

deliberately isolated himself from other fields of experience and singled out love as his theme. But what is lauded as renunciation may in reality be a genuine limitation. Confined to the limited space and narrow walls of his temperament, he probably had no vision of the world beyond it. Another difference between them should also be emphasized. Quite early in life, Ghālib broke away from the thralldom to his ingenious fancy and wrote poetry that is as simple as it is deep. Indeed, as time passed, he freed himself more and more. Momin's poetry, with a few exceptions, is uniformly subtle: it shows no development.

To conclude, Momin's mind is strongly 'metaphysical'. He has a passion for the tortuous, far-fetched, intricate, ingenious, and recondite. Some of his verses are so compressed that they leave one groping in the dark. His *qasidas* are so overlaid with scholarship and are so full of out-of-the-way allusions that one must have something of the scholarship of the poet himself to understand them. But suppose you penetrate through the thicket of his obsolete learning, what do you get? Certainly not what you get in Browning or Donne. There is no fount of feeling behind his subtlety. He writes with the head, not the heart, and behind the impenetrable garb of his scholarship there lurks the skeleton of a conceit. His best points are his ironic wit and vivacity. The following *ghazal* is among his best, and one wishes that he had written more often in this strain:

ہے بواہوسوں پر بھی ستم ناز تو دیکھو	آنکھوں سے جیسا ٹپکے ہے انداز تو دیکھو
اس عشقِ خوش انجام کا آغاز تو دیکھو	اُس بُت کے لئے میں ہوں خود سے گُزرا
طرزِ تیکہ چشمِ نموں ساز تو دیکھو	چہنگ میری وحشت پہ ہے کیا حضرتِ ناصح
کم طالعی عاشقِ جانِ تاز تو دیکھو	اربابِ ہوس ہمارے بھی جان پہ کھیلے
بدنامی عشقِ اَق کا اعزاز تو دیکھو	مجلس میں مرے ذکر کے آتے ہی اُٹھو
منظور ہے پنہاں نہ ہے راز تو دیکھو	محل میں تم اغیار کو دُور دیدہ نظر سے
شغلہ ساچک جائے ہے آواز تو دیکھو	اُسِ غیرتِ نامید کی ہر تان ہے پیک
اُس یوسف بے درد کا اعجاز تو دیکھو	دیں پاکئی دہن کی گواہی میرے اُسنو

بہشت میں بھی مومن نہ ملا ہائے بُتوں سے
جو راجلِ تفرستہ پر داز تو دیکھو

Eyes brimful of modesty—O what grace they shed!
Her cruelty is extended even to her vulgar admirers. O what elegance!

Led by my love for her, I decided to forgo the promised houri in heaven;
Mark the beginning of this happy-ending love affair!

Why do you chide me for my madness, O friend!
Note first the bewitching glance of that magical eye!

The rejected lovers (whose love was selfish) in desperation laid down their lives;
Look at the misfortune of the true lovers!

At the bare mention of my name she got up (to go),
Mark the honour done me on account of my notoriety as a lover!

By all means cast secret glances at my rivals in the assembly—
If it is your wish that your secret should not remain hidden!

Every *tān* of that Venus-like beauty is like a flash of fire,
It leaps up like a flame—O what a marvellous voice!

My tears bear testimony to her chastity,
Look at the miracle of that heartless Joseph!

Even in Paradise Momin was not destined to meet the idols (the beautiful ones).
Look at the cruelty of the disuniting death!

5

Mirza Asadullah Khān, surnamed Ghālib, was born on 27 December 1797, in Agra. His father, Mirza 'Abdullah, an officer in the Alvar army, dying during a punitive expedition, Ghālib, who was then hardly five, became the ward, first, of his uncle Nasrullah Khān, a cavalry officer in the British army, and on his death, four years later, that of his brother-in-law, Nawab Ahmad Bakhsh, recognized by the British government as the guardian of the former's family. Though nominally a ward of the Nawab, Ghālib passed his childhood and youth under the roof of his

maternal grand-uncle in Āgra, in a state of sumptuous ease. As a result of this early freedom, he plunged into youthful excesses and low company, and had, by his own account, his fill of the fashionable vices of the day. These costly and extravagant habits weighed heavily on him in later life, when, in reduced circumstances, he had to fend for himself as best he could.

Ghālib's early escapades have lent colour to the view that his education must have been neglected. But this opinion does not seem to be correct. Poetry was then considered one of the necessary accomplishments of the gentry, and Ghālib, who is said to have begun writing in the difficult style of Bedil at twelve or so, must have gone through a course of regular training early in life. By his own account, the chief formative influence in his life, so far as education was concerned, was that of Hürmuz ('Abdus-Samad), a Zoroastrian convert, who stayed with him as his guest for some two years and introduced him to Persian literature, mythology and history. Later, Ghālib was wont to treat this teacher of his as an imaginary figure, invented to silence the critics who ascribed his literary oddities to the absence of a regular literary training.⁷ This mild expression of vanity has been made into a serious ground for his moral arraignment by Dr 'Abdul Latif.⁸ Without going into the ethical implications of the case, it is enough to point out that Ghālib, as his correspondence shows, continued to revere the memory of his teacher; nor was he far wrong in appropriating some praise for his self-education. It is hard to believe that such competent scholarship as Ghālib's could have been acquired in a year or two of casual study at a time when, as we learn from his correspondence, he was more interested in chess, kite-flying, and other boyish sports than in books. Ghālib was essentially a self-taught man, and there is no escaping the idea that, at some stage in his youth, he must have employed himself diligently to the improvement of his mind.

The year 1826 came as a turning-point in his life. He had been for some time in straitened circumstances, and came to believe that the Nawab had all along withheld a part of the pension to which he was entitled as a member of his uncle's family. This led to a prolonged lawsuit, which being decided against him in 1831, left him almost a ruined man. He had acquired expensive habits which his meagre pension of Rs sixty-two or so per mensem did not enable him to support, and he was involved in serious financial difficulties. The shadow of the debtor's prison hung over him, and his peace of mind was gone for ever. Henceforth, we find him making desperate efforts to add to his emolu-

ments by seeking preferment at court; but the Emperor who had taken a dislike to him for some political reasons (which we need not go into in this brief sketch), continued to look askance at him; and it was only in 1850, when he was already an old man, that he relented so far as to honour him with a title and appoint him as Royal Historiographer at Rs fifty per mensem. A few years before, in 1847, he had been made to taste the bitterness of life to the dregs on being imprisoned for gambling at the report of a police inspector.⁹ He was released before he had served his term, at the intercession of some influential friends, but his heart was broken by the humiliation. In 1854, on Zauq's death, he was appointed poetic preceptor to the Emperor, but these small mercies disappeared with the Mutiny. His troubles now reached their climax. His pension was withdrawn and for some time he lived precariously by selling his household effects. Two years after the Mutiny, the Nawab of Rāmpur bestowed upon him a stipend of Rs 100 per mensem for life. A year after, his pension was restored, probably at the intercession of Sayyid Ahmad Khān, and he was able to pass his last days in comparative ease, dying on 15 February 1869.

6

I have reserved for separate discussion an event in Ghālib's life, namely, his visit to Calcutta in connection with the pension he used to get in return for the fief of his uncle. He stayed in that semi-Westernized city for about two years and was much impressed by the technological advance made by the British. Consequently, when Sayyid Ahmad Khān requested him to write a favourable review of his edition of *Ā'm-e-Akbarī*, he sent him a *qita* to the effect that the British had so much outstripped the Mughals in the art of civilization that it was a sheer waste of time to resurrect works which had had their day.

Influenced by this encomium on the British, Professor Ihtishām Husain had drawn the conclusion that Ghālib's visit to Calcutta was a turning-point in his life and gave him a new outlook on life. Discussing the impact this visit had on him, he writes:

No conclusive evidence can be drawn, but noting the striking similarity that exists between the prose of Ghālib's Urdu letters and the style that was being consciously cultivated in the prose at Fort William College, it does appear conceivable that during his two years in Calcutta, Ghālib studied the new prose and benefited from the beauty and effect with which other Urdu writers were as yet unacquainted.¹⁰

This view is flatly contradicted by Ghālib's own account of why he discarded the old florid style in favour of the simple one he used in a part of his correspondence. He himself assigns two reasons for it: (1) he found the difficult style too exacting in old age and decided to give it up, and (2) his duties as Royal Historiographer left him little time for it. With Ghālib this change to the simple style was merely a matter of convenience, and he set no store by it. It was only on being complimented by his friends for it that he realized how unwittingly he had given a new direction to prose.

Professor Ihtishām Husain's viewpoint is untenable from the purely historical angle as well. According to him Ghālib studied the new prose during his stay in Calcutta in 1828 and was impressed by it, yet it was somewhere in 1845 that he began to use it in his correspondence. Surely this presupposes an inordinately long incubation period.

It is also noteworthy that Ghālib in his writings nowhere speaks of the Fort William College literature; he does not include it in his encomiums on the British. He writes of charming ladies and fine buildings and lawns and costly wines. But there is not the slightest reference to the College and the new prose. And if he broke away from the old prose style under the impact of the Fort William College literature, it is most surprising that he should have made no mention of it.

In fact, Ghālib attached no importance to the new style; he used it for correspondence with his friends and equals, but in his letters to the nobility he scrupulously stuck to the old florid style.

