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HAFEZ I. AN OVERVIEW

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i. AN OVERVIEW

Hafez is the most popular of Persian poets. If a book of poetry is to be found in a Persian home, it is likely to be the *Divān* (collected poems) of Hafez. Many of his lines have become proverbial sayings, and there are few who cannot recite some of his lyrics, partially or totally, by heart. His *Divān* is widely used in bibliomancy (*fāl*; see FĀL-NĀMAHĀ; DIVINATION); stories abound about his inspired predictions, justified by his popular sobriquet, *lesān-al-ḡayb*, the Tongue of the Unseen. And yet he is also a poet's poet. No other Persian poet has been the subject of so much analysis, commentary, and interpretation. Nor has any poet influenced the course of post-fourteenth century Persian lyrics as much as he has. He falls short of the epic poet Ferdowsi (10th century) in terms of panoramic scope and socio-political significance, and Saʿdi (13th century) in terms of versatility, verve, and vivacity, and Rumi in rhythmic musicality, but by common consent he represents the zenith of Persian lyric poetry. In no other Persian poet can be found such a combination of fertile imagination, polished diction, apt choice of words, and silken melodious expressions. These are all wedded to a broad humanity, philosophical musings, moral precepts, and reflections about the unfathomable nature of destiny, the transience of life, and the wisdom of making the most of the moment—all expressed with a lyrical exuberance that lifts his poetry above all

other Persian lyrics.

Hafez is almost exclusively known for his ghazals (see ĠAZAL), lyric poems of generally about 7-9 lines. His poems in other genres are not very significant and have hardly any place in the popular consciousness, except perhaps his *Sāqi-nāma*, a poem in couplet form about wine and drinking, often sung in a particular mode of traditional Persian music. His ghazals consist of generally self-contained lines, bound together by a single meter, a single rhyme, and sometimes a *radif*, that is, a word or phrase repeated at the end of each line. The first line more often than not sets the mood of each ghazal, but this is hardly followed through in all the lines; the thought or sentiment in other lines is determined by several factors: the general mood or motivation involved in composing the ghazal, the requirements of the rhyme and the *radif*, the poet's fluttering fancy, and possibly a consideration of the musical mode or melody intended for each line, as the ghazals of Hafez seem to have been written to be sung as well as read (see ix. below). Disparate and randomly chosen as the contents of Hafezian ghazals appear, nevertheless they all belong to a grand thematic scheme, gradually established, from which the poet may pick the themes of his choice and offer his own variations on them. Among the conventional mo-tifs largely contributed or confirmed by Hafez himself are, for instance, a number of figures who inhabit Persian lyrics, including "the beloved," "the poet-lover," "the dispenser of advice against love," "the chaperon of the beloved turned rival," "the *sāqi*, or youth who serves wine in drinking sessions," and such themes as "the worshipful craving of the lover," "the indifference of the beloved," "the symbolic love of the nightingale for the rose" and "the devotion of the moth to the candle flame."

A ghazal, by definition, has love as its main subject. The ghazals of Hafez are no exception. He sings with paramount passion of the ecstasy of love, the incomparable beauty of the beloved, the pains of separation, the rare pleasure of union, and the grievous disdain of the beloved. There are also a number of themes common to Persian lyric poetry that essentially derive from the beloved's being generally a reluctant young male figure (see BELOVED), the love for whom—even though accepted in poetry—is not condoned by the Law; hence the indifference or acerbity of the beloved, the scandal of revealed love (*rosvāʾi*), the advice of nay-sayers and dispensers of wisdom against such love, the oppressive hindrance of the beloved's warden or chaperon (*raqib*), and the lover-poet's burning envy of the other admirers and lovers of the beloved. Odd as some of these sentiments may appear to a Western or Far Eastern mind, a

