Faces of Love

Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz

Introduced and Translated by

Dick Davis

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For Afkham, Najmieh and Mohammad,
Mariam and Mehri, Zal and Rostam

The Pronunciation of Persian Names

Persian names are pronounced with a more even stress than is common in English, which sounds to an English speaker's ear as though the last syllable is being slightly stressed. There are two "a" sounds in Persian: a long "a" like the "a" in the British pronunciation of "father"; and a short "a" like the "a" in "cat." In Hafez the "a" is long; in Jahan the first "a" is short, and the second "a" long; in Malek the "a" is short; in Khatun the "a" is long. The "Kh" of Khatun is pronounced like the Scottish "ch" in "loch." The "a" in Abu is short; that in Es'haq and Bos'haq is long; in Mozaffar each "a" is short; in Mobarez the "a" is long. Obayd is pronounced more or less as though it were the English word "obeyed." Each "a" in Zakani is long. The "q" at the end of "Es'haq" and "Bos'haq" is pronounced like a guttural "g," far back in the throat. The apostrophe in Es'haq and Bos'haq indicates only that the "s" and "h" sounds are pronounced separately, as in "mishandle," not together as in "ashen."

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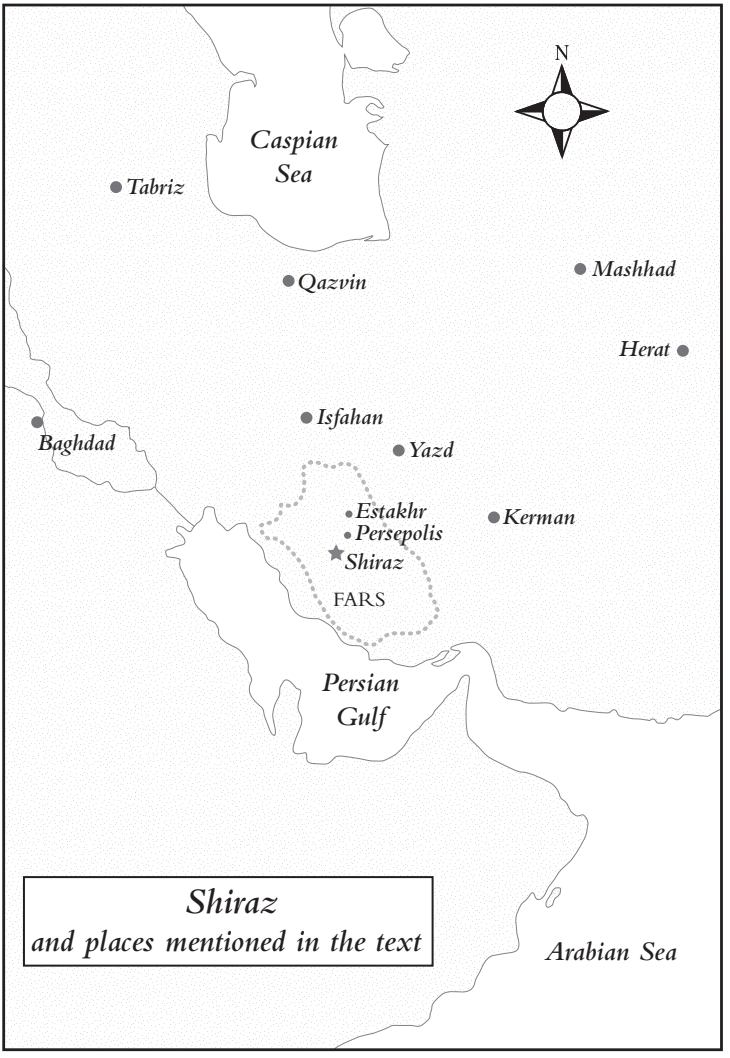

