

## Altaf Hussain Hali's Ideas on Ghazal

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The importance of Maulana Altaf Husain Hali [Alṭāf Ḥusain Ḥālī] in the evolution of Urdu literature is sufficiently known, and we don't need to emphasize it here again.<sup>i</sup> It is sufficient to say that his *Muqaddama*, or 'Introduction' (originally intended as a rather long preface to his *Divān*, published in 1893) was and still partly is considered the modern *ars poetica* for Urdu poetry. "Hali and Shibli<sup>ii</sup> were the two great literary dictators of their age: writes Dr. Vahid Quraishi in the preface to his valuable re-edition of the *Muqaddama* published by the *Maktaba-e Jadid* in Lahore with interesting notes and appendices<sup>iii</sup>—they studied the old and new literary criticism and after having clearly fixed the limits of the old frame they tried to pour into it the leaven of Western ideas". Such first attempts to create a fusion of Eastern and Western ideals in Art I consider extremely interesting both for their theoretical value (nobody can possibly know the intricacies and depths of the Muslim poetical style as much as an oriental poet) and their practical results. From the latter point of view it is sufficient

to say that Hali is considered the renovator of modern style in Urdu and a bridge between the great Ghalib<sup>iv</sup> and the national Poet-Philosopher of Muslim India and Pakistan, Muhammad Iqbal.<sup>v</sup>

As far as I know, Hali's *Muqaddama* was never translated into any European language, and, since not many students of Persian Literature and stylists know Urdu. I think it useful to condense and study the most important passages of Hali's lengthy "Introduction" concerning the "renovation" of the classical *ghazal*. Hali's *Muqaddama* (I follow Dr. Quraishi's edition quoted in note 1) covers more than 200 pp. in 8': the part on *ghazal* consists of 54 pages.

Hali starts saying that the *ghazal*, together with the *rubā'ī* and the *qit'ā* is particularly well adapted to the expression of momentary and fugacious emotions or ideas brought about by this or that event of everyday life. This is why a reform (*iṣlāḥ*) of the *ghazal* is urgently needed: the *ghazal* is moreover extremely popular even among illiterate people and children. According to Hali those who more than any other contributed to render the *ghazal* so popular were the so-called "men of God" (*ahlu'llāh*) and esoteric reform (*iṣlāḥ*) (*ṣāhib-i bāṭin*) poets including Sa'di, Rumi, Amir-i-Khusrav, Hafiz, 'Iraqi, Maghribi, Ahmad Jam, etc. Hali however, like many Oriental thinkers of the modern school, expresses his doubts as to the love that they described being really *majāzi*.<sup>vi</sup> In any case his opinion is that, especially in Iran, the *majazi* love became more and more the generalized subject of the *ghazal* style, whereas in Urdu literature not more than half of the *ghazals* treat this subject, another good half being devoted to the description of true love and emotions in a natural and simple way.<sup>vii</sup>

The proposed reform of the *ghazal* includes in his opinion the following four points, which he treats in detail.

1. The range of the love-motifs ought to be extended so as to include not only the real or mystical love of the Leila-Majnun and Shirin-Farhad type, but also the love between God and man, children and parents, brothers and sisters, husband and wife, masters and servants, kings and subjects; love among friends, love of man for his home or town, or country, folk, family and so on.

Concerning this first point of his reform Hali particularly insists on the fact that the *new* ghazal writer ought to avoid such words as may reveal whether the object of such a generalized love is male or female, as for instance کلاه (a man's hat), چیرا, دستار (turban), قبا, جامه (different men's coats), سبز و دخط (down on adolescents' faces), مطرب پسر (the young minstrel), منبج (the young Magian), ترسایچ (the young Christian) etc., or, on the other hand, محرم (spouse), کڑتی (a part of a woman's dress), آری (mirror) etc.

Concerning the famous question of the “gender” of the Beloved in *ghazals*, Hali—in order to save his great classical Iranian and Urdu predecessors from the accusation of homosexuality—maintains that the use of words indicating female dresses or female beauty was considered indecent owing to the old *parda* custom; so the poets used to speak of their beloved as young boys. This soon became a “style” with the chrims of classicity, but ought to be absolutely avoided by the new *ghazal* writer. Actually classical Urdu *ghazal*-writers made this habit even worse, since the Urdu language—differently from Persian, where no grammatical gender exists—knows the masculine and feminine genders; in this language even the general ambiguity of the Persian style (which Urdu poets imitated) is spoiled, and to the Beloved

the masculine gender is openly applied. Strangely enough the use of the masculine gender was so generalized in Urdu poetry as to be applied even to unmistakably feminine subjects, as e.g. in this verse by Zauq (d. 1854):

جھانکتے تھے وہ ہمیں جس روزن دیوار سے

وائے قسمت ہو اسی روزن میں گھر زبور کا

[“Oh how fortunate the wasp’s nest in that hole in the wall wherefrom they (evidently pretty girls) were peeping at us!”] Here the subject of جھانکتے تھے (“they were peeping”) is clearly feminine, but the verb is in the masculine gender.