Persian reader is used to them, familiar as s/he is with the thematic repertory of Persian lyrics and their conventions, as well as with the independent content of each line.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that love and its ramifications is the only major theme of the ghazals of Hafez—applicable as this may be to some other ghazal writers such as ʿAṭṭār, Saʿdi, and Rumi. Driven by an inner urge, Hafez includes in his ghazals a theme which is totally unlyrical and alien to love poetry; but he is so passionately consumed by it that he cannot help broaching it—incongruous and ill-placed as it first may seem: he is out to expose the hypocrisy of all those who have set themselves up as guardians, judges, and examples of moral rectitude. To Hafez, they pose as moral and spiritual leaders while they secretly practice the sins they exhort others not to commit. Unless we realize the intensity of Hafez's deep-rooted and passionate animosity towards the hypocrisy and perfidy of these figures, we will fail to appreciate much of his poetry.

Those that he persists in decrying include the *zāhed* (literally "ascetic," but to Hafez, a practitioner of sham piety), the *wāʿeẓ* (preacher), the shaikh (religious elder), the *mofti* (a cleric who issues religious rulings), the *qāżi* (judge, a religious figure in Islam), the *faqih* (scholar of religious law or *šariʿa*), the *ḥāfeẓ* (a memorizer and reciter of the Qurʾān), the *moḥtaseb* (official charged with policing public morals), and *emām-e jamāʿat* (leader of public prayer). His railing is no less intense against the Sufis or Islamic mystics, whom he describes as dishonest and deceitful and whose cloaks of poverty are stained by the secretly consumed forbidden wine. In one poem, 237:6, he venomously describes the Sufi as having the faith of the Antichrist (*dajjāl-kiš*) and the figure of an infidel (*molḥed-šakl*). Sufis originally represented a pious and popular reaction against the narrowness of dogmatic Law and its preoccupation with the formal aspects of religion, but in time many of them were corrupted into deceitful seekers of power and mundane pleasures. In no less than 170 ghazals, out of a total of 486 (according to Ḵānlari's edition), he jeers, directly or indirectly, at the impious clique.

It is only Hafez's eloquence, musicality, and mellifluousness and his skillful, witty manner of planting his satire in his ghazals that succeed in establishing such an unlyrical theme as a frequent motif in post-Hafezian lyric poetry.

The wittiest lines of Hafez are those in which he attacks the false figures of authority in the institutional religion: "Since the city's preacher has chosen to

love the prince and the police chief/what if I have chosen to love a pretty face?" (222.4; *wāʿeẓ-e šahr čo mehr-e malek o šeḥna gozid/man agar mehr-e negār-i begozinam če šavad?*). His lampooning of the lot, however, seldom sounds bitter. His satire, though sharp, often takes a humorous turn through the use of irony, mocking sarcasm, and ridicule: "The seminary scholar was drunk yesterday and made a ruling/that wine is forbidden, but not so bad as [dipping into] the funds of religious endowments" (45.4; *faqih-e madrasa di mast bud o fatwā dād/ke mey ḥarām wali beh ze māl-e awqāf ast*). Typical is his description of the drunken leader of public prayers: "They were carrying on their shoulders last night/the city's revered prayer-leader who used to carry a prayer-rug on his shoulders"(278:5; *ze kuy-e meykada duš-aš ba duš mibordand/emām-e ḵᵛāja ke sajjāda mikašid ba duš*).

By ranking himself among the sinners and hypocrites, particularly in view of his pen-name "Hafez" and its religious connotation, he achieves a self-debunking burlesque which further lends a humorous aspect to his satire: "O Hafez, how long will you hide under your cloak goblets of wine/one day at the patron's banquet I shall pull the curtain off your deeds" (335.8; *Ḥāfez ba zir-e ḵerqa qadaḥ tā ba key kaši/dar bazm-e kᵛāja parda ze kār-at bar afkanam*). His spoofs of the hypocrites are among the wittiest, perhaps *the* wittiest, lines in the entire corpus of Persian poetry. One of the main reasons for the popularity of Hafez is precisely his trenchant gibes against the pretenders of piety in the religious establishment, whom people resent but cannot denounce.