One might as well ask: was the Fort William College literature strictly confined to the bounds of Calcutta and not known outside that city? We have clear evidence that it was known in northern India, as is provided by Rajab 'Alī Surūr's attack in *Fasānā-e-'Ajāib* on Mir Amman's *Bagh-o-Bahār* which he ridicules as bald and savourless in style. Like so many others, Ghālib, in all probability, had heard of it but there is nothing to prove that he was even remotely interested in it.

7

The idealistic view of Ghālib the man, curiously enough, thought by some to be the necessary adjunct to his poetic achievement, and based on nothing better than an anecdote or two and a few of his verses, is not supported by facts. His letters to the Nawab of Rāmpur, published in 1937, are typically oriental and courtier-like in their fulsome adulation

and are a bitter pill to swallow for his admirers. Reviewing the book, Dr 'Abdul Haq wrote:

In some of these letters he has implored monetary help to meet his liabilities in such words as are incompatible with the dignity of a great poet, and it is possible that some readers should resent their publication and consider them to be a slur on their beloved poet. But intelligent admiration demands that we should study both sides of his character, good and bad, as truthfully and honestly as possible.¹¹

Even a casual study of these letters would convince any disinterested person that the man who wrote:

بندگی میں بھی وہ آزاد و خود ہیں میں کہ تم
اٹلے پھر آئے در کعبہ اگر روانہ ہوا

Even in adoration I am so intent on my self-respect
That I would retrace my footsteps if I did not find the door of the Ka'ba open,

seldom tried to follow this counsel of perfection in the practical affairs of life.

The more carefully Ghālib's correspondence is studied, the more evident it becomes that he was essentially a man of the world. There was very little of the hero or the hero-worshipper in him. An egoist by temperament, like most poets and artists, he was very little endowed either with enthusiasm or loyalty. Of him it may be said that he knew only one hero—Ghālib—and he worshipped him with unremitting assiduity. That he developed a sensitivity to the wrongs and sufferings of his community after the Mutiny, his letters fully establish. But a few years before the Mutiny he had felt no qualms in transferring his allegiance to the British on learning that the East India Company had decided to terminate the Mughal dynasty on Bahadur Shah's demise. He had no sooner come to know of this than he decided to cement friendly relations with the British, and composing a *qasīda* in praise of Queen Victoria, forwarded it to Lord Canning with the request that, as a leading poet, he might be honoured with 'title, robe of honour, and pension'.¹² After the Mutiny, when he was a political suspect and his pension had been withdrawn, he plied Lord Canning with a large number of *qasīdas*, and did not desist until he was told in unequivocal terms 'not to send such things to him in future'.¹³

From the above it is possible to draw one inference only—that Ghālib was an opportunist and was not troubled with feelings and sentiments. He held that ideals were for men and not men for ideals, and were on the whole a pretty disagreeable thing if your object was to get on in life. The

desperate efforts he made for the restoration of his pension, the pertinacity with which he courted the officials, the rebuffs he encountered in his attempts to contact them—all show that he was a practical man with an eye to his own interests. Ghālib had a genius for perseverance. He had set his heart on being admitted to the Imperial court, and undeterred by Bahādur Shāh's coldness, he plied him with *qasīda* after *qasīda*, until he had gained his object. And the motive was self-love. It was not enough for him to know that his genius as a poet had been recognized by the leading men of the day. It must be ratified by the Emperor; he must have his place by the side of his hated rival Zauq, who, he believed, had come between him and preferment at court. Ghālib's self-esteem sometimes bordered on the comic. I wonder if there is any other poet of equal fame or merit who strove so much to be in the limelight, or took such a childish delight in titles, distinctions, robes of honour, invitations to *durbars*, or plumed himself so much on his contacts with the official world. He smacks his lips over them in his correspondence and recounts them to his friends with elaborate unctiousness. When he was bespattered with mud by a critic for his attack on the author of *Burhān-e-Qāti*, what pained him most was that he (the critic) had been wanting in respect to a titled person who stood well with the Government.

All the abusive epithets that exist in the language have been showered by him on me. He should have realized that even if I am not a poet and scholar, I hold, at least, a distinguished position among the gentry and aristocracy. I am an honourable man, nobly descended, and on friendly terms with the Indian gentry, chiefs, and mahārājas. I have been recognized as *Rais-Zāda* by the Government, awarded the title of *Najm-ud-Daula* by the Emperor, and addressed as *Khān Sāhib* and *Very Dear Friend* by the Government. Did he ever think: Why should I call him *insane, dog, ass*, when he is addressed as *Khān Sāhib* by the Government? In reality this is putting a slight on the Government, nobility, and gentry of India.¹⁴

We would be tempted to treat Ghālib as the injured party in this controversy, if we did not know that he himself was by no means a model of forbearance as a controversialist.¹⁵ As regards the merits of the controversy, Ghālib's position was untenable. His contention was that no one could say the last word on Persian lexicography except Persian scholars. So far he was not far wrong. But being himself a Mughal and, therefore, as much an outsider as any Indian scholar, what grounds had he, one wonders, for posing as an authority on the Persian language?

Interesting light is thrown on this aspect of his mind by his attitude towards the masses. He disliked the popular taste in poetry both as a

scholar and an aristocrat. Yet what really gave point to his contempt for the masses was that they had failed to recognize his genius. His position was illogical. He deliberately cultivated a difficult style to rise above the rank and file of poets; and when people failed or refused to respond to his style, he was angry with them for not doing him justice. No reprieve was to be given to them because they had injured his ego.

His twin weakness was envy, which often degenerated into a scathing contempt for his successful rival Zauq, whose plebeian taste often provoked him into saying very ungenerous things about him.¹⁶ Ghālib was what we would call a highbrow today, but I cannot withstand the conclusion that his vehement dislike of the popular element in poetry was enormously strengthened by his dislike of Zauq—the most popular poet of the age.

In stressing the less attractive side of Ghālib's character my sole desire is to bring to light those subconscious traits which, as we shall see, largely determined his inner life and therefore his poetry. He had his good points no less; he had all the virtues of the aristocracy. His treatment of the poor was full of aristocratic condescension. Generous to a fault, he continued to support his servants and dependants even in his darkest days, with his usual cheerfulness and liberality. His eminence as a poet made him friends, and his wit, generosity, and courtly manners enabled him to retain them. *Noblesse oblige* was not a cultivated attitude with him, it was an instinct. Such was the amiable side of his character; but the other, the less amiable side, too, was no less pronounced. Ghālib could forgive a thousand things, but if you hurt his self-esteem, he pursued you with ineradicable malignity. His range of vituperation was wide; the old sores continued to fester and were beyond time's healing touch. In his old age he came to contemplate life with some philosophic detachment; but he never forgave Zauq. As regards Qatīl,¹⁷ he completely forgot himself at the barest mention of his name, and then nothing was too strong or too coarse for him. And why? Because he had been cited as an authority against him in a *mushā'ara* in Calcutta.

To conclude: Ghālib was a man of the world, endowed with a genius for poetry. Beyond this, neither in his virtues nor in his vices is there anything heroic. The only remarkable thing about him is his poetry. He was an accomplished courtier and had the virtues and defects peculiar to that class. As an astute man of the world he believed that he must get on in life and to this end he must stand well with those who could dispense patronage. He was always eager to make new contacts because they were useful.

Perhaps it will enable the reader to have a more indulgent view of Ghālib's idiosyncrasies in which his egoism involved him if we tried to explain their genesis by reference to his life and state of mind. We have already seen how life smiled on him in his childhood and youth. Brought up in the lap of luxury he had a grand and worshipful image of himself. With the sudden decline in his fortune, he should have faced reality, adjusted himself to altered circumstances, and given up his aristocratic pretensions. But he was not so made. He clung tenaciously to the old image, and the greater his financial difficulties the more assiduously he worshipped that image. And as that image grew fainter and fainter, he refurbished it with an arabesque of fantastic embroideries. Of these the first was the glorification of his ancestry; and the reader has only to go through his correspondence to know with what relish he dwells on the greatness of his forbears and revels in the memories of his earlier happy days. His one effort was to forget the harrowing sense of his decline. And here, besides his ancestry, his most coveted possessions were the titles with which he had been honoured by the Emperor and the titles and other conventional epithets used by the British government in their letters to him. He let his imagination run on them, magnified their worth and importance out of all proportion, and invested them with meanings which they were not meant to have. They soothed his wounded pride, assured him that all was not lost, and he recounted them with pride and joy to his friends and admirers. The pathetic part of it is that it was all make-believe. He thought all along that he was the model of dignity and self-respect and yet, in practice, he had to stoop to abject flattery to keep body and soul together. We have referred to this already; for further confirmation of the view take this extract from his letters:

On Lord Canning taking over office as governor, I sent him a *qasīda*. The letter of acknowledgement from his secretary, hitherto unknown to me, contains an addition to my titles. So far I have been addressed as *Khān Sāhib, Bisyar Mihrbān Dostān*. This gentleman, *endowed with true discernment* [italics mine] by way of adding to my honour, has addressed me as *Sāhib Mushfiq Bisyar Mihrbān Mukh lisān*. Now tell me why shouldn't I deem him as my patron and benefactor? Am I a *kāfir* that I should not acknowledge his favour?²¹⁸

The conventional character of the greater part of Urdu poetry often makes it difficult to know for certain the strictly personal element con-

tained in it. In this respect, Ghālib is no exception to the general rule. His themes are the usual themes of Urdu poetry; and the fact that he made a deliberate departure from the style of his predecessors and contemporaries does not change the conventional nature of his poetry. At the same time, as in other poets, 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.

