Ilse: AATT Donation

IS THIS MAN CRAZY?

The mostly rhetorical question in what is supposed to be a catchy title is not intended to indicate that I will be talking about the psychology of someone who would agree to travel *to* New York City especially in the middle of February. In actuality, travelling to New York in the middle of February is symptomatic of my rather pathetic compulsion to talk to anyone who shows even the slightest interest in Ottoman poetry. Thus the question of craziness becomes a question of why one would bother to study a subject in which there is so little interest and about which, by many accounts, there is so little to be interested in.

The study of

Anyone who goes into Near Eastern literature of any sort is opting for a somewhat marginal position, although there are some quite respectable choices of specialty: for example, pre-Islamic poetry, Abu Nuwas, Hafiz, the Shahname, modern anything, to name a few. Nonetheless, there is a sort of scholarly dead-zone running from the death of Câmî or the latter part of the 15th century, up to the emergence of the modern, westernized literatures. As a test you might quickly try to think of all the western scholars of Arabic, Persian, or Turkish who are working primarily on this period. It is no coincidence in my mind that this period corresponds exactly to the era of Ottoman and/or Turkish hegemony over ~~almost the whole~~ a large part of the Near East.

Wolfenbüttelter forschungen 17 The town & State Physician
Andrew W. Russell ~~1979~~ 1981

As we know, the Ottomans existed primarily for the benefit of historians of every type. They fought innumerable battles all over three continents and several seas, and developed a massive bureaucracy which administered a highly complex political and economic entity by churning out enough unreadable documents to keep historians busy right through the next millenium. To be sure, the Ottomans also churned out a mountain of ***belle lettres***--enough to engage scholars of literature also for a geologically significant period. But, sadly, this is not a literature deemed worthy of serious interest and those who choose to take it seriously are tolerated [redacted] or even, at times, respected in the same way as one respects the hermit who retreats to meditate on higher things in a cave on a cold, wind-swept peak above the tree-line where nothing grows--the kind of respect we give to manifestations of incomprehensible spiritual madness.

What I now propose to do is to outline and illustrate for you some of the major arguments I use to convince myself that I am not indeed crazy, that I am not a scholarly hermit, and that, on the contrary, I am doing meaningful work in and for the world. This apology or defence must begin with a brief statement of a few theoretical principles that I find to be especially true and especially pertainent to the case at hand. Those who are familiar with the theoretical winds that blow through post-positivist, post-structuralist, post-modernist criticism will recognize the very complex antecedents of my necessarily reductionist account. Those who are not thus familiar will have an easier time and, perhaps, more reason to continue to think me somewhat mad.

The most liberating and, for many literary scholars, the most troubling recent trend in critical thinking is the viewing of literature as part of a broad textual proletariat--literature with its sleeves rolled up, its hands dirty, doing the work of the world. There is a suspicion going about that literature is not really engaged in the transcendent task of representing a class of essences, or ideals, or unities, or presences temporarily not at home, and that it is, in fact, busily creating the illusion of vacationing essences, ideals, and so forth in order to perform its actual, mundane tasks more effectively.

If representation is a strategy and not an end, then to what end the strategy? ~~When the hands are dirty they are truly dirty and~~ The bottom line here, as elsewhere, is power. The business of literature because is what one theorist calls the "disciplining of desire," making us ardently wish for one set of conditions instead of another, making one set of conditions (and, hence, one manner of exercising power) seem right, and true, and normal. Thus literature is manipulation; it is quite literally propaganda; it is fully engaged in the processes of history. Not only are we asked to abandon the illusion of a pristine vantage point for literature, but we are, in some theoretical formulations, asked to believe that the way we experience literature is the way we experience everything--what we know we know in the way we know texts.

There is, of course, more to it than this and we will explore some ramifications of the above theoretical ***pot-pourri*** in the rest of this account. However, even a glimpse should indicate why a range of literary critics from New Critics and Pluralists to un-

deconstructed Structuralists and newly risen defenders of the traditional canon are rushing to man the barricades against the end of literature-as-we-know-it. The magic kingdom of the "aesthetic" is in danger of being seen as a part of everything else, no walls, no special realm, [redacted]!'" Poetry's precious and innocent ideals are being thrown open to the poking and prodding of musty-dusty historians, anthropologists in blue jeans, feminists, people of color and the like. Despite last ditch efforts to save literature for the English Department, the breach is wide and the opposition strong.