Hafez's attack on the pretenders of virtues is not limited to witty or derisive barbs; he employs a stratagem far more effective than merely satirizing them. To humiliate and embarrass self-righteous hypocrites, he takes the dregs and derelicts of society and enthrones them as paragons of virtue, even as *pir*s or saintly Sufi leaders. These are the *rend* "debauchee," the *qalandar* "dissolute hoodlum," *pir-e meyforuš* "wine-selling *pir*" and *pir-e moḡān* "the *pir* of the Magians—"both meaning in Hafez's ironic vocabulary "tavern keeper—"and *moḡ-bača* "wine seller's errand boy," occasionally also the object of the poet's philandering. The strategy involves also ignominious locations made holy, namely *meykada* or *meyḵāna* "wine house or tavern," *dayr-e moḡān* "tavern" (lit. "convent of the Magians") and *ḵarābāt* "the ruins on the outskirts of towns frequented by the *rend*s, *qalandar*s, beggars and other outcasts to commit illicit acts."

To irk and humiliate the hypocrites, Hafez puts the men of ill-repute on a pedestal, almost sanctifies them, and attributes to them all the virtues absent

in the hypocrites. The chief merit of his debauchees-turned-angels is candor—the quality notably lacking in the subjects of Hafez's attacks: "A drinker who is devoid of cant/is superior to a piety-seller who practices pretense" (25.4; *bāda nuš-i ke dar'u ruy o riā-i nabovad/behtar az zohd foruši ke dar'u ruy o riā'st*; cf. 335.3, *rendān-e pākbāz* "honest *rend*s'). Those critics who have tried to find a different, somewhat mitigated, meaning for *rend* and *qalandar*, or who see in *pir-e moḡān* a figure other than the practitioner of a contemptible trade and therefore ranking amongst the lowest of the low on the social scale, have missed the point of what Hafez is trying to do. His championing of an anti-culture low life through the honoring of the tavern and the *ḵarābāt,* and his setting up the *rend*s and the *qalandar*s as the very embodiments of virtue and piety are meant to be a thorn in the flesh of those he satirizes: "Ask the *rend*s the mystery behind the curtain of destiny" (7.2; *rāz-e darun-e parda ze rendān-e mast pors*); or "I swear by the *rend*s' purity of heart that morning drinkers/can open many closed doors with the key of their prayers" (197.3; *be ṣafā-ye del-e rendān ke ṣabuḥi-zadegān/bas dar-e basta ba meftāḥ-e doʿā bogšāyand*). Calling himself a devotee of the *rend*s, or seeking wisdom and words of Truth from the Magian wine-seller, and preferring to kiss the dust of the tavern's threshold as hallowed ground (201.1) rather than kiss the hands of "piety merchants" (*zohd forušān*; 385:9) are Hafez's way of scandalizing the hypocrites and putting them to shame. Often posing as one who wears a Sufi or a cleric's cloak (*ḵerqa*), he accuses the *ḵerqa*-wearers of drinking in secret, carrying flasks of wine under their cloak, and pawning their *ḵerqa* to obtain the forbidden wine (see, e.g., 5.12, 135.6, 175.5, 188.4, 238.6, 397.7). He is telling them: "The dregs of society are godly compared to you pompous poseurs; I would sooner frequent infamous places such as a tavern or the *ḵarābāt* than places infested with you hypocrites; I would rather choose an abject wine-seller or a debauchee as my spiritual guide and mentor than one of you liars and cheats." To read anything other than social outcasts and men of ill repute in Hafez's *rend* and *qalandar* is to miss the point. A glance at the context of occurrences of *rend* and *rendi* (see Ṣadiqiān, pp. 600-602) is sufficient to show that by *rend* Hafez did not mean anything other than a derelict, an embodiment of sin and dissoluteness occupying the basest position in society. He frequently associates *rend*s with drunkenness, vagrancy, philandering, irresponsibility (*lāobāli*) and misdeeds: "Though I am a love-addict, a *rend*, a drunkard, and have a black record/a thousand thanks that our friends in the city are innocent" (196.2; *man ar-če ʿāšeq-am o rend o mast o nāma-siāh/hazār šokr ke yārān-e šahr bigonāhand*; see also 305:2, 342:8, 454:11, 321:2, 47:9, 306:4).

