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Disorienting encounters : re-reading seventeenth and eighteenth century Ottoman miniature paintings = Desoriënterende ontmoetingen : een herlezing van zeventiende- en achttiende-eeuwse Ottomaanse miniaturen

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CHAPTER 6: Looking through Metaphors: From the Window toward the Threshold

Throughout this study, there have been instances when I explicitly dwelled on the alleged tension between so-called Eastern and Western visual cultures as it has manifested itself in Ottoman miniatures. I argued against the popular contemporary polarization between the East and the West—reminiscent of the view put forth in Kipling's *Ballad of East and West* (1895)—by showing how the miniatures are sites where a productive visual cross-cultural encounter has taken place.[183] I suggested that the genre of portraiture was one of the realms in which an immense process of negation and negotiation between the two contesting cultural discourses has been played out. Similarly, I discussed how bazaar artists and court miniaturists alike appropriated the style and content of Orientalist costume albums in their attempts to represent everyday life.[184]

In the light of such visual encounters between Europe and the Ottomans, this chapter looks at a seventeenth-century miniature painting entitled "Gazanfer Ağa Medresesi" (The Theological School of Gazanfer Ağa), executed by Ahmed Nakşi as part of the book *Divan-i Nadiri* (Anthology of Nadiri, c. 1620) (Figure 35). Scholars argue that Ahmed Nakşi created a distinct style of representation in which he combined the imperial style with that of the West, as evinced by "the peculiar perspective seen in architecture, the receding planes, diminishing elements in the background and an interest in representing Europeans" (Atil, 1978: 109). Atil explains the occurrence of these pictorial elements by arguing that Nakşi might have been exposed to sixteenth-century Italian and Dutch engravings kept in the Topkapi seraglio (Figure 36). These engravings, albeit in a "miniaturized" form, exemplify the operation of the window metaphor, which has been pertinent in delineating not only the logic of the tableau but also the seeing subject's encounter with the visible world. According to Atil, since Nakşi has seen the "window," he has attempted to trace its logic in his miniatures by giving a back view of some of the figures in the

[183] The refrain of the poem reads: "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,/ Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat,/ But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,/ When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!"

[184] The trajectory I set out here is from the perspective of the Ottomans. For the impact of Ottoman art in Europe, see Renda (2005); for the fashion of Turquerie, see Boer (1994).

foreground, incorporating other figures into the background, and introducing gates, windows, and arches opening onto distant vistas. In contrast to Atil, I argue that the "Gazanfer Ağa Medresesi" miniature demonstrates that Nakşi might indeed have been exposed to the discourse of painting as a window, yet instead of reproducing its logic in his miniatures, he in fact negotiates with it and ultimately offers us another metaphor for painting, namely, the threshold.

The metaphor of the window, first articulated by Leon Battista Alberti in his treatise *On Painting* (1435), has been one of the most persistent metaphors in the study of visual media. It has been invoked not only in relation to painting but also in delineating the operations of photography, television, cinema, and recent "new media." Anne Friedberg suggests that the metaphor offered a "discourse of translation between the traditions, debates, and objects of study of separate disciplinary domains" (2006: 15). In addition, she argues that it is an "epistemological metaphor" (26) that produces the knowledge of its object and the conditions under which it becomes knowable. I contend that the trope achieves these ends by juxtaposing two interrelated discourses: the discourse of the frame and that of transparency, both of which are burdened with the baggage of the window-object.

The "Gazanfer Ağa Medresesi" miniature enters into a complex negotiation with both discourses. This negotiation can best be understood by means of another (architectural) metaphor, namely, the threshold. The miniature frame, instead of offering up the painting as an immediate readable object (as suggested by the discourses of the frame and of transparency), encourages a liminal (deriving from *limen*, meaning 'threshold' in Latin) experience of looking that is caught between different modes of representation; looking, reading, and sensing. Moreover, the viewer's acts of looking is "thresholded" by means of horizontal layering of the pictorial plane tainting the encounter with opacity rather than transparency. By so doing, the miniature prompts a process of looking that constantly questions the status of the frame as well as the instantaneous visibility and readability of the image being seen. In this capacity, I explore whether the threshold metaphor provides an epistemology of the visual that can function as an alternative to the epistemology dictated by the window metaphor.

I will suggest that the threshold metaphor should be conceived not as an antidote but as an alternative to the window trope so as to illustrate what the latter lacks and conceals. *Threshold*, functioning as an entrance, the beginning of a state or

action, and an outset and opening, resonates with Didi-Huberman's notion of the state of painting as a passage that I invoked in the previous chapter. Unlike the window, the threshold as an architectural element refers to a passage between two spaces; hence it does not belong to the visual *per se*. In contrast to the immediate visibility offered by the window metaphor, the threshold suggests a gating of the viewer's gaze that obstructs and delays her vision.

As we shall see, the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature thresholds the viewer's gaze in a horizontal manner by means of multiple apertures—such as doors, windows, and vaults—that assure the opacity of the miniature. Moreover, its connotations of bordering and delimiting invoke the pictorial frame as a liminal zone. The notion of threshold enables us to understand the miniature as a betwixt-and-between image, at the crossroads of what constitutes its outside and inside. Finally, the threshold as the "limit below which a stimulus is not perceptible" (*OED*) questions the status of both the viewer as the absolute seer/knower and of painting as a knowable and knowledgeable object of her contemplation.

In Gazanfer Ağa's School

"As soon as you open the book as a door, you enter another world, you close the door on this world," writes Hélène Cixous (1993: 20). In Chapter 5, I discussed how the miniature, as a part of the book, opens to another world that is perceived horizontally in a miniaturized time. In this chapter, I follow Cixous' metaphorical insight and open the door of the *Divan-i Nadiri* to step into the world of the miniature—not to liberate ourselves from all obligations imposed by dimensions, as Bachelard (1958) would have it, but to imagine alternative epistemologies of the visual.

Divan-i Nadiri consists of poems, written by Mehmed (b. Abdulgani Emirshah) using the pseudonym Nadiri, that were addressed to sultans, grand viziers, the *Sheykh ül-Islâm* (the highest religious officer), and various other learned dignitaries. Its themes include battles, army marches, the besieging of fortresses, and the sultan's parade as he departs his palace (Atasoy and Çağman, 1974: 68). The volume contains nine miniatures by the court illustrator of the time, Ahmed Nakşi.[185]

[185] Ahmed Nakşi was a renowned astrologer and the official timekeeper at the Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul. He was the foremost illustrator of historical manuscripts under the reign of Sultan Osman II. His earliest known work is the series of 49 illustrations he provided for a copy of the *Shaqa'iq al-*

The miniature of the Gazanfer Ağa's school is one of the first miniatures encountered by the viewer upon opening the book. As its title implies, the subject matter of the miniature takes place in and around the Gazanfer Ağa School, which is positioned centrally in the miniature (Figure 35). The script above the double-winged entrance door indicates that the domed edifice is *Medrese-i Gazanfer Ağa*.[186] As the façade of the building has been discarded, the viewer can see the vibrantly ornamented interior of the school and witness the intimate atmosphere of a classroom. Gazanfer Ağa, an Islamic scholar who also commissioned the building of the *Medrese*, lectures the twelve members of the *ulema* (scholars of the Islamic law, "learned men"), who are recognizable by their special headgear. They are positioned diagonally, facing the lecturer. Gazanfer Ağa holds a book in his left hand and marks with his finger the page that he had probably just been reading, while his right hand lies gently on his knee. His pupils, holding on to their books, appear to be interested in what he is saying, except for one student in the middle of the row who is whispering something into the ear of the colleague beside him. This distracted and distracting figure breaks up the stiff atmosphere of the classroom by bringing an element of disarray into the rigid order of the interior.

On both sides of the school building we see the supplementary buildings or "*medrese* cells" of the *Külliye* (complex). They are placed on top of each other with windows opening to nowhere. At the bottom left of the miniature there is a small building with an orange interior, which we can recognize as a *sebil* (public fountain) upon seeing the water cups that have been placed on its windowpanes.

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nu `maniyya, a biographical dictionary of Ottoman scholars by Tasköprülüzade Ahmed Efendi (Topkapi Museum, H. 1263). The manuscript was commissioned in 1619 by Grand Vizier Öküz Mehmed Pasha as a gift for the sultan, and the last scene shows the grand vizier presenting the book to the sultan in the presence of the artist. Apart from the *Divan-i Nadiri* he is known to have illustrated *Sâhnâme*, an account of Osman II's campaign against Poland in 1621 (Topkapi Museum, H. 1124), and at least three copies of the Turkish translation of the Persian epic, the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Firdawsi, two dated 1620 (Uppsala, U. Lib., MS. Celsing I, and New York, Public Library, Spencer collection Turkish MS. 1) and one dated *c.* 1622 (Paris, BN, MS. suppl. turc 326). Other paintings were incorporated into albums. See Atil (1978).

[186] The complex still exists in Istanbul in the present-day Fatih district and hosts the Museum of Caricature and Humor.

Figure 35. "Gazanfer Ağa Medresesi," *Divan-i Nadiri*, Ahmed Nakşi, c.1620, Topkapi Museum, (H. 899, f. 22a), 18 x 20 cm.

