

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF PLOT  
IN THE COUPLET OF THE URDU GHAZAL:  
AN EXAMINATION OF NARRATIVE**

By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a selection of verses taken from the Urdu divan of Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib. Ghalib is considered by many to be the preeminent writer of the classical Urdu ghazal (circa 1750-1850). Although the examination is restricted to Ghalib's verse, the problem it investigates is broader in nature and involves questions which some aspects of the ghazal raise with respect to the reader's involvement. An essential feature of the ghazal form is the fact that, although the ghazal poem consists of a set of couplets, each couplet of a ghazal is itself a complete text with respect to its content. The question, then, is "how does the reader become involved in a form limited to two lines of text?" This thesis discusses the question from a narratological perspective: the couplet involves the reader by telling a story.

The narrative of the couplet differs from what one normally thinks of as narrative in that the significance of its plot is derived, not from a series of episodes arranged in chronological order, but from a thematic continuity which links couplet to couplet within the tradition as a whole. The world of the ghazal is inhabited by a few characters, the principal being the lover and the beloved, whose behaviour and attitudes are determined largely by a set of well-defined conventions. The characters who appear in the individual couplet are already familiar from the dramas to which these characters have been subjected in previous readings of other couplets. However, unlike the characters in a traditional novel whose histories connect a great variety of events within a chronological framework, the couplet is extremely limited in term of the number of chronological connections it can establish. The depiction of time in the ghazal is radically different from the often elaborate histories presented in forms such as the novel. The world of the ghazal is merely suggested. Consequently, the reader's role in reconstructing the world of the text is of particular importance in compact forms such as that of the ghazal. The contention of this thesis is that the restrictions imposed by the couplet on plot structure has been compensated for by the cultivation of a narrative style in the ghazal text which often forces the reader to become aware of the process of discovering the drama of the text.

The first chapter begins with an introduction to the thesis, and is followed by an introduction to the formal features of the ghazal text and some of the important themes of the tradition. The second chapter presents a review of critical writings in English on the Urdu ghazal. The third chapter presents a discussion of methodology. In this chapter I use Peter Rabinowitz' analysis of the reader's beliefs in my attempt to define what I mean by the reader's involvement in the world of the text. According to Rabinowitz, a fictional work invites its reader to pretend that its plot is a historical account, even though the reader knows that the world of the text is imaginary. To account for the reader's dual role, Rabinowitz divides the reader's beliefs into what he calls the "authorial audience" and the narrative audience." Briefly, the authorial audience can be viewed as the competent reader, the one who possesses the required knowledge to understand the text, to decipher its allusions, but who knows the world of the text is a fiction. The narrative audience sees the fictional text as a description of events that "really" happened. My investigation of the reader's attempt to discover the world of the text is from the point of view of the narrative audience. The third chapter attempts to apply Rabinowitz' views to some general features of the plot structure in the ghazal text. The fourth and final chapter examines the ways in which the ghazal text forces the reader to become aware of the process of discovering the world of the text.

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Mother for her constant support and encouragement throughout its writing, and for the love she has shown me always.

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## CHAPTER I

### The Implied Narrative of Thematic Convention: Character as Examples of the Ideals of Romantic Love

#### 1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the classical period of the Urdu ghazal (circa 1750-1850). From the classical period to the present, the ghazal has been viewed as the highest form of literary expression in the Urdu language. The ghazal is preeminent in both India and Pakistan, and its popularity extends well beyond the sectarian limits of Islam and includes the Hindu, and Hindi-speaking, segment of the population as well.

An essential feature of the ghazal form is the fact that, although the ghazal poem consists of a set of couplets, each couplet of a ghazal is itself a complete text with respect to its content. Two lines of text might seem hardly enough space for a writer to say anything exciting or of significance, yet the couplet has proven adequate space for generations of poets to voice their thoughts and feelings, not only in the Urdu ghazal but in its predecessor, the Persian ghazal, as well. The compact style of the poetry is possible because the ideas and events expressed in the verse belong to a thematic universe sustained by the tradition as a whole<sup>1</sup>. Each couplet also participates in what we might call a larger implied narrative nurtured by the literary tradition. Much of what the reader knows about

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<sup>1</sup> The classical Urdu ghazal has borrowed many of its themes wholesale from the Persian literary tradition. The documented history of the ghazal begins at the end of the sixth century A.D. in the *nasīb*, the amatory elegiac prelude to the Arabic *qaṣīda*. This paper does not examine the historical influences on the Urdu ghazal. For a discussion of the origins of the ghazal in Arabic poetry, its subsequent refinement by the Persian tradition, and a brief history of the Urdu ghazal and discussion the relationship of the Urdu ghazal to the Persian ghazal, see R. Blachere, A. Bausani, "Ghazal." *Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Vol II 1965), pp. 1028-36.

the events described by a couplet depends on his or her readings of other couplets. The central theme of the ghazal is *gam-e-'ishq*, or unrequited love, and the story of love is enacted by a set of characters, each with their own recognizable peculiarities, and whose relationships to each other have been more or less defined by the tradition.

The continuity of events throughout the ghazal tradition as a whole invites comparison with longer narrative forms such as the novel. One might characterize the ghazal tradition as being the collective creation of generations of poets, but there is one very important difference between the "text" of the tradition and texts such as those of the novel. Although the tradition enriches the significance of the couplet, the thematic conventions of the ghazal cannot be organized into a plot structure in the same way that much of the detail of a novel is organized into a coherent history. The problem is that since each couplet is a complete text, the statements of one couplet are not logically connected to the statements of other couplets within the tradition. Consequently, the significance of an event is derived not so much from its location within a chronological order created by a single text, but from readings of similar events in other couplets. We should not assume, however, that the individual couplet completely lacks a plot or that the events of the poetry have no reference to time. The difference between the plot of a form such as the couplet and that of the novel is one of degree, rather than of kind. Connections of space and time are not eliminated but reduced. The reduction of complexity within the space-time framework of a single couplet tends to be compensated for by an intricate web of connections between the event of one couplet and similar events as they appear in other couplets. For example, if a novel presents a love story, it will subject its lovers to a series of meetings, trials and triumphs, the dramatic impact of each episode being largely a function of its location within the chronology. On the other hand, the events described by a couplet cannot be fit into a chronological series. A favourite topos of the ghazal is that of the lover's death. Whenever the lover dies within the context of the couplet, there is no question of reconstructing a detailed series of events leading up to the moment of death. The significance of the lover's

death in one couplet is derived, for the most part, from the fact that his death is but one variation of a larger archetypal pattern which has been repeated in many couplets.

The reduction of history within the context of the couplet implies the presentation of a world radically different from that of literary forms such as novels with their often elaborate and detailed histories. Unlike the world of a novel, which is described in great detail, the world of the couplet is merely suggested. From the point of view of the reader, the significance of the couplet is based, not only on the events it describes, but also on the process of reconstructing a world from the restricted format of the ghazal text. Thus, apart from the drama of the text, the reader is involved in another drama, that of discovering the world of the text. The question this thesis examines is "what implications does the couplet's restricted plot structure have for the reader's attempt to reconstruct the world of the text?" The fourth chapter will attempt to answer this question by examining some of the ways in which the narrative style of the text forces the reader to become aware of the process of reconstructing the drama of the text. This discussion is divided into four sections dealing respectively with: 1) the creation of surprise through deceptive syntax, 2) the dual perspective of unreliable narration and irony, 3) metaphor as the creation of fictional worlds, 4) the ambiguities and incongruities of the text.

A potential source of confusion in our examination of the reader's attempt to discover the world of the ghazal text is the fact that the descriptions of the text is not intended to correspond to the external world in the same fashion as the descriptions of nonliterary texts such as those of history or science are. That is, the world described by the poetry is a fictional world. Because the world of the text is fictional, the events of a poetic context, engage the reader in a different manner than do the events of nonfictional discourse. In order to investigate the special nature of the reader's involvement in ghazal poetry, we shall use Peter Rabinowitz' analysis of fiction in terms of the reader's beliefs.

According to Rabinowitz, a work of fiction places special demands on its reader because it appears to be something it is not. Fiction imitates non-fictional forms, generally history or autobiography. For example, the plot of a novel reads as if it were recounting the history of a set of characters, yet the reader (and the writer) knows that the history is a fabrication. The novel invites its reader to pretend that its plot is a historical account, even though the reader knows that the novel's world is imaginary. Pretence implies a dualism within the reader: the reader who knows the world is an artifact, and the reader who enters that world as though it were real. According to Peter Rabinowitz, this dualism is an essential feature of fiction in general. To describe this feature he divides the reader's beliefs into the "authorial audience" and "narrative audience." Briefly, the authorial audience can be viewed as the competent reader, the one who possesses the required knowledge to understand the text, to decipher its allusions, but who knows the world of the text is a fiction. The narrative audience corresponds to a set of assumptions or beliefs the reader pretends to hold. The narrative audience sees the plot of a fictional text as a description of events that "really" happened. It is the narrative audience who discovers the world of the text, and our investigation of the reader's reconstruction of the world of the text will be mainly from the point of view of the narrative audience. The third chapter consists primarily of a presentation of Rabinowitz' views and an application of these views to some general features of the plot structure in the ghazal text.

Because of the restricted format of the couplet, ghazal poetry does not fit readily into the category of narrative, the notion of narrative being generally reserved for larger forms of poetry such as the epic, or within the Urdu-Persian tradition, the *maṣnavī*. By examining the couplet as a form of narrative, I am adopting a new approach to the poetry. The notion of narrative has the advantage of being easy to grasp intuitively. Since the narratological approach I adopt focuses specifically on the reader's point of view, this approach promises to provide us with valuable insights into how the poetry engages its reader. The fact that the

poetry resists by its very form the possibility of an elaborate plot is interesting in itself. We can learn as much about the reader's involvement in ghazal poetry by examining the absence of a plot structure as we can by examining the presence of a plot structure.

The following sections of this chapter will serve as a general introduction to the ghazal. The second section consists of a brief introduction to the formal features of the text. The third section introduces some of the important themes of the tradition. The third section discusses the principle ideals of the ghazal's world, their role in the make-up of the ghazal's characters and a discussion of the complexities which result from the uses of convention. The second chapter presents a review of critical writings in English on the Urdu ghazal. The third chapter begins with a discussion of Rabinowitz's analysis of the reader into four audiences. The second section of the third chapter ©applies Rabinowitz' notion of realism to the views of Ralph Russell and Kenneth Bryant, two of the writers reviewed in the second chapter. In the final section, I apply the notion of narrative audience and authorial audience to the problem of plot within the couplet. The fourth and final chapter examines the ways in which the ghazal text forces the reader to become aware of the process of discovering the world of the text. The final section of the fourth chapter presents my conclusions. Throughout this paper the examples I shall use are taken almost entirely from Mirza Ghalib's Urdu divan. Mirza Ghalib has been considered by many to be the greatest writer in the tradition of the Urdu ghazal.

## 2 Unity Within the Formal Unit of the Ghazal

So far I have discussed the ghazal's couplet as though it were a text complete in itself. This is true with respect to its content, but the couplet is also part of a larger form, the ghazal. The ghazal acquires its unity, not from its content, but from its form, in particular, from the regularity of its rhythmic and metrical patterns. A brief examination of a ghazal in its entirety will give the reader some idea of the formal features of the ghazal.

yih na thī hamārī qismat kih visāl-e-yār hotā agar aur jīte rahte yahī intizār hotā	A A
tire v'āde par jīe ham, to yih jān jhūt jānā kih khushi se mar na jāte agar e'tibār hotā	B A
tirī nāzūkī se jānā kih bañdhā thā 'ahd bodā kabhī tū na toṛ saktā, agar ustuvār hotā	C A
ko'ī mere dil se pūche, tire tīr-e-nīm-kash ko yih khalish kahāñ se hotī jo jigar ke pār hotā	D A
yih kahāñ kī dostī hai kih bane haiñ dost nāṣih kv'ī cāra-sāz hotā, ko'ī gam gusār hotā	E A
rag-e-sang se tapaktā vah lahū kih phir na thamtā jise gam samajh rahe ho yih agar sharār hotā	F A
gam agarce jañ-gusil hai, pih bacīñ kahañ kih dil hai! gam-e-'ishq agar na hotā, gam-e-rozgār hotā	G A
kahūñ kis se mainī kih kyā hai shab-e-gam burī balā hai mujhe kyā burā thā marnā, agar ek bār hotā	H A
hue mar ke ham jo rusvā, hue kīoñ na garq-e-daryā na kabhī janāzā uṭhtā, na kahiñ mazār hotā	I A
use kaun dekh saktā kih yagānā hai vah yaktā jo dūī kī bū bhī hotī to kahiñ do-cār hotā	K A
yih masāil-e-taṣavvuf, yih tirā bayān gālib tujhe ham valī samajhte jo na bādā-khār hotā	L A <sup>2</sup>

The ghazal is expected to conform to an unvarying pattern of meter and rhyme. Meter is scanned by long and short syllables. Each line of this ghazal conforms to the following pattern (L=long S=short):

S S L S L S L L S S L S L S L L

The first couplet, or *sh'ar*, is called the *maṭlā*. Both lines of the *maṭlā* rhyme, setting up the rhyme for the rest of the ghazal. In each subsequent *sh'ar*, the rhyme is suppressed in the first hemistich and reappears in the second. In the above ghazal the syllables and words of the lines which rhyme have been underlined and the lines have been marked with letters, indicating a rhyme scheme of the pattern AA,BA,CA,DA etc. In this ghazal the rhyme consists of two words. It begins with a word whose end syllable is repeated much in the same way that rhyme is formed in the English language, i.e. *yār*, *intizār*, *etibār*, *ustuvar*, etc. The rhyming syllable is called the *qāfiyā*. The last part of the rhyme differs somewhat from rhyme as it is commonly practised in English poetry. It consists of a complete word (or words) and is called the *radīf*, in this ghazal the word "*hotā*". If a ghazal were written in English, an example of this type of rhyme might be: deceive me, believe me, receive me. The rhyming portion of the first words, i.e. "deceive," would form the *qāfiyā*, and the word "me" would form the *radīf*.

In terms of its content, the ghazal is generally disconnected, but at times it does display a sort of unity. One type of unity is that imposed by the semantic content of its rhyme-word. The rhyme scheme often introduces some degree of continuity of meaning amongst the couplets. Because the rhyme includes a complete word or phrase, the repetition of the word or phrase throughout the body of the poem will provide a kind of unity of meaning to the ghazal as whole. The rhyming word of this ghazal, "*hotā*", is the

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<sup>2</sup> *Dīvān-e-Ghālīb*, ed. Nur-ulhusn Naqvi (Aligarh: 1981), p47. All of Ghalib's verses which appear in this paper are taken from this edition.

contrafactual of the verb "*honā*," "to be". Although "*hotā*" does not dictate any particular meaning, all of the couplets carry the sense of "what would happen if." There are many other ghazals in the divan whose *radīfs* impose thematic restrictions in a more obvious way. Some examples include *āzmāish hai* (to be a test), *dar-o-dīvār* (doors and walls), *mauj-e-sharāb* (wave of wine), *mere b'ād* (after I'm gone). Even in these cases, however, the unity of meaning that results from the rhyme scheme contributes to a similarity of content without connecting the meanings of the verses to each other. Each verse remains an independent description of its world, relying for its significance little, if at all, on the meanings of the other verses. The ghazal's lack of unity can be illustrated by examining a translation of the above ghazal.



It was not in my luck to unite with the friend.  
Had I lived longer, I would still be waiting.

I live on your promise, But know this: I knew it to be false.  
If I believed it, would I not have died of happiness?

I knew from your delicacy that your promise was tied only lightly.  
Had it been drawn tightly it could not have been untied (broken).

Should someone ask my heart about your half-drawn arrow:  
How could there be an ache, had it passed through the heart?

What kind of friendship is this that my friends have become advisors?  
I needed someone to heal my wounds, someone to ease my grief.

From the veins of stone, the flow of blood would be unending,  
If its inner spark were what is known as grief.

Although grief is deadly, with the heart there's no escape;  
If not the grief of love, then the sorrows of the world.

How can I describe it, the night of grief is a calamity.  
I would not have minded dying had it been only once.

By dying I was disgraced, why didn't I drown in the river?  
There would have been neither funeral procession nor grave.

Who can see Him? the One is unique.  
With even the fragrance of two, there would be an encounter.

These intricacies of Sufism, your eloquence, O Ghalib!  
We would have thought you to be a saint, if you weren't such a drunk<sup>3</sup>.

This ghazal deals with topics ranging from complaints towards the beloved to the difficulties of grief, to Sufism<sup>4</sup> and drinking. If one examines these verses carefully, it is possible to discover patterns. For example, the first four couplets focus on the beloved and return to that focus, but indirectly, in the tenth couplet, whose main concern is with theological aspects of unity and diversity. Perhaps there is some sort of progression in

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<sup>3</sup> All translations of Ghalib's verse in this paper are my own.

<sup>4</sup> Sufism is the mystical tradition of Islam. Sufi thought has had a profound effect on the literatures of Islam, and on the ghazal in particular. A brief discussion of the influence of mystical thought on the thematic tradition appears later in this chapter.

these couplets. The first two couplets deal with a similar topic: the sheer impossibility of the lover's attainment of his desire to unite with the beloved. But the similarity ends there. The situations which express this predicament are unconnected to each other. The mood of futility built up in the first couplet depends in part on the serious treatment of the speaker's death. If we attempt to connect the scene of the first couplet to the second, the narrator's vision from beyond the grave of the futility of life is undermined by the trivialization of death in the second couplet, in which death would result from mere belief in the beloved's promise of a meeting. The drama of each couplet can be thought of as an isolated unit whose impact does not depend on the events portrayed in the other couplets. There are times, however, when the meaning of one couplet is connected to the meaning of another. The last two couplets of the verse seem to be connected, not so much in terms of their content, but in terms of the imagined audience's reaction to that content.

use kaun dekh śaktā kih yagānā hai vah yaktā  
jo dūī ki bū bhī hotī to kahiñ do cār hotā

Who can see Him? the One is unique.  
With even the fragrance of two, there would be an encounter.

yih masāil-e-ṭaṣavvuf, yih tirā byān gālib  
tujhe ham valī samajhte jo na bādā-khār hotā

These intricacies of Sufism, your eloquence, O Ghalib!  
We would have thought you to be a saint, if you weren't such a drunkard.

In the first of these two *sh'ers*, the poet deals with a topic subject to theological controversy within the context of Sufism: whether or not God can be seen<sup>5</sup>. In this couplet,

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<sup>5</sup> The condensed and often difficult style of Ghalib's poetry has inspired a tradition of Urdu commentaries. The commentaries which I use are as follows: Sayyad Ali Haidar Sahab Tabatabai, *Sharaḥ Dīvān-e-Urdu-e-Ghālib* (Lucknow: 1984); Ghulam Rasul Mahr, *Navā-e-Surosh* (Lahore: 1969); Sayyad Muhammed Ahmad Bekhud, *Sharaḥ Dīvān-e-Ghālib* (Lucknow: 1970); Yusuf Salim Chisti *Sharaḥ Dīvān-e-Ghālib* (New Delhi: 1983); Agha Muhammed Baqr *Bayān-e-Ghālib* (Amritsar: no date); Sayyad-o-Haidaruddin Sahab Bekhud *Marāt-ul-Ghālib* (Calcutta: 1985). (In order to distinguish Sayyad Muhammed Ahmad

Ghalib presents a position favouring the impossibility of seeing God by pointing out that His unitary state transcends the dualism implied by sight. If there were even a hint of duality in His make-up, then we would be sure to come across Him at some time or another. The phrase, "*do cār hotā*" translates literally as two would become four. This phrase refers to a face to face encounter in which two eyes become four, i.e. when the eyes meet; idiomatically, the phrase means "to appear, or become visible." The phrase is also used as a pun to mean, there would be two or four, implying that duality would result in the endless division of the One (the state of affairs in polytheistic conceptions of the cosmos). Having stated his position in this debate, he begins the next verse with what, on the surface, appears to be a bit of self-praise in the voice of a narrator<sup>6</sup>. The narrator's praise, however, is deflated by the comment, "if you weren't such a drunkard." The tone is really sarcastic: "You believe yourself to be an expert on all these matters, but we know you are really just a drunk." The sarcasm that this couplet expresses is not Ghalib's own view of his poetry. The couplet, in fact, makes fun of a hypothetical reader who, not really understanding Ghalib, believes that Ghalib, in the last verse, takes himself to be an authority on religious matters.

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Bekhud from Sayyad-o-Haidaruddin Sahab Bekhud, I shall refer to the former as M.A. Bekhud, and the latter as H. Bekhud.) The commentaries on this couplet all agree that this couplet demonstrates the impossibility of seeing God by calling attention to His unitary state: the act of seeing implies duality, but since God is the only one, seeing is logically excluded. Many of the commentators see this couplet as alluding to the Quranic verse, "If, there were several Gods, instead of only one God, within the earth and heavens, the order of the world would be destroyed (M.A. Bekhud pp 51)."

<sup>6</sup> The commentaries focus on the speaker's praise of Ghalib's abilities as a writer. They refer to an amusing anecdote recounted by Hali. According to Hali, the emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, expressed surprise at the allusions of this couplet to Ghalib's being a drunk and saint. Ghalib was quick to remark, 'Sir, even now your Highness believes this to be so. But the reason I said this is so that I should not become proud of my sainthood.'

Ghalib was well-known for his drinking habit, and he was generally considered to be a sceptic in mystical matters. Ghalib's scepticism did not imply that any verse on Sufistic matters would necessarily be considered incongruous. The conventions of the ghazal not only allowed, they demanded that a ghazal writer explore mystical themes in his poetry. The incongruity in the preceding couplet is that the position Ghalib adopts is somewhat more orthodox than the view of the ghazal's mystic who not only tends to see God in each and everything, but who often identifies with the idolatry which the couplet rejects. The departure from convention in this couplet, sets up the drama for the narrator's misinterpretation in the next.

Unlike the other couplets of this ghazal these two couplets are connected in meaning. Continuity of meaning amongst verses of the ghazal, however, is definitely the exception rather than the rule. Whatever unity of content a particular ghazal may exhibit, a continuity of content from couplet to couplet is not one of the requirements of what makes a group of verses a ghazal. The fact that one ghazal displays unity in terms of its content in no way makes it superior to a ghazal which does not. On the other hand, each couplet in a ghazal is expected to conform to an unvarying pattern of rhyme and meter. It is the ghazal's form and not its content which unifies the ghazal.

### 3. Unity of Couplet and Tradition Conventional Ideals in the Ghazal

Although it is possible, at times, to make connections amongst couplets, our examination of the poetry will treat each couplet as though its meaning were independent of the other couplets of the ghazal. For our purposes, the term "text" refers to the couplet, and not the collection of verses making up the ghazal. The text is not, however, an isolated unit. Much of the meaning and significance of the text is rooted in the tradition. The lover, whose fate is to wait with no hope of fulfilment, is also the protagonist of the ghazal, and the love he exemplifies is the principal ideal of the ghazal, an ideal whose conditions can only be fully met within the world of the ghazal. Let us now explore some of the facets of this world.

The central theme of the ghazal is *'ishq*, or love. We learn about love by entering the world of the lover. The lover's world is remarkably sparse. Only a handful of characters inhabit this world. As psychological or moral subjects, they tend to be shallow, at least in comparison to the depth of characterization we would expect in works of fiction such as novels. The most important and the most complex character is without doubt that of the *'ashiq*, or lover. It is essentially through his eyes that we view his world and the other characters of his world. The importance of the lover's point of view is further reinforced by the role he generally plays as narrator. Next in importance is the *mā'shuq*, or beloved. The lover is ever faithful and the beloved, never. The cruelty of the beloved and the deliberate masochism of the lover are unusual by any standards. The tendency of each poet to create one character more masochistic than the last has led to results which are at times simply farfetched, but it has also resulted in some of the wittiest verses of the

ghazal<sup>7</sup>. The other characters are of little interest in themselves. Their function is generally limited to that of exemplifying persons or states of mind which are devoid of love. As Muhammad Sadiq remarks "with fixed roles, like figures in a puppet show, they are not a little amusing in their perpetual woodenness (S27)." The *raqīb*, or rival, is the lover's main competitor for the affections of the beloved. He lacks any of the good qualities of a lover, yet he always seems to find his way into the company of the beloved, much to the ire of the lover. The *nāsiḥ* is the one who advises the lover to abandon his hopeless pursuits. He is himself unresponsive to the beloved's charms, and the lover always ignores his advice. Among others, Sadiq lists the confidant (*rāzdān*), the messenger (*paigham-bar*), the doorkeeper (*darbān*), the doctor of religion (*shaikh*), and the recluse (*zāhid*).