In his sweeping denunciation of hypocrites, Hafez makes no exceptions. His condemnation is absolute. We do not find "good" or "exceptional" *zāhed*s, shaikhs or *moḥtaseb*s. They are depicted as two-faced and corrupt as a generic lot: "Let us have wine, since the *shaikh,* the *ḥāfeẓ*, the *mofti*, and the *moḥtaseb* are all cheats when you look (at them) closely" (195.9; *mey deh ke šayḵ o ḥāfeẓ o mofti o moḥtaseb/čun nik bengari hama tazwir mikonand*). He speaks, however of *pārsā* (the virtuous) or *pārsāʾi* (virtue; altogether six times) *darviš* and *darviši*, *mardān-e ḵodā* "men of God" and particularly *ṭariqat* "the Way" (17 times) in a positive sense, but never so of the *zāhed.*

A third major theme of the poetry of Hafez is the celebration of wine and intoxication. It ranks second, in terms of frequency of occurrence, to the theme of love. In some respects it is a corollary of the previous theme, since drinking is forbidden by the Islamic law, and exalting it, as Hafez does, was partly meant to shock and embarrass the hypocrites. The theme of wine drinking and its inclusion in the ghazal was not new, but no other poet made bacchanalia so frequent and integral a part of his poetry. His Anacreontic praise of wine goes hand in hand with praise of *rend*s and *qalandar*s, both given to inebriation. Hafez passes himself off as a votary of wine, destined to be a drinker by the unfathomable divine decree (see, e.g., 124:9, 145:6, 66:8. 411:5), a habitué of the tavern and a follower of the *rend*s' and *qalandar*s' ways in order, again, to declare that honest and open drinkers are far superior to dishonest abstainers. Hafez's antinomian drinking and his rapturous exultation in drunkenness have superficially a *malāmati* aspect; a *malāmati,* however, will commit anti-social acts in order to break his own pride and to teach himself humiliation. Hafez, on the other hand, celebrates wine and inebriation both to honor a poetic tradition and to annoy the hypocrites and show them his abhorrence of their false piety.

Attempts at finding a mystical interpretation for Hafez's praise of wine and drunkenness are not supported by his *Divān*. Many lovers of Hafez have sought to find clues in his poetry to his mysticism or confirmation of his religious beliefs. As Sufi centers (*ḵānaqāh*s) multiplied and Sufi orders found more and more affiliates, a mystical view of life and the universe and the attainment of Truth by love rather than reason became prevalent and profoundly influenced the Persian world view. It was only natural that a Sufistic interpretation should be applied to the poems of Hafez, ignoring in the process many indications to the contrary. Some commentators and even some Western translators of Hafez, notably Wilberforce Clarke, a translator of the

Divān (London, 1974), satisfied themselves, to the point of utter absurdity, that every single word written by Hafez had a mystical meaning and no line of Hafez actually meant what it said. The reading of Hafez as codified poetry implying an esoteric meaning for each line or word propounded the view that his ghazals can be read at two levels, one apparent, the other hidden—the latter representing the intended meaning. Deciphering Hafez's underlying meaning grew into an esoteric art, not dissimilar to the explanations offered by the addicts of "conspiracy theories" (q.v.) in political affairs.