Shiraz
and places mentioned in the text

Introduction

Shiraz is the capital of Fars, the southern central province of Persia/Iran that was the home of two of its greatest pre-Islamic imperial dynasties, the Achaemenids, who established the Persian Empire and are known in western history as the Asian antagonists of ancient Greece, and the Sasanians, who fought against Rome and Byzantium until their empire was destroyed during the Arab/Islamic conquest of the country in the seventh century. During this pre-Islamic period, Shiraz was a place of very minor importance, overshadowed at first by the nearby Achaemenid palace of Persepolis, and later, when this fell into ruin, by the imperial city of Estakhr. Shiraz, at this time though, does have one claim to fame; it is one of the archaeological sites that show the earliest traces of systematic wine-making in the Near East. It was not until the Islamic period that Shiraz became the capital of the province; this seems to have been a deliberate strategy on the part of the Islamic conquerors, as the more established towns of southern Iran, like Estakhr and Isfahan, were for a long time fiercely resistant to their new rulers, and also for a while to the new religion that they brought with them.

The green, fertile plain on which Shiraz is located is admirably suited for agriculture, including wine production, and this is in stark contrast to the aridity of much of the Persian landscape. The city nestles at the foot of the Zagros Mountains, and its elevation of over 5,000 feet above sea-level has ensured it a comparatively mild and equable climate compared with much of the rest of Iran. The pass through the mountains to the north affords a sudden sight of the city lying below in its green splendor; in the Middle Ages, this view was thought to be so strikingly beautiful that the pass became known by the name "Allahu Akbar" ("God is Great"), from the phrase travellers were said to shout out when they saw Shiraz and its orchards and gardens spread out below them.

Shiraz prospered in the medieval period; it became a trading center with direct links to the Persian Gulf to the south, and so to imported goods from India and the Arabian peninsula, and its merchant class, centered on the city's bazaar, became wealthy and important in the government of Fars. Its commercial life was not unlike that of the great mercantile cities of medieval Italy, such as Venice and Genoa, although on a more modest scale, because Shiraz for a long time remained a comparatively small city. As in its Italian counterparts, at the highest levels of society the city's wealth resulted in a great deal of artistic patronage, and the efflorescence of a culture of self-conscious luxury and elegance. One result of this artistic patronage was the development of a distinctively Shirazi school of poetry; in the thirteenth century the Shirazi poet Sa'di (c.1213–92) was considered the greatest living Persian poet, and from this time on Shiraz's reputation as a city of poetry was

assured. Sa'di was followed by various other poets associated with the city, including Khaju Kermani (1280–1352), who, despite his name, which identifies him as coming from the city of Kerman, made his home in Shiraz, and whose poetry provides a kind of link between that of Sa'di and that of Hafez and his contemporaries. Khaju's poetry has had the unfortunate fate of being overshadowed by the work of both his illustrious predecessor, and his even more illustrious successor. Some of the great families of the city were also known for their interest in Sufism, the heterodox mysticism of Islam, and the Sufism and the poetry often tended to become mixed up with one another, which is not surprising as it was the wealthy who provided poets with patronage. This literary Sufism has varying degrees of seriousness in the work of different poets: sometimes it seems sincere, and central to what the poet is saying; sometimes it can seem little more than the deployment of a fashionable rhetoric.

The three Shirazi poets whose work is featured in this book, Hafez, Jahan Malek Khatun, and Obayd-e Zakani, lived at the same time (the mid fourteenth century), and certainly knew of one another – Obayd wrote at least two poems about Jahan Khatun, and Jahan Khatun quotes Hafez in one of her poems. It's extremely likely that, during the 1340s and early 1350s at least, they also knew one another personally. The poetic life of the city during this period centered on the court of the ruling family, the Injus; Jahan Khatun was an Inju princess, while her uncle, Abu Es'haq, the head of the family and the ruler of the city, was a great patron of poets. Both Hafez and Obayd were among the recipients of his patronage

