



## ḤOSN-E TA'LIL

**ḤOSN-E TA'LIL** (lit. “beauty of rationale”), “fantastic etiology,” a rhetorical device among the figures of *‘elm-e badi’* (the science of rhetorical embellishment; see BADI). It was included among the Persian poetical figures as early as Rāduyāni’s *Tarjomān al-balāga* (late 5th/11th century). According to Rāduyāni, poets employ this device when describing something already endowed with many poetical attributes (*ṣefāt*) and images (*ma’āni*), for example, spring or autumn. The poet strengthens certain attributes by finding their causes in others, and through such description achieves an elegant liberty (*taṣarrof-e niku*; Rāduyāni, p. 92). Rašid-al-Din Waṭwāt (d. 578/1182-83) notes that the poet’s goal in *ḥosn-e ta’lil* is not to invent the cause, but rather to make the conventional descriptions sound unusual, and that the device is widespread among both Arabs and Persians. For example, in the line (which *Tarjomān* attributes to the poet Qamari) “Because the cloud weeps without reason, tulips and roses laugh at it,” it is the groundless tears of the cloud which cause mockery on the part of the tulips and roses (Waṭwāt, p. 85). In this example, which was often quoted later to explain the essence of the device, two conventional expressions—“the cloud’s tears” (describing the spring rain) and “the flowers’ laughter” (describing their blossoming)—are connected by a causal relationship which does not exist in reality. The device is explained similarly in the *Ḥaqā’eq al-ḥadā’eq* by Šaraf Rāmi (fl. second half 8th/14th century), and in *Badāye’ al-afkār fī ṣanāye’ al-aš’ār* by Ḥosayn Wā’eẓ Kāšefi; (d. 910/1504-05).

‘Aṭā-Allāh Ḥosayni in his *Badāye’ al-ṣanāye’* (9th/15th century) classifies *ḥosn-e*



*ta'lil* (referring to the author of the *Izāh*, probably Kaṭīb Qazvini) into four types, depending on the correlation between reality and the elements of the poetical syllogism. (1) The attribute is in fact inherent in the object described; but it has no visible cause (*sabab-e zāher*), and the poet strives to find this cause (example: “The pen of predestination has inscribed the musky ligature of down on his face so that it might serve as protection from the evil eye”). (2) There is a visible cause, but the poet substitutes for it an imaginary one (example: “O joy of my soul, each moment I emit a sigh before you, because I am trying to expel completely any attraction to others”). (3) The attribute is not actually inherent in the described object, but it is possible (*momken al-ṭobut*) in everyday life, so the poet finds a cause for it (example: “O Aṭā'i, the wild goat ceased to fear me because even she perceived the fragrance of love for that wild gazelle which I emit”). (4) The attribute is not inherent in the object described in reality and is impossible in everyday life (example: “The image of that blood-shedding beauty has not abandoned my eyes, which is why even during sleep my eyes shed drops of blood;” Ḥosayni, pp. 88-89).

The device was so popular that Jan Rypka mentions it as specific to Persian poetry as a whole (Rypka, *Hist. Iran. Lit.*, p. 102). It was already widely used in *qaṣidas* by the poets of the Ghaznavid period (especially 'Onṣori) to shape elegant compliments to the person praised. Later, *ḥosn-e ta'lil* was widely employed for constructing “learned” images (especially in Anwari's [q.v.] panegyrics), and a fantastic conjunction of complicated metaphorical expressions became a major feature of nature descriptions in romantic *maṭnawī* poems (see further BADI'; on Neẓāmi's fantastic etiologies see Ritter; on poetical logic in Kāqāni's poetry see Reinert). The device also remained important for the Indian-style poets (Rypka, *Hist. Iran. Lit.*, p. 285). In fact, *ḥosn-e ta'lil* touches the main nerve of Persian poetry: the passion for a discourse based on antithesis. As a conjunction of fantastic images within a syllogism, it creates additional levels of opposition in the line, rationally “proving” the possibility of the impossible and thus presenting lies disguised as truth.



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