It is equally important to remember that judged by the volume of his Persian verse and the just pride he took in it, Ghālib would be classed as a Persian poet. Urdu poetry was merely an accident in his career and forms a very small fraction of his works, having been written (barring his early poetry which terminated in 1821) during 1821-7, and 1847-57. His ripest years (1827-47) were given mainly to Persian. The post-Mutiny period is again one of Persian. He based his hope of poetic immortality on his Persian verse, as witness the gibe at Zauq—

فارسی میں تا بہ بینی نقشہ تائے رنگ بنگ
بلکہ از مجموعہ اردو کہ بے رنگ من است

Study my Persian poetry so that thou mayst find numerous many-coloured pictures;

Pass over my collection of Urdu verses because it is insipid and colourless.

I am pointing this out because I fear that by confining myself to his Urdu poetry, as I should and must, I shall be seriously delimiting my range of reference. His poetry, as the expression of his personality, is an indivisible whole, and an estimate based on a small part of it may not only be incomplete but even misleading. And yet on account of the exigencies of this work I must perforce make his Urdu poetry my chief guide, supplementing it by some citations from his Persian poetry.

Ghālib's outlook on life was essentially and overwhelmingly pagan. Salāh-ud-Dīn Khuda Baksh was right in comparing him with the German poet, Heine.¹⁹ He, too, would have said with the latter:

The fairer and happier generations . . . that will rise up and bloom in the atmosphere of a religion of pleasure, will smile sadly when they think of their poor ancestors, whose life was passed in melancholy abstinence from the joys of this

beautiful earth, and who faded away into spectres, from the mortal compression which they put upon the warm and glowing emotions of the sense.²⁰

Ghālib had no conscious theory of life to offer: he was more intent on living his life than on theorizing about it; but if there is one thing more than another that his life and poetry substantiate, and to which ample testimony is borne by those who knew him personally, it is that he yearned to have more and more of life and explore its possibilities for personal enjoyment. His attitude towards the hereafter, as is well known, was sceptical; and even if, occasionally, he was led to think of the rewards promised to the righteous, a class to which he emphatically did not belong, he decided to have the cash and let the credit go.

Yet the word 'pagan' as defined by Matthew Arnold (the ideal, cheerful, sensuous life²¹) is applicable to him only in a general way. The difference between a pagan strictly so called, and a modern pagan is this: the former led a life of the senses because he lived at a physical level; because neither by training nor by experience did he know of an attitude above or beyond it. He followed the senses, but there was nothing militant or revolutionary about his sense-worship; nor did it imply a conscious selection of an ideal from a tangle of conflicting motives. But between us and the old pagan world there lies, historically, the wide gulf of religious puritanism with its inhibitions and repressions, and a new set of values, ascetic or semi-ascetic. Paganism is in our blood; it is the voice of our deepest nature, but during the last two thousand years or so the native sensuous impulse has been overlaid with successive layers of a restrictive morality. Consequently, today, paganism implies a revolt or a conscious repudiation of religious ideals. And this revolt is quite evident in Ghālib. Not only was he uncomfortable in the religious framework; he broke through it proclaiming aloud that he owed no allegiance to it. Nor was there a particle of mysticism in his temperament. It implies, among other things, a disbelief in the reality and, very often, the goodness of the world; and Ghālib knew no other reality and no other good. The world was in perfect accord with his deepest impulses. The note of revolt is struck quite stridently in these Persian verses:

نہوئے آدم دارم آدم زادہ ام آشکارا دم ز عصیایاں سے زخم

I have inherited the nature of Adam and am descended from him,
I openly declare that I indulge in sins.

مگیسر خوردہ از ازاں فرقہ ام کہ میداند سواد خال مٹخ یار داغ عصیایاں را

Do not upbraid me, because I belong to the sect
Which considers the stain of sin to be the beautiful mole on the cheek of
the beloved.

خوشترندی و ہوش زنده رود و شربتیش بہ لب خشکی چه میری در برابرستان زندہ ہا

Take delight in revelry, riotous passions, and luxurious living;
Why dost thou die of thirst in the mirage of religion?

شباب و زہد چه ناقدردانی ہستی است بلا بہ جان جوانان پارا ریزد

Youth and piety—what a disparagement of the gift of life!
It is a calamity for the youthful to be pious.

اگر بہ بادہ بودمیل شاعر م نہ فقیرہ سخن بچہ رنگ ز آلودہ دامنی دارد

If I am inclined towards wine I should not be censured; I am not a theologian
but a poet;

Why should poetry be afraid of moral defilement?

رموز دین نشناسم درست و مغذوم تہاد من عجمی و طریق من عربی است

I do not know the ways of religion, and I should be held excusable,
I am Persian by nature although my religion is that of the Arabs.

Ghālib's repudiation of orthodoxy, though temperamental, was also a reasoned creed and was, in one important respect, a reaction to the narrow-mindedness and hypocrisy of the orthodox. The following verses illustrate his viewpoint:

جانتا ہوں تو اب طاعت و زہد پر طبیعت ادھر نہیں آتی

I am aware of the promised reward for worship and piety,
But my heart is not inclined that way.

سخن کوتہ مرا ہم دل بہ تقویٰ مائل است اما
زنگ زہد افتادم بہ کافر ماجبر ایہا

In brief, my heart, too, is inclined towards piety,
But disgusted by the shameful behaviour of the pious I have drifted into
heterodox ways.

A great deal of his verse is devoted to the criticism of religious ideals, especially the incentives to morality. Ghālib is of the opinion that virtue

should be its own reward. But the calculated morality, the morality that is motivated by the desire for reward in the hereafter, is really a species of selfishness, a profitable investment or a convenient barter.

He writes:

گاہ بہ خلد امیدوار گم بہ نجیم بیم ناک
گر چہ خدا کی یاد ہے کلفت ماسوا سمجھ

Awhile entertaining hopes of heaven, awhile afraid of hell,
Beshrew it even if it be God's worship, it is in no way different from the
vexatious pursuit of worldly things.

The pious who aim at winning rewards in heaven, Ghālib argues, are for ever tossing between the hope of reward and the fear of punishment. They have no peace of mind and, as such, there is no difference between them and those who have set their heart on worldly things.

طاعت میں تاہے نہ مے و انگیس کی لاگ
دوزخ میں ڈال دو کوئی لے کر بہشت کو

So that there should be no lure of wine and honey (Joys of paradise) in God's
worship,

Let heaven be flung into hell.

دلم در کعبہ از تنگی گرفت آوارہ خواہم
کہ با من وسعت بت خانہ لائے ہندو چین گوید

My heart is bored by the narrowness of Ka'ba;

O for a wanderer who should traverse with me the open spaces of the idol
houses of China and India!

Ka'ba here symbolizes the restrictive morality which condemns the senses, and the idol-houses stand for pagan joys, the healthy enjoyment of the senses.

Note the humorous juxtaposition of the tedium of the formal aspect of religion with the poet's joy in love, song, and music in:

شادم بہ بزم و عطا کہ رامش اگر چہ نیست
بارے حدیث چنگ فنی و عود مے رود

I find food for joy in the insipid sermon of the preacher;
For though it has no music there is at least a frequent mention of harp, wine,
and lute in it.

سخن زروضہ رضوان بہ کئے یار کشید
چو جادہ کہ ز صحرا بہ لالہ زار کشید

The talk took a turn from the garden of paradise to the beloved's lane;
It was like the path that swerves from the desert to the tulip-field.

Here is direct criticism of the abstinence that defeats its own end:

تن پروری خلق فزوں شد ز ریاضت
بجز گرمی افطار ندارد رمضان بیح

Man's gluttony increases with abstinence,
The *Ramazān* has no attraction except the eager preparation for fast-breaking.

And here is scepticism:

ہم کو معلوم ہے جنت کی حقیقت لیکن
دل کے خوش رکھنے کو غالب خیال اچھا ہے

I know what paradise really is—
A pleasing illusion to titillate the fancy.

I am aware that some critics have tried to bring Ghālib within the fold of orthodoxy on the strength of some of his utterances, mostly in prose, and a few others in poetry as well. There is no doubt that in his capacity as a Muslim he subscribed to the dogmas of Islam, and he was perfectly sincere in doing that. But, as we have stressed repeatedly, poetry like Ghālib's, at any rate, the one on which I have based the estimate of his mind, is the voice of his inner self. It reveals him as he really was, and it is at variance with what he said or felt in his capacity as the product of the social order in which he had been brought up and to the forms, convictions, and views of which he mechanically subscribed. He had a profound admiration for Hazrat Āli and wrote in praise of the Prophet also. But this personal loyalty or admiration is compatible with his general sceptical attitude towards religion and its utilitarian morality.

And if, occasionally, he is found jeering at life and proclaiming its vanity, it is because he feels that there was so much in life that remained beyond his reach.

دوم عیش بزر قہر بسمل نہ بود
بہ اندازہ خواہش دل نہ بود

The period of joy was all too brief like the dance (writhing in agony) or a
slaughtered bird;

It was not commensurate with the extent of my desires.

Ghālib had his tribulations, his moments of gloom and despondency, but it will be obvious to anyone who reads him with an open and critical mind that he never proclaimed life to be a vanity. He nowhere says that life cannot give us anything that is worth having. He holds that life is good and believes in making the best of it. A healthy, all-round responsiveness to life—such seems to be his general attitude towards life.

منخشے ہے جلوہ گل ذوق تاشا غالب
چشم کو چاہئے ہر رنگ میں واہو جاننا

O Ghālib, the beauty of the flower sharpens the power of perception in the beholder;

It is meet, therefore, that the eye remain open under all circumstances.

