



KOSROW O ŠIRIN

KOSROW O ŠIRIN AND ITS IMITATIONS. *Kosrow o Širin*, the second poem of Neẓāmi's *Ķamsa*, recounts the amorous relationship between the Sasanian king Kosrow II Parviz (590-628 CE), and the beautiful princess Širin. It comprises some 6,150 verses in *hazaj* meter, subdivided into 100 *bands* (chapters) in the Tarvatiān edition (Tehran, 1987-8). The bibliography on Neẓāmi's works, and on this poem in particular, is vast (cf. Rādfar, pp. 322-6; Bertel's, 1995; the manuscripts and editions of the poem are reviewed in Rādfar, pp. 89-108 and in de Blois, pp. 449-80 and 483-4). The poem was composed over a period of about 16 lunar years, between 571/1175-6 and 587/1191 (cf. de Blois, pp. 440, 446; Zarrinkub, p. 25ff.). It contains eulogies to the Seljuq sultan ʿTögrol III b. Arsalān (571 /1175-6-590/1194), to his nominal vassal but actual master, the *atābak* of Azarbaijan Abu Ja'far Moḥammad b. Ildegez Jahān-Pahlavān (571/1175-6-582/1186-7), and to the latter's brother and successor Qezel Arsalān (582/1186-7 to 587/1191). Neẓāmi probably began this poem in 571/1175-6, when ʿTögrol succeeded his father on the throne (*band* 7/5-7). According to Bertel's however, Neẓāmi began it after the death of his first wife, his beloved Āfāq, in 576/1180-1 (Bertel's, 1956, p. 104). The poet completed the poem in a short time; but a series of deferments by sultan ʿTögrol, and the lack of generosity of his patrons (ʿTögrol and his *atābak*, Moḥammad Jahān-Pahlavān) probably delayed its consignment (*band* 7/10 ff). The year 571/1175-6 is given as the date of composition in the Tarvatiān edition (*band* 99/56); but the manuscripts also bear other dates. The internal chronology of the poem is complex, as the poet added parts at different times. For instance, *band* 94/126-134, where the poet mentions the death of Āfāq, and



band 95, in which the poet addresses his son, Moḥammad, 7 years old at the time, can both be dated to 576/1180-1; also, a number of wise considerations at the end of the story of *Farhād* (*band* 58), in which the poet states that he is fifty years old, was probably added between 581/1185-6 and 585/1189-90. The last chapter of the poem, which relates the meeting of the poet with Qezel Arsalān, ending with an allusion to the latter's death and a eulogy to his successor Noṣrat-al-Din Abu Bakr, son of Abu Ja'far Moḥammad Jahān-Pahlavān (587/1191–609/1212-3), may have been composed in 587/1191 or shortly thereafter (cf. Tarvatiān, Introduction, pp. 8-15).

The poem relates a love affair that takes place in a historical setting: the deposition, imprisonment, and blinding of the Sasanian king Hormoz (579-590 CE), during an insurrection led by two maternal uncles of prince Kōsrow, designated to become king and probably party to the rebellion; the accession of Kōsrow to his father's throne (590 CE); the uprising of the army commander Bahrām Čubin against the new king; and Kōsrow's flight to the Byzantine empire to seek help from the *qeyṣar*, emperor Maurice (582-602 CE). These events, documented in the historical sources (Christensen, pp. 436-90), and narrated in detail in Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma*, are only briefly referred to by Neẓāmi, who focuses his attention on the love relationship between Kōsrow and Širin. Neẓāmi states that his source was a manuscript kept in Barda', the ancient capital of Arrān. He probably alludes to this work and its author when relating the legend of the conception of Šabdiz (*band* 18, in particular verse 26). Širin is a historical figure (cf. Aliev, 1960, pp. 21-36; Scarcia, 2003, particularly pp. 107-26). The Byzantine historian Theophylact Simocatta (7th cent.) quotes the text of two letters written in Greek accompanying certain objects that Kōsrow had donated to the basilica of St. Sergius in Roṣāpha for two graces received (V, 13, 4-6 and V, 14, 2-11; Eng. tr., pp. 149-52). The first was the killing of Zatsparham, a general under Bahrām Čubin (591 CE); and the second the pregnancy of Širin, who had accompanied him in his flight to Byzantine territory (Peeters, 1947; Higgins). Both texts are reported, with slight differences, by the Byzantine historian Evagrius (6th-7th cent. CE). The text of the second letter, datable to 593 CE, after Kōsrow's return to his capital, is important in understanding the figure of Širin in Persian literature. Indeed, Kōsrow writes in his dedication to St. Sergius: "And since Seirem [*Sirēn*, indeclinable, in Evagrius] is a Christian and I a pagan [*hellēn*], our law does not grant us freedom to have a Christian wife. So on account of my gratitude to you, for this reason I disregarded the law, and I held and hold from day to day this one among my wives as legitimate, and thus I resolved now to beseech