2. The second important subject of *ghazal*, after love, is what could be synthetized in the word *نمريات*, including both nanacreontic praise of wine, cup-bearers and accessories, and the scornful reproach of Muslim orthodox *mullās* ملاح, *faqīhs* and ascetics including even praises of *kufṛ*,<sup>viii</sup> in the most exaggerated ways. This style, according to Hali, ought to be abandoned by the new *ghazal* writers. It owes its origin to the fact that — the *ghazal* style having been popularized especially by *ṣūfī* poets, who criticized partly rightly the hypocrisy of the *mullās* their innumerable imitators carried this tendency to its extreme limits, often in a quite artificial way. Hali partly accepts (to save his great predecessors from the accusation of *kufṛ*) the metaphorical and symbolical interpretation of such verses, quoting Rumi’s justification:

خوشتر آں باشد کہ سرِ دلبراں

گفتہ آید در حدیث دیگران

But, in a rather rationalistic and quite exoteric way, he distinguishes between a “just” protest against the hypocrisy of the *zuhhād* and the *mullāhs*, like the one embodied in this verse of Zauq:

رندِ خراب حال کو زاهد نہ چھیڑتو

تجھ کو پرانی کیا پڑی، اپنی نیڑتو

(“O ascetic! Don’t censure the profligate libertine, what hast thou to do with others’ sins, think rather of thine!”)

where the reproach is addressed to a well-defined evil quality of the reproached, and this other verse of the same author:

ذوقِ زیبا ہے جو ہو ریشِ سفید شیخ پر

وسمہ آبِ بنگ سے مہندی مے گلرنگ سے

(“O Zauq, how nice it is when on the white beard of the *shaikh*, the *wasma* is made of hashish and the *mahindi* of rose-red wine!”)

where the *shaikh qua shaikh* is reproached and scorned, even if he might possibly be faultless.

3. If a deepening and an extension ought to be achieved by the new, *ghazal*-writers in the field of love and *نہریات*, which are the two chief subjects of the classical *ghazal*, the themes of the new *ghazal* must acquire a new scope also in other directions. Hali invites the poet to express his feelings of joy and sorrow, repentance, thankfulness lament, patience, resignation, contentment, trust in God, hate, passion, clemency, justice, wonder, love of his country, social problems etc. In

this point Hali is clearly a forerunner of modern “social” art, which he himself successfully endeavoured to realize especially in his simple and dignified *Musaddas*.<sup>ix</sup> He admits that a full realization of such a social art is rather difficult, but, he says, a revolution is now necessary: "Nowadays the situation of the world resembles that of an old tree in which new young sprouts are germinating and old branches are withering away and falling... Old peoples are giving place to young peoples, and this is not like a flood of the Ganges or the Jumna which is only covering a few nearby villages with its waters; no, it is like a great Ocean flood which expands its waters over the entire globe. If one looks at this, and understands it, hundreds of exemplary images will occur to him from morning to night, so that an entire life will not be enough for a poet to describe all their details... What other material could be more interesting than this for *ghazal*-writing?... The ecstasies of love were beautiful for happier times; now that time is gone. The night of pleasure and joy has passed away, the dawn has come”.

New *ghazals* must, in other words, be descriptive of new social and political realities also. And this in a more congruous way too, Hali tells us. He criticizes the well-known incongruity and looseness of the classical *ghazals*, and invites new poets to compose *ghazals* in which e. g. the description of a season of the year, or the grace of a moonlight night or of a forest at spring-time, or the sadness of a cemetery, or the love for one's country, may be expressed by means of a continuous flow of congruous verses.

The *ghazal*— he says—resembles now those boxes of English sweets where the bonbons are in the most different shapes (round, oblong, rectangular; triangular etc.) but have all one and the same

flavour and taste. To demonstrate this he brings an interesting example from the *divān* of a contemporary poet, whose name he does not mention: he succeeds in extracting from the *ghazals* of that *divān* 23 different ways of expressing the same classical metaphor of the چاکِ گریبان “the rending of the collar” (in despair, but also told of blossoming rosebuds etc.) well known to every student of Persian, Turkish and Urdu poetry. Together with the چاکِ گریبان image he puts other time-worn, ever repeated concepts, which formed the stock-in-trade of every classical *ghazal* writer, such as رنج، چشمِ فدا، زلفِ پریشان، بادِ خوارى، رندى، توبہ شکنی، بت پرستی، چشمِ فدا، زلفِ پریشان، رنج etc. etc. etc.

If we concentrate—Hali says—all the concepts used by the classical *ghazal* writers, leaving apart repetitions and reinterpretations, it will result into something like a long “condensed” *ghazal* of a few pages including all the themes of the classical style of poetry.

This does not mean, however, that imitation (تقلید) has to be absolutely forbidden and avoided. In his opinion imitation is justified only when the imitator fills some gap or perfects or corrects some “defect” of the original. So the famous verse of Hafiz:

شبه تار یک و نیم موج و گردا به چنیں بائل  
کجا دانند حال ما سبک سارانِ ساحل با

is imitated from Sa‘di’s

از ورطه باخبر ندارد

آسوده که برکنار در یاست

but it seems that Hafiz has filled some conceptual gap in Sa'di's verse (.... اس مضمون میں گویا اس کی کوپورا کر دیا ہے، جو شیخ کے بیان میں رہ گئی تھی۔). Naziri expressed the same concept in the following form:

بہ زیر شاخ گل و انعی گزیدہ بلبل را  
نواگران، نوردہ گزند راچہ خبر

Hali's comment on this verse is interesting. He says that though Naziri has not added anything new to the concept, so that it may be said that he vanquished (چھین لیا). Hafiz, he however expresses the concept in so new a style (بدیع اسلوب) that it seems altogether new.