The top of the miniature displays the walls and vaults of the Valans (or Bozdoğan in Turkish) aqueduct opening onto a green field. Through these apertures we see two figures. The one on the left is entering the picture plane while the one on the right is about to leave the scene. Both figures can be identified as women, the latter wears a red dress and a white headscarf while the former is dressed in a light brown costume with a matching red belt, head covering, and boots. She carries a big black bag.

At the bottom right, five figures stand by the entrance door of the complex. Following several scholars identify the man on horseback as Sultan Osman II, the ruler who commissioned the *Divan-i Nadiri* (Atil, 1978: 105; And, 2002: 99).[187] The two figures with conic headgears are his servants, while two of the other men (who each wear high-banded headgear of a light-brown color) accompanying the sultan can be recognized as imperial soldiers. As one of the sultan's servants carries a book under his arm, we can speculate that the sultan has come to visit the school in order to join Gazanfer Ağa's class.

Atil suggests that Ahmed Nakşi's style is "highly eclectic, revealing direct borrowings from classical and provincial Ottoman painting as well as elements chosen at random from Persian and European schools" (1978: 103). She adds that although he was working within the tradition of illustrated Ottoman manuscripts, he managed to create a distinct and characteristic style of representation, one that is immediately identifiable (103). In practically every miniature by Nakşi, the artist experiments with the local illusion of depth via architectural elements such as doors, windows, gates, and vaults. For instance, in his earliest work, *Tercüme-i Şekayık-ı Numaniye*, he places the figures "against interior settings with windows and doors opening to the background or within a landscape painting with the elements in the

[187] Semra Ögel (1993) identifies this figure as either a prince or a wealthy man. Bağci, Çağman, and Renda (2006) offer an entirely different reading of the miniature. They identify the figure on the horseback as Gazanfer Ağa. Moreover, they suggest that the instructor is Nadiri, the author of *Divan-i Nadiri*. However, I find And's and Atil's reading more plausible as the figure on the horseback "resembles" the other portraits of Osman II made by Nakşi, such as "Osman on Horseback," (ca. 1620, Topkapi Museum, H.2169, f.13r), "Sultan Osman II on Horseback" (ca. 1620, BL, Or. 2709, f 13.r), and "Sultan Osman II on Throne" (ca. 1620, IUL, T.9365, f. 9r.). Known as the "Young Osman," Sultan Osman II has a peculiar iconography in the Ottoman royal-portraiture tradition. He became sultan when he was fourteen years old and reigned only for four years before he was killed during a janissary uprising. Because of his young age, he has been depicted as a young boy without a beard, a trait that makes his depiction easily distinguishable from other sultans who, of course, unmistakably, cultivated beards or mustaches. For more on the Sultan Osman II portraits see Mahir (2000).

distance shown in perspective with diminishing proportions" (Atil, 1978: 104). According to Atil, Nakşi drew on the arts of the imperial workshop and of the West as his two main visual sources. He relies upon the Ottoman imperial miniature tradition "in representing the proper settings of the events and adheres to the established schemes of enthronement and battle scenes, and in the depiction of court activities" (1978: 109). Singular elements, such as "the peculiar perspective seen in architecture, the receding planes, diminishing elements in the background and an interest in representing Europeans" reveal the impact of another tradition, that of the West (109).[188]

Atil argues that Nakşi must have seen several albums in the Topkapi Palace containing a number of engravings made in Europe during the second half of the sixteenth century (1978: 109). They were "generally devoted to Biblical stories or the ages of man, they depict steps leading to archways, windows opening into the background and panoramic views extending to the distance" (109). The employment of depth via architectural elements in these engravings of Italian and Dutch origin might have influenced Nakşi's distinctive style. However, Nakşi does not employ a full perspectival configuration of the miniature plane of the sort observed in these engravings (Figure 36). Instead, in his rendering of these architectural openings, he retains partial depth almost as a motif.

[188] These engravings are collected in albums with numbers: H. 2135, H. 2148, and H. 2153 in the Topkapi Museum Collection.

Figure 36. "The Story of Daniel," artists unknown, Late sixteenth century, The Netherlands, Topkapi Museum, (H. 2148, f. 13 b). Reproduced from Atil (1978: 121).

Nevertheless, both Atil and Semra Ögel (1993) emphasize the impact of the European engravings on Nakşi's art and argue that not only was he exposed to the engravings, he also absorbed the logic of painting as a "window" as well as the discourse that accompanied such a conception. In Chapter 4, I discussed the ways in which the so-called Eastern and Western discourses concerning portraiture were incorporated into a distinctive Ottoman imperial visual idiom. In this chapter, I discuss whether the tradition of Ottoman miniature painting suggests an alternative visual epistemology to that which is promoted by the window metaphor, the conception that Ahmed Nakşi supposedly attempted to incorporate into his miniatures.

The Window Effect

In his treatise *De Pictura* (*On Painting*, 1435), Leon Battista Alberti described what one does when one paints as if looking through a window: "First of all, on the

surface on which I am going to paint, I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want, which I regard as an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen […]" (1972: 55).[189] This sentence, and nothing more, marked the "debut" of the window metaphor, which centuries later informs the world's dominant computer operating system, namely, Microsoft Windows.[190] Obviously, Alberti's *De Pictura* is the first theoretical account of one-point perspective. I will not discuss here the technical details of the perspectival configuration of three-dimensional space on two-dimensional space, as has been done so often.[191] Rather, I would like to elaborate on the *function* of the window metaphor, which, once articulated by Alberti, came to frame our understanding of the subject's encounter with the visual. It has been used to explain not only our experience of the medium of painting but also of a variety of visual media.

In their groundbreaking book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that metaphors are not mere devices of poetic imagination and rhetorical flourish but are, more importantly, cognitive tools that affect our everyday ways of thinking, speaking, and acting. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between two essentially unlike things. The essence of metaphor or metaphorical thinking is to understand and experience one kind of thing or experience in terms of another (1980b: 455). In her article "Scared to Death" (2006), Mieke Bal identifies three aspects of metaphors that relate them to theoretical concepts. She argues that the act of establishing similarities between two items is

[189] Among others, Gérard Wajcman argues that according to a strict reading of the Latin version of *On Painting*, Alberti compares painting to a window through which he sees not the world, as has often been stated, but a story (*istoria*) (2004: 53). His translation of the same sentence is: "First I draw on the surface to be painted a quadrilateral of the size I wish, made of right angles, which plays for me the role of an open window in which, outside, a story can be seen" (2004b: 60).

[190] New-media theorist Lev Manovich (1995) suggests that the "classical screen" of the tableau-window is still dominant and is the paradigm of the "windows interface" in computer display. He defines the classical screen as "a flat, rectangular surface. It is intended for frontal viewing (as opposed to, for instance, a panorama)." It exists in our normal space, "the space of our body, and acts as a window into another space. This other space, the space of representation, typically has a different scale from the scale of our normal space." Defined in this way, he argues, "a screen describes equally well a Renaissance painting [….] and a modern computer display. Even proportions have not changed in five centuries; they are similar for a typical fifteenth-century painting, a film screen, and a computer screen. (In this respect it is not accidental that the very names of the two main formats of computer displays point to two genres of painting: a horizontal format is referred to as 'landscape mode' while the vertical format is referred to as 'portrait mode')."

[191] For the configuration of perspectival painting, see Hubert Damisch (1994); Erwin Panosfky (1991), and Hanneke Grootenboer (2005).

meaningful because the new term illuminates something in the meaning of the first term—or, conversely, obscures something. However, the similarity need not reside in the meanings of the term itself but may be brought by the respective contexts of the two terms. The combination of similarity and difference "makes for the new, the creative, the informational surplus of metaphor" (158). It is this surplus of the metaphor that brings us something new about the object. Second, Bal contends that metaphors displace meanings and redirect them to something else—from the events to the subject, for example—and such dislocation gives them meaning in an implicit narrative. This sort of directing makes metaphor a "powerful heuristic tool" as it brings unseen and unforeseen aspects of the first term to the fore and produces "a contextual network for the object." Third, metaphors offer a second discourse within which the second term can be placed. She argues that the collusion of two discourses or two frames of reference, which can be called the framing aspect of metaphor, "is crucial for the fragile foundation of interdisciplinary scholarship constituted by nomadic concepts" (all on 158).

For Bal, this standard theory of metaphor characterizing the operation of concepts also becomes an epistemology, a way of knowing or analyzing those objects that we try to understand. However, this process is not so much meant to "predict, explain, or generalize," as, on the contrary, "to specify, analyze, get an eye for differences" (158). It "can yield intellectual gain when they raise new questions and suggest new perspectives," yet Bal warns us that it "can also entail loss when they [metaphors/concepts] are thematically closing and semantically vague" (159). I would add that once turned into clichés, metaphors can become restrictive, as they render their objects fixed and make their potential analyses ahistorical and uncritical.

