

THE THEME OF INITIATION THROUGH DREAM IN TURKISH FOLK LITERATURE

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One of the strongest human sentiments, Love, which binds man to man and God, forms the basis of not only works of art but virtually all human achievements. It can even be said that without Love neither poetry nor fiction or music can be created. It is Love which creates the need for self-expression. The artist cannot exist in a vacuum; he has to communicate his feelings to his fellow men. It is for this reason that a work of art can be compared to a new birth and creation.

From time immemorial Love has provided not only inspiration for literature but has itself constituted the subject matter of great works of literature. Love may be divided into physical and mystical.

In the Classical Ottoman poetry, which lasted until the mid-nineteenth century, poets often wrote of an ideal Love. She is depicted as perfect and immutable beauty: a tall lady with dark eyes, long eyelashes, a small mouth and crimson lips. The poet cannot escape from the irresistible spell of this lady.

In the heart of the Turkish mystical poet, however, is to be found an Absolute Beauty, i.e., God himself. Totally devoting himself to Divine Love, the mystical poet believes that he himself comes from God and spends his entire life in the joy of achieving communion with God, his ultimate aim. Since God is infinite the Love experienced by the mystical poet is also endless and provides an inexhaustible source for his poetry.

In folk literature a somewhat different phenomenon is found. The poet in the early years of adolescence dreams of a beautiful girl who through the intervention of either Hızır, the protector of those in distress, or a saint, offers him a goblet from which to drink. Aroused in this manner Love becomes the subject of poems which the poet sings to the accompaniment of a *saz* throughout his life.

Occasionally the poet marries a girl resembling the one in his dreams and this establishes a bond between illusion and reality. It is significant that in Turkish, poets who have experienced such dreams are called *aşık* i.e. lover.

After these brief introductory remarks we shall consider the dream stories of individual folk poets.

First, we shall consider the case of the poet Ilyas of Çıldır, a village in eastern Turkey, as he described how he became a poet.

On a hot summer day, Ilyas, a boy of thirteen, was herding his flock with his father. In the evening he was sent home to bring food for his father. On the way home Ilyas, who is tired from the day's work, falls asleep by the grave of a martyr. He soon begins to dream and finds himself in unusual surroundings where he is faced by a black-haired beautiful maiden with long eyelashes, rosy cheeks, lovely lips, a gown and embroidered stockings on her feet. He also envisioned angels instructing Hızır to offer the poet a goblet from which to drink. Hızır fills the goblet and tells the maiden to take it and present it to the poet. After the poet has drunk the beverage, Hızır refills the goblet and asks Ilyas to offer it to the maiden. Upon drinking the beverage the two fall in love. The maiden announces herself to be Selatin of Bedahshan in Chin-Machin, and beckons Ilyas to come to her side. Tradition has it that six months after such a vision a poet comes of age and so it was in the case of Ilyas who some six months later began to produce love poems, which he sang to the accompaniment of his *saz*. He is overtaken by a desire to join Selatin but this being impossible he has to be content with his childhood playmate Selvinaz, who in a similar dream saw herself being presented with a goblet by Ilyas. The two lovers engage in an exchange of love poems and are eventually wed.

The theme of two lovers having a dream in which they drink from a goblet is also to be founded in the story of *Muhibbî and Esmahan*.

When Kaya Salih, the son of Ali the Blacksmith, was seventeen years old he was put in jail for an offence. One night in a dream he saw himself in the presence of three *derwishes* who said: "Fear not child! We'll give you advice. If you heed it you'll gain a miraculous power". Then ushering in a girl by the name of Esmahan, he told him "Take this goblet from Esmehan's hand and drink for the love of her".

After Salih drinks from the goblet, Esmahan is presented with the same goblet and told to drink for the love of "Muhibbî" a pseudonym they have chosen for him. They, then, turn to Salih and say: "We have given you the name Muhibbî. You will never be beaten by your rivals".

Kaya Salih, now known as Ashik Muhibbî, sees himself kissing the derwishes' hands in gratitude and staring at Esmahan in admiration, he wakes up, looks about, begins to contemplate and suddenly bursts out in tears. At that moment a guard enters his cell and Ashik Muhibbî, covering one ear with his hand, recites his first poem.