Ghalib however succeeded in improving even on the verse of Hafiz, adding in the second *misra* a less explicit but artistically more graphic image of the neglectful friends:

ہو مخالف و شب تار و بحر طوفان خیز  
گتہ لنگر کشتی و ناخدا خفتست<sup>x</sup>

As I consider these comparative aesthetical judgments by an Oriental particularly interesting, I shall quote some more. The Persian متاخر poet Shifa'i of Isfahan<sup>xi</sup> in his verse

مشاطہ را بگو کہ بر اسباب حسن دوست  
چیزے فزوں کند کہ تماشا بہ مار سید

wanted to express the idea that the ordinary appearance of the Beloved is not sufficient for us, and a مشاطہ ("bride – adorer") is needed to add something to the beauty of the Beloved, because it is now our turn to have a look at her. Hali discovers in this verse three defects: a) it is not



*sahih* to call *dust* a person who is not in love with him (the poet); b) it seems that that person had no original beauty of her own if she needs so much a مشاطہ to be really beautiful and attractive to the poet, and this is not nice; c) Love is born always involuntarily and as by chance; on the contrary the poet seems here to see love as something which can be directed at will.

But look—now Hali says — at the way Ghalib expresses this same concept, though in a quite different way:

زمانہ عہد میں ہے اس کے محو آرائش

بنیں گے اور ستارے اب آسماں کے لئے

(“Destiny has lost—in this Epoch of His—all his adornments: new stars are now needed for the sky.”)

In this splendid *madh*-verse Ghalib intends to convey the idea that the cosmos has no more ornaments (آرائش) for the Praised one: so it shall be necessary that new, “other” stars be created in the sky (to adorn the Praised one, the old stars being insufficient and unworthy). The idea is more or less formally the same (something must be added to adorn the person loved or praised in perfect way) but all the three defects present in the verse of Shifa‘i are here absent: the praised Person is here introduced as already perfect, but even the stars must be renewed to show themselves to him (or her) in a way worthy of his (or her) Perfection! Ghalib perhaps imitated Shifa‘i, but this kind of imitation is not only allowed, it is a recommendable perfectionment.

Let us take now the concept of unfathomable depth of esoteric “meanings” hidden even in the simplest objects of Nature.

‘Urfi of Shiraz says:

ہر کس نہ شناسندہٴ راز است و گرنہ  
اینہا ہمہ راز است کہ معلوم عوام ست

And Ghalib on the same subject:

محرم نہیں ہے تُو ہی نوا ہائے راز کا  
یاں ورنہ جو حجاب ہے پردہ ہے ساز کا

(“There is no confident here of the melodies of the Arcanum; otherwise where is the veil (حجاب) is in reality the true *parda* of that mysterious Music”.

where *parda* means both “veil” and “musical tune”).

Told in plain words, what ‘Urfi meant is that those things which seem well-known to everybody, to the vulgar, are in reality mysteries. Ghalib’s imitation is very clear (even in the outward form, in Ghalib’s verse there is a *وگرنہ* exactly corresponding to the *وگرنہ* of the original Persian) but Ghalib succeeds in “adding” something to that, saying that those things which seem to be impediments to the revealing of the Mystery, are in reality the revealers of the Secret themselves, and at the same time the *parda* (play on words!) of the arcane music. The original idea is, of course, in its turn, much older than both poets and Hali retraces it in the Qur’ān (XVII, 44).

Thus for Hali there *is* progress in Art, there is a “better” and a “more complete” in aesthetical expression, though this is meant from the point of view of mere content. In order to enrich the stock of classical imagery and to improve on the *متقدمین*, the new *ghazal*-poet

ought to imitate, eventually, not only Persian and Arabic poets, but also European literatures (Hali speaks especially of English literature) in which poetry and even more prose<sup>xii</sup> are extremely rich in new and various images, concepts and subjects for poets (this “richness in subjects” seems to impress Hali more than anything else, in comparison with the thematic poverty of the classical Persian *Bildschatz*). Also Sanscrit and بھاشا<sup>xiii</sup> can be highly useful for this purpose.

All this introduces the problem of “poetical translation”, which Hali solves very simply, saying that it is a difficult task but a task worth undertaking: some verses can even be better in translation than in the original, as for instance the following verse of Sauda (d. 1780):

کیفیتِ چشمِ اس کی مجھے یاد ہے سودا  
ساغر کو مرے ہاتھ سے لینا کہ چلا میں

(“There came to my memory the form of His eye, o Sauda; take the cup away from my hand, I am gone!”),  
translated from Naziri’s<sup>xiv</sup>

بوئے یارِ من از ایں سست وفاے آید  
گلم از دست بہ گیرید کہ از کار شد م

Criticizing this from the point of view of *balāghat*, Hali says that the idea of substituting the perfume of the rose with the comparison of the red-wine goblet as the intoxicated eye of the Beloved one is a far more *qarīn qiyās* and, above all, the *az kār shudam* of the Persian original is much heavier and out of place in its precision, than

the vague چلا میں ("I am gone", "it is finished with me") of the Urdu translation.

Here are two more examples of "translation better than the original". Unknown Persian author:

در محفل خود راہ مدہ پہچو منی را

افسردہ دل افسردہ کند انجمنی را

Urdu by Khwaja Mir Dard (d. 1785):

نہ کہیں عیش تمہارا بھی منغص ہو جائے

دوستو درد کو محفل میں نہ تم یاد کرو

("O friends! Don't even mention the name of Dard in your assembly, so that your pleasure may not be spoiled!").

The merits of this "translation" (rather an adaptation) are, according to Hali: a) To have nicely introduced his *takhallus* (درد = Sorrow) in this verse, shifting it from the *maṭla* of the *ghazal* (as it was in the original) to the *maqṭa*. b) The substitution of راہ مدہ with یاد کرو, thus emphasizing the hyperbole. Moreover یاد کرنا has in Urdu also meaning of "to call" (especially of a superior calling an inferior): so also the sense of the Persian راہ دادن is preserved, but in a more refined way, c) The first مصرعہ of the Urdu verse is *lighter* than the second مصرعہ of the Persian text, of which it is the rendering, because the Persian مصرعہ (افسردہ دل افسردہ کند انجمنی را) is a too sharp and absolute statement, whereas the Urdu verse gives the idea "so that one may not say their pleasure is spoiled..."

