THE LITERARY CULTURE OF CLASSICAL URDU POETRY

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Most of the literary cultures we seek to reconstruct in our project must be pieced together from stray fragments and surviving traces--and these are often all too distant from each other in space and time. By contrast, the literary culture of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century North Indian "Urdu" poetry--as we retrospectively call it--is among the easiest to explore. This literary culture seems to have been highly self-conscious and self-recording right from the beginning--that is, from the first two decades of the eighteenth century. By 1718-19, Urdu poets in Delhi apparently formed enough of a network to be composing verse competitively in a common prearranged meter and rhyme scheme; and in 1719-20 the arrival from the south of Valī Dakanī's poetry volume [*dīvān*] sparked an intense burst of interest in this new creation-- sophisticated poetic genres that were literarily Persianized, and linguistically indigenous.[1]

It was easy for this new literary culture to appear out of nowhere in a highly polished form, because it didn't have to invent itself from scratch, or even evolve itself gradually. Nor did it have to develop in constant tension with the immense literary, cultural, and religious authority of Sanskrit; unlike most of the other literary cultures in our study, Urdu poetry has not a grain or a shred of "Sanskrit anxiety." Rather, its touchstone was always Persian; Persian formed a kind of matrix or lattice--even literally, in the case of much early macaronic verse--on which it could grow with remarkable speed and sophistication. Only gradually, after many decades, did it begin to emerge from this Persianized cultural milieu, when English gently knocked on the door. At length, of course, English broke the door down entirely--and the post-1857 wave of Victorian, didactic, and naturalistic critiques created a surge of hostility that swept this literary culture away. As we will see, much of the hostility continues to the present day.

The internally-generated record of the tradition begins with a sudden flowering: the first three anthologies or tazkirahs [*tażkirah*] all appeared early in 1752, and two more were completed within the next couple of years. The fact that two of the earliest three both claim to be the first tazkirah of Urdu poets makes it probable that we are indeed seeing the beginning of the genre, rather than simply its earliest surviving examples. But it should be noted that early tazkirahs also refer to *other* early tazkirahs not now extant (Gardezī 1995:13).

Like almost all other Urdu literary genres, the tazkirah tradition was taken over from Persian; in fact, until well into the nineteenth century most tazkirahs of Urdu poetry were themselves written in Persian. (Just to complicate the picture, however, it should be kept in mind that the first tazkirahs of *Persian* poetry itself were Indian: they were composed in Sind, in the early thirteenth century (Alam, REF).) Etymologically, *tażkirah* is derived from an Arabic root meaning "to mention, to remember." Historically, the literary tazkirah grows out of the

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[1] The earliest verses included in Ḥātim's *Dīvān zādah* are two ghazals that Ḥātim attributes to A.H. 1131 (1718-19); both are identified as being composed in a specified meter and rhyme scheme [*zamīn ṭarḥī*], for recitation in a poets' gathering. The arrival in Delhi of Valī's poetry in A.H. 1132 [1719-20] is reported by Muṣḥafī on Ḥātim's authority, and Ḥātim describes its impact (Ḥātim 1975:1, also introduction 10-11, 39-40).

ubiquitous little "notebook" [*bayāẓ*] that lovers of poetry carried around with them for recording verses that caught their fancy. A typical notebook would include some verses by its owner, and others by poets living and dead, both Persian and Urdu. More serious, or more organized, students might compile notebooks devoted only to certain kinds of poetry: to the work of living poets, for example, or the finest poets, or poets from a particular city, or women poets, or poets in a certain genre. There were a great many occasional poets, but only a few of them had become "possessors of a volume" [*ṣāḥib-e dīvān*] by collecting a substantial body of their own poetry and arranging it for dissemination in manuscript form. Compilers of notebooks were thus often moved to perform a public service by sharing their work with a wider circle. With the addition of a certain amount--sometimes a very small amount--of introductory or identifying information about the poets, a notebook could become a tazkirah. Tazkirahs circulated in manuscript form, and as printing presses became more common in North India (Khan 1991) they gradually began to be printed as well.

Since tazkirahs both define and embody the parameters of the tradition, they enable us to examine this literary culture as a textbook case of "classical" poetry. (By common consent, Urdu criticism has itself adopted the term "classical" [*klāsīkī*] as a rubric for this poetry.) North Indian Urdu poets were conscious of sharing both a vocabulary of inherited forms (genres, meters, themes, imagery), and a set of authoritative ancestors to be emulated (certain earlier Persian and Urdu poets); they were committed to mastering and augmenting a single much-cherished canon, so that the memorization of thousands of Urdu and Persian verses lay at the heart of their training. They even shared, as we will see, an unusually codified approach to poetic practice: a formidable apprenticeship system to which much importance was given, and an institutionalized set of regular gatherings for recitation and discussion. All these elements can be seen to be already fully present--albeit still somewhat new--by the time of the first tazkirahs (1752), and to be present still--albeit somewhat on the decline--at the time of the last tazkirah (1880). Both before the early eighteenth century and after the late nineteenth, the absence of not just some but most of the elements in this cluster is equally striking. The sudden seemingly full-fledged appearance of this literary culture, and then its relatively abrupt and thoroughgoing disappearance, give it clearly marked boundaries; it thus becomes, for comparative purposes, an excellent case study.

All the tazkirahs document and record this literary culture--but not, of course, always in the same way. Their origin in the ubiquitous personal "notebook" explains one of their most conspicuous traits: their individuality, their insouciance, the insistence of each one on defining its own approach to its own group of poets. These idiosyncrasies can be clearly seen in their various styles of organization. Although the majority arranged their contents in alphabetical order by the first letter of each poet's pen name--and thus were emphatically ahistorical--this scheme was by no means universal; no fewer than twenty out of the sixty-eight or so surviving tazkirahs adopt other systems. The earliest three tazkirahs, all completed in A.H. 1165 [1752], presented their poets in a largely random order. The fourth, completed only months later in A.H. 1166 [1752], was alphabetical. The fifth, completed in A.H. 1168 [1754-55] but begun as early as 1744, already felt able to present the poets in an "early, middle, late" sequence (Farmān Fātḥpūrī 1972:93-133).

In this study we will examine two individual tazkirahs in some detail, within the context of their tradition; we will also consider the kinds of attack to which they have been subject since the death of their literary culture. In some respects, these two tazkirahs are opposite enough to reveal the whole range of the genre. The first is very early, and helps to

define its tradition; the second is quite late, and shows us the literary culture in its fullest flower. The first works selectively and haphazardly, the second is encyclopedic and tightly organized. The first is acerbic, sharp, austere, authoritative; the second is casual, snobbish, gossippy, conventional in its judgments. The first is famous for pronouncements, the second for anecdotes. The first grapples with questions of origin, the second is intensely present-minded. Both make legitimate claims to linguistic and literary innovation. And beneath the level of their differences, both reveal the contours of the same brilliantly achieving literary culture, and show its trajectory during the two centuries of its creative life.

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Among the earliest group of three tazkirahs, one stands out as the first tazkirah *par excellence*. It opened up the tradition as decisively as *Water of Life* [*Āb-e ḥayāt*] (1880), the last tazkirah and first literary history, eventually closed it down. This primal tazkirah, *Nikāt ush-shu‚arā* [Fine Points about the Poets] (1752), is a literary as well as historical document of the first magnitude. In it one of the two greatest poets of the tradition, Muḥammad Taqī 'Mīr' (1722-1810), gives us not only his selection of poets worth mentioning, but also literary judgments about the nature and quality of their work, often illustrated with "corrections" [*iṣlāḥ*] that he felt would improve individual verses.

Mīr is well aware that he stands near the beginning of a tradition. He introduces his tazkirah on that basis:

> Let it not remain hidden that in the art of Reḳhtah--which is poetry of the Persian style in the language of the exalted city [*urdū-e mu‚allā*, lit. "exalted encampment"] of Shāhjahānābād in Delhi--until now no book has been composed through which the circumstances [*ḥāl*] of the poets of this art would remain on the page of the time. Therefore this tazkirah, of which the name is *Nikāt ush-shu‚arā*, is being written.
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> Although Reḳhtah is from the Deccan, nevertheless, since no writer of tightly connected [*marbūṯ*] poetry has arisen from that region, their names have not been placed at the beginning. And this inadequate one's temperament is also not inclined in such a direction, for [recording] the circumstances of a number of them would be bothersome. Still, the circumstances of some of them will be recorded, God Most High willing.
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> I hope that whichever connoisseur of poetry [*ṣāḥib-e suḳhan*] this book reaches will bestow on it a glance of favor (Mīr 1979:9).

Mīr thus begins by pithily defining "Reḳhtah" ("Mixed"), the commonest name in his time for what we now call "Urdu" poetry: Reḳhtah is poetry made by shaping Delhi urban language in the literary mold of Persian. (The later--and clearly tendentious--British misunderstanding of the term *urdū-e mu‚allā* as "army camp" instead of royal court is discussed in Faruqi's paper, REF.)

After this definition, however, Mīr must deal with an uncomfortable fact: the existence of at least several centuries' worth of "Dakanī" Urdu poetry composed in the Deccan (in Golconda and Bijapur) and elsewhere (notably in Gujarat) (Zaidi 1993:36-55, Faruqi, REF). Within a few brief sentences, Mīr performs several contortions as he seeks to explain how he has dealt with the Dakanī poets. Reḳhtah--the poetry, not the language itself--is "from" [*az*] the Deccan, he acknowledges. However, no writer of *marbūṯ* or "tightly connected" poetry (a term we will examine later) has appeared there. Therefore he has not given Dakanī poetry pride of place in his tazkirah. Moreover, he himself is not a researcher by temperament; thus he is not inclined to trouble himself (or his readers?) with a systematic study of these second-rate poets.

Still, he plans to include "some of them."

Mīr does indeed include a fair number of Dakanī poets; almost a third of the 105 poets in his tazkirah are southerners. One such Dakanī poet was ,Abd ul-Valī ,Uzlat, a personal friend whose "notebook" Mīr gratefully mined for information (Mīr 1979:87-102). But for over two-thirds of the Dakanī poets he includes, Mīr gives little or no biographical information and records only a verse or two. Plainly Dakanī poets are quite numerous, but Mīr does not know-- and obviously does not want to know--much about them. They cannot be omitted, but neither are they fully accepted as peers, much less ancestors.[2]

The nuances of this uneasy relationship are encoded in the story of 'Valī' Dakanī (1667-1720/25), who is said to have come north to Delhi, bringing his Reḵhtah poetry and spreading the fashion for this new genre. According to Mīr, Valī's home was in Aurangabad.

> They say that he came to Shāhjahānābād Delhi too. He presented himself in the service of Miyāñ Gulshan Ṣāḥib, and recited a little bit from his poetry. Miyāñ Ṣāḥib commanded, "All the themes [maẕmūn] of Persian that are lying around useless--make use of them in your Reḵhtah. Will you be called to account?" His fame has spread so widely that there is no need to praise him here. I do not know his circumstances (Mīr 1979:87).

Valī was thus a southerner, an outsider. After arriving, however, Valī supposedly replaced his whole Dakanī dīvān--on the advice of the Delhi pīr Shāh Gulshan--with a fresh batch of poetry in a more Persianized style, and this new poetry is what inspired the Delhi poets. The mythology of Valī as grudgingly indigenized culture hero is discussed in detail in Faruqi's paper (REF).

Mīr's complaint that most Dakanī poets do not write "tightly connected" poetry shows that he was thinking chiefly of the ghazal [ġhazal], which in any case was by far the most important genre in his literary culture. The ghazal was incorporated, along with so much else, from Persian; but once again, to give the picture its due complexity, it should be noted that one of the very earliest important founders of *Persian* ghazal, Mas,ūd-e Sa,d Salmān (c.1046-1121), was a Ghaznavid court poet in Lahore (Lewis 1995:58). The ghazal was a brief lyric poem, generally romantic and/or mystical in tone, evoking the moods of a passionate lover separated from his beloved. Each two-line verse [shi,r] of the ghazal was in the same strictly determined Perso-Arabic syllabic meter, and the second line of each verse ended with a rhyming syllable [qāfiyah], followed by an optional (but very common) refrain [radīf] one or more syllables long. To set the pattern in oral performance, the first verse usually included the rhyming element(s) at the end of both lines. The last verse usually included the pen name [taḵhalluṣ] of the poet. Each verse was semantically independent, so that the unit of recitation, quotation, and analysis was almost always the individual two-line verse, not the whole ghazal (Pritchett 1993). This independence made the *marbūṱ* quality of each verse--meaning, as we will see, the tight interrelationship of its two lines--an obvious criterion for critical judgment.

In the conclusion to his tazkirah, Mīr carefully delineates the contours of this ghazal-centered literary universe. He divides Reḵhtah into six types: first, verses in which one line is Persian and one Urdu; second, verses in which half of each line is Persian and half Urdu; third,

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[2]Some of the contours of this vexed relationship have been mapped by Carla Petievich (1990, 1999). Petievich's exploration of these complex regional and cultural tensions, though inevitably speculative at times, performs an invaluable service: it opens up crucial, long-ignored areas of literary and cultural history, and shows the kinds of research that must be done before we can claim any adequate historical understanding of the situation.

verses in which Persian verbs and particles are used, a "detestable" practice; fourth, verses in which Persian grammatical structures [*tarkīb*] are brought in, a dubious practice to be adopted only within strict limits; fifth, verses based on *īhām*, the use of "a word fundamental to the verse, and that word should have two meanings, one obvious and one remote, and the poet should intend the remote meaning, not the obvious one." The sixth and last type, "the style that I have adopted," is "based on the use of all verbal devices [*ṣan,at*]." Mīr explains, "By all verbal devices is meant alliteration; metrical and semantic parallelism in rhymed phrases [*tarṣī,*]; simile; limpidity of diction; eloquent word choice [*faṣāḥat*]; rhetoric [*balāġhat*]; portrayals of love affairs [*adā bandī*]; imagination [*ḳhiyāl*]; and so on" (Mīr 1979:161).

The first four of these categories consist of verses so closely bound to Persian that they contain whole chunks of the language, or at least incorporate its grammatical forms and structures. Poetry like this represents Reḳhtah's earliest history: Mīr attributes occasional macaronic verses of the first type to Amīr Ḳhusrau (1253-1325), the poet to whom he gives pride of place--in lieu of the Dakanī poets--by putting him first in the tazkirah (Mīr 1979:10). The fifth category describes a specialized form of punning that had been highly fashionable in Mīr's youth; after its particular vogue had passed, it was destined to remain, along with other forms of wordplay, central to the technical repertoire.

Mīr reserves his sixth category for himself; and in his own poetry, he wants to have it all. He claims to use in his work the whole available repertoire of verbal devices and techniques. The subtlety and complexity of his poetry have recently been analyzed with a sophistication of which he would certainly have approved (Fārūqī 1990-94). And as we have seen, Mīr particularly values poetry with complex internal connectedness; his primary reproach against Dakanī poets is that they fail to create it. Later in the tazkirah he returns with special emphasis to this point, acknowledging that there are a few exceptions, but repeating his scornful assertion that most Dakanīs are "poets of no standing" who merely "go on writing verses" without knowing how to make them *marbūṭ*. About one verse by a Dakanī poet he complains even more sarcastically, "The relationship between the two lines of this verse--praise be to God, there's not a trace!" (Mīr 1979:87, 91).