If I appear to show an unseemly glee at the discomfiture of some of my colleagues in literature, it is not because I lack respect for, pre-post-modern critical thought and thinkers but because they or the perspective they represent is responsible for rejecting or excluding the literature in which I am interested. Let me give you an example of what I mean.

--in passing--

In another paper I am working on, I examine some of the ramifications for Ottoman poetry of the more or less recent "Hafiz' unities" or "*agar ân tork-e shîrâzî*" debate among some of the brightest and best in Persian literature. In the course of the debate over a period of at least 30 years, any number of scholars--myself included--made a stab or two at demonstrating classical unities in Persian and Ottoman poetry. In my opinion, the end point [redacted] of the debate comes in Michael Hillman's book ***Unity in the Ghazals of Hafez***, when, as a result of lengthy

analysis he rejects the key poem of the discussion, the third ghazal of Hafez, ("*agar ân tork-e*. . .) as a non-poem.

I think that Michael Hillman is quite clever, true to his principles, and forthright almost to a fault. He seems to me to be correct: if we elevate Aristotelian concepts of unity to principles that, from an ahistorical source, saturate every nook and cranny of history , then "*agar ân tork-e shîrâzî*" is not really a poem, and, what is more, neither are the majority of the verses written after Hafez including virtually all of Ottoman poetry. What Hillman has done then is to demonstrate that an attempt to reconstruct Perso-Ottoman poetry on an Aristotelian model produces a pattern of acceptance and rejection that closely parallels the common view--proving, on the one hand, the quite obvious fact that the common view is based on the hegemony of a Western perspective on literature descended from Aristotle; and on the other hand, suggesting that the claim of this perspective to a privileged, universal position is purest poppycock.

The problem with Ottoman poetry from the perspective of traditional western literary consciousness is that it resists, or defies, or rejects being reconstructed as some form of traditional western literature. I would assert, moreover, that this resistance is exceptionally vividly and meaningfully manifested in Ottoman poetry. This is to say that like other non-western literatures, but in a more graphic way, Ottoman poetry displays certain features--full engagement in historical processes and the assertion of power, a relentless foregrounding of its own poetic devices, the hegemonic, ideologically directed nature of its

discourse--features that call into question some of our cherished beliefs about the "aesthetic" or "literary." From the perspective of western discourse Ottoman poetry is guilty of literary indecent exposure. As the naked native was to Victorian explorers, so it is in our eyes both an affront to what is right, decent, and normal, and a sign of that essential cultural and racial inferiority that arouses the bemused tolerance or prurient interest of the superior.

Let me illustrate for you what I mean by literary indecent exposure. On the most obviously mundane level, Ottoman poetry displays its economic realities, its poetic modes of production without much in the way of concealment. The upper echelon of poets as a matter of course turned out panegyrics on holidays and special occasions and were paid, out of the official treasury, varying amounts which were duely recorded in official registers (***in'amat defterleri***): "for a panegyric on the feast day to so and so an embroidered garment, to such and such one thousand silver coins, and so on." Poetry plainly visible as part of the business of state.

The purposes of this state business are also made quite manifest. The historian Ali, for example, relates a story about the poet Revânî who began his career during the reign of Bayezid II for whom, during the blackest part of a cold and snowy winter, he wrote a not-too-bad ***şitâye*** or "winter panegyric" with the ***redif*** (repeated final word or phrase) ***berf*** or "snow." Some years later, after the demise of Bayezit, this same Revânî accompanied the new Sultan, Selim I, on the latter's successful campaign into Egypt. On the way home, the Sultan and his retinue were camped in the Syrian desert. Because of the time of year perhaps, Revani decided to brush off his

old winter panegyric, change the dedication from Bayezit to his son and try it out on the assembled court and local dignitaries. The results were disappointing. The Sultan remarked, "What a ridiculous idea! What -do these people (indicating the Syrian visitors) know of snow!" And poor Revani was awarded no recompense whatsoever, not even the fur coat that his poem points out as a suitable choice. The Sultan's response to the poem clearly indicates that the panegyric, although *to* the Sultan, was considered to be *for* the edification of those present at court. Like a good advertising executive, the Sultan rejects a theme that will not strike a response in the local audience--"No, Revani, snow poems just don't fly down here in the desert."