Sa'di:

دوستان منع کنندم کہ چرا دل تو دادم  
باید اول تو گفتن کہ چنیں خوب چرائی؟

Mir (d. 1810):

پیار کرنے کا جو خوباں ہم پہ رکھتے ہیں گناہ  
ان سے بھی تو پوچھئے ”تم اتنے کیوں پیارے ہوئے؟“

(“Those beautiful maidens who adscribe to us as a sin our having them dear—or “loving them”—one ought to ask them “why have you become so dear”?)

Even in this case Hali gives the palm to the Urdu poet-translator (or imitator): the reason he gives is that the question of the second مصرعہ must be unanswerable. Now this is not the case for Sa‘di, as, strictly speaking, an answer to the question “why are you so pretty” could perhaps be given, whereas the really unanswerable question is that of Mir, who asks the person dear to him (پیار) “Why did you become, or why were you, so dear to me?”

At the end of this paragraph on translation, Hali emphasizes again its utility, stating that the only cause (sic!) of the superiority of the Europeans in literature in modern times is that they did not leave untranslated any of the great works of foreign literary geniuses of all ages.<sup>xv</sup>

4. But the new *ghazal* needs a widening of shape still in another field: I mean the linguistic field. Not only its contents but its language too must be renewed. The present classical *ghazal*—Hali says—utilizes only a very limited *Wortschatz*. In its centuries-long process of

formation the *ghazal* created for itself a fixed language: any expression or word strange and foreign to that fixed style was felt as غیر مانوس, “unfamiliar” and rejected. This is one of the causes of the birth of the *ṣūfī* metaphors, as the *ṣūfī* poets were compelled to utilize the already codified عشقیہ and نغمیات *Wortschatz* of the *ghazal*. It is true that in the first times the Urdu *ghazal* of the Deccan type used a much wider range of words and expressions (often of a colloquial and natural kind unusual in the classical Persian), but after, in the late Delhi period and still worse in the Lucknow school,<sup>xvi</sup> the persianization of the lexicon became extreme. It can seem rather curious that Hali (as well as the majority of the Urdu critics of the new school) attributes all the faults connected with a swollen and bombastic style to the Persian influence, whereas this kind of style is generally known in Persia as “Indian style.”<sup>xvii</sup>

In order to achieve this linguistic and formal renovation Hali recommends attention to the following points:

A) Revolution in *ghazal* must be gradual. The language of the *ghazal* must remain مانوس (familiar) also for practical purposes: the vulgar like presently the old language, and we need *ghazals* first and foremost to influence their ideas.<sup>xviii</sup> The sudden introduction of unfamiliar and “strange” words, as done by certain contemporary poets, must be avoided: even the language of the Qur’ān made use of metaphors of the ancient classical pre-islamic poetry. Language is more conservative than ideas, a revolution in ideas is *not* generally followed by an immediate revolution in language. The following paragraph is an interesting example of the cautious revolutionarism of Hali:

“Let us consider that a time has come when the progress of human science has finally demonstrated the falsity of such concepts as the fixity of the earth, the existence of four elements, of a miraculous world-reflecting Cup of Jamshed, of the Water of Life hidden in the land of Darkness, of the *سیرغ، دیو، پری* etc. The task of the poet is not that of avoiding mentioning such objects any longer, nay, his perfection will consist in declaring and explaining realities, facts and true and natural ideas *just by means of* those mistaken and unfounded concepts, used as embellishments: they are a magic charm created by the Ancients, a charm which must in no way be broken, otherwise the poet will soon notice that he has lost a powerful spell to captivate the hearts of men.”

This page could be considered—and is in fact—the aesthetic manifesto of the modern Urdu writer, so different in this from the Persian.<sup>xix</sup>

In order to inculcate that “truth” Hali quotes numerous instances of well-constructed and efficacious “classical” *ghazal*-verses in which no perfectionment through new and unfamiliar words is needed. Examples are taken from the *divāns* of Hafiz, Mir Dard, Sauda, Zauq, Ghalib and Shefta.

I quote only a couple to show the literary taste of Hali: a) Look—Hali says—at the way this very simple and sound concept (مضمون): “God dwells in the hut of the poor” can be expressed in a classical form in this verse by Shefta:

فانوس و شیشہ و لگن زر سے کیا حصول

وہ ہے وہاں جہاں نہیں روغن چراغ میں

(“What is the ultimate use of lanterns and glasses and golden vessels? He abideth where there is no oil for the lamp!”)

b) And here is how Sauda expresses the idea: “those who speak of the ephemeral state of the things of the world are neglectful of their own ephemerality”

بھلا گل تو تُو ہنستا ہے ہماری بے ثباتی پر  
بتا روتی ہے کس کی ہستی مہو ہوم پر شبنم

(“The rose is laughing on our ephemeral state. But tell me: On whose evanescent Being is the dewdrop weeping?”).

As we see, Hali is far from denying importance to the classical tropes, تمثیل, استعارہ, کنایہ, etc.<sup>xx</sup> He however distinguishes between a minority of objects and situations, poetical in themselves and which need none of the embellishments taught in the treatises of علم البیان, and the majority of them, which would remain lifeless without a good use of the استعارہ etc. But Hali, with his characteristic equilibrium, hates the “bad” metaphors, i. e. those in which the intellectual effort of the poet is too apparent, or the two objects compared are conceptually too far from each other. As for instance this, worthy to be called a چیتان (enigma) rather than a comparison, embodied in a verse by Shah Naṣir:<sup>xxi</sup>

چرائی چادرِ مہتاب شب میکش نے جیجوں پر  
کٹورا صبح دوڑانے لگا خورشید گردوں پر

(“The drunken night stole the veil of the Moonshine over the Jaihun river; at dawn the sun began to let the golden goblet run around in the firmament”).



