COMMON LIFE IN UNCOMMON WORDS: DAILY LIFE IN THE POETRY OF FEVRI

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According to the general opinion which first appeared within the Ottoman Westernisation, Divan poetry was a literary activity that addressed only the Ottoman court and those who were, one way or another, connected to the palace or ruling class. These types of criticisms towards the Ottoman Divan poetry, have been receiving a general acceptance with their well-fitted arguments in the official definition of Ottoman history of the Cumhuriyet regime which rejects it’s Ottoman past with all the elements of the Empire (policy, culture, and literature).

One of the most important critics of Ottoman literature, Namık Kemal says:

"... these works (he means: poems written in the Divan tradition) remain outside of reality and nature."

And, Agah Sirri Levend, in his famous work Divan Edebiyatı says:

"Divan poetry reflects it’s time with all the characteristics of it, however it’s interest to real world is not much."

To understand this paradoxical quote let me pose a question: What does it mean that Divan poetry has no relations to real life? The one who thinks that way, with no doubt, also thinks that there is a direct relation between literature and life. However, when we talk about Ottoman poetry and reflecting the real world, we must consider a very important point, that is to say, literature is not real life itself. Literary texts are fictional works.

Ottoman poetry reflects it’s time, and the society in which it was created, in an aesthetical and symbolical way. We shall interpret the world which is seen on the mirror of Divan poetry as a contemplative scene of real life.

Especially, in the sixteenth century, poets brought the scenes and signs of everyday life into their poetry, not only as contemplative and fictitious but also with all the reality of life itself. Customs, traditions, superstitions, and everyday life found their ways into Ottoman poetry. And poets brought real life into poetry in a rather realistic and objective way.
Hüsn-i tali декаб good way to do it. They found fictional reasons for
natural events and there by enriched Divan poetry. (Example: raining: even the
clouds are crying for my love).

In his gazel Fevrev says:

Servı kaddine gülü ruhuna benzetdi diyü
Băğbăna nevbahăr Allăh ki otlar yoldurur

It is because, he has compared the cypress with your body and the rose
with your cheek, (oh my beloved!) the spring ordered the gardener to tear out
the weeds. Note that “ot yoldurmak” also means “to make someone work hard”.
Here, we see an everyday scene from a garden; a gardener is plucking and
tearing out the weeds. But, the poet uses this scene in order to praise his
beloveds beaauty: his cypress-like balanced body and his rose-like scented, red
cheeks.

Today, I would like to give some examples which I have choosen from
Fevrev’s Divan. Fevrev is a sixteenth century poet lived during the reigns of the
Sultan Süleyman (Kanuni) and Selim the second. He was a famous poet and
scholar of his time. He was deeply influenced by Nakkaş Ali Beg, the father of
his master Lamiı, and also by the Măderris Dursun Efendi. A măderris himself,
Fevrev was both a notable scholar and a teacher. He took part in the expedition
against Nahcivan under Sultan Süleyman, whose patronage he secured by means
of numerous panegyrics. Fevrev died in Damascus where he had filled the post of
Măftă, in April 1571. He was the editor of poems of Sultan Süleyman (Muhibbi).
Some of the sources (Aşk Çelebi Tezkiresi and Ali’s Kühnül-abhăr) mention his
ability to use everyday language, words and phrases of the common people. His
Divan contains many examples with scenes and signs of everyday life but I will
be content with a few of them.

1. Writing “âh şâhum!” (oh my sultan, oh my beloved!) here and there
onto walls.

Ah şâhum yazarlar her der ü dîvârdâ
Şâhu şâhmâr ah ü şâhmâr benim

They write “âh şâhum” onto every wall, here and there. The şâh is mine,
the âh (sigh) is mine.

Kim yazardı âh şâhum resmini sen olmasan
Bu misâfirhâne-i dehrin der ü dîvârîn
Who would write “âh şâhım” onto every wall in this guesthouse called the world, if you were not be in it?