Mīr in his tazkirah outlines the terrain of his own literary culture not merely theoretically, but historically and practically as well. He is highly aware of poetic lineages: where possible, he always names the *ustād*s of the poets he includes. The *ustād-shāgird*, or master-pupil, relationship was a systematically cultivated and much-cherished part of the North Indian Urdu tradition--and, apparently, of no other ghazal tradition, including the Indo-Persian. (Faruqi advances a thoughtful hypothesis about how this unique ustad-shagird institution came about, REF.) This apprenticeship system transmitted over time a command of the technical repertoire of "verbal devices," as exemplified in verses from the "classical" poetic canon. At the heart of the system was the process of "correction" by which the ustad improved the shagird's poetry. It appears that in practice the most common kind of correction involved changing only a word or two, and that the chief goal of such changes was generally to make the two lines of the verse more tightly connected (Ṣafdar Mirzāpūrī [1918-28] 1992).

Mīr also attaches much importance to another institution especially--though not uniquely, since Persian and especially Indo-Persian examples have been reported--characteristic of the North Indian Urdu tradition: the *mushā,irah* or regular gathering for poetic recitation and discussion (Zaidī 1992). Mīr himself hosted one such mushairah, and carefully recorded in his tazkirah the manner in which he began to do so. The poet Mīr 'Dard' (1721-1785), whom he venerated as a Sufi master, handed it over to him:

...and the poetic gathering for Reḵhtah at this servant's house that is regularly fixed for the fifteenth day of each month, in reality is attached and affiliated only to him. For before that, this gathering used to be fixed at his house. Through the revolving of unstable time, that gathering was broken up. Thus, since he had heartfelt love for this unworthy one, he said, "If you fix this gathering for your house, it will be a good thing." Keeping in mind the love of this gracious one, it was thus arranged (Mīr 1979:50).

Even at this early stage mushairahs must have been omnipresent, for Mīr casually mentions several others. "Four or five years ago there used to be a gathering of Reḵhtah companions at Ja,far ,Alī Ḵhān's house--God knows what happened that caused it to break up"; "In the old days, for several months he [the poet 'Kāfir'] had fixed a gathering for Reḵhtah at his house; finally his rakish habits caused it to break up"; "I used to see him [the poet ',Ājiz'] in Ḥāfiẕ Ḥalīm's mushairah" (Mīr 1979:127, 135-36).

This latter instance seems to be almost the only time Mīr actually uses the word "mushairah" for such sessions; usually there is some general term for "gathering" [*majlis*, *jalsah*, more rarely *majma,*], and once he even experiments with *murāḵhitah*--which, he explains, has been devised to refer to a gathering for Reḵhtah "on the analogy of *mushā,irah*" (since the latter term refers to a gathering for poetry [*shi,r*] in general) (Mīr 1979:134). The institution thus plainly antedates the fixing of its name: there were well-established mushairahs before there was even a well-established name for them. While many South Asian literary cultures have featured occasional gatherings for literary performance (e.g., the *goṣṭhī* in Malayalam, the *arankerram* in Tamil, the *kavigaṇ* in Bengali (REFS)), and a few have even had regular ones (e.g., the kind sponsored by Vastupāla in thirteenth-century Gujarat (@@REF?)), these have generally been under the control of a courtly patron or outside authority. Urdu mushairahs, even when sponsored by patrons, have been largely controlled by the poets themselves, and as we will see, they have had many of the features of technical workshops.

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One of Mīr's favorite poets, and a personal friend as well, was called Sajjād (d. 1806?). In describing Sajjād, Mīr reveals many facets of his own understanding of Reḵhtah and its proper practice:

Mīr Sajjād is from Akbarābād [=Agra]; he is a seeker of knowledge, has ability, and is an excellent poet of Reḵhtah. He is a shagird of Miyāñ Ābrū, and uses the pen-name 'Sajjād.' He is a very good man, and his poetry has already arrived at the level of ustad-ship: it is extremely well composed, and possesses themes [*ma,nī*]. His speech is not that of just anybody. When a piece of white paper is placed before him, then his colorful thought becomes the shadow of the [fertilizing] raincloud on the garden of searching [for new themes]. Enjoyable construction [*bandish*] is a servant to his every line. His every verse in a short meter runs a razor across the liver; the language of his expression, in its refinedness, is the jugular vein of poetry. Injustice is another thing; otherwise [to the fair-minded] the depth [*tahdārī*] of his poetry is manifest. To anyone who knows his hair-splitting temperament, his verse is coiled and burnt, like a hair touched by flame.

Formerly there used to be at his house a gathering of friends and a Reḵhtah-recitation assembly. This servant too used to go. For the present, because of some misfortunes our meetings have been somewhat reduced, from both sides. May God keep him well (Mīr 1979:60).[3]

Here we see Mīr's description of what poetry ought to be. And it does indeed seem to include not only "all verbal devices," but all kinds of literary pleasures--compressed, of course, into poems two lines long.

According to Mīr, a good verse is intellectually piquant: it shows a mastery over whole "hordes" of themes, and arranges them to create fresh effects. It is vividly imagined: it causes a colorful mind-born garden to bloom on the white page. It is tightly constructed: every line is inventive and is enjoyably presented. It is powerful as a razor--literally, a medical "lancet"--on flesh, and delicate as the jugular vein. To ascribe to the poet a "hair-splitting temperament" is actually a compliment to his subtlety and fine powers of discrimination; his verses are "coiled," convoluted, complex, full of multiple meanings--and also "burnt," like the suffering heart of the archetypal lover. Intellectually piquant, vividly imagined, tightly constructed, emotionally powerful, layered with "coiled" and intertwined meanings--this, in Mīr's eyes, is the ideal ghazal verse.

Here we also see Mīr displaying his own love for subtle, elegant wordplay. Although he is writing what we would think of as critical or analytical commentary, he conveys his meaning by playing with metaphors that themselves are directly part of the ghazal universe. And in a markedly belles-lettristic way, he creates constant echoes and resonances in his own prose. For example, Mīr praises Sajjād for his sophisticated literary sensibility by attributing to him a "hair-splitting" [*mū shigāf*] temperament. Then he describes his poetry as multi-layered, convoluted, "coiled" [*pechdār*]; and also as emotionally intense--passionate and pain-filled, literally "burnt" [*soḳhtah*], like the archetypal lover's heart. Both of these qualities are captured when he calls Sajjād's verse a "hair touched by flame" [*mū-e ātash dīdah*]. (As everyone in the ghazal world knows, a hair singed by a flame will instantly form a tight curl, and the curl itself will be dark and ashy.) Such use of a series of words drawn from the same domain, while conducting discourse of an ostensibly unrelated kind, is a form of elegance much valued in the medieval Persian prose tradition. Since it is supererogatory, it feels luxurious and aristocratic: it gives the mind two (or more) pleasures for the price of one.

After this introduction, Mīr provides us with many samples of Sajjād's poetry. Most of them, of course, are single verses or selected small groups of verses rather than whole ghazals. With the very first such sample, Mīr offers us his own "correction" as well. It involves, as many corrections do, a change in a single word, and it seeks to tighten the verse internally. Sajjād's verse is:

> *kāfir butoñ se dād nah chāho kih yāñ koī*
> *mar jā sitam se un ke to kahte haiñ ḥaq huī*
> /Don't demand your deserts from these infidel idols, for here if anyone
> Dies of their tyranny then they say justice was done/
> > Although false [*bāṭil*] is false, nevertheless in the first line, in place of
> > 'infidel' [*kāfir*], according to the belief of this faqir, the word 'false' [*bāṭil*] is true
> > [*ḥaq*]" (Mīr 1979:60).

The beloved, in ghazal convention, is well known to be an idol: beautiful, cruel, demanding, treacherous, a false god who diverts one's attention from the true God. (Here as always, the

beloved is grammatically masculine, very probably to achieve a "desirable state of non-particularity" (Ḥālī 1969:133) and abstraction.)

Mīr's words here have two dimensions. *Bāṭil* ("false, vain") in the first line would be a better adjective for "idols," since it would doubly echo the "true" in the second line: *ḥaq* has a range of meanings including truth, justice, and God. This pairing of opposites would increase the *marbūṭ* quality of the verse, thus enhancing its excellence. But Mīr is also showing once again his own delight in clever wordplay: he is using a form of allusive double meaning [*ẕila,*] much appreciated in the medieval Persian literary tradition. Since the verse is about true and false religious faith, justice and injustice, his word-choices are similarly focused. He makes a point of playing with paradox: instead of saying that the word "false" is more suitable, he says that although "false is false," nevertheless "false is true." And he introduces religious double meanings by contrasting "false" with *ḥaq*, "truth, justice, God." Appropriately to the domain of meaning, he refers to himself as "this faqir" and speaks of his literary judgment as his "belief." Even as he uses language analytically, he uses it playfully and creatively as well.

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Mīr not only gives us the exemplary Sajjād, he gives us an anti-hero as well: the poet Inʻāmullāh K̲h̲ān 'Yaqīn' (1727?-1755). Yaqīn "has compiled a *dīvān*, and is very famous," as Mīr acknowledges; his ustad was the prestigious Mirzā 'Maẕhar.' Moreover his late father was humane, sociable, hospitable, poetically inclined, and a personal friend of Mīr's. How then, Mīr implies, can the son have gone so wrong? "People have told me that Mirzā Maẕhar used to compose verses and give them to him, and he counted them as his own legacy." This Mīr finds hard to believe--he is even "inclined to laugh"--because "everything else can be inherited except poetry."

He then proceeds to denigrate Yaqīn's character and abilities as thoroughly as possible. Yaqīn surrounds himself with flatterers: "To make a long story short, he has taken up some petty and worthless people [as admirers]--if you and I wanted, we too could take up such people." He is arrogant: "He thinks so highly of himself that in his presence even the pride of Pharaoh would appear as humility." And his incompetence is manifest, for "on meeting this person you instantly realize that he has absolutely no taste in the understanding of poetry," and in fact "everyone agrees" that his poetry "is not free of flaws." Mīr can even offer proof: he reports that the poet 'Ṣāqib' once went to Yaqīn's house "only to test him," and "fixed the pattern for a ghazal" to be composed on the spot by both poets. The result? Ṣāqib "composed a whole ghazal in good order--and not even a single line of verse from *him*!" (Mīr 1979:80-81).

Mīr's primary accusation, bolstered by snide anecdotes, is direct and highly insulting--that Yaqīn simply appropriated his ustad Maẕhar's verses and claimed them as his own. (In Yaqīn's case, the accusation seems to have been quite false.) While such behavior in a senior poet was unforgivable, more subtle kinds of appropriation were a major source of tension within the tradition. The corpus of Persian ghazal was immense and prestigious, and was constantly being augmented by contemporary Indo-Persian poets. What if a poet in effect translated (or perhaps "transcreated") a Persian verse into Urdu? If this happened deliberately, it was "plagiarism" [*sarqah*], and was held to be culpable. But what if such duplication happened accidentally? Then it was a case of "coincidence" [*tavārud*], in which parallel thought processes applied to the same material led to similar results. Such cases were an inevitable result of the way ghazal poetry worked. The semantically independent, internally unified, metrically tight verses were ideally designed for memorization. Poets were trained in part by memorizing literally thousands of such (Persian and Urdu) verses. Since the individual two-line verses were

not semantically bound to the particular ghazal in which they occurred, they required a great deal of prior knowledge on the part of the audience. This knowledge included a map of the interrelated, metaphorically-based "themes"--usually called *maẓmūn*, though sometimes *ma,nī* was used[4]--that constituted the ghazal universe. The sharing of these themes meant that poets were always echoing or evoking (if not on the verge of "plagiarizing") each other's verses.

Mīr then shows us an example of such interrelated themes: two verses that share their basic imagery, but not culpably. One of Yaqīn's opening verses, included among the samples of his poetry, reminds Mīr of one of his own. But the two make very different use of their basic thematic matter. Mīr cites the two verses side by side:

> *mujhe yih bāt ḳhush āf̤hai ik majnūn-e ,uryāñ se*
> *kiyā kīje kahāñ tak chāk ham guzre garebāñ se*[5]
> /This utterance of a naked madman [*majnūn*] pleases me--
> How long can one always keep on ripping? I've passed beyond my collar/

This faqir has a verse very near to this one, with almost the same theme [*ma,nī*], and in my opinion it is better in quality:

> *chāk par chāk huf̤ jūñ jūñ silāyā ham ne*
> *ab garebān hī se hāth uṭhāyā ham ne*
> /Rip upon rip appeared, as fast as I had them sewn up
> Now I've washed my hands of my collar itself/ (Mīr 1979:86)

The very word for madness, *junūñ*, evokes Majnūn (the "mad one," literally the "jinn-possessed"), the classic mad lover of Arabic-Persian-Turkish-Urdu literary tradition. And with the theme of madness we are at the heart of the ghazal's system of imagery: the lover, if not always mad, is always on the verge of madness.

For the ghazal is always exploring borderline cases--and, in the process, playing with borderlines. The ghazal looks for borderlines in order to transgress them; the ghazal poet makes some of his best hay in fields where the wild paradox grows. This is why in the ghazal universe there is no coziness, no rootedness, no wives and children, no normalcy or domestic tranquility whatsoever. Instead there is transgression beyond all plausibility. Poets envision themselves as madmen; as drunkards, wastrels, or reprobates; as infidels or apostates from Islam; as criminals facing execution; as mystical seekers claiming direct access to God; as voices speaking from beyond the grave; and as lovers always of forbidden and unsuitable beloveds (courtesans, unavailable ladies in *pardah*, beautiful boys). For as Āzād shrewdly observes in *Water of Life*, "In presenting everyday topics, the impact of the expressive power is extremely weak." By contrast, he says, the use of "matters that are contrary to good manners" creates a kind of "heat and quickness of language"--so that "the urge evoked in the poet's heart mingles with the emotional effect of the poetry to create a little tickle in the armpits even of sleepers" (Āzād 1982:302).

Ghazal convention prescribes that a mad lover will rip apart the neck-opening of his kurta, because he feels himself suffocating and needs more air; he will then proceed to tear at his clothing more generally, because those in grief and despair rend their garments, and because

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[4]"Themes" is of course an unsatisfactorily broad translation for *maẓmūn*. However, all things considered, I cannot find a better one. On the early use of *ma,nī* to mean what was later meant by *maẓmūn*, see Fārūqī 1997:14-25.

[5]Amending *bayābāñ*--in this context obviously a calligraphic error--to *garebāñ*, and *āf̤* to *āf̤.*

madmen are known to tear their clothes off. Majnūn, as everyone in the ghazal world knows, fled to the wilderness after he lost his beloved Lailā. There he lived quite alone, except for the sympathetic wild animals whom he charmed with his songs of love. He rent his garments until he was virtually naked. Yaqīn's verse imagines an encounter with a naked madman, a "jinnn-possessed" [*majnūn*] one. The madman complains, "How long can one keep ripping?" Beyond the collar, what does one do next?