There is no indication at all that Hafez said one thing and meant something else. His language is transparent. Of course he uses metaphor and allegory, intimation and allusion. When he says, for instance (in 250.1), "The lost Joseph will return to Canaan, don't grieve" (*Yusof-e gom-gašta bāz āyad be kanʿān ḡam maḵor*), we understand his metaphor as a message of hope for change in the prevailing situation. Or, again, when he says (in 468.7): "With the poisonous wind that blew over the garden/it is a wonder if there is still left the scent of a rose or the color of a jasmine" (*az in somum ke bar ṭarf-e bustān begozašt/ʿajab ke bu-ye goli hast o rang-e yāsamani*) we know that he is alluding to a period of political convulsions and bloodshed that engulfed Fārs province under a Mozaffarid ruler. There are lines in which he talks about the recitation of the Qurʾān, about midnight prayers (*doʿā-ye nima-šab*, 263.8) and early morning invocations (*werd-e saḥargāh*, 401.1), and lines that paraphrase Koranic verses or express Koranic ideas; and there are lines in which he expresses Gnostic ideas, for instance, his immigrant soul's not belonging to this world, and lines in which he praises love beyond any divine gift and as the key to the understanding of the world. There are lines that show how familiar he is with Sufism, the mystical Path (*ṭariqat*), and Gnostic precepts. These are clearly said, and are quite expected, since Hafez, far from being a deliberate atheist, is a Muslim, brought up in a Muslim environment, educated in traditional religious schools, and immersed in Islamic culture. But there are also lines in which grape wine is described with the accuracy of a connoisseur, leaving no doubt that he meant the real stuff and nothing else (e.g., where he describes wine, in 303.6, as "Rose-colored, bitter, smooth, astringent, and light": *bāda-ye golrang-e talḵ-e tiz-e ḵošḵᵛār-e sabok*). And, there are quite a number of lines in which Hafez shows a strong streak of skepticism. He frequently scorns the promise of paradise and its comforts, leaving them to *zāhed*s and their ilk, opting himself, as a *rend,* for earthly gifts, particularly wine: "The palace of paradise is bestowed as a reward for (good) deeds/for us *rend*s and beggars the enclosure of Magians (the tavern) is enough" (262:3; *qaṣr-e ferdows be pādāš-e*

ʿamal mibaḵšand/mā ke rend-im o gedā deyr-e mogān mā-rā bas). He repeatedly states that we do not know the secret of the universe and therefore there is no certainty that what the preachers preach or the *zāhed*s proclaim about the final judgment or man's destiny is valid. In such matters he pleads to remain agnostic. The most eloquent and unmistakable expression of his skepticism, however, is the line 101.3: "Our *pir* said 'the pen that designed creation committed no mistakes'/blessed be his saintly and error-forgiving appraisal!" (*pir-e mā goft ḵaṭā bar qalam-e ṣonʿ naraft/āfarin bar naẓar-e pāk-e ḵaṭāpuš-aš bād*). It also requires a great deal of faith to believe that Hafez made a point all his life of decrying and taunting the Sufis while he was a devotee of their way, even if they were not all such hypocrites as Hafez thought.