The image of poor old Revani camped in the desert reading out his poem before the court, hoping for a fur coat does not in the least fit our prefered picture of poetic activity. More to our liking is the figure of a Wordsworth in the wilds of the Lake Country brooding over a field of golden daffodils or a cottager's attractive daughter. For us, real poetry is lyric poetry. I cannot think, for example, that I have heard of an English department that offers a course on panegyric. How many anthologies of English Literature contain panegyrics? Yet every Ottoman poet's ***divan*** (or collected poems) has a section of ***kasides*** before one even gets to the lyric poems.

That panegyrics make us uncomfortable, is obvious. But Ottoman lyrics do not go far either in meeting our expectations for poetic modesty. For example, by the rules of a quite intractable convention, virtually all Ottoman lyrics are about

either passionate love or obsessive intoxication. The beloved or the cup stands in a position of complete authority over the lover/~~toper~~ drunkard. Both the dominance of one side and the submission of the other are complete and unquestioned. For example, the poet Necati, who died in the early years of the sixteenth century, refers to the lover's typical groveling at the beloved's door thusly:

> Te'ŝîr iderdi kevkeb-i ʿizzet Necâtî'ye
> Nârencî cizme kebkebi itse yüzinde yir
> (***divan*** 193, no.77)
>
> The star of fortune has had its effect on Necati,
> If on his face show the hobnails of her orange boots.

or, in another place,

> Dimez nice sürinürsin kapumda sen de ġarîb
> Kimesne benceleyin olmasun vaṭanda garîb
> (p.159,no.24)
>
> She never even says,"How you prostrate yourself at my door, be gone, strange one!"
> Let no one be like me, a stranger in his own land.

For the lover his homeland is the dust of his lover's courtyard where he prostrates himself, fortunate if she but deign to step on his face. Note also the linking by a deficient homonymy (***cinas-i nakis***) between ***kevkeb***, the stars in the sky, and ***kebkeb***, the hobnails that produce a constellation of marks on the lover's face. Is this extreme? Of course it is but neither is it unusual and if one considers that the beloved is constantly associated with the ruler--she is regularly called 'ruler' or 'monarch'--it all but impossible to avoid facing up to the intermingling of so -called "love poetry" and the rhetoric of power that permeates the literary discourse of the Ottoman state.

In ***Poetry's Voice*** I have gone into some detail to show how this dominance-submission pattern, the rhetoric of power, articulates itself in Ottoman lyrics through the thematic linking of political, religious, and psychological motives, and in the social realm through the ritualized acting-out of a poetic drinking-party-with-beloved. Implicit in this same set of motives is a definite socio-political structure with an in-group--the moths about the beloved's flame, the party-goers, the dervishes, the slaves of the sultan, the emotionally sensitive and aware--gathered in their special locale allegorized as a garden surrounded by a hostile, dangerous exterior peopled by enemies--the beloved's chaperones, rivals-in-love, bigoted and prudish religious zealots, the worldly, cold and insensitive, rivals for political power.

The in-group is distinguished by enhanced perception which permits them to see through the illusions of this-worldly reality or of the social proprieties that separate lover and beloved and allows

them to see beyond the surface meaning of Holy Writ and Prophetic example. This ability to perceive the true truth, to interpret this world correctly, confers immense power, a power popularly symbolized by the seemingly magical abilities of the dervish adepts--flying on a carpet, miraculous cures, imperviousness to injury, reading of future or distant events. The Ottoman aesthetic perspective (like the religious perspective) is essentially idealist; reality is a sign for a non-present but ultimately real, ahistorical presence. But nonetheless, their perspective on the relation between human beings and the physical universe, their notion of how human beings know the world, would not be out of place in the present post-structuralist discourse. The world is seen textually, as a text, a text that is interpreted with varying levels of sophistication and accuracy, perfect accuracy bestowing the ability to manipulate the accidental aspects of the real: time, place, matter. This vision of the real and the actual as existing in a metaphorical relation is acted out in the poetry by the very common device of using a Turkish verb in its literal and idiomatic senses simultaneously, so that it is impossible to insist on one reading or another. For example, Necati's

> Baña yâruñ yañagi vü-lebi-vü-ḳaddı yeter
> Üzül ey gül açıl ey ġonca yıḳıl ey ʿarʿar
>
> To me the beloved's cheek and lip and body
> are enough;
> Be worn to tatters, oh rose; blow (and fade),
> oh bud; topple, oh juniper.