The ghazal's thematic universe can be characterized by the lack of a historical framework. At times, the plot of the ghazal seems to be no more than a demonstration of ideal love. The actions of a realistic lover are expected to reveal psychological or moral complexities, but in the ghazal, the lover's actions are essentially examples of what true love is. The same restrictions apply to the other characters: each occupies a stable position within the ghazal's ethical universe, a position which reflects, not inner struggle, but an ordering of the cosmos which seems to precede the existence of the individual. As we shall see, however, not everything can be explained in terms of convention, nor can conventions be reduced to a single overarching order. There is plenty of variety in the ghazal's conventional universe, and the uses to which conventions are put often turn out to be as complex as realistic portrayals.

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<sup>7</sup> The exaggeration of the lover's enjoyment of his suffering can, at times, be viewed as a parody on the conventional ideal of submission to an external authority. Apart from the undermining of a conventional ideal, an even more important effect achieved by exaggeration is the creation of paradox. That is, the imagery of many couplets often affirms simultaneously the two contrary attitudes of submission and rebellion. In these cases, the poetic text is less concerned with undermining, as it is with inviting its reader to explore the paradoxical implications of conventional attitudes taken to their logical extreme.

yih na thī hamārī qismat kih viṣāl-e-yār hotā  
 agar aur jīte rahte yahī intizār hotā

It was not in my luck to unite with the friend  
 Had I lived longer, I would still be waiting<sup>8</sup>.

The speaker complains about his bad luck, a condition which cannot be changed at all by extending his life in time. The lover desires union intensely, but the forces that be are unrelenting. When the narrator declares that he would still be waiting, he is telling his reader nothing new. The reader is well aware of both the lover's fidelity and his bad luck. The possibility of hope, however, is introduced by the phrase "had I lived longer," only to be crushed by the pessimistic conclusion of the sentence. One of the qualifications of ideal love is to endure bad luck, and this couplet reaffirms the narrator's qualifications by demonstrating that there is no possibility that life could ever fulfill the protagonist's desires. In the end, death seems preferable to life, since life doesn't present even the possibility of hope<sup>9</sup>. In the next couplet, the narrator's qualifications as the ideal lover result in an amusing paradox.

tire v'āde par jīe ham, to yih jān jhūt jānā  
 kih khushi se mar na jāte agar e'tibār hotā

I live on your promise, though, dear, I know it to be false.  
 If I believed it, would I not have died of happiness?

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8 Grammatically, the Urdu text is not clear as to whether the lover is on the point of death or has already died. The beginning phrase of the second line could also be translated as "Were I to live longer." All the commentaries, however, interpret the second line as referring to a scene after the fact of the lover's death. In conforming to their interpretations, I have translated the beginning of the line as "Had I lived longer." One commentator, M.A. Bekhud, gives a rather common-sensical interpretation of this scene. He sees the speaker of this scene, not as the voice of the one who has died, but as self-evident "declarations" made by the lover's grave and corpse to the witnesses of the scene, pp 48.

9 H. Bekhud makes the point that the lover would continue to wait because the lover can never give up hope in the possibility of union, p. 43. The knowledge of the speaker is paradoxical: objectively he knows union can not be attained, but his subjective response to life is to continue to hope for union.

The dramatic force of this couplet lies in the surprise resolution of a seemingly impossible paradox created in the first line. The resolution in turn depends on a word play which loses little in its translation into English. "Dying of happiness" and "*khushi se marnā*" are both idioms which use the notion of death to express extreme emotion. The *sh'ar* begins with the lover's declaration that he lives on his beloved's promise to meet with him. Such a reaction is exactly what one would expect of a lover. The remainder of the line, however, leads us to ask: how can one live on a promise that one knows to be false? The paradox is resolved in the second line, and the resolution depends not only on the double meaning of "to die," but retrospectively on the double meaning of "*jīnā*," or "to live," i.e. to continue to exist, and to be happy, to derive meaning out of life.

The resolution in the second line, however, is more than a matter of word play. The second line tells the reader that the correct interpretation of "to live" is "to continue to exist". In other words, the mere assurance of a meeting with the beloved is enough to end the lover's life. Unless the reader knows something about what is possible for the ghazal's lover, such a claim will appear to be far-fetched. In fact, one of the common proofs of the lover's status as the ideal lover is the extreme sensitivity of his temperament, both in terms of his violently intense reactions to his beloved's actions, as well as his greatly weakened condition often wavering at the point of death. In one couplet, the lover resigns himself to the necessity of restraining his sighs because, he informs us, one more sigh is enough to finish him off. In another, the legendary lover, Farhad, is accused of being enslaved by custom and ritual because he killed himself with his carving axe on the news of his beloved's death, indicating to the reader that if the narrator were in his place, his response would have been immediate: he would have died upon hearing the news<sup>10</sup>. The world of

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the ghazal is a place of extremes. The lover's sighs burn the feathers of a mythical bird (the *anqā*) that lives in non-existence ('*adam*)<sup>11</sup>; his tears are floods<sup>12</sup>; he is a madman wandering the desert<sup>13</sup>; the beloved's eyelashes slice the lover's heart to pieces<sup>14</sup>; she

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10 teshe bagair mar na sakā kohakan, asad!  
sargashta-e-khumār-e-rusūm-o-quyūd thā

Asad, kohakan could not have died without his carving axe.  
He was numbed by the intoxication of rites and rituals [p. 30].

11 main 'adam se bhī pare hūn, varna gāfil! bārḥā  
merī āh-e-ātishen se bāl-e-'anqā jal gayā

O heedless one! I am beyond even '*adam*, otherwise many times  
The feathers of the '*anqā* were scorched by my fiery sighs [p. 32].

12 yūn hī gar rotā rahā gālib to ae ahl-e-jahañ  
dekhnā in bastion ko tum kih virāñ ho gain

If Ghalib continues to weep in this fashion, people of the world beware!  
Just see the habitations that have become desolate [p. 118].

13 asad ham vah junūñ jaulāñ gadā-e-be-sar-o-pā hain  
kih hai sar-panjh-e-mizhgān-e-āhū pusht-khār apnā

Asad, I am that mad wanderer, beggar without means  
For whom the claws of the deer's eyelashes serve as backscratcher [p. 49].

14 kartā hūñ jama' phir jigar-e-lakht lakht ko  
'arṣa huā hai dā'vat-e-mizhgāñ kie hue

Again, I gather up the scattered pieces of the heart.  
It's been a while since the invitation of the eyelashes.[p. 215].

carries the weight of the hearts of a hundred lovers in the palm of her hand<sup>15</sup>. These images have become part of a world where the consequences of true love can be taken to their logical extreme<sup>16</sup>. Because the lover's extreme reaction to his beloved is a topos of the ghazal, the narrator isn't simply playing with words, he is informing us of the absurd predicaments his extreme sensitivity has created for him<sup>17</sup>.

Although the lover is considered an ideal lover, not all his choices are necessarily the correct ones. In the following, the lover berates himself for an indiscretion on his part.

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15 shumār-e-subḥ margūb-e-but-e-mushkil-pasand āyā  
tamāshā-e-bayak-kaf burdan-e-ṣad dil pasand āyā

Difficult-loving, the idol enjoys the counting of beads.  
She loves to feel the weight of a hundred hearts in her palm.

16 Although these images are all metaphors in origin, within the world of the ghazal, many of these images have more or less become "facts" of the ghazal's world. One of the factors underlying the transition of the ghazal's imagery from metaphor to fact is the tendency of the tradition to exaggerate the qualifications of its characters in either a positive or negative direction. We shall deal with the problem of the literal interpretation of metaphor in greater detail in the fourth chapter.

17 According to the interpretation outlined above, the second line of the couplet on the beloved's failure to keep her word forces the reader to reinterpret the meaning of to live, from a sense of having hope, to one of continuing to exist. The second line also suggests another, even more bizarre reinterpretation, but one favoured by the commentaries. According to this view, the beloved has promised union to the lover, and she expects that he will be so overcome by the news that he will die of joy. But finding that no such effect results, she wonders what kind of a lover he is. The lover's response is that he continues to live, because he knows her promise is false, otherwise if he believed it, he would definitely have died of happiness. This interpretation indicates just how conventionalized the lover's death has become. However, this interpretation is only possible after one reads the second line. From the point of view of an initial reading of the first line, "to live" has the meaning "to have hope." It is only when the possibility of death is brought out in the second line, that the meaning of "to continue to exist" is inferred. Much of the dramatic impact of this couplet is the result of the reader's "misinterpretation of the facts" in the first line.

hue mar ke ham jo rusvā, hue kion na garq-e-daryā  
na kabhī janāzā uṭhtā, na kahīn mazār hōtā

By dying I was disgraced, why didn't I drown in the river?  
There would have been neither funeral procession nor grave.

Once again the lover is in a pessimistic mood contemplating his own death. We do not generally think of funeral processions and graves as signs of disgrace, unless of course we understand a little more about what constitutes disgrace for the lover. One of the important duties of the lover is to keep his love secret at all costs. To allow the public into the private musings of the heart is to cheapen love. If the lover had killed himself by drowning, he would have quietly disappeared from the world. Instead, his funeral procession and grave have become signs to the whole world of his love<sup>18</sup>. Although the lover has failed, this failure is really an indication to the reader of the exalted code of ethics which he subscribes to. The fact that he berates himself demonstrates his remarkable sensitivity to this moral code, a sensitivity which extends even beyond death.

If the lover enjoys the privilege of representing the highest aspects of love, the minor characters of the ghazal seem to convey to the reader what love is not. Each character demonstrates this message through his own typical defects. The continued successes of the *raqīb*, or rival, are undeserved because he only pretends to love. Unlike the lover, whose intentions are pure, the rival's intentions are motivated by lust. The pious one, or *vāiz*, is the representative of the orthodox strain of Islamic thought. The *vāiz* is always a hypocrite and by exposing his hypocrisy, the lover demonstrates how profane

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<sup>18</sup> While the commentaries generally concur in viewing the funeral procession and the lover's grave as signs to the public of the lover's condition, resulting in his disgrace, these two images are also interpreted as causing the lover's disgrace in another fashion. According to this interpretation, in the end, the lover is already in a state of disgrace and has alienated himself from friends and family. After dying, none offer their hands to raise his bier, and none are present to attend his burial. Had the lover inconspicuously drowned in the river, he would have been spared this final humiliation.

love is greater than mere shows of love for God, or, the lover indicates his own qualifications as the true lover of God, the mystic.

We are already familiar with the role of the *nāsiḥ* from the introductory couplet. The following couplet expresses a common complaint the lover has against his friends.

yih kahān kī dostī hai kih bane haiḥ dost nāsiḥ  
ko'ī cāra-sāz hotā, ko'ī gam-gusār hotā

What kind of friendship is this that my friends have become advisors?  
I needed someone to heal my wounds, someone to ease my grief.

The advisor, or *nāsiḥ*, is a character similar to the *vāiz*. He considers himself to be an expert on all matters, and his advice to the lover is to give up the pursuit of a love which will prove disastrous. All such advice is viewed by the lover as interference, and now that his own friends are playing the role of the *nāsiḥ*, the lover is left alone in his grief. He has no one in whom he can confide, nor will anyone help him in winning over his beloved<sup>19</sup>.

The problem with the *nāsiḥ* is that he doesn't understand that the lover cannot be reasoned with, that the lover's course of action is not the product of choice, but something more akin to addiction or the influence of magic. To choose to love or not to love is possible only to the lover's friends and advisors. The lover's friends and those who are often referred to as people of the world, *ahl-e-dunyā*, subscribe to a different code of ethics than that of the lover. Although they, at times, present a more reasonable view of

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<sup>19</sup> All the commentaries see this couplet as a straightforward complaint on the lover's part towards his friends, or so-called friends. They also point out the lover's extreme distaste for any advice suggesting he give up his love.

life, they know nothing of the passion and anguish which have become the lover's world. At other times, they are definitely antagonistic towards the lover, and a favourite method of reform they subject the lover to is that of imprisonment and chains. The lover almost always manages to foil their attempts, thereby demonstrating their incompetence as well as their moral failings.

As callous as the lover's friends or the fellow-inhabitants of his world are, none are as cruel as the beloved. Yet the beloved is not an unsympathetic character in the same way that the minor characters of the ghazal are. The beloved plays a special role in the ghazal. Ideal love not only demands an ideal subject, or lover, but an ideal object, or beloved, to whom the lover surrenders. In possessing a beauty capable of inspiring a profound attraction in the lover's heart, an important qualification of the beloved is her ability to put the lover's surrender to the test. Through being needled and tortured by the beloved, the lover is given the opportunity to experience love at its height. In spite of the antagonism, the beloved plays a complementary role. If the beloved were to conform to the lover's standards, she would cease to perform her function. The world and its inhabitants are judged harshly because their antagonism does not contribute to the lover's fulfilling his role, but are perceived as attempts to undermine it. They are judged in terms of their role as potential lovers. Those who reject love, such as the *vaiẓ* and *nāṣih*, are deemed failures because they fall short of their potential. Their hearts are hardened even to the possibility of love; they represent humanity at its lowest. On the other hand, those who accept love do not fare much better. They are invariably perceived as rivals. The protagonist of the ghazal is really the only one who is truly capable of love.

Although the lover's surrender to the beloved is absolute, he is capable of entertaining thoughts towards the beloved which seem to be in direct contradiction to his surrender. *The lover's blindness does not necessarily include a blindness to the defects in*

the beloved's character. We have already encountered an example of the lover's sarcasm in his accusation of duplicity with respect to the beloved's word. The lover is both keenly aware of the beloved's duplicity and capable of dying at the mere assurance of a meeting with her. The unlikely combination of these two tendencies in one character is possible because they are both well-established topoi of the tradition. The lover's extreme devotion and his suspicions of the beloved are aspects of the ghazal's world which have been demonstrated to be true time and time again. In a realistic setting we would expect the incarnation of these two tendencies in a character to result in some sort of psychological or moral conflict. In this *sh'ar*, however, the tension between the contradictory tendencies is not a tension between psychological forces, but between the opposing positions of a paradox. The basis for the paradox is the fact that each position--the lover's devotion, and the lover's suspicion--is supported by thematic convention. Much of the complexity of the lover's character is derived from the fact that the lover is not the product of a single coherent narrative but the product of the great variety of narratives which make up the ghazal's topoi.

Another example of the lover's paradoxical attitude has to do with his desire for union. In the couplet just discussed, the lover expressed an unambiguous desire for union. However, there are many couplets in which the lover seems to express the opposite attitude: a desire for separation. The lover's tendency to welcome suffering has its origins in a view of love, called '*uzri*' love, similar to what we know as courtly love. '*Uzri*' love is part of a tradition originating, for the most part, in Iraq, sometime in the seventh or eighth century. The fame of '*uzri*' love was spread by semi-historical poet-lovers who became legendary heroes of love. One such figure was Majnun (in the Urdu ghazal, he is the most popular of legendary figures) whose claim to fame was his intense passion for Laila which

transformed him into a madman<sup>20</sup>. According to 'uzrī love, the beloved is an unattainable ideal. That is, distance from the ideal is not only inevitable, but desirable, because the pangs of separation are seen as being the highest experience of true love. Distance from the ideal is created both by the lover's renouncing his aspirations for union, as well as by the cruelty of the beloved. As a result, the 'uzrī lover's pain and suffering are ambiguous in that a sign of true love is the ability to take pleasure in the agonies and hardships of love. In the ghazal, whether or not a reference to pain or suffering implies complaint or celebration is a matter of how it is used in a particular couplet. When the lover informed us of the duplicity of the beloved's word and of the impossibility of union, he was complaining. In the following couplet his pain is a cause for celebration.

ko'ī mere dil se pūche, tīre tīr-e-nīm-kash ko  
yih khalish kahañ se hotī jo jigar ke pār hotā

Should someone ask my heart about your half-drawn arrow:  
How could there be an ache, had it passed through the heart?

The lover says the beloved's sidelong glances are more effective than would be her direct gaze. "Yih khalish kahañ se hotī" translates literally as "from where would the pricking come." The phrase "from where" suggests derogatory connotations, i.e. the pain wouldn't amount to much. The effectiveness of the beloved's glance is established through the image of the arrow in the heart. The image tells us two things about the condition of the lover. So long as the arrow is in the heart, the lover experiences the pangs of love, and because the arrow is from the beloved, its presence in the heart also results in contact with the beloved. These views are essentially those of the lover. From the beloved's point of view, the half-drawn arrow represents a refinement of her power. By restraining herself, she demonstrates her ability to control the force of impact so as to cause the maximum pain

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<sup>20</sup> R. Blachere, p.1031

in the lover<sup>21</sup>. The two points of view differ in their interpretation of pain. The beloved derives satisfaction from the knowledge that her arrows cause suffering for the lover. But the lover views this suffering as pleasure. Thus, it seems that the lover's ability to enjoy suffering has undermined the beloved's original intentions. On the other hand, if we ignore the differences in point of view, the relationship of the lover and beloved becomes a mutually satisfying one in the sense that the lover gets his pain and the beloved has the pleasure of causing pain.

Not only does this couplet bring out the ambiguity of the lover's pain, it brings out an ambiguity in terms of the beloved's power. One of the pleasures of the beloved is to captivate the hearts of others with her beauty. But the expression of beauty would be a happy event for the lover and since the beloved is committed to the lover's unhappiness, this expression must be curtailed in some way. Thus, by restraining her glances or arrows, the beloved is in a sense veiling her power.

The veil is one of the most fascinating aspects of the lover's world. Although the veil is a means of torture devised by the beloved, the lover also sees it as an essential ingredient in his experience of love. From a larger perspective, the veil also serves as a necessary limit to the beloved's power. In a world where the beloved's power is excessive, to the point that it can actually destroy the lover, there is a real danger that the whole game will be over. We have already seen how the lover was in a position to die at the mere assurance of union. One of the implications of the beloved striking the lover with

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<sup>21</sup> Most of the commentaries see the presence of the arrow as pleasure from the lover's point of view. H. Bekhud, however, sees the pricking as causing pain (pp. 44). Both he and M.A. Bekhud (pp.49), take the view that the lover's comments are in response to the beloved's embarrassment over the fact that her glance has not passed through the lover's heart. He assures her that, by remaining in his heart, her arrows are far more effective than they would be if they had passed through.



the full force of her arrow is that it will cause his death, and so long as the lover wants the pain to continue and the beloved feels the lover is a necessary part of the expression of her cruelty, his death is undesirable.

The problem of the beloved's power and the ambiguity of the lover's pain take on a new level of meaning once we consider the mystical aspect of the ghazal tradition. One of the most far reaching influences on the world of the ghazal is that of Sufism, the mystical tradition of Islam. The poetics of the ghazal tradition has adopted a terminology which distinguishes between the secular and mystical interpretations of the verse. Love on the human level is called *'ishq-e-majāzī*, or symbolic love, and love on the divine level is called *'ishq-e-ḥaqīqī*, or real love. Islamic mysticism holds that human love is a symbol for the divine. According to Sufism, the cosmos is God's created object in which He manifests Himself to Himself. Created phenomena thus contain a spark of the divine. One of the consequences of this point of view has been to look for analogies for the divine in natural phenomenon, and a favourite analogy is that of human love for divine love. From the point of view of Sufism, the human level is, nevertheless, distinct from the divine level; it is, at best, a distorted reflection. In the ghazal tradition, this distinction is often blurred. The lover and beloved of the ghazal can at times be placed either on a human or on a divine level. But it is perhaps more common to come across a set of characters who are really a composite of both the human and the divine. The beloved has all the qualities of a cruel and human beloved, but at the same time, the power of her beauty is of such a magnitude that like God's grace, it is capable of transforming everything with which it comes into contact<sup>22</sup>. Similarly, the lover has all the audacity a human lover is capable of, yet he is

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22      huī hai kis qadr arzānī-e-me-e-jalva  
kih mast hai tire kūce meñ har dar-o-dīvār

intimate with the secrets of mystical love<sup>23</sup>; his desire belongs to regions far vaster than those of the human heart<sup>24</sup>. The relationship between the human lover and beloved may be reenacted on the level of the divine: God's desire is to know Himself, and this object is accomplished through the creation. The creation becomes a mirror and God becomes a Beloved, vain, admiring His<sup>25</sup> own reflection<sup>26</sup>. On the other hand, the object of the lover, or soul, is to reunite with God, the Beloved. According to Sufism, the soul's origins are in God, and the soul's experience of a limited existence is a necessary phase in its journey towards mystical union with the divine. The Ghazal's mystic, however, tends to view God's action in subjecting him to the tortures of a limited existence as an unwarranted expression of cruelty. God is accused of pursuing His own ends at the expense of His

How cheap is the wine of your radiance.  
Every door and wall of your lane is intoxicated [p. 75].

23 maḥram nahīn hai tū hī navāhā-e-rāz kā  
yān varna jo ḥijāb hai, parda hai sāz kā

It is you who are not a confidant to the secret songs.  
This veil is the sounding board of the instrument [p. 39].

24 gīla hai shauq ko dil meñ bhī tangī-e-jā kā  
guhr meñ maḥv huā iztrāb daryā kā

Even in the heart, desire complains about the lack of space.  
The disturbances of the ocean have been absorbed into the pearl [p. 53].

25 In addition to homosexual love, an important source of ambiguity in the beloved's gender is connected with the tendency of the beloved to symbolize the divine. My use of the masculine gender to refer to the Divine Beloved is in conformity with the conventional interpretations of the ghazal.

26 kīā āina-khāne kā vah naqsha tere jalve ne  
kare jo partav-e-khurshīd, 'ālam shabnamistān kā

Your splendour has created a spectacle in the house of mirrors,  
Like the effects of the sun's ray on a field of dew [p. 37].

lovers. The opening couplet of Ghalib's divan portrays the creature as a mark whose limited form is the expression of the Divine writer's malicious intentions:

naqsh faryādī hai kis kī shokhī-e-tahrīr kā  
kāgazī hai pairahn har paikar-e-taṣvīr kā

Whose impertinant style of writing is the mark complaining of?  
Each figure in the picture wears paper clothing.

According to Ghalib's own remarks, *Kāgazī pairahan*, or paper clothing, refers to a custom in Iran in which those wishing to address their complaints to the king or emperor would appear wearing paper clothing<sup>27</sup>. This couplet also refers to the Islamic notion that in the beginning, before the creation of the universe, the creature was with God, and that act of creation resulted in distance between the creature and Creator. The hyperbole of the couplet creates an interesting paradox. The impertinence underlying the creative act is so great, that the created objects are no longer expressions of the Creator's intentions, but have become the voices of their own disaffectation towards the original act of creation.

The lover's attitude towards suffering as we saw earlier is not only one of complaint. The enjoyment of suffering also has its counterpart on the mystical level of interpretation. The mystic's suffering results in *fanā*, or the annihilation of the finite self, a necessary precondition for union with the Infinite. Suffering is a source of joy, in that it

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<sup>27</sup> Ghalib's explanation has inspired considerable controversy amongst the commentators. Tabatabai (p. 3), one of the earliest of commentators, initiated the controversy by his critical remark that even though he is familiar with the expression *Kāgazī pairahan*, he has not come across any such Persian custom as described by Ghalib, and because Tabatabai does not believe there was such a custom, he finds the verse meaningless. Many of the later commentaries attempt a defense of Ghalib's statement by presenting examples in the Persian literature in which the expression clearly refers to the act of complaining. Although the evidence demonstrates there was such a custom, the allusion is rather obscure. Given the mood of the couplet, one might be tempted to attribute the source of the controversy to the author's own *shokhī-e-tahrīr* (impertinant style of writing).

brings the lover closer to the goal of union. The topos of the lover's longing for his own death at the hands of the beloved parallels the Sufistic notion of attaining union with God through annihilation. At times the destruction of the lover clearly suggests mystical union<sup>28</sup>. At other times, the lover seems to be fascinated more by the spectacle of his own death than moved by the possibility of union<sup>29</sup>.