Hafez very often is called an *ʿāref*. The application of this term depends on what is meant by it. If by *ʿāref* is meant a person of wisdom and insight, broad-mindedness and understanding, given to reflection on human destiny, the transience of life, and the vanity of our worldly concerns, a man who would not go for the dogmatic rigidity of formal religion and the intervention of self-appointed guardians of faith in the daily lives of believers, but would prefer the devotion of truly pious men and sets high value on purity of heart and kindliness towards others rather than pretentious observation of religious ordinances—in other words, a benevolent sage—there is no reason to deny that epithet to Hafez. He has an enticing way of implanting in the midst of expressing his passionate love or describing the perfection of the beloved, or conveying the wonders of wine, a line or two of wise observation, moral maxim or broad comment on life that transport the reader to a world of enlightening contemplation or consoling thought. On the other hand, if by *ʿāref* is meant a "mystic," that is, a person who believes in the theory and practice of Sufism, is attached to a certain Order or the circle of a Sufi mentor (*pir*) or a *ḵānaqāh*, or allows the clarity of his mind to be clouded by the irrational and obfuscated by the woolly thinking of some Sufis and their belief in miraculous deeds ascribed to their saints, then the epithet is a misnomer. While it is clear that Hafez distinguishes sincere, self-effacing, and godly mystics from the false ones, he does not belong to any Sufi school of thought, but chooses to be entirely free and independent of any such attachment. He is very much a man of normal sensibilities with an unmistakable appetite for the beauties and pleasures of life; he serves a number of patrons with his panegyric ghazals and expects to receive rewards: 224.1, "If the stipend reaches (me) it is to be spent on flowers and wine" (*waẓifa gar berasad maṣraf-aš gol ast o nabid*; see also 34.8). He is eager to have the necessary material means to enable him to

enjoy a good life adorned with music, outings, partying with friends, and having the pleasure of *sāqi*s' services. Confusing Hafez's lack of fanaticism, his broad world view, and his contemplative and moral musings with "mysticism" implies a subjective interpretation of his poetry.

It should be noted that in Hafez's time the Persian cultural climate was so saturated with expressions of mystical thought that it was nearly impossible for anyone to avoid them. The currency of Gnostic ideas and expressions, however, did not entail a deliberate attachment to Sufi tenets or practices. Today, even an atheist speaker of Persian cannot avoid the use of a large number of expressions with *ḵodā* or *Allāh* as their component: *ḵodā nakonad* "God forbid," *ḵodā ḥāfeẓ* "good-bye," *ḵodā midānad* "God knows," *en-šā Allāh* "God willing," and so on. In the same way, expressions or ideas such as *ṭariqat* (the way) or *pir* (spiritual guide), or the body's being the cage of the soul, the soul's belonging to another world, love's being a gift of God to man differentiating him from angels, or the necessity of a guide for spiritual journeys—all Gnostic, mystical, or Islamic concepts—were on everybody's lips, but this does not mean that those who used them were necessarily conscious believers in their implied philosophical or religious sense. It was simply a matter of falling in line with the cultural trend and ideological conventions of the time.

Although modern critics who have commented on Hafez have acknowledged that many lines of his poetry concerning the beloved, the *sāqi*, and wine cannot be interpreted in any way other than this-worldly, and that love and wine refer to earthly love and grape wine, a certain timidity in denying claims for esoteric meanings and a reluctance to brush away Hafez's mystical aura have resulted in equivocation and the adoption, at least in some cases, of a binary reading of his poems at two levels, mystical and mundane. In the absence of reliable biographical data, the safest way to understand Hafez and fathom his beliefs and attitudes is to go by his own poems.To impose views not sanctioned by his poetry is to make Hafez a mirror of the views of his interpreters. This may have a phenomenological validity, reflecting the historical evolution of Hafez's image in the minds of his readers, and some post-modernist reading of Hafez may seek to establish the interaction between his text and his audiences; but if we are aiming at finding what Hafez actually thought and said, we must rely on a close reading of his *Divān* without pre-judgments. Making an oracular saint and a mystic out of him, rather than a superb and truly great poet, will mean ignoring the transparency of his

language and the lucidity of his diction.

Hafez's appeal has been tremendous. He profoundly influenced the subsequent host of ghazal writers. The figures that he attacked or extolled in his poems became the common stock of Persian lyric poetry. Glorifying wine and applauding intoxication, satirizing the *zāhed*, the shaikh, the preacher and other hypocrites, furnished the post-Hafezian ghazal with themes and motifs that have continued to our own day, albeit with diminished vigor after the modernist poetry of Nima and his followers gained ground. Hafez's own appeal and popularity, however, have survived all subsequent developments.

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