The translation represents the more literal reading using a quite standard set of comparisons with the "rose-cheek," the "bud-like mouth" and the body like a stately tree. However, the three Turkish verbs in the second half-line have (and had in Necati's day) the idiomatic meanings: "be sorry or ashamed" for ***üzül***, "go away" for ***açıl***, and "get lost" for ***yıkıl***. Thus the rose, rosebud, and juniper literally fade, bloom, and topple while also, as personified by the poet's direct address, are told to be off, ashamed of their lack of beauty in comparison to the beloved. This is a rather simple example of a common poetic device that is used over and over again, in my opinion, because it is seen by the poets and their audiences to display something fundamental about both literary texts and the world-text: there is a surface interpretation and a deep interpretation, and mastery of both confers power.

With this we might return to the correctly interpreting in-group-with-beloved and focus on its exclusivity and self-sufficiency. The group may be characterized as jealous of its special relation to the beloved; it hoards its vision of the truth; it does not seek to educate and thus include a larger group but rather speaks in an ostensibly obscure, figurative language. It is not difficult to see how the tendency to form a group which then excludes other groups, a tendency which I have called "compartmentalization" in another paper, is acted out in the socio-political arena of the Empire.

In the Ottoman ideological climate, subjects were encouraged to identify narrowly with a particular religious, ethnic, or occupational group. Each group would set its own ritual and establish its own relations to the beloved or authority figure.

Even the state itself resisted gestures of inclusion such as foriegn (or more accurately, European) language competence among members of the ruling elites. The beloved/authority figure itself constituted a self-sufficient compartment, its power permeating all other groups and group activities but itself in no way contingent upon the participation or approval of any other group.

The Ottoman poetic realm, I would argue, calls insistently for the same reading as the socio-political realm. A prime aesthetic principle in ***divan*** poetry is for each ***beyt*** (each couplet) to approach the maximum self-sufficiency, what I would call "completeness." Completeness is manifested in a poetic line when it is so replete with meaning that it seems impossible that anything could be added. Obviously, the same sort of thing is said about any valued line of poetry in the western tradition, and probably in every other tradition as well. However, in my opinion, the Ottoman sort of completeness is different and different in ways that our western tradition would be unlikely to value. Consider, for example, the following line of Necati's from a ***kaside*** on the official signature of the sultan,

> Żımnında mużmer olmasa bir tîġ-i âb-dâr
> Pûlâd beyża vaż'ına olmazdi her nişân
>
> Were there not a bright sword secreted within it,
> Every royal signature would not come in the shape of a steel egg.

This line is a favorite of mine because of the trouble I had making sense of it on the first encounter. Part of the image is clear if one visualises the Sultan's ***tuġra.*** The terminations of two of the letters from the text--usually reading "sultan so-and-so son of sultan so-and-so, enternally victorious"--sweep out to the left and back in a nested oval shape, cross the top of the text and end in two flourishes to the right. The oval shape is called "the egg" and through its center runs the extended termination of another letter. This latter stroke, usually curved and pointed, is obviously the "sword" in the "egg." What remains, however, is the question of what the real-world point of the comparison might be: what is the "steel egg" that has an actual sword in it? And then there is the less obvious question: why the emphasis on hiddenness, concealment, the secret, implied but not stated part of something all of which are conveyed by the words ***żımn*** and ***mużmer***?