According to Bal, referring to the mobility and displacement of meaning and knowledge like "traveling concepts," metaphors can be understood as akin to vehicles of transportation (Bal, 2002). As a transfer device, a conduit that moves meaning from one frame of reference to another, the *concept* of metaphor itself may "offer a discourse of translation between the traditions, debates, and objects of study of separate disciplinary domains" (Friedberg, 2006: 15). In this capacity, metaphors can become tools for critical analysis. They can help us translate objects from one disciplinary domain to another and can reveal what remains untranslatable.

The window metaphor, even though it was initially invoked to define the operation of Renaissance perspectival painting, is one such metaphor that offers a

discourse of translation in its travels among different media—cinema and photography, for example, as well as computer-based expression, interactive design, and digital art—and usually separate disciplinary domains. As such, it seems as if the trope still exerts its estimable illustrative power—and hence informs our experience of images in myriad and problematic ways.[192]

Wajcman's book *Fenêtre*: *Chroniques du regard et de l'intime* (2004) is one of the few works entirely devoted to the discussion of the window metaphor as it is materialized in what he calls the "tableau-window." In tracing the "logic" of the Albertian window trope, Wajcman argues that when Alberti formulated the rectangular tableau as a *finestra aperta*, the architectural rectangular window as we know it today had not yet existed. Rather, it became widespread only from about 1450 onwards (2004a: 74).[193] Therefore, Wajcman states, the Albertian tableau was like a window—but not the window of architecture, rather an ideal model. Consequently, Wajcman suggests that when Alberti formulated the analogy, he, in fact, did not proceed from a comparison between two existing, real objects. Instead he made the two comparable (56). The Albertian comparison, Wajcman contends, made us start looking at the window as at a tableau: it is not the tableau that is like a window but the window that has become similar to a tableau (60).

If we were to follow Wajcman's account, it is plausible to argue that by preparing the ground on which the metaphor could assert its effects, Alberti was putting forward two objects of knowledge. Yet, whether or not what Alberti meant by *finestra aperta* corresponds to what we now understand by the term "window," I argue that the operation of the architectural figure of the window should be understood as what Anne Friedberg has called an "epistemological metaphor" (2006:

[192] For the itinerary of the window trope—and its conceptual misuses—see Friedman (2005). The trope has recently been taken up by new-media theorists to delineate the operation of digital design and computer interface. For instance, *Windows and Mirrors: Interaction Design, Digital Art, and the Myth of Transparency* (2003) by Jay David Bolter and Diane Gromala argues for a permanent disparity between the metaphors "window" and "mirror"—corresponding to attributes of transparency as opposed to reflectivity—for defining the functioning of the computer interface. For the authors of the *Windows and Mirrors*, the mirror metaphor suggests that the encounter between the user and the interface involves an interactive act of "looking at" the medium in which the interface reflects the users and their contexts. The window metaphor, conversely, proposes a one-directional relation in which the viewer "looks through" the medium.

[193] Wajcman contends that the tableau was supposed to make something visible, whereas the Gothic windows of the time were not meant to be looked through: they were too highly placed or were darkened with lattices or less transparent glazing. Moreover, the tableau was framed and its frame—as is still the case—was turned toward the interior, whereas windows were not always framed and, when they were, their frames were carved on external walls.

26). An epistemological metaphor produces knowledge of its object and renders it knowable. In this sense, the window metaphor describes not so much the "nature" of the painting but the viewer's encounter with it, what she can see and know of it. As such, the window trope does not define what painting is. Rather, it describes the ways in which painting operates and relates to the viewer, and thus refers to the relation between the seeing subject and the object seen. It describes painting's *effect*.

Joseph Masheck opens his essay "Alberti's 'Window': Art-Historiographic Notes on an Antimodernist Misprision" (1991) by stating that "[c]lichés, like weeds, prove difficult to uproot" (35). The cliché he aims to dislocate is none other than the commonplace misuse of Alberti's evocation of the metaphor that equates the surface of painting with the transparent glass surface of the window. He suggests that "*De Pictura* 1.19 maintains [...] that if you draw a rectangle then you *may* treat it—the drawn rectangle that is, not the entire hypothetical surface—as an open window" (35). Similarly, Friedberg painstakingly argues that Alberti's metaphor of the window emphasized the frame of viewing rather than a natural or mimetic view enclosed by an architectural window (2006: 35): the "frame was what mattered, not the view out the window" (30).

The frame of the architectural window and the painting both bring forth an "ontological cut," to use Stoichita's terminology (1997: 30).[194] Both negate the wall and mark the boundaries of what is given-to-be-seen. A window separates the outside from the inside yet makes the two realms permeable by allowing light, wind, and the view to filter inside. The picture frame establishes, on the contrary, "the identity of the fiction" (Stoichita, 1997: 55). It points to representation at work. According to Louis Marin, the frame is "an ornament of the painting, but it is a necessary ornament: it is one of the conditions of *possibility* for contemplating the painting, for reading it, and thus interpreting it" (2001a: 323). Hence, the frame not only presents the painting as a "painting" but also makes it *lisible* (readable) as an object of contemplation and knowledge. In this sense, the frame brings the visual to the fore, or, as John Berger suggests, it deposits the visual in "a safe let into a wall" (1979:

[194] In *The Self-Aware Image*, Stoichita uses this term to refer to the separation of the portable panel painting from the wall. Relevant here is Jacques Derrida's (1987) discussion on the frame as *parergon* that functions as a kind of supplement to the work of which it is a part. According to Derrida, the frame is not a cut between the world and the work but a link between the two entities.

109).[195] It encloses what pertains to visual representation, and, ideally, it refutes the presence of forms of representation other than the figural. In relation to the viewer, the enclosed view of the window and the painting present themselves as clearly delimited objects standing out there, clearly separated from the self, and making themselves available for prospective scrutiny.

In addition to the discourse of the frame, the window metaphor brings forth another discourse, that of transparency. By invoking transparency, I distance myself from Masheck's and Friedberg's accounts. I argue with, for example, Stoichita, who has suggested that the window was a metaphor for dealing with perspective through which "[t]he image's painted surface functioned in the same way as the surface of a window, behind which the representation of a three-dimensional, homogenous, and logical space stretched far into the distance" (1997: 12). More importantly, the metaphor issues a discourse of transparency referring to a perceptual and conceptual cleanness and intelligibility concerning the relation between viewer and image. In this sense, it assumes an attitude of the viewer rather than a property of the object or the medium. The notion of transparency suggests that what is seen is at once comprehensible, hence it is knowable; the viewer's encounter with the tableau-window thus involves neither distortion nor interference. It does not acknowledge that the surface of the window (hence, the surface of the painting) can include streaks, reflections, refractions, or dust.

In its interlocking of the discourses of the frame and transparency, the window metaphor produces the knowledge of painting and casts the painting as a knowable and knowledgeable object. It promotes a viewing position, akin to that of looking though a window that strictly frames the seen within a transparent condition of knowing. However, in arguing in this fashion I do not wish to promote the viewing position identified by Jean Starobinski as "looking through the window." According to Starobinski, this position is an "archetypal situation," evident in itself, with neither a past nor a history. Indeed, it is beyond history, and as representing a point of eternal origin this viewing position conditions the performance of the viewer: its unreflected permanence suppresses the potentiality of other modes of visual encounter (1984, quoted in Wajcman, 2004a: 15). In contrast to such an

[195] Berger here refers to the possessability of a painting as an independent object. Here, I read his metaphor as positing that a painting encloses the visual and keeps it safe and "sound" within its frame.

ahistorical view, I align myself with Wajcman, who suggests a historically situated understanding of the operation of the tableau-window that, for him, paves the way for the "birth of the spectator." He writes:

> Previously the visible world was an address to the seeing man; it was entirely an invocation to decipher there the signs of the Creator and to give thanks for his creation. The world "gazed upon" him and called him, and reminded him that he had eyes not to see. Called by the visible, the subject was implicated in the visible. The idea of the window is, on the contrary, that of a seeing subject removed from what he sees. The visible no longer directed toward him and does not make a sign for him, doesn't send him a call. Through the window the visible becomes finally silent [….] To see without being seen and without being called to see: this is the spectator. (2004b: 63)

Wajcman argues here that the tableau-window renders the gaze of the Other invisible and by doing so creates the illusion that the viewer sees everything without being seen by the omnipotent gaze. In facing the tableau, the subject is taken away from the world, subtracted from the visual field as if she were looking out a window without the threat of being seen in return. For Wajcman, this scopic formula conditions the notion of subjectivity, that is, one's being intimate with oneself.[196] The one-way transparency (from inside to outside) suggested by the act of looking at a window is analogous to what is suggested when one looks at a painting: the subject can see without being seen by the gaze of the Other.

According to Wajcman, the tableau-window instigated a new subjectivity, that of the man who looks through his window, who has "the right to look upon the world [….] through the window, in secret, he can contemplate it" (2007). In this sense, the operation of the window metaphor not only delineates our encounter with painting but also, and more importantly, comes to demarcate our positioning within the visual field within which the seeing subject is converted into a spectator. However, the distancing of the seeing subject from what she sees does not proclaim a withdrawal from the visible world that is silenced –"a mute world, good to see" (Wajcman; 2004b: 63). Instead, seeing at a distance, in retreat, protected from what

[196] For the notion of the gaze and visual intimacy, see Chapter 2.

one sees to “satisfy one’s appetite to see” (63), asserts a drive to assume power over the visible as it is captured within the frame of the window/tableau as that which is there to be contemplated. As Bal argues, metaphors bring two discourses and two frames of reference into collision and produce a contextual network for the object. In this respect, it is through the amalgamation of the discourses of the frame and transparency that the window metaphor knits a contextual web around painting as its object: the painting as a framed object for contemplation is fused with the painting as a transparent object.

