

The Uncreated Garden: A Commentary on Ghalib's "Rejected" Verses

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There are presently three commentaries on the corpus of verses that Ghalib did not include in his published Divan: Abdul Bari Asi's, *Mukammal Sharh-e Kalam-e Ghalib*, Gyan Chand Jain's, *Tafseer-e Ghalib* and S. M. Zamin Kantoori's, *Sharh-e Divan-e Ghalib*. In this column I will present she'rs that are arguably among the best of Ghalib's compositions but have not received the attention they deserve because they were not a part of his Divan. I will translate the she'r into English because my aim is to open Ghalib's poetry to a wider readership. Translation in itself is an interpretation. My analysis of the she'rs will summarize the noteworthy points of the commentators who have preceded me followed by my own comments.

This matla' is of ghazal # 112 from the *Nuskha-e Hamidiyya*, edited by Hamid Ahmad Khan, Lahore 1969 p. 134; it was composed before 1821.

1.

ہوں بہ وحشت انتظار آوارنہ دشتِ خیال
اک سفیدی مارتی ہے دور سے چشمِ غزال
I roam the wilds of imagination
in terrified/solitary anticipation;
the gazelle's eye is a white speck
in the distance

Vocabulary:

vahshat: solitude, loneliness, dear, terror, timidity, wildness

intizar avarah: restless waiting

dasht: wilderness, desert

ghizal: gazelle, deer

chashm-e ghizal: (terrified) eyes of a gazelle

Asi: My state of solitude (a'lam-e vahshat) and waiting has made me roam the valley of thoughts; and now my state is such that the eye of the gazelle that is wild (vahshi mijaz) appears like a white spot in the distance. In short I am far from the gazelle and my state of vahshat is quite different from the gazelle.

Jain: Waiting for the beautiful beloved has put me in a restless state. My mind's eye is wandering. The deer's eye is known to be wild and scared but I have run so far in the valley of imagination that the deer's eye is just a white spot.

Kantoori: Like a disappointed lover I roam in the wilderness of imagination; just as a hunter runs after a gazelle upon seeing a glimpse of the white of its eye.

MAF: An extraordinary she'r with layers of meaning and evocative imagery. Kantoori's reading is appealing in that it paints a poignant picture of a disappointed lover. I prefer to go further with the *dasht-e khiyal* motif. The gazelle runs fast but the speaker of the poem has outdistanced the gazelle in the valley of imagination [dasht-e khiyal] so much so that only the whites of the eyes can be made out. The gazelle runs away because it is *vahshi*, or wild, scared, shy, unsociable, untamed etc. The conceit is that whites of the eyes become prominent when one rolls the eyes, a sign of distress or *vahshat*, madness if you will. Thus the gazelle and the speaker are both terrified, bewildered *vahshatzadah* creatures. The speaker is running in world of ideas. Ghalib the master poet has juxtaposed the two images, of thoughts running wild and the gazelle running wild. *Safedi marna* also means to see a spark at a distance. It can be compared to the spark of a new idea. *Intizar avarah* is a new expression.

The exact meaning of *vahshat*'s polysemy is difficult to capture in English. Its poetic potential is mined fully by Ghalib and ghazal poetry in general. While I appreciate Asi's observation that solitude has made the mind wander, it is difficult to follow the rest of his explanation. Jain's reading is closer to the actual text.