I wish I had solved the mystery of the "steel egg" myself but as it happens, my friend ~~colleague~~, late prof. Mehmed Çavuşoğlu, provided a possible solution out of a reference he ran across in Sudi's commentary on Hafiz. It seems that raw steel, at least in some places in the Near East, came in the form of egg-shaped or oval ingots. Thus the sword is bright because it is newly beaten from an ingot. It is also true that ``***beyża***'' or ``ostritch egg'' was a metaphor for anything shiny and especially a shiny sword since pre-Islamic times. In this case, however, the sword is secret, hidden in the interior of the egg because the ingot only implies the sword. Now the word ***żımn*** (interior) becomes more meaningful as the commonly used senses of "an implied meaning" and "a sub-text, or text embedded in another text" come into play. The signature becomes a

synechdoche for the message to which it is affixed and the royal command is seen to have embedded in it the threat of Ottoman military might; the division of the ruling establishment into "those of the pen" (***ehl-i kalem***) and "those of the sword" (***ehl-i sayf***) is resolved in the signature of the sultan--an act of the pen that subsumes the power of the sword--and, by extension, in the person of the sultan himself. Thus too, the new sword, the bright, shining, and, especially, untarnished sword, cannot but recall the conventional image of the bright, polished, untarnished mirror that is the soul of the mystical adept--one of the roles traditionally assigned to the sultan/beloved. One could go on, but I think you see the point.

When one considers such a line, it becomes difficult to see how it would be possible to get more into a twelve word statement, or how such a statement could be expanded upon by a subsequent statement. This is what I mean by "completeness," a complexity and fulness of meaning arising from a shared awareness of a very stable set of conventions, which leaves no room for expansion or organic links to other elements. Necati's treatment of a conceit might be compared to Donne's in the following often commented upon example,

If they be two, they are two so
As stiffe twin compasses are two.
Thy soule the fixt foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the'other doe.

And though it in the center sit
Yet when the other far doth rome,
It leanes and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

So wilt thou be to mee, who must
Like th'other foot, obliquely runne:
Thy firmnes drawes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begunne.

(coffin, p. 39)

For an Ottoman poet, the expenditure of three quatrains and eighty three words to develop a single simile would be a sign of an inexcusable lack of skill and care. Moreover, Donne's detailing of the simile would be considered not only tedious but insulting to the intelligence of the reader. This comparison points to major differences in audience, expectations, and poetic convention. The Ottoman poet focuses on completeness and exclusivity. A line that stands alone, like the noble ~~gasses whose atoms resist bonding with anything else,~~ is a masterful line. This principle is enshrined in the tradition of ***nâẓire*** or parallel poems in which poets compete by trying to produce a line or lines that use another poet's imagry and vocabulary more appropriately and completely. Consider

also that the emphasis on complete, self-sufficient lines results in poems that seem unusual to us: not the poem as a linked or organic unity, but the poem as a concatenation, a compartment of exclusive compartments in which the most complete couplet is called the "royal couplet" or "crown line" (***şâh beyt*** or ***tâc beyt***). Thus we return to the themes of rule, mastery, the assumption of power, the exclusive realm. It always seems to me difficult to ***avoid*** seeing an unbroken continuity of motives in the forms of Ottoman poetry and the Ottoman political/social order.

Changing the viewpoint a bit, it seems quite possible that Donne or a successor might well have managed to develop the compasses conceit fully in 12 words or 28 syllables had there been available a several hundred years tradition of compasses conceits. However, in Donne's tradition--or our present reading of Donne's tradition--the creation of a conceit, its original statement is valued highly, the elaboration or perfection of the conceit is valued little or not at all.

I have a friend and colleague, a brilliant literary scholar and critic, whose primary career is in English literature but who has done masterful work on Persian literature as well. One day he was musing more or less in my direction and said something like the following, "the truly interesting periods are those points of transition and discovery when everything was new and exciting, before the machine of poetic craft takes over and begins grinding out poems." I was greatly struck by this because it so eloquently stated a position that I myself believed without question until I became involved with Ottoman poetry.

By a miracle of serendipidy, exactly one day after the above reported encounter, I was talking to ~~a Turkish Ottomanist~~ Professor Şavaşoğlu ~~colleague~~ about a joint study of the Ottoman ***kaside***, which we were planning. The question arose as to whether or not we would look back as far as Ahmedî and Şeyhî--that is, to one of those "exciting" transitional periods. "I think not," ~~my friend~~ Şavaşoğlu said, "Why bother with a time when they didn't really know what they were doing?"