2. People used to believe that when they see the new moon, if they look at a coin, it bring good luck.

Bakmaz yaşına göre gözümde kaşı aksin  
Gerçi ki bakar akçaya gören yeni ayı

No one looks at my tears; they only see the reflections of your eyebrows on my eyes. Although the one who sees the new moon shall look at a coin.

3. It was a custom to bury the martyr without washing his body:

Yuyup defn itme lutf it ben şehid-i tiğ-i hicrâni  
Ko yatsun hâk ü hün içre zelil olsun ten-i zârî

Do me a favor, don’t wash my body before burying me. I am a martyr of the sword of separation. Let my corpse stay in the soil and the blood, and let my lamenting flesh be low.

4. Ornamenting a coffin with roses:

Sanma tâbútumu zeyn eyediler güller ile  
Fîrhatinde bedenim kapladî âhım şereri

Don’t think they decorated my coffin with roses; sparks of my sigh covered my corpse in your seperation.

5. Exhibition of a guilty men publicly with painting his face with black:

Mâh öykündü ruh-i dilbere taksîr etti  
Yüzüne kara sürüp çarş anı teşîr etti

With imitating the cheek of my beloved, the moon did a sin; and sky put black paint on it’s face and publicly exhibited it.

6. There were some decorative paintings especially cypresses on gourds of waterseller:

Göz merdümü ki aks-i kad-i yâr andadı  
Sakkâ durur ki serv yazılmış kabagina
The pupil of my eye where my beloved’s figure is reflected, looks like a waterseller who has a gourd, cypress figure on.

7. Executioners used to pierce their scimitars into soil:

Gamzesi ol katilin bu sine-i sad-çâkde
Sanki bir cellâd tîgidir gömülmuş hâkde

The glance of that murderer on this breast with hundred wounds, is like a scimitar of an executioner pierced into soil.

8. Increasing quantity of flies in summer:

Ruhlarında n’ola çog olsa senin hâl-i siyahîn
Çokdur ey tâze bahârîm megesi yazlarîn

What if you have many black moles on your cheek, oh my early summer! amount of the fly increases in the summer.

9. Arab brigands attacks caravans on the road to Damascus:

Hat geldi aldi zulf-i siyeh-fâm yollarîn
Gûyâ ki basdı hayli Arab Sâm yollarîn

Your cheek-downs have arrived and captured the roads to your black hair; it looks just like, Arab rebels came and attacked suddenly on the road to Damascus.

10. People go out to salute the Sultan who visits their city:

Dil ü cân karsî çikar sineye cânân gelicek
Memleket halkî gibi şehrine sultân gelicek

Heart and soul go out to greet when beloved come to my brest. Just like people going out to salute the sultan visits their city.

11. Decorating the roads of a rosegarden with irises:

Râh-i kûyîn zeyn idersem tan mı tîğ-i åh ile
Zeyn olur süsenle âdettir gülistân yollarîn

Is it any suprise if I decorate the streets of your town with the swords of my sighs. It is customary to decorate the roads of a rosegarden with irises.
12. And my last example will be about “fânûs-ı hayâl” magic lantern. Fanus-ı hayâl or the lantern of images had pictures painted on the glass, leather, or fabric of the lantern, which became large when projected onto a wall:

Şekl ü a’zâ kim dil-i pûr-sûz-hâl üstündedir
Nakş u sûrettir ki fânûs-ı hayâl üstündedir

My body with it’s shapes, figures, and limbs is covering a burning heart; it resembles a lantern of images with pictures and drawings on.

Ottoman poetry is highly developed, complex and sophisticated. Because it built upon shared knowledge of previously employed themes and cultural motives using lexical tools capable of fashioning the most complicated metaphors, the most puzzling ambiguities. On the other hand, it the sixteenth century, when reality took it’s place in the Ottoman Divan poetry, poets like Fevri, used the scenes and signs of everyday life in their poems. This effort gave a good balance their works between tradition and everyday life. I believe, literary texts of the sixteent century can help us to understand the social, actual life of the time as much as archival documents.