Within the world of the ghazal, the importance of love is taken for granted, but its standards are not always consistent. As we saw, the lover sometimes enjoys his suffering, at other times, he demands release from his suffering. Indeed, the life of the lover is a patchwork of many otherwise disconnected contexts. We have hardly touched on the rich variety of topoi found in the ghazal tradition. The mystical level is the most important extension of the lover's character. Other predominant topoi include the rose and nightingale, desert wandering, the saqi and drinker, hunter and prey, executioner and victim, candle and flame. In fact, since each couplet can be said to be a text complete in itself, there are as many views on love as there are couplets. Love is neither a philosophical system nor the source of a coherent history, it is a thematic kernel which generations of writers have nurtured into a garden of fascinating variety. The complexity

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28 partav-e-khur se hai shabnam ko fanā kī t'ālīm  
main bhī hūn ek 'ināyat kī nazar hone tak

From a sun's ray the dewdrop receives the lesson of annihilation.  
I too am, till the kindness of your one glance [p. 91].

29 'ishrat-e-qatl-gah-e-ahl-e-tamannā mat pūch  
'id-e-nazzāra hai shamshīr kā uryān honā

Don't ask about the lovers' delight in the place of slaughter.  
The baring of the sword is a feast for their eyes [p. 44].

of this world can also be gauged by the diverse reactions writers have had to the Urdu ghazal. In the next chapter, we will examine some of these reactions.

## CHAPTER II

### REALISM VS. CONVENTION: A REVIEW

The review of Urdu ghazal criticism in this chapter is restricted to writings in the English language. This does not mean to imply that there has been any scarcity of ghazal criticism in the Urdu language. An indication of the complexity and importance of Ghalib's Urdu divan is the well-established tradition of commentaries, or *shara'*s, explaining the meanings of the verse<sup>1</sup>. In addition to the tradition of *shara'*, there is a large body of critical works on Ghalib's verse as well as on the Urdu Ghazal in general. For the purposes of this thesis, my review has been restricted to criticism in the English language<sup>2</sup>. I have selected for review those writings which have played an important role in defining some of the main issues on which English critical writings have focused.

Each of the the writers reviewed in this chapter presents his or her own standards in understanding or judging ghazal poetry. The approach of each of these writer's can be characterized by where they locate their standards, in the cultural context, in the thematic tradition, or in the text. The first writer I review is Ralph Russell, followed by Muhammed Sadiq. Both writers judge the poetry in terms of they cultural ideals they believe the poetry expresses, or should express. Russell expresses his appreciation for the ghazal poetry of Mir, and attempts to justify his views by showing how the poetry is an expression of the pattern of romance found in Mughal society. On the other hand, Sadiq tends to take a

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<sup>1</sup> I refer to these commentaries in many of my footnotes to the discussion of Ghalib's couplets.

<sup>2</sup> The article by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi reviewed here is also a part of the tradition of Urdu criticism. It is a translation from the Urdu journal *Shab Khun* edited by Faruqi.

negative view of ghazal poetry, and attempts to justify his position by pointing out the distance between the poetry and social conditions. The next three writers take a more favourable view of conventional norms. Frances Pritchett sees the lover's enjoyment of suffering as a conventional attitude originating in the quasi-religious tradition of 'uzri love. The mystical symbolism of the conventional images of suffering is the subject of Anna Marie Schimmel's discussion of Ghalib's poetry. The following writer, Kenneth Bryant, examines the game-like qualities of the ghazal's thematic conventions. The last writer, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, discusses Ghalib's poetry in terms of a quality of the text. According to Faruqi, the merits of Ghalib's poetry can be understood in terms of its ambiguity.

In *Three Mughal Poets*, Ralph Russell warns modern readers on the dangers of judging the conventionality of the Urdu ghazal as well as its emotional content by standards different from those of the original audience<sup>3</sup>.

To appreciate the ghazal one has to bear two things constantly in mind: first, the ghazal has its own conventions, and if some of these are strange to us, that does not necessarily make them absurd. Secondly, many features which may appear at first sight to be purely conventional are in fact a direct, natural expression of emotions that seem foreign to us only because we are no longer familiar with the situations that produce them<sup>4</sup>.

Russell sees the distance between the modern western reader, and the audience for whom ghazal poetry is written, as a barrier to the modern reader's enjoyment of the poetry. To rectify this situation, he presents a sort of guide for the modern reader into the social conditions behind the poetry of the great Urdu Ghazal poet, Mir Taqi "Mir."

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<sup>3</sup> Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, *Three Mughal Poets* (Cambridge: 1968). We are concerned here with the chapters on the ghazal writer, Mir Taqi "Mir." From the preface of the book, it appears that Ralph Russell is mainly responsible for these chapters. Accordingly, the discussion that follows assumes Russell to be the author of these chapters.

<sup>4</sup> Russell, pp. 108.

According to Russell, the preoccupation of the ghazal with the theme of love is a reflection of the fact that for Mughal society, romantic love was both an important ideal, as well as a dramatic, often bitter, reality for the one who should actually fall in love. The separation of the sexes institutionalized by the system of *parda* is seen as one of the main influences on the pattern of romance. Not only did the separation of the sexes create a fascination for the opposite sex, leading to a situation where love at first sight tends to be the rule rather than the exception in romantic relationships, the social retributions were often extreme for those whose intense feelings led them to ignore the prohibitions on relationships with the opposite sex<sup>5</sup>. The intensity of feeling explains not only the lover's strong attachment to the beloved, but the negative aspects of love as well. Russell explains the cruel behaviour of the beloved in terms of other social conditions. Although the term "beloved" is generally ambiguous in the ghazal, Russell views the model for much of the beloved's behaviour as being that of a young woman. Because of the separation of the sexes, a prospective beloved often would not realize the fact that she even had a lover. If she did, she would usually take a keen pleasure in exercising her new found power over her unfortunate lover. This attitude is understandable in view of the degree to which women in Mughal society were subject to domination by men. The possibility of reversing the trend by dominating a male would naturally seem attractive<sup>6</sup>. Even if she felt love, she would be less likely to reveal her feelings to her lover because the consequences of being discovered were generally severe, especially for the female members of Mughal society<sup>7</sup>. The beloved also appears cruel because the poetry presents her character through the eyes of the lover.

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<sup>5</sup> Russell, p. 108

<sup>6</sup> Russell, pp. 117-8.

<sup>7</sup> Russell, p. 121.



To him her conduct necessarily appears more perverse and her cruelties more capricious than ever, and even though he understands something of the state of mind which causes it, he cannot help expressing the misery it makes him feel<sup>8</sup>.

Russell admits that not everything about the poetry can be explained in terms of social conditions. All poets were expected by convention to depict the beloved as being cruel and themselves as her faithful lovers<sup>9</sup>. Russell, however, sees Mir, the poet who forms the subject of his study of the ghazal, as presenting more than a conventional pose in his assertions of love. For him, much of Mir's poetry refers to the poet's actual experiences of love. In Russell's view, Mir's status as a lover can be inferred not only from his more realistic *maṣnavī*s, but from external sources as well. In keeping with this view, the order in which Russell presents much of the poetry has been made to conform to episodes in a biography<sup>10</sup>. This biography is both the story of Mir's romantic involvements and an archetypal pattern of love in the culture. He describes this pattern in terms of what he calls "the stages of love." According to Russell, the ghazal is more than a literary achievement, it is an expression of some of the nobler aspects of Mughal culture as experienced by Mir, the consummate lover. The following comment on a set of verses sees the text as revealing something of Mir's qualification as a true lover.

This rather wry humour is especially characteristic of Mir. It derives in the last resort from a sureness of himself, a complete confidence that he has the strength to stand all the tests of love without breaking, and can therefore see them and love, and his mistress and himself, without illusion, and even laugh at what he sees. In some verses he speaks ruefully of his fame as a poet, and smiles at its pitiful irrelevance to his standing as a lover<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Russell, p.134.

<sup>9</sup> Russell, p. 139.

<sup>10</sup> See Russell, p. 206.

<sup>11</sup> Russell, p. 127.

But even in Mir's case there are some aspects of his poetry which are conventions. For instance, Mir's beloved was not cruel, even though the beloved of his verses is. This inconsistency is not seen as being problematic, because Russell also sees the poetry as expressing a symbolic dimension as well. The image of the cruel beloved provides scope for demonstrating the unselfish nature of love, continuing to give even in the face of indifference and hatred. The cruelty of the beloved may symbolize the apparent indifference of God to the afflictions of His faithful servant, and in a quasi-mystic sense, the beloved may symbolize any ideal to which someone is deeply committed<sup>12</sup>.

Russell is not the only writer to judge Mir's poetry in terms of its reflection of social realities. Muhammad Sadiq, in *A History of Urdu Literature*, expresses a view radically different from that of Russell's, in terms of the ideals which are reflected in Mir's poetry. Many of the details of Medieval life, which inspire in Russell a sense of nostalgia for a time when men's lives acquired meaning from their shared ideals, for Sadiq are evidence of a slavish conformity to convention, a failure to embrace life as it is. The poet who appears to be a hero in Russell's eyes is, for Sadiq, arrogant and obstinate<sup>13</sup>. He finds Mir's poetry excessively gloomy, and pathetic in the moods it expresses<sup>14</sup>. He attributes the secret of Mir's extreme popularity to the morbid attraction on the part of his people to whatever is sad and pathetic<sup>15</sup>. Mir's poetry does have its positive aspects. His verse presents love in a realistic fashion, unlike the conventional point of view expressed in

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<sup>12</sup> Russell, p. 229.

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature*, (London: 1964), p. 93.

<sup>14</sup> Sadiq, p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Sadiq, p. 98.

most Urdu poetry. "His poetry, at its best, comes from the heart and goes to the heart<sup>16</sup>." If we turn to Sadiq's view of Ghalib, we find Ghalib wanting in other respects. Like the typical Urdu writer, Ghalib is vain and egotistical. But in one respect, his attitude was healthier than Mir's: he was not a pessimist. Unfortunately, we are told, his poetry tends to be obscure and burdened by conceits. In these verses, ingenuity shines forth at the cost of sincerity. The source of Ghalib's complex style is his vanity, his desire to be different from the "vulgar herd"<sup>17</sup>. One must exercise discretion in judging the sincerity of the poetry.

[His] ghazals are interspersed with intimately personal utterances; and it is in these alone that his inner life is to be sought. The rest is a masquerade; and the reader cannot be warned too often and too seriously against taking the greater part of his verse as a genuine expression of his mind<sup>18</sup>.

It may seem strange that two scholars, starting with the same premises as to the proper function of poetry, should diverge so dramatically in their views of the merit of the same body of verse. They differ because their evaluation of the life and times of the poets differ. But there is also another reason for their differences. Their views differ in terms of how accurate a picture of its surroundings they expect the poetry to convey. When Mir's poetry describes events which clearly differ from external circumstance, Russell sees symbolic connections between the distortion of fact and the ideals of the poet. For Sadiq, however, it is not enough that the external world be presented in symbolic form, the poetry should recreate something of the conditions of life. Urdu poetry "leaves out observation and borrows its imagery wholesale from Persia."

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<sup>16</sup> Sadiq, p. 98.

<sup>17</sup> Sadiq, p. 197.

<sup>18</sup> Sadiq, p. 181.

One of the most unfailing sources of aesthetic enjoyment in poetry lies in the idealization and recognition in it of things we see and love in life. It is not only that the sights and scenes we are familiar with come crowding to the mind when described in poetry and make the poetic experience richer and more significant. By far the greatest function of poetry, as I take it, is to send us back to life with an increased zest for it: it is a training for a fuller and more meaningful life. Your heart will not dance with the daffodils unless you have seen them disporting in the air, like Wordsworth; and if you have seen them under the lead of the poet's imagination, then your observation of them in future will acquire associations which it did not have before. In this respect the poverty of Urdu poetry is too palpable to require further comment<sup>19</sup>.

The distortion of nature in ghazal poetry is one of the reasons why Sadiq sees the Urdu ghazal as being decadent. Sadiq feels that Wordsworth's daffodils are a powerful image because we can recognize them from our own experiences of them. For Russell, however, a detailed factual knowledge of the reality behind a poem does not help much in understanding its impact. He provides an example in his later paper "The Pursuit of the Urdu Ghazal" written partly in reaction to the criticisms of the Urdu Ghazal expressed in Sadiq's book. He has this to say.

I think it probable that the great majority of those who respond to the poetry of Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale* have never heard a nightingale sing, and that most of those who have, myself included, would probably not recognize its song again if they heard it. They no doubt vaguely assume that Keats himself had heard it, and I expect he had. But if someone could prove to me conclusively that in fact he had not, this would not alter in any way my estimate of the greatness of his poem, just as it does not in any way lessen my opinion of the man who likes the poem if I know that he has never heard a real nightingale sing<sup>20</sup>.

Before drawing any conclusions about the differences between the approaches of Russell and Sadiq, it would be useful to cover Russell's attempt in his paper to define more

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<sup>19</sup> Sadiq, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> Ralph Russell, "The Pursuit of the Urdu Ghazal," *Journal of Asian Studies*, (November 1969), p. 119.

precisely the relationship of the ghazal poem to social reality. For Russell, ghazal poetry is essentially medieval in spirit<sup>21</sup>. The subject of the ghazal is illicit love<sup>22</sup>. In a society where marriage is purely utilitarian, a necessary consequence is the idealization of illicit love. Russell begins his inquiry into the life situation of the poets with the question, "Who in fact is the earthly 'beloved' of the Urdu ghazal?"<sup>23</sup> He sees three possible sources for the human beloved: 1) the betrothed or the wife of another man, 2) a beautiful male youth, and 3) the courtesan. Russell points out that these types of love are all ultimately hopeless: the lover can never possess the girl married or betrothed to another, the youth matures, and the courtesan belongs to her clients<sup>24</sup>. Russell excludes marriage from this list. Even though it is generally expected that love develops after an arranged marriage, this love has never been associated with the kind of love found in the ghazal. To these sources of the beloved's symbolism, Russell adds a fourth possibility: the beloved may be a product of the poet's imagination. One of the factors underlying the extravagant hyperbole of the ghazal is the possibility of creating a beloved "free from the trammels of real life experience"<sup>25</sup>. Finally, a tolerable performance at composing verse on themes of love was a part of the social equipment of a gentlemen: many of the lesser ghazal poets may not even have had a fantasy beloved<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> For a similar opinion see Sadiq, pp.37-41.

<sup>22</sup> Russell (1969), p. 113.

<sup>23</sup> Russell, p. 116.

<sup>24</sup> Russell, p. 117.

<sup>25</sup> Russell, p. 118.

<sup>26</sup> Russell, p. 118.

In addition to the human level, the ghazal also has a mystic level. Russell discusses what he calls the mystic or quasi-mystic aspect of the ghazal<sup>27</sup>. At one extreme, there were poets such as Mir Dard who were practising mystics, and at the other extreme, were those poets for whom the ability to incorporate mystical themes in their poetry was nothing more than a demonstration of their qualifications as cultured gentlemen. Shifting the focus in the opposite direction, Russell asks how much personal experience lies behind the symbols of mystical love. What experience did the mystic poets have of illicit love, of the intoxicating effects of wine, or of the pleasures of music? Again, we can assume that a wide range in terms of the poet's experience, from those who had all these experiences to those who had none of them. Where a poet stands in the spectrum, we can only guess. One of the problems is that a cultured audience would not have approved of the open expression of intimate personal experiences<sup>28</sup>, nor is a knowledge of the poet's personal experiences necessary, since a poet can make effective use of experiences which exist only in the imagination (see above for Russell's discussion of Keat's *Ode to a Nightingale*).

Returning to the subject of mystical experience, Russell asserts that few Urdu ghazal poets could be described as mystics. But the best of them share a similar dedication to ideals they feel to be greater than themselves. In some cases, the poet's sacrifice to an ideal may not have been a fact, but something he wished he had the strength to realize. Combining the mystic, quasi-mystic, and human aspects of the beloved, Russell answers the more comprehensive question "Who, or what is the beloved of the Urdu ghazal?" with

Any person, or any ideal to whom or to which the poet, whether in real life or in fantasy, is prepared to dedicate himself, sacrificing himself for its (her,his) sake and willingly accepting the hostility of his fellow men as an inevitable consequence of his love<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Russell, p. 118.

<sup>28</sup> Russell, p. 119.

<sup>29</sup> Russell, p. 120.

Applying these observations to the ghazal's audience, Russell makes an interesting observation. The ghazal is the most esteemed and popular literary form of medieval society, yet in the poetry, all the accepted institutions of that society, its most venerable personages, are subject to unrestrained ridicule and abuse<sup>30</sup>. In Russell's opinion, the popularity of the ghazal is due precisely to its deviation from the conventional values of the society. The ideals of medieval society are static. Mughal society is a culture in which the pressures of public opinion are overwhelming, a public opinion whose business is knowing what goes on in the life of everyone else, and which reacts to any deviation from the normal pattern of behaviour with hatred and fear. In this context the ghazal served,

as a, so to speak, licensed institutionalized form of passionate protest against the world in which the poet and his audience were alike confined. And from that day to this it is probably true to say that for the great majority of ghazal poets... and for the great majority of their audiences the ghazal has represented the release in socially approved fantasy of impulses which if released in action would bring drastic penalties to those who feel them and disruption to social life as a whole<sup>31</sup>.

The differences between Russell's and Sadiq's approach to the poetry can be understood in terms of representation and symbol. Sadiq takes a view of poetry which is essentially representational. One of his complaints is that the imagery of the Urdu ghazal can no longer conjure a vivid picture of the things referred to because it is largely the imagery of the Persian culture, a culture belonging to a different time and place than that of Mughal India. Russell's attempt to interpret Mir's poetry in terms of biographical references is also representational in its approach. But many of the connections he draws between ghazal poetry and the life of a poet are better described as symbolic; this is

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<sup>30</sup> Russell, p. 120.

<sup>31</sup> Russell, p. 120.

especially true of his later paper. For Sadiq, it is enough that the attitudes expressed in a poem differ from the poet's actual beliefs, for the poem to be judged insincere. But in Russell's view, the expression of an ideal in a poem need not be insincere simply because the ideal has not been attained in practice. Even if the poet was not a real lover or a practising mystic, the ideals expressed in a poem may symbolize a poet's commitment to a larger cause, or his wish to lead a life of dedication to a person or ideal. For Russell, representation is only one aspect of the poetry. Much of his interpretation of the poetry is perhaps best viewed as symbolic in its approach. Russell's biographical interpretation of Mir's poetry is, however, representational, and we shall encounter a criticism of Russell's representational approach when we examine the views of Frances Pritchett. But first, let us have a look at the work of an author, Anna Marie Schimmel, who discusses some of the imagery in Ghalib's Urdu and Persian poetry from a mystical perspective.

In *A Dance of Sparks*, Anna Marie Schimmel traces some of the influences which the earlier Persian poets have had on the themes and imagery found in Ghalib's poetry. For Schimmel, Sufistic thought is an important source for the symbolism of the ghazal throughout the Persian and Urdu traditions. The presence of mystical thought in the poetry, however, is not an indication that all ghazal writers were necessarily mystics. "Not the genuine expression of personal feelings was regarded as the poet's goal: the real art was to surpass former poets<sup>32</sup>." Schimmel borrows the metaphor of the craftsman or jeweller from Arberry to describe the intentions of the Persian and Urdu poet<sup>33</sup>. Theme and image are the materials provided by the tradition to be fashioned into a finished product by the poet. Each new verse plays on expectations built up by the tradition, and calls for a careful

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<sup>32</sup> Anna Marie Schimmel, *A Dance of Sparks*, (New Delhi:1979), p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> Schimmel, p. 12.



interpretation of its symbols and metaphors<sup>34</sup>. Her study of the symbol is organized in terms of the imagery of the poetry. Except for the introduction, each chapter discusses Ghalib's poetry in terms of a particular image or theme. The first chapter deals with the image of the dance, the second chapter presents fire imagery, the next chapter titled, "A Dance in Chains" focuses on the tradition of al-Hallaj, and the final chapter examines images and themes related to calligraphy. Her favourite image seems to be that of the dance, for it is the one she devotes the most attention to, and the word occurs in the title of the book as well as in the titles of three of the chapters. She begins her examination of the dance with a digression on the religious significance of the dance as it occurs in many cultures. She ends the digression with a short exposition on the dance symbolism of the Sufi mystic Jalaluddin Rumi. Rumi was the spiritual initiator of the Mevlevi order (the Whirling Dervishes), an order for which the dance was part of mystical practice<sup>35</sup>. The symbol of the dance was brought to its perfection in Rumi's poetry<sup>36</sup>. In the Mevlevi tradition, dance symbolizes a movement from the earthly plane to a higher sphere of existence, the attainment of the final stages of mystical endeavour: *fanā* and *baqā*, annihilation and duration in God. The one who dances, symbolically dies to this world and lives "in the larger cosmic harmony, in permanent union with God<sup>37</sup>." Rumi's influence on the literatures of Iran, Turkey and Muslim India was unique and it is out of this tradition that Ghalib's verse should be understood<sup>38</sup>. The notion of *fanā* and *baqā* plays an important role in her discussion of the other images used in Ghalib's poetry. According to

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<sup>34</sup> Schimmel, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> Schimmel, p. 26.

<sup>36</sup> Schimmel, p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> Schimmel, p. 30.

<sup>38</sup> Schimmel, p. 30.

Schimmel, many of the ghazal's images of pain have a mystical significance. The lover's joy at being destroyed recalls the mystic's yearning for the final annihilation leading to everlasting life<sup>39</sup>.

Frances Pritchett also discusses the theme of the suffering lover<sup>40</sup>. Her examination of this theme is not limited to its mystical aspects, but also includes other aspects. The questions she discusses in her paper all have to do with the role of convention in the ghazal. She begins with a criticism of Russell's biographical approach to Mir's poetry. Pritchett presents three objections to Russell's attempt to connect the details of Mir's life to the poetry. First of all, much of Russell's evidence for the life of Mir can be called into question because it is taken from Mir's *maṣnavī*s, texts which are primarily works of art<sup>41</sup>. Secondly, his source of evidence for the sociological conditions of Mir's times is unclear. He presents the social context as an archetypal pattern consisting of a progression through various stages of love. Again, it seems to be the *maṣnavī*s which are his source of evidence<sup>42</sup>. Her third argument against Russell's position is her discussion of another writer, Shadani, who presents a very different set of sociological and biographical circumstances to account for Mir's poetry. He sees Mir's poetic subject as being the love of young boys, and argues the likelihood that Mir had actually experienced such a love<sup>43</sup>. He also traces the origins of the ghazal's cruel beloved to the medieval

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<sup>39</sup> Schimmel, p. 33.

<sup>40</sup> Frances Pritchett, "Convention in the Classical Urdu Ghazal: The Case of Mir." *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, (Fall 1979)

<sup>41</sup> Pritchett, p. 61.

<sup>42</sup> Pritchett, p. 61.

<sup>43</sup> Andalib Shadani, "Mīr ṣaḥīb kā ek khas rang." in his *Taḥīqīqat*, (New Delhi), p. 139.

Persian practice of pederasty. Since the older poet-lover did not possess the qualities of youthfulness to arouse the sexual desires of the boy, the boy's indifference would result in a cruel treatment of the poet<sup>44</sup>. Russell and Shadani arrive at very contradictory views of Mir's life. The reason for such contradictions, Pritchett concludes, is that these two critics infer information from Mir's ghazals which is simply not there<sup>45</sup>. Mir is, in fact, generally recognized "as 'a true chronicler' not of the events of his life, but of his inner 'moods, feelings, and susceptibilities'<sup>46</sup>."