The Threshold

Certainly, a miniature painting cannot be compared to a window, as there are incommensurable formal dissimilarities between the two. To begin with, the window is an opening in the wall and consequently a form of separation from the outside world; the miniature painting, by contrast, is part of a book. As an element of the book *Divan-i Nadiri*, the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature negates or, better, negotiates with the page and the space of the book that is made up of scripture as well as decorative patterns. Secondly, the size of the miniature (the dimensions of the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature are 18 x 20 cm) is too small to warrant comparison with a window that one can look through. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the size of the miniature is determined by the dimensions of the book, dimensions that correspond to the human hand; whereas the window is more commensurate with the form and dimensions of the human body as a whole. Finally, the miniature within the book lies horizontally in front of the viewer, whereas the window has its basis in the verticality of architecture, as I have already discussed. Accordingly, as I have argued in the previous chapter, the viewing position encouraged by the miniature is analogous to the bodily posture assumed when reading a book rather than the position taken when looking through a vertically oriented, transparent window.

However, these physical incommensurabilities do not lead to an inherent refusal of the discourse of the window metaphor. The engravings to which Nakşi was allegedly exposed share common material traits with the miniature. However, they retain the logic of the window and hence the discourses it knits around its object,

albeit in a condensed, engraved form (Figure 2).[197] In fact, if Nakşi borrowed anything from these engravings, it is not the logic of the window but rather the use of architectural embrasures. As I noted before, Atil proposes that, in his *oeuvre*, Ahmed Nakşi sought to combine "the traditional compositions of Ottoman painting of the 16th and early 17th [sic.] with conventions drawn from European prints, particularly perspective."[198] Atil presumes that as Nakşi has seen the "window," he has attempted to produce an illusion of depth by giving a back view of some of the figures in the foreground, incorporating other figures into the background, and introducing gates, windows and arches opening on to distant vistas.

Another miniature from the *Divan-i Nadiri* which depicts the house of *Sheykh ül-Islâm* Mustafa Efendi displays the use of such architectural openings (Figure 37). In this miniature, an assistant stands atop the steps and gathers petitions from the people assembled in the arcaded courtyard. Mustafa Efendi, depicted as considerably larger than the other figures, appears at a window on the second floor. He is busy with writing. Members of his household stand in front of other windows. An opening in the courtyard shows the street behind the house; two horses peer in through the window. A more peculiar view is presented through a window on the second floor, which gives onto a scene in which two figures converse in an alley. Instead of a window view, this miniature offers us a "windowed" space by mixing contesting spatial constructions through architectural embrasures.

Displaying numerous windows, door, and archways, the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature exemplifies a similar functioning of the apertures. What interests me in Nakşi's work, however, is not his supposed attempts to master perspective within the traditionally flat miniature surface but rather his constant interrogation of architectural openings—a preoccupation that asserts itself in his work more than it does in the paintings of any other Ottoman miniaturist. While I tend to agree with Atil's suggestion that he used these openings to experiment with the illusion of depth, I contend that their rendering has little to do with the organization of the whole pictorial space (hence, perspective).

[197] For the relation between paintings and engravings, see Boer (2004: 109-138).

[198] For a similar argument on the role of perspective in the "Gazanfer Ağa Medresesi" miniature, see Atasoy and Çağman (1974: 68-9).

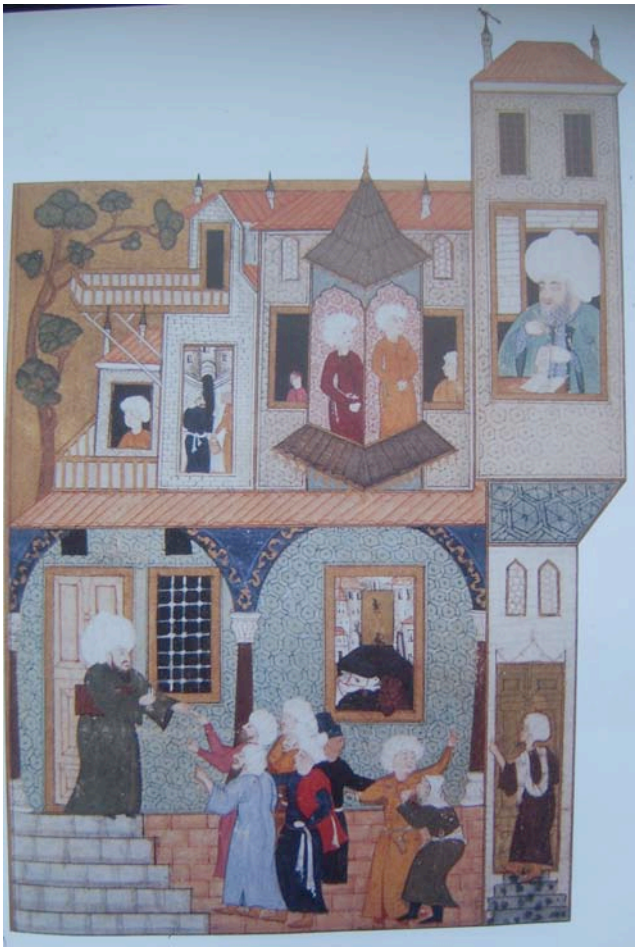

Figure 37. "The house of Sheykh ül-Islâm Mustafa Efendi," *Divan-i Nadiri*, Ahmed Nakşi, c.1620, Topkapi Museum, (H. 899, f. 18b). Reproduced from And (2002: 337).

I speculate that the employment of architectural thresholds in the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature indicates a subversion of their conventional function as architectural elements used for framing events and figures, as is the case, for example, in the *House of Sheykh ül-Islâm Mustafa Efendi* miniature.[199] Traditionally, doors and especially windows were utilized functionally to show a figure who usually has a secondary role in a given narrative. This function of such apertures can be compared to contemporaneous Dutch genre paintings. Georgina Cole suggests that the doorway in Dutch genre painting can also demarcate a site of liminal subjectivity within the image. In the work of Nicolaes Maes, for example, the liminal spaces of doorways

[199] See Victor Stoichita's *The Self-Aware Image* for a discussion of the meta-functioning of representation of doors, window, frames, and niches in early modern European painting.

are used to frame figures so as to keep them apart from narrative events as they unfold within the work (2006).[200]

However, the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature does away with this sort of narrative framing function performed by architectural elements. For me, Nakşi's use of such openings should rather be conceived as an attempt to revise the conventional framing function by putting forth a novel treatment of such apertures as mere cavities that mostly lead the viewer's gaze nowhere. In this capacity, these potential openings do not operate visually so as to offer a view. Instead, they operate spatially so as to order the pictorial plane in a horizontal manner, as I will argue below. As opposed to visual apertures, these are "liminal" spaces, to use a term which has gained wide currency though its appearance and consideration in works by Edward Soja (1996) and Homi Bhabha (1994), among others. In her book *The Eye in the Text* (1981), which concentrates on textual figurings of passages, Mary Ann Caws relates the contemporary use of the term *threshold* to its initial use in anthropology:

> Whether or not the less used Greek sense of *limen* as refuge or harbor is added to the far more widespread Latin sense of *limen* as threshold, the present awareness of liminality and its applications is of far reach. This broad threshold includes at once the multiple notions of border, hinge, and articulation [….] of beginning and exit, of the place for crossing-over, and of the link between inside and out. Any serious mention of liminality has to take into account the anthropological notions of passage and its rites […]. (15)

Most notably the anthropologist Victor Turner (1969), who explored Arnold van Gennep's threefold structure of rites of passage (that could be social, sexual, spiritual, or spatial) describes the liminal as a period of transition in which the subject, having relinquished an old identity without yet assuming a new one, becomes no one and finds herself to be nowhere. He describes such passages as occupying a "no-man's-land betwixt-and-between," a site of "a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities [….] a striving after new forms and structures, a gestation process" (Turner 1986: 41).

[200]The "eavesdropper" is the primary example of a figure functioning equally as protagonist and beholder, spectacle and spectator—and who occupies a space both within and without the pictorial narrative. See also Jenny Anger (2004), especially the conclusion.

Inspired by Turner's metaphorical investment of the notion of the threshold, I suggest that Nakşi's multiple embrasures are indeed a storehouse of possibilities for the viewer to discern new visual forms and structures and to initiate a conception process, which might be called a "threshold experience." However, I do not argue that the metaphor of the threshold should be conceived as an antidote to the pervasive figure of the window. Instead, I would like to propose that the term *threshold* might help us better understand the operation of miniature painting and illustrate, at the same time, what the window trope lacks and conceals.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term *threshold* as "the piece of timber or stone which lies below the bottom of a door, and has to be crossed in entering a house; the sill of a doorway; hence, the entrance to a house or building." It is fundamentally related to architecture and, like the window, has a bordering function. Yet, it relates less to the visual than does the window, as it refers to a space for movement from one separate space to another. It is more of a tunnel or passage than a transparent surface. As such, it has more spatial and temporal connotations. Moreover, as the threshold is a space between two realms, it is itself a space in between, belonging to neither of them. It marks a passage and an intersection. In relation to sight, the threshold might bring forth opacity instead of transparency as it can delay the process of seeing.