It so happens that Esmahan, a young girl of the same village has the same dream as Kaya Salih, is told by the *derwishes* to drink for the love of Muhibbî and consequently falls in love. However, in keeping with the popular tradition, she does not immediately reveal her dream and love. But love cannot remain silent long and gives itself away one way or another. And so it is in the case of Esmahan. She becomes moody, begins to talk in her sleep and utters incomprehensible words. Esmahan's mother seeks the assistance of an old woman, Sultan Nine, whom she asks to find out the reason for her daughter's odd behaviour. The girl reveals her dream to the old woman in poetic form and tells her that her sweetheart's father's name is Ali. She goes on to say: "Pointing at Muhibbî, the *derwishes* told him to take the goblet from me. He took it and drank from it. He was a tall handsome young man. Then, one of the *derwishes* told me to drink for the love of Muhibbî. When I awoke, they had all vanished into thin air!"

After these dreams the two lovers begin to express their love for each other in poetic form and decide to marry. Thus a link is formed between dream and reality.¹

Both in the story of *Ilyas and Selvinaz* and in the story of *Muhibbî and Esmahan* we can find a common theme, i.e., the awakening of love through a dream.

For a further example of the importance of dream as a source of artistic inspiration, let us consider another episode in the life of Muhibbî.

¹ M. Adil Özder, *Muhibbî ile Esmahan Hikâyesi*, Ankara, 1976.

When Muhibbî was 14 years old he began to participate in village gatherings where he attempted to sing but was unsuccessful. He offered rewards to those who could help him but he was unable to remember the things taught and became the laughingstock of the community. After the dream experience, however, he became a poet of distinction.²

Following such dreams folk poets occasionally experience intense psychological crises and find themselves in a state of total oblivion. It is only through the intervention of another poet that they are able to come to themselves.

The poet Osman, born in a village near Muhibbî's had such an experience. In 1865 when he was 17 years old, he had a dream in which he was offered the goblet. Consequently he fell in love with Mahtaban, a maiden from the city of Shirvan in Iran. He was so overcome by his dream that he lay unconscious till morning and could not wake up for many hours. When the attempts of his elder sister to revive him fail, neighbours are summoned. They examine him and come to the conclusion that Osman is dead. An atmosphere of mourning envelops the house and preparations are made for the funeral. Someone is sent to Muhibbî's village to buy a shroud. This person encounters Muhibbî on his way back. Muhibbî tells the villagers to return the shroud and asks him to bring his *saz*. The villager does so and accompanies Muhibbî to Osman's village. The villagers disapprove of Muhibbî's having brought his *saz* along but the poet pays them no heed, goes straight to Osman and begins to play and sing. In his first poem he orders Osman to regain consciousness. When his first poem fails to revive Osman he composes a second poem. First he asks Osman whether he had by any chance offended the Forty Saints (*Kırklar*) or drunk from their goblet. Then, he repeats his command that Osman wake up. Thereupon Osman wakes and in a kneeling position, covering one of his ears, recites a poem in which he says that the Forty Saints approached him, plunged the dagger of love into his bosom and told him to search for the girl in Shirvan, whereupon he developed an intolerable fever. Later Osman became a famous poet known by the pseudonym "Mahirî".

² M. Adil Özder, *Yusufelili Muhibbî*, Kars 1940.

When the villagers asked Muhibbî about Osman's condition he replied that the previous evening he had had a dream in which he saw Osman taking the love goblet from the hands of the Saints.³

These phases of initiation appear even more clearly in the life of Nihanî.

When the poet Nihanî was 18 years old he and his shepherd friends decided to spend the night on a hill. He fell asleep with his head resting on the tombstone of a martyr and had the following dream.