your goodness that she conceive in her womb” (Theophylact, Eng. tr., p. 151). From this text, considered reliable by historians (Peeters, 1947; Ciancaglini), it can be assumed that Širin was a Christian; that Ḳosrow—maybe after having her for a while as a concubine (cf. Aliev, 1960, p. 24)—in devotion to St. Sergius had resolved to take as his legitimate wife, in breach of Mazdean law; and that Širin, at least for some time, had been unable to conceive. The Armenian historian Sebeos (7th cent. CE) also mentions her: the beautiful Širin was one of Ḳosrow’s most influential wives; she was a Christian from Khuzestan; she had a convent and a church built near the royal palace, and used her influence on the king to protect the Christians (Sebeos, p. 28). Of the ancient sources, two Syriac chronicles (cf. Scarcia, 2003, p. 93) also refer to Širin, stating that she was “Aramean,” i.e., from the region named Beth Aramaie in Syriac sources. The tradition of her Armenian extraction appears to be of later origin (Scarcia, 2003, pp. 46-50, 113). Though Ferdowsi, like Neẓāmi, does not mention Širin’s Christian faith, this does seem to be the true reason for the opposition to the wedding on the part of the nobles in the *Šāh-nāma*. Indeed, Ferdowsi narrates that after acceding to the Iranian throne, Ḳosrow forgot his love for Širin, his favorite during his youth. One day, Širin standing on the king’s route and weeping, reminds him of their love in former times. Ḳosrow then marries her, using an expedient to quell the opposition of the nobles (Ferdowsi, IX, pp. 210-17, vv. 3368-3483). Širin’s Christian faith probably also explains one of the main problems in Neẓāmi’s poem: that of a legitimate marriage desired by Širin, which Ḳosrow constantly eludes. At the beginning the young king, following the rebellion of Bahrām Čubin, flees to Armenia, to the court of Širin’s aunt Mehin Bānu (her father’s sister); and Širin firmly rejects the young man’s advances, making any possibility of marriage conditional upon his solving the problems of his kingdom (*band* 40/143-9). Ḳosrow then goes to Rum, and marries Maryam, the qeysar’s daughter, who helps him defeat Bahrām Čubin and reclaim his kingdom. But after the death of Maryam he again evades marrying Širin, attempting to take her as a concubine. Then, weary of her *nāz* “playful teasing or coquetry” (on the concepts of *nāz* and *niyāz*, cf. Fouchécour), he goes to Isfahan and, after a ‘trial’ year (he has to cure his bad breath), marries the courtesan Šakar. In Neẓāmi’s poem, Ḳosrow is depicted as a pleasure-seeking king. The poet even attenuates the king’s features given in the sources where he is said to have had 3,000 women in his harem, constantly replenished by forcefully acquired new concubines (Christensen, p. 469). His conduct towards Širin cannot, however, be entirely accounted for by his shallow character and his passion for women. His marriage to Šakar is explained as an interpolation of an episode of the poem



by *Gorgāni*, when Rāmin, who was unable to marry Vis (already married to the elderly Mōbad), travels to Gurāb and marries Gol (Maḥjub, Introduction, pp. 92-4). But the most convincing explanation of this inconsistency in the plot is connected with the re-emergence of the historical figure of Širin, whose Christian faith made her unacceptable as the legitimate wife of the king.