Not only this. He believes that life is worth living even at its poorest. The very act of existence, shorn of all adventitious considerations, is a great privilege. Even in the fever and fret of life, in pain and sorrow, there is an excitement that is life. The worst is death, the darkness of the grave.

نغمہ نغم کو بھی آئے دل غنیمت جانئے
بے صدا ہو جائیگا یہ سازِ ہستی ایک دن

O my heart! Make the best even of the strains of sorrow;
It is not long before the harp of life will be silenced for ever.

ایک ہنگامہ یہ متوقف ہے گھر کی رونق
نوحہ نغم ہی سہی نغمہ شادی نہ سہی

The life of my house depends on some sort of commotion;
If it is not a song of joy then let it be a dirge of sorrow.

اسد یہ درد و الم بھی تو مغنم ہے کہ آخر
نہ گریہ سحری ہے نہ آہ نیم شبی ہے

O Asad, we should be grateful for this sorrow and pain, because at the end
There are neither the morning tears nor the midnight sighs.

He knew the pain of love, its heartaches and sorrow, but he held that

رونقِ ہستی ہے عشقِ خانہ ویراں سانسے
انجن بے شمع ہے گر برقِ خرمن میں نہیں

The stir of life is owing to the all-consuming passion of love,
When the lightning does not fall on the harvest of life, the assembly is without a candle.

And is there not behind the self-commiseration of the following a devouring passion for life?

جاتا ہوں داغِ حسرتِ تھی لئے ہونے
ہوں شمعِ کشتہ درخورِ محفلِ تمہیں رہا

I bear on my heart the scar of longing for life.
I am like the extinguished candle which is no longer fit for the assembly.

آتا ہے داغِ حسرتِ دل کا شمار یاد
مجھ سے مے گنہ کا حساب اُٹھانہ مانگ

I am reminded of numerous unsatisfied yearnings in the world,
O God! Do not ask me to furnish an account of my transgressions!

مشتاہے فوتِ فرصتِ ہستی کا نغم کوئی
عمر عزیز صرف عبادت ہی کیوں نہ تو

It is not possible to get over the regret at the lost opportunities of life,
Even if we have devoted the best part of life to the worship of God.

ہزاروں تمناہیں ایسی کہ ہر خواہش پر دم نکلے
بہت نکلے مے ارمان لیکن پھر بھی کم نکلے

A thousand desires, each most ardently pursued;
No doubt, a large number of them were satisfied, yet I feel that they were not enough.

ناکردہ گناہوں کی بھی حسرت کی سٹے داو
یارب اگر ان کردہ گناہوں کی سزا ہے

O God! If there be punishment for the sins committed by me,
There should be compensation too, for those that I planned, but failed to commit.

تنناشائے گلشن تمنائے چیدن
بہار آفرینا گنہ گار ہیں ہم

Looking at the garden, we have the urge to pluck flowers;
O Creator of Spring! we are guilty.

Says Ghālib, God has implanted strong instincts in us to make the most of life, yet our eagerness to satisfy our basic instincts is treated as sin. The verse is highly ironical and means that it is just and right that we should avail ourselves of what the world has to give us.

اسد شکوہ کفر و دُمانا سپاسی
ہجومِ تمنا سے لاچار ہیں ہم

O Asad, complaint is sheer heresy, and solicitation ingratitude,
We are in a strange dilemma because of the intensity of desires.

سر پر مے و بال ہزار آرزو رہا
یارب میں کس غریب کا بختِ رمیدہ ہوں

I had the affliction of a hundred thousand desires,
O God, whose unlucky star am I?

خوشی میں نہاں خوں گشتہ لاکھوں آرزوئیں ہیں
چرخِ مردہ ہوں میں بے زباں گوہرِ غریباں کا

In silence there are a thousand stifled desires,
I, tongue-tied, am like the extinguished lamp at a stranger's grave.

ہوں میں بھی تماشائی نیرنگِ تمنا مطلب نہیں کچھ اس سے کہ مطلب ہی برآئے

I, too, gaze at the magic show of desire;
I do not really mean that the desires should be fulfilled.

According to Ghālib, to cherish or entertain desires is a sign of life.
Take them away and there would be no zest for life.

If this view of the mind of Ghālib is accepted, and a study of his works leaves one no alternative, it is not a little surprising to find him dubbed a pessimist. For a pessimist is one who believes that life is not worth living even at its best; and Ghālib was a confirmed believer in the goodness and beauty of life. The pessimism theory of Ghālib, so far as his poetry is concerned, is, in my opinion, based exclusively on his self-commiseration, generally misunderstood. Hālī, who knew him personally, denies that he was temperamentally or habitually gloomy, and ascribes his moodiness and self-pity to the conventional tendency of our poets to exaggerate their woes.²² Ghālib, like most people, obtained relief by airing his grievances, but considering his general responses to life as revealed in his prose and poetry, and taking into account, further, the unequivocal views expressed about his heartiness by some of his contemporaries, it looks like wilful misrepresentation to take the following as his real or final verdict on life. In all these I see self-pity and no more.

رنج سے جوگر ہوا انسان تو مٹجاتا ہے رنج مشکلیں مجھ پر پڑیں اتنی کہ آساں ہو گئیں

Sorrow ceases to be felt when one gets used to it;
So numerous have been my trials that I can now meet them with equanimity.

زندگی اپنی جو اس طرح سے گزری غالب ہم بھی کیا یاد کریں گے کہ خدا رکھتے تھے

When such is the sort of life I have been fated to live,
How painful would it be, then, to cherish the thought that I had a benevolent
God to look after me!

نغم ہستی کا آسہ کس سے ہو مجزومرگِ علاج شمع ہر رنگ میں جلتی ہے سحر ہونے تک

There is no cure for the sorrow of life except death. O Asad;
The lamp must continue burning till the arrival of the dawn.

قید حیات و بندِ غم اصل میں دونوں ایک ہیں موت سے پہلے آدمی غم سے نجات پائے کیوں

The imprisonment that is life and the chain of sorrows are, in reality, one and the
same thing.

How can one be free from the sorrows of life before the arrival of death?

خزاں کیا فصل گل کہتے ہیں سکو کوئی موسم ہو
وہی ہم ہیں قفس ہے اور ماتم بال و پر کا ہے

It may be autumn, springtide or any other season;
I am the same in all the seasons, mourning my captivity and the loss of wings and
feathers.

The financial worries in which Ghālib was involved on account of his
prolonged lawsuit, came as a watershed or dividing line in his life; on one
side, memories of joy, wine, women, music, and good-fellowship, on the
other, carking cares, poverty, and thwarted passions and desires. He
now lingers wistfully on the past and yearns for the golden period of his
life, the paradise from which he has been driven out.

فلک سے ہم کو عیشِ زلفہ کا کیا کیا تقاضا ہے متاعِ بردہ کو سمجھے ہوئے ہیں قرضِ رہزن پر

ہے نازِ مخلصاں زرار دستِ زلفہ پر ہوں گل فروشِ شوخیِ داغ کہن ہونڈ

مغلیں برہم کرے ہے گنجدہ بازخیال ہیں ورق گردانی نیرنگ یک متجانہ ہم

یاد تھیں ہم کو بھی رنگارنگ بزمِ آرائیاں لیکن اب نقضِ نگار طاقِ نسیاں ہو گئیں

وہ بادۂ شبانہ کی مستیاں کہاں اٹھئے بس اب کہ لذتِ خوابِ سحر گئی

مارا زمانہ نے آسہ اللہ خاں تمھیں وہ ولولے کہاں وہ جوانی کہ ہر گئی

How importunately we ask the sky to restore our lost pleasures to us,
We think this lost property to be a debt due from a highwayman (sky).

Those reduced to poverty love to linger in imagination on the wealth they have
lost,
I am the flower vendor of the lustre of my old scars.

The artful Fancy is given to shifting the scenes:
I am, thus, the turner of the leaves of a fascinating picture-book.

I, too, knew how to arrange colourful festive assemblies,
But they have become now the decoration of the shelf of forgetfulness.

Gone is the intoxication of last night's carousal,
Wake up now, for the sweet sleep of the early hours of the dawn is gone.

You have been brought low by the hand of time, O Asadullah Khān,
Whither have gone the early longings of your heart and the youthful ardour of
your soul?

The above are all from *ghazals* composed after 1830 and embody
memories of his youth, when not only was his ardour for life at its highest,
but he possessed also the wherewithal to make the best of it. In this
respect, the following, composed in 1831 when he was thirty-four years
old, has a special autobiographical significance:

وہ فراق اور وہ وصال کہاں وہ شب و روز و ماہ و سال کہاں
فرصتِ کار و بارِ شوق کئے ذوقِ نظارہٴ جمال کہاں
دل تو دلِ وہ دماغ بھی نہ رہا شورِ سودائے خط و حال کہاں
تھی وہ اک شخص کے تصور سے اب وہ رعنائیِ خیال کہاں
ایسا آساں نہیں لہو رونا دل میں طاقتِ بگر میں حال کہاں
ہم سے چھوٹا تم راخانہٴ عشق واں جو جاہیں گره میں مال کہاں
منکرِ دنیا میں سر کھپاتا ہوں میں کہاں اور یہ وبال کہاں
مضعل ہو گئے قومی غالب وہ عناصر میں اہمیتِ مال کہاں

Whither are gone those days of union and separation!
Those nights and days, those months and years!