Hali finds that, “stealing the veil of Moonshine” to express the idea of “revealing the beauty of the full Moonshine” is بعید از فہم; the same reproach is addressed to those poets who compare the sun with an آہوئے مادہ, the stars with the اشک زلیخا, the letters of the alphabet with the ہرگ بنفشہ, the cup with the آب خشک etc. In any case the استعارہ Hali rightly remarks, is at the basis of many everyday idioms (محاورات) so that it can be said that the metaphor is not only a living element of poetry, but also of the colloquial language.

B) This section, for us comparatively less interesting, is devoted to a discussion of the real meaning of the terms محاورہ and روزمرہ, the first translating English *idiom*, the second used in the sense of the English word *colloquial*. غم کھانا (“to eat pain” i.e. “to be sorrowful”) is an idiom, روٹی کھانا (“to eat bread”) is a colloquial expression. The idiom, Hali thinks, renders often poetry “higher” and more efficacious, whereas colloquial expressions are rather unfit for it. Some instances follow (as customary, single verses of poets) as this verse of Mu’min (d. 1851).

کل تم جو بزم غیر میں آنکھیں چراگئے  
کھوئے گئے ہم ایسے کہ اغیار پاگئے

(“Yesterday when you stole your regards — from me, feigning neglect and disdain—in the assembly of strangers, I was so shameful and confused that the strangers guessed it”).

Here there are at least three idiomatic expressions: آنکھیں چرانا (to steal the eyes, i. e. to pay no attention) کھویا جانا (lit. “to be lost” i. e. “to become abashed and confused”) and پا جانا (“to guess” as Persian پائے بردن). This simple and idiomatic verse is, according to Hali, better (there

is more صفائی in it) than the more persianized verse by Ghalib, from which it was taken:

گرچہ ہے طرزِ تغافل پردہ دارِ رازِ عشق  
پر ہم ایسے کھوئے جاتے ہیں کہ وہ پا جائے ہے

(“Though the style of feigned neglect is the curtain-holder of the secret of Love, I was so confused that he guessed all the matter”) in which, however, two of the three above-mentioned idioms are also present.

C) About literary artifices (بدائع and صنائع) Hali recommends a *natural* (this word, in English, *نچرل* recurs very often in the *Muqaddama*) use of them. In other words they have to come as if spontaneously, بے تکلف, as in this verse of Hafiz:

بہ زیرِ دلق ملع کند ہا دارند  
دراز دستی ایں کوتہ آستیناں ہیں

Where, in the contrast دراز-کوتاہ we have a طباق and in the play of مراعات النظر a آستین with دست.

On the contrary بدائع and صنائع are not in good taste in this verse of a “famous poet” (ایک مشہور شاعر), probably a contemporary of

مرغِ دل کو توڑے گی بلی تیرے دروازہ کی  
رختِ تن کو کترے گا چوہا تمہاری ناک کا

(“The cat of thy door will tear to pieces the bird of my heart, my body will be gnawed by the mouse of thy nose!”).

Here the مراعات النظر (cat—mouse) is extremely forced and artificial.

Hali also attempts an explanation of the fact that the moderns (متاخرین) use بدائع and صنائع much more and often more artificially than the ancients (مقدمین). He says— rather naively indeed—that the moderns saw that some verses of the ancients, in which they had used plays on words, were very much liked by the people, and mistook the cause of this acceptance as due to those plays on words rather than to the forcefulness of expression; and so they began to imitate that part of the ancients’ style.<sup>xxii</sup> It is also difficult to follow him when he says that the Urdu literature is comparatively safer from such plays on words than the Persian. It depends, evidently, on the historical period chosen for the comparison.<sup>xxiii</sup>

D) The last of Hali’s recommendations for a renovation of the form of *ghazal* is of a metrical and prosodical character. The new poet — Hali says—ought to avoid the “heavy” (سنگین) and difficult metres (زین). The rhyme—though a powerful means to embellish poetry — is sometimes too تنگ, it imposes too strict limits to fancy, especially when, as in *ghazals* and especially Urdu *ghazals*, it is accompanied by the ردیف. Hali seems to have a special dislike for the ردیف, or, to put it better, for an excessive generalization of too long ردیف. Sometimes *radifs* force the poet to rather ridiculous coupling of images, as for instance:

تدبیر، پشت آئینہ، نخچیر، پشت آئینہ، تقریر پشت آئینہ etc.

He mentions the fact that European poets—to be rescued from the difficulty of rhymes—adopted the *blank verse*, but he gives no

judgement on it, though he rather seems to approve of the European system.

Summing up, Hali thinks that a renovation of *ghazal* must be achieved on the line of an amplification of its subjects (عشقیہ, مضامین) and نثریات, adding especially social and patriotic themes and avoiding useless imitation from the Ancients. Formally, a gradual revolution in style must be accomplished on the line of enlarging the *Wortschatz* and using metaphors and tropes in a more natural, moderate and simple way; introducing idioms of the common language and avoiding unnatural and cumbersome complications in rhyme and rhythm.