Two traditions soon formed around the figure of Širin: one in her favor, with its roots in Armenia and in the Christian regions of the Caucasus, where, as we have seen, Neẓāmi found his source; and the second, represented in the *Šāhnāma*, where Širin is shown as a woman of humble origin and ill repute, who makes merciless use of poison (in Ferdowsi, Širin, wrought with jealousy, poisons Maryam). Neẓāmi follows a tradition in favor of Širin; he makes her a chaste, albeit passionate, woman, and inflexible in her resistance to Ḳosrow's attempts to seduce her, no doubt expressing the poet's ideal of a woman. However, the insistence with which she defends her good name (*niknāmi*) can also be seen as the poet's reaction to the bad reputation attributed to Širin in the sources, and which she herself refers to at a certain point in the poem (*band* 71/50-1). In Neẓāmi's poem, this negative vision probably led to the creation of the figure of Šakar of Isfahan, derived by "gemination" from Širin, and bearing the negative traits attributed to her in the sources (Zarrinkub, pp. 98, 105-6).

Regarding the figure of Maryam, no ancient source mentions a daughter of Maurice's married to Ḳosrow; and scholars have generally considered Maryam as a duplication of Širin, lacking any historical basis (Aliev, 1960, pp. 30-2). Recently, Gianroberto Scarcia identified this character as the Persian martyr *Saint Golinduch* (Golēn-dokt, perhaps originally Golān dokt), who died in Hierapolis, in the Byzantine empire, on 13 July 591 (Scarcia, 2003, pp. 89-105; Scarcia, 2004). A lost biography of the saint was composed in Syriac immediately after her death by Stephan, bishop of Hierapolis, and of which two versions exist: a Georgian version (ed. Kekelidze; Latin tr. and study of the text in Garitte), and a Greek version, composed by Eustratius (ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameos; cf. Peeters, 1944; Garitte, pp. 419-25). Golinduch, of Persian origin, was converted to Christianity during the reign of Ḳosrow Anuširvān (r. 531-579 CE), taking the name of Maryam. After being imprisoned for more than 18 years in the dreaded Sassanian jail referred to as the Castle of Oblivion in Khuzestan, not far from *Gondēšāpur* (Peeters, 1944, pp. 84-5 and 99, note 2; Garitte, p. 409, note 1), she managed to escape, probably taking advantage of the troubled events that followed the deposition of Hormuz in

590. She sought refuge in Byzantine territory; and as a devotee of St. Sergius (like Širin), she traveled to Rošāpha, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and finally returned to Hierapolis. Here she met Ḳosrow, in flight with his retinue. According to several historians, she was even a member of the legation sent by Maurice to the Persian king (cf. Peeters, 1944, p. 118; Scarcia, 2003, p. 99). In the later tradition, Maryam became the daughter of Maurice, a Christian wife of Ḳosrow, an *alter ego* of Širin. Maryam plays a marginal role in Neẓāmi's poem (analyzed in Mo'ayyad), an even lesser role in the poem *Širin o Ḳosrow* by Amir Ḳosrow Dehlavi, and she has been omitted in Hātefi's homonymous poem (see below). According to Scarcia (2004, pp. 132-3) this Persian, not Greek, saint has been entirely forgotten in Iran. However, the Italian scholar's assertion may be partially rectified: the figure of the saint is revived as Gol, in a series of poems considered as "imitations" of Neẓāmi's poems: 'Aṭṭār's *Ḳosrow-nāma* (or *Ḳosrow o Gol*); Kvāju of Kermān's *Gol o Nowruz*, composed in 742/1341; and *Farhād-nāma* by 'Āref of Ardabil or 'Ārefi (13th-14th cent.), together with other poems that relate the same story, in spite of a change in the name of the protagonist.