According to the same dictionary, figurative definitions of the threshold include "entrance, the beginning of a state or action, outset, opening." In this capacity, the threshold offers us a place for our quest to find an alternative state of painting that has been crowded out by the dominance of the tableau-window. Finally, in physiology, the term *threshold* refers to the "limit below which a stimulus is not perceptible; the magnitude or intensity of a stimulus which has to be exceeded for it to produce a certain response." In this sense, the threshold metaphor allows us to consider what the viewer cannot see in painting, or, to put it a different way, what the viewer leaves unseen. Keeping these definitions in mind, my analysis of the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature will confront the threshold to the window by focusing two discourses brought to the fore latter: the function of the *frame* and the notion of *transparency*.

The Frame as a Threshold

Stoichita argues that the frame "separates the image from anything that is nonimage" (1997: 30). It defines "what is framed as a meaningful world as opposed to the outside-the-frame, which is simply the world experienced" (30). While the frame of the tableau severs it from the wall and, hence, the surrounding world, the miniature resides within the space of the book as an object of the world that is experienced. However, the miniature is not strictly a part of the scriptural space of the book; its spatial partition is maintained by means of the visibly drawn gilded frame that surrounds the miniature on four sides.[201] This frame, even though it has no material or formal difference (line and color) from the image itself, serves to mark the limits of the miniature by detaching it from the textual space of the manuscript, which actually continues on to the next page.[202] The frame also separates the miniature from the space immediate outside it, which is traditionally reserved for (mostly floral) ornamentation.[203]

The frame of the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature, however, sets its borders between the image and the blankness of the page. This visible separation, in turn, acknowledges the presence of the material supporting surface: the page of the book. While the window metaphor necessarily denies or annihilates the material support "because it is assumed to be empty by an essential *aperité*, a surface window that will soon come open" the miniature highlights the support/surface (Marin, 2001b: 378).[204] In this capacity, I argue that, instead of operating as an "ontological cut," the

[201] In some reproductions, for example in Metin And (2003: 336), the gilded frame of the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature has been discarded. This "cropping attitude" amounts to a certain conceptualization of painting that defines the work as that which is reserved within the frame. The frame is conceived as detachable even when it is physically impossible to remove it, as in the case of the miniature painting. As Barbara Savedoff suggests, this is the case in many reproductions: they provide us with an "ideal" view of the work—unobstructed, well lit, and presented to us at eye level—usually isolated from their material and contextual settings. They show what is presumed to be "the painting itself"—the painted portion of the canvas up to the border of the frame (1999: 346).

[202] The script on the next page actually continues within the miniature, within the text boxes placed on the top and the bottom of the picture plane.

[203] The *Woman bathing in the Hamam* (Chapter 2), the Fall (Chapter 1), and the portrait of the Sultan Ahmed III (Chapter 4) miniatures are surrounded by moderate floral ornamentation; whereas the immediate exteriors of the circumcision march miniature series (Chapter 3) and the Timur miniature (Chapter 5) are left blank.

[204] See also Norman Bryson's *Vision and Painting* (1983), in which he discusses the material logic of Western oil painting through what he calls the "erasive imperative." This imperative first erases the material support through the thickness of paint as well as brushstrokes—hence the implication of

miniature frame embarks upon a threshold function by mediating between the textual, the figural, the ornamental, and the emptiness that is supposedly exterior to the miniature. Unlike the tableau-window, the miniature comes into essence by means of an intimate interplay with its outside and also among different modes of representation. The frame mediates and permeates this interaction by serving as a threshold.

In the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature, this threshold modality of the frame is made tangible by means of two pictorial details that linger on the threshold/frame. The hardly ignorable first detail shows the gilded finial (*alem*) of the *medrese* dome that sticks eye-catchingly out of the frame. It is drawn over and extends beyond the frame. Similarly, the less visible headgear of Sultan Osman II is painted on the frame at the lower right of the miniature. These two instances, I suggest, problematize the "normative" status and the function of the frame by questioning what it incorporates and encircles, hence what it can make known/seen. They illustrate the moments when the figural, secured by the frame, slips into its alleged outside. The frame does not serve to contain the internal operation of figuration. Instead, it allows the figurative to expand beyond the boundaries of the image into the void, into the unmapped territory of the empty page. In this sense, the protruding finial can be compared to the fortress located outside of the frame of the Timur miniature, discussed in the preceding chapter. As I argued there, the broken right-hand-side frame of the Timur miniature discards the separation between inside and outside and thereby appropriates the surrounding void. In this capacity, the fortress (and also the obtruding hills and cascading river) extends the picture plane beyond its alleged borders and exploits the whole page in its "interior."

In the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature, conversely, the difference between inside and outside is first sustained as a dialectical relation—by the regulating frame—that is subsequently questioned by the pictorial elements, which are literally hanging on the threshold. The headgear of the sultan is neither inside nor outside, belonging to neither realm but rather to the liminal zone between them. This tension is carried further, as the finial transgresses the frame as if to test the limits of the dialectic. This transgression yields to continuity between the two realms, as the finial touches both.

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artist's body—leaving the picture plane materially opaque. This material opacity is the condition of metaphorical transparency (88-89).

As such, the frame is not a device of separation but is rather a line of transition, a mediating threshold.

The finial is a highly ambiguous figure—a "theoretical apex" that strikes us with its ambivalent presence. It reminds the viewer specifically of the mediation of the frame and the intermedial state of the miniature itself. While it touches the empty space conventionally reserved for the ornamental and the textual, it facilitates, at the same time, the contamination of the field of the "pure visual" caused within the frame by the presence of "alien" representational systems. Take, for example, the text-boxes within the miniature that keep the handwritten text at bay by enclosing it in a separate space.[205] "Windowed" within their own "scriptural conceptual aesthetic space" (Gonzalez, 2001: 103), the calligraphic texts are strictly isolated from the figurative. Yet they are not liberated from each other. They act as complementary cognitive means for those who read Ottoman (Arabic) script. But for those who cannot (or do not) read the text, the formal aesthetic qualities of the handwritten text reveal themselves more openly in relation to the "rest" of the miniature. Even though the scriptural space is inserted in the margins of the picture plane, I argue that it remains neither visually nor semantically subordinated to the figural, as has been traditionally argued. In "The Signifying Aesthetic System of Inscription in Islamic Art," Valérie Gonzales suggests that when "Muslim painters dared to venture into the marvelous world of three-dimensional illusion," there occurred a clash between the two-dimensional space of calligraphy and the illusionistic figurative one (Gonzalez, 2001: 109). In such cases, Gonzalez argues,

> Without successfully severing its links with calligraphy, the iconography shares with it the entire pictorial plane of the page, in such a way that inscriptions serve only a marginalized function, namely an informative function that only aims to provide semantic terms for the understanding of the miniature. In this case, the scriptures appear circumscribed inside cartouches,

[205] The text on the miniature reads: "Gubâr-i tevsen-i iclâli surme-i a'yân" (upper section) and "Cenâb-i dergeh-i ikbâli kible-i ahyâr" (lower section). This couplet can loosely be translated as "The dust of his horse (which is the symbol of his) omnipotence is the kohl of the eyes of notable men / the courtyard of the *dergah* [a sufi center for teaching, literally meaning the threshold] which is [the symbol] of bliss and prosperity is the *kible* [the direction of Mecca] of the auspicious people." Below, I will elaborate on the use of the notion of *dergah* (the threshold). I am grateful to Hatice Aynur from Yildiz Technical University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Turkish Language and Literature, for the transcription of the Ottoman (Arabic) text into Turkish.

> panels or as friezes set back from the image, alongside its edges. The terms of the message emanating from these texts do not modify the aesthetic vision that the picture itself proposes. (109)

A similar configuration relating the two signifying systems is at stake in the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature.

Yet the inscriptions do not function to merely impart information; they also participate in the aesthetics of the miniature by invoking a threshold experience. The viewer's gaze has to travel between these two planes. Because the inner frame emphasizes the difference between the two realms, the passage from one plane to the other does not occur subtly. The textual contamination of the figural turns the whole plane into a kind of intermediary space that sustains the difference between the two. The textual also connects the pictorial plane to its outside, to the next page inhibited by the textual itself. The scripts in the text-boxes function as "hyperlinks" (to borrow a contemporary term from the vocabulary of the Internet), which transport the viewer to the textual outside of the miniature located, on the right-hand page**.**

The interplay between the textual and the figurative is further complicated by means of the script above the entrance door of the *külliye*, which reminds the ignorant (though not illeterate) viewer that *this* is, indeed, the *Medrese* of Gazanfer Ağa. It is not a "representation" of a text on the building, but is the text itself. It was probably put there by the scribe who executed the whole manuscript. Here, the strict separation suggested by the text-boxes is replaced by a smooth transition between the two realms within the figure of the door. As an architectural element, the door demarcates and delimits, but also allows the conjoining of different spaces that form "permeable boundaries between heterogeneous zones of experience" (Cole, 2006). The door of the *külliye* carries this threshold function to the level of metaphor as that which mediates between the scriptural and the visual. Seen together with its blue ornamented frame, the door brings the ornamental into play and thereby highlights the pictorial plane as a liminal space opening toward the textual, ornamental, and figurative.[206] As such, the door of the complex is an allegorical figure in *mise-en-abyme* for the operation of the miniature itself as well as for the book, as it incorporates different modalities into its surface.