After discussing Russell's views, Pritchett examines some of the general features of the theme of the suffering lover in the ghazal. She traces the origins of this theme to the quasi-religious tradition of 'uzri love. At the heart of this tradition is the vision of love as suffering, "the quasi-religious belief that the true lover who suffered and even died from love was a kind of martyr<sup>47</sup>." Although the ghazal in fact makes use of a great variety of themes, the theme of suffering clearly predominates<sup>48</sup>. An important aspect of the lover's suffering is the fact that the beloved is inaccessible. The beloved's distance is not indicated only by her cruelty to the lover, this distance is also implied by the manner in which the beloved is described. The beloved's gender is indeterminate. In Persian, there is no gender distinction in pronouns or verb endings. This feature is preserved in the Urdu language: the beloved is always grammatically masculine, even when the descriptions

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<sup>44</sup> Shadani, p. 142.

<sup>45</sup> Pritchett, p. 64.

<sup>46</sup> Pritchett, p. 71.

<sup>47</sup> Pritchett, p. 66.

<sup>48</sup> Pritchett, p. 67.

clearly imply a female beloved<sup>49</sup>. The beloved is personally indeterminate as well. The terms describing the beloved are generally applicable either to a woman or to a beardless youth. The image of beauty is ideal rather than specific. The idealization of beauty implies the absence of the beloved: the ideal is necessarily distant<sup>50</sup>. Pritchett sees the suffering lover and the inaccessible beloved as two sides of the same coin. She sums up as follows.

The beloved of the classical ghazal may be anything at all, but almost never a familiar person sitting cosily in the lover's lap. This absence of the beloved gives the lover both cause to suffer and the scope to dwell on his sufferings: a single couplet would seem even more confining if the lover and the beloved were both actively present. If the lover's defining trait is his suffering, the beloved is defined above all by inaccessibility<sup>51</sup>.

Pritchett also calls attention to the parallels between the theme of suffering in ghazal poetry and the same theme as it occurs in the courtly love poetry of medieval Europe. The courtly lover is a suffering lover because he has chosen a beloved who is unattainable. As in the ghazal, the courtly admirer loves with no hope of a reward; he loves for its own sake, his love often reaching the proportions of religious devotion<sup>52</sup>. Pritchett discusses the views of various scholars as to the significance of the similarities between courtly love of medieval Europe and the conception of love within the Islamic literary tradition. The similarities may be explained in terms of the similarity of the social conditions operative in both cultures<sup>53</sup>, in terms of the historical influence of Muslim culture on the medieval

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<sup>49</sup> Pritchett, p. 68.

<sup>50</sup> Pritchett, p. 68.

<sup>51</sup> Pritchett, p. 70.

<sup>52</sup> Pritchett, p. 74.

<sup>53</sup> Pritchett, p. 75.

Christian state<sup>54</sup>, and in terms of psychological explanations which view both types of poetry "as recreations of the same fundamental emotional situation." She ends her paper with a general statement of her thesis. Even though most courtly love poetry and most ghazal verse was not written by "real-life" lovers, their verses were nevertheless "nourished by the depths of their own inner lives<sup>55</sup>."

Although Pritchett opposes her views to the biographical approach to Mir's poetry taken by Russell, her criticisms are less applicable to the view Russell takes of the ghazal's beloved in his later paper. As Russell states, "I doubt very much whether a detailed, factual knowledge of what practical experience lies behind a poet's poem helps very significantly to an understanding of its impact<sup>56</sup>." It would appear that Pritchett and Russell have more to agree on than is implied by the criticisms expressed in Pritchett's paper. However, one approach that clearly differs from that taken by Russell is the one taken by Kenneth Bryant in his paper, "Textual Obsessions: Conventionality in the Urdu Ghazal."

If Sadiq laments the conventionality of the Urdu ghazal, Bryant finds in this fact a cause for celebration. Sadiq, Russell, Schimmel, and Pritchett all speak of the ghazal in terms of its ideals, be they internal or external, and in terms of feelings, emotions and moods. Bryant, on the other hand, speaks of matrices, formal constructs, closural strategies, and neurotic texts. Bryant's paper focuses on the question of how much scope there is for originality in a literary form as conventionalized as that of the Urdu ghazal. For Bryant, apart from its reference to external realities, the ghazal is also a game<sup>57</sup>, interesting

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<sup>54</sup> Pritchett, p. 75.

<sup>55</sup> Pritchett, p. 77.

<sup>56</sup> Russell, (1969) p. 119.

on its own terms. His introduction to the game-like qualities of the ghazal begins with an investigation into the nature of the ghazal text. He considers a problem we have examined in the first chapter: the couplet is connected to the other couplets of the ghazal text by strict requirements of rhyme and meter. The couplet, however, is unconnected to the other couplets of the ghazal in terms of its content, but is connected thematically to other couplets within the tradition as a whole. In order to examine these two types of unity he asks his reader to view the *sh'er* as lying at the intersection of two texts, the first text being the set of verses comprising the ghazal, the second text being "the tradition of all couplets ever written on the same theme<sup>58</sup>."

Bryant acknowledges that his attempt to describe the tradition in terms of a text is unusual. In order to illustrate the structure of both of his texts, he presents a model taken from Michael Riffaterre's *Semiotics of Poetry*. According to Riffaterre, the poetic text is generated as variants on an underlying structure which he calls the "matrix." The matrix is "an abstract concept never visualized per se: it becomes visible only in its variants<sup>59</sup>". The reader's attention is directed to the matrix through the "ungrammaticalities" of the text. Bryant, however, doesn't elaborate on Riffaterre's notion of "ungrammaticality", or on the two processes of "expansion" and "conversion" by which the text is generated from the matrix. It is Riffaterre's metaphor of the poetic text as a neurosis that interests Bryant in his examination of the ghazal. In Riffaterre's view "the matrix is repressed, the displacement produces variants all through the text, just as suppressed symptoms break out somewhere else in the body<sup>60</sup>." The objective of the poem is like a fixation. The text

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<sup>57</sup> Kenneth Bryant, "Textual Obsessions: Conventionality in the Urdu Ghazal," Unpublished paper, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> Bryant, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, (Bloomington: 1984) p. 13.

<sup>60</sup> Riffaterre, p. 19.

moves "from representation to representation . . . with the aim of exhausting the paradigm of all possible variations on the matrix<sup>61</sup>." For Bryant, the notion of exhausting all possible variations can be applied to both the formal text as well as the thematic text. On the one hand, the couplet is part of a ghazal, a formal skeleton in which the poet aims to say as much as can be said--"to 'exhaust the paradigm' of a scheme of rhyme and meter<sup>62</sup>." On the other hand, the same couplet is also part of a larger collective project whose aim is to exhaust all possible variations on a theme, "which has as its aim saying all there is to be said about the rose and the nightingale<sup>63</sup>." The production of both texts involves an element of obsession: "poet after poet picks at the scab of the nightingale's pain; couplet after couplet reaches for new meanings to be packaged in the same formal envelope<sup>64</sup>." Thus, the game of matrix and its paradigms is played on "two separate but converging axes."

In the next section of his paper, Bryant discusses the parallels between the ghazal's thematic tradition and Riffaterre's notion of the text. Bryant begins with an examination of the closed nature of the ghazal's universe. He compares this world to an image taken from the poetry itself, the *'anqā'*<sup>65</sup>. According to the conventions of Islamic literature, the *'anqā'* is a bird whose distinguishing feature is its non-existence. That is, the *'anqā'* dwells in *'adam*, in non-being. This image characterizes the sparse nature of the ghazal's world, "inhabited by a scant handful of characters, whose relationships to one another have

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<sup>61</sup> Riffaterre, p. 19.

<sup>62</sup> Bryant, p. 5.

<sup>63</sup> Bryant, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Bryant, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Bryant, p. 6.

been fixed and predictable for centuries<sup>66</sup>." The usual practise is to interpret this microcosm as signifying simultaneously macrocosms, or realities outside the tradition. Bryant lists the following levels of interpretation: the mystical, the "generic" consisting of any ideals which may be passionately pursued in life, and the real emotions of lovers described in metaphorical terms, or described in realistic terms<sup>67</sup>. Accepting the value of such approaches, Bryant, however, feels it is important "that we not, in our pursuit of macrocosms, lose sight of the microcosm<sup>68</sup>." According to Sadiq, the decadence of the ghazal can be traced to its urge for novelty whose line of development "lay wholly in the direction of fantasy and unreality<sup>69</sup>." Bryant agrees with this perception, but not with Sadiq's negative judgement of ghazal's conventionality. Sadiq's reaction is explained in terms of Kenneth Burke's view of a tendency in Western literature. For Burke, the modern period is characterized by an excessive increase in the "psychology of information" and a corresponding decrease in the "psychology of form"<sup>70</sup>. In this respect, Sadiq is a "modern." But Bryant is pleased to note that the current trend in literature is towards "post-modernism," towards an emphasis on form. As a result, the game-like qualities of poetic composition in ghazal poetry may appeal directly to the tastes of the "post-modern" mind<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> Bryant, p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Bryant, p. 7.

<sup>68</sup> Bryant, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> Sadiq, p. 25.

<sup>70</sup> Burke, p. 33.

<sup>71</sup> Bryant, p. 10.



In order to illustrate the "playful spirit in the ghazal poets' elaborations on their fanciful world," Bryant presents a metaphor. He asks his reader to imagine a community of story-tellers participating in a collective project. Continuing the analogy, the "history" of this project is traced. Bryant begins with the simple story of a lover and his unresponsive beloved. The story then evolves, first with a fairly straight-forward exaggeration of the beloved's beauty and cruelty, to a collection of very intricate and bizarre descriptions of the effects of the beloved's beauty and cruelty on the lover's person<sup>72</sup>. Bryant is not interested here in speculating on the historical origins of the ghazal. His example is meant to capture "something of the spirit in which each subsequent poet makes his contributions to this received text."<sup>73</sup> The matrix of this "text" is the ghazal's central theme--*gam-e-'ishq*, or unrequited love<sup>74</sup>. The text generated by the central theme "is in fact one tree with several branches<sup>75</sup>." The "transforms" of the central theme consist of the many topoi of the ghazal such as, rose and nightingale, tyrant and victim etc. Each topos can be viewed as a variation on the central theme which has become a semi-independent text in its own right<sup>76</sup>. Thus, in Bryant's version of Riffaterre's text, we seem to have a hierarchy of texts and subtexts, of matrices within matrices. The individual *sh'er* is but one attempt in the "aim of exhausting all possible variations" on a particular topos, which is itself but one of many possible variations on the central theme. Bryant illustrates this process using three *sh'ers* on the topos of the execution scene. Each of the couplets is taken from a different author, the first is by Mir, the second by Nasikh and the last by Ghalib. In all three couplets the instrument

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<sup>72</sup> Bryant, pp. 10-11.

<sup>73</sup> Bryant, p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> Bryant, p. 12.

<sup>75</sup> Bryant, p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> Bryant, p. 12.

of the lover's execution is the sword, and the lover's reaction to the event is one of intense pleasure.

After examining the thematic "text", Bryant applies Riffaterre's model to the formal text. He examines this text in terms of its rhyme. The rhyme consists of two parts, the *qāfiya* and the *radīf*<sup>77</sup>. Because the *radīf* is a complete word (*honā*, or the infinitive of the verb "to become" in Bryant's example), the rhyme scheme imposes restrictions on the semantic possibilities of each couplet. The ghazal is an elaborate semantic game: "how many *different* ways can you use the infinitive 'to become', with the added restriction that each thing which 'becomes' must end in the syllable '-ā' [i.e. the *qāfiya*]<sup>78</sup>?"

For Bryant, the *qāfiya* and *radīf* function like Riffaterre's matrix in that they are temporarily suppressed by the rhyme scheme<sup>79</sup>. According to the ghazal's rhyme scheme, both lines of the first couplet rhyme, and this rhyme is continued in the last line of the remaining verses of the ghazal. The rhyme scheme consists of the following pattern: AA BA CA DA etc. The rhyme set up in the first couplet is "suppressed" in the first line of each subsequent couplet. For Bryant, this rhyme scheme is a variation of a more universal pattern, exemplified by the first two couplets of any ghazal, AABA. The first two lines establish a pattern the third line interrupts the pattern and the final line resolves the deviation with a return to the original rhyme. This pattern occurs in verse forms other than those of the ghazal such as classical Chinese poetry and the English Limerick. But the pattern is also found in forms outside the realm of literature. This pattern corresponds to a common

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<sup>77</sup> For a discussion of the features of the ghazal's rhyme, see the first chapter.

<sup>78</sup> Bryant, p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> Bryant, p. 17.f

form found in Western music theory known as "ternary"<sup>80</sup>." Returning to the rhyme scheme of the ghazal, we find that the sense of closure created in the second couplet is continued in each subsequent couplet. Bryant contrasts the disconnected sense of each couplet of the ghazal to a form such as the *maṣnavī*, whose couplets display a serial development of meaning, and whose rhyme scheme AA BB CC does not contribute to any sense of closure in its individual verses<sup>81</sup>.

In conclusion, Bryant emphasizes the similarities between "the formal manoeuvre from couplet to couplet within a ghazal, and the thematic manoeuvre from poet to poet within the tradition .... Each couplet's closure satisfies at once two converging sets of expectations<sup>82</sup>." This game is inexhaustible and demonstrates that convention can accommodate originality. The ghazal is like a game of chess: "a finite set of playing pieces and a restrictive set of rules can yet provoke an endlessly creative evolution<sup>83</sup>." For Bryant, over and above its reference to external conditions, the individual couplet participates in a larger tradition. And this participation is akin to game-playing, a process which can be understood in Riffaterre's terms.

The next and final writer, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, also calls attention to the problematic nature of reference in the poetry. In this case, the focus is on the ambiguity of a poem's reference, the multi-dimensionality of its world. In his essay, "Ghalib, the Difficult Poet," Faruqi examines a controversy regarding Ghalib's apparent rejection of his

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<sup>80</sup> Bryant, p. 18.

<sup>81</sup> Bryant, p. 18.

<sup>82</sup> Bryant, p. 18.

<sup>83</sup> Bryant, p. 19.

earlier "difficult" style in favour of the less elaborate style which was currently in vogue. In addition to the official divan of Ghalib's Urdu verse, there is an earlier divan which Ghalib rejected and only a few verses appear in the later divan. Ghalib explained this action as a rejection of his former difficult style. Faruqi cautions his reader against accepting such explanations at face value. In his view, Ghalib's style did not change, it simply became smoother and more polished<sup>84</sup>. Ghalib's explanations were really a ploy to achieve two very different effects on his public. On the one hand, his "confession" created the "myth" that Ghalib had indeed come round to the accepted style of poetry. On the other hand, given the intricate style his later divan did in fact manifest, it led to a sense of wonderment over the insoluble enigmas that must be contained in the rejected divan<sup>85</sup>.

Before proceeding with his discussion, Faruqi defines what he believes Ghalib really meant when he used the term "difficult." Faruqi considers difficulty to be a defect in poetry and compares it to a code or riddle whose meaning depends entirely on the possession of the key<sup>86</sup>. Only the one who possesses the key unlocks the meaning of the verse, and the meaning that is unlocked is definite and final in nature. The difficulty of Ghalib's verse is better described as ambiguity<sup>87</sup>. Faruqi sees ambiguity as a merit, and compares it to a problem "with a series of solutions each of which is right<sup>88</sup>." Difficulty is one-dimensional, but ambiguity is multilayered and expresses a plurality of "truths." The intricacies of a poem, "through verbal mechanics, endow the experience related in a given verse with a state

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<sup>84</sup> Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, "Ghalib, the Difficult Poet." *The Secret Mirror*, (Delhi: 1981), p. 35.

<sup>85</sup> Faruqi, p. 35.

<sup>86</sup> Faruqi, p. 36.

<sup>87</sup> Faruqi, p. 36.

<sup>88</sup> Faruqi, p. 36.

that affords the reader a spectrum of possibilities for his response<sup>89</sup>." Defining Ghalib's difficulty in this manner, Faruqi then asks what made Ghalib choose such a style. One possible answer is that proposed by Muhammed Husain Azad, that Ghalib simply wanted to express himself in a style opposed to public taste<sup>90</sup>. But why did Ghalib express himself in an intricate style when there were many other styles which he could have chosen? The reason is that the intricate style of the poetry conformed to his temperament<sup>91</sup>. The intricate structure of ambiguities in his poetry is the expression of Ghalib's intellectual temperament. The breaking up of reality into a plurality of states is the product of a rational mind. Faruqi contrasts intricacy with the style of Mir, which Faruqi characterizes as the style of madness. According to Faruqi, madness is the essential characteristic of the romantic vision. Madness states intricate truths in simple terms; whereas, "intellectualism" attempts to "grasp things in their bewildering plurality, then express them in such a way that all their different levels are laid bare simultaneously<sup>92</sup>." In the poetry of madness there is a rejection of intellectual modes of perception. As in the intellectual style, the style of madness is a reflection of the poet's temperament. There is madness in Ghalib's tragic condition of Delhi reduced to a state of ruin. But this madness is born out of shock and sorrow. It contains nothing of the cultivated "terror" and "delight" of the romantic, Baudelaire<sup>93</sup>.

Faruqi illustrates Ghalib's ambiguous style with two verses taken from the *divan*.

The source of ambiguity in both of these couplets is metaphor. Indeed Faruqi sees

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<sup>89</sup> Faruqi, p. 37.

<sup>90</sup> Faruqi, p. 38.

<sup>91</sup> Faruqi, p. 38.

<sup>92</sup> Faruqi, p. 42.

<sup>93</sup> Faruqi, p. 44.

metaphor as the means by which a multidimensional mode of perception is articulated<sup>94</sup>.

Let us look at his examination of the second of the couplets.

jazbā-e-be-intiyār-e-shauq dykhā cahie  
sīnā-e-shamshir se bāhar hai dam shamshir kā

The uncontrolled passion of desire is a sight to behold  
The blade of the sword is out of its sheath<sup>95</sup>

The unsheathing of the sword is used as a metaphor for the irrepressible nature of desire. This metaphor is supported by an extended pun in the second line which is difficult to reproduce in English. The pun is based on the double meaning of *dam* (breath or blade) and the double meaning of *sīnā* (chest or scabbard). As a result, the expression "*shamshir ka dam sīnā se bāhar hai*" means "the blade of the sword is out of its sheath." The expression "*dam sīnā se bāhar hai*" means the breath is outside of the chest, an idiom signifying restlessness or intense longing. According to Faruqi, the underlying "fact" the metaphor signifies is that the lover loves the beloved<sup>96</sup>. Based on this fact are some common metaphors of the tradition: the lover sacrifices his life, the beloved's beauty slays the lover, and the beloved's indifference is like death. However, as conventions, these metaphors tend to be treated as facts by the poetry. These "facts" lead to the creation of even more unusual situations: the beloved keeps in her store an artillery of weapons for the purpose of killing the lover, the lover wishes to die at the hands of his beloved, the beloved has no qualms about killing the lover. All of these "facts" and metaphors are part of the conventional view of the execution scene. Faruqi goes on to elaborate the interpretations specific to this couplet. The sword slicing through the air

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<sup>94</sup> Faruqi, p. 46.

<sup>95</sup> *Divān-e-Ghālīb*, p.29

<sup>96</sup> Faruqi, p. 48.

represents a frenzied desire, as though anxious to decapitate the lover. But whose desire? Is it the sword's? Perhaps it is the lover's desire to meet his death? Or is it an expression of the beloved's desire to kill the lover<sup>97</sup>? Faruqi brings out these and other meanings to show something of the intellectual process underlying the interpretation of Ghalib's ambiguities and to show that Ghalib's verse is not merely difficult in a technical sense. "Ghalib's difficulty was not an end in itself, its end lay rather in articulating different layers of consciousness in a single moment<sup>98</sup>."

The writers in the first half of this chapter share a common premise, that the reader's ideals are an important basis for his or her involvement in the text. The views of these writers differ mainly over the nature of these ideals. Are the ideals an expression of what the author or his audience actually believed or are they the product of conventional beliefs? Russell and Sadiq emphasize the importance of realistic ideals, and Schimmel and Pritchett emphasize the role of convention in the ghazal's portrayal of the suffering lover. The next two writers take a more abstract view of the reader's involvement. For Bryant the ghazal, at least in its conventional aspect, is akin to a game, and Faruqi sees ambiguity as an important quality in poetic composition. In the next chapter we shall begin our examination of drama in terms of the notion of argument.

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<sup>97</sup> Faruqi, p. 45.

<sup>98</sup> Faruqi, p. 50.

**CHAPTER III**  
**THE MANY AUDIENCES OF THE TEXT:**  
**NARRATIVE AUDIENCE AND THE WORLD OF THE TEXT**

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section discusses Rabinowitz' view of the reader's role in fictional works. Rabinowitz examines the reader in terms of four audiences, the "actual audience," the authorial audience," the "narrative audience" and the "ideal audience." Of these four audiences, the two we shall focus on are the authorial audience and narrative audience. In the next section, we shall use Rabinowitz' notion of distance between the authorial and narrative audiences as the framework for a discussion of the role of narrative in the views of two writers reviewed in the last chapter. The third section delineates some of the problems in applying the notion of narrative audience to the poetry. What role does background knowledge play in the narrative audience's reconstruction of the world of the text? And, what role does the text itself play in the narrative audience's reconstruction of the world of the text? The final section examines the minimal nature of plot in the ghazal text and the implications this type of plot has for the narrative audience's discovery of the world of the text.



### 1. The Four Audiences: The Reader According to Peter Rabinowitz

A potential cause for confusion in any discussion of the frame of reference of a literary work is the fact that each reader or writer will use different standards to determine what a work is talking about. Sadiq judges ghazal poetry harshly because he feels it does not reflect external circumstance. Russell presents a favourable picture of the ghazal, and he sees the norms of the ghazal as conforming to its socio-historic context. Pritchett focuses on the conventional norms underlying ghazal imagery, and suggests that this imagery depicts not the external circumstance but the "inner life" of the poets, their moods and feelings. Schimmel seeks correspondences between poetic image and the ideas of Islamic mysticism. Bryant emphasizes the isolation of the thematic tradition from external norms by proposing the notion of an ongoing narrative as a model for the ghazal's world. Faruqi sees the merits of Ghalib's poetry in terms of its ambiguities. One of the main differences amongst these writers is where, in relation to the text, they locate the norms of the poetry. At one extreme, we have Russell who sees the cultural context as the basis for understanding the poetry. At the other extreme, we have Bryant, who views thematic convention as the source of the ghazal's norms and Faruqi, who judges the poem in terms of its ambiguous effects. Although these two extremes tend to be opposed to each other, they do not cancel each other out because they focus on different aspects of the poetry. On the one hand, all poetry presupposes that its readers have had certain experiences in the world, and without these experiences, its readers would be unable to reconstruct the world of the text. On the other hand, poetry deviates from the reader's prior experiences: it creates a world with its own set of norms. In this respect, the reader's point of view towards the poetic text resembles the reader's point of view towards fictional texts in general.

In "Assertion and Assumption: Fictional Patterns and the External World," Peter Rabinowitz examines the dual role of the reader. According to Rabinowitz, art cannot be measured in terms of some empirically verifiable world external to the work itself, because "even the most apparently 'objective' facts will always be coloured by the experiences, conceptual moulds, social background, and language of the observer." At most, art "reflects" how people think about the external world<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, "writing fiction is not a purely individual creative act; since it presupposes some reading community, large or small, it is also a public act<sup>2</sup>." A work of fiction has an implied reader. The concept of an implied reader, however, is ambiguous because art is imitation; "it pretends to be something it is not<sup>3</sup>." Neither can the reader treat the work "solely as what it is nor solely as what it appears to be<sup>4</sup>." According to Rabinowitz, this duality generates four audiences<sup>5</sup>:

(1) The first audience is the "actual audience<sup>6</sup>." All works are ultimately written to be consumed by actual flesh-and-blood people. But the author cannot possibly write for all those who happen to read his work.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Rabinowitz, "Assertion and Assumption: Fictional Patterns and the External World." *PMLA*, (96:1981), p. 409.