(they each wrote praise poems dedicated to him), and both are likely to have been frequent visitors at his court. Perhaps because her parents had no sons, Jahan Khatun had received what was then an unusual education for a woman, even an aristocratic one – she had been taught to read and write, and was a highly accomplished poet whose verses brought her a local fame. The women of the largely Mongol families that ruled Iran during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and which included the Inju dynasty, were much less secluded than was usual in other Moslem courts of the period, and they often took an active part in their courts' social life; it seems reasonable to assume that a princess who had access to her uncle's court, and who wrote poetry, would make sure that she was there whenever Hafez – the most famous poet of the town, not to say the whole of Iran – was present. Whether she enjoyed the company of Obayd-e Zakani is more doubtful. His verses about her are not at all complimentary, and he was famous for the satirical, scabrous, and often obscene nature of his poetry; even the relatively easygoing Injus might have thought his company was a bit much for a well-brought-up young woman. Still, it is likely that Jahan Khatun and Obayd had an at least nodding acquaintance, as Obayd too was, for a while, a member of the poetic gatherings convened by Jahan Khatun's uncle, Abu Es'haq.

An indulgent ruler, a poet-princess who was his niece, the most famous poet of the age, and a somewhat disreputable hanger-on who also wrote verses, all meeting together for poetic gatherings in a city famous for its gardens, nightingales and roses, its generally mild and

gentle climate, and the pleasures of its open-air social gatherings – all this sounds rapturously idyllic in its elegance and charm, and no doubt, for some of the time, it was. But the fourteenth century was an extremely violent and dangerous period in Iran's history, and although Shiraz could claim in some ways to be something of a haven (it had largely escaped the depredations of the thirteenth-century Mongol invasion of the country, for example, as it was also to escape the worst consequences of the conquests by Timur the Lame – Tamburlaine – in the 1380s, in both cases by astutely accommodating political moves on the part of its rulers), it still saw an immense amount of bloodshed and political chaos of a kind that directly affected our three poets, and came close to killing at least one of them. In one five-year period, for example (1339-44), the government of Shiraz and the province of Fars changed hands no less than eight times; each time blood ran in the palaces and usually in the streets too. If Shiraz was fortunate enough to escape the most spectacularly destructive wars that engulfed much of Iran in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the fierce in-fighting of local would-be ruling families was more than enough to ensure constant periods of nightmarish political instability.

The careers of two families, the Injus and the Mozaffarids, are of particular importance in helping us understand the historical reality that lies behind the poems of Hafez, Jahan Khatun, and Obayd-e Zakani. The Inju prince Masud Shah succeeded his father – the dynasty's founder – as king of the area in 1336. He was driven out by ambitious rivals in 1339, and various claimants to the throne squabbled over the rulership of Shiraz and Fars

until 1342, when Masud Shah returned at the head of a sizable army and regained control of the province. His triumph was short-lived though, as he was murdered by a subordinate within a year. His younger brother, Abu Es'haq, avenged his death in 1343, ruling Shiraz and its environs until 1353, when he was in turn driven out of Shiraz by the Mozaffarid warlord, Mobarez al-din. The deposed Inju king fled to Isfahan, but was captured there by forces allied with Mobarez al-din, who had his royal prisoner brought back to Shiraz and put to death in its main square.

As the new king of Shiraz, Mobarez al-din could not have been more different from Abu Es'haq, either in temperament or as a ruler. He was, at least outwardly, fanatically religious, and also extremely brutal. The historian Khandamir (1475–1534) recounts an anecdote that yokes together his piety and ruthlessness. A couple of prisoners were brought into Mobarez al-din's presence while he was praying; the ruler completed the section of prayer on which he was engaged, stood up, cut off the prisoners' heads, and returned to his prayers. The same historian reports how Mobarez al-din boasted to his son that he had personally killed over 800 people. The most obvious effect of Mobarez al-din's rule, apart from the terror it inspired, was his strict enforcement of Islamic religious prohibitions. Wine-shops, which had flourished during Abu Es'haq's lax not to say dissipated reign, were closed, both wine and music were forbidden, and severe sobriety became the order of the day. Mobarez al-din also doesn't seem to have been very interested in poetry: at one point he considered having the grave of

Sa'di destroyed, because he thought the great poet's verses weren't Islamic enough. The Shirazis, who had (and to some extent still have, despite the Islamic Revolution of 1979) a reputation for not holding back when it comes to enjoying life's pleasures, referred to their new ruler by the contemptuous nickname "the Morals Officer."