[206] See Chapter 4 for the role of the ornamentation in miniature painting.

Until now, I have discussed the first metaphorical effect of the threshold notion in respect to the functioning of the frame. The frame understood as a threshold renders the pictorial plane as a transitional passage between inside and outside as well as between different logics of representation and modalities of seeing. Destabilized here is the status of the frame as "an indispensable *parergon*, a constitutive supplement" (Marin, 2001a; Derrida, 1997) that "autonomizes the work within visible space" by putting "representation into a state of exclusive presence" (Marin, 2001a: 356). What the frame of the tableau-window makes tangible is the revelation that outside the space it encircles, "there is nothing to contemplate" (Marin, 2001a: 356). The miniature frame, however, allows permeation between outside and inside. Its virtue is, then, not simply in its offering of the painting for viewing as an object of contemplation, as Marin would have it. On the contrary, it encourages the viewer to be caught in-between practices and frames of knowing the world and modes of communication at the threshold. She is invited to dwell at this threshold between alternative states of knowing and experiencing: looking, reading, and sensing. In this capacity, the frame facilitates a liminal zone of a fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities leading the viewer to experience a state of productive distraction and intermedial confusion rather than one of attentive contemplation.

Thresholding the Visual

I mentioned that the window metaphor entails that the meeting of viewer with the medium is a transparent encounter, one that involves no visual distractions such as streaks, reflections, refractions, and dust. The miniature, on the other hand, highlights the opacity of the medium as well as the spatial and temporal aspects that are involved in the acts of looking, which accentuate the potentiality of what Marin calls the "ruptures," "interruptions," or "syncopes" entailed by the encounter (2001b).[207] I will argue that the architectural embrasures in the "Gazanfer Ağa Medresesi" miniature not only organize the representational space in a horizontal manner but also operate as interruptions that gates or thresholds the viewer's gaze.

[207] In his essay titled "Ruptures, Interruptions or Syncopes in Representation in Painting" (2001b), Marin focuses on the blanks of representation in painting, or "opacifications"—ways of making "white" or "blank" spaces in painting.

The most visible rupture of this kind can be observed in the spatial organization of the miniature plane. Semra Ögel states that the "Gazanfer Ağa Medresesi" miniature brings together two distinct forms of pictorial space: the perspectival in the upper plane and the traditional two-dimensional multiple point of view of the Ottoman miniature painting in the rest (1993: 371). These two modes of spatial representation are appended to each other without intermingling. This spatial separation within the miniature plane creates the illusion that there is, indeed, a "foreground" of the miniature—the school, school cells, the *sebil*, the front walls, and the gate in front of which the sultan waits—as well as a "background" comprising the aqueduct wall and vaults.

It is plausible to argue that the foreground enjoys what Deepak Ananth calls "the aesthetic of the carpet," as mentioned in Chapter 4 in the discussion of the portrait of the sultan. Such an aesthetic denies "any hierarchy in the treatment of space as exemplified by the easy reciprocity and mobility between indoors and outdoors, background and foreground, center and margin—those paradigmatic spatial components of Western painting that the Islamic miniature audaciously recasts as the discrete yet interlinked elements of an all-encompassing surface design" (1996, 157). The local illusion of depth suggested by the two aqueduct vaults partially brings in those paradigmatic spatial components in an otherwise flat miniature plane and gives order to the visible within the miniature. However, this order, I argue, is different from the perspectival organization that would have rendered the picture plane harmoniously transparent. Rather, it participates in the horizontal layering or "thresholding" of the visible as central to a visual order that contaminates the experience of the viewer with opacity.

The thresholding of the visual through horizontal layers can be traced through the viewer's entering of the miniature following the "intruder," namely, the figure of the sultan, who seems to have come into the picture just in time to leave his headgear on the frame. The sultan and his company are headed toward the door of the complex and lead the viewer's gaze into the interior of the school. Hence the sultan—and his escorts—not only invite the viewer into the picture plane but also introduce her to the "subject matter" of the miniature: the theological school of Gazanfer Ağa. The sultan might then be called a "figure of the frame," a rhetorical personage who, according to Marin, is aligned with the boundaries of the work and can draw the viewer's gaze to the events unfolding within the painting (2001a: 358-360).

In narrative terms, the figure of the sultan is a focalizer whose point of view the viewer adopts through a process of identification, and hence perceives the narrative.[208] We enter the story by subsuming his vision, yet his "gated gaze" does not take the viewer too far. There seems to be no passage into the school's interior. The grilled window on the walls of the complex opens to a garden view, yet it leaves the viewer with a cropped view of the pavement and grass. Hence the viewer is held at the door, the "focalized object" of the sultan's vision. The viewer, just like the sultan himself, is prevented from interrupting the intimacy of the interior, partitioned by the door into private and public spheres. Yet, as Bachelard suggests, "the door is both an entrance and exit; it keeps in, protects, secures, but also lets pass, invites and tempts (1994: 222). In this sense, the closed door functions as the first threshold that not only prevents vision but also enables it by invoking a desire for sight. In line with the previous reading of the door as a threshold between different modalities of seeing, here the door functions as a wavering, liminal space between inside and outside as well as between vision and its closure.[209] This threshold experience responds, as it were, to Bachelard's observation of "[h]ow concrete everything becomes in the world of the spirit when an object, a mere door, can give us images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect" (1994: 224). Torn between hesitation and temptation—just like the viewer—the sultan as the focalizer and the door as the focalized object help us see, in Bal's words, "not what is represented, but how it is represented—what view of the scene is proposed to us" (1991: 211).

Unlike the sultan, the viewer can make a transgressive crossing past the closed door so as to catch a glimpse of the school's interior, thanks to the canceling out of the façade of the building, a common technique used to show interiors in miniature painting. In fact, the lower text on the miniature defines the school as a *dergâh* ("the courtyard of the *dergâh* which is [the symbol] of bliss and prosperity is

[208] For the concept of focalization, see Bal (1997). The *fabula* (a temporally and logically connected sequence of events) comes across as a story by means of the semanticization of characters, the concretization of space in place, the thickening of a sense of time, and above all, through focalization. The term indicates the connection between the events that make up the *fabula* and the one or more subjects whose "perspective" or "point of view" on the events is represented in the narrative. For the visual status of the narrative focalizer, see Bal (1991), especially Chapter 4.

[209] For the discussion of dialectics of inside and outside in literature, with a strong emphasis on the visual, see Bachelard (1994).

the *kible* [the direction of Mecca] of the auspicious people"). *Dergâh* is a center for teaching the Sufi tradition. Literally it means "threshold," referring to the passage to the Infinite, the Divine.[210] As such, the *dergâh* is a mediating space between the divine and the material world. The elimination of the "fourth wall" of this sacred threshold permits the viewer to see what otherwise would have remained invisible and intimate. Stoichita argues that

> All representations of interiors envision the room with the fourth wall eliminated. The missing partition—an essential element in all intimist fiction—is replaced by the surface of the pictorial image. To study this substitution is, in a way, to make (remake) the history of European painting. (1997: 44)

This easy, yet problematic, exchangeability makes the work of the plane of representation invisible and renders it "entirely transparent" (Marin, 2001a: 354). The history of Ottoman miniature painting is, however, different. The miniature, although it eliminates the fourth wall in its representations of interiors, acknowledges this abolition so as to reflect on the exclusion itself. [211] Instead of juxtaposing the fourth wall with the surface of the pictorial image, to create for the viewer the illusion that she is gazing into an interior through a window, the "Gazanfer Ağa" miniature stages its exclusion. In this specific miniature, as well as in many others, the missing partition referred to by Stoichita is replaced or made tangible by means of the closed door, which suggests opacity rather than a transparent vision. The discarded fourth wall thresholds the viewer *in absentia*; it promises its beholder a view of the "sacred" only by reminding her of its exclusion. In this sense, the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature is a self-aware image, to borrow Stoichita's book title,

[210] Similarly, other terms such as *dervish* and *muraqabah* (Sufi mediation) mean "threshold" or "doorway."

[211] Here I find the role of the *medrese* dome quite important with respect to the relation between the interior and exterior of the building. In his article "The Problem of Space in the Ottoman Mosque" (1963), David Gebhard argues that Ottoman mosques—along with other religious edifices that imitate the form of the mosque—sought to mirror the volumetric enclosure of space. The domes, which enclose the space and form the structure of the building, were consistently and logically declared on the exterior of the building, establishing a close expressive correspondence between exterior and interior. He contends that with little effort one may read the structure and the plan of the volumetric space by examining these dome structures. As such, the dome is an element that reveals the structure of interior toward outside.

commenting on itself and in particular on its representational operation of the separation of inside from outside.