<sup>2</sup> Rabinowitz, p. 409.

<sup>3</sup> Rabinowitz, p. 410.

<sup>4</sup> Rabinowitz, p. 410.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction: A Reramination of Audiences." *Critical Inquiry*, (4:1977), p. 125

<sup>6</sup> Rabinowitz, (1977), p. 126.

(2) Writers must make assumptions about the beliefs of their readers when designing a work<sup>7</sup>. These hypothetical readers constitute the second of Rabinowitz' audiences, which he calls the "authorial audience." Much of the reader's understanding or appreciation of a work will depend on the accuracy of the assumptions writers make about their reader's beliefs. Rabinowitz uses the example of William Demby's *The Catacombs*. "[T]he novel achieves its sense of impending doom only if the reader knows that John F. Kennedy will be assassinated when the events of the novel reach 22 November 1963<sup>8</sup>." Works belonging to another time or culture are often difficult to understand precisely because the author is writing for an audience whose beliefs differ substantially from our own<sup>9</sup>.

(3) All writers, whether of fiction or of nonfiction, design their works with an authorial audience in mind. Fictional works, however, bring another audience into play:

Since the novel is generally an imitation of some nonfictional form (usually history, including biography and autobiography), the narrator of the novel (implicit or explicit) is generally an imitation of an author<sup>10</sup>

The narrator writes for an imitation audience which Rabinowitz calls the "narrative audience<sup>11</sup>." For instance, *War and Peace* is presented as an historical account.

As an historian, [the narrator] is writing for an audience which not only knows--as does the authorial audience--that Moscow was burned in 1812 but also believes that Natasha, Pierre, and Andrei "really" existed, and that the events in their lives "really" took place.

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<sup>7</sup> Rabinowitz, (1977), p. 126.

<sup>8</sup> Rabinowitz, (1977), p. 126.

<sup>9</sup> Rabinowitz, (1977), p. 127

<sup>10</sup> Rabinowitz, (1977), p. 127

<sup>11</sup> Rabinowitz, (1977), p. 127.

Unlike the authorial audience, the narrative audience enters into the world of the text as if it were real<sup>12</sup>. The reader's imaginary participation in the world of the text is an important part of what makes fiction work. "The reader who refuses to pretend to believe in talking bears can only wonder where Goldilocks has been buying her drugs."<sup>13</sup>

(4) Although the narrator plays an important role in the narrative audience's reconstruction of the world of the text, the narrator does not always present a reliable account of his world. A narrator is reliable or unreliable, not by the norms of the authorial audience, but by the norms of his own narrative audience. Unreliable narration occurs whenever the speaker's understanding of his world is inferior to that of the narrative audience's understanding. The speaker's failure to understand may indicate a lack in the speaker's knowledge, intelligence, or moral stature. In order to account for the narrative audience's relation to the unreliable narrator, Rabinowitz postulates a fourth audience, the "ideal audience"<sup>14</sup>. The ideal audience is the audience for whom the narrator believes or wishes he were writing<sup>15</sup>. When narration is reliable, the ideal audience corresponds more or less to the narrative audience, i.e. the narrator is in full command of his audience, and unreliable narration results in distance between the two audiences, i.e. the narrator believes his audience is convinced when, in fact, it disagrees with him. Rabinowitz illustrates the ideal audience with the Jason section of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. "[T]he ideal

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<sup>12</sup> Rabinowitz, (1977), p. 128.

<sup>13</sup> Rabinowitz, (1981), p. 410.

<sup>14</sup> Rabinowitz, (1977), p. 134.

<sup>15</sup> Rabinowitz, (1977), p. 134.

narrative audience believes that Jason has been victimized and sympathizes with his whining misery, although the narrative audience despises him<sup>16</sup>."

For the reader who is unfamiliar with Rabinowitz' audiences, a potential source of confusion is the fact that, except in the case of the actual audience, the term "audience" refers to a set of beliefs rather than to a group of individuals. The actual audience refers to a plurality of individuals, that is, any reader who happens to read the book. Although we may single out a particular type of reader in discussing a possible reaction to a literary work, the concept of actual audience includes a set of readers who are in a sense out there and who could be interviewed or investigated. The authorial audience, however, does not correspond to a set of individuals, but to a set of beliefs belonging to what one might call the "ideal reader<sup>17</sup>." This ideal reader is best thought of as a particular individual who possesses the requisite knowledge in reading a work of fiction. For example, the actual audience of *The Catacombs* includes not only those readers who know of Kennedy's assassination, but those who do not as well. We might then decide that the authorial audience is simply a subset of the actual audience consisting of those readers who are aware of Kennedy's assassination. As we include more and more beliefs the work draws upon, our group becomes smaller and smaller, but it would still remain a group of people. Since the authorial audience is constructed with a set of actual readers in mind, it makes sense to talk of the authorial audience as a group of readers. But to understand the dynamics of the text, we must also think of the authorial audience as a person or point of view the text invites the reader to become, just as we tend to become different people

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<sup>16</sup> Rabinowitz, (1977), p. 134.

<sup>17</sup> My reader may wonder at my choice of the term "ideal reader" in the light of Rabinowitz' use of the term "ideal audience." According to Rabinowitz, the ideal audience and the authorial audience are similar in their function (R134). These similarities will be discussed presently.

depending on whether we are at home, at school, or at work. In so far as we attempt to understand the text, we are struggling with the material as an individual, and for the purposes of this discussion, it will be better to conceive of the authorial audience as consisting of a set of beliefs held by some "ideal" reader or implied by a role the reader becomes. Similarly, the narrative audience can be viewed as a role of the reader. But in this case, the narrative audience is a role the reader pretends to become. The ideal audience, on the other hand, is a role the narrator invites the narrative audience to become, but whether or not the narrator succeeds depends on whether or not narration is reliable.

As an illustration of these four audiences, let us examine a couplet we discussed in the first chapter.

yih masāil-e-ṭaṣavvuf, yih tirā bayān gālib  
tujhe ham valī samajhte jo na bādā-khār hotā

These intricacies of Sufism, your eloquence, O Ghalib!  
We would have thought you to be a saint, if you weren't such a drunkard.

In this couplet "Ghalib" is not Ghalib the poet, but his persona, or in Wayne Booth's words, the "spokesman for the implied author"<sup>18</sup>. The speaker criticizes Ghalib for putting on airs of sainthood when in fact he is a drunkard. Although the narrative audience agrees with the speaker in his views that Ghalib is a drunkard, it disagrees with him in his belief that the state of inebriation is a degraded one, and in presuming that Ghalib is pretending piety<sup>19</sup>. The speaker, however, believes that his audience is in full

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<sup>18</sup> The implied author is the author's counterpart to the authorial audience. The character Ghalib is a creation of the implied author and serves as his representative or spokesman. For a discussion of the relationship of the implied author to the authorial audience see Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago:1961), pp. 421-431.

agreement with him. The audience he imagines he is addressing is the ideal audience. The ideal audience, like the narrator<sup>20</sup>, believes that Ghalib is a drunkard, that drunkenness is morally wrong, and that Ghalib is putting on an air of piety.

The ideal audience agrees with the unreliable narrator's point of view, whereas the narrative audience disagrees. The narrative audience is really the final authority on the world of the text, and it is for this reason that the norms of the narrative audience form the standards by which a narrator is deemed reliable or unreliable. The narrative audience's disagreement is based in part on its knowledge of the conventional character that Ghalib represents in this couplet. One of the incarnations of lover's personality is the character of the *rind*, or rake. The lover, at times, exhibits a devil-may-care attitude about life, and along with it, a great fondness for drinking. His devotion to the beloved may approach that of religious zeal, but he also exhibits a heedlessness characteristic of the greatest of sinners. The outrageous behaviour of the *rind* is much admired by the narrative audience, and as a result, the speaker believes his audience is laughing with him, when in fact, it is laughing at him.

In addition to the conventional features of the character in this couplet, some aspects of "Ghalib's" personality are based on what the *authorial* audience knows of Ghalib, the person. Ghalib's abilities as a poet, his fondness for drink, as well as his nonreligious tendencies were well-known to Ghalib's reader, and this knowledge is relevant to the narrative audience's understanding of what is happening in the couplet. The main difference between the authorial and narrative audience is that whereas the narrative

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<sup>19</sup> The reader will recall from the first chapter, that the speaker assumes from the pious tone of the previous verse that "Ghalib" is pretending to have saintly qualities he does not have.

<sup>20</sup> In this paper I use the terms "narrator" and "speaker" interchangeably.

audience believes that "Ghalib", the character, and the speaker of this couplet both exist, the authorial audience sees them as fictional creations of Ghalib, the poet.

My own reader might wonder how "Ghalib" as he appears in this couplet can be a fictional creation, particularly when the qualities of "Ghalib" seem to correspond to those of Ghalib, the poet. There are at least two reasons why "Ghalib" should be considered a fictional creation. First of all, the character that appears in this verse is not simply a reflection of the historical Ghalib; much of his personality is based on the narrative audience's knowledge of the outrageous behaviour of the lover in the role of the *rind*. Second, since the narrator is himself a creation of the couplet, the events he describes (which include the character, Ghalib) must also be fictional in nature. The difference between the narrative and authorial audiences lies in the fact that the narrative audience believes that the events described by a fictional text are true; whereas the authorial audience knows they are creations, in spite of whatever correspondences to external realities the descriptions of the text may display.

The authorial audience is a hypothetical audience; it involves the notion of authorial intention. Ghalib, in writing this couplet, designed it for a specific audience. The authorial audience of this couplet is the Mughal reader of the Urdu ghazal. This audience is conversant both with the attitudes and customs of Mughal society, and with the literary conventions of the ghazal. This design includes a reader who not only has the requisite background knowledge, but is willing to join the narrative audience as well. In other words, the narrative audience's rejection of the speaker's point of view and its sympathy for the character "Ghalib," are a part of the intentions of the author in writing the couplet.

Authorial intention brings up the problem of actual audience. As the product of intention, the authorial audience is a hypothetical audience which only partially corresponds



to the actual reader<sup>21</sup>. Distance between the authorial audience and actual audience generally indicates a defect in the design of the work or a failure on the part of the reader to understand the work. For instance, the writer's attempt to express pathos may come across as sentimental indulgence; what seems clear in the writer's mind may be confusing to the reader etc. Distance between authorial and actual audience may also indicate the opposite condition, an inability on the part of the reader to understand the text. For instance, a reader unfamiliar with Islamic culture will miss some of the connotations of the above couplet because he is not aware of the restrictions on drinking, nor of the importance of Sufism within the cultural fabric of Islam. Works such as Russell's *Three Mughal Poets* are primarily concerned with bridging the gap between the authorial audience and the modern Western reader, by presenting information on the cultural background. Apart from a set of cultural norms the authorial audience also presupposes familiarity with its literary conventions. Unless the reader knows that drinking is normally seen in a positive light in the ghazal's world, he may find it difficult to decide who is the actual subject of criticism, the narrator, or "Ghalib." Ghalib's Urdu divan has inspired a whole tradition of commentary, whose main purpose is to clarify some of the subtler or more difficult allusions of the poetry which the actual reader might miss. Distance between the authorial and narrative audience may be in terms of ethics. Even after understanding the cultural background and the literary allusions, a reader may dislike a poem because of the values it expresses or seems to express. For example, much of Sadiq's view of the failings of the Urdu literary tradition is based precisely on his antipathy towards the outlook on life it

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<sup>21</sup> The notion of authorial intention is also problematic in itself. Although we can be reasonably certain that Ghalib, the writer existed, how do we know what Ghalib's intentions are in writing a particular text? The reader does not begin with knowledge of Ghalib's intentions, but must infer them from reading the text. Consequently, the notion of an author designing the work is also a hypothetical construct on the reader's part. This "hypothetical" author has been described by Booth as the "implied author." For a discussion of the relationship between implied author and authorial audience, I will again refer my reader to *The Rhetoric of Fiction* pp. 421-431

expresses. This type of distance is much more difficult to resolve, since the issues at stake are not simply a writer's ability or a reader's understanding of the poetry, but a conflict between points of view whose origin is outside of the literary tradition itself. Critics such as Booth have examined problems which occur in reading when readers cannot agree with the ethics implied by a work of fiction.

The notion of four audiences might be easier to grasp if we view them in terms of a pattern. According to Rabinowitz, the relationship between the ideal audience and narrative audience is roughly analogous to the relationship between the authorial audience and actual audience (R134). That is, within the context of the world of the text, the narrator has his own "actual" audience and this audience is the narrative audience. Just as the author makes certain inferences about his audience, so does the narrator. The author's inferences correspond to the authorial audience and the narrator's inferences correspond to the ideal audience. For example, the knowledge of drinking customs in Islam and in Mughal India as well as the literary conventions about drinking are part of the authorial audience. The belief that the character "Ghalib" is a drinker, that drinking is degrading are part of the ideal audience. In both cases, the narrator and author make certain assumptions which they believe are shared by their audience. When the author misjudges his audience (the actual audience), the authorial audience does not correspond to the actual audience, and the work fails<sup>22</sup>, and when the narrator misjudges his audience (the narrative audience), the ideal audience is distant from the narrative audience, and narration is unreliable<sup>23</sup>. According to Rabinowitz, the analogy is only a rough one. The analogy breaks down when we consider

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<sup>22</sup> In the case of this couplet, I am assuming that Ghalib has indeed judged his audience correctly and that his verse succeeds.

<sup>23</sup> The narrator of this couplet makes assumptions about "Ghalib" which differ from those of the narrative audience, and consequently, he is unreliable.

the fact that distance between actual and authorial audiences does not necessarily imply a failure in the author's judgement, whereas, distance between the narrative and ideal audiences necessarily implies a misunderstanding on the part of the narrator. The reason for this difference is that the narrative audience plays a unique role in the world of the text in the sense that the narrative audience is the final authority on what happens within the text. On the other hand, the actual audience may be a competent reader or an incompetent reader. Under Rabinowitz' scheme, distance from the actual audience would mar the success of a work only if by actual audience one meant competent reader.

The question of what makes a competent reader competent brings us into the realm of ethics. Implicit in the notion of competence is a value judgement that such and such a reader is superior to another with respect to such and such a capacity or virtue. Although we may try to make our own readings as objective-looking as possible by presenting evidence to support them, much of the evidence we present is accepted as evidence because we speak to or write for an audience whose assumptions about a text are similar to our own. Within the real world someone can always challenge our assumptions, and we may have to revise them if new evidence is presented. On the other hand, the narrative audience is the final authority on the world of the text, there is no outside agent that can contradict the narrative audience's beliefs. If we question the narrative audience's view, it is always from outside the world of the text. We may not like the moral implications of such a world, or we may find that the world is not very interesting. For example, a reader may dislike the views implied by the above couplet, because he or she finds drinking morally reprehensible, and cannot enjoy the positive treatment of the drinking habit even within a fictional setting. If the narrative audience fails, it fails in terms of standards imported by the reader and not by the standards of the world of the text, because it *is*, by definition, the standards of the text's world. Thus, the question of reliable and unreliable narration is internal to the world of the text, and if one is to understand the logic underlying the

narrative audience's "thinking", one should keep in mind that when I speak of the beliefs of the narrative audience, I am using the frame of reference of the world of the text<sup>24</sup>.

As mentioned before, except for the actual audience, Rabinowitz' audiences are not to be understood as being comprised of individuals, but of beliefs. Each of the last three audiences comprises a coherent set of beliefs which is best thought of as belonging to a particular individual who is located either in the external world, or in the world of the text. To elucidate the four audiences, I have included the following summary. For the sake of clarity, I restrict the beliefs of the various audiences to those regarding the narrator and the character "Ghalib's" drinking habits.

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<sup>24</sup> The notion that the text presents a fictional world is an assumption which post-modern critics would question. It is well beyond the scope of a paper such as this to demonstrate whether or not we are justified in speaking of the "world of the text." However, at the end of this paper, I contrast the objectives of the ghazal text with those of the post-modern novel.

### 1. Actual Audience:

consists of a plurality of readers with varying degrees of ability to join the authorial audience;  
 is aware of the external world;  
 may or may not be aware of Islamic prohibitions on drinking, or of the ghazal convention that  
     drinking is "good;"  
 may or may not enjoy the couplet for any range of reasons.

### 2. Authorial Audience:

is the hypothetical reader for whom the text is designed;  
 is aware of the external world;  
 is aware of the world of the text but as a fictional world;  
 sees "Ghalib" and the narrator as fictional creations of Ghalib the poet.  
 is aware of Islamic prohibitions on drinking, and of ghazal convention that drinking is "good;"  
 enjoys the couplet;

### 3. Narrative Audience:

is the imagined receiver of information on the world of the text;  
 is not aware of the external world;  
 is aware of the world of the text as real;  
 believes that "Ghalib" and the narrator both exist, that "Ghalib" is a drinker;  
 believes that the narrator is misguided and that drinking is not degrading;  
 is amused, perhaps shocked, by the narrator's inability to understand the true stature of  
     "Ghalib."

### 4. Ideal Audience:

is the narrator's hypothetical listener, the one to whom the narrator believes or wishes he were  
     speaking;  
 is not aware of the external world;  
 is aware of the world of the text as real;  
 correctly believes that "Ghalib" and the narrator both exist, that "Ghalib" is a drinker;  
 but incorrectly believes that the narrator is correct in his views and that drinking is degrading;  
 is pleased with the fact that the speaker has finally presented the unvarnished truth about  
     "Ghalib," the drunk.

It should be noted that both narrative and ideal audiences participate in the same fictional world. Both audiences are trying to understand the same world. The ideal audience in this couplet is distant from the world of the text only in terms of its understanding of that world, not in terms of where it is located. The ideal audience is just as much a part of the world of the text as the narrative audience; the only difference is that the ideal audience's knowledge is defective. On the other hand, the authorial audience and the actual audience are both aware of the external world. They are located outside the world of the text; whereas, the narrative and ideal audiences are located within the world of the text. Another point to be noted is that the narrative and ideal audiences are unaware of the external world in the sense that even if the world of the text incorporates features of the external world, for the narrative and ideal audiences, these features are part of the world of the text; they are not aware of the larger context from which the features originate. For example, the character with whom the narrative audience is acquainted resembles what the authorial audience knows about Mirza Ghalib, but the narrative audience does not know that both the character of the verse and the narrator are fictional creations of Ghalib, the writer. The problem of what the narrative audience knows or doesn't know will be discussed in more detail later, when I define how I shall use the narrative audience in my examination of the poetry.

Of Rabinowitz' four audiences, the two which will concern us are the authorial and narrative audiences. The relationship of the authorial audience to actual audience will receive only cursory treatment. Our focus will be primarily on two relationships, between the authorial and narrative audiences and between the narrative audience and its world. The ideal audience will be dealt with again in the fourth chapter, but as an aspect of how the narrative audience reconstructs its world. Let us examine how Rabinowitz defines the relationship between the authorial and narrative audience.

Joining the narrative audience involves pretence, but not everything the narrative audience believes involves pretence. Although the authorial audience (unlike the narrative audience) knows that the character "Ghalib" is fictitious, it can, nevertheless, see similarities between the character "Ghalib" and what it knows about the poet. This couplet is an example of a ghazal text whose events are fairly close to how the authorial audience perceives the world. But even in ghazal texts or other works whose flights of fancy seem to leave the external world far behind, there is always some overlap between the narrative audience's beliefs and those of the authorial audience<sup>25</sup>. Rabinowitz gives this overlap as defining the realism of a work and the distance between the two audiences as defining the nonrealism of a work.<sup>26</sup> Seen in this way, realism and nonrealism are not categories into which some works fall and others do not, but are tendencies present to some degree in all texts. The following diagram illustrates the relationship between the narrative and authorial audience in the above couplet.

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<sup>25</sup> Rabinowitz, (1981), p. 412-413.

<sup>26</sup> Rabinowitz, p. 412

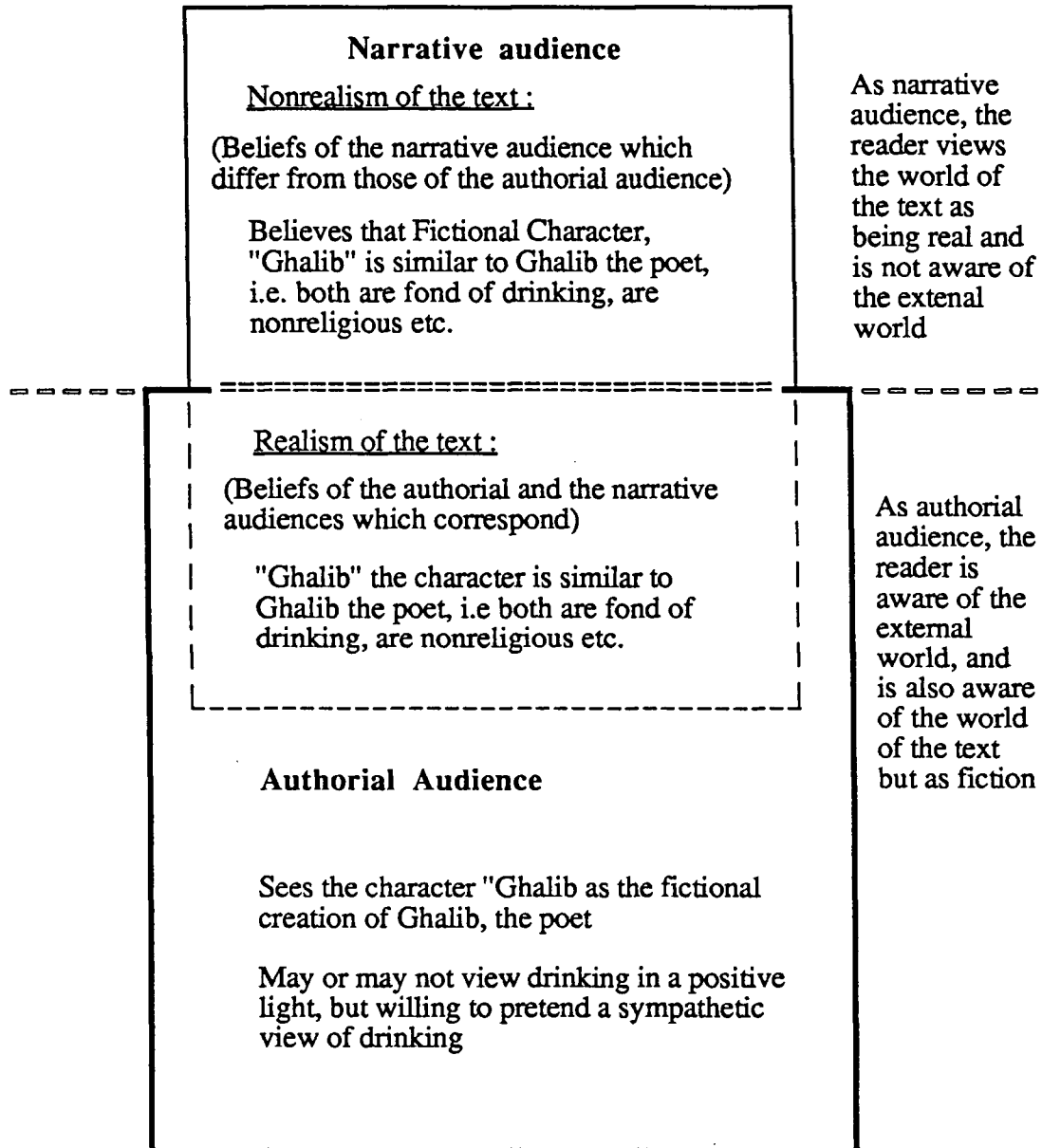


Figure 3-1. Distance and overlap of the authorial and narrative audiences



## 2. Narrative as Imitation: Similarities and Differences

By defining the realism of the text in terms of its conformity to the beliefs of the authorial audience, Rabinowitz suggests that realism is a function of the text and remains constant in spite of historical change or difference in culture<sup>27</sup>. That is, what makes a text realistic is not its conformity to what a particular reader or critic might believe about the world, but its conformity to the views of its authorial audience. Let us now examine two writers who emphasize different aspects of ghazal poetry, but for both of whom the narrative plays an important role. Russell emphasizes the realism of the ghazal and Bryant examines the conventions of the ghazal in terms of its nonrealism. Let us begin with a discussion of Russell's view of the poetry.