This non-informative [*inshāʾyah*] mode of speech, questioning or speculative or exclamatory, is a fundamental device of the ghazal, and is far more versatile than any factual or informative [*khabariyah*] statement. In fact such *inshāʾyah* speech is multifaceted in Urdu (and Persian) in a way that can hardly be captured in English, since it is made possible by grammatical simplicities and the absence of punctuation (Faruqi 1993:23-37; Pritchett 1994:106-10). Such radical multivalence is part of the ghazal's "meaning creation" [*maʿnī āfirīnī*]--its love for extracting the maximum number of meanings from the fewest possible words.

Yaqīn offers us *inshāʾyah* discourse, in the form of a rhetorical question that remains unanswered. How long can one keep ripping one's garment--before what? Before it falls apart into shreds and one is left entirely a "naked madman"? Before one loses patience and tears it off and flings it away? Before one's passion enters a new phase and ripping a garment no longer suffices to express it? Before one reaches a state so transcendant that one no longer attaches any importance to clothing at all? And how does this question fit together with the final brief *khabariyah* statement, "I've passed beyond the collar"? Does he rip other things now? Other garments? His own flesh?

Yaqīn's is not a bad verse, but Mīr is right to prefer his own. He knows that a twist is needed to establish originality--the introduction of some new thought, or even some especially suggestive new word. "A fresh word is equal to a *mazmūn*," as Shāh Jahān's poet laureate Abū Ṭālib 'Kalīm' put it (Faruqi 1981:40). Mīr's verse seems to regard the whole process of garment-ripping in a way more mystified than mystical. He is actually trying to keep the neck-opening of his kurta mended, it seems, but every time he gets a rent stitched up, another one appears. Because he is so absent-minded, so heedless, so lost in his inner desolation, he finds that these rips just seem to happen of themselves, with no indication of causality. His reaction to the situation is one of bafflement, impatience, and ultimate indifference--he has "lifted his hand from" [*se hāth uṭhānā*] his collar entirely. I have translated this phrase with the comparable English idiom, "washed his hands of," to show its colloquial meaning: to give up on, to renounce, to abandon all concern for.

Mīr has thus achieved an elegant kind of "meaning-creation" [*maʿnī āfirīnī*]: he has arranged for a common phrase to be read both literally and idiomatically--such that both readings are entirely suitable to the verse, though exactly contrary in meaning. Idiomatically, "I've lifted my hand from my collar" would mean "I've washed my hands of my collar"--I've given up on it, I'm disgusted with it--let it suffer rip after rip, let it need mending, let it fall apart entirely, I don't care what becomes of it! I've abandoned the collar to its fate, and those rips that keep appearing will no doubt finish it off. Literally, however, "I've lifted my hand from my collar" would of course mean "I've ceased to touch my collar," I'm no longer constantly ripping it open, I'm leaving my collar alone. And the addition of "now" [*ab*] seems to imply a change of state. Perhaps I do dimly realize that it was my hand all along that was causing the rips? If Mīr considers his verse superior to Yaqīn's, this wittily suitable play on a common expression is surely a large part of the reason.

There is more to be said on this verse, of course--the small particle *hī* itself provides

a range of possible fresh emphases. This tiny particle can either emphasize ("I've washed my hands of my *collar*") or restrict ("I've washed my hands of my collar *alone*") the word it follows. If it is read emphatically, it adds an expressive note of impatience and even exasperation to the verse. The particle *hī* as restrictive, however, if read with the literal rather than idiomatic form of the phrase, would imply, "I'm keeping my hands off *only* my collar"--that is, I will rend the rest of my clothing, and maybe even tear my hair, it is only my especially vulnerable collar from which I will now keep my hands away. But in any case, pity the poor translator! How to convey all these nuances and possibilities in a single English line? Plainly, it cannot be done. Even *hī* itself involves such a wide range of choices: "Just, very, exactly, indeed, truly, only, alone, merely, solely, altogether, outright" (Platts [1930] 1968:1243).

Moreover, these multiple interpretive possibilities are not adventitious or casual: they are absolutely fundamental to the genre. Classical poets generally go out of their way *not* to provide us any interpretive help in choosing among such multiply arrayed meanings. Not only does nothing in this verse, and nothing we know about Mīr generally, enable us to decisively choose one interpretation out of the range of possibilities--but even worse, everything we know about this verse, and about these poets generally, tells us that they were extremely proud of their ability to lead us into exactly this sort of interpretive bind--and then leave us there. (Which is why the modern tendency to guide our interpretations by inserting western-style punctuation is such a sad sign of cultural ignorance and loss.) One's mind must be left to ricochet around among the various possibilities without being able to come to any resolution. This undecidability forms part of the piquant and inexhaustible quality of many of the best classical ghazal verses.

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Mīr felt, however, that such subtleties of poetic analysis were not for just anyone. As we have seen, in his introduction he hoped that not any random reader but any "connoisseur of poetry" would look on his tazkirah with favor. And in his conclusion, he warns off outsiders in no uncertain terms: "The meaning of these words, the one whom I'm addressing understands; I do not address the common people [*ɛavām*]. What I have written is a warrant [*sanad*] for my friends, it is not for just anybody." He does make some room for other views of poetry: "The field of poetry is wide, and I am well aware of the color/changefulness of the garden of the manifest" (Mīr 1979:161). But the universality (of using *all* verbal devices) and the complexity (of making verses internally *marbūṯ*) that he claims as his own, appear to relegate other kinds of poetry to a second-class status.

While defining his own poetics, Mīr thus makes a strong, if not quite explicit, claim to superiority. The force of that claim is increased by his fearless and famously impatient literary judgments about other poets. Not only is Yaqīn such a fake that he doesn't have even the smallest trace of poetic understanding, but 'Ḥashmat' too is a vulgar chatterer who "makes inappropriate objections to people like us"; and perhaps worst of all, the hapless ',Ushshāq' ('Lovers'), a Khattrī, not only has a foolish pen name but "composes verses of Reḵhtah that are extremely non-*marbūṯ*" (Mīr 1979:80, 102, 136). Such pronouncements soon inspired the composition of several other tazkirahs, as indignant poets leaped to the defense of those whom Mīr had ignored or slighted.

Mīr's poetic judgments are unaffected by aristocratic birth, courtly rank, or wealth. In his tazkirah he includes soldiers, Sufis, and poor men in need of patronage, as readily as he does the rich and powerful. Mīr also declines to be morally selective: the poet 'Ḥātim' is "ignorant" and "arrogant." But never mind: "What do we have to do with such things? He has

a lot of poetry--his *dīvān*, up to the letter *mīm*, is in my hands" (Mīr 1979:75). It is Ḥātim's poetry, not his allegedly deficient character, that is important. Mīr was supremely confident in making such decrees. He was able to lay down the law--and back it with the remarkable quality and impressive quantity of his own verse. He composed six *dīvān*s in his long lifetime, and his fame eclipsed that of nearly all his rivals. The figure of Mīr the irascible purist became legendary within the tradition.

For this unique stature Mīr paid an ironic price, a form of posthumous cooptation: he was made the sponsor of a radical linguistic "Delhi chauvinism." Many anecdotes, given their canonical form in *Water of Life* and still widely known, illustrate the curmudgeonly attitudes later attributed to him. While traveling to Lucknow, Mīr is made to rebuff the friendly chit-chat of a commoner who is sharing his oxcart. The commoner says, "Your Honor, what's the harm? It's a pastime while traveling--we can entertain ourselves a bit with conversation." Mīr replies angrily, "Well, for you it's a pastime; as for me, it corrupts my language!" (Āzād 1982:195-96).

In Lucknow itself, Mīr is made to snub the local aristocrats even more pointedly than he did his humble traveling companion. When some "nobles and important people of Lucknow" call on him and courteously request him to recite some verses for them, he puts them off repeatedly, at length telling them, "Noble gentlemen, my verses are not such as you will understand."

> Finally, feeling a bit piqued, they said, "Your Honor! We understand the [Persian] poetry of Anvarī and Ḳhāqānī. Why will we not understand your noble utterance?" Mīr Sahib said, "That's true. But for their poetry commentaries, vocabularies, and dictionaries are available. And for my poetry, there is only the idiom of the people of Urdu, or the stairs of the Jāma, Masjid [in Delhi]. And these are beyond your reach" (Āzād 1982:209).

In this and many similar displays of "Delhi chauvinism," the austere, severe, dignified poet from the venerable but decaying Mughal city is made to look down his nose at Lucknow, which is seen as a lively but frivolous new center of wealth and patronage.

The "Mīr" of later tradition in fact becomes the consummate Dihlavi poet; he is made to insist that one must be an educated, language-conscious, native speaker of upper-class Delhi Urdu before one can become a poet of Reḳhtah--or even, apparently, can genuinely appreciate Reḳhtah. In view of Mīr's own life, this would have been an extraordinary attitude for him to adopt: after all, he himself "was born in Agra, moved to Delhi when he was nine years old, returned to Agra during the invasion of Nadir Shah in 1739, returned to Delhi thereafter, and spent the last thirty years of his life (1781-1810) in Lucknow," as Carla Petievich has pointed out (Petievich 1992:90). Analyzing the "two schools" theory that later became such a commonplace of Urdu critical tradition, Petievich shows that this Delhi-Lucknow polarization is full of cultural, historical, and psychological interest--every kind of interest, in short, except the literary kind.

But of course, the Mīr revealed in *Nikāt ush-shu,arā* itself would never have dreamed of taking such a "Delhi chauvinist" stance. The poets he includes in his tazkirah come from various cities, yet there is not a hint that the native or lifelong Dihlavis are in any way superior to the others. The only outsiders who trouble him are the Dakanī poets; and with them, his struggle is never finally resolved. Moreover, it is clear that Mīr did not value the use of "pure" idiom above everything else. His favored poet Sajjād once again provides a case in point: in one verse, Sajjād takes liberties with an idiomatic expression. Mīr comments, "In an idiom,

making such a change is not permissible"; and he quotes the correct expression. Then he continues, "But when a poet obtains masterful usage in poetry, he is forgiven" (Mīr 1979:70). The real Mīr is interested in Delhi court language not as an end in itself, but for the literary use one can make of it.

The other later, widespread canard about Mīr depicts him as a naively suffering (real-life) lover by temperament, full of pathos, innocence, and simplicity--a poet who placed a supreme value on intense emotional sincerity and disdained all mere wordplay and verbal artifice. This image of Mīr is so patently false (Pritchett 1979) that even the few passages from his tazkirah that we have examined above serve effectively to discredit it. Remarkably, this view persists in many popular and some scholarly quarters (Russell 1968, 1992), despite the existence of ample evidence to refute it and virtually none (except literal readings of the stylized tropes in certain carefully chosen verses) to back it up. This view forms part of a wider vision of "natural poetry" that came to dominate modern Urdu criticism, most unfortunately for the ghazal, after the shock of 1857 and the end of the tazkirah tradition in 1880 (Ḥālī 1969).
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Appropriately enough in view of his status, Mīr became the first Urdu poet whose complete works were typeset and printed. The voluminous "*Koolliyati Meer Tyqee*" [Complete works of Mīr Taqī] (1811), an immense project, was a collaborative effort by no fewer than four editors (Das 1978:159). The honor of preparing and publishing it goes, like many other oft-begrudged honors, to Fort William College in Calcutta, which was originally set up in 1800 as a language training institute for British colonial administrators. During its first two decades Fort William published many works designed for use as language textbooks--and perhaps also, subliminally at least, as role models. Urdu at this time was, says *Water of Life*, like a "lively boy," and "was delighting everyone, in poets' gatherings and the courts of the wealthy, with the mischievous pranks of his youth." Overseeing this boy, however, was a "wise European" who was "seated with a telescope atop the fort of Fort William in Calcutta." This European "looked--and his hawk-like glance deduced that the boy was promising, but needed training" (Āzād 1982:24).

Since the Urdu ghazal tradition was by then so well established, for Fort William to publish its great master Mīr no doubt seemed an obvious choice. Far more characteristically innovative was the publishing of a tazkirah of Urdu poets written in Urdu instead of Persian, under the sponsorship of Fort William's "professor of the Hindoostanee language," the redoubtable John Borthwick Gilchrist (Siddiqi 1963). This work was compiled by Ḥaidar Baḵẖsh 'Ḥaidarī,' a regular Fort William "moonshee" [*munshī*] who taught, wrote, and prepared textbooks for the students' use; it was published as part of a larger work, *Guldastah-e ḥaidarī* [Ḥaidarī's Anthology], in 1803. Another similar, though much shorter, tazkirah in Urdu was prepared at almost the same time by Mirzā ,Alī 'Luṭf,' an author loosely affiliated with Fort William, but was not published till a century later (Farmān Fatḥpūrī 1972:210-13, 221-25). This latter work by Luṭf contains one fascinating assertion: that Mīr himself once "appeared before Colonel Scott with a view to literary employment at Fort William College, but because of his old age he could not be selected" (Farmān Fatḥpūrī 1972:212).

Mīr in his early years had helped to draw the boundaries of Reḵẖtah, separating it politely but firmly from the enveloping Persian medium in which it had been born; in his tazkirah, written when he was thirty, the word "English" never occurred. Near the end of his long life, when he was eighty or so, we see him reacting to the first delicate literary probes and proddings from the English world. And reacting perhaps even favorably, if Luṭf's account can

be relied upon. Mīr died in 1810; the printed version of his complete works appeared in 1811. A watershed of sorts; or as a larger watershed one might choose the year 1803, in which Lord Lake took Delhi--and in which Ḥaidarī's work became not only the first tazkirah of Urdu poets to be published, but also the first to be composed in Urdu rather than Persian (since Luṭf's was for the most part a brief and very direct translation from a Persian source).

Yet on the whole, even after 1803 the new British rulers of Delhi took pains to be as unobtrusive as possible. As one historian has noted, in studying the early nineteenth century "one is impressed by how little in feeling and in style of life, the educated classes of upper India were touched by the British presence before 1857" (Hardy 1972:55). Or as Āzād himself put it, "Those were the days when if a European was seen in Delhi, people considered him an extraordinary sample of God's handiwork, and pointed him out to each other: 'Look, there goes a European!'" (Āzād 1933:145).

For after all, the fact that Fort William College commissioned, prepared, and published so many ground-breaking, precedent-setting books does not mean that people paid much attention to them, or that those who did read them--especially in the early decades of the century--found them to be anything more than curiosities (Sadiq 1984:290-91). The ghazal was the genre of choice, and "the number of Urdu poets was much greater than the number of Persian poets"; but when it came to prose, "the whole country was interested only in reading and writing in Persian," according to the Lakhnavi historical writer ‚Abd ul-Ḥalīm 'Sharar' (1860-1926). And although Fort William Urdu prose works "may have impressed the English in those days, they did not--and could not--impress anyone among the Hindustani literary people." For "at that time the effect of English education had not changed the country's literary taste," and Persian's rhymed prose, flowing diction, and artistic use of repetition "dwelt in imaginations and minds" (Sharar 1963:181-83).[6] Even the powerful tradition of Urdu prose romance, or *dāstān*, became a significant written genre only relatively late in the nineteenth century (Pritchett 1991:21-28).