The importance of Hali's work and personality has been extremely great in Muslim India (he is considered with Ghalib and Iqbal one of the Big Three of Urdu Literature) as he, with both his *Ars Poetica* and his own poems (first and foremost his *Musaddas*) introduced something resembling a Romantic revolution into the classical crystallized Urdu literature. As an Italian I feel him very much akin to some of our Risorgimento poets, so enthusiastically content-conscious but often alas so incapable of understanding the deeper reasons of artistic phenomena.<sup>xxiv</sup> Actually Hali in his long and detailed analysis of the *ghazal* fails to understand fully three points.

a) The only causes of the alleged نقیث of European literature is *not* abundance of translations, nor simply the fact that it is more natural and straightforward etc.

b) That highly interesting artistic phenomenon which is the classical *ghazal*-style, with its imagery, its metaphors, its *Leit-motive* has deeper roots than those imagined by the over-simplifying mind of

Hali (we saw above some rather childish “historical” interpretations of the reasons of metaphors etc.)

c) A renovation of the *ghazal*, from the point of view of “natural art” from which Hali seems to start, is possible only through the abolition of the classical *ghazal* itself; classical *ghazal* is a highly unnatural form of Art.

We observe:

Regarding point a): Modern European lyrics is different from the classical Muslim *ghazal*-style chiefly in that European poetry is not based on a bidimensional decorative<sup>xxv</sup> visual play, but has a dynamic dimension which seems unknown to classical Muslim style. A couple of examples will suffice to illustrate what I say (of course to *connoisseurs* of the classical Persian *ghazal* only: a tentative description of what *ghazal* is would be out of place here). Let us take e. g. Rilke’s verses:

Uraltes Wehn vom Meer

welches weht

nur wie für Urgestein,

lauter Raum

reißend von weit herein . . .

That “lauter Raum reiend von weit herein” is an action totally absurd for an Oriental *ghazal*-poet. Somebody would object perhaps that even an action as that described by Hafiz,

دوش دیدم که ملائک در میخانه زدند

is equally absurd. But it is very easy to realize how different the two absurdities are. The fact of angels knocking at the tavern door is simply a moral absurdity, an exaggeration (a *mubalaga*, to use the well-known technical term) whereas in Rilke's expression a new physical plane, as it were, is introduced to suggest a new emotion. This “curving”, this possibility of moving not only on a linear-visual plane but also freely in other directions, is what renders modern European poetry *so rich in new images and subjects* (a fact which Hali rightly remarks without explaining its deeper reasons).

The same could be said of this other verse by the same German poet:

Der Heilige hob das Haupt und das Gebet

fiel wie ein Helm zurck von seinem Haupte...

It is quite improbable that to an Oriental *ghazal*-writer would ever occur the idea (for him) extremely strange of comparing a “prayer” to a “helmet”. What unites the two terms of comparison in the European poet is a common *action*, in the Oriental poet it is a common (visual) *form*. It is clear that a comparatively limited number of things have a more or less clear common form, whereas the number of things to which the fertile imagination of a poet can give a common *field of action* is practically infinite.<sup>xxvi</sup> So it happens that though oriental

metaphors are often very strange to our taste, if we go deeper, we will easily see that a certain reasonable similarity of shape, of static linear form between the two objects compared is always preserved: so the moon is compared with a face, or possibly a omelette, or even, as we saw above, a nose to a mouse, but the moon is never brought into action, in a mythical way, as a personified entity, e.g., walking with its (or her) feet on the clouds etc.<sup>xxvii</sup>

To point b): Actually we have to look for the reasons of this difference deeper, into that metaphysical background of Art which is, for the *ghazal*-style, a sort of a visual antimythical neo-platonic اشراق. So when Shelley sings, in his wonderful ode *The Cloud*, of the moon among the clouds:

...that orbéd maiden, with white fire laden  
whom mortals call the Moon,  
glides glimmering o'er my fleece-like floor  
by the midnight breezes strewn;  
and wherever the heat of her unseen feet  
(which only the Angels hear)  
may have broken the woof of my tent's thin roof  
the stars peep behind her and peer...

he is instinctively still connected with a *pagan* mythologizing world. Every orientalist knows how many thousands of *ghazal* verses include metaphors and comparisons having as chief ingredient the moon, but I

think everybody will agree when I say that nowhere in the infinite number of classical *divāns* we could find such a moon-image as in Shelley's *Cloud*. The moon breaking the woof of the cloud's tent by the gentle touch of her feet is an absurdity to the *ghazal* writer — because the moon has no feet! The moon can only be compared with more or less round objects, or luminous objects, or possibly yellow objects, or, when it is *hilāl* with ships and vessels, but cannot *walk*: this, for a *ghazal*-writer would amount, consciously or not, to بہت پرستی. And all this, we would add, cannot be renewed or reformed without in the same time renewing or reforming neo-platonic Islam itself.

To point c): So the logical issue of Hali's pleading for a "natural" reform of poetry would be the automatic annihilation of the *ghazal* itself and ultimately (though he is prudently opposed to all "excesses") the introduction of that simple *blank-verse*-style which is now attempted also in Muslim countries by some modern progressive writers. Hali would mark so the starting point of an evolution in Art quite different from that initiated, *inside* the *ghazal*-style, in a masterly way, by Ghalib. The idea often expressed by Eastern and Western historians of Urdu literature that Hali is a link in the evolution Ghalib-Hali-Iqbal is only partially true. The real renovator of the *ghazal* style is Ghalib, who succeeds in this in a way quite far from the *natural style* advocated by Hali (Ghalib is one of the perhaps *less natural* Urdu poets). When Ghalib writes verses like