"Three long-bearded elders with sweet faces were approaching me from a distance carrying cups full of drinks. They said 'Rise and drink, oh, young man!' While drinking I heard a voice. I turned and saw a tall beauty, her hair descending to her ankles, her face turned other way, singing an elegy. I listened to her song for a while and realized that she was crying for me, thinking that I, whom she loved, had died. I should have told her that I had not died. But how could I do this? Although I drank three goblets my thirst was not quenched and I was unable to speak. The girl began to depart and I attempted to call her but was unable to utter a sound. I wondered if I had died. Then I woke in a cold sweat, covered one ear and began to sing after my departed lover Mihriban in the dark and deserted forest. My shepherd friends hearing my plaint came to my side and attempted to revive me by shaking my arms and shoulders, but it was to no avail. So I was carried home. I now have but a faint memory of these events. I was the last to wake up in the village guest room. When I woke up I saw an old man smiling, but I knew not why. I was looking around me absent-mindedly. Apparently, without my knowledge the villagers had decided to call Summanî, a wellknown poet of the region, to my side. When he came he said: "This fellow is either drunk or out of his mind". Whereupon Nihanî rose, grasped Summanî's coat and regained the ability to talk. The two poets were then engaged in an exchange of verses.

Summanî, then, asked Nihanî whether or not the divine mystery, i.e., the ultimate phase of initiation had been revealed to him, whom he had seen first in his dream, how they were dressed and whether or not he had been enveloped by the flames of passion. Nihanî replied

³ M. Adil Özder, *Muhibbî ile Esmahan Hikayesi*, Ankara 1976.

that the divine mystery had been revealed to him in 1902. Later he went on to say that he had been approached by three *derwishes* in fragrant white and green robes, carrying three goblets of drink which they presented to him and that he had wept when struck by the arrow of love.

Summanî kisses the young poet on the forehead thereby announcing the birth of a new folk poet. Whereas prior to his dream Nihanî had been barely capable of playing the *saz* and singing the songs he knew by heart, he became one of the most proficient Turkish folk poets after his dream.

Some dreams seen by Turkish folk poets take different forms from those mentioned above. In the story of *Melikshah and Güllü Han*, Hızır shows a picture of the maiden to the young poet, who prays to God to help him to fall in love with the girl. At the end of his prayer he sees the *derwish* holding a goblet in one hand and the girl's picture in the other. The poet drinks from the goblet, falls in love with Güllü Han and consequently becomes a divinely inspired poet.

In another story, that of *Mahmut and Elif*, the young man while hunting begins to chase an antelope and finds himself in a cave where he encounters several *derwishes*. They inform him that the animal he was chasing was, in fact, not an antelope and that it had been sent to lead him to the cave. The young man sees the picture of a young girl on the wall of the cave and demands to see her. The *derwishes* say that it is only possible if he makes a vow, which in this case is to drink from the goblet they will offer him. Mahmut takes a few sips and is immediately stricken by feverish passion.

In these examples we can identify a recurring pattern in which the dreamer is offered a goblet from which to drink and consequently he falls in love with a beauty and at the same time is initiated as a divinely inspired poet. This experience usually occurs when the young man is between the ages 13-17 and the scene in the dream is often a pastoral one in which a beautiful girl with long hair, accompanied by such holy figures as Hızır, Saints, and *derwishes*, is introduced to the young man. The young man and the girl exchange goblets of drink and the young man consequently becomes an *ashık* (*hak aşığı* or *badeli aşık* i.e. lover poet who has had the goblet). The girl in the dream is usually an inhabitant of some imaginary, inaccessible lands

such as Bedahshan, Chin-Machin (i.e., China and Manchuria). The love which the young man feels for his dream lover continues throughout his life as this love can never be consummated. Because the girl will preserve her perfection and beauty as an ideal and an unending source of poetic inspiration. Even if the poet should marry a living girl who resembles her dream counterpart, the ideal girl who presented the goblet in the presence of Saints or *derwishes* will remain as he first envisioned her.

The question may be asked whether the folk poets actually experience such dreams or do they simply conform to a traditional theme?

Although it is impossible to give a definite answer to this question it is probably the case that certain outstanding poets did indeed have such dreams which they revealed and that others, merely because such stories were a necessary part of the lives of folk poets, invented such dreams for themselves. Whatever the case may be the outcome is the same: the actual or fabricated dream serves as a source of inspiration for the poet throughout his life.

In conclusion we can say that folk poets inspired as they are by a feeling of love are instrumental in fostering an ideal of universal love without which no happy human society can be conceived.