Urdu poetry and Urdu prose thus had radically different histories in North India. The tazkirahs tell us that when Valī Dakanī came north in the early eighteenth century, his poetry spread like wildfire, and Reḵẖtah at once began to supplant Persian as the poetry of choice: Valī had been the first to "match Persian stride for stride." The result was that "when his *dīvān* arrived in Delhi, Eagerness took it with the hands of respect, and Judgment regarded it with the eyes of attention; Pleasure read it aloud" (Āzād 1982:87). But when Fort William provided similarly exemplary Urdu prose texts (not only for tazkirahs but for other genres as well), and even conveniently published them, the resulting works had almost no impact--and in fact were rather condescendingly ignored for decades. Lovers of Reḵẖtah preferred to embed their verses in a matrix of Persian prose. Tazkirahs of Urdu poetry continued to be written in Persian: eleven of them survive from the first four decades of the nineteenth century, along with only one very halfhearted Urdu work, really more of a "notebook," and even that one linked to Fort William patronage (Farmān Fatḥpūrī 1972:252-55).

Not until the 1840's was the grip of Persian prose finally broken: starting in that decade, well over half the tazkirahs of Urdu poets began to be written in languages other than Persian. Garcin de Tassy composed a massive and important tazkirah of sorts (1839-47) in French, and Alois Sprenger produced a tazkirah (1850) in English (Farmān Fatḥpūrī 1972:303-

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[6]There is also a useful English translation of Sharar's work that can be relied on for most purposes (Sharar 1975). I have not cited it in this paper because I wanted to stay closer to the literal wording of the original.

12, 366-72). But most, of course, were in Urdu. Of the three Urdu tazkirahs composed in this decade, two were small productions (twelve poets in one, thirty-seven in the other) by Delhi authors closely associated with the British-sponsored Delhi College (Farmān Fatḥpūrī 1972:313-28). Thus the author of the third of these three tazkirahs could almost claim to be writing the first truly "indigenous" Urdu tazkirah of Urdu poets, the first one not to be directly inspired, or even indirectly influenced, by British patronage.

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This third tazkirah, *K̲h̲ūsh ma،rikah-e zebā* [A Fine and Appropriate Martial Encounter] (1846), by Sa،ādat K̲h̲ān 'Nāṣir,' is a particularly notable example of the genre. We do not know when Nāṣir was born; we know only that he died between 1857 and 1871. He was a Lakhnavi, and a very religious Shiite; he was lively, sociably inclined, a lover of anecdotes. He had all the outward requisites of poetic status: he was accepted as a shagird by a well-known ustad, Mirzā 'Mużnib,' and in turn had shagirds of his own. He composed a number of *dīvān*s of Urdu poetry, using almost every genre available; most of these are now lost. But clearly he had "no special rank" as a poet. He occasionally composed in Persian, and translated from Persian. His only published work was the Urdu prose romance *Qiṣṣah agar o gul* [The story of Aloe and Rose] (1846) (K̲h̲vājah 1972:17-39).

His lengthy tazkirah *K̲h̲ūsh ma،rikah-e zebā* was completed in 1846--or rather, reached a stage its author initially deemed complete, for its name is a chronogram [*tārīk̲h̲*] encoding that year. But its textual history is one of subsequent steady expansion in manuscript form over a period of fifteen years or more. Four manuscripts exist, each later one containing significant authorial revisions; each has a different number and slightly varying selection of poets, although the general trend is toward expansion and improved organization over time (K̲h̲vājah 1972:82-105). This situation was common in the tazkirah genre, especially in its earlier years: since publication was not generally intended, the tazkirah was disseminated by repeated copying and recopying--and what author could resist the chance to make improvements? One could add new poets one had recently discovered, or include dates of death (along with the traditional chronograms that encoded them) for poets who had recently died. Nāṣir took advantage of the chance to do even more: within his remarkable ustad-shagird structure he added a city-by-city grouping of poets as well (K̲h̲vājah 1972:101-03). The over-all number of poets contained in the four manuscripts taken together is 824--a total that is large but not, by tazkirah standards, extraordinary.

Nāṣir's own account of his work is casual, offhand, almost perfunctory. Some tazkirah-writers started with the creation of Adam and the whole of human literary history, offered glimpses of selected high points of Arabic, Persian, and Indian poetry, explicated their views on poetic theory, or gave accounts of their own lives--and only after dozens of pages got around to the tazkirah itself. Nāṣir, by contrast, introduces his massive volume with the briefest possible description of his project:

> For some time this unworthy one had the idea of compiling a tazkirah of the poets of Hind. But because of a lack of information about the circumstances of the early poets, this intention was not fulfilled. In those days when the tazkirah compiled by the late Miyāñ 'Muṣḥafī' Ṣāḥib came to hand, the importunities of enthusiasm roused courage to action. And in contrast to Miyāñ Ṣāḥib whose tazkirah is in the Persian language, this faqir wrote in Hindī, for uniformity [*yakrangī*] is better than diversity [*dorangī*]; and he did not retain the rule of alphabetical order, so that wherever one would find the name of a shagird, it would be written under the ustad's

name. And so that the [use of the] Hindī language and the manner of [arranging] the poets' names would be my invention. And those poets whose ustad and shagird relationships are not known, and their names and identities not understood--it would conclude with them. I begin it with Mirzā Rafī, us-Saudā, first because he is the founding elder of composition in Reḵhtah, and second because the lineage [*silsilah*] of this insignificant one's *shāgirdī* goes back to him (1:1).[7]

Three sweeping claims are made here, and all deserve scrutiny: that Nāṣir invented the use of "Hindī" rather than Persian for tazkirahs; that he invented the organization of poets according to lineages; and that Saudā is the founding elder of Urdu poetry.

Nāṣir wishes to write a tazkirah of the "poets of Hind," or India--what more logical language to use than the "language of Hind," or "Hindī"? Abandoning the Persian language used by almost all his predecessors is an act justified in a single phrase: he chooses Hindī because "uniformity is better than diversity." It can be seen already from this brief preface that Nāṣir is by no means a theorist: he obviously loves order and organization, but he feels no need to explain his methodology at length. Perhaps he feels that simplifying and rationalizing the process of tazkirah-writing is a self-evidently desirable goal: why use two languages when you only need one?

And of course, Nāṣir participates in the wider rethinking of Persian that was going on in his time and place. Less than a decade later, another Urdu tazkirah-writer, in Delhi, described his own sense of the situation: "A number of right-seeing companions showed me the way: Persian is the merchandise of the shop of others, and the capital of the trading of strangers; accomplishment in it requires a whole long lifetime, and some sweetly-singing guide from among the nightingale-voiced ones of the garden of Iran." Instead, one should concentrate one's efforts on Urdu: if it could "manage to become clean and trim," then "Persian would be devoid of radiance before it, and Afghan Persian [Darī] would go out of use by comparison to it" (Ṣābir 1972:15). Persian, however beautiful, is ultimately the property of others; Reḵhtah-Hindī-Urdu, with its great potential, is the proper locally-owned field for literary work.

Hindī as the "language of Hind" could--and did--play an obvious role as an umbrella term. Like the term *bhāshā* or *bhākhā*, "(colloquial) language," it could mean whatever a given writer and audience understood by it (Alam, REF). Until a much later point in the nineteenth century Hindī was, in the literary culture we are examining, the most common name for the language we now call Urdu--a language that used the Delhi region's *khaṛī bolī* grammar and the Persianized range of its vocabulary, and was written in a modified form of the Persian script. There was no confusion with what is now called Hindi--the *khaṛī bolī* grammar written in Devanāgarī script--simply because as a literary presence that language scarcely existed (King 1994). Nāṣir uses "Hindī" very often in the course of his tazkirah, while "Urdu" occurs only rarely; the other term he uses--once in his brief preface and often at other points in his tazkirah-- is of course "Reḵhtah."

Nāṣir claims to be the first tazkirah writer to use "Hindī" rather than Persian. This claim is unfounded. However, he must have believed it, or at least expected his readers to believe it; otherwise as a proud boast in his preface it makes no sense. And indeed his claim may well have reflected his knowledge, for three of the five earlier Urdu tazkirahs had been composed long ago--thirty to forty years previously--and far away, in Calcutta. He might well not have known of them. The other two tazkirahs were only slightly earlier than his own, so that

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[7]This and all such parenthesized numbers from now on refer to volume and page in Nāṣir 1972.

the periods of composition undoubtedly overlapped, and they were much smaller productions; moreover, they were by Delhi authors--and while Delhi was not so far from Lucknow, local chauvinism and mutual rivalries were not exactly unknown. As we have seen, all five earlier Urdu tazkirahs had been produced under markedly westernizing auspices; thus the semi-legitimacy with which Nāṣir could have claimed to be writing the first truly "indigenous" Urdu tazkirah of Urdu poets.

But of course such subtle and hairsplitting claims were outside his purview. Nāṣir was not a scholar, as his own preface makes clear. He says he was unable to write his tazkirah until he obtained information about the early poets; once he obtained Muṣḥafī's tazkirah, he immediately set to work. At the end of the tazkirah (2:585) he reports his laborious acquisition of only four sources: Muṣḥafī's two tazkirahs, Sheftah's, and Sarvar's. He refers much more often to Muṣḥafī, but uses the others also, and is indebted directly or indirectly to several more tazkirahs as well. Of course, in his world manuscripts were hand-copied, and were rarer and more difficult not only to obtain, but even to know about, than we usually remember. But even by the standards of his own time, he was definitely unscholarly, as his editor Mushfiq Ḳhvājah notes with disapproval. He ignored a number of the most famous and valuable tazkirahs--ones that were "not so rare and inaccessible that Nāṣir wouldn't have obtained them if he had searched." His basic practice was to use "for one poet, material from one tazkirah." And even then, he was careless: "Muṣḥafī's tazkirahs were before him--at least Nāṣir could have copied down from them the poets' birth and death dates; but he didn't even do that much." He had "no special principle before him" as he described some poets in one sentence and others in a number of pages, and gave very few or very many samples of their work (Ḳhvājah 1972:55-56, 69).

Yet in one respect Nāṣir was the most rigorous of Urdu tazkirah writers. While the great majority of tazkirahs were alphabetical, roughly chronological, idiosyncratic, or even random in their listing of poets, Nāṣir's alone was based as scrupulously as possible on the poetic lineage [*silsilah*], the chain of transmission over time from ustad to shagird, from master-poet to pupil. There was a certain logic to this organization, since in the North Indian Urdu ghazal tradition these relationships were so highly developed and so uniquely important. In his introduction Nāṣir claims, as we have seen, to have invented this approach to tazkirah organization; and this time, his claim seems to be quite legitimate. He thus begins his tazkirah with the great ustad Saudā, both "because he is the founding elder of composition in Reḳhtah," and because "the lineage of this insignificant one's *shāgirdī* goes back to him." Nāṣir documents this latter claim with pride: the lineage runs from Mirzā Muḥammad Rafī, 'Saudā' (1706?-1781), Mīr's great contemporary, through Mirzā Aḥsan ,Alī 'Aḥsan,' to Mirzā Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Mużnib,' to Nāṣir himself. As can be seen, Nāṣir places himself in the fourth literary generation, so that his two shagirds--one of whom was a nawab from whom he received a regular stipend (1:81-82)--then fall into the fifth. The maximum depth of this whole "family tree" of lineages is seven ustad-to-shagird "generations," mapped over a period of roughly a century and a half.

Within this "family tree" one at once notices the immense disproportion between quality and quantity. Most of the poets on Nāṣir's list are extremely minor, and are now deservedly forgotten. Of the two greatest poets in the classical Urdu tradition, Mīr himself and his successor Mirzā Asadullāh Ḳhān 'Ġhālib' (1797-1869), Mīr had no more than thirteen poets in the lineage he founded, while Ġhālib had--according to Nāṣir--exactly one. Among the other major poets, Saudā, Nāṣir's own ustad, had 65 shagirds over four generations; Ḳhvājah Mīr 'Dard' (1720-1785) had 72 over seven generations; these numbers sound reasonable. But Shaiḳh

Ġhulām Hamadānī 'Muṣḥafī' (1750-1824), author of Nāṣir's favorite tazkirah sources, ended up with no fewer than 341 poets over six generations in his lineage, or well over half of the 595 poets who are included in the whole set of lineages. Many chance factors were involved: ustads who lived longer, who lived in important cities, who had sociable dispositions, whose poetry was widely popular, who needed the extra money, obviously ended up with more shagirds--and even one or two talented and energetic shagirds could be the makings of an impressive lineage. And poets who composed their own tazkirahs of Urdu poets--Muṣḥafī composed not one but two-- could make sure that everyone knew the full list of their shagirds.

Above all, from Nāṣir's tazkirah one can clearly see how widespread the lineage network was, and how fast it ramified: how many hundreds of poets needed or wanted to have an ustad, and how commonly they sought a close relationship with an available local poet, no matter how minor, rather than claiming affiliation with a greater poet more distant in place and time. Plainly these ustad-shagird relationships were generally based not so much on prestige or literary fame, as on local access and personal affinity. One can also see from Nāṣir's presentation how the lines of power ran: it was not the ustad who needed the shagirds, to enhance his prestige; rather, it was the shagirds who needed the ustad, to train them in the skills of poetry-composition. In Nāṣir's view, wherever one finds the name of a shagird, one should find it linked to the name of his ustad.

Nāṣir takes this linkage very seriously, and recognizes that its intimacy lends itself to abuse. About one verse attributed to Qāfm he says pointedly, "I have seen this verse in Saudā's *dīvān* also"--and he adds, with a heavily sarcastic disapproval reminiscent of Mīr's, "There's no harm, because the shagird acquires ownership of the ustad's property!" (1:25). Although they could not (legitimately) inherit poetry, shagirds could be heirs in many other senses--and this was true even if they were women, and even if they were courtesans [*ṭavāʾf*]. Nāṣir tells an anecdote about the courtesan Begā 'Shīrīn,' shagird of the poet 'Baḥr':

> One day Mīr Vazīr 'Ṣabā' said to me, "I have heard that Shīrīn's poetry has been [favorably] mentioned in the mushairah. It's a pity that she is not among the descendants of Shaikh 'Nāsiḵ,' so that his name would have remained radiant." Miyāñ Baḥr said, "Pupils too have the status of sons, his name will remain established through us." And he said to Shīrīn, "You too, through connection with me, are his granddaughter" (2:582).

The practical uses of such close apprenticeship relationships between ustad and shagird were, as we will see, manifold.

Like any family tree, this one invites questions about its beginnings and ends. Where did the primal ancestors come from, and what happened over time to the descendants? In the case of classical Urdu poetry, the latter question is relatively easy to answer: a decade after Nāṣir's genealogical chart had first been drawn up, the family was killed off, or at least mortally wounded. The shock of the "Mutiny" of 1857--and especially its bloody aftermath, in which the British avenged themselves with particular harshness on the Indo-Muslim elites--gave rise to forms of political, economic, social, and cultural restructuring that produced a notable literary restructuring as well. Āzād's *Water of Life* (1880) is generally held to be the last tazkirah; by no coincidence, this crucial canon-forming work--which is heavily indebted, as many have recognized, to Nāṣir's own lively and anecdotal narrative style--is also the first modern literary history. *Water of Life* looms over the tazkirah tradition, and acts as a hinge between the old literary world and the new. Nāṣir too, like Āzād, lived to see the death-blow given to his literary culture. He initially completed his tazkirah in 1846, a decade before the "Mutiny"; but some of

his addenda were made after 1857, and he may have been alive as late as 1871, to see that what Āzād called "the page of the times" had been turned--and turned with (literally) a vengeance (Ḵhvājah 1972:17, 60-61, 83-84; Āzād 1982:4).