No leisure have I now for the affairs of the heart,
Whither is gone that keen desire for looking at beauty!

Not only my heart but the entire temper of my mind is changed,
Whither is fled that rapturous joy in the loveliness of form and figure!

It was all due to the inspiration I received from the love of a certain lady,
Where are those rare thoughts that once visited me!

It is not easy to shed tears of blood,
My heart has lost its strength, my spirits their buoyancy.

Reluctantly, I have retired from the gambling house of love,
And even if I go there, there is no cash in my pocket.

Vexed by the worries of life I eat out my heart in grief—
I who am least fit to bear these vexations.

My faculties have fallen into a state of decay, O Ghālib!
And gone is the balance of the elements that composed my nature.

For the comfortable life to which Ghālib had been accustomed and
which he longed to lead, three things were essential—youthful ardour,
means, and leisure, i.e., freedom from worries. With his changed circum-
stances the last two had disappeared. The note of depression in the poem
quoted above appears to have been deepened by the emotional crisis
referred to in the fourth line, but the poem offers on the whole a true
picture of the general state of his mind at the time, and of his tempera-
ment in general. The worries of life (فکرِ دنیا) left him no leisure
(فرصت), and he must perforce relive in memory the days that were
no more. It is significant that when this youthful mood revives in the
ghazal beginning with the line

مدت ہوئی ہے یار کو مہماں کئے ہوئے بوشِ قح سے بزمِ چراغاں کئے ہوئے

It is long since I had my love as my guest,
And lit the festive assembly with the shining cup of wine,
it is on this absence of leisure that he dwells:

بھی ڈھونڈتا ہے پھر وہی فرصتِ راتِ دن بیٹھے رہیں تصورِ جاناں کئے ہوئے

My heart is once more seeking those carefree days,
So that I should sit lost in thoughts of the sweet countenance of my beloved.

11

Ghālib's view of life, then, is that of a pagan. It is an extreme view, like that of the puritans, and leaves out so much that makes life significant and heroic. To quote Matthew Arnold:

[Paganism] by the very intensity and unremittingness of its appeal to the senses and the understanding, by its stimulating a single side of us too absolutely, ends by fatiguing and revolting us; ends by leaving us with a sense of tightness, of oppression,—with a desire for an utter change, for clouds, storms, effusion, and relief.²³

Ghālib escaped this narrowness, because in him the life of the senses, vigorous and full-blooded as it was, had been reinforced and supplemented by an equally keen intellect. So important, so apparent, is this aspect of his mind that there is an almost universal tendency to regard him as a philosopher. And yet a moment's reflection will show that this view is based on a misunderstanding of the word 'philosopher'. If by a philosopher we mean, as we should, one who presents a systematic and abstract system of thought or a consistent theory of life, as did, for example, Iqbal, then Ghālib would be found to be anything but a philosopher, the distinguishing quality of his mind being a keen intellectual awareness, a tendency to question things, and offer fresh and often profound comments on them, or rediscovering old truths anew for himself. It is this objectivity, this capacity for being influenced by things as they are, without seeing them through the distorting medium of preconceived views and theories that has led to his being called a pessimist, optimist, believer, agnostic, mystic, sceptic, etc. In an open mind there is scope for all these moods or attitudes; but it is uncritical to regard these momentary reactions, even if they repeat themselves occasionally, as settled convictions.

The fact is that Ghālib had an open mind and did not permit any one aspect of life, however important, to blind him to its other sides. The world is too vast, too complex, too contradictory, to fit into any one scheme of things. Hence, a philosophy of life necessarily implies selection, omission, or at least, a belittlement, conscious or unconscious, or experiences not in accord with one's bias. All philosophies of life are based on experience and truth, but not on the whole truth, the totality of experience. Consequently, a predisposition towards any philosophy im-

plies a certain amount of narrowness, if not blindness. The distinguishing trait of Ghālib's mind is a wide receptivity and not a predisposition towards any one theory of life.

Ghālib had an inquiring mind: as he lived his life, he no less thought about it. Hence, all his impressions are of the nature of a personal discovery, his vision of life as it appeared to him at a given moment. Some of these impressions tend to recur. Probably they have a greater relevance to the cast of his mind or the nature of his experience. But he does not surrender himself to them; they do not constitute his final verdict on life. Note, for example, the following:

مری تعمیر میں مضمحل ہے اک صورت خرابی کی بہوئی برق خرمین کا بے خون گرم دہقان کا

Even in my construction there is implicit an element of disintegration;
The warm blood in the veins of a farmer is itself the bolt that is hurled on the harvest of his life.

ہوس کو ہے نشاط کار کیا کیا نہ ہو مزا تو چھینے کا مزا کیا

How eagerly we plan ever new activities!
Take away death and there would be left no zest in life.

غافل بہ وہم ناز خود آرا ہے ورنہ یاں بے شانہ صبا نہیں طرہ گیاه کا

The heedless person ascribes his achievements to his own unaided efforts,
As a matter of fact, there is not a blade of grass but owes its gloss to the comb of the morning breeze.

روقی ہستی ہے عشق خانہ ویراں ساکسے انجن بے شمع ہے گرم خرمین میں نہیں

The stir and bustle of life is all due to the ravages of love,
Without this lightning falling on the harvest of life, the assembly remains immersed in darkness.

سند سے دل اگر افسردہ ہے گرم تاشا ہو کہ چشم تنگ شاید کثرت نظار سے وا ہو

If your envy does not permit you to enjoy life, go out of yourself and study life in general.

It is quite likely that your narrow outlook may widen by a fuller knowledge of life.

دل لگی کی آرزو بچپن کھتی ہے ہمیں ورنہ یاں بے رونقی سود چرخ کشتہ

We are made restless by our eagerness to satisfy our desires,
Otherwise the absence of light is good for the extinguished lamp.

یک نظر بیش نہیں فرصت ہستی غافل گئی بزم ہے اک رقص ثمر پہونے تک

Life's leisure is no more than a single glance.
The ardour of the festive assembly is momentary like the dance of a spark.

دیر و حرم آئینہ تکرار تمنا داماندگی شوق تراشے ہے پناہیں

What are idol-houses and the *Ka'ba* except images of the persistence of desire,
The unfulfilment of desire invents places of refuge for itself.

Here *dair-o-haram* stands for religious systems in general. According to Ghālib, they have their origin in man's failure to obtain happiness in the world. Faced with unfulfilled desires, men seek refuge in imagination and invent a world of bliss in the form of pleasing dogmas which not only take away the sting of failure, but also promise happiness in one form or another. In a perfect world there would be no place for religion and its consolatory vision of a blissful world where all wrongs would be righted, and the believers rewarded for their faith. Note how the conquest of Nature and the evolution of a just order have weakened the hold of faith in the West.

آرائش جمال سے فارغ نہیں ہنوز پیش نظر ہے آئینہ دائم نقاب میں

The beautiful one has not yet done with adornment,
The looking-glass is still in front of the beloved under the veil.

Here is something akin to the evolutionary conception of life presented in the imagery of the *ghazal*. The world is not a being but a becoming—

عالم غبار و حشمت مجنوں ہے سر بسر کب تک خیال طرہ لیلیٰ کرے کوئی

The world is full of the dust raised by the madness of Majnūn.
How long can one beguile oneself with the loveliness of the crest of Lailā!

Face to face with the confusion and disorder that figure so large in life, it is difficult to beguile ourselves with the belief that all is for the best in the best of possible worlds.

ہیں زوال آمادہ اجزا آفرینش کے تمام مہر گردوں ہے چراغ رہگذار بادیاں

All the elements of creation are tending towards decay.
The sun in heaven is like a lamp set in the path of a gale.

In Time eternal the sun may one day be snuffed out like a candle, says Ghālib.

These lines are not cold intellectual diagrams or platitudes; they are charged with emotion. The truths they embody may be as old as man himself; some of them actually are, but under the stress of emotions they come as revelations to us. Then we see them for the first time in a new light; and they are not a second-hand or tenth-hand reproduction of other people's experiences, but a palpitating and vital discovery as personal as Newton's or Galileo's.

It has been held by Hālī, and after him by Dr Ikrām, that Ghālib has enriched poetry with certain ideas unknown before. It is difficult to say how far this is true. But it would be generally conceded that a capacity for originating thought or discovering phases of experience unknown before, however praiseworthy, does not constitute poetic greatness. There is in the reasoning of these critics a confusion between scientific truth and poetic truth. The former lies in discovering some tendency in nature or man unknown before. But poetic truths are very old truths, and we feel them so intensely because they are so old.

It would not be out of place to point out that they have not been able to produce much evidence for this type of originality. Dr Ikrām quotes:

نہ کرتا کاش نامہ مجھ کو کیا معلوم تھا ہم کہ ہوگا باعث آفرینش در دروں وہی

I am not sure that it is a new idea, or being new it is true also. Besides, poetry is judged primarily by the beautiful work it makes with ideas, and the line quoted above is too unmusical and heavy-footed to be even tolerable poetry.

The high esteem in which Ghālib is held is mostly due to his excellence as a poet. His personality is much less attractive. One must admit, however reluctantly, that a careful study of his writings leaves one in no doubt that though there is much that is admirable in his temperament, there is also a great deal which, if not positively ugly, at least fails to inspire much love or enthusiasm.