Russell sees the extravagant expression of emotion in the ghazal as an accurate reflection of the pattern of romantic love in Mughal society. To use Rabinowitz' terminology, Russell sees the views of the narrative audience and authorial audience as overlapping, at least with respect to the portrayal of feelings. In order to introduce the modern reader to the realism of the ghazal, Russell explains the social context behind the poetry. His description of the cultural setting reads like a story. That is, we are presented with the story of a typical Mughal lover and the various stages he passes through in his experience of love. Adding to the dramatic significance of this story are the couplets selected to exemplify each stage in the lover's progress. The result is a very readable account of the background. Commenting on Russell's stages of love, Pritchett has this to say, "The whole effect is coherent and elegant, well-suited to win new Western admirers for Mir's art<sup>28</sup>."

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<sup>27</sup> Rabinowitz, (1981), p. 412.

One may not agree with Russell's claims to sociological accuracy, but it is significant that he organizes the background as a narrative. Although we would like to believe that the values we hold are directly applicable to the actual conditions of the world, an important part of our conception of life has to do with the stories we have been told. For example, in the previous chapter we came across a popular image in the ghazal, that of the sword. Ignoring for the moment its treatment in the ghazal, the sword is generally associated with the context of the battle, and tends to signify the destructive possibilities of human might. Although these associations are based on our knowledge of the world, i.e. we know that swords are used in battle, they are not necessarily evoked by the physical object themselves. Few of us have seen swords except in museums or in movies, yet the sword remains an effective symbol of human might. Indeed, much of the sword's power to evoke the human condition is based not on direct experience, but on stories of brave knights in battle. If stories can shape the views of the modern reader, it is reasonable to assume that the narratives of Mughal India would have had a similar influence on the beliefs of its readers. From this perspective, Mir's *maṣnavīs*, or narrative poems (on which Russell bases much of his evidence) might not tell us much about actual practices in the society, but they are probably reasonable approximations of the views which the society had of romantic love. According to Rabinowitz, a work is realistic, not because it is an accurate description of the external world, but because it reflects the authorial audience's views of the world. In this regard, Russell's narrative format could be viewed as descriptions of the authorial audience's views, even if these descriptions do not accurately document the social conditions of the time.

The problem with Russell's presentations is not so much what it tells us about the authorial audience's views. It seems to me, that Russell's view of the stages of love makes

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<sup>28</sup> Pritchett, p. 62.

the ghazal's context read too much like a series of episodes within a rigidly sequential plot. For instance, he recounts the theme of the beloved's distance from the lover as a series of events within a chronology. In the beginning, the lover notices a loss of intimacy with his beloved<sup>29</sup>. He attempts to move her by expressing his jealousy<sup>30</sup>. He "appeals to her pity<sup>31</sup>." He finds he has less and less to say to her<sup>32</sup>. "He sends word to her, and she does not even reply<sup>33</sup>." And finally, "He no longer even hopes for more than a minimum of human kindness from her; yet even that hope is vain<sup>34</sup>." According to the framework Russell has set up here, the reader's sympathy for the lover's predicament in each couplet is based on a knowledge of the various episodes which have brought him to that point in his career; just as in a novel, we are moved by its climax because of the plot which precedes it. Within the context of the couplet, however, such a notion can be misleading. In the couplet, we are presented with the dramatic moment itself, with very few clues as to how to reconstruct its past. For instance, Russell--in describing the stage in which the lover, on discovering his estrangement from the beloved, appeals to her sense of pity--uses the following couplet as an example.

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<sup>29</sup> Russell, (1968), p. 141.

<sup>30</sup> Russell, (1968), p. 142.

<sup>31</sup> Russell, (1968), p. 143.

<sup>32</sup> Russell, (1968), p. 143.

<sup>33</sup> Russell, (1968), p. 146.

<sup>34</sup> Russell, (1968), p. 146.

gaī 'umr merī sārī jaise sham'a bād ke bīc  
yahī ronā jalnā gulnā yahī iz̄tarāb tujh bin

The candle gutters in the draught, and my life too must waste away.  
Like it I weep, and burn, and melt, and pine away parted from you.<sup>35</sup>

It is not at all clear why Russell has decided that the speaker of this couplet still believes that his beloved might respond to his pleadings. The speaker could as easily be declaring his love for a beloved he believes to be completely heartless. It is not even clear from this couplet what the actual cause of the lover's separation is. Is it the beloved who has deliberately distanced herself? Or is circumstance the cause of distance? The problem here is not simply that the couplet gives us no reason to accept Russell's version of the history of its event, but that beyond the fact of the lover's separation from the beloved, we can say nothing about the past which would contribute to the drama of this couplet. In other words, the larger chronology with which Russell frames this event is, for the most part, irrelevant to what is happening here. Indeed, any attempt to fit what is happening in this couplet into such a chronology would only diffuse the timeless quality of the drama. The only couplets whose drama can be said to depend on a larger chronological frame are those which refer to stories and legends whose origins are external to the ghazal tradition, in particular, the references to Majnun and Farhad. When the poet uses the epithet *kohkan*, or mountain-carver, we know he is referring to a particular episode in the story of Farhad's unsuccessful attempts to attain his beloved Shirin. But when the poet is talking of the ghazal's lover, he is describing a character who participates in a great variety of events, but whose participation in these events cannot be organized into any kind of chronology. From the point of view of time or history, the world of the ghazal is extremely narrow.

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<sup>35</sup> The translation is Russell's, pp. 143

Russell may claim that the emotional extravagance of the ghazal is realistic, but he seems to forget, at times, that the space-time framework in which this emotion is expressed is not. The narrative audience's conception of time is radically different from that of the authorial audience, and in so far as Russell's narrative framework treats both views of time as one, it is misleading.

The next writer we shall examine, Bryant, emphasizes the distance between the narrative audience and the authorial audience. For Bryant, the context of the poetry is a restricted set of events serving as a kernel or matrix generating the individual couplets as variations on the matrix. To illustrate the production of variations, he suggests the analogy of a community of story-tellers. However, in Bryant's view, the ghazal's narrative is not a progression in time, but a fixation on what is essentially the same event: an attempt "to exhaust the paradigm of all possible variations on the matrix." For example, in an adventure story, or tale of bravery, the image of the sword includes previous associations with the context of the battle, but its dramatic impact is also a function of where and how it fits into the plot of the narrative. However, in the ghazal, the image of the sword has been greatly reduced by conventional usage in terms of the detail of its context, and in terms of its function. Within the context of a couplet, the significance of the sword is derived, not from a set of past events, but from an archetypal pattern of which the couplet is a variation. The sword has a very narrow function: its purpose is to decapitate the lover. How the beloved acquired a sword, where she keeps it, the place where the execution takes place, the events leading up to the lover's execution, all these questions have little to do with the drama of the couplet. The lover's execution engages the reader because the reader has witnessed many similar executions in previous readings.

Bryant sees the drama of ghazal poetry as an obsession. By this, he doesn't mean to imply that the ghazal's writers and their audiences were neurotic. He uses neurosis as a

metaphor for the process whereby the events of the ghazal become more and more restricted in scope as they are abstracted from their larger, more realistic settings. In this capacity, neurosis could be viewed as a failure to adjust to the world, a withdrawal from the threatening complexities of the macrocosm into the security of a well-ordered microcosm. But if ghazal poetry obscures the external world, the reader is also quite aware of this process. Unlike the neurotic, the reader not only recognizes distance, but is able to consciously derive pleasure from this distance. Applying Rabinowitz' model to this process, the reader would play the role of both neurotic and therapist: the narrative audience is the patient, and the authorial audience is the doctor.

### 3. Fiction as Pretended Ignorance of the External World

According to Rabinowitz, the defining feature of a fictional text is the presence of the narrative audience over and above the authorial audience. He also states that in realistic works, the gap between the two audiences is less than in works of nonrealism. Let us extrapolate a bit here and ask "what would happen if the gap between the two audiences were to disappear?" The result it seems, would be nonfiction. In nonfiction, both audiences would be identical. Thus, the identifying feature of fiction is not simply the presence of the narrative audience but the condition of distance between the two audiences<sup>36</sup>.

The notion of distance between the narrative and authorial audiences is a bit confusing, unless one keeps in mind the hierarchical relationship between the two audiences. The narrative audience is a subset of the authorial audience in the sense that the authorial audience is both aware of the external world as well as the narrative audience's world; whereas, the narrative audience only knows its own world (See figure 3-1). In other words, the authorial audience knows that the narrative audience's world is distant from the external world; whereas, since the narrative audience is aware only of its own world, it cannot be aware of its distance. For the narrative audience, the world it enters becomes its reality; whether that world is realistic or unrealistic is known by the authorial audience and not by the narrative audience.

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<sup>36</sup> My remark that in nonfiction the authorial and narrative audiences are identical needs qualification. It is not uncommon for nonfictional forms to describe conditions which are not literally true, for the purposes of illustration. In this case, the two audiences are no longer identical. But again, we could also characterize this type of description as the use of incidental fiction for the purposes of illustration. Thus, distance between the two audiences is present in nonfictional forms in so far as they employ fiction to achieve their ends. On the other hand, distance is a necessary condition of fiction. A work of fiction may reduce the distance between the two audiences, but if it eliminates it, it becomes nonfiction.

hue mar ke ham jo rusvā, hue kion na garq-e-daryā  
na kabhī janāzā uṭhā, na kahiñ mazār hōtā

By dying I was disgraced, why didn't I drown in the river?  
There would have been neither funeral procession nor grave.

The speaker expresses the regret that his suicide announced to the world the secret of his love. Had he drowned in the river, he would not have left any evidence behind. The narrative audience of this couplet believes not only that the speaker exists but that he is speaking from beyond the grave. These beliefs imply an ignorance of the fact that the speaker is a creation of the author, and that speakers do not, as a matter of course, address their audiences from beyond the grave. Thus, understanding the narrative audience's participation in a fictional world, requires not only that we take into account what it knows, but what it does not know as well.



#### 4. Restrictions of Plot:

##### The Adventures of Discovering Time and Space

An important implication of the narrative audience's "ignorance" has to do with how it draws on prior experience. Whereas the authorial audience draws directly on its experiences of the world and on its readings of other texts, the narrative audience has only indirect access to these experiences. That is, the fictional nature of the text imposes restrictions on the narrative audience's access to the prior experiences of the reader. These restrictions may apply with respect to experiences of the external world or with respect to the readings of other texts. We have already examined how the above couplet requires that the narrative audience ignore the fact that the speaker is a creation of the author and that speakers do not address their audiences from beyond the grave. What is perhaps less obvious, is that the narrative audience is also called upon to ignore the fact that the protagonist of this couplet has died innumerable times in other couplets, even though the authorial audience is quite aware that the protagonist has died many times before and in many different situations. For the narrative audience whose knowledge is limited to the world of the text, the speaker's death is a unique event. This does not mean that what the authorial audience knows about the protagonist's "previous experiences" does not influence the narrative audience's reception of the text. Even though the narrative audience may not recall the particulars of the lover's experiences in other couplets, the *form* in which this situation presents itself is familiar to the narrative audience. Just as an accomplished pianist knows the keyboard of the piano, without recalling the individual practice sessions which were part of his or her learning experience, similarly, the narrative audience's prior knowledge excludes an awareness of the particulars of time and space.

At the beginning of any given couplet, the narrative audience's knowledge of its world is undefined in terms of a particular space-time framework. It is through the text, that the narrative audience becomes aware of the chronological order of the events of the text. On the other hand, the authorial audience's sense of history is based first of all on its knowledge of the events of the external world. That is, the authorial audience's involvement in historical process precedes the text. The authorial audience of the ghazal is aware of many details of Mughal culture which are unlikely to change from the reading of one couplet to another. On the other hand, the narrative audience of one couplet will be presented a chronology of events which may differ radically from the view of history presented in the next. Each couplet creates its own unique plot, and from the point of view of the narrative audience, the reconstruction of history begins with the assertions of the text.

When the lover waits for the beloved, his waiting is within the limits of time. The couplet may not define time precisely, but the couplet does present its own limited version of time, its own history. However, much of the significance of the couplet's drama is derived, not from the extension of a plot in time, but through the correspondence of event to similar events in other couplets. It is the intertextual nature of the couplet's drama which makes it significant, in spite of its restriction to the space-time frame of the couplet. The minimal nature of space-time within the poetic context has important consequences in terms of the reader's involvement in the text. Unlike larger forms such as the novel which provide detailed descriptions of their worlds, the world of the couplet is only suggested: The process of reconstructing the drama of the text is as absorbing as the drama itself. In this regard, the narrative audience could be viewed as the "protagonist" in its own "plot" of discovering the world of the text. The absence of a significant history is compensated for by the drama of discovery. In the next chapter we will explore some of the ways in which the text involves its reader in the drama of discovery.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ELUSIVE WORLD OF THE TEXT

This chapter examines some of the ways in which the text forces the narrative audience to become aware of its attempt to discover the world of the text. The discussion is divided into four sections. The first section deals with deceptive syntax, the second, with unreliable narration, the third, with metaphor, and the fourth, with ambiguity. The final section presents the conclusion.

### 1. Deceptive Syntax

In discussing the relation of the narrative audience to the ideal audience, I stated that the narrative audience was the final authority on the world of the text. This is true only with respect to what the narrative audience knows retrospectively. Before reading begins, the narrative audience's knowledge of the world of the text is yet to be defined. It is only through reading that the narrative audience becomes aware of what happens in the text. As a result, the initial assumptions it makes about the world of the text may prove false when further details are provided. By misleading the narrative audience, the text forces the narrative audience to make a dramatic shift in point of view.

It was not in my luck to unite with the friend.  
Had I lived longer, I would still be waiting.

About all we can say about the lover's past in this couplet is what we are told directly in this couplet, that due to circumstances beyond his control, he was unable to unite with his beloved. We have no idea how he first met the beloved, what circumstances led to his separation, or what efforts the speaker made to attain his wishes. The whole significance of his past is summarized by a single event, his unproductive waiting. We can infer from the phrase "had I lived longer" that he was unable to attain his desire within his life time; indeed no amount of waiting would have resulted in success. We can also infer that the narrator is now consoling himself. If death means that it is no longer possible to be with the beloved, then there is no difference between life and death, since the same conditions prevailed while he was alive. The plot of this couplet is minimal indeed: at some point in the past the lover was disappointed in love, and now, beyond the grave, he has acquired the wisdom to speak with authority on the futility of life and love. But it is a plot in name only. The problem is that we may understand what the lover has gone through, but we have not gone through the lover's disappointments with him.

Much of the dramatic effect in this couplet is based, not on the reader's sense of a progression in time, but on a change in the reader's perspective which results from the narrator's choice of words. In the first line, the speaker's mood is retrospective, but since there is no mention of death, the narrative audience assumes that the speaker's perspective is from within the context of life. The narrative audience knows that the lover's past was disappointing, but the narrator hasn't explicitly ruled out a better outcome in the future. The second line is a revelation in that it denies even the possibility of union, but also because it discloses the speaker's true circumstances: the speaker who appears at first to be alive has died; life appears to offer hope, but life is no better than death. By withholding information about his actual circumstances, the speaker forces his audience to make a dramatic reinterpretation of the events of the text.

The narrator is able to temporarily deceive his reader because he knows his audience very well. His choice of words delivers just the right effect. But as we saw in the previous chapter, the narrator does not always understand his audience. In the next section, we will examine the notion of unreliable narration once again.

## 2. Unreliable Narration and Irony

### i) Irony

An unreliable narrator, because of his failure to understand his world, adds complexity to the narrative audience's view of the world of the text. The narrative audience is aware of two views of its world, the incorrect view of the narrator's and its own correct view which must be inferred from the text. Unreliable narration implies an incorrect view on the narrator's part. However, there are times when even reliable narrators will make statements which are unreliable.

kī mire qatl ke b'ād us ne jafā se tauba  
hāe us zūd-pashemāñ kā pashemāñ honā

She finished me off, then foreswore tyranny.  
Ah! the repentance of the quick-repenting one.

After killing the lover, the beloved, presumably realising the loss of such a worthy admirer, came to repent her mistreatment of the lover. The tone of the second line is sarcastic. The beloved was quick to repent after the fact, when it was too late to be of any use to the lover. But while the lover was alive, the beloved was unrelenting. Not only did she repent too late, but it seems her repentance is another manifestation of her cruel nature. Now that she has given up tyranny, the lover's rivals are the ones to benefit; indeed, the renunciation of tyranny is just an excuse for the beloved to put aside all restraint when she is in the company of the rivals<sup>1</sup>. The point to consider here is the speaker's statement that the beloved was quick to repent. This statement expresses a position which is ridiculous from the narrative audience's point of view: the narrative audience believes the opposite: that the beloved was quite slow to repent, and that there is good reason to doubt that her

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<sup>1</sup> The commentaries focus on the fact that the beloved's "quick repentance" was too late and of no benefit to the lover. Mahr (p. 73) and Chisti (p.303) emphasize the fact that the rivals are the ones to benefit from the beloved's repentance.

repentance is sincere. Although the narrative audience disagrees with the position expressed by the narrator's statement, the narrator himself is not perceived to be unreliable because the narrative audience also knows that the narrator sees the statement as being ridiculous. The narrator and narrative audience are in agreement. The literal sense of the irony seems to imply distance between the narrative audience and the ideal audience as in the case of unreliable narration, but the narrator of this ideal audience is not the narrator of the couplet, because the narrator of the couplet is reliable. The speaker is only pretending to take an erroneous point of view. It is as though the speaker were posing as an unreliable narrator. Before discussing the pretense of the narrator let us first examine a writer who has examined irony in terms what he calls the "unsound reader."

## ii) Booth: Irony and the Unsound Reader

Wayne Booth, in *A Rhetoric of Irony*, describes the process of interpreting irony in metaphoric terms, as the creation of two edifices located respectively at a lower level and a higher level<sup>2</sup>. Booth explains the differences in height between the levels to mean that the lower level is lower in the sense that the point of view it expresses is always judged to be inferior to that on the higher level. The overt statement of the irony, the unacceptable "conclusion," is part of the structure located at the lower level. Booth uses the metaphor of an edifice to emphasize that the rejection of the explicit statement includes a rejection of other justifications which are only implied. In this edifice, "dwell" the explicit victims of the irony and/or its implied unsound readers, e.g. the readers who believe that the beloved was quick to repent, that the beloved is no longer cruel (towards the lover). Located on the higher level are the acceptable covert "conclusions" which the irony hints at and the various justifications of the conclusions. The author invites the "sound readers to come and dwell with him" in

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<sup>2</sup> Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago:1974), p. 36-37.

this edifice, e.g. the readers who believe that the beloved was slow to repent, that her renunciation of cruelty is simply another form of cruelty: it is an excuse for the beloved to be in the company of the rivals without restraint.

Booth's distinction between the unsound reader and the sound reader is an attempt to describe the dual meanings of irony. His description of irony resembles Rabinowitz' attempt to explain unreliable narration in terms of the differences between the ideal audience and the narrative audience. Both postulate an audience which is taken in by an inferior point of view. Rabinowitz' term of "ideal audience" describes this audience from the perspective of the narrator; whereas, Booth's notion of "unsound reader" is really a description of how the narrative audience perceives this audience. Although irony is generally viewed as a figure of speech, Booth's notion of irony also includes unreliable narration as well<sup>3</sup>. Booth treats unreliable narration as a species of irony, but we shall take the opposite view, that irony (the figure) is a species of unreliable narration. This approach is in conformity with our attempt to understand the relationship of the narrative audience's point of view to narration.

If irony<sup>4</sup> is a species of unreliable narration, it also differs from what we normally think of as unreliable narration. As we saw in the above couplet, even if the speaker's statement is unreliable, he was not unreliable. The reason the narrator is reliable is that the narrative audience understands that the speaker does not identify with the statement; he is merely posing. If the narrator is simply pretending we may ask "who is he imitating?" He

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<sup>3</sup> See Booth's discussion of Swift's *A Modest Proposal* pp. 105-134

<sup>4</sup> My use of the term "irony" here, and in what follows, will be restricted to its use as a figure of speech, reserving the term unreliable narration for the broader uses of irony.



is imitating an unreliable narrator. Although the speaker does not identify with the implications of the phrase "quick-repenting one", the unreliable narrator, who is only present implicitly, does. By momentarily adopting the position he rejects, the narrator voices his complaint indirectly. As in the case of unreliable narration, the narrative audience must reconstruct what the correct view is. In the process, the reader's rejection of the untenable position is more dramatic, i.e. the possibility that the beloved was hasty in her repentance is simply ridiculous within the context of this couplet.

### iii) Ironies that Undermine the Lover's Point of View

The irony expressed in this couplet and the example of unreliable narration we examined at the beginning of this chapter add complexity to the narrative audience's point of view, but as ironies they are perhaps impossible for the narrative audience to miss. Since in the example of unreliable narration, the narrative audience is already strongly biased in "Ghalib's" favour, criticism is automatically perceived as being unreliable. On the other hand, the irony of the above couplet expresses a criticism of the beloved which can be easily understood from the context, and it conforms to the conventional attitude of complaint the lover adopts towards the beloved. The effects of an unreliable point of view, are more interesting when the unreliable narrator is one who is reliable by convention, i.e. when the lover is cast in the role of unreliable narrator.

Of perspectives within the world of the ghazal, the point of view of the lover dominates all others. The lover's voice is the most important source of the narrative audience's norms. Since the lover is generally cast in the role of narrator, narration in the ghazal is reliable for the most part. However, the fact that the lover commands the reader's sympathies need not imply that he is always a reliable narrator. Indeed, an important part of our sympathy for the lover is that he is not always omniscient. The lover is after all only

human. In this respect, there are more than a few verses in which the lover as narrator undermines his own point of view. But this undermining never results in our disliking the lover. Rather, the effect is almost always comic.

na pūch bekhudī-e-‘aish-e-maqdam-e-sailāb  
kih nācte haiñ pāre, sar-ba-sar, dar-o-dīvār

What can I say about my delight over the coming of the flood?  
From top to bottom, the doors and walls are dancing.

In this couplet, the narrator expresses a very familiar theme, the delight the lover takes in being obliterated. What is not likely to be obvious to the non-ghazal reader is the cause of the flood. According to convention, the lover's weeping is excessive to such an extent, that it becomes a flood that destroys his home. The image of the flood is so well established, that it has acquired a life of its own apart from its origins in the lover's person. Although the reader knows in this verse that the cause of the flood is the lover's weeping, the source of the flood is clearly external. The scene depicts the lover waiting in his home for the flood to come pouring in, destroying his home as well as himself. The question of the speaker's unreliability arises from his description of the doors and walls as dancing. If we imagine the effect of the force of a mighty flood smashing a house to pieces, we can see that the doors and walls might well appear to be dancing from top to bottom. But the narrator describes this dancing as fact, and the narrative audience can infer from the narrator's belief that the door and wall are actually dancing, that it is listening to a mad narrator. By convention, the lover is driven mad from his weeping. The lover mistakes the appearance of dancing for reality. In his moment of ecstasy, the lover believes that the whole of his immediate cosmos has joined him in the dance of his destruction<sup>5</sup>. Thus,

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<sup>5</sup> The idea that the narrator, in his madness, mistakes the appearance of dancing for the "reality" is only one of several interpretations. M.A. Bekhud presents two additional interpretations of this verse (p. 128).

1)The narrator intends dancing as a metaphor for the effects of the flood on his home. 2) The dancing of the

even though the narrator is reliable as a character, there is plenty of scope for the text to undermine his authority. In the following, the ironic effect is even more complex because it is impossible to decide whether or not the lover is mad.

dost gamkhārī meñ merī sa'ī farmāenge kyā  
zakhm̄ ke bharne talak nākhun barh jāenge kyā

What sort of help could my friends offer me in my grief?  
Will not my nails grow back before the wounds can heal?