The question of origins is, however, more vexed. As we have seen, Nāṣir identifies Saudā, the head of his own lineage, as the founder of "composition in Reḵhtah," [*reḵhtah go ī*], and begins his tazkirah with him. Introducing Saudā, Nāṣir reports that his father is from Isfahan, and that his mother comes from a distinguished family. He then simply endows him--by means of an anecdote found nowhere else in the Urdu tradition (Shamīm Inhonvī 1971:25)--with a divine gift for poetry:

> A radiant faqir used to bestow a gaze of attention on the aforementioned Mirzā
> [Saudā]. After the death of [Saudā's] venerable father, he said to this solitary pearl,
> "This is the time when the prayer of the needy would be accepted and granted in the
> Court of the Fulfiller of Needs. Whatever you wish, ask for it." He petitioned,
> "Thanks to you I am free from care. If you insist, then please bestow on me the
> wealth of speech, the expression of which is poetry-composition." This one whose
> prayers are granted smiled on him, and as a pen name for this careless madman he
> brought to his lips the word 'Saudā' [madness]" (1:3).

The faqir also bestows on him undying, universal fame "throughout the four quarters of Hindustan"--a fame, Nāṣir notes, that Saudā indeed possesses, for he is known and revered "in every house." After the faqir's blessing Saudā goes directly to Delhi, the "seat of the kingdom, where all the people of talent and accomplishment were gathered," and dazzles everyone with his poetic powers (1:3-4). Nāṣir does not even trouble to tell us where Saudā lived before he went to Delhi: his life is his literary life, and his literary life begins with his trip to Delhi.

In other tazkirahs, as we have seen, (North Indian) Urdu poetry tends to begin with Valī. Āzād in *Water of Life*, for example, describes him as the "Adam of the race of Urdu poetry" and meditates at length on his role as its founder, the person who "brought all the meters of Persian into Urdu," who imported the ghazal itself and "opened the road" for the other genres (Āzād 1982:83). Since Urdu poetry had a history of several prior centuries in Gujarat and the Deccan, however, Valī could at the most have been a kind of Noah, restarting poetry in the north after a great flood of forgetting had wiped the slate clean of Deccani literary activity. Mīr was too close to his Dakanī predecessors to simply overlook them; by Nāṣir's time, such erasure was much easier to perform. But Nāṣir takes the amnesiac process a step further, for he is not even interested in Valī; we learn only, in passing, that "the foundation of Reḵhtah was laid by him" (2:568). Instead, Nāṣir blithely begins his lineages a generation later, with Saudā and his peers. He then jump-starts the tradition with the faqir's divine gift to Saudā: the invention or founding of Urdu poetry.

The point is not that Nāṣir has some particular revisionist view of early Urdu literary history. Rather, he seems to have almost no interest in it. He simply bundles it all up and makes it a transaction between God (through a faqir) and his own founding ustad, Saudā. His view of Urdu poetry is synchronic, and his interest in his own contemporaries is far more compelling than his commitment to the past. His only recognition of Persian, the ancestral language, is to boast of his originality in replacing it with "Hindī" in his tazkirah. He is not anxious about the past, because he sees the present effortlessly assimilating it, using it, evolving beyond it. And he does not even have much time for the past, because the present is so fruitful and the poetry so obviously flourishing. Saudā is revered "in every house" in all quarters of Hindustan, other great poets are equally universal in their appeal (1:348-49), and more and more shagirds flock to the

available ustads. Arranging the poets into lineages is, among other things, a way to organize the proliferation of poets that Nāṣir sees all around him. It is a way of putting one's house in order to serve the needs of the present; it is a display of one's own inventive energy and zeal. Through such a unique achievement, even a poet of secondary talent could hope to make a name for himself.

Not surprisingly, Nāṣir the Lakhnavi paints an exceptionally harsh portrait of Mīr, who was not only Saudā's great contemporary and rival but had also by then been coopted into appearing as the quintessential Dihlavi poet. When Nāṣir tells the story of Mīr and the commoner in the oxcart, he describes the man as a grocer [*baniyā*] and makes Mīr recoil from the mere sight of the man's face and keep his eyes fastidiously averted for the duration of the trip (1:141). He also depicts Mīr as arrogant in the extreme, both to his peers and his patrons. In Lucknow Mīr 'Soz,' Nawab Āṣif ud-Daulah's ustad, is asked to recite a few ghazals and is then lavishly praised by the nawab. Both Mīr Soz's "presumption" and the nawab's praise displease Mīr. He says to Mīr Soz, "You're not ashamed of such presumption?"--and proceeds to clarify his point: "About your venerable status and nobility there is no doubt, but in poetic rank no one equals Mīr!" (1:143-44). Nāṣir thus, by no coincidence, heightens the contrast between the arrogant Mīr and the carefree and casual Saudā.

Nāṣir devotes to ustads like Saudā and Mīr, and to some personal friends as well, a number of pages of anecdotal narrative; but most poets receive very brief entries. Nāṣir generally introduces his poets with a flourish: in many cases, with traditional (though often low-quality) Persianized rhymed prose [*saj,*]. Here is his account of an extremely unimportant poet (with line breaks imposed to show the rhyme):

> *shā,ir-e bā imtiyāz*
> *Mīr Amānat ,Alī taḳhalluṣ Mumtāz*
> *shāgirdī-e Saudā us kā māyah-e nāz*

"A poet with distinction; Mīr Amānat ,Alī, pen name 'Distinguished'; being Saudā's shagird was his source of pride." This, followed by a single verse as a select sample of his work, is all we hear about Mumtāz (1:22-23). Rather than being credited with any special "distinction," this poet is plainly being introduced with resonant sound effects. Nāṣir is a circus ringmaster presenting his performers with a flourish: "thrilling-- chilling-- high-flying-- death-defying!" As Nāṣir says of another poet's work, the verses are recorded "so that the reader may enjoy them"; but the truth is more complex. Poets have verses as their memorials [*yādgār*], and minor poets may well live on only in such references as this; it is an almost poignant service for a tazkirah writer to preserve their names. Nāṣir says of yet another poet, "Some of his verses are recorded, so that he will still continue to be mentioned [*żikr us kā bāqī rahe*]" (1:393, 390); *żikr* is of course the literal root of the *tażkirah*.

In the case of a major poet, however, such rhymed prose not only proves no barrier to communication, but in fact is often used for especially formal pronouncements. After a few sentences of (unrhymed) biographical information, Nāṣir presents to us his great contemporary, the Lakhnavi ustad Ḳhvājah Ḥaidar ,Alī 'Ātash' (1777-1847):

> *ab binā-e reḳhtah is rukn-e sālim se pāïdār*
> *bāvajūd pīrānah sālī ke ṯarż-e ,āshiqānah par har shi,r kā shi,ār*
> *,ārif-e kāmil*
> *qāni, aur mutavakkil*
> *Ḳhvājah Ṣāḥib sā kamyāb*
> *aur kalām un kā sab intiḳhāb*

is qadar mashhūr kih use ḥājat jam,a karne kī nahīñ

"Now the mansion of Reḳhtah is established on this sound pillar; despite his venerable age, a maker of every verse in a romantic style; a perfect knower of divine mysteries; few are austere and pious like the Ḳhvājah Ṣāḥib; and his poetry is all select; it is so famous that there is no need to collect it" (2:1). The (non-)relationship of poetry to personal biography in this literary culture is here perfectly illustrated. Nāṣir admires Ātash for his status as a venerable elder, his mystical knowledge, his austerity and piety, his religious qualities--*and* for his nevertheless making (experiencing, interpreting) "every verse in a romantic style." The word "romantic" [*,āshiqānah*] literally means "lover-like," and Nāṣir makes it clear that the lover-like qualities were to inhere in the poetry and the interpretation of the poetry, not the life of the poet. If Ātash invariably created and experienced poetry romantically despite his piety, venerability, and old age, this was a piquant and exemplary personal achievement. It demonstrates once again the entirely non-naturalistic poetics of the classical ghazal, which were later to be so sadly misconstrued by the cult of "natural poetry."

Nāṣir was also adept at using rhymed prose for the occasional hatchet job. Here he introduces one of his least favorite poets:

,ādī-e daḳhl o taṣarruf
Mīr Ḥusain ,Alī Taṣṣuf
shāgird-e Mīr Sher ,Alī Afsos, nihāyat ḳhud-bīn aur ḳhud-pasand
arvāḥ-e marḥūmāñ us se dardmand
nāḥaq nāḥaq ustādoñ ke ash,ār par i,tirāẓ kiyā
aur risālah-e muḳhtaṣar fareb-e ,avām ko tartīb diyā

"Accustomed to [improper] intervention and appropriation; Mīr Ḥusain ,Alī 'Taṣṣuf'; a shagird of Mīr Sher ,Alī 'Afsos,' extremely self-regarding and self-willed; the souls of the departed are in pain because of him; very wrongly he made objections to the ustads' verses; and he put together a brief pamphlet to mislead everybody" (1:244). Nāṣir intends to refute this pamphlet in detail: he provides a series of examples that shed light both on his own view of poetry, and on the kinds of literary debate in which his culture constantly engaged.

One of Nāṣir's examples of Taṣṣuf's folly deals with a verse by the revered ustad Ātash--a verse that in fact he singles out for its excellence:

A verse of Ḳhvājah Ātash's that is one of the best verses:

> *saudā huṣ hai murġh-e junūñ ke shikār kā*
> *phandā banā rahā hūñ garebāñ ke tār kā*
> /I am crazy about hunting the bird of madness
> I am making a snare from the threads of my collar/

About this by way of regret [*taṣṣuf*] he says, "I hope that the possessors of intelligence will consider what a defect can be seen in the meaning of this introductory verse. If the bird of madness has not yet been captured, then no person in his senses pulls out threads from his collar, which is the work of a madman. And if it has already been captured, then to procure the equipment for hunting is a vain action. If he had said it like this, it would have been better:

> /Whoever might be crazy about hunting the bird of madness
> Let him make a snare from the threads of my collar/."

The correction that this self-deluded one has done--if he is a madman, how would he have a collar? And if he is not a madman and is in his senses, since when is the act of a madman done by a man in his senses? If in Ḳhvājah Ṣāḥib's verse he had

already finished with his madness, then the objection would have been appropriate (1:245).

The word *saudā*, "madness," I have translated as "to be crazy about," in order to capture the punning effect that our own idiom also conveys.

Ātash's verse invokes the complex interplay between madness as an overpowering force that nullifies all personal choice, and madness as an object of the lover's personal choice, one that he voluntarily and even urgently pursues. Taṣṣuf is right to put his finger on the paradoxical nature of this interaction, but wrong to consider it a defect. Ātash is exploring, and relishing, the process by which the lover goes mad--a process both voluntary and beyond all volition, a process of his eagerly making a snare for something that has already captured him. The verse also highlights the wordplay embodied in the common idiom *saudā honā*, "to be crazy (about)." Since everyone in Nāṣir's world shares all this background information already, the discussion is devoted only to matters of over-all poetic effect and interpretation: does the verse create a clumsily flat contradiction, or an elegantly unresolvable paradox?

Through this kind of extremely abstract argument, the treatment of ghazal themes [*maẓmūn*] at the broadest level is refined and developed. At a slightly lower level of generality, Nāṣir also offers, in another of his refutations of the presumptuous Taṣṣuf, an argument about logical and semantic "fit":

> Now please listen, about Shaikh Nāsikh he writes, "His poetry is 'The shop grand, the food bland.'" Accordingly, this verse is taken as proof:
>> /My intoxication and awareness are the same state--
>> I never had a dream that my fortune was awake/
> He says, "In this verse the defect is present, that the first line has no connection [*rabt*] with the second line. In the first line the theme of madness is found, and in the second fate and destiny. He should have said,
>> /No one thought my sleep to be any different from wakefulness
>> My heedlessness and awareness are the same state/."
> Someone should ask that incoherent one: when heedlessness, awareness, dream, wakefulness--four things--are present in one verse, how can there not be connection? And when that madman likens the theme of the first line to madness--is madness mentioned in it, or bad fortune? And the lack of connection in the first line of his own verse is manifest: its theme has been badly fitted in (1:246-47).

The two lines of a ghazal verse are in every sense an independent mini-poem, and must be related to each other in some clear and poetically effective way, so that they have "connection" [*rabt*]. We have seen Mīr's heavy emphasis on the cultivation of *marbūt*, or *rabt*-possessing, poetry. Nāsikh's first line suggests that the speaker is deeply mad--is in fact never not mad, so that he has no intervals of lucidity. His "intoxication" of madness is identical with his normal awareness. He is so far from aspiring to better fortune, that even in his dreams he never imagines that his fortune would "awaken" and would bring him good luck. Nāsikh's verse is undoubtedly more piquant than Taṣṣuf's pedestrian reworking. (And by playfully calling Taṣsuf "that incoherent [*berabt*] one" and "that madman," Nāṣir too, like Mīr, ties his critical language directly into the content of his discussion.) But the point is that here the argument is at the level of the line: the success or failure of the "connection" between the two lines that should make them *marbūt*, the fitting in [*bāñdhnā*] of a theme into an individual line. The question is one of nuts and bolts, of technical skill in verse construction.

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Such disputes were sooner or later brought into the central institution of this literary culture: the poetry recitation session or *mushāʾirah*, venue for legendary rivalries, definitive site of the "fine and appropriate martial encounter" of Nāṣir's title. Here, the battles often came down to a level even more detailed and finicky, as individual words were called into question. Almost all mushairahs were "patterned" [*ṭarḥī*], which meant that an exemplary line from a verse was announced in advance, and all the poets recited fresh verses composed for the occasion in that specified meter and rhyme scheme. In one of his vivid anecdotes about mushairah behavior, Nāṣir narrates such a "martial encounter." This anecdote shows us Shaiḵ Imām Baḵhsh 'Nāsiḵ' (1776-1838), one of the ustads criticized by Taṣṣuf, assuming the offensive in his turn. Nāṣir writes in his account of Maujī Rām 'Maujī,'

These few verses are his memorial:

/When that unveiled one went to bathe beneath the water
Then because of the color of her face, a rose [*gulāb*] bloomed beneath
the water/
/When in a state of despair, I wept from thirst
There appeared there the wave of a mirage, beneath the water/
/Tears flowed from the weeping eyes in such a way
Just as water would flow from a fountain under water/

This pattern [*ṭarḥ*] was that of Mirzā Jaʿfar Ṣāḥib's mushairah. Mirzā Ḥājī 'Qamar' and Mīr Muẓaffar Ḥusain 'Ẓamīr' wanted to have Maujī Rām disgraced through the lips of Mirzā Qatīl. Mirzā Qatīl, in the open mushairah, made the following objection to [his ghazal]: that to call a rose [*gul*] a *gulāb* is contrary to usage; and a fountain is outside the water; and that a mirage is only [in] a desert-- what connection does sand have with waves? When Mirzā Ṣāḥib made these objections against it in the open mushairah, Shaiḵ Imām Baḵhsh Nāsiḵh found his temerity extremely displeasing. Maujī Rām took his plea to [his ustad] Miyāñ Muṣhafī. Miyāñ Ṣāḥib said, "Friendship ought not to be spoiled because of a shagird; one can acquire many such [shagirds]." When Nāsiḵh heard that Muṣhafī was not supporting Maujī, he himself sent for Maujī, wrote these questions and answers on a folded paper, and gave it to him. At the next gathering, he read it in the open mushairah.

