



HĀTEF, SAYYED AḤMAD EŞFAHĀNI

HĀTEF, SAYYED AḤMAD EŞFAHĀNI (d. Qom 1198/1783), an influential poet of the 18th century. He belonged to the first generation of poets who rejected what they saw as the excesses of the so-called Indian style (*sabk-e Hendi*), and adopted a poetical idiom closer to the stylistic principles of early Persian poetry. Later this movement became known as the “literary return” (*bāzgašt-e adabi*, q.v.). Hātef’s family, originally from Ordubād in Azarbaijan, had moved in Safavid times to Isfahan, where he was born in the first half of the 18th century. He studied the traditional sciences under Nāşer Ṭabib of Isfahan (d. 1191/1777), and the literary arts under Mir Sayyed ‘Ali Moştāq (d. 1171/1757-58). He also associated with other important literary figures of the time, including Şabāḥi and Āzar (Ādar) Bigdeli (q.v.; d. 1195/1781). Besides Isfahan, he also lived for a while in Kāşān and spent his last years in Qom.

Hātef was one of the few truly great Persian poets of the 12th/18th century. He had a small but varied poetical output, comprising *ġazals* (lyrics), a few *qaşidas* (panegyric odes), *moqatta‘āt* (occasional pieces), quatrains, and chronograms (q.v.), recording the deaths of such literary friends as Moştāq and Āzar, the foundation of buildings, gardens, and other events. He was foremost a poet of *ġazals*, modeled on the poetry of Sa‘di and Ḥāfez. These are fine compositions, composed in a natural and eloquent style. He is particularly remembered for his *tarji‘-band*, a poem in five stanzas (or strophes) with a recurring refrain—a credo in Arabic and Persian affirming divine unity. In the



words of Jan Rypka, this poem “sings of a mystical vision, albeit with all the conventional erotic and wine-house accessories, but in an uncommonly straightforward style, in a lucidly arranged metaphorical language intensified to the highest degree of perfection, free from the euphuisms and obscurities of the foregoing period” (Rypka, *Hist. Iran. Lit.*, p. 308).

The rhyme scheme of the *tarjiʿ-band* is A/A, B/A, . . . Y/Y; C/C, D/C, . . . Y/Y; etc. Strophe 1 opens with a complaint from the believer that the way to God is hard and painful. The poet describes his (vision or dream of a) visit to a Zoroastrian service, “a secret gathering bright with the Light of Truth, not with the Flames [of Hell],” and compares the sacred fire with that of the burning bush as witnessed by Moses. The celebrants invite him to join them in their enjoyment of music, sweets, and wine; the fiery wine overcomes his mental powers, and he swoons into a spiritual experience of the unity of God expressed purely corporeally, through his body and blood: “He is One and there is naught but He:/There is no God save Him alone!” In Strophe 2 he is a helpless lover in lyrical Sufi style; he visits a church and protests to his Christian beloved at the slanderous notion of the Trinity. “Silk does not become three things if thou callest it *Parniyān*, *Ḥarir*, and *Parand*” is the reply, as the refrain of divine unity speaks from the peal of the church bell. In Strophe 3 he seeks out a gathering of drinkers and merrymakers, by convention Zoroastrians but more Hafezian or even Ḳayyām-like in their scorn of rationalized religion and devotional decorum. He drinks a cup of their wine, and becomes “free from the pain of understanding and the trouble of sense” and hears the angel Soruš whisper the familiar refrain in his ear. Strophe 4 is a vision of the earthly paradise beyond the dimensions of time, space, and society, where king and beggar are equal, and love—in fact, finding and making love (*ʿeşq varzidan*) to the One—is the key to bliss. In Strophe 5, the poet exhorts his listeners to aim high, to search for fulfillment through love rather than reason, along the path of the mystic. He lists various conventions of mystical-lyrical verse, some of which he has just used himself, and declares them all to be cryptic keys to an appreciation of the truth summed up in his refrain (translations taken from Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia IV*, pp. 292-97).

The poem shows a subtle structure and sense of pace behind its simple lyrical outpourings of a seeker and lover of the divine. The first two strophes both begin with dance-like amatory declarations in which the entity and the actions of the lover and beloved are sharply demarcated. But their stately *pas de deux*



is suddenly abandoned when the poet/lover beholds and enters the fiery crucible of divine love in its different ecumenical manifestations. In his description of different creeds and cults as vehicles for contemplating divine immanence, the poet displays remarkable empathy for other religions, an appreciation rarely encountered in pre-modern Persian literature (Biruni and Kāqāni being the obvious exceptions).

Already in the early 19th century, Hātef's *tarji'-band* became known in Europe through translations in French (by J.-M. Jouannin and Ch. Defrémery) and German (by O. Schlechta-Wssehrd). Edward Browne included its text and translation in the fourth volume (1924) of his *Literary History of Persia* (pp. 284-97). The first stanza only was translated into Italian by Alessandro Bausani. Both Āzar Bigdeli and Rezāqoli Khan Hedāyat state that Hātef also composed Arabic poetry, but only three Arabic *qašidas* of his seem to have survived (*Divān*, ed. 'Alidust, pp. 267-78).

Hātef's son Sayyed Moḥammad Saḥāb (d. 1222/1807-8) followed in his father's footsteps and became an accomplished poet of the early Qājār period. Poems by his daughter Rašḥa have also been preserved (a selection in *Divān*, pp. 279-92).

For a music sample, see [Čahār pāra](#).

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