One of the preoccupations of the lover in his mad phase is to claw away at his chest in hopes of removing the source of his agony, the heart. As a means of preventing the lover from causing further harm to himself, the lover's friends chained him and cut his finger nails. The speaker's logic in pointing out that his finger nails will grow back before his wounds heal is uncanny and adds a touch of realism to his madness.

The speaker's description of the cutting of his fingernails as help from his friends is ironic. As a rule, any time the lover uses the term "friend" it is with a sense of irony. By convention, the lover has no friends because none can truly sympathize with his plight. On the other hand, the tops of the lover's madness is also ironic. Although the lover displays the characteristic features of one who has literally gone mad, the lover's madness is a sign

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doors and walls is a metaphor for the spasms of the speaker's limbs at the moment of death, i.e. the lover, by convention, longs for the moment of death, and the coming of the floods represents death's arrival. Chisti interprets this scene as hyperbole. According to this interpretations, it is the doors and walls that are aware of the coming of the floods. Their immediate reaction is to dance. By dancing they cause their own disintegration with the result that even before the floods reach the lover's place, his home self-destructs.

Each of these interpretations is interesting in itself, and forms part of the multifaceted view of this couplet. My interpretation of this couplet as unreliable narration is for the purposes of illustration and is not meant to rule out the possibility of other interpretations. Multiple interpretations imply a plurality of worlds or plots which the narrative audience may discover. My discussion of this couplet is deliberately restricted to one of several possible plots. The problem of multiple interpretations is discussed in greater detail later in the section on ambiguity.

of the intensity of his love, and love is the ideal state of mind in the ghazal's world. As a result it is really love, which appears to be madness, that is the standard of sanity. This irony is reinforced by the primitive cures which the lover's friends or others subject the lover to. Since they believe the lover is truly insane, they see the proper remedy for his disease to be the traditional method of imprisonment and chains. Their methods are not only ineffective (the narrative audience knows true love cannot be cured), but the crudeness of their methods demonstrates the inadequacy of their point of view. The rhetorical questions are "who is truly sane? those who take appearances at face value? or the one who is embroiled in the reality behind the appearances?" Not only do the methods fail to achieve the "cure," but the lover almost always manages to escape the cages which his so-called friends devise for him. In one case the lover's restlessness (*ātis-zer-e-pā*, or fire-under-foot) reduces the link that binds his feet to the coiled form of a singed hair<sup>6</sup>; in another, the lover is imprisoned, but his thoughts remain desert-wanderers<sup>7</sup>.

In this couplet, the lover succeeds once again in foiling the attempts of his antagonists. But the lover's success adds one more twist to the irony of the topos. In the two examples just mentioned, the lover's escape is an escape to a place which contrasts favourably with his immediate condition of bondage. In the former case, he simply

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6      baske hūñ gālib asīrī meñ bhī ātish-zer-e-pā  
mū-e-ātish-dīda hai ḥalqa mirī zanjīr kā

Indeed, Ghalib, even in prison there is fire-under-my-feet  
The links of my chains are the coiling of singed hair.

7      aḥbab cāra-sāzī-e-vaḥshat na kar sake  
zindān meñ bhī khyāl bayābān navard thā

My friends could not cure my madness.  
Even in prison my thoughts were desert wanderers.

escapes from his chains; in the latter, through the medium of thought, he continues his proper occupation of wandering in the desert. In this case, the lover is also restored to his previous occupation of clawing away at his heart, but it is not entirely clear that this return is to the lover's advantage.

The ripping of the heart is definitely one of the more gruesome aspects of the lover's behaviour. It is presumably easier for the narrative audience to view the lover's wanderings in the desert as part of his inner search for the beloved, than it is to attribute a higher purpose to the action of tearing away at the chest. The narrative audience's belief in the lover's sanity depends in part on its ability to distance itself from the realistic implications of the action of clawing at the chest. As a rule, the image is treated in a conventional manner, so that many of the realistic implications of such a gruesome act are no longer present. But this couplet deliberately revives some of the realistic features of the action<sup>8</sup>. The realistic effect is accomplished mainly by introducing a precise notion of time through the competition between the growing out of the fingernails and the healing of the wound. Generally speaking, the lover's wounds do not exist at a particular point in time; their significance, according to our earlier discussion of chronology of event, is derived from their similarity to the lover's wounds as they appear in other couplets. The fact that wounds heal over a period of time is not a consequence the narrative audience would normally consider. But here the narrative audience is forced to consider such a fact, and the source of information is not convention, but what the narrative audience knows about the realistic properties of wounds. The narrative audience is forced to take a more realistic point of view.

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<sup>8</sup> The commentaries see the friends' task of curing the lover of his madness as being negated by the growing back of the lover's fingernails. Mahr (p.78) emphasizes the temporal implications of the growing back of the fingernails, and M.A. Bekhud (p.46) points out the realism of the madness portrayed in this couplet.

From a realistic perspective, the self-infliction of wounds is a sign of severe mental instability. As a result, there is a clash of interpretations. From a conventional perspective, the narrative audience agrees with the speaker's sarcasm. "This is an example of what my so-called friends call help!" From a realistic perspective, the narrative audience also agrees with the fact that the speaker's condition cannot be cured. But the realistic perspective also raises doubts as to the sanity, and therefore the reliability, of the speaker. Thus, the question "who is really sane?" no longer has a definite answer. By convention, the lover should be allowed to express himself freely, but this couplet makes it difficult for the narrative audience to identify with that assumption; perhaps in this case the lover really does need help.

What makes the irony of this couplet unusual is that it is impossible to decide what the proper view is. Is the lover's appearance of madness merely an appearance, or is it in fact a reality? In Booth's view, this couplet would be an example of unstable irony. Unlike stable irony, unstable irony does not provide the reader with a clear choice as to what the correct perspective is<sup>9</sup>; it is ambiguous. The problem of ambiguity in this couplet will be discussed later in the section on ambiguity. In the following section, we shall examine another figure, that of metaphor, in terms of the narrative audience's point of view.

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of unstable irony see part III "Instabilities" in *A Rhetoric of Irony* pp.233-277

### 3. Metaphor

The literal interpretation of an ironic statement was understood as a form of unreliable narration with the unreliable narrator only implicitly present. Metaphoric statement seems to present a similar situation. The incongruity of its literal interpretation with the narrator's beliefs suggests the presence of an implied narrator. The narrator in the following couplet speaks of carving into the difficulties of his life, but intends a metaphoric interpretation.

kāv-kāv-e-sakht-jāniha-e-tanhāi, na pūch  
 subaḥ karnā shām kā, lānā hai jū-e-shīr kā

Don't ask about the carving and scraping of the hard life of loneliness.  
 Turning night into dawn, the bringing forth of a river of milk.

This couplet contains an allusion to the story of the lovers, Farhad and Shirin. An unfortunate episode in the career of Farhad is the marriage of his beloved, Shirin, to a prince. To humour Farhad, the king promises his daughter-in-law to Farhad if he succeeds in carving a channel in a mountain up to Shirin's garden. Farhad's determination is such that he succeeds. The king, upon learning of Farhad's success sends the false news of Shirin's death to Farhad. Upon hearing the news, Farhad kills himself with his carving axe.

The isolation and despair of the narrator are treated in a realistic fashion. The mood is almost existential in terms of the weight which has been imposed on the speaker's fragile existence. The unyielding nature of the dark mountain contributes to the speaker's isolation. The mountain is of course a metaphor for the speaker's difficulties, and the

action of carving is meant to illustrate the intensity of the lover's struggles<sup>10</sup>. If the narrative audience were to believe that the speaker were literally carving into the hardships of his life, then the realism of the speaker's struggle would be lost in the absurd situation implied by such an interpretation.

Although a literal interpretation of the metaphor of carving into the hardships of life is not intended by the speaker, the metaphor at least suggests a literal interpretation. As in the case of irony, we shall assume that the one who believes the literal interpretation is only implicitly present. But unlike irony, whose literal interpretation corresponds to an incorrect view of some event in the world of the text, the literal interpretation of metaphor corresponds to a view, not of some event in the narrator's world, but to a view of an event which is fictional relative to what is happening in the narrator's world. The difference between irony and metaphor can be understood in terms of the nature of the conditions to which these statements refer. The implied narrator of an ironic statement is unreliable because the statement is intended to refer to conditions within the narrative audience's world; as a result, the incongruity of his statements is perceived as a mistake in judgement. On the other hand, the implied narrator of a metaphoric statement is reliable, since the statement refers not to the narrative audience's world, but to a fictional world relative to the narrative audience's world. In this regard, "carving into the hardships of life" does not represent a mistake in judgement, because it not meant as a description of the lover's

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<sup>10</sup> The commentaries point out that the mountain is a metaphor for the hardships of life and the night of grief, and that the river of milk is a metaphor for the dawn. Mahr (p. 18) explains that according to legend, Farhad's river was only a river of milk in appearance. The white appearance was the result of the foam arising from the rushing waters, a condition characteristic of mountain streams. M.A. Bekhud states that the lover's difficulties were even greater than Farhad's because, while Farhad had to face his task but once, the lover passes through his difficulties every night. According to H. Bekhud, the lover's difficulties are greater than those of Farhad's because the lover must live through his difficulties, and does not have the option of killing himself as did Farhad.



condition, but as a description of a state of affairs connected to the lover's immediate struggle only for the purposes of illustration. But "the quick-repenting one" is a mistake on the implied speaker's part, because it is meant to refer directly to the beloved. The point of view in metaphor seems to parallel the dual perspective of fiction in general. Rabinowitz does not discuss the problem of metaphor, but Paul Ricoeur expresses a view of metaphor which is similar to Rabinowitz' duality.

i) Ricoeur: the split reference of metaphor

A common definition of metaphor is that it is a figurative statement suggesting a comparison between two meanings. Ricoeur conforms to this school of thought in *The Rule of Metaphor*, but he takes a broad view of these two meanings. Although his approach is mainly philosophical, his view of metaphorical truth is of particular interest here. Ricoeur takes a dialectic view of the comparison underlying metaphor. That is, metaphorical truth is "tensional" in character<sup>11</sup>. The unmarked "to be like" of metaphor is a dialectic between the explicit "is" and the implicit "is not." Metaphor is an assertion of identity between two dissimilar terms. It is the inherent differences between the terms which subverts the literal interpretation and forces a metaphorical interpretation. The literal is not simply abolished, but results in stereoscopic vision.

It is this tensional constitution of the verb *to be* that receives its grammatical mark in the 'to be like' of metaphor elaborated into simile, at the same time as the tension between *same* and *other* is marked in the relational copula<sup>12</sup>."

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto:1977), p. 255

<sup>12</sup> Ricoeur, p. 256

What is interesting here is the structural similarity between Ricoeur's view of the tensional character of metaphoric truth, and the tension Rabinowitz sees as operating between two levels of the aesthetic experience in fiction. "We can treat the work neither solely as what it is nor solely as what it appears to be; we must be simultaneously aware of both aspects." Rabinowitz' duality seems equally applicable to the metaphoric statement. The reader cannot treat the metaphoric statement solely as a comparison, nor as what it appears to be, a statement of fact. That is, the literal interpretation of a metaphor seems to serve as a miniature fiction, but of a special kind. Unlike most fictions, which can generally be read in terms of a single context, the identity of terms in metaphor tends to fuse together two contexts which are not normally connected, or at least, not in the manner suggested by the metaphor. In this respect, the fiction of metaphor is allegorical in nature.

## ii) Metaphor and the creation of narrative levels

Within the context of nonfiction, metaphor can be viewed as the use of incidental fiction for the purposes of illustration. That is, metaphor is the creation of a miniature fiction or allegory. However, the metaphors of fiction introduce an added complication, in that metaphor is not simply the creation of fiction, but the creation of fiction within fiction. As a result, not only must we consider the narrative audience of the text, but the narrative audience within the narrative audience as well. Metaphor introduces a hierarchy of narrative levels. For the purpose of discussing what is happening with metaphor, let us call the narrative proper the "primary narrative level" and the fiction created by the metaphor as the "secondary narrative level"<sup>13</sup>. Since the notion of narrative levels is a complex idea, I have illustrated the narrative levels of the above couplet with a diagram.

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<sup>13</sup> The notion of narrative levels is important in Gerard Genette's study of the general features of fictional works (see Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Ithaca:1980). Genette's distinction between levels,

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however, differs from the distinction we are interested in. He separates the act of narration from the events of the narrative and places them on different "diagetic" levels. The placement of narrating instance and narrative event is relative to each other in the sense that a narrating instance may occur on different diagetic levels. For example, a narrator may appear within the setting of a narrative and tell a story. Genette states the relationship between the act of narration and narrative event in a general form. "Any event a narrative recounts is at a diagetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed (G228)." Genette mentions three diagetic level: the "extradiagetic", the "diagetic", and the "metadiagetic". The primary narrating instance is an extradiagetic act and the events to which it refers are on the diagetic level; a narrating instance on the diagetic level refers to an event on the metadiagetic level and so on and so forth. (Although in theory the diagetic levels can continue ad infinitum, in practice Genette finds that it becomes difficult for the reader to keep track of things much beyond the metadiagetic level.) The basis for Genette's distinction between the narrating instance and event is linguistic. That is, the narrating instance belongs to the realm of the sign or signifier and the narrated event belongs to the realm of the referent or signified. The basis I use for separating levels, however, is quite different. The distinction I am interested in is not between description and its referent, but between a secondary audience who believes a description to be literally true and a primary audience who believes a description is only metaphorically true, that is, true within a fictional framework relative to the primary audience's point of view.

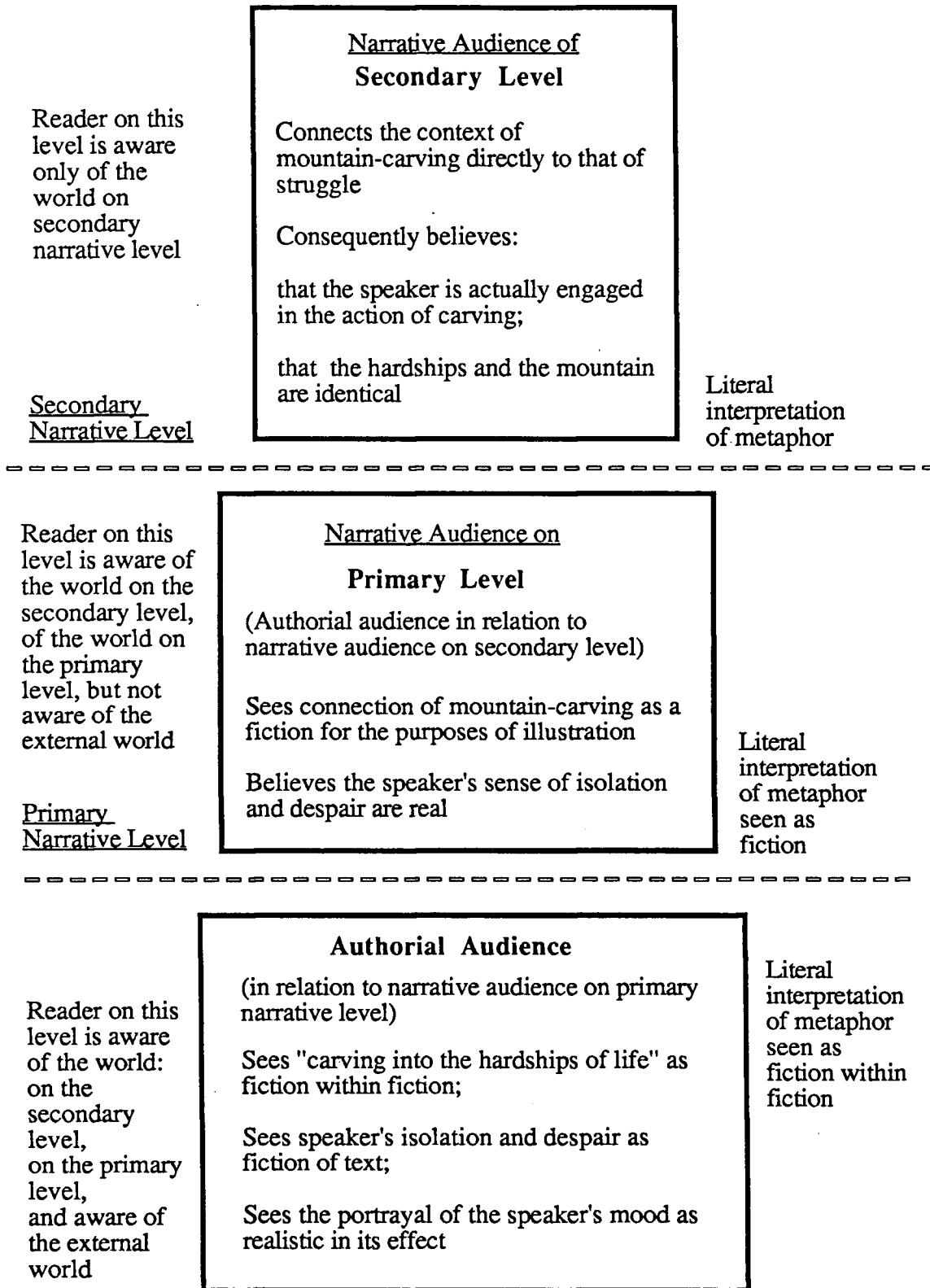


Figure 4-1. Narrative levels generated by metaphor

Beginning with the authorial audience, the reader sees the literal interpretation of the metaphor as a fiction within a fiction. The first fiction is located on the primary narrative level. The authorial audience perceives the narrator's isolation as a fiction, but as a realistic fiction. For the narrative audience on the primary level, the narrator and his mood are real, i.e. it is not aware that they are fabrications of the author. But "carving into the hardships of life" is seen as a fiction, and is connected to the speaker's struggles only for the purposes of illustration. The narrative audience sees the lover *as if* he were carving into the mountain. The narrative audience on the secondary level sees the fusion of the context of mountain carving and the context of struggle as fact. The lover *is* carving into the mountain. The lover's mental anguish *is* a mountain. The literal meanings of the metaphor are real for the secondary narrative audience. This audience is not aware that the literal meanings are a fabrications of the narrator on the primary level and are designed to illustrate his dilemma.

In postulating a secondary narrative level over and above the primary level, my intention has been to illustrate the underlying narrative structure of metaphor. I do not mean to imply, however, that all the imagery of the above couplet can be simply plugged into one level or the other. The couplet speaks of the passing of the night until dawn. By convention, the night is a time when the torments of grief are at their height<sup>14</sup>. The couplet also alludes to the topos of the lover's attempt to destroy the source of his pain, his heart, by clawing (carving) away at it. Since both of these images are metaphors for the lover's struggle, they seem to belong on the secondary narrative level along with the image of mountain-carving. But if each is on the secondary level then what is their relationship to

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<sup>14</sup> The association of the night with grief or despair is a symbolism the reader unacquainted with ghazal convention will have no trouble understanding. What makes this symbolism a convention of the ghazal is the degree to which the agonies of grief have been identified with the images of the night.

each other? It seems that both metaphors serve as a separate narrative illustrating the drama of the primary narrative. That is, we have a series of secondary levels with only minimal connections between each secondary level. As in the case of irony and unreliable narration, the metaphors of ghazal poetry are often ambiguous. We shall return to the problem of ambiguity and metaphor in the last part of the next and final section.

#### 4. Ambiguity

The problem of ambiguity is examined by Rabinowitz in "Truth in Fiction: a Reexamination of Audiences." He discusses ambiguity in terms of the problems which occur in reading when the reader experiences "difficulty in discovering precisely what are the characteristics of the narrative audience<sup>15</sup>." The first type of ambiguity lies within the narrative audience. The narrative audience is uncertain about the nature of certain events within its world. The novel may raise questions about the moral standing of its characters or about its facts. This type of ambiguity does not interfere with the reader's involvement, because the questions it poses are within the world of the text. Indeed, when it relates to ethics or motives, ambiguity often contributes to the reader's involvement with a character<sup>16</sup>.

The second type of ambiguity is far less common in novels<sup>17</sup>. In this case, the reader is faced with several narrative audiences with no means of deciding which is the correct one. Rabinowitz discusses this type of ambiguity in terms of the controversy surrounding Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire*. The main body of the novel is in the form of a poem written by the professor-poet John Shade. The poem has an introduction and commentary written by Charles Kinbote, neighbour and colleague of Shade. According to Kinbote's commentary, the poem is about events which took place in the country of Zembla. Kinbote claims to be King Charles who escaped at the beginning of the Zemblan revolution and it seems that his colleagues believe him to be a lunatic. Rabinowitz

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<sup>15</sup> Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences," p. 136.

<sup>16</sup> Rabinowitz, p. 136.

<sup>17</sup> Rabinowitz, p. 137.

focuses on two problems in understanding the world of the *Pale Fire*<sup>18</sup>. 1) Is John Shade, the poet, real or a product of Kinbote's imagination? 2) Does the country of Zembla exist? If Shade does not exist, Kinbote's commentary takes on quite a different meaning than it would in the case that Shade does exist. Depending on the choices one makes, the text can be read as an entirely different novel<sup>19</sup>.

i) Sanity vs. Madness: the Ambiguities of Irony

What sort of help could my friends offer me in my grief?  
Will not my nails grow back before the wounds can heal?

In our examination of this couplet, we saw that unstable irony presents conflicting choices to the narrative audience with no means of choosing between them. The question here is, "which type of ambiguity are we dealing with?" Whether we decide the lover is mad or sane makes a great difference in terms of the dramatic significance of the events of the couplet, but whether or not those events actually took place is not subject to question. Even if the narrative audience decides the speaker is mad, it does not doubt that his friends have in fact imprisoned him and cut off his nails, and it also agrees that the speaker's nails will grow back before his wounds have a chance to heal. The narrator plays a dual role. He may not provide sufficient clues for the reader to decide on the condition of his mind, but unlike Shade in *Pale Fire*, his description of events is unambiguous. The possibility of the narrator's madness, paradoxically, does not rule out his omniscience.

ii) Incongruity: the clash between realism and nonrealism

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<sup>18</sup> Rabinowitz, p. 138

<sup>19</sup> Rabinowitz, p. 140.



What sustains the ambiguity on the surface (is the lover sane or mad?) is a clash between convention and realism: the mad lover's conventional sanity is in conflict with the realistic treatment of his madness. In this case, the clash between convention and realism leads to moral ambiguity, because convention and realism are identified with opposing moral choices. In other couplets which introduce a clash between convention and realism, the effect may simply be one of incongruity in the sense that the narrative audience is not presented with any choices.

dar pih rahne ko kahā aur kah ke kaisā phir gyā  
jitne ‘arse meñ mirā liṭā hvā bistar khulā

She said I could stay by her door, but she changed her mind.  
In the meantime I managed to unroll my bedding.

The first line combines two familiar themes, the lover's difficulty in gaining access to the beloved's door and the fickle nature of the beloved. The context behind this line is that the lover longs to enter into the beloved's premises but is refused; he would be happy just to remain at her door step, but the cruel beloved will not even allow him that much. Here, he is finally given permission to remain, only to be immediately expelled. This course of events is as we would expect, given the fickle nature of the beloved. The second line, however, informs us of the real reason for his expulsion. The lover has had the audacity to lay out his bedding roll in order to settle in for a long stay<sup>20</sup>. Given the ardor of the lover's longing, it

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<sup>20</sup> According to the commentaries, the sense of this couplet is that the beloved changed her mind in the time it took the lover to unroll his bedding. The commentaries emphasize the fickleness of the beloved. However, it seems to me, the unrolling of the bedding roll before the beloved's door is sufficient reason for his expulsion, and that the action is meant to undermine the lover's point of view as well as that of the beloved's. The effect of the speaker's surprise at the beloved's change of heart is ironic, and shows just how exasperating the lover can be. The fact that the lover also puts his beloved to task is well-established.

ghiste ghiste miṭ jātā, āp ne ‘abaṣ badlā  
nang-e-sajde se mere, sang-e-āstāñ apnā

is a shock to find that granting his desire results in the opportunistic behaviour displayed in the second line. Apart from the unpredictable nature of the lover's behaviour, the dramatic effect of this couplet also depends upon its deceptive syntax. The first line sets the narrative audience up, in that the reader assumes that the change in the beloved's mind is a product of the beloved's fickle nature. But the second line reveals the true cause of the lover's expulsion, his audacity. The effect of this shift in expectations is one of surprise. The narrative audience has been lead to interpret the situation incorrectly, and the false assumptions of the narrative audience contribute to the surprise of the final revelation when the assumptions are perceived to be wrong.