The study of the poems composed as imitations of Neẓāmi's *Ḳosrow o Širin* has only recently begun. We have lists of authors' names and titles of poems, but little more (Aliev, 1960, 162-168; Aliev, 1985; Rādfar, pp. 224-32). In 1933, Herbert Wilhelm Duda published a monograph on the topic, with particular emphasis on the episode of Farhād. Many of the poems that "imitate" Neẓāmi remain unpublished, and it is not clear how or according to what criteria a given poem can be identified as belonging to this genre, or what is meant by "imitation." Generally speaking, a poem is considered an imitation (*taqlid*) of Neẓāmi's *Ḳosrow o Širin* when it is composed in *hazaj* meter; the subject is a story of secular love; the protagonists are kings and queens, princes and princesses; and the setting is pre-Islamic Iran, often connected with Rum (the Greco-Byzantine world). In this sense, all three poems mentioned above belong to that genre. The name of the characters may change: Farhād, in the first part of 'Ārefi's poem, can be considered a "double" of Ḳosrow; and behind the figure of Nowruz, in the poem by Kvāju of Kermān, is none other than Ḳosrow Parviz during his exile in Byzantine territory. At the beginning of 'Aṭṭār's poem, Širin reappears, in her evil guise, as the sterile Ḳātun, who attempts to poison her rival; and Ḳosrow is no longer the son-in-law, but the illegitimate son of the qeysar. But in all these cases the story told, more or less re-invented by the authors, or contaminated by other sources, remains the same, or refers in all or in part, to common sources.



The *Ḳosrow-nāma* (ed. Soheyli Kvānsāri) is a poem of 8364 lines in *hazaj* meter, considered to be the last work composed by ‘Aṭṭār (Ritter, pp. 144-56; de Blois, p. 274). De Blois appears to be the first to notice a striking similarity not only in title, but also in general character, between the *Ḳosrow-nāma* and Neẓāmi’s poem. In the absence of an absolute chronology of ‘Aṭṭār’s works, however, it is difficult to say who influenced whom (de Blois, p. 275; Reinert). The text we have is an abridged form of a first version of the poem, apparently lost (Ritter, pp. 144-6; de Blois, 276), mentioned by the author in an introductory chapter of the poem (pp. 32-4). In the chapter describing why he composed the poem (*sabab-e naẓm-e ketāb*; pp. 28-32), ‘Aṭṭār relates that he was prompted by a friend to compose the poem, based on a text in prose by a certain Badr-e Ahvāzi. The story, however, is a very old one (*deqiyānusi va dirina*, p. 31, v. 624). The plot is as follows (summary in Ritter, pp. 160-71; Soheyli Kvānsāri, *Moqaddema*, pp. 5-25). The qeysar of Rum desperately wants a son; at last one of his handmaids is pregnant. His rich and powerful wife Ḳātun, evidently sterile, prepares a poison to induce a miscarriage; but another handmaiden saves her, and hides her until the child is born. He is named Ḳosrow in the *Rumi* tongue. The handmaiden (also the baby’s wet nurse) leaves, taking Ḳosrow back with her to Khuzestan, her native land. Here, after traveling in great hardship, the woman dies, and the baby is raised by the king’s gardener and his wife who, like the launderer and his wife in the story of Dārāb in the *Šāh-nāma* (Ferdowsi, VI, pp. 354-60, vv. 1-103), have just lost a child of their own. The baby is named Hormoz (or Hormez, as it often rhymes with *hargez*). Some years later, the beautiful daughter of the king of Khuzestan, Golroḳ, also called Gol, falls in love with him; and, with Gol’s nurse as intermediary, Hormoz falls in love with her, too. Theirs is a desperate love affair, not least because of their different social status. After a series of events, Hormoz is sent as messenger of the king of Khuzestan to the court of the qeysar. Here his true mother recognizes him, and the qeysar, reassured with proof that Hormoz is his son, welcomes him with open arms. Some time later, Hormoz goes away again to bring Gol back with him to Rum. Meanwhile, Gol has been kidnapped by the king of Isfahan, and Khuzestan has been devastated. At this point begins a never-ending series of events that impede the young lovers’ marriage. Gol is imprisoned several times, just like the Christian saint on whom the character is based. She is also chained and locked in a chest that falls into the sea when the ship carrying it is sunk. After being rescued by a fisherman, Gol has to undertake a long journey full of misadventures; and in order to safeguard her maidenhood, she even has to disguise herself as a man. The long tale of Gol’s travels by land and by sea,