"Oh most eloquent of the eloquent, Mirzā Qatīl Ṣāḥib, when you made these objections to this lowly one's ghazal, that to call a rose *gulāb* is contrary to usage and has not entered into Urdu--it is strange that a poet like you, the pride of the age, would say such a nonsensical thing. Do you not know that in the idiom of the people of Hind, cold weather during the spring season is called *gulābī jāṛā*, and rose-color is called *gulābī*? Not to mention that Mīr Muḥammad Taqī, who has no equal or peer in the language of Reḵhtah, says, [verses by Mīr, Maẓhar, and Muṣhafī illustrating these usages of *gulāb*]. And when you said that a fountain is outside the water, in reality Saʿdī, in the *Gulistān*, has committed this "mistake": [an illustrative Persian verse]. And when you said that a mirage is only in a desert, and asked what connection it has with a wave--Nāṣir ʿAlī says, [an illustrative Persian verse]. This is the answer to every one of your objections" (1:514-16).

Here Nāsiḵh offers two kinds of evidence: that of colloquial language, and that of poetic authority [*sanad*]. In the case of a disputed usage, citing instances from the work of recognized ustads in the tradition is an extremely powerful form of legitimation. Of the five examples he

offers, three are in Urdu and two in Persian. One of the Urdu examples is by Maẓhar, who is much better known as a Persian poet. Of the two Persian examples, the first is by an Iranian and the second by an Indo-Persian poet. The interpenetration of the Indo-Persian and Urdu ghazal traditions could hardly be clearer; in fact Qatīl himself, at whom this argument is directed, was known--by Nāṣir himself (1:296-97) among others--chiefly as a Persian ghazal poet. But the relationship with Persian was increasingly fraught: Ġhālib, for example, made a point of scoffing at Qatīl's Persian scholarship, claiming to respect only the Persian of native speakers, an attitude that led to a bitter and prolonged literary war.[8]

Once Nāsiḵh has demolished Qatīl's objections to Maujī's ghazal, he proceeds to carry the war into the enemy's territory:

And the second ghazal, composed by Ẓamīr, that you claim is free of defects--in one verse of it are [grounds for] two objections:
/Even in their homeland, the distracted ones [*sargashtagoñ*] find no peace at all
As the fish's restlessness [*iẕtirāb*] is not diminished beneath the water/
My dear sir, no poet has spoken of the restlessness of a fish under water, for the reason that a fish finds no rest anywhere except in the water. And if *iẕtirāb* is used in the meaning of "speed"--well, there is a big difference between "restlessness" and "speed." *Sargashtah* is singular; when you form its plural, instead of [the final] *he*, the Persian *kāf* [=*gāf*] and *alif nūn* will come, and it will be *sargashtagān*. Where has the invention of *sargashtagoñ* come from? The knowers of the Urdu language in this age are Miyāñ Muṣḥafī and Inshā ḟillāh Ḵhān; it is vain for you to to intervene where you have no standing. Your Persian is no doubt famous--let the Isfahanis enjoy it! Beyond that, you can have only our greetings and respects! (1:516-17).

As can be seen, the "objections" are here made at a very precise and even nit-picking level. Nasiḵh not only criticizes the description of fish as showing "restlessness" under water, but even takes exception to a grammatical form: *sargashtah* has been given an Urdu oblique plural ending instead of a Persian one. His tone toward Qatīl is withering: Qatīl may know Persian, but he should not plume himself on his Urdu, since the true contemporary ustads for Urdu are Muṣḥafī and Inshā. Persian and Urdu interpenetrate, but Urdu maintains its own standards of mastery, and over time the relationship becomes more and more contentious--for despite many vicissitudes and purist fantasies (Faruqi 1998), Urdu, as can be seen, is increasingly asserting its autonomy.

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Mushairahs were not only complex competitive arenas and technical workshops, but hothouses of gossip and general social rivalry as well. From Nāṣir's tazkirah we can obtain an unusually complete and lively impression of the societal range of Urdu poetry in the Lucknow of his time. The love of stories and anecdotes and small local details that Nāṣir shows in his tazkirah is unmatched (until *Water of Life*) in the tradition, and is one of the special

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[8]"In some gathering Mirzā recited a Persian ghazal. Some persons objected to one word in it. And the objection was according to the rule which Mirzā Qatīl had written in one of his pamphlets. When Mirzā heard it, he said, 'Who is Qatīl? And what do I have to do with Qatīl? He was a Khatrī from Faridabad. I have no respect for anyone except native speakers.' Most of those people were pupils of Mirzā Qatīl. Thus, they averted their eyes from the rules of hospitality, and tumult and turmoil arose among great and small" (Āzād 1982:505). For further discussion of these issues, see Faruqi 1998.

distinguishing features of his work. His contemporaries hated his tazkirah for its candidly gossippy stories and casually--or gleefully--unflattering anecdotes (Ḳhvājah 1972:40-46); they could not have imagined how much we in our time would value it for exactly that kind of insider's approach.

In Nāṣir's world there were numerous Hindu poets; Maujī Rām Maujī was of course among them. Mirzā Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Qatīl' (1757/8-1818) was himself a convert from Hinduism. Nāṣir is especially strong on the Lucknow poets of his own time: for about one hundred of them, he is our only source of knowledge (Ḳhvājah 1972:41). He records about forty-five poets who seem from their names to be Hindu, and seven poets named "Singh" of whom one or two were perhaps Sikhs. (Some tazkirah writers, by contrast, tend more or less to ignore Hindu poets (Farmān Fatḥpūrī 1972:596).) Nāṣir also includes another Hindu poet who has become a Muslim, and a Muslim poet who "through his evil fortune" has been converted to Christianity (1:275, 1:38). He provides brief accounts of fourteen women poets (2:577-83, 2:628); for only two of them does he name ustads. Of them all, the most fully described is the courtesan Shīrīn, heroine of the anecdote about the "sonship" of shagirds, a relationship in which her ustad Baḥr, as we have seen, most specifically included her.

Nāṣir also mentions a few poets from humble backgrounds, including a barber (1:47-48), a herald (1:204), a perfumer (1:248), a member of the lowly Hindu porter [*kahār*] caste (1:421), a watchmaker (2:99), a shoe-merchant (2:397), a jeweler's son (2:513-14). It is clear that their relatively lowly status does not exactly disqualify them from being poets, but it does let them in for patronizing treatment. Nāṣir is rather surprised by their achievements, and seeks to use them as a moral lesson. The poet 'Ḥajjām' [Barber], for example, "obtained improvement [*iṣlāḥ*] by trimming the beard of Mirzā Rafī, Saudā." Nāṣir enjoys his pun on the barbers' idiomatic use of the word *iṣlāḥ* to mean "trimming or shaving the hair." And as we might expect, Nāṣir proceeds to assign all the credit to Saudā: "The company of accomplished people has the quality of a philosopher's stone: iron, although it is black inside, becomes pure gold, just as this craftsman obtained the wealth of the coin of poetry, and received praise and applause in all Shāhjahānābād [Delhi]" (1:48). Of 'Mujrim' Nāṣir says, "Although he is a shoe-merchant in Dalāl Bazaar, in the mold of his temperament verses are well formed." In this case, the credit goes to his city: "And what a cultivated city Lucknow is, that nobles from elsewhere are consumed with jealousy over the eloquent word choice [*faṣāḥat*] of our craftsmen!" (2:397). Nāṣir's use of "mold" and "well formed" also wittily evokes the shoemaker's craft, in the style of allusive double-meaning much appreciated in the Persianized literary tradition.

Among all these humble poets, particularly fascinating is Āftāb Rāʄ 'Rusvā' [Disgraced], who according to Nāṣir amply lived up to his pen name.

He was a jeweler's son; through the zeal and ambition of love he gave up name and honor, and wandered in streets and markets. Street urchins used to present him with a drum and a cowrie shell; with a garland of cowrie shells around his neck, this verse was on his lips:

/He was disgraced [*rusvā*], he was ruined, he became a vagabond--
Whoever passed through love's way/

Due to his distractedness, he left Shāhjahānābād [Delhi] and came to Amroha. Since in those days men from Delhi were honored and esteemed everywhere, he settled down in a Sayyid's house. One day he sent a youth to get wine, and the youth became absorbed in childish games. This verse was on his lips at every moment:

/The boy went away to get wine--how can there be entertainment?

I give up the thought of wine--may the boy be well!!/
When he was dying, he requested his drinking companions to bathe his corpse in wine [rather than water]; his drinking companions acted on his request. These two or three verses, which are the pearls of his temperament, are noted by way of memorial: [two verses] (2:513-14).

Here is almost the archetype of the ghazal's classic lover-protagonist: wandering, half-mad, disgraced, flaunting his intoxication, violating worldly and religious norms--living out ghazal conventions, it would seem, in his actual life.

What is striking about this anecdote is its tone--elegiac, austere, free of the moralizing or condemnation of which Nāṣir is exceedingly capable. For Nāṣir is never one to mince words: he gleefully offers critical anecdotes and makes sweeping, hostile judgments about two dozen or so poets, many of whom he accuses of arrogance, use of vulgar and abusive language, ingratitude toward noble and generous patrons--or sexual pursuit of boys. Nāṣir records of eight or nine poets (out of 824) that they loved boys. In some cases he clearly disapproves of this behavior. About 'Fidvī' Lāhorī, whom he dislikes, he writes: "In his mind, his claim to poetry was beyond all limits; and passing beyond the level of poetry, he set his foot on the path of pederasty [*amrad parastī*]. This vile practice caused many conflicts within his family; his body was pulverized with wounds, but he didn't have the strength to give up this weakness" (1:126). But in the case of Nāṣir's own close friend ',Aẕhar,' his tone is much more indulgent: "In the season of his youth he was restless with love for smooth-faced [beardless] ones, and unable to control his love of boys who were the envy of Houris" (2:154).

What can be made of anecdotal commentary like this? It is not necessary to affirm the historical truth of such anecdotes to find them significant; and in fact, many of the most famous literary anecdotes, especially those in *Water of Life*, have been amply discredited (Vadūd 1984). In this case, it is the doubleness of perspective that is so piquant. For the tazkirah tradition situates itself right at the intersection of social reality and literary convention: it reports--anecdotally at least--on the poets, as well as on their poetry. When a sexual predilection for boys is considered in its actual social context of lived behavior (as in the case of Fidvī), Nāṣir often views it as repugnant. But when the love of beautiful boys is considered abstractly or distantly (as in the case of ,Aẕhar) or is allegorized into an archetypal life of alienation, suffering, and death (as in the case of Rusvā), it arouses no such disgust. It seems then to become assimilated into the ghazal's poetic universe, along with madness, drunkenness, outcast status, apostasy from Islam, sacrificial death, and other themes of transgression (Schimmel 1992).

As we have seen in Nāṣir's treatment of Ātash, the romantic and passionate behavior attributed to the ideal-typical lover was emphatically *not* to be conflated with the real life of this venerable and elderly ustad. Still, especially in the case of minor poets, the tazkirahs' anecdotal approach often faces two ways. Āzād says of a certain minor poet who died young, "He was himself beautiful, and loved to look at beautiful ones, and finally gave up his life in the grief of separation" (Āzād 1982:186). Is this biography, or a romantic play on a literary archetype? In the case of the extremely numerous minor poets, about whom often little was known except vague gossip and rumor, such conflation was understandable; and of course nobody bothered about it, since people read tazkirahs for literary pleasure--for good poetry and good anecdotes, not precise factual information. Only with the cult of "natural poetry" from the late nineteenth century onward did such biography and pseudo-biography become reified in the naive way that continues to be troubling to many ghazal-lovers.

Many of Nāṣir's characteristic attitudes converge in a unique and often-cited passage, in which he observes with considerable disdain a new performance genre that was destined to become the start of the dramatic tradition in Urdu (Sharar 1963:173-75). His report takes the form of an eyewitness account--and it is the only one we possess. Sayyid Āġhā Ḥasan 'Amānat' (1815-1858) had, Nāṣir tells us, composed a *masnavī*--an extended poem, often narrative, in rhymed couplets--called *Indar sabhā* [Indra's Assembly] "in the manner of a *rahas*." A *rahas* was a kind of performance involving Krishna and the *gopī*s, which was invented by Vājid ,Alī Shāh (r.1850-1856) and staged by him in his court at Lucknow. Amānat's work, in its new performance mode, now opened this genre to an unprecedentedly wide audience:

> And in this masnavi he composed ghazals and *holī*s and *ṭhumrī*s and *chhand* in the [Braj] Bhākhā language. Thus when they heard it Paṅḍit Kashmīrī and Bihārī the Porter and Mīr Ḥāfiẓ selected some beautiful children and lovely moon-faced boys and had the boys memorize the masnavi, and educated them in singing and dancing, and set up a *rahas*. And they were retained for fifteen rupees a day. Accordingly, people saw this new-style gathering and liked it very much, and thousands of common [*bāzārī*] people began to come for it. One day the author of this tazkirah too went to this *rahas* gathering of the *Indar sabhā*. I saw that thousands of people were mad and crazy for those beautiful boys. As the verse says,
> /There was such a crowd of moon-faced ones
> That I was afraid my heart would be ground to pieces/
> And Miyāñ Amānat was seated on a high platform, and a beautiful moon-faced boy sang before him. When I saw this, after watching for a while I came away to my home.

Lest we should fail to note his disapproving tone, Nāṣir adds a final verdict: "Just as thousands of women became prostitutes [*fāḥishah*] through Mīr Ḥasan's masnavi, so through this masnavi *Indar sabhā* thousands of men became sodomites [*lūṭī*] and catamites [*muġhlam*], and sodomy became widespread" (1:231).

