



## HYPERBOLE

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**HYPERBOLE**, a figure (or figures) of speech in the classical Persian system of *'elm al-badi'* (see BADI'). Hyperbole is known chiefly by the term *eḡrāq* "surpassing the measure," as a trope or rhetorical figure, and, in a wider sense, by that of *mobālaḡa* "exaggeration," as a mode of expression. The description of hyperbole in Persian treatises on *badi'* is naturally based on Arabic prototypes (see Heinrichs, in *EI* 2). In creative experience, however, the direction could have been the reverse: Jan Rypka was of the opinion that the Iranians' affection for hyperbolic expressions had already revealed itself in the Avesta (Rypka, *Hist. Iran. Lit.*, p. 103), and before that V. Eberman showed that the Arabic poets had borrowed the fashion for hyperbole from the Persians in the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries (Eberman, pp. 113-54; see also Reinert, 1973, pp. 75-82)

As a mode of description, hyperbole found its fullest development in the panegyric poetry of the 5th/11th-7th/13th centuries, especially through attributing macrocosmic qualities to the microcosm of the praised person. By presenting the patron as the ruler of the universe, who governs the heavens, fate, and destiny, some poets (for example Anwari, q.v.) brought their hyperboles to the brink of heresy. Thus, Šams-e Qays Rāzi in his *Moʿjam* (ca. 630/1232-33) describes as a poetic vice "exaggeration reaching the boundaries of the unthinkable, or containing disrespect for the *šari'a*," illustrated by Anwari's verse praising the patron as eternal in his essence (*dāt*), which is only permissible when discussing the essence and the attributes of God (Šams-e Qays Rāzi, p. 192).



The sections on hyperbole in Persian *badi'* treatises scarcely touched the problem of permissibility of exaggeration in the context of the issue of untruth in poetry. (On the vivid discussion of this problem in the treatises of Arabic philologists such as Qodāma b. Ja'far, Abu Helāl al-'Askari [q.v.], and Ebn Rašiq, see Heinrichs.) Rādüyāni in his *Tarjomān al-balāḡa* (late 5th/11th century) restricted himself to observing that hyperbole (*al-eḡrāq fi'l-ṣefa*) is a description (*ṣefat*) that astounds one's mind, because it is said that the best poetry is the most deceitful (p. 62). Rašid-al-Din Vaṭvāṭ (d. 578/1182-83) describes hyperbole (*al-eḡrāq fi'l-ṣefa*) as an exaggeration (*mobālaḡa*) of description running to an extreme (p. 73). Šams-e Qays (pp. 358 ff.) adds to this a generic subdivision of hyperbole (*eḡrāq*) into praising descriptions (e.g., Rudaki's "You were killing until no courageous were left among your enemies; you were dispensing until no poor were left among your friends"), derisive descriptions (e.g., the anonymous verse, "His miserliness is such that he leaves no dirt for the bathhouse servant and no hair for the barber"), and lyrical descriptions (e.g., 'Onšori's "If the moon in heaven were like her cheeks, the sun would become just a particle of moonshine"). Šams-e Qays is primarily concerned, not with the credibility of hyperbole, but rather with the decorum (*adab*) of exaggerations. He gives the poet lengthy instructions on how to harmonize the degree of exaggeration with the status of the person praised.

Šaraf Rāmi (fl. second half of the 8th/14th century) introduces the subdivision of hyperbole into *mobālaḡat* as plain exaggeration and *eḡrāq* as its highest degree (Rāmi, p. 107). It was only in the 9th/15th century, however, that Persian authors reproduced the classification of the Arabic theoreticians, most explicitly present in Kaṭib Qazvini's (d. 739/1338) *Izāhā*. In *Badāye' al-šanāye'*, *mobālaḡat* is subdivided into *tabliḡ* (causing to arrive), a description plausible (*momken*) according to common sense and everyday experience; *eḡrāq*, a description plausible, but not encountered in everyday experience; and *ḡoluw* "exceeding bounds," a description both unimaginable and not encountered in everyday life. The device is discussed from the point of view of untruth in poetry, and the first two types of hyperbole are acknowledged as acceptable. Words like *guyā* "(as) you would say" are regarded as auxiliary instruments intended to keep the hyperbole within the limits of credibility, as in the verse, "The custom of generosity has disappeared from the world, as if [*guyā*] no one had ever heard about it" (Ḥosayni, pp. 101-4). This resembles the Arabic theoreticians' *kāda* test, that is, the possibility of rewriting the acceptable hyperbole using the verb *kāda* "to be close (to doing something)" (see Heinrichs). Such attention to theoretical aspects already discussed in Arabic



treatises several centuries earlier, restricting rampant freedom of exaggeration, may be regarded as an indirect reflection of a change in literary tastes: in the 9th/15th century the panegyric *qaṣida* visibly yields to the *ġazal* (q.v.), and total hyperbolization is replaced by other strategies of poetic expression.

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