Probably the least attractive side of his character comes out in his conception of love. 'Love in the highest type of poetry,' writes Priestly, 'is

always a facing outward, and not a facing inward, a mere emotional barter; it is a life to be lived together by two in a divine companionship.²⁴ For the most part, love with Ghālib is an appetite not a sentiment: it is a commodity that can be bought and sold. Ghālib, as I have pointed out in his character-sketch, was essentially possessive, egoistical, and there is no instance in his life, and there is none in his verse, to show that he ever felt love as an ideal passion calling forth self-surrender and self-sacrifice. His attitude towards it was that of a voluptuary.

نیند اُس کی ہے دماغ اُس کا ہے تہیں سکی ہیں
تیری لُفین جس کے بازو پر پریشاں کہیں

He alone enjoys a good sleep, mental composure and joyous nights,
Whose arm carries over it thy dishevelled locks.

With his usual frankness, he wrote to one of his friends on the death of his mistress:

I am sixty-five now. I have tasted life for fifty years. In my early youth a perfect guide advised me thus: I do not approve of piety and righteousness, nor do I disapprove of a life of pleasure. Eat, drink, and be merry; but remember that in your pursuit of pleasure you must be a fly, not a bee. One who is himself a mortal should not deplore the death of another mortal. Why shed tears and raise a hue and cry? Be thankful for your freedom. And if you have set your heart on bondage, then one mistress is as good as another. . . . Come to your senses and give your heart to someone else.²⁵

Harmless banter! says the admiring critic, thrown on the defensive by the cynicism of the confession. I shall let it go at that, for once. But what is there to say in defence of a poet who dismisses domestic life, after fifty years of companionship, with such shocking cynicism, as in the passage below:

I pity Umrāo Singh and at the same time envy his lot. O, my God! There are some who have been freed twice from matrimonial bondage: and yet, so far as I am concerned, it is now over fifty years since this noose of death was cast around my neck, yet neither the noose breaks nor do I die.²⁶

Obviously this does not read like badinage. But Ghālib has taken the question out of the sphere of controversy by another utterance, still more outspoken, on his pet grievance.

Married life is my death. I have never been happy in this imprisonment. There was disgrace and humiliation in going to Patialā, but, at any rate, it would have

brought me. the wealth of *singleness*. But, alas, what is the good of this *temporary singleness*. this borrowed celibacy!²⁷

In his straitened circumstances when his pension had been withdrawn, he did not think of his wife's privations and sufferings; but harping as usual on the strings of self, wrote:

Had I been single, I could have lived a happy and carefree life on this small allowance. Heaven knows whether my pension will be granted or not. In my present circumstances however, the prospect of leading a comfortable life on my pension, as a *single man*, seems extremely remote.²⁸

Ghālib's egoism is distressing. Nature had been bountiful to him in several ways, but she had not sown the seed of the ideal in him; and we cannot escape the conclusion that when he speaks of his unsatisfied desires and uncommitted sins, he is thinking of some unsuccessful intrigue like the one with the 'tantalizing *dūmnā*',²⁹ over which he used to smack his lips even in old age. I feel almost certain that it is the absence of devotion to a great ideal that explains the recurrent note of discontent and fidgetiness in his writings. His life lacked serenity. If he had been capable of true love he would have found in it a recompense for the comparative poverty and want of recognition of which he so often complained. Love, which is nature's greatest gift to man in this imperfect world, had been denied to him. What really makes life worth living is some ideal passion, a devotion to something outside us, be it the love of one's country, religion, humanity, a woman; or of nature, as with Wordsworth, who writes:

. . . if in this time of dereliction,
Of dereliction and dismay, I yet
Despair not of our nature, but retain
A more than Roman confidence, a faith
That fails not, in all sorrow my support,
The blessing of my life, the gift is yours
Ye winds and sounding cataracts! 'tis yours,
Ye mountains! thine, O Nature! Thou hast fed
My lofty speculations: and in thee,
For this uneasy heart of ours I find
A never-failing principle of joy
And purest passion.

Ghālib's end was pathetic. In his youth he had defied the gods. But when

the shadow of old age dimmed his intellect and weakened his body, he made a pathetic surrender to the powers he had all along challenged. His correspondence is full of quietistic utterances—now that he has lost the energy that had fed his revolt. The horrors of the Mutiny and his personal sufferings and bereavements shook his life to the foundations. He was a broken man, with little or no hold on life, and it was now, for the first time, that he came really to subscribe to the unreality of life and sought refuge in a weak and enervating mysticism. There is a similar change too in his strident faith in the goodness of life. All that he had admired, all that he had lived for, is now like dust and ashes in the mouth. The great achievements of man in poetry, philosophy, religion, what are they, he writes, but the quintessence of dust!

You are cultivating the art of poetry and I am cultivating the art of immersion in the divine spirit. I consider the scholarship of Avicenna and the poetry of Nizāmī to be useless, unprofitable, and unreal. To live we require a little happiness: as for philosophy, kingship, poetry, magic—they are all absurd. If someone was an avatar among the Hindus, what then? If you make a name in the world, what then? or if you are unknown, what then? Some means of livelihood, a little health—these matter: all else is vain. No doubt, these also may be felt as vain, but I have not yet attained this stage. Who knows that in a little while the curtain may be rung up, and I may ignore the means of livelihood, health and comfort also. I may enter on the stage of non-existence. There is no sign of the world or both the worlds in the great silence on which I have now entered. . . . I consider all to be unreal. It is not a river but a mirage; it is not existence but an illusion. We are good poets, and may be as famous as Sa'dī and Hāfiz. What did they gain by their renown, and what shall we?³⁰

And again:

What did 'Urfi gain by the fame of his panegyrics that I should look forward to some good by the publication of my *qasīdas*? What did Sa'dī gain by his *Bostān*? Everything besides God is unreal and non-existent. There is neither poetry nor poets, nor *qasīda*, nor will. Nothing exists but God.³¹

This apathetic self-surrender and sense of futility, this disbelief in the greatness and achievement of man, in poetry, religion, and philosophy, this negation of life, of strenuousness and effort—here is the grim spectre of pessimism under whose shadow Ghālib appears to have passed his last days.

14

In one important respect the life of Ghālib was a tragedy. It was the tragedy of a highly original person, born in a conventional age, which

gave him little or no scope for rising to the highest possibilities of his mind. At almost every point he was at odds with his society, and although he strove hard to find an outlet for his energies and rise above the pressure of the age, he was never completely successful. He was wont to speak of authority with a certain amount of irritability and vehemence, even braggadocio. In an age when the ancients were held in extreme veneration, he could say: 'Do not think that whatever the ancients have written is true. Were not foolish men born in those days?'³² And criticizing a line of Hazīn, he wrote: 'Hazīn was a man. If this opening line were archangel Gabriel's I should refuse to take it as an authority and follow it.'³³

And yet, despite this tilting at authority, Ghālib could not find his way to a constructive vision. His revolt against puritanism and conventional morality came very near bohemianism, while his passion for originality resulted in eccentricity and a feverish desire to be unlike others. The fact remains that he could not transcend his age.

The reason for this failure was that his age was too mediocre, too commonplace, and too incurious to supply the necessary stimulus for high original work. With this view not a few will disagree. In fact, those who maintain that Ghālib really fulfilled himself—and there are many—hold that he was a great poet because he was born in a creative period. On this point I have already expressed my views. I maintain that although there was a revival of peace and learning during the period—thanks to the advent of the British—and the old interests in literature and scholarship had to some extent been revived, yet of really active or living thought there was little or nothing in the age; and unless we allow our enthusiasm to blind us to facts, we shall see in the closing years of the Mughal rule in Delhi, the after-glow of a sunset rather than the promise of a sunrise. So much with regard to the revival of the old Muslim learning. As regards the religious revival of the period already hinted at, it did not even remotely touch him. His friends and contemporaries of whom we hear so much—Shāh Nasīr, Momin, Zauq, Maulvī Fazl Haq, Nawab Mustafā Khān Shefta—were intellectually commonplace, though models of good breeding and courtesy. Ghālib stood outside the ferment which gave us the Earlier Renaissance. He belonged to the past and had no affiliations with the forces, religious, educational, and scientific, which heralded the modern age.

Given a man with a passion for originality, born in a narrow and insular society, how will he react to his environment? He will affect singularity and condemn the ideal he cannot break through or demolish.

Ghālib's attitude towards his contemporaries was superior and aristocratic. His vanity, which, as we have seen, was terribly hurt by the refusal of his age to take his oddities for genius, led him to decide that he would have no truck with it and eschew whatever was popular. He decided that he must be different from the masses in every way—'not only in poetry, but in his personal appearance, his dress, his food, his mode of life; nay, even in life and death'.³⁴ This contempt amounted to an obsession, and he studiously avoided in life and literature anything that could be traced to the vulgar herd. So far as poetry was concerned, he strove to be new in imagery, diction, thought, feeling, at all costs. Hence his conceits, his 'metaphysical' fancy, his love of the recondite, and his highly Persianized diction. All these had their root in an intense desire to be unlike others, especially the popular writers of the day, adored by the multitude. In all this, he forgot the great truth that great men are unlike others, not because they strive to be different from them but simply because they are. Again, although a great writer's genius may tower over the populace, yet the warp and woof of his art are the very thoughts and feelings he shares with them. A great writer has simply to be himself and go the way his genius leads, to rise above the rank and file. Let this become a conscious craze and he will become affected and artificial. Ghālib's failures as a poet are principally due to a passion for originality at all costs which often degenerated into a desire to be unlike other people. Priestley's analysis of Meredith's failure as a writer is so true of Ghālib that I cannot do better than quote him at some length.