Dwelling at the threshold of the *dergâh*, the viewer witnesses an intimate and almost sacred space of a classroom at a standstill. The silent and rigid atmosphere is broken by one figure in the row of *ulema*s, who turns towards his colleague to whisper something in his ear—perhaps word of the arrival of the sultan. This figure is yet another internal focalizer, who, by turning toward the door, carries the viewer's gaze back outside toward the sultan. Thus a circular "line of sight" is created in response to the gated vision of the sultan.[212] As the rest of the figures in the classroom seem to be entirely absorbed in their activities, the viewer's look is captured within this circular sight, caught between inside and outside.

The two windows on the decorated walls of the *medrese*, toward which all the figures have turned their backs, offer the viewer another direction for sight that is different than the enclosed circular gazing. At first glance, the windows seem to reveal an arbitrarily cropped view of a lawn with a tree and a giant plant with flowers. However, what we are given to see is hardly a "view from a window" but is instead a flat surface giving the impression of being a picture within a picture, hardly distinguishable from the floral wall ornamentation. Rather than display the pavement behind the school—which would be the expected view—they disengage the interior of the school from the world outside by not being permeable to sight, as windows are supposed to be. In this capacity, these openings can be *revzens* (upper windows) or *içlik*, those stained glass panes that are inserted inside the interior faces of windows (Bakirer, 2001: 3). These sorts of windows are made to mediate light through their intricate stucco grills and glass insets—but they do not permit a view. The construction of the *revzen* windows in the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature resembles the eighteenth-century examples that "became more unified with interior decoration" and employed grills that were an "almost inseparable part of the stucco ornaments with garlands, twining scrolls and blooming flowers that covered the wall surfaces" (Bakirer, 2001: 6). In this capacity, the windows of the school do not open to the outside but are opaque surfaces contingent to the interior. They are liminal openings,

[212] Bal suggests that paintings propose spectator positions, "lines of sight," that can be read into the image. They do not, however, in any way guarantee that the actual viewer looks along these lines, but only represent aspects of the image. (1991: 121). See Chapter 3 for a short discussion of the "line of sight" that produces a sense of continuity within a miniature series.

which do not give a view. Instead they mediate between separate spaces and "threshold" the viewer's gaze.

The archways of the aqueduct, on the other hand, contrast with the opacity of the interior windows in bringing forth a limited transparency. Through the foreshortened vaults of the aqueduct we catch a glimpse of a green, meadow-like field. The illusion of depth promises the viewer that this field extends well beyond the surface of the miniature. As I have suggested, the different spatial order of the upper picture plane clearly separates it from the flat foreground scene. This internal partition within the miniature plane is operational on two interconnected levels. First, it relates to the semantics of the miniature and, second, on a theoretical level, it comments on the notion of the threshold as the "limit below which a stimulus is not perceptible; the magnitude or intensity of a stimulus which has to be exceeded for it to produce a certain response" (*OED*).

On the level of meaning production, the separation between two realms functions as an invisible threshold between the public and the private, or better yet, between the world of the learned and that of common people (or, alternatively, between the sacred space of the *dergâh* and the mundane realm of street life). This is made clearly apparent by the impermeable windows of the school, which detach the interior from the street. Moreover, compared to the richly decorated and minutely represented foreground—the interior of the school and its entrance gate, a space that includes the sultan and his company—the background is plainly depicted. In this sense, it is plausible to argue that the world of the learned is depicted as self-enclosed and indifferent to the blunt and blank everyday (dis)order.

This demarcation between the two worlds can have an additional function once we recognize the two figures walking under the vaults, because of their dresses and headscarves, to be women. In Chapter 2, I mentioned the gendered gap when we inquire into works dealing with Ottoman history, one of the major fields in which figural illustration played an important role. As Gülru Necipoğlu states, "official Ottoman historians mostly avoided the subject of women," as "the central figure of their narratives was always the sultan" (1991: 159). However, by the mid-seventeenth century, the female figure becomes a subject in it own right in the miniatures representing scenes of everyday life. The *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature brings together in one image two worlds—the male imperial and administrative realm and the feminized arena of daily life—while simultaneously acknowledging their

separateness. In this capacity, the division between spaces works as an invisible gender line, keeping the women out of the learned men's world and subordinating them to the plain world of the everyday.[213] Yet this pictorial assignment works against the stereotypical secluded, submissive, and domestic image of the Ottoman woman—who is often supposed to belong to the fantastic world of the *harem*—by replacing her with a wanderer figure who comes in (the miniature) and leaves (the miniature) according to her own will.

The allocation of these women to the "public space," to use the term anachronistically, turns these two figures into de Certeauian pedestrians who by their act of walking transform the "place" into a lived "space."[214] De Certeau contends that the walker constitutes—by means of pedestrian speech acts—both a near and a far in relation to "his" position (1984: 99). Indeed, these two figures operate in a constructed three-dimensional space and through their presence mark it as their *space*, indifferent and inaccessible to the world of (learned) men. The difference between the two modes of spatial representation thus operates as an invisible threshold in which the two worlds touch each other without merging.

Moreover, the archways that frame the women can be read as the thresholds of the city—they open out onto an unmarked green territory—as well as of the miniature. This threshold function is close to Walter Benjamin's employment of the German notion *Schwelle* in his unfinished *Das Passagen-Werk.*[215] *Schwelle* can be

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[213] I would like to thank one of the participants in the International ASCA Workshop entitled "Inside Knowledge (Un)doing Methodologies, Imagining Alternatives" (2007), whose name I unfortunately cannot recall, for bringing the gender aspect to my attention following my presentation during the session "Creating Objects, Developing Methodologies."

[214]De Certeau's definition of place is akin to calculated, geometrical, perspectival space: "The law of the 'proper' rules in the place; the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its own 'proper' and distinct location, a location it defines" (1984: 117). In contrast, *space is a practiced place* that "exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables [. . . .] Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities [. . . .] In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a 'proper'" (117).

[215] No doubt, Benjamin uses the notion of *Schwelle* to refer to nineteenth-century Paris. However, his rendering of the topography of Paris to make it legible as a text allows me to expand his notion to the visual field. Benjamin also evokes this notion in relation to prostitutes. However, in my reading I do not wish to put forth such a connection. My reading of the archways as Benjaminian thresholds is strongly influenced by Feride Çiçekoğlu (2007), who concentrates on the representation of women wanderers, strollers, and prostitutes in Turkish cinema. Çiçekoğlu also draws on the notion of the threshold in her analyses, which have also inspired my reading of the invisible gender line in the miniature.

translated into English as “threshold” without doing justice to what Benjamin means by the term. He explains the significance of the term by elucidating its meaning, referring to the German verb *schwellen* cognate with the English “to swell,” and contends that “[t]he threshold must be carefully distinguished from the boundary. A *Schwelle* <threshold> is a zone. Transformation, passage, wave action are in the word *schwellen*, swell, and etymology ought not to overlook these senses” (1999: 494). Samuel Weber notes that a threshold is a zone of transition, change, and movement where the edges of a place are inflated such that inside and outside spaces overlap and the separation between the two breaks down (2003: 23). My use of the notion of the threshold in relation to the archways comes close to the Benjaminian *Schwelle* as that which entails the breakdown of a clear-cut opposition between inside and outside. Swelling, on the other hand, as Weber notes, indicates a crisis in the function of containment. The container, he suggests, “no longer serves as a fixed place to define movement as change of place but instead is itself caught up in a movement, a tension, becomes over-extended” (2003: 23). Therefore, the threshold is not a mere space of transition or interval situated between two fixed points or places, but is a “zone of indefinite expansion and inflation” (26).

In their tension with the foreground, in their expansion toward a territory that the viewer is not asked to see, the two vaults are Benjaminian thresholds. This unseen territory presents a crisis of containment of the miniature plane, as it inflates toward that which cannot be visualized within it. The two figures—one who has already been there, the other facing it—are offered this unspecified and uncertain territory, whereas we are given a glimpse that is just sufficient enough to invoke the desire to see and conquer. The viewer can follow the “woman in red” who is about to step out of sight, yet this figure will not lead her anywhere. We will end up “back in the miniature,” too, if we follow the other figure with the red headscarf. In either case, the viewer is stuck within the miniature, between multiple thresholds.

I argue that this gated order of looking, constructed via architectural openings—the door, the windows and the archways—allows the viewer to travel within the miniature through numerous opaque thresholds. Such an ordering of the miniature can be related to the general ordering of the visible or what the scholar of Ottoman architecture and art Gülru Necipoğlu calls “framing the gaze.” As I discussed in Chapter 4, in “Framing the Gaze in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Palaces,” (1993) Necipoğlu concentrates on the differences among visual economies

of the three dynasties manifested in the construction of imperial architecture. I suggested that the portrait of Sultan Ahmed III affirms the incompatible invisibility and overemphasized power of gazing of the Ottoman sultan by replicating the function of the grilled windows of the Topkapi Seraglio.