which certainly recalls the vicissitudes and suffering of Saint Golinduch, relates this figure to that of 'Adrā in the poem *Vāmeq o 'Adrā* by 'Onşori (cf. Kaladze; Utas; D'Alfonso); and through this mediation, 'Aţţār's poem follows in the wake of the romances of Greco-Hellenistic tradition (on the relationship between Greek romance and Persian literature cf. Davis). Of course, Saint Golinduch's peregrinations took place entirely on land (see above); but, in the Ethiopian chronicle by John, Bishop of Nikiu (late 7th cent.), at a certain point the saint is said to be traveling by sea. This "sea," as assumed by Paul Peeters (1944, pp. 100-1), is probably due to a misunderstanding of the geographic term "border territories" which, in Stephen's Syriac original, designated the region of Nisibis, the last Persian stronghold before the Byzantine border, where the saint, according to various sources (Theophylact, V, 12, 13; Eng. tr. p. 149), was held prisoner. One of the most beautiful episodes of the poem *Őirin o Ķosrow* by Hātefi (see below), where Őirin is caught in a storm on a boat with her nurse and her life is at risk, is probably a late survival of the episode of Gol/Saint Golinduch at sea.

In *Gol o Nowruz* by Kvāju of Kermān (ed. 'Eyni), a poem of some 5,200 lines in *hazaj* meter, Nowruz, son of the king of Khorasan, falls in love with Gol, the daughter of the qeyşar, after a merchant describes her to him. Despite his father's opposition, Nowruz leaves for Rum. After a series of events, Nowruz, now in Rum, kills a dragon that terrorizes the region. When the qeyşar summons him to court, and asks him to name his reward, Nowruz asks for his daughter's hand. The qeyşar, concealing his rage, makes a pact with Nowruz, whereby he will concede his daughter's hand if he fights one of his *zangi* slaves. The description of the *zangi* and of their combat, won, of course, by Nowruz, is one of the salient parts of the poem. But the qeyşar breaks his promise, constantly adding new conditions. Meanwhile, Gol, who had witnessed the fight against the *zangi*, falls in love with Nowruz, and sends her nurse to declare her love to him. A series of misadventures, including Gol being kidnapped by a wizard and imprisoned in the Qaşr-e Őāpur, prevent the lovers from meeting. In the end, the two lovers marry and leave for Persia, where Nowruz succeeds his father on the throne. The couple give birth to a handsome son, Qobād, who is none other than Őiruya (Qobād II), son of Ķosrow and Maryam according to the sources (Christensen, p. 487 ff.).

Despite changes in the characters' names, a similar story is recounted by Salmān-e Sāveji in his *Jamşid o Ķorşid* (ed. Asmussen and Vahman), a poem of about 3,000 lines composed for the Jalayerid sultan Oveys in 763/1362. Jamşid,



son of the king of China, falls in love with a beautiful maiden who appears to him one night in a dream. After a long fruitless search, he sees a portrait of her made by a merchant named Mehrāb, and discovers that his loved one is Ḳoršid, daughter of the qeyšar of Rum. Against his parents' will, Jamšid leaves with Mehrāb and, after numerous vicissitudes, including a sea crossing, he arrives in Rum where he meets Ḳoršid, who falls in love with him. The princess's mother, troubled by the lovers' relationship, locks Ḳoršid in a fortress. Jamšid manages to win over Ḳoršid's mother, and rescues the qeyšar from a lion; and finally reveals that he is the son of the king of China, and not a merchant. After defeating Šādi, the son of the king of Syria, who wanted to take Ḳoršid's hand, the two lovers marry; they return some time later to China, where Jamšid succeeds his father on the throne.