This is in part due to the fact that his pride forbade him to take any interest in the commonplaces, in what any Tom, Dick, or Harry could do fairly well. He was always too self-conscious on this score to be a really great artist, for the really great artist, forgetful of everything but the work in hand, does not wonder whether he is being original or merely commonplace and platitudinous, does not try to be different from other people, but merely does the work as well as it possibly can be done.

A great many of his defects proceed from this self-consciousness. His later novels are almost ruined by the writer's obvious desire to avoid the commonplace. As he grew older he coddled himself and frankly abandoned himself to his pet mannerisms. His pride would not allow him to state a plain fact in a plain way. In much of his work he was compelled to appear somewhat obscure simply because he was trying to express really subtle and difficult impressions and states of mind. But by the time he came to write *One of Our Conquerors* . . . he had to give an appearance of subtlety and difficulty whether there happened to be anything subtle and difficult to express or not. His style had mastered him, and the reason why it was allowed to master him was that his genuine artistic impulse was by this

time weak, whereas his pride, his self-consciousness, his desire not merely to be 'different' but to be increasingly more 'different', to be more and more the Meredith whom the public had neglected and his friends had adored, were stronger than ever. It is generally supposed that these later novels of his are more subtle and complicated than the earlier ones, but actually they are nothing of the kind. . . . Either he was by this time the slave of his own mannerisms, or he deliberately covered up this interior simplicity with a surface complexity, determined that it should not be said that George Meredith was at last coming to terms with his hostile critics and the public.³⁵

Similar as Ghālib's mind was to that of Meredith, we find at work in him a reverse process. He began where Meredith ended. His earliest poetry is hopelessly riddled with the defects associated with him. But as time passed, his good sense prevailed, though not without a sharp reminder from the public. And he is the poet that he is, because he grew less self-centred as time passed, and came to feel that originality was not the same thing as singularity.

Ghālib owed his salvation partly to his critics and friends and partly to his own common sense. He began by imitating Bedil, one of the most obscure and mannered of Persian poets. With this ideal before him, he wrote a poetry which is the most arid and impenetrable of its kind. In his old age, reviewing his youthful vagaries, he wrote: 'From the beginning my nature had been seeking rare and lofty thoughts, yet on account of my unconventionality, I mostly followed those poets who are unacquainted with the right path.'³⁶

How long he would have continued to sow these literary wild oats, it is difficult to say; but it is clear that he set much store by his early poetry, and left to himself he would have struck to it much longer than he did.

Out of these self-complacent dreams, Ghālib was rudely shaken by contemporary criticism, sharp, stinging, but just. For some time he stood his ground, replying attacks like—

اگر اپنا کہا تم آپ ہی سمجھے تو کیا سمجھے مزا کہنے کا جب سے اک کہے اور دوسرے سمجھے
کلام میر سمجھے اور زبان میر سے زاب سمجھے مگر ان کا کہا یہ آپ سمجھیں یا خدا سمجھے

If you alone understand your verses and no one else, you have not achieved much;

What is really praiseworthy is that others understand what you say.

We have understood the poetry of Mir and Mirza,

But what you write can be understood by you or by God alone,
with—

مہ ستائش کی تقاضا نہ صلہ کی پروا گر نہیں ہیں مرے اشعار میں معنی نہ سہی

I am neither hankering after praise, nor am I solicitous of reward,
If there is no meaning in my verses, it does not matter much.

But this was no more than bravado. The laughter of his contemporaries made him think, and, when to the censure of his critics was added the persuasion of his friends, he decided to hold out no longer. He handed over his *divān* to his friends whose drastic excisions reduced it to nearly one-third of the original. Henceforth, as he tells us, his guides were to be 'Urfī, Nazīrī, and Tālib Āmulī—poets who without being extremists, represented the same ideal as Bedil.

From the above it would be evident that, even after this compromise, Ghālib's literary sympathies were predominantly with the Persian 'metaphysicals'. From first to last, excepting the brief interval when he wrote in the style of Mīr, Ghālib did not try to fall in line with the tradition of the Urdu *ghazal*. In his poetry one is struck more by the line of departure from this tradition than by the points of contact with it. A brief study of his diction, imagery, and obscurity will confirm this viewpoint.

15

Ghālib maintained that the language of poetry should not be the same as the spoken language of the day. Here was a radical departure from the practice of his predecessors and contemporaries. The poets before him had cultivated, especially in the *ghazal* (the reader will remember that *ghazal* means conversation with women), what has been called the neutral style; a style which differs from the best spoken language, as the language of feeling will naturally differ from the language of less exalted moods. Ghālib is in favour of a highly Persianized, learned, and elegant diction. 'Even now', writes Hālī, criticizing his excised *divān*, 'nearly one-third of his *divān* consists of verses to which the word Urdu can be applied with difficulty.³⁷ Later on he adds: 'The thoughts are as strange as the language is unfamiliar. He made free use of the characteristic Persian infinitives, conjunctions, and adverbs . . . in his Urdu writings. Many of his Urdu verses could be easily converted into Persian by altering a single word.'³⁸

This excessive predilection for Persianized diction may rightly be ascribed to his becoming immersed in Persian; but it is quite as much, and sometimes exclusively, due to his horror of the commonplace in expression, corresponding to his horror of the obvious in thought. This is also Hālī's view. 'He avoided the common modes of expression as far as possible and refused to negotiate the beaten path. Consequently, he preferred novelty and originality in thought and expression to simplicity.³⁹ This partiality for Persian, whatever its cause, is proved by the nonchalance with which he uses Persian idioms and expressions in Urdu. No doubt, in importing Persian vocabulary and idioms into Urdu he was following an old precedent; but what had been done with moderation by his predecessors was often carried to licence and abandon by him, as in the following:

ہوائے سیر گل آئینہ بے مہرئی قائل کہ اندازہ بخون غلطیدین بسل پسند آیا
پے نظر کرم تھہ ہے شرم نارسائی کا بخون غلطیدین صد رنگ عوی پارسائی کا
شب خمار شوق ساقی رستخیز اندازہ تھا تا محیط بادہ صورت خانہ خمبازہ تھا
یک قدم وحشت سے درین قہر امکاں کھلا جاوہ اجزلے دو عالم دشت کا شیرازہ تھا
برنگ کاغذ آتش زوہ نیرنگ بے تابانی ہزار آئینہ دل بانہ سے بال یکتیدین بچو

Ghālib's obscurity is an indubitable fact, and during the past sixty years or so has provided the most extensive scope for guesswork and critical ingenuity. That he is difficult on account of fundamental brain work is one of those fictions by which the hagiologist has always tried to cover up the failures of his hero all over the world. As far as I can see, Ghālib's obscurity may be ascribed to three convergent causes: (1) his learned diction, far-fetched imagery and allusive style; (2) vagaries with regard to the use of Persian idioms and expressions; and (3) by and large, his compression, involving omission, sometimes, of vital links in the chain of thought. Take the following:

آہ کو چاہئے اک عمر اتر ہونے تک کون بچتا ہے تری زلف کے سر ہونے تک

قمری کف خاکستر و بلبل نفس رنگ اے نالہ نشان جگر سوختہ کیا ہے

لانا ترا اگر نہیں آساں تو سہل ہے دوشوار تو یہی ہے کہ دوشوار بھی نہیں

The first is obscure because the reader does not know what to make of the second hemistich; the second because of the use of *اے* for *جز*, for which there is no precedent in Urdu; and the third, because he is trying to put into a verse a great deal more than it can reasonably hold. Ghālib is very often difficult because he wants to pour a quart into a pint bottle.

The avoidance of the familiar, or the instinctive desire for what is far-fetched, remote, and subtle, is abundantly proved by his imagery. Imagery in Urdu poetry is mostly simple and drawn from the world of familiar observation. Ghālib's imagery is far-fetched, ingenious, and intellectual. Even when it is familiar, he is generally arrested by its unfamiliar aspect. Except in his early poetry and a few other instances, where he may be said to be straining for effect, neither his bizarre imagery nor his learned diction can be ascribed exclusively to affectation. With him the style is the man; and the key to his grotesque imagery is provided by the fact that what is unfamiliar to the ordinary man is familiar to him. His was essentially a subtle, brooding, and introspective mind, looking at things from odd and unexpected angles, so that his imagery comes home to us with a shock of surprise, like some of his profound comments on life discussed in an earlier section. The subtlety of his imagery can be aptly illustrated by the following:

نوازش نفس آستانا کہاں، ورنہ بزرگ نے ہے نہاں در ہر استخوان فریاد

I am without the favour of a friendly breath,
Otherwise there lies hidden in every bone of mine a cry of anguish, as in a reed.

پیدا نہیں ہے اصل تک ناز جستجو مانند موج آب زبان بریدہ ہوں

I do not know the real nature of the urge for quest which is ever driving us forward,
Like the wave in the river I am an amputated tongue.

باعث ایذا ہے برہم خوردن برہم سرو نخوت نخت نیشہ بشکستہ جز نشتر نہیں

The dissolution of the festive assembly is a source of pain,
Every piece of a broken glass plate is sharp and painful like a lancet.

اصل آفت نہ دیکھا جز شکست آرزو دل بدل پیوستہ گویا ایک لب افسوس تھا

The final outcome of love has never been other than disappointment,
The two hearts bound together in love were like the lips compressed in sorrow and regret.

This is not the pictorial imagery of one who lives by preference in the objective world only; it is that of a self-communing mind at home in thought also.