According to Necipoğlu, the structure of the seraglio granted the sultan the omnipotent power of gazing over others and, at the same time, rendered him invisible. Those who had the privilege of entering the imperial building (such as Ottoman dignitaries, local notables, and foreign ambassadors) had to pass through gates that connected and separated different secluded courts. These passages regulated the visual economy of the seraglio.[216] Necipoğlu states:

> Its [Topkapi's] three increasingly secluded courts were experienced in a processional sequence that drew the official visitor from one clearly marked ceremonial station to the next. Three monumental gates occupying the central position at the head of each court funneled the ceremonial procession toward the sultan's private reception hall attached to the inner threshold of the third gate where all movement converged. The first two outer courts housed various workshops, service areas, and administrative functions, mere extensions of a much more magnificent inner palace constituting the sultan's inaccessible private domain. The innermost third court, divided into male and female zones [was] fronted by a walled hanging garden with kiosks […]. (303)

These three gates designated the order of the visual by controlling who could and could not be seen and who was allowed to see what, thereby defining the limits of the visible. The *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature employs a similar thresholding in which the viewer reads the miniature by means of passing multiple thresholds that are guarded by obstructing opaque figures instead of Janus-headed janissaries. However, the miniature reverses the order of the visual that is at stake in the Topkapi. While the palace structure kept the sultan visible only as a silhouette, as I argued in Chapter 4, the miniature here depicts him almost as a fleeting detail on the corner of the picture

[216] Except for the two religious holidays in which the sultan agreed to give public audiences, he would remain in seclusion and only receive privileged dignitaries and ambassadors in his private audience hall four times a week.

plane. He is marginalized to the extent that the viewer might pass him by without recognizing that she is looking at the sultan. With this visual reversal, the miniature makes the sultan an object of contemplation by taking him out of the confines of the palace where he was "hidden like a pearl 'in the depth of the oyster shell'" (Necipoğlu, 1993: 304). What is made invisible, on the contrary, is the order of the city of his vassals, to which he remains oblivious.

Finally, this last threshold of the vaults that swells toward unknown territories provides the notion of the threshold its ultimate metaphorical significance as the "limit below which a stimulus is not perceptible; the magnitude or intensity of a stimulus which has to be exceeded for it to produce a certain response" (*OED*). Either it resides at the edge of the miniature opening or it swells toward its outside: to the emptiness of the page, thereby setting the limit of the perceptible, and hence representable and knowable within the miniature. On the one hand, it asserts the limits of the omnipotent gaze of its intended viewer—the sultan—by thresholding his vision for the third time. The everyday realm of the city that has been given to the two "*flâneuse*" figures is kept out of the reach of the sultan's gazing power; he can see neither where they come from nor where they are headed. On the other hand, it challenges the informed gaze that we possess as the "uninvited" beholders, as those who want to take hold of the miniature. What we can see through the vaults is a flat-as-paper lawn that, while not feeding the "good eye" of the art historian, provides food for thought for the cultural analyst.[217] It asks for a "curious eye," as Irit Rogoff calls it, implying a certain "unsettled act of looking oriented towards the outside of the realm of the known, towards the things not yet quite understood or articulated, towards the pleasures of the forbidden or the hidden or the unthought with the optimism of finding out something one had not known or been able to conceive of before" (1998:18).

The pleasure that the miniature promises to its curious viewer is, I propose, the joy of "opacity" and the bliss of not being able to see/know a "secret" that is given only to the female figures of the miniature—and, additionally, is kept away from the viewer who has to assume, and identify with the viewing position of the

[217] Rogoff writes: "When I was training as an art historian, we were instructed in staring at pictures. The assumption was that the harder we look, the more would be revealed to us; that a rigorous, precise and historically informed looking would reveal a wealth of hidden meanings. This belief produced a new anatomical formation called 'the good eye' […]" (1996: 17).

sultan. This is the threshold of the invisible and unknowable that the window metaphor is keen on framing and making visible. Dwelling at the threshold involves taking the "risks of fiction," as Didi-Huberman contends. It consists of not-grasping the image, of letting oneself be grasped by it, and thus of "letting go of one's knowledge about it" (Didi-Huberman, 2005: 16). It definitely requires letting go of metaphors we think we see through clearly.

Dwelling at the Threshold

Whether Ahmet Nakşi indeed tried to incorporate the logic of the painting as a window in his miniature or not, the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature negotiates with the discourse of transparency and the rhetoric of the frame, as I discussed above. The metaphor/concept of the threshold, as it pertains to a theory of the miniature, sheds light on the in-between spaces neglected and negated by the persistence of the window metaphor. It allocated a process of analyzing the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature that is in line with Bal's epistemology of the concept-metaphor, an epistemology that instead of predicting, explaining, or generalizing, helps us specify and get an eye for differences. In this sense, the operation of the multiple thresholds in the miniature resonates with my analyses in previous chapters. Similar to the functioning of the details in the Adam and Eve miniature, the symptom in the Timur miniature, and the ornamentation in the portrait of Sultan Ahmed III, the threshold conveys a theoretical opening into images through which, not the truth, but the unthought of the image can come forth.

Jean-Luc Nancy is one of the few scholars who has taken up the notion of the threshold in visual arts and bestowed it with analytical potentiality. In his essay "On the Threshold," the threshold becomes a critical notion in his analysis of Caravaggio's *The Death of the Virgin* (1605-6). For Nancy, when exposed to a work of art the spectator "becomes an access" to that which is absolutely inaccessible (1996: 60). *The Death of the Virgin* is the paradigmatic case of being exposed to the "absolute inaccessible": death.[218] He argues that Caravaggio's painting not only paints the threshold of death but is itself a threshold. When we enter the scene, we

[218] I will not expand on Nancy's musings about death as a singular event, which cannot be presented by pictorial or any other means. One is always on the other side of death or beyond it.

are neither inside nor outside the work; we "*compear*," co-exist with the presence of the apostles, the Virgin Mary, and Mary Magdalene. This co-presence reminds the viewer that "[f]rom the inside of (the) painting to the outside of (the) painting there is nothing, no passage. There is painting, there is us, indistinctly, distinctly" (61). This incommensurable distance between inside and outside, Nancy argues, reassures us of our existence and the fact that we accede neither to the inside nor the outside of ourselves. Hence, the painting "paints the threshold of existence." In these conditions, he states, "to paint does not mean to represent, but simply to pose the ground, the texture, and the pigment of the threshold" (61).

Nancy states that what separates the Virgin from Mary Magdalene and from the spectator who "compears" with them is not death, however. In between the two women, "there is only the immobile material stuff of the painting – the canvas, the oil, the pigment and the texture, and the most important thing created by these, the use of light" (Heikkilä, 2007: 237). The materiality of painting cancels out the demand to see the invisible either beyond the picture or inside or outside of it; hence *everything* is there in the painting, "right at it, on the threshold, like its very oil, its weave, and its pigment" (Nancy, 1996: 59). Martta Heikkilä contends that Nancy's explication of Caravaggio's painting seems to suggest that we, "as spectators, are in a position which is parallel to our existence as mortals: there is no access to the 'mystery' or the hidden invisible inside behind the surface of a work of art, since we cannot penetrate into the obvious facts of the painting, that is, into its materiality" (2007: 237). Instead, as long as we remain on the threshold of its inappropriability, we also ourselves *exist* as the living threshold of death.

In his quest for another conception of painting, Nancy puts the viewer on the threshold where one does not explain the painting but rather gets an eye for differences. In front of the painting or, better, at its threshold, Nancy seems to be recollecting a threshold experience between "this" and the "other" sides of both painting and death. The encounter is marked with ambivalence and transition. According to Walter Benjamin such experiences are in abeyance. He writes:

> Rites of passage—this is the designation in folklore for the ceremonies that attach to death and birth, to marriage, puberty, and so forth. In modern life, these transitions are becoming ever more unrecognizable and impossible to experience. We have grown very poor in threshold experiences. Falling

> asleep is perhaps the only such experience that remains to us. (But together with this, there is also waking up). (1999: 494)

Nancy's work and his analysis of the Caravaggio painting in particular seem to suggest that images may be another residue of the transitional experiences that Benjamin deems to have been lost in modern life.

My aim, however, is not to compare our encounter with the *Gazanfer Ağa* miniature either to a state of awakening as the last residue of our threshold experiences or to an access to the inaccessible. If the threshold is a zone of transition between one state of consciousness and another, as Benjamin suggests, the miniature encourages us to dwell at such a passage. It does so by giving the viewer an opportunity to envisage her relation with works of art through notions other than those previously taken as norms, such as the window or the mirror. The viewer experiences a different mode of knowing and sensing art objects than those dictated by the window trope. This experience involves an oscillation from a state of certainty, transparency, and unconditioned visibility to a zone characterized by transitional, relational, opaque, and precarious ways of seeing and knowing. The miniature, experienced as a threshold between different modes of representation as well as a "thresholder" of the visible, invites her to perch on the verge. By so doing, the threshold as a metaphor/concept illuminates not what the miniature is (and is about) but what it does. It helps us to designate and analyze—rather than describe—the viewer's experience. It enables us to conceive images neither as windows nor as mirrors but as spaces to dwell on.