جادہ چوں نبض تپاں در تن صحرابونند

("they see the Road as a pulsating vein in the body of the Desert") or



ہر قدم دوری منزل ہے نمایاں مجھ سے

میری رفتار سے بھاگے ہے بیاباں مجھ سے

(“At every step I see the distance from the Station deeper and clearer: deserts have run away under my gait”) or when in some perfect verses in his *مثنوی ابر گوہر بار* he expresses his dislike for the “fixed” and eternal paradise of lights of the traditional religions, he shows both a complete mastery of the old style and a taste for dynamic images unknown to his predecessors. Of course Ghalib’s system for the reform of *ghazal* is the “narrow path”: Ghalib is one of the most *difficult* poets of the Urdu-Persian literature. Hali, as a romantic oversimplifier (his *Musaddas* could be translated by an able versifier into European stanzas with great ease) is rather in sharp contrast with Ghalib. The core of all his *Ars Poetica* could be poetically summarized with the following verses taken from his *Divān*:

If poetry is not charming (دلفریب) don’t be sad,

regret you must feel if poetry is not heart-melting (دلگداز).

The entire world can be allured by Art,

when it comes from your sincerity (سادگی) not from play (باز)

If in thy personality (ذات) there is the pearl of Truth (حقیقت)

Time will praise thee spontaneously (بے نیاز);

Gone are the days in which Lying was the faith of Poets,

don’t pray any more with thy face turned towards that Qibla!



## NOTES

- <sup>i</sup> I don't know however of any important study of Hali by European Orientalists, who generally devote to Urdu literature an amount of work far inferior to the importance of this Muslim language, written and spoken by a far greater number of persons than Arabic itself. Especially modern Urdu literature — with personalities as those of Ghalib (d. 1869), Hali (d. 1914), M. Iqbal (d. 1938), Faiz A. Faiz (a living progressive poet presently in jail in Pakistan) etc. — is a subject of study perhaps more repaying than that of contemporary Persian literature. A summary bibliography on Hali (see Dr. Vahid Quraishi's edition of the *Mqaddama* quoted below) is the following:

امین زبیری: تذکرہ شمس العلماء خواجہ حالی مرحوم۔ 1925ء  
 شیخ محمد اسماعیل پانی پتی: تذکرہ حالی۔ پانی پت 1935ء  
 صادق قریشی: ذکر حالی۔ لاہور 1949ء  
 نصیح زیدی (مرتب): مقالات یوم حالی۔ کراچی 1951ء  
 الطاف حسین حالی: مقدمہ شعر و شاعری۔ مرتب ڈاکٹر وحید قریشی۔ لاہور 1953ء  
 محمد عبدالحق: چند ہمعصر۔ کراچی 1953ء، ص 144-163  
 ڈاکٹر ابوالہیث صدیقی: تذکرہ حالی۔ علی گڑھ۔ بلا تارخ  
 صالحہ عابد حسین: یادگار حالی۔ علی گڑھ: انجمن ترقی اردو۔ بلا تارخ  
 شری جو الا پرشاد: حالی اور ان کی کویہ (ہندی میں)۔ بلا تارخ

M. Tahir Jamil: *Hali's poetry. A Study*. Bombay 1938.

- There are of course numerous articles on him (often rather poor) in Urdu literary magazines. Especially interesting are the *Hali Numbers* of the same. Particularly valuable that of the magazine *روز* organ of the Anjuman-i taraqqi-i Urdu (Karachi, April, 1952); see also the *Hali Number* of the periodical *زمانہ* (Dec. 1935) and the article devoted to Hali in the "Personalities Number" (شخصیات نمبر) of the elegant and valuable magazine *نقوش* (Lahore, 1954) by غلام حسین (pp. 26-35)
- <sup>ii</sup> Shibli Nu'mani (d. 1914) author of famous critical works on Islamic literatures. His *شعر العجم*, a History of Persian Literature in Urdu in 5 vols. was amply utilized by E. G. Browne.
- <sup>iii</sup> It constitutes the second number of a splendidly printed (in movable characters, which is still rather an exception in Pakistan and Muslim India) collection of "Urdu Classics" (*Urdu Klasiki Adab*). The *Maktaba-e-Jadid* is one of the best new publishing houses of Lahore, and gives particular attention to young and progressive writers.
- <sup>iv</sup> It is really astonishing (and another proof of the scarce value wrongly attributed by European Orientalists to Urdu literature) to see that no European Orientalist—at my notice at least—devoted a monograph to this poet, in my opinion the greatest Muslim poet of the XIX century.