When his ingenuity is carried to excess, he becomes bizarre, as in

ہے عجب مردوں کو غفلت ہائے اہل دہرہ مہرہ نوال انگشت حیات در دہان گورہے

The dead are lost in wonder at the thoughtlessness of the living,
The verdure at the mouth of the grave is like the finger raised to the lips in a moment of surprise,

or strained as in the following:

یک ذرہ زمین نہیں بیکار باغ کا یاں جاوہ بھی فیتدہ ہے لالہ کے داغ کا

Not even the smallest particle of the garden is without its verdure and flowers,
The pathway is like the plug inserted into the wound of the poppy.

The abstract character of his imagery can be studied in these:

کوئی آگاہ نہیں باطن ہم دیگر سے ہے ہر اک فرد جہاں میں ورق نامواذہ

No one can fathom the mystery of another person,
Each individual in the world is like an undeciphered manuscript.

جز قبیس اور کوئی نہ آیا بروئے کار صحرا مگر بہ تنگی چشم سمود تھا

No one was adventurous enough to meet the challenge of love,
The wilderness (in which lovers wander) was probably narrow like the eye of a jealous person.

خلتے پاتے نزاں ہے بہار اگر ہے یہی دوام کلفت خاطر ہے عیش دنیا کا

If this is the spring, it is no better than the henna applied to the feet of the autumn,
All that we do in the world is a source of perpetual vexation.

His finest imagery has no touch of the bizarre:

فنا کو سوپ گر شاق ہے اپنی حقیقت کا فروغ طالع ناشاک ہے موقوف گلشن پر

Consign yourself to extinction if you are eager to know your true nature,
A chip of wood leaps into a flame when it is cast into a furnace.

پر تو خور سے ہے شبنم کو فنا کی تعلیم میں بھی ہوں ایک عنایت کی نظر ہونے تک

The light of the sun imparts the lesson of annihilation to the dew,
I also will endure till you bestow a favourable glance at me.

بیضہ آسانگ بال و پے یہ کیج نفس از سر نو زندگی ہو کر رہا ہو جائیے

Like unto the egg, this confinement in the cage of the body is a disgrace for
your wings and feathers,
Set your self free by obtaining a new life.

ہے تجلی تری سامان وجود ذرہ بے پر تو خورشید نہیں

Thy light is the source of all existence,
The particle of dust shines by the light reflected from the sun.

16

Ghālib's theory of poetry was a part of his theory of life. With an aristocrat's sense of the futility and limitations of conventions, the goal of his endeavour was to discover new paths in poetry. So far so good. The refusal to tread the beaten path is a necessary condition for renovation and progress. Ghālib's instincts were sound; unluckily, in trying to be a reformer he was reckoning without the age he lived in; for it is not enough to be discontented with things as they are, or to refuse to follow the herd, as he did, to renovate literature. Every genius gives something positive to its age, although this positive something may in the last analysis be discovered to be no more than the contribution of the age itself. Ghālib knew his age to be a prison, but there were no cracks and fissures in its walls to enable him to have a vision of a different world. Hence, his iconoclasm, finding no constructive outlet, turned upon itself like a dammed stream. Eccentricity is originality without a conscious goal, a dynamic urge that is directionless; and since Ghālib felt thwarted, he became self-centred, eccentric, defiant, as his early poetry only too clearly shows. I believe it was the general aridity of his age which accounts for

the feverishness and discontent that characterized his life. We can say of him what Matthew Arnold says of Gray: 'Born in the same year with Milton, Gray would have been another man; born in the same year with Burns, he would have been another man'.⁴⁰ All through his life he prided himself on the avoidance of plebeian contacts; but what was the net gain? Artificiality. The greater part of his poetry lacks passion; but to give it the appearance of freshness, he must bedizen it with useless scholarship and subtlety. Consequently his poetry looks most profound when it is least so. It is a hard nut to crack, but the reader gets little or no kernel for his pains.

We are now in a position to take our final stock of Ghālib's achievement as a poet. To begin with, as already explained and illustrated, he excelled in a certain capacity for thought. Here his pre-eminence is undeniable. It is no less true that being a confirmed egoist, he was deficient in feeling. He does not appear to have gone through any great emotional experience, and is wanting in pathos and feeling for others.

His poetry is said to be tough and the reason assigned is its depth. That his poetry is often tough is no doubt true; that it is due to the recondite nature of his thought, is incorrect. The best of his poetry in which he truly expresses himself, the poetry from which I have quoted, is transparent. In the poetry that strikes us as difficult and obscure he has nothing of his own to say; it is merely an exercise in ingenuity and no more. It consists of well-worn themes of the *ghazal* swathed in conceits and recondite learning and allusions. It makes an impressive show, but is found to be hollow on analysis. You laboriously remove the trappings and come upon a hyperbole or a violent distortion of some simple fact, in short a conceit.

Of late it has been fashionable to say that Ghālib stood at the parting of the ways and looked forward to the future. Having broken away from the past both in thought and style, he stands at the threshold of the modern world. It is needless to say, Ghālib is wholly a product of the past. He did break away from the traditions of poetry from Valī to Mīr, but it was only to find masters in the Persian decadents whose ingenuity, conceit-writing and obscurity he imported in Urdu.

17

Ghālib's letters which have given him a permanent place in the evolution of modern Urdu prose were begun about 1849. In writing them he was following no conscious theory of style. Indeed, so far was he from

feeling sure of his ground that he felt his innovation required an explanation if not an apology. All this has been discussed in an earlier section. The view that he deliberately broke with the past showing the way to others is not supported by facts. The writers of the Aligarh school did not go to him for inspiration; they followed the Time Spirit. Ghālib's prime motive was convenience and it was quite inadvertently that he became the forerunner of modern prose.

Ghālib's letters, except those addressed to the nobility, where he crosses his t's and dots his i's with punctilious care, have all the directness, informality, and well-bred ease of polite conversation. I believe the secret of all successful letter-writing is the joy of communication or expression. One feels, as one reads these letters, that the writer has something to say, and he says it without stint or reserve. The contrast between his prose style and poetry is striking. In the latter, he is self-conscious, pithy, intellectual, and wrote in full panoply. He wrote his prose in lounge-suit and slippers. Essentially utilitarian in tone, it possesses an easy, familiar, leisurely movement, and has no intellectual interest, having been written, for the most part, at a plane of consciousness totally different from that of his poetry.

Most of these letters have little interest beyond their style. Their themes are the well-worn themes of correspondence—instructions to his pupils on versification; critical dicta; news, inquiries; information or directions about the publication of his books; relations with the British Government; the withdrawal and restoration of his pension; greetings; condolences; reminiscences; and other personal odds and ends. They reveal a temperament at once cultured, urbane, social, and egoistical, in which much that is polished and courteous alternates with savage and rasping moods. The fact is that Ghālib was self-centred, and only a true hero-worshipper would fail to note some of his limitations.

From this engrossing self-love Ghālib was, to some extent, awakened by the Indian Mutiny. Ghālib, who had brooded over his wrongs, was now suddenly made to see by that great catastrophe all the cruelty and brutality of life. Some of the letters of the period are the best of their kind. They are the works of a sensitive man who is also a humorist—the sensitive man whose heart goes out to suffering humanity, and the humorist who from the vantage ground of this new knowledge can smile at his own mishaps.

Ghālib has been acclaimed as a great humorist. His letters do not provide much evidence for this judgement. His gift of humour was at best intermittent, and is confined to half a dozen letters of the post-Mutiny

period. But though the quantity is limited, the quality is high. On the other hand he is often witty; and those who praise his humour usually mistake the former for the latter.

Besides the light they throw on his life, interests, and character, these letters are valuable for their style. Strange as it may sound, the earliest of them are quite as mature as the latest. For sheer beauty of style, the best of them are only surpassed by Muhammad Husain Āzād at his very best. I mean Āzād the raconteur and not the letter-writer.

18

Zafar (Abū Zafar Sirāj-ud-Dīn Muhammad Bahādur Shāh), the last of the Mughal emperors, is the author of four voluminous *divāns*. Two things stand out in his poetry; first his passion for difficult rhymes, excessive word-play, often of a crude type, and his love of fine writing, i.e., over-indulgence in idiomatic language for its own sake. This aspect of his poetry is traceable to the influence of Lucknow, through his poetical preceptors, Shāh Nasir and Zauq, who had both cultivated this style to emulate the poets of Lucknow, then held in high esteem and studiously imitated. The second is the sense of frustration and gloom. As is well known, his father had been persuaded by his favourite wife to nominate her son, Mirzā Jahāndār, as his successor; and though in this he was overruled by the British, he continued to suffer from his father's resentment till his succession to the throne in 1837, when he was a little over sixty.

The poetry of Zafar is the image of his own mind. It has a distressing sense of the disabilities imposed upon him, and his inability to break through them. Significant in this respect is the nature of his imagery, the use of words like fowler, chain, captive, cage, snare, etc. The persistence with which he returns to them shows how overwhelming and unbroken must have been his sense of frustration. He is not uniformly gloomy; there are eager longings and fugitive gleams of hope as well, but they are few and far between, and serve only to throw his gloom into still sharper relief.

Zafar's poetry is wholly personal, a dirge on his blighted hopes and the misfortunes that dogged his heels. There are some, however, who see the patriot in him, and by way of proof refer to the last three lines quoted below, and other similar verses as proof of his heroic resolve to rid the country of the British. Taken out of their biographical context and provided with a political background, they may be interpreted as the ebb and flow of his political sympathies. But his life, as we know it,