In the course of the above remarks, I have been trying to convey a sense of the way Ottoman poetry rejects or excludes important aspects of our western perspective; how it thematically and formally isolates itself within an exclusive grouping or statement. It seems reasonable to assert that a focus on the new, the original, the moment of change and transition is an inclusive focus. At such moments differences of culture and perspective are minimized--a state of affairs that we tend to value. But when artists "really know what they are doing," when art is fully integrated into the business of life, then is the exclusive moment, the moment of the topical, the refined, the conventional.

Because Ottoman poetry so powerfully marginalizes the west and western aesthetics, it also treats westerners to a perspective on art that makes us profoundly uncomfortable. At the instant when the hegemonic discourse or rhetoric of power has been most effectively normalized for the in-group, when it is the most completely opaque from

within, it is, at the same time, most transparent from without. This is the indecent exposure, the vision of poetry doing the work of power, of manipulation, of propaganda that our own internalized discourse urges us viscerally to reject. And we most certainly have rejected.

Why so powerful a compulsion to reject? Let me mention just a few of the more obvious reasons. In the first place, the Ottoman Empire is the ancient enemy to the Continent of Europe from which our notions of the world and world literature descend. Since at least the 14th century, the Ottoman has been the ***other***, a looming and frightful presence that helps define the terms of western discourse by negation. We are what they are not, what they believe we do not, our values are not their values. When our discourse is then transmuted into universal principle, they are the blind who refuse to see the truth: wrong values, wrong science, wrong truth. Thus to question our valuation of Ottoman poetry, for example, is to question our own perception of the true and elemental.

In addition, and perhaps more directly to the point, accepting Ottoman poetry seems to imply accepting things about poetry in general that we would prefer to ignore. The indecent exposure analogy is instructive here. The "flasher" does not expose anything exceptionally novel or grotesque, but rather exposes something perfectly natural which we, by convention, choose to conceal. "Flashing," moreover, is generally perceived as a hostile act, a forced and hence abusive reminder that we are all naked underneath our clothes. I would assert that underneath garments of aesthetic pretension, sublimity, beauty, truth, and so forth, all

poetry does its naked, persuasive, rhetorical work in the historical world, even when (or especially when) it is most busy weaving garments. In the matter of Ottoman poetry, because we are outside the discourse, the truth-making conspiracy, we can see plainly that the emperor (or Empire, in this case) has no clothes. What we fail to see or very much don't want to see, however, is that ***all*** such clothes, including our own, are illusory.

Those of us who study pre-modern Near Eastern literatures are, perhaps, as predisposed as any at least to consider the premise that all poetry--even good poetry (especially good poetry?)--is engaged at a real, political level. There is, however, a corrolary to this premise, on the one hand, much more sinister and difficult to accept, and on the other hand, an unequivocal answer to doubts about the pragmatic function of studying pre-modern, foreign literatures in the academy in the kind of world we experience today.

The corrolary proposition is this: if what I have said about poetry is true, then the same is true of all kinds of writing ***including*** what we call scholarship. There is no privileged standpoint from which scholarship can do its work; there is no pristine, innocent approach to the analytical, critical act. Of course ever since Freud and the discovery of the unconscious, notions of objectivity (including scholarly objectivity and even scientific objectivity) have been under suspicion and what I have said thus far seems not too distant from the currently accepted view. However, there is a school of thought that admits the impossibility of perfect objectivity while still believing in the efficacy of striving for an "almost objective" innocence--99and 44/100ths pure

scholarship--by eliminating anything that smacks of the subjective or ideological. The more time one spends with Ottoman poetry, however, the less possible objectivity appears and the more it begins to look like an especially insidious form of repression.