In his *Farhād-nāma*, 'Ārefi (cf. Aliev, 1985, pp. 60-2; Rādfar, p. 381) refers to Neẓāmi polemically, as if to rectify the version given by the poet from Ganja. The first part of the poem, titled *Ḥekāyat-e Farhād o Golestān*, relates the events that preceded the story treated by Neẓāmi in his poem, which form the subject of the second part of the *Farhād-nāma*, entitled *Ḥekayāt-e Farhād o Širin* (summary and analysis in Duda, pp. 86-97). The figure and role of the various characters are reworked by the author; but in Farhād and Golestān, the protagonists of the first part of the poem, we again recognize Ḳosrow and Maryam/Golēndoḳt. Farhād is the son of the Faḡfur of China, and is a highly skilled painter. He is dispossessed of his kingdom by an uncle. Then, with Šāpur, who had come from the Caucasus (Abḳāz) to study painting in China, he takes refuge in the Caucasus, where he meets the king, his wife Mehin Bānu and their daughter, Širin, a mere child at that time. But he was in love with Golestān, the daughter of a master stonecutter, since Šāpur had shown him her portrait. The two finally meet and their love story begins. As Golestān is a Christian, Farhād converts to the Christian faith, and after a series of events, they marry each other but Golestān dies in childbirth.

The poems examined thus far, with the exception of the *Farhād-nāma* by 'Ārefi, seem not to be explicitly related to Neẓāmi's poem, but are based on common narrative material: the story of Ḳosrow Parviz, in his peregrinations between Persia and Byzantine territory, and the story of the king's Christian or Byzantine "wife." The material appears to have been re-elaborated with borrowings from other texts (the Alexander romance and other romances of Greco-Hellenistic tradition) following various traditions that occasionally represent local variations of the story. Thus, while Neẓāmi's poem appears to

be a reworking of the story of Ḳosrow and Širin as it was known in the Caucasus, ‘Aṭṭār’s poem has its roots in Khuzestan. On the other hand, another group of poems is more or less explicitly related to Neẓāmi’s poem. Among those I examined directly, the poems that belong to this group are: *Širin o Ḳosrow* by Amir Ḳosrow Dehlavi, composed in 698/1298; *Mehr o Negār* by Jamāli, composed in 805/1403; and *Širin o Ḳosrow* by Hātefi, composed between 889/1484 and 895/1490. These poems relate the same story as Neẓāmi, but they diverge from the model to varying degrees, until in Jamāli we find a radical change in the characters’ names and in the setting of the poem. These poems react to and provide different responses to a series of themes and reflections addressed in Neẓāmi’s poem, the latter responding in turn to Gorgāni’s poem *Vis o Rāmin*: the problem of love, mainly associated with that of regality, the problem of dominating passions, and the behavior of women in a love relationship (Orsatti, 2003). Probably, by setting the poems in pre-Islamic Persia, the authors could approach such themes with a freedom that would otherwise have been unthinkable (on the importance of such a setting in portraying female characters, cf. Sa’idi Sirjāni).

Amir Ḳosrow’s poem is composed of 4,124 lines (ed. Aliev; this is the total number of lines indicated by the author himself, v. 4111) in *hazaj* meter, narrating the same story as Neẓāmi (summarized and analyzed in Aliev, 1960, pp. 127-62). But Amir Ḳosrow eliminates certain episodes, including the initial one relating the intemperance of the young prince and the punishments inflicted upon him by his father. The poem begins with the death of Hormoz and the accession of his son Ḳosrow to the throne, followed by Ḳosrow’s flight from Madāyen after the rebellion of Bahrām Čubin (on this episode Amir Ḳosrow provides historical details lacking in Neẓāmi and taken from various sources). After Ḳosrow falls in love with Širin on seeing her portrait, and their meeting in Armenia, Amir Ḳosrow delineates a relationship between the two lovers without the contrasting attitudes described by Neẓāmi: Širin affirms that her decision not to yield to the king has nothing to do with the uncertain situation of his kingdom, thus decidedly distancing herself from the figure of Širin in Neẓāmi’s poem. In addition to defending values such as virginity, she has a more profound requirement: that their love shall be strong and lasting, not a fleeting passion. Širin promises Ḳosrow that she will wait for him, and will belong to him alone, a promise that substitutes Širin’s for Mehin Bānu in Neẓāmi’s poem. However, after Ḳosrow retrieves his kingdom, and following Maryam’s death, Širin still obstinately resists the king, and imposes a period of separation. It is at this point that the episode of Šakar and that of Farhād are