Nāṣir's comparison is to Mīr Ḥasan's *Siḥr ul-bayān* [Magic of Discourse], which is by far the most famous masnavi in Urdu. Yet in his account of Mīr Ḥasan, Nāṣir has lavish praise for the masnavi and not a word to say about its alleged corrupting tendencies (1:41-42). Apparently Amānat's work irritates Nāṣir, and inclines him to dark mutterings. Even in the midst of his petulance he cannot help inserting a verse, but that does not change his basic mood. For in this performance he sees what might be called a real-world vulgarization of the love of beautiful boys: instead of being abstract poetic visions of beauty, desire, and transgression, here the boys are present in the flesh, in quantity, singing romantic verses before a huge audience of excited common people. Instead of remaining a sophisticated genre, recited in settings controlled by poets and elite patrons, here the masnavi is filled with colloquial verse-forms and acted out as popular entertainment. Instead of a few commoners' being generously allowed to join the company of poets, here a veteran poet himself presides over the offering of his work for mass consumption and patronage (Hanson 1998). Here is the beginning of something new, the seed of Urdu drama from which would grow the Parsi theater and so much else besides; Nāṣir seems to sense this, and he is *not* amused.
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We have noticed the confrontational aspects of the tradition--the way the mushairah functioned as an arena for many kinds of conflict and rivalry. But the warmer and more

supportive side of the literary experience should not be overlooked. Impromptu composition was highly valued, and many opportunities were available for the poet to show his skill. Above all, well-earned praise from one's ustad was sweet beyond measure. Nāṣir describes, with a becoming show of modesty, one such achievement of his own that earned his ustad's praise.

> One day [a shagird named] 'Ṭapish' came to Ḥaẓrat Ustād [Mużnib], having composed this line and petitioning for the second line:
> /Sir, please just shoot your arrow with a bit of care/
> As it happened, this humble one too was in attendance at that time. From my lips, without thought or hesitation, there emerged,
> /Some awestruck one might be in the guise of a gazelle/
> The ustad was extremely pleased with the second line, and gave the highest praise and applause to my inventiveness (1:67-68).

What does it mean to "shoot with care"? To avoid hitting an innocent passerby who stands transfixed by the sight of the beloved's beauty? Or to shoot accurately for a clean kill, to spare the hopelessly infatuated lover any prolonged suffering? Both at once, of course. This is part of the elegance of *kināyah*, "implication," one of the recognized ways to make a small two-line poem feel packed with meaning (Faruqi 1990-94:2:136).

> While the shagird might pull off such feats occasionally, for an experienced and long-practiced ustad these subtleties were routine. An ustad was a priceless resource: by changing a single word, he could raise the verse from the realm of the ordinary into a much finer and more complex state. Taking a mediocre verse, the ustad "adorned it with the jewels of correction" (2:310-11). Many of Nāṣir's anecdotes illustrate such skills.

> /Whichever taciturn one [*kam suḵẖan*] I address, would speak out--
> There is such accomplishment in me that a picture would speak out/
> Miyāñ 'Dilgīr' Ṣāḥib used to say, "One day I was in attendance upon Shaiḵẖ Nāsiḵẖ, when Mīr Sa,adat ,Alī 'Taskīn' arrived. The Shaiḵẖ Ṣāḥib said, "Please recite something." Dilgīr Ṣāḥib recited the verse above. The Shaiḵẖ said, "Your verse is good. If in place of *kam suḵẖan* [taciturn] there were *be zabāñ* [tongueless], then your accomplishment would be manifest and the verse would become peerless." Dilgīr Ṣāḥib accepted his alteration (1:175-76).

The difference between "taciturn" and "tongueless" is the difference between an improbability (a reticent, silent person speaks) and an impossibility (a tongueless person speaks, a picture speaks). The claim is now a miraculous one, parallel to that in the second line--and a far more suggestive and compelling verse has been created.

> The emphasis on ghazal verses as independent two-line poems naturally encouraged the cult of *rabṭ* and the creation of various kinds of "implication" and multivalence and subtlety in small amounts of verbal space. It also lent itself to a focus on the smallest possible verbal space, the single perfect word--the word that brings the whole verse to life and delights the audience. As we have seen, Mīr reserved a separate category of Urdu poetry for verses based on *īhām*, the use of a "word fundamental to the verse" that would "have two meanings, one obvious and one remote, and the poet should intend the remote meaning, not the obvious one." Such verses carry an obvious one-two punch, since they first notably misdirect--and then abruptly correct--the audience. Nāṣir too recognizes *īhām* as a special style characteristic of certain poets (1:491, 1:505, 2:142). In one case, he links it explicitly with the pursuit of meaning, describing a poet as not only an *īhām*-creator but also a *ma,nī band*, a "capturer/depicter of meaning" (2:419). After the early vogue for *īhām* had passed, the concept remained as one of the technical devices

in the ghazal repertoire; it was merely one rather specialized form of "meaning creation" (Faruqi 1997).

Ġhālib, the last great master of classical ghazal, was famous for this kind of convoluted, metaphysical, "difficult" poetry. He famously declared poetry to be "the creation of meanings [ma,nī āfirīnī], not the measuring out of rhymes" (Ġhālib 1969:1:114-15). But the love of wordplay and complexity certainly goes back at least to Mīr, who, as we have seen, claimed all verbal resources as his own. "A single utterance has any number of aspects, Mīr / What a variety of things I constantly say with the tongue of the pen!" And again: "Every verse is coiled [pechdār] like a lock of hair / Mīr's speech is of an extraordinary kind" (Mīr 1983:553, 615). Not only examples of such complex poetry, but also specific references to it and claims of prowess in it, are found in virtually all the great Urdu (and Indo-Persian) poets (Faruqi 1990-94:3:129-31). Samayasundar's legendary feat, at Akbar's court in Lahore, of drawing more than eight hundred thousand meanings from an eight-word sentence, might in fact be considered a sort of limit case of ma,nī āfirīnī (Yashaschandra, REF).

Moreover, this love of wordplay, implication, and verbal complexity was no mere elite pastime: at least in nineteenth-century Delhi and Lucknow, it was by all accounts a widespread taste that pervaded the popular culture. According to Sharar, wordplay with double meanings [żila,] was a specialty of Amānat, the author of the *Indar sabhā*; but even his expertise was outdone by the skill of the people of Lucknow in general. Sharar names several popular Lakhnavi genres of wit and quick repartee (e.g., *phabtī, tuk bandī*) and singles out for particular praise the cry of a street vendor:

> A street vendor was selling sugarcane in the market. This was his cry: "Hey friends, who will capture a kite?" Can any metaphor be more enjoyable than this? The most refined metaphor is that in which the name neither of the thing itself, nor of the metaphorical thing, appears. Only some special feature of the metaphorical thing is mentioned, to give pleasure in the speaking. What better example can there be of this than his not mentioning the name of sugarcane, or of the bamboo with which kites are captured, but only saying, "Who will capture a kite?"

The bamboo pole with which kites are captured is a metaphor for the tall sugarcane; and the pole itself is not even named, but only suggested. Sharar reports that no simile could be more to the taste of the common people [bāzārī log] than this, and that "hundreds, thousands" of such examples could be heard "night and day" in popular conversation (Sharar 1963:189-93).

A disdain for "mere" wordplay is by now deeply engrained in the poetic sensibilities of modern Urdu-speakers. Yet, as Shamsur Rahman Faruqi points out, it is quite wrong to conceive of such wordplay as some kind of lacy ornamental frippery unrelated to the real world. "Wordplay tells us much about language and its possibilities, its colorful varieties, its subtleties." And since language itself is not merely a most important part of our world, but actually also constitutive of that world, none of its creative and expressive possibilities should be overlooked (Faruqi 1997:46). Wordplay is, in short, always meaning-play as well. The poets and audiences of the classical Urdu ghazal were well aware of its multivalent powers, and valued it accordingly. Their heirs live in a literary universe that is, by comparison, much simpler, flatter, and more impoverished.

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Ideally, at the high points of the ghazal world all forms of delight and reward converged. With two lines of poetry, Mīr Ḥasan created a sensation:

> *dhyān rahtā hai jo us kūche meñ aksar apnā*

> *ghar meñ ham rahte haiñ aur ḍhūñḍhte haiñ ghar apnā*
> /The way my thoughts dwell in that lane--
> I live in a house--and I search for my house/

At Shāh ,Ālam Mirzā Sulaimān Shikoh Bahādur's place there was a mushairah; *dilbar apnā* was its pattern. When Mīr Ḥasan recited the above introductory verse, Ḥaẕrat [Sulaimān Shikoh] again and again praised him in such a way that that free one's back was bent under the burden of gratitude. And Shaiḵ Nāsiḵ, too, often recited this introductory verse, and lost himself in ecstasy (1:42-43).

To "lose oneself in ecstasy" [*vajd karnā*] was to enter into a state of religious or poetic transport, sometimes frenzied--the term could apply to the dance of dervishes--but often simply enraptured and deeply delighted.

Nāṣir says of another poet that he achieves a kind of "impossible simplicity" [*sahl ul-mumtana,*] (1:207); the same term, one commonly used in the tradition, could easily be applied to this verse as well. Its vocabulary and grammar are elementary; it makes no show of sophisticated Persian words or complex rhetorical devices. The first line is a relative clause with the elusive, multivalent relative pronoun *jo* ("in that," "since," "because," or even "the way that"); it seems to demand a correlative ("thus," "accordingly," or even "similarly") which the second line does not provide. We know of course that "that lane" is the one where the beloved lives. But then we are left to put together for ourselves the relationship between the two lines. On an obvious level, (1) I am so absent-minded, so much absorbed in thinking of the beloved, that even when I'm in my own house I don't recognize it: I go around asking people where my house is, I behave like a fool or a madman because my thoughts are so entirely elsewhere.

Or, to go a level further, (2) I may live in "a" (random, happenstance) house, but it is not really "my own" [*apnā*] house, and I can never feel comfortable in it. My heart and mind constantly dwell in the beloved's street, haunting the only place that I can ever truly feel to be "mine." Thus my behavior is not foolish or mad, but quite natural: I know the street where my own true house is, and I am constantly reaching out toward it longingly in my thoughts, as any homesick traveler would.

Or, if we push hard on the relative pronoun *jo*, the meaning becomes a sufistic one: (3) Since my mind mostly dwells in that street already, that street is my real home; so how foolish it is of me not to recognize my good fortune! I am already *living* in my home--yet I am not aware, not satisfied; I am constantly, deludedly, searching elsewhere, outside, for my home. My mind is in God's street and with God, yet I am too foolish to realize that great mystical truth.

There is also a simple but satisfying recurrence of the verb *rahnā,* to stay, live, remain: my mind does it (metaphorically) in that street, I do it (concretely) in a house. This completely unforced word-and-meaning play increases the connectedness of the lines, making the verse more *marbūṯ.* There are sound-echoes and alliterations as well. And because the speaker uses the first person plural [*ham*], the verse can easily be about not merely the poet, but also all of "us"--the whole human species.

In short, even in such an utterly simple verse one can easily find three quite different meanings (with more meanings perhaps possible, though they would become farfetched). No one could call this verse complex in any ostentatious way, yet it seems to achieve an effortless triple "meaning-creation." The grammar of the verse makes it impossible for a reader to give absolute priority to any one meaning, so that the mind moves among them in a way that is intensely satisfying. It is like savoring a very subtle, piquant blend of flavors. It is absorbing; it is enough to make one recite it over and over and "lose oneself in ecstasy." Verses like this

further show the radical critical folly of any attempt to divide ghazal verses into (bad, unnatural) ones full of complexity and artifice, versus (good, natural) ones of irreproachable simplicity; or into "Ġhālib-style" intellectual tours de force that cause you to say "Bravo!" [*vāh*], versus what are still often considered "Mīr-style" emotional expressions that cause you to sigh [*āh*] with sentiment.

Among the verses of Ġhālib's that Nāṣir selects for recording is a famous introductory verse (2:191) that illustrates the range of possibilities offered by the genre.

shauq har rang raqīb-e sar o sāmāñ niklā

qais taṣvīr ke parde meñ bhī uryāñ niklā

/Passion, in every way, emerged as an enemy of pomp and circumstance

Qais, even in the purdah of a picture, emerged naked/

Qais was the given name of Majnūn, the mad lover who tore his garments. Separated from his beloved Lailā, he ran off to the desert and lived naked among the wild animals, who cared for him and listened raptly to his songs of love. Despite the pleas of his wealthy and respectable family, he refused to return. Painters constantly depicted him thus, and poets loved to envision him as the ultimate, the absolute, lover. In performance, of course, as always with the ghazal, the audience hears the first line of the verse two or three times before being offered the second: suspense has time to build, guesses to be made. In this case the first line is an abstract claim [*da,vā*], the second an illustration or "proof" [*tamṡīl*] of it, thus making the verse strongly *marbūṭ* in one of the classically accepted ways.

But what hits the listener most forcefully is the last two words, both shockers: *uryāñ niklā*, "emerged naked." Qais's public masculine nakedness is sharply contrasted with private feminine coveredness: it was even while he was "in" purdah [*pardah*] that Qais somehow "emerged" naked (or "turned out to be naked," in another possible translation). And he was, moreover, in the purdah "of a picture"--*pardah* literally means "veil," and paper veils the forms drawn on it, freezing them into a static two-dimensionality of mere representation from which they are not expected to "emerge" at all, much less emerge "naked," stripped of their paper garments. Knowers of the literary culture are also at once reminded of the crucial first verse in Ġhālib's *dīvān*, nominally a tribute to God [*ḥamd*] but actually a criticism, which imagines us humans as helpless "figures in pictures" wearing "paper robes" in order to appeal for redress of grievances--this according to what apparently was an ancient Persian custom (Ġhālib 1982:159). Yet Qais alone did the impossible: shockingly, he "emerged naked."

Qais did it as the embodiment of sheer passion [*shauq*], as an "enemy" [*raqīb*] of "pomp and circumstance." These two abstractions vie with one another: passion emerges to compete "in every way" with pomp and circumstance. The phrase *sar o sāmāñ* has been translated "pomp and circumstance" to illustrate its resonance and well-knownness; otherwise, "dignity and respectability," "intelligence and organization," "composure and preparedness," and many other renderings could be produced for this pairing of the common words for "head (power, inclination, desire)" and "equipment." Dignity would keep passion respectably clothed, hidden away in purdah, flattened out into the static passivity of a picture. But passion is irrepressible, it rebels to the uttermost: against all odds, "in every way"--literally, "in every color," with a fine wordplay [*munāsibat*] on "picture"--it "emerges naked." The presence of the literal words for "head" and "equipment" also reminds us that Qais is the one figure in the ghazal world who has rejected both entirely: as a madman he is out of his head, as a naked wanderer in the desert he nas renounced all possible forms of "equipment."

Passion is thus opposed to a complex set of associations having largely to do with

intelligence, self-control, rational use and control of the world--in short, with thought as opposed to feeling. On the surface of the verse, "passion" is vindicated, for it *does* emerge. Yet the very verse that asserts the primacy of passion is enjoyable largely for the *thought* that has created and subtly developed that astonishing concept of Qais naked in the purdah of a picture. Donne would have loved Ġhālib. Here indeed is a verse that is "a hair touched by the flame," both "coiled" and "burnt," expressing both complexity of thought and intensity of feeling. Well might one read it over and over, and become lost in ecstasy.

        Mir too speaks in his tazkirah of a verse that causes him to lose himself in ecstasy. Not surprisingly, it is by the exemplary Sajjād:

> ,ishq kī nā ƒ pār kyā ho ƒe
> jo yih kishtī tire to bas ḍūbe
> /How can the boat of love make the crossing?
> As soon as this ship floats--that's it, it sinks/

>   "Although all the verses are--praise be to God!--excellent, when this faqir sees *this* verse, he at once loses himself in ecstasy. Reading this verse gives me much joy--I want to write this verse in a hundred places" (Mīr 1979:71-72).