The study of Ottoman literature, which is for the most part equivalent to the rejection of Ottoman literature, is marked by a host of essentially racist assumptions about the cultural and, by extension, the moral and spiritual inferiority of the Turks, all concealed beneath a veneer of scholarly objectivity. Moreover, when we have confronted Ottoman culture, above all we have found ***rhetoric***, obtrusive, inescapable mountains of rhetoric. And we have dug down searching for the unadorned object and found nothing but more rhetoric. When we read Ottoman historians, for example, we work to forget about the lines of poetry, ignore the rhymes, the repetitions, the formulas, the flowery phraseology and try to get to what they are ***really*** saying. In the end, of course, we rush off to the archives to find a list, a table, a chart, anything that will free us from the taint of rhetoric. What are we then repressing? We are repressing our enmity, our racisms, and most of all our awareness of the significance of the rhetorical and the fact that our own rhetoric represses difference by assigning it to the category of error.

It seems sometimes that it is only among scholars that the belief in a non-rhetorically determined object persists. On television the other day, I heard a group of assorted pundits and government spokespersons using the term "massaging the numbers" in a context

indicating that it is an accepted or at least common practice. "Massaging the numbers" is, of course, the imbedding of so-called "raw" data in a rhetorical environment that suits the purposes of masseur. This sounds like a pretty questionable activity--in the case I heard discussed it probably was--but, after all, is it not what we all are up to? "The numbers" are, in fact, nothing without the massage and all scholars are masseurs and masseuses. [Here I am reminded of the Monte Python BBC take-off: ". . . and now for the football scores: 2 to 1, 4 to 3, 0 to 0, and 5 to 1."]

To repeat my hypothesis succinctly and, I hope, clearly, Ottoman poetry [or the present day experience of Ottoman poetry] brings to the foreground a number of issues that appear to say something of value about the nature of literature and about the nature of the study of literature.

First: literature and rhetoric--and literary study and rhetoric--are inextricably intertwined. One cannot peel the one away to reveal the truth of the other.

Second: rhetoric is persuasion; it is ideological; it is manipulation; it is the propogation of a point of view that supports a particular distribution of power.

Third: Like it or not, we repress at our peril awareness of the rhetorical [that is, political] nature of literature and of criticism as a literary activity. When we do what has been done in the Ottoman case--define the work of rhetoric as what "they" do and then reject or marginalize "them" and all their works--then we have

shut our eyes to the existence of the rhetorical and the power of rhetoric in our own lives. We perpetuate, consciously or unconsciously, the hegemony of our contemporary discourse, a way of thinking about and talking about the world that often seems to have brought us to the very brink of disaster.

It is possible to visualize literary criticism as a self-aware philology, the study of language-in-force, language at work in and on the world. Instead of focusing on universal concepts which, in order to exist as universals, must be imposed on all instances--an imperialism of ideals--we could be students of rhetorical processes as well as producers of a scholarly rhetoric about rhetoric that persuades toward a more humane and liberated discourse. Such a discourse might, in my visualization, turn its power toward the making of a world that accepts difference rather than either rejecting it or annihilating it in some "higher" synthesis, a world that might just be a better, a saner, and a safer world.

Nonetheless, we must also remember that rhetoric has exceptional power because it reaches down to the ways in which people talk about and think about some very fundamental things. ~~At the end of my career as a teacher of things that failed to engage either my interest or my expertise~~, recently I made what might be my last advanced Turkish class read Ottoman poetry with me--whether they wanted to or not! We did it in the old style, as a narrative done word by word, line by line, bringing up the background as necessary, at a rate of about two couplets an hour. We struggled with context, with spirit, with the spirituality of the poems; we struggled to feel, to understand, to translate somehow into our own experience the experiences of those strange and vastly

talented individuals alienated from us by such a vast gulf of time and expectation. At the end of the quarter, one of the students said, ``You know, I really enjoyed this class--talking about love and God and . . .'' She really couldn't think of a way to express what else we had talked about--because she had pretty much covered it all. We went on from there to discuss how we, today, talk about what we love and what is holy to us and what that way of talking or not talking says about us and where we stand in relation to life and the world and being in and of them both.

In the end, this is why I believe that I am not quite crazy: because I believe that there is a transcendent value in the struggle to find where love and the holy lie at the core of this difficult, often frustrating and off-putting poetry. And this value is somehow related to making more transparent similar struggles, on the one hand, to lay bare the practical roots in power and material need that drive our creation of many seemingly eternal verities, and, on the other hand, to reveal the mystery of what we variously call ``love'' or ``God,'' or whatever it is that motivates behavior that neither power nor need can help define.