- v Bibliography on Iqbal is enormously growing especially now that the Poet is recognized by Pakistanis as the spiritual originator of the Pakistan movement and their national poet-philosopher. For an essential bibliography on him see A. Bausani. *Il Poema Celeste*. Roma, 1952; id. *The Concept of Time in Iqbal's Religious Philosophy in: Die Welt des Islam*, Leiden 1951 pp. 158-186; id. *Satana nell'opera filosofico-poetica di M. Iqbal* in: 'di RSO (Roma) vol. XXX (1955) pp. 55-102.
- vi Hali in his "Life of Sa'di" (*Hayat-i Sa'di*), pp. 188-192) quotes passages to demonstrate that the Persian poet did often exactly the contrary, i.e. adorned with the garment of *majāzi* love a real (*haqiqi*) love.
- vii This idea of Hali, together with that expressed by him some pages further (see notes 17 and 23) amounts to say that in general Persian poetry is more artificial than Urdu poetry, and can hardly be shared by a knower of Persian literature in its historical development. Actually—seen from an Indian perspective—the maximum of Persian influence on India being exercised in the Mughal period, XV-XIX cc.), this opinion can become understandable, if not approvable. Persia influenced India, just at the beginning and during the course of its literary and moral decadence. So the so-called Indian style of the Persian poets of the Mughal court was born, a style famous for its bombast and exaggerated subtleties and bad taste. This style on its turn influenced the Urdu literature of the Delhi and Lucknow periods, while the original Deccan Urdu was one of great simplicity and freshness.
- viii An article on کفر in classical Persian and Urdu poetry can be read in a recent number of the Pakistani literary magazine اردو ادب (Aftab Ahmad. شاعری میں کفر pp. 10-24 of n. 1, s. d. but prob. 1954).
- ix This famous *Musaddas* of Hali (so known by antonomasy. Its title is مد و جز اسلام "Ebb and Tide of Islam") represents really something new in the classical Muslim literature, both for the dignified simpleness of style (sometimes even falling into shallowness) and for its epic inspiration (rather rare in Islamic literatures).
- x This verse of Ghalib is quoted more than once in the *Muqaddama* and evidently Hali liked that image very much: he openly imitated it just in the first stanzas of his *Musaddas*.
- xi The well-known poet and physician of the court of Shah 'Abbas. Cfr. E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persian*. Cambridge, 1951—53, vol. IV, p. 256.
- xii Hali did not know English: what he knew of English literature and literary taste was through translations or through oral information obtained from English knowing friends, See Vahid Quraishi op. cit., p. 67 ff.
- xiii By لالو is meant here لالو لالو *lalo sensa*, perhaps including all the post-Sancritic literature in Western Hindi.
- xiv Naziri (d. 1612-13) is one of the numerous Persian poets (he was of Nishapur) who migrated to Mughal India. He still enjoys a far wider popularity in India and Pakistan

than in Persia. For a قصیدہ مصرعہ by Naziri Iqbal (see his پیام مشرق p. 188) would have given all the reign of Jamshed.

xv This and other instances that we have already remarked (e.g. the reasons given for the “homosexual” form of classical *ghazal* poetry etc.) are good examples of the illuministic naiveness which remained until recently a characteristic of certain Muslim progressive thinkers. This is rightly and exactly admitted and emphasized by Dr. Quraishi in his already quoted and really remarkable introduction to his re-edition of the *Muqaddama* (pp. 95-96) where he also criticizes the منطقی مغالطے اور الجھنیں (“logical misunderstandings and confusions”) of the first Muslim modernists of India such as Sir Sayyid Ahmad and other collaborators of his magazine تہذیب الاخلاق.

xvi I suppose in the reader a general knowledge of the evolution of Urdu literature. See T. G. Bailey. *Urdu Literature*, Calcutta-London, 1932.

xvii See note 7.

xviii This shows another basic component of Hali's aesthetic thought: he is clearly in favour of the poetry *à thèse*, and against the concept of ادب برائے ادب (“Art for Art's sake”). This is also very clear from the verses quoted at the end of this paper.

xix It seems to me that contemporary Iranian poetry did not yet succeed in reaching a formal and contentistic equilibrium between classical heritage and modernism. It oscillates between pure aesthetism and total imitation of some kind of Western revolutionary art.

xx All these matters too I consider known to my readers. Otherwise consult the pp. 19ff. of the above quoted *History* of Browne.

xxi A poet of Delhi (d. 1810) famous for his elaborate style.

xxii See note 13.

xxiii See note 7. Hali's criticism of Persian poetry and his appreciation of Arabic and Hebrew poetry (this last known by him in translations from the Bible), have been inherited by the younger generations of Indo-Muslim thinkers (including Iqbal). During my recent visit to Pakistan I had occasion to remark how much the study of Persian language and culture has lost ground in that country, whereas the study of Arabic is much more fostered. For Hali Arabic (especially old Arabic) and Hebrew poetry possessed in high degree a quality which is, in his opinion, of first rate importance in poetry i.e. عشق (passion) (See *Muqaddama* pp. 160 ff.). For him perhaps less clearly and less consciously, for others (especially Iqbal) in a more determinate way, a return to Arabic “passion” means a revaluation of Semitic absolute monotheism as against the new-platonic “deterioration” of Islam typical of Persian aesthetical taste.

xxiv What Hali wanted poetry to be, could perhaps expressed by those famous words of Milton (*Traclate of Educaiton* ed. Morris, London 1895, p. 18)... poetry...being... more simple, sensuous and passionate” words enthusiastically approved by

romantics as Coleridge as a fitting definition of Poetry. Hali indirectly knew something of those Miltonian ideas of poetry.

<sup>xxv</sup> Actually, though Hali here and there states that form (لفظ) and contents (معنی) are in the relation of body (جسم) to soul (روح), he more often remains attached to the old canon of Muslim literary criticism, which sees rather this relation as one of body to “garment” (لباس). His sharp and artificial distinction of لفظ and معنی is one of the greatest handicaps of Hali a literary criticism and shows him partly still a follower of the classical “decorative” taste.

<sup>xxvi</sup> See interesting remarks on this in H. Ritter’s *Über die Bildersprache Nizamis*. Berlin-Leipzig, 1927.

<sup>xxvii</sup> One of the consequences of all this is that an Urdu poet can write poetry in a foreign language (as Persian) more easily than, say, a German poet in Italian or vice-versa. It is interesting that Hali had remarked that in his book on Ghalib (یادگار غالب) p. 388 ff.) where he maintains that one of the differences between European and Asiatic (sic!) art is that the first aims at “interpretation of Nature” (نیچر کی ترجمانی), the second is a purely verbal perfectionment—brought to extreme degrees of نزاکت—of a certain given world of images (those first “invented” by the مستقدمین). In this way Hali says: for an Asiatic poet it is not so difficult as for a European to compose poetry in a foreign language (as Ghalib masterly did in Persian).