



IHĀM

IHĀM, literally meaning “making one suppose,” a term applied to a rhetorical figure (*badiʿ*, q.v.), also known as *tawriya* (disguising) and *takyil* (making one imagine), a kind of play on words based on a single word with a double meaning (cf. amphibology, double entendre). It is not mentioned in early Arabic treatises on *badiʿ* and first appears in the 6th/12th century. (See S. Bonebakker, pp. 31-37, for details on *tawriya* and *ihām* in early Persian tradition.)

Rašid-al-Din Vaṭṭvāṭ (d. 578/1182-83) was the first among Persian and Arabic authors (ibid., p. 31) to use the term *ihām* for this figure, thus providing a model for its later descriptions in both languages. In his *Ḥadāʿeq*, *ihām* is defined as a figure designed to throw the hearer into doubt. In order to achieve this, the author uses in his prose or poetry some words with a double meaning, one obvious (*qarib*) and the other far-fetched (*baʿīd*). The intended audience at once grasps the obvious meaning, while it is the not so obvious meaning that provides the full significance. The numerous Arabic and Persian illustrations of *ihām* in *Ḥadāʿeq* include a story acknowledging Vaṭṭvāṭ’s pioneering role in using this literary device: the poet Anbāri (q.v.), while in love with a young boy, recited to Vaṭṭvāṭ his own verse “This young baker’s apprentice, despite such abundance of bread, does not regale us with a single slice (*lab*).” The word *lab*, naturally understood as “a slice of bread” immediately after a baker had been mentioned, also means “lips,” thus providing the implicit understanding, “does not welcome us to his lips.” Anbāri was apparently ignorant of the technical term for such a mode of



expression until enlightened by Vaṭvāṭ (Vaṭvāṭ, p. 39).

In Arabic literary theory, ihām was given its most comprehensive description in the 14th century, when a detailed classification was proposed (A. Mehren, pp. 105-7). The term *tawriya* was usually the preferred term in Arabic, while in Persian ihām was maintained. Šams-al-Din Qays Rāzi in his *Moʿjam* (completed about 1232) follows Vaṭ-vāṭ’s description of ihām, but inserts his own examples. While *Ḥadāʿeq* demonstrates the paronomastic potential of ihām in jokes (Ḥariri’s *Maqāmāt*, anecdotes), *Moʿjam* opts for panegyric and lyrical verses (Šams-al-Din Rāzi, pp. 355-56), as if prescient of the future fate of the figure. The device became extremely popular among the poets of the 8th/14th century, with Salmān Sāvaji (d. 1376) in particular (Šebli Noʿmāni, II, p. 162). The established conventions and vocabulary of lyrical and mystic poetry serve as an additional source for ihām-based imagery. Later on, with the advent of the Indian style, ihām and other forms of poetic ambiguity penetrate into the very core of most poetic ideas and images (ibid., III, p. 19).

The growing popularity of the device in Persian poetry was implicitly noted in manuals on *badiʿ* from the 14th-15th centuries. (It appears even in works concerned only in a marginal way with *badiʿ*—for example, by Faḡr-al-Din ʿAli Wāʿeḡ Kāšefi, Kamāl al-Din Ḥosayn Wāʿeḡ Kā-šefi’s son; see his *Laṭāʿef al-ṭawāʿef*, ed. Aḡmad Golčīn-e Maʿāni, pp. 279-80.) Šaraf-al-Din Rāmi (fl. second half of the 14th century) elaborates on the definition of ihām by pointing out that a word may have three meanings (Rāmi, p. 58). Ḥosayn Wāʿeḡ Kāšefi (d. 1504) in *Badāyeʿ al-afkār fi šanāyeʿ al-ašʿār* (ed. Kazzāzi, pp. 109-12) subdivides ihām into two varieties in accordance with the presence or absence of additional means of “throwing into doubt,” i.e., words pointing to the customary (*qarib*) meaning of the ihām-word, like “baker” in the above-mentioned example. He also demonstrates the usage of polysemantic words, mentioning one case, a verse from Amir Ḳosrow Dehlavi (q.v.), with as many as seven meanings, and notes complicated variations of the device like *šebh-e ihām* (imitation of ihām) and *ihām-emorakkab* (a compound *ihām*), when the figure utilizes compound words or phrases within a verse. On the whole *ihām*, considered first as a wordplay device suitable for linguistic jokes and anecdotes, was transformed in time into one of the leading strategies in the semantic organization of poetic ideas.

The supreme *gāzal* poet of Iran, Šams-al-Din Ḥāfeḡ (d. 1389, q.v.), extensively used ihām, achieving both the density and the ambiguity of expression and meaning. Note the well-known *bayt* from the *Tork-e širāzi* ghazal with several



ihām-words in the first hemistich: *faḡān kin luliyān-e šuk-e širinkār-e šahrāšub // čonān bordand šabr az del ke torkān kār-e yaḡmā rā*. The word *luliyān* in its customary meaning “Gypsies” provides the natural understanding of the attributes *šuk*, *širinkār*, and *šahrāšub* as “mischievous,” “swift-acting, dexterous,” and “disturbing [the tranquility of] the town” (or “[playing] *šahr-āšub*”) respectively: “Alas, these mischievous, swift-acting and town-agitating Gypsies // took the patience from the heart, like the Turks at the Feast of Plunder.” *Luliyān* in its “far-fetched” or conventional meaning “a beautiful youth” permits one to grasp the alternative meanings of the attributes, “cheerful,” “sweet-acting,” and “charming” respectively. *Luliyān* bears also the second conventional meaning “the eyes of the beloved”; the eyes that resemble the Gypsies are by convention “mischievous,” “dexterous” in wounding hearts, and “town-agitating.” The accumulation of the ihām-words in the verse opens several opportunities to link and crisscross “obvious” and “far-fetched” meanings and creates an ambiguous and entangled image. (On the outstanding ihām technique of Hafez, see M. Mo’in, *Hāfez-e širin-soḡan*, 3d ed., Tehran, 1375/1996, pp. 562-63, with further references.)

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See also *EI*², s.v. *Tawriya* with bibliography.