introduced in Amir Ḳosrow's poem. The true fracture between the two lovers is not caused by Ḳosrow's resistance to the marriage, but by a series of conditions imposed by Širin, whose obstinacy was already present in Neẓāmi's Širin: Ḳosrow must assure her that he will have no other woman, and that his love will be lasting; and, above all, the king must prepare for their marriage through a process of internal perfection equal to that pursued by herself during the course of the poem. While Neẓāmi, through the endless clashes between Ḳosrow and Širin, gives a realistic representation of the different concept of love for men (following the laws of nature) and for women (guided by wisdom), Amir Ḳosrow—with Širin's words—appears to voice a “high” and “elitist” concept of love as a path to achieving knowledge, that differs from love as a human experience, full of bickering and misunderstandings, as described by Neẓāmi. Širin never gives in to passion, which she strongly feels, however; and she grants Ḳosrow merely a kiss—here we have an implicit criticism of Neẓāmi's Širin by Amir Ḳosrow. She never shows coyness or weakness, or the suffering and ill feeling towards Ḳosrow, that make the figure of Širin in Neẓāmi's poem so realistic; neither does she manifest an excessive *nāz* or the desire for revenge and superiority which in Neẓāmi is perhaps an indication of her lower social status. From the very beginning of the poem, Širin is presented as a queen, a strong woman, a skilled warrior, in all things equal to a man, even in evil. Indeed, she does not hesitate to have her rival poisoned. The rival here is not Maryam, who is almost absent in the poem, but Šakar, shown by Amir Ḳosrow as a positive and moving figure. While narrating the same story, Amir Ḳosrow provides different responses to the main themes around which the story is built, and to love in particular, criticizing Neẓāmi's Širin who is excessively preoccupied with what people think; he expresses love as a deep feeling, subject to risk. Thus his figure of Širin, purified of those morally unacceptable traits of Neẓāmi's, in her conception of love is closer to that of the protagonist of Gorgāni's poem (a critical position, in a certain way in harmony with that expressed today by Banāni).

In his *Mehr o Negār* (London, India Office Library, Persian MS. Ethé 1284, some 5,800 lines in *hazaj* meter), the second poem of a *Ḳamsa* composed as an imitation of Neẓāmi's *Ḳamsa*, Jamāli adopts a different approach: although he changes the names of the characters and the setting of the poem, he faithfully follows the plot of Neẓāmi's poem, responding to it point by point (study on the work and the author, and summary of the poem in Orsatti, 1996). Thus, at the beginning of the poem, he recasts Neẓāmi's entire story of the young prince's intemperance, and of the cruel punishments inflicted upon him by his father,

the king, to represent a relationship between father and son based on love and understanding, a theme very dear to Jamāli, who lost his own elder son due to his lack of discipline. Mehr, king of Isfahan, corresponding to Ḳosrow in Neẓāmi, is a much more positive figure than his model; and the obstacles to the lovers' marriage are mainly caused by external circumstances, and not by negative aspects of their character: fatuity and the love of pleasure in Ḳosrow; obstinacy and resentment in Širin. Mehr's unhappy marriage to the daughter of the Faġfur, Nabāti (Neẓāmi's Maryam), takes place at the beginning of the poem, before Mehr's love story begins with beautiful Negār, a descendant—the female protagonist here—of the ancient royal dynasty in Madāyen. Negār has in turn been promised in marriage to her cousin Behzād (Farhād in Neẓāmi's poem), kidnapped by brigands and not heard of for many years. A series of events complicate the story and lay bare the psychology and feelings of the characters. Jamāli invents new developments, like when Negār finally returns the love of her cousin Behzād, finally freed by the brigands; but too late, because Behzād, whose unrequited love has made him go mad, is dying in a cave. By changing the sequence of the episodes, they take on a totally different meaning, sometimes quite the opposite of that in the model. The famous episode of Ḳosrow and Širin at the spring (Orsatti, 1997, pp. 143-5) has been moved to the end of the poem: after the death of both Behzād and the Faġfur's daughter, Mehr abdicates the throne of Isfahan so that he can go to Madāyen and finally wed Negār. It is then that he commits his grave fault: having discovered Negār bathing in a spring, unlike Ḳosrow, he is unable to control himself, and moves closer to his beloved, who flees, offended and humiliated. By giving the characters new, fictitious, names, Jamāli probably aims to distance himself from the traditional versions, in order to rework the plot and the character of his actors with utmost freedom, nonetheless remaining closely linked to his model. His *Mehr o Negār* is an extremely interesting example of *javāb* “reply” to Neẓāmi's poem.