To make you read a verse over and over, to make you feel like writing it in a hundred places-- what else is poetry for? As Nāṣir said of another poet, "His verses scratch like a fingernail on the heart" (2:20).

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        Nāṣir's tazkirah was initially completed in 1846, and a decade later the Mutiny, the First War of Indian Independence, swept away the world of classical Urdu poetry. Old "Mughal" Delhi was destroyed, its poets dispersed. The young Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād, whose father was executed by the British for participation in the rebellion, fled the city on foot with his whole extended family. Parking them in safety with friends, he wandered for several years, avoiding arrest, until he settled in Lahore and eventually got a job with the Department of Public Instruction. There he lived for the rest of his life, and there he wrote, among many other works, *Water of Life* (1880)--for he knew that "poetry is water of life to the spirit" (Pritchett 1994:50). He explained his purpose in this work by analyzing the traditional cultural role of the tazkirah:

>   Moreover, those with new-style educations, whose minds are illumined by light from English lanterns, complain that our tazkirahs describe neither a poet's biography, nor his temperament, character, and habits; nor do they reveal the merits of his work, or its strong and weak points, or the relationship between him and his contemporaries and between his poetry and their poetry. In fact they even go so far as to omit the dates of his birth and death. Although this complaint is not entirely without foundation, the truth is that information of this kind is generally available in families, and through accomplished members of distinguished families and their circles of acquaintances. It's partly that such people have been disheartened at the reversal in the times and have given up on literature, and partly that knowledge and its forms of communication take new paths with every day's experience.

Tazkirahs, in other words, had always been supplemented by oral narrative and anecdote--stories about the poets were "the small change of gossip, suitable tidbits to be enjoyed when groups of friends were gathered together," so that "it never occurred to people to write about these things in books" in any systematic manner. Could anyone have known "that the page of the times would be turned--that the old families would be destroyed, and their offspring so ignorant that they would no longer know even their own family traditions?" (Āzād 1982:3-4).

Āzād emphasized the value of the new technology of printing, and he proposed to use it to create a new super-tazkirah. "All these thoughts made it incumbent upon me to collect what I knew about the elders or had found in various references in different tazkirahs, and write it down in one place." Moreover, he would strive for a degree of narrative continuity that traditional tazkirahs had never remotely desired: "And insofar as possible I should write in such a way that speaking, moving, walking pictures of their lives should appear before us and attain immortal life." As he seeks to renew, vindicate, and purify Urdu poetry, he has a clearly proclaimed agenda: Persian is over and done with, while "the English language is a magic world of progress and reform" (Āzād 1982:4). In *Water of Life* Āzād created the ultimate tazkirah--it was at once the self-proclaimed culmination of the tradition, the pre-eminent canon-forming work, a severe and sweeping criticism of the classical poetry, and the first real linguistic and literary history of Urdu. After this immensely transformative work, neither the tazkirah tradition nor the classical poetry could ever look the same again.

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In the aftermath of the cataclysmic events of 1857 and their lasting effects, in the aftermath of *Water of Life*, what now survives of the classical tradition? Certainly the whole "literary culture" is long gone, and over the past century or so its surviving texts have been widely misunderstood and misjudged (Pritchett 1994). Āzād and his followers crammed the classical ghazal willy-nilly into a Victorian and naively realistic mold; when they found parts that didn't fit, they were quite prepared to cut them off and cast them aside. The fact that Mīr wrote verses in which the beloved was a beautiful boy was never a problem within the stylized and well-understood world of the ghazal; since Āzād's time, however, it has made many critics uncomfortable, and such verses are routinely edited out of anthologies. Mīr was proud of his verses based on wordplay and punning; nowadays some consider it insulting to his "simplicity" and "sincerity" even to point out that such verses exist. Modern Urdu readers are thus left with a monumental legacy of literary achievement, and on the whole, a very inadequate critical apparatus for confronting it.

And what of the other "classical" genres? Our discussion here has given them short shrift, in order to look as closely as possible at the ghazal-based heart of this literary culture. The generic spectrum of classical Urdu poetry has been described, and its famous ustads enumerated, in considerable detail elsewhere; accounts are available both in Urdu (Shamīm Aḥmad 1981; Fārūqī 1981) and in English (Schimmel 1975; Zaidi 1993). Like the ghazal, the other genres too have had their various problems with the post-1857 tendencies--moralistic, realist, nationalist--of the Urdu critical tradition. Ram Babu Saksena, in one of the earliest Urdu literary histories to be written in English, accused all the poetic genres *en masse* of a "servile imitation" of Persian poetry that made them, as he explained in carefully numbered categories, 1) unreal; 2) rhetorical; 3) conventional; 4) mechanical, artificial, and sensual; and 5) unnatural--for Persian poetry was often "vitiated and perverse" (Saksena [1927] 1990:23-25). Ralph Russell has addressed this pervasive hostility in a wryly funny article, "How Not to Write the History of Urdu Literature" (Russell 1987).

And the situation is not all that different even today. The panegyric *qaṣīdah* has been found to be demeaningly effusive and implausibly hyperbolic; the satiric *hajv* has "degenerated" and consists of "coarse and vulgar lampoons"; the Shiite Karbala-lament or *marṡiyah*, with its weeping and fainting heroes, is accused of excessive pathos and a lack of "manliness"; the prose romance or *dāstān* is castigated for displaying "a complete lack of historical sense," and its looming presence denigrated or even largely ignored (Sadiq 1984:38-

40, 211-212, 55). All these common attitudes are easy to illustrate from a single widely known literary history, Prof. Muhammad Sadiq's--and that too, sadly enough, the very one the English-language reader is most likely to encounter in a Western library.

The trajectory of the *shahr āshob* ("city-destruction") genre is particularly illustrative of the changing times: from its Turkish origins as a sexy, witty, wordplay-filled inventory of beautiful boys (whose looks made them "city-destroyers") and their various professions, the genre evolved into a still-witty "world-turned-upside-down" poem in which the poet exulted in his verbal prowess and gloated over his upstart rivals or expressed a variety of other opinions about different professions and classes in his city (the world might be going to hell, but his art remained supreme). It also came to include some melancholy, rather abstract, ghazal-influenced evocations of the utter ruin of a city. Over time, critics have increasingly sought to reify such accounts as much as possible and to view the genre as one filled with actual, reliable historical descriptions of urban decay (Na,īm Aḥmad 1979; Pritchett 1984).

Whatever have been the vicissitudes of other genres, however, the ghazal remains in a class by itself. According to that same authoritative literary history of Muhammad Sadiq's, the ghazal is guilty of a uniquely long list of offenses. Because the ghazal was "tainted with narrowness and artificiality at the very outset of its career," it "lacks freshness"; it "has no local colour"; its deficiency in "truthfulness," "sincerity," and a "personal note" has made much of it into a "museum piece." Its imagery is "fixed and stereotyped"; it is "incapable of showing any feeling for nature"; it is a "patchwork of disconnected and often contradictory thoughts and feelings." Its love is "a torture, a disease," a "morbid and perverse passion"--a view that is a "legacy from Persia" and is "ultimately traceable to homosexual love." Furthermore, over time the ghazal has gone from bad to worse: it has developed "wholly in the direction of fantasy and unreality" in the course of its "downward career" (Sadiq 1984:14-19, 24, 27, 29). For all these reasons, in short, the ghazal "stands very low in the hierarchy of literary forms" (Sadiq 1984:20).

The ghazal remains in a class by itself, however, not only because of its historical preeminence or the widespread modern discomfort with its "immoral" themes and "unnatural" poetics. The other important traditional genres all involved units of composition longer than the two-line verses of the ghazal, and were by comparison less performative, less orally focused, less agonistic, less versatile. Textual and attributional problems in most of the longer genres were also less pervasive: since longer works were fewer and more conspicuous, their authorship was easier to establish, and they were more likely to circulate in writing than orally. In the case of the other literary forms, there was much less need (or use) for a special genre of record and dissemination like the tazkirah. For although other genres were involved in a secondary way, the whole interlocked literary culture of ustad, shagird, and mushairah documented in the tazkirahs was primarily devoted to the cultivation of the ghazal as an elite oral performance genre.

Once the page of history had been turned on that culture, how could the ghazal live? How could it maintain its subtlety and complexity, and how could the necessary level of connoisseurship be inculcated in its audience? After *Water of Life*, people continued to write works that called themselves tazkirahs, like ,Abd ul-Ḥayy's *Gul-e ra,nā* (The Two-colored Rose) (1921-22) and Lālah Srī Rām's multi-volume *Ḳhumḳhānah-e jāved* (The Eternal Winehouse) (1906-26) (Saksena [1927] 1990:311-12) and many other less famous examples (,Ishrat [1918] 1928). Such works are produced to this day (Jauhar De ƒbandī 1985). But authors could no longer write a tazkirah naturally and unselfconsciously--they always had to take into account, for better or worse, the all-pervasive influence of *Water of Life*, with its naive and ruthlessly westernizing notions of literary history.

And how to make up for the even more irretrievable loss of those bearers of oral tradition, the great ustads of the past? Once the aftermath of 1857 had destroyed the patronage system--and in fact the whole culture--that sustained such ustads, what was to be done? For decades people mourned the loss of the old ustad-shagird lineages, and of the poetic world they had constituted. Attenuated ustad-shagird relationships continued to exist, but the heart had gone out of it all. The power of collective nostalgia eventually produced a remarkable monument: a work called *Mashshāṯah-e suḵẖan* (The Adorner of Poetry), by ʿṢafdar' Mirzāpūrī, of which the first part was published in 1918 and the second part in 1928. According to Maulvī ʾAbd ul-Ḥaq, the first part sold so briskly that within a few years not a copy was to be had anywhere. Starting in 1927, therefore, ʾAbd ul-Ḥaq serialized the second part in his journal *Urdū*, since he considered the work so important. It offered an anthology of the great ustads' corrections, he explained, and showed their extraordinary technical skill: "how changing only one word, or rearranging the words, or taking out an unsuitable word and putting in a suitable one, lifts the level of the verse and the *maẕmūn* to a new height" (Ṣafdar Mirzāpūrī 1928:2:8). Readers so appreciated the first volume, Ṣafdar wrote, that they helped locate much new material in letters and other sources for the second volume; while the first volume featured only seventeen ustads, the second volume contained exemplary corrections by fully sixty-one ustads (Pritchett 1994:82-84).

At about the same time, Muḥammad ʾAbd ul-ʾAlā 'Shauq' Sandīlvī devised a fascinating experiment, poised between the old ways and the new. He composed sixteen ghazals and sent them, with polite and deferential letters, to a number of well-known poets, asking for correction. Then he took the responses of forty-two of these ustads, juxtaposed their corrections to each verse, and turned the whole thing into a very well-received book (Shauq Sandīlvī [1926] 1986). Even today similar attempts continue to be published: corrections made by revered poets--including "corrections" of the corrections of earlier ustads--are sometimes compiled and analyzed, as was recently done in the case of 'Abr' Aḥsanī Gunnaurī (1898-1973) (Chishtī 1990).

If ustad-shagird relationships and the correction process survive in a kind of ghostly conceptual limbo, the mushairah itself is far more vigorously present. Reformist mushairahs with an assigned topic ("Patriotism," "The Rainy Season") rather than a pattern line were part of the "natural poetry" movement from its earliest days (Pritchett 1994:35-39). It is true that nowadays in films and books people look nostalgically to the past, imagining consummate mushairahs as they never were but should have been (Beg [1935-36?] 1986; Qamber 1979). But important modern mushairahs too have been studied (Sarvar Taunsvī 1990; Zaidī 1992:189-248). Modern public mushairahs now take place in every city in the world where Urdu-speakers are at all numerous and organized; many readers of this volume will be able to find them if they look. They are now usually not private affairs but open public performances funded through donations and ticket sales; they are single events rather than regular meetings; they are no longer "patterned" but are free-form; they do not feature criticism or analysis of the poetry, but instead are run by specially adept "comperes" who know how best to entertain the audience (Rahman 1983; Naim 1989).

The ghazal itself thrives nowadays not only among popular and crowd-pleasing "mushairah poets" (as they are sometimes called), but among serious poets as well; a list of names could be provided that would include almost every notable Urdu poet of this century. But these more serious poets cannot write with the expectation of oral performance, the way the classical poets could. They cannot assume, for example, that the audience would hear the first

line of each verse several times, so that the audience would be held in a state of suspense before being granted access to the second line, as would have been the case in a classical mushairah; some recitation styles actually turned mushairah performance into almost a musical genre (Qureshi 1989:175-189). Nowadays, serious modern ghazals tend inevitably to be "eye poetry" meant to be experienced first and foremost on the printed page. This in itself marks them off very sharply from their classical predecessors.

In any case, in numbers and influence they pale by comparison to the extraordinarily pervasive mass-market, "pop" ghazal phenomenon. If Ġhālib's life is made, or rather remade--extremely and implausibly democratized, romanticized, nationalized--into films and TV serials, if his ghazals are sung (sometimes rather inaccurately) by Jagjit and Chitra Singh, is this a gain or a loss to historical memory? A gain, no doubt, but a bittersweet one. Anita Desai's novel *In Custody* (Desai 1984), and the successful Urdu film *Ḥifāẓat* (Protection) that was made from it, are seen by some as a trashing of the old literary culture, by others as a nostalgic lament at its decline. "Hindi" (actually, Hindi-Urdu) films are full of *filmī* ghazals of a naive, romantic, simplistic kind--but can the ghazal still be itself, after such a sacrifice of depth for the sake of maximum breadth of appeal? The ghazal thrives in modern "cassette culture" (Manuel 1993:89-104), and now on CDs as well. An astonishing number of informative and interpretive websites--mostly amateurish but clearly labors of love--are devoted to both classical and pop ghazal, as anyone with a web browser can easily discover. Only the ghazal's modern readers and hearers can decide its current health, and so far they seem to show an undiminished enthusiasm.

Modern ghazal is now a living genre in Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, Panjabi, and other languages, with its own history in each one. And even more strikingly, we are seeing an attempted leap by the ghazal into English--not through translation, but as a genuine indigenized genre. Translations have a long history: some Persian ghazals of Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī were translated into Latin and published by Sir William Jones as early as 1771; Ḥāfiẓ's whole *dīvān* was published in German in 1812-13, and influenced Goethe (Schimmel 1992:4-6). English translations of Urdu ghazals have included unsatisfactory versions too numerous to mention, a few textbooks for students (Barker 1977; Shackle and Matthews 1972), and one volume of literarily excellent but highly inaccurate "transcreations" by modern English poets working from literal translations (Ahmad 1971). Now, however, the Indian-American poet and translator Agha Shahid Ali has been making serious efforts to work with a "ghazal" genre in English, by preserving the repeated element [*radīf*] at the end of each verse (Ali 1997:40, 73-4, 78). His efforts seem to be increasingly well received. And why should they not? English can surely make room for the ghazal, and the ghazal make itself at home in one more new language.

Not surprisingly, Valī, himself a mediator between different times, places, and literary styles, has laid the groundwork beautifully:
/The road to fresh *maẓmūn*s is never closed--
Till Doomsday the gate of poetry stands open/ (Valī 1965:103).[9]

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