In addition to its deceptive syntax, this couplet brings together two incongruous contexts. The source of incongruity is the clash between the beloved's door and the lover's bedding roll. The incongruity of this couplet involves a whole network of conventional assumptions as to what events may possibly take place at the beloved's door. Although the beloved's door is a place where fantastic events often occur, such as in fairy tales, her door also excludes the richer, more complex details found in realistic settings. The external world is, in effect, far removed from this scene. It is the threshold to heaven, a place where lovers come to worship, where even the dust is blessed by her presence. By convention, everything which comes before the beloved is fated to become her lover.

When the lover unrolls his bedding, he is not only showing his impudence, he is introducing an object which clashes with the dignified atmosphere of the beloved's world. Although the lover's bedding is a part of the lover's conventionalized household, its appearance at the beloved's threshold brings to light realistic possibilities which are

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You changed it to no avail. It disappeared from the rubbing  
Of my shameless prostrations: the stone of your threshold.

normally excluded: that the lover is capable of going over to his house and getting his mattress, that he has certain needs to be taken care of, such as where to sleep at night etc. The sense of realism is particularly emphasized by the detail of unrolling the mattress. In this sense, the lover is not simply bringing into her presence his conventionalized mattress, but a real mattress that can be manipulated and transferred from one household to another. The image of the lover transporting his rolled up mattress also brings to mind a familiar scene of Indian travel. The bedding roll is generally carried on the head of the traveller and it serves as a sort of home away from home. Consequently, the lover's arrogance is reinforced by his bringing the profane world before his beloved's door.

In this couplet, the inherent realism of the bedding roll belongs to a space-time framework radically different from the simpler conventional world implied by the beloved's threshold. What is significant here is that the narrative audience is forced to merge into a single context, two incompatible narrative frameworks. Unlike the mistakes in character judgements, which were simply replaced by the true version, the clash between contexts cannot be resolved through a simple replacement. We do not suddenly decide, "aha! the beloved, by virtue of the presence of the bedding roll, really belongs to a more complex narrative." It is only because she remains connected to the conventional context, that the incongruity introduced by the lover's bedding roll is so powerful in its effect. Although we are dealing with two incompatible narrative frameworks, at least on the surface, they read as a single narrative context.

### iii) Ambiguity: Realism vs. Nonrealism

Many of the ghazal's ambiguities involve an opposition between realism and nonrealism. In the two previous couplets, the realistic elements clashed with the nonrealistic elements. The narrative context forced the reader to accept both points of view

simultaneously. In a sense, the clash between points of view does not constitute ambiguity, but rather incongruity. The ambivalence of incongruity is a part of the narrative proper. Ambiguity in Rabinowitz' sense precedes the narrative audience's discovery of its world. That is, the narrative audience has no way of deciding whether the events of its world are fact or fabrication. The following couplet is ambiguous in the sense that the narrative audience cannot decide whether the couplet has one or two narrative levels, and it is also confused as to which event belongs where.

jāzbā-e-be-ikhtiyār-e-shauq dekhā cahīe  
sīnā-e-shamshīr se bāhar hai dam shamshīr kā

The uncontrolled passion of desire is a sight to behold  
The blade of the sword is out of its sheath

The reader may recall from the discussion of this couplet in the last chapter, that the connection between the baring of the sword and desire is reinforced by a pun. "The blade of the sword is out of its sheath" also means "the breath of the sword is out of its chest," or "the sword is extremely agitated"<sup>21</sup>. In his analysis, Faruqi listed a number of ambiguities in this couplet. Some of these ambiguities are generated by asking "whose desire are we talking about? is it the sword that is agitated? is it the lover? or is it the beloved?"<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The commentaries limit their discussion mainly to elaborating the dual meanings of the extended pun of the couplet. H. Bekhud (p. 10), however, seems to misinterpret the meaning of *dam* as being polish. None of the other commentators support his meaning, nor do the dictionaries. His interpretation, that the polish of the sword is on the outside of the sword, does not convey nearly the excitement or drama of the other interpretations.

<sup>22</sup> Faruqi also mentions the erotic symbolism of this couplet in his description of its ambiguities. For the Western reader, the phallic symbolism of the sword will seem obvious. However, the traditional audience of the ghazal, in its idealistic approach to romantic love, does not, as a rule, explore the sexual connotations of its imagery. In this respect, the Western reader has a very different attitude towards erotic symbolism, than that of the ghazal's authorial audience. The traditional interpretation of the image of the sword would be a "fertile" topic for the deconstructionists amongst my readers.

Underlying these interpretations is a more fundamental question concerning the narrative audience's reconstruction of the world of the text. It is impossible for the narrative audience to decide what are the facts of its world. The couplet offers at least three possible interpretations.

1) If the narrative audience interprets the couplet in a literal fashion, then the couplet reads as a straightforward description of a fanciful recreation of the topos of the execution scene. According to this interpretation, the couplet's imagery is hyperbolic. Desire is so irrepressible by nature, it is so powerful, that when the beloved is ready to execute the lover, the sword becomes infected by the excitement of the moment: the unsheathing of the sword is an expression of the surging forth of its own passion.

2) But the sword's agitation can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the excitement of the lover and beloved at the moment of execution. In this case, the narrative audience conceives of a narrative more realistic than the narrative implied by the hyperbolic interpretation. The sword's agitation illustrates the intensity of the emotional states of the lover and beloved.

The possibility that the beloved should execute her lover is hardly what we would call realism. Just the same, the slaying of a lover by his beloved is within the realm of human possibility. But the notion that the sword itself should become agitated is even more removed from human reality. Compared to the hyperbolic interpretation, the metaphoric interpretation is realistic.

3) The metaphorical interpretation I have just outlined assumes that the primary narrative is about the irrepressible nature of desire as it manifests itself in the conventional characters of the lover and beloved at the moment of execution. Given the importance of the

topos of the execution scene, this interpretation is understandable. But this couplet offers an even more realistic interpretation than the illustration of a conventional theme. The couplet begins by calling the reader's attention to the uncontrolled passion of desire. That is, the couplet is also a convincing study on the nature of desire. Consequently, one can interpret this couplet from an even more realistic point of view. In this case, the execution scene is no longer a fact of the primary narrative, but a metaphor illustrating an event more realistic than that of the execution scene: the irrepressible nature of desire<sup>23</sup>.

What is interesting in these three interpretations is that, as more events are treated in a metaphorical fashion, the primary narrative acquires a more realistic quality. This increase in realism is demonstrated in the following three diagrams.

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<sup>23</sup> A consequence of considering more realistic interpretations of the couplet is that nontraditional interpretations such as phallic symbolism are difficult to rule out. A similar case could be made for Russell's view that the beloved represents "everyman's ideal." His interest in discovering the connections between Mir's poetry and the culture has lead him to postulate a set of realistic ideals which are symbolically present in the poetry.

**Primary Narrative Audience**

Believes:

sword is agitated

lover and beloved are excited at the moment of execution

desire is irrepressible

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**Authorial Audience**

Sees the agitated sword, the excitement of the execution scene and the power of desire as events within the narrative on the primary level

Sees primary narrative as unrealistic because it includes the event of the agitated sword; the animation of the sword is but one more fanciful account of the unusual events which take place within the fictional context of the ghazal's world

**Figure 4-2.** Interpretation #1: Couplet as literal description

The literal interpretation of the couplet reduces what is happening in the text to a single narrative level. Since the primary narrative includes the agitation of the sword as fact, it is perceived by the authorial audience as being unrealistic.

**Secondary Narrative Audience**

Believes:

Sword is agitated

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**Primary Narrative Audience**

Believes:

Lover and Beloved are excited at moment of execution

Desire is irrepressible

Sees the agitation of sword as fictional example of excitement of the execution scene and of the irrepressible nature of desire as it manifests itself in the characters of the lover and the beloved

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**Authorial Audience**

Sees events of execution scene and the lover's and beloved's state of desire as fiction

Sees primary narrative as more realistic because the event of the agitated sword is removed to the secondary narrative level, but sees the lover's execution on the primary level as unrealistic just the same

Figure 4-3. Interpretation #2: agitated sword as metaphor



**Secondary Narrative Audience**

Believes:

Sword is agitated

Lover and beloved are excited at moment of execution

**Primary Narrative Audience**

Believes:

Desire is irrepressible

Sees agitation of sword and the excitement of the lover and Beloved as fictional examples of the irrepressible nature of desire

**Authorial Audience**

Sees events of primary narrative as fiction

Sees primary narrative as realistic because the events of the agitated sword and the execution scene are removed to the secondary narrative level, that is, they are not part of primary narrative level, but serve as illustrations of the power of desire as it is conceived on the primary narrative level.

**Figure 4-4.** Interpretation #3: agitated sword and execution scene as fictional illustration.

In the above three diagrams, as the boundary of the secondary narrative audience includes more of the events on the level of the primary narrative level, the primary narrative becomes more realistic. If we reverse the process, we move from a realistic context to a situation of fantasy. Since each of these interpretations is equally true, the poem is ambiguous. The only fact that is unambiguous is the irrepressible nature of desire. The rest of the imagery may be fiction or fact. Consequently, the couplet invites its reader, not only to explore its world, but to explore its levels of realism as well.

iv) What does the literal interpretation of metaphor achieve?

Since the agitation of the sword is itself an effective metaphor, it may seem that a literal interpretation of the image is simply an attempt to create ambiguities by adding interpretations that are not "really in text." One might ask, "what does the literal interpretation of a metaphor contribute to the narrative audience's enjoyment of the couplet?" I shall begin answering this question by pointing out that the literal interpretation of metaphor is a tendency in the ghazal tradition as a whole. Much of what has by convention become incorporated into the ghazal's universe was at one point a metaphor. For example, the topos of the execution scene portrays the beloved as slaying the lover, and the lover taking delight in his execution. From a more realistic perspective, the slaying of the lover can be viewed as a metaphor for the effects of the beloved's beauty or cruelty, or for the lover's desire to sacrifice himself for the sake of the beloved. Sadiq describes the transition from "realism to fantasy" within the ghazal as a process of using "what had been previously a metaphor as a piece of literalism." I quote in full his analysis of the execution scene in order to give the reader some idea of this process.

Quite early in Persian poetry, the cruel or seductive beloved of the earlier tradition came to be called a murderer (*qātil*). This was a metaphor pure and simple to render concretely the overwhelming effect wrought on the lover, say, by the killing looks of the beloved, spoken of as *tir-e-nigāh*, or the arch

looks, described as an arrow. Soon after, what was merely a metaphor came to be taken literally, and forthwith the beloved came to be invested with all the features of a murderer. Scimitar in hand, he [Sadiq chooses here to view the beloved as a male] promenades the streets, [executing] his admirers who vie with one another in their masochistic frenzy to pay love's debt with their lives. Others who would take no chances--for the beloved may relent or excuse himself--present themselves arrayed in winding sheets and swords. Presently we hear of large execution grounds where lovers await eagerly for mass execution amidst a throng of sightseers. Not infrequently the overworked beloved delegates his function to a paid executioner. The above leaves us in no doubt that the metaphorical idea of dying or being killed has been either thickly overlaid with fantasy or completely forgotten<sup>24</sup>.

The literal interpretation of metaphor plays an important part in the topos of the execution scene, and part of the narrative audience's predisposition is to at least consider the possibility of a literal interpretation. However, the tendency to make such interpretations does not in itself tell us anything about what this style of interpretation contributes to the reader's enjoyment. To understand what a literal interpretation accomplishes, let us examine a couplet which presents its "metaphorical" image in an unambiguously literal fashion.

ham the marne ko khare, pās na āyā, na sahī  
ākhir us shokh ke tarkash meñ koi tīr bhī thā?

I was ready to die; if she wouldn't come near; well all right,  
 But didn't that tease have an arrow in her quiver too?

The protagonist complains that even though it was beneath the beloved's dignity to come up to him and kill him with her sword, she could have killed him with the arrow in her quiver<sup>25</sup>. Here, the arrow is no longer part of a fiction illustrating the effects of the beloved's beauty on the lover, but has actually been incorporated directly into the drama of

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<sup>24</sup> Sadiq, p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> All the commentaries concur on the idea that the beloved does not want to approach the lover because it is beneath her dignity.

that relationship. The arrow has become a physical possession of the beloved's, and the lover's death is not symbol but fact. The transition from metaphor to literalism is a transformation of the original game of flirtation into one in which the instrument of flirtation is a weapon and the stakes of the game are the lover's death. The result is an incongruity similar to the incongruities discussed earlier. The effect of this type of incongruity is that of hyperbole. The basis of the hyperbole is "how far can the context of the arrow (and sword) be incorporated into the original context of flirtation without destroying the essential features of that drama?<sup>26</sup>" i.e. the drama of the beloved deliberately holding back something the lover wants. Since this drama, by convention, already includes such objects as the arrow and sword, the incongruity of this couplet is achieved by introducing features from the context of the arrow which are not included in the conventional situation: the presence of the quiver, visible to the lover, the fact that the beloved has a choice between using an arrow or her sword, the sword is not effective from a distance, but the arrow is.

One of the important effects of interpreting metaphor in a literal fashion is hyperbole. When metaphor is interpreted as metaphor, the incongruous literal interpretation is distanced from the primary narrative by locating it within the secondary narrative, i.e. the imagery of the metaphor illustrates the primary narrative. But when metaphor is interpreted literally, the incongruous literal interpretation becomes part of the primary narrative. That is, the statement no longer illustrates the primary narrative, but serves as an exaggerated description of the events of the text. As a result, metaphor always contains the potential of introducing incongruity on the primary narrative level. However, the literal interpretation of metaphor

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<sup>26</sup> Bryant discusses the convention of interpreting metaphors literally as outlined by Sadiq. According to Bryant, the use of thematic conventions in the poetry is obsessive: it has the aim of saying all there is to be said about a theme or topos (p. 5).

does not always result in incongruity. In so far as the literal interpretation is a conventional feature of the tradition, the merging of the contexts is a seamless one. That is, from the perspective of the tradition, the slaying of the lover is not an exaggeration or hyperbole but a norm of the tradition, in the same way as the magical power of the wand is a normal feature of fairy tales. Incongruity must be achieved by the text. As we saw, it was achieved in the above couplet by treating the conventional image of the arrow in a more "realistic" fashion, by incorporating more details from the context of the arrow. In the case of the agitated sword, incongruity is achieved in a different manner: by the creation of a new connection, a connection between the image of the sword and desire. The fact that the beloved should possess a sword is not incongruous to conventional assumption, but the fact that the sword should be agitated is.

v) Why is it ambiguous?

The imagery of the above couplet was interpreted only as a "literal" description: the beloved literally has arrows in her quiver. The image of mountain-carving in the couplet we examined in our discussion of metaphor was interpreted only as a metaphor: the lover is not really carving into the hardships of his life. Unlike the imagery in these two couplets, the image of the agitated sword can be interpreted as both literal description and metaphor. Why was this image interpreted in an ambiguous fashion, while the other two couplets were interpreted in an unambiguous fashion? The image of the arrows in the beloved's quiver was interpreted only in a literal fashion because a metaphorical interpretation would merely distance the reader from this drama without adding any new insights to realities external to the drama (at least none that I can detect<sup>27</sup>). The lover's action of carving was

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<sup>27</sup> M.A. Bekhud (p. 59) and H. Bekhud (p. 73) suggest a metaphorical interpretation. The lover insists that the beloved flirt with him with her eyes, even if it is beneath her dignity to approach him. The metaphor, however, is incomplete in that it leaves out two of the images. What does the sword correspond to? and what does the quiver correspond to?

interpreted only in a metaphorical fashion, because of the serious mood of the couplet. That is, the intensity of the speaker's despair would be undermined if the narrative audience also believed that speaker is "literally" carving into the hardships of his life. The isolation of the lover and the distance from his object (beloved, or otherwise) are treated in a realistic fashion. If the lover really has a carving axe in his hand, then his isolation and distance are no longer convincing. On the other hand, the agitation of the sword can be interpreted literally or metaphorically. It can be interpreted metaphorically because this image illustrates a more realistic point of view (the irrepressible nature of desire). It can be interpreted literally as well because the literal interpretation does not clash with the mood of the realistic interpretation. The notion that desire is irrepressible has an element of subversion. That is, the theme is not one of isolation or distance, rather, it is the celebration of breaking through boundaries, the annihilation of distance. If desire should suddenly manifest itself in the sword of the execution scene, is this not but one more example of the irrepressible nature of desire: the impossibility of confining desire to its proper context?

#### vi) The Couplet as Narrative: a Comparison with the Novel

The image of a sword surging with desire is ambiguous because the narrative audience cannot decide whether this image is a fact on the primary narrative level, or on the secondary level. If the narrative audience interprets this image literally, the agitation of the sword is a fact on the primary narrative level. If the interpretation is metaphorical, the agitation of the sword is a fact on the secondary narrative level. Like the country of Zembla, the agitation of the sword is both fact and fiction at one and the same time.

For Rabinowitz, ambiguity of the second type often makes it impossible for the reader to join the narrative audience. According to his example, since the narrative

audience cannot decide on whether Shade or the country, Zembla, exists, the reader is unable to join the narrative audience.

Since this ambiguity is perceived only in our capacities as authorial and actual audience, it makes us more aware of the gap between authorial and narrative audience, and hence of the novel as art, as construct<sup>28</sup>."

Thus, the presentation of an image as both literally true and metaphorically true forces the reader to become aware of narration as artifice. But there are important differences between this type of ambiguity and the ambiguities examined by Rabinowitz. Whether or not one interprets the agitation of the sword literally or as a metaphor, the dramatic significance is essentially the same. That is, even if we take the image literally, the image is still a demonstration of the irrepressible nature of desire. Unlike the ambiguities of *Pale Fire*, the ambiguities of this couplet share a common significance. On the other hand, the example of unstable irony created a conflict in terms of the underlying drama (is the speaker sane or mad?), but was unambiguous in terms of the speaker's description of event (the speaker has really been imprisoned, and his nails cut off etc.) Apart from these differences, a more important difference between the ambiguities of the ghazal and those of *Pale Fire* arises from the fact that we are dealing with a form very different from that of the novel. Let us examine these differences.

It seems from Rabinowitz' discussion, that in order for the reader to join the narrative audience, the world of the novel must be coherent at least with respect to its essential facts. As the unity of the world of the novel is disrupted, so is the reader's involvement. But why should the reader's involvement in the novel as a whole require that the world of the text be a coherent one? It appears that the size of the novel imposes a different set of demands on the reader than those made by the ghazal text. Novels, by virtue of the sheer volume of their detail, are a challenge in that they demand a coherent

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<sup>28</sup> Rabinowitz, p. 139.

structure. That is, in order for the reader to become involved in the world of the novel, its details must fit into a logical chronology. Novels such as *Pale Fire* are internally coherent with respect to much of their detail, even if they make it impossible for the narrative audience to decide whether its events are fact or fabrication. The reader is unable to decide whether or not the country of Zembla exists, but the description of this country includes, nevertheless, an account of its history culminating in the Zemblan revolution. Unlike events in the couplet, the country of Zembla is part of an extensive and detailed history. That is, *Pale Fire*, like other novels, involves its reader through its plot. However, *Pale Fire* undermines the reader's involvement in the plot when the narrator creates doubts about his sanity. At this point, whatever expectations the narrative audience has built up with respect to the world of the novel are diffused, since the reader is no longer even sure if those events happened or not. Consequently, even if the reader is able to join the narrative audience during the initial stages of the novel, the creation of doubts as to the very possibility of describing the world of the novel effectively disrupts the narrative audience's attempt to identify with the events of the narrative. In order for the narrative audience to become involved in the plot, in order for history to engage its reader, the narrative audience must first be sure that the episodes that make up the chronology really happened. In the couplet, on the other hand, the question as to whether an event really happened has far less impact on the reader's involvement, since the events of the couplet derive much of their significance from associations with similar events of previous readings, rather than from their location within a coherent history. Because the events of the couplet can be traced to many different contexts, when the narrative audience begins a reading, it is already involved in a plurality of worlds. Indeed, without the scope to create significance horizontally within a single narrative, the logical alternative for the couplet is to create significance vertically by forcing the reader to conceive of more than one narrative at the same time.



## vii) Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to examine how the text creates the drama of discovery by calling attention to itself. We began by examining how deceptive syntax creates a dramatic shift in the narrative audience's view of the world of the text. Unreliable narration adds the complexity of a second, but unreliable, point of view. Unreliable narration reduces the transparency of the narrator by calling attention to his failures to understand his own world. The figures of irony and metaphor can be understood as forms of narration with a narrator whose presence must be inferred from the literal sense of a statement. Metaphor is particularly complex in that its literal sense seems to demand another level of narration. In order to keep track of the levels, we referred to the main narrative as the primary level of narration and we referred to the fiction implied by the literal sense of the metaphor as the secondary level of narration. Ambiguity can be viewed in terms of the inability of the narrative audience to decide what is actually happening in its world. The incongruities we examined were not really ambiguous since these incongruities did not raise the question of whether or not an event actually happened but were the result of an underlying clash between realism and nonrealism. We also examined ambiguity in terms of the dual interpretation of an image as both a metaphor and as a fact. This ambiguity originates in part in the ghazal tradition itself which tends to treat its metaphors in a literal fashion. That is, the images of metaphor tend to be treated as hyperbolic descriptions rather than illustrations of the events of the text. The hyperbolic description is incongruous in that it results in the fusion of the original love story with different contexts. Whether an image will be interpreted literally, or metaphorically, or whether it will be interpreted ambiguously and include both a literal and metaphorical interpretation is a function of how it is used in the poetry. However, unlike the novels of post-modernism, the ambiguities of the ghazal do not negate the narrative audience's involvement in the world of the text, but rather, they exploit the narrative audience's prior involvement in the many worlds of the ghazal tradition.

## 5. Conclusion

What ghazal poetry lacks in richness of plot is made up for by the demands the poetry makes on the reader's point of view. The ambiguities, deceptions, ironies, and metaphors of the text themselves function like a plot, the narrative audience serving as the "protagonist" in the adventure of discovering the world of the text. The self-reflexive nature of ghazal poetry suggests a comparison with post-modernist notions of self-reflexivity. However, post-modernist novels, such as *Pale Fire*, are intensely ironic. Ironies of post-modernism imply a criticism, not simply of a point of view within the world of the text, but a criticism of even the possibility of creating a world. The object of irony seems to be the narrative audience itself, that is, the reader who is foolish enough to join the narrative audience. The post-modernist text is static: the significance of the text is limited to calling attention to its own artifice. All facts dissolve before the one all-pervasive truth, that all facts are constructs. The ghazal text, on the other hand, is not ironic but metaphoric. The self-referentiality of the post-modernist text negates the possibility of significance, but the ghazal text is an expansion of significance, the generating of larger possibilities in a dynamic vertical motion, creating a shifting context of clashes and mergings of possible fictional worlds.

The discussion of how the couplet frustrates the narrative audience's attempt to reconstruct its world only demonstrates a few of the ways in which narration can call attention to itself. The objective has been to show how the concept of the narrative audience provides us with a way of talking about the artistic qualities of the poetry without ignoring the content. Although Rabinowitz' notion of the narrative audience was originally intended to describe the reader's point of view underlying larger literary forms such as the novel, such a concept may prove to be of even greater value in the examination of poetry, where content and point of view are especially difficult to separate from each other. The

notion of the narrative audience shows us that the restricted size of the couplet need not limit the reader's involvement: the drama of events unfolding in time is replaced by the drama of discovering an event whose unfolding is the flower of countless previous unfoldings.

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