In his poem *Širin o Ḳosrow* (ed. Asadullaev; 1,815 verses in *hazaj* meter), Hātefi eliminates many of the episodes contained in Neẓāmi's poem, and reduces the story to the bare bones. He also narrates some of the episodes differently (for an analysis of the poem, and in particular the episode of Farhād, cf. Duda, pp. 103-8). For instance, he replaces Širin's flight to Madāyen and the first encounter of the two lovers at the spring, with Širin's travel by sea accompanied by her nurse (see above), and with the disembarkation of the two women on the coast of the Caspian Sea, exactly where Ḳosrow lies sleeping (vv. 580-627). Hātefi's Širin, far from enjoying the freedom of



Nezāmi's figure, lives as a recluse in a castle guarded by more than 300 virgins—an umpteenth retelling of the myth of the Amazons (vv. 433-44)—and her aunt (her father's sister) Mehin Bānu, queen of Darband, is a warrior, depicted with quasi masculine attributes (vv. 401-6). With what may—at least to our modern eye—appear to be a curious inconsistency, this “Grand Lady,” in advising her niece, expresses a concept of love and marriage as a contract, in which there is no place for feelings or passion, and in which the only important element for the woman is the security of the relationship, which only the birth of a child can reinforce (vv. 776-97); and the niece claims that she shares this view. We are a long way off from the figure of a free and independent woman described by Nezāmi; and farther still from Amir Kōsrow's profound reflections on love and amorous behavior. Certain episodes of the story appear to be totally unfounded, as when Kōsrow invites Širin to join him in Madāyen, and she immediately agrees to do so (vv. 826-30). Things change in the second half of the poem: after the death of Farhād, in the letters exchanged between Kōsrow and Širin, Hātefi begins to voice the feelings of the protagonists. Unlike the events in Nezāmi's poem, Kōsrow, in the height of summer, goes to Širin's residence, a pleasant place, surrounded by a beautiful garden, quite different from the Qaṣr-e Širin; and he is allowed to enter. The next morning Širin appears in front of him smiling and without her veil. Kōsrow thus begins his process of seduction. Only then do the differences between the two characters begin to emerge, in terms very similar to those that oppose the two lovers in Nezāmi, albeit much more succinctly. Kōsrow, offended at being brusquely rejected, consoles himself in the arms of Šakar of Isfahan. The description of Šakar's toilette, plainly that of a courtesan, is a true masterpiece (vv. 1413-24). But the king is disappointed by his encounter with her, and proclaims that he loves only Širin who, meanwhile, regrets her behavior and, in despair, entrusts Šāpur with a message for Kōsrow. The two finally marry. In Hātefi, unlike Nezāmi, Širin is the indirect cause of the collapse of his kingdom, because Kōsrow, entirely absorbed in his marital bliss and indulging in the pleasures of life, loses all interest in it. One day a letter arrives from the king of Yaṭreb, inviting Kōsrow to yield and accept the new religion of Moḥammad; but Kōsrow tears the letter up in front of the messenger. The situation precipitates. Incited by a group of opponents to the king, Širuya, son of Maryam and a descendant of the qeṣar, kills his father. On the day of the funeral, Širin drinks a poisonous potion and drops dead on her husband's body. So she does use the poison, but here she takes it herself. Hātefi makes no original reflections on love or on the relationship between man and woman, which is probably not his main interest. He does,



however, present many episodes under a new guise, occasionally going back to ancient sources, in a vivid and convincing narrative.

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