After five years of Mobarez al-din's rule in Shiraz, his dour brutality proved too much even for his son, Shah Shoja, who had his father blinded, deposed, and imprisoned. Shah Shoja finally sent the old man off to a prison in Bam (near Kerman, Mobarez al-din's base before he captured Shiraz), where he died. To the relief of at least some sections of the population, Shah Shoja reversed his father's draconian anti-pleasure policies, and wine and music once again emerged from the shadows where they had been hidden away. Jahan Khatun made her peace with the son (she has some poems that praise him), as did Hafez and Obayd-e Zakani – who had apparently also considered discretion to be the better part of valor and hightailed it out of Shiraz shortly after Mobarez al-din took over – and all three of them returned to the city. Shah Shoja ruled Shiraz for well over twenty years (from 1358 to 1384, with a brief interregnum during 1364–6); by the end of his reign, Obayd-e Zakani was dead, and both Jahan Khatun and Hafez were nearing the end of their lives.

These political events are clearly reflected in Jahan Khatun's poems, as might be expected, given that she and her family were so deeply involved in Shiraz's dynastic upheavals, but they are also present as a kind of ground bass in the poetry of both Hafez and Obayd-e Zakani. Most obviously, both poets praise Abu Es'haq, and both

express disdain and loathing for Mobarez al-din and the consequences of his reign on the life of their city. More subtly, a constantly repeated refrain in the work of each of them (very different though their poems can be in other ways) is that the world is not to be trusted, and that living in relative seclusion, far from court, is the wisest and the safest course. Although it is a commonplace of medieval Persian verse, this apprehension of the often terrifying instability of human affairs was surely reinforced by the political chaos all three poets witnessed and must to some extent have experienced.

The Conventions of Fourteenth-Century Persian Lyric Poetry

A much more pervasive influence than political events on the content and atmosphere of these writers' verses was the set of conventions associated with the type of poetry they were writing. Such conventions always exert a strong pull, whether conscious or unconscious, on what a writer feels can be said in a poem, as well as on the ways in which it seems appropriate to say these things. When we read poems from a culture whose genre conventions resemble those of our own, the constraints that genre suggests are perhaps not especially obvious, because we have already internalized them as "natural" (as when an English speaker reads Italian sonnets, for example; there are differences, but they fall within a recognizable range of what can be expected in a sonnet). But the case is quite different when we read poems from a culture with unfamiliar genre conventions; here the "recognizable

range" is lacking, and we can feel lost. The conventions of fourteenth-century Persian lyric verse – and most of the poems included in this book can be characterized as lyrics of one kind or another – are not especially close to European lyric conventions (although there is perhaps more overlap than might at first sight be apparent). We need to make some attempt to familiarize ourselves with this unfamiliarity if we are to be able to see what it is that these poets are saying, and why they are saying such things in the particular ways that they do.

Perhaps the most fundamental fact about Persian lyric verse of this period is that it is court poetry, which means that its rhetoric is the rhetoric of praise poetry. Poetry exalting the sovereign and his powerful ministers and friends was in great demand, and produced the highest rewards for those who could excel at it. The most obvious lyric form, the ghazal, began as an offshoot of the praise poem, as a kind of lyrical introduction to it, which then became detached as an independent form, in much the same way that in the west the overture began as an introduction to an opera, but then became an independent piece which could stand alone. The rhetoric of the ghazal was still, in effect, the rhetoric of the praise poem. This had two results: 1) a ghazal's rhetoric slips easily into hyperbole (princes can always believe the best of themselves, and lovers too apparently); and 2) a ghazal is virtually always concerned with a relationship between a speaker and an addressee in which the addressee is conceived of as infinitely superior to the speaker (the relationship is virtually never one of equivalence, or of the speaker feeling superior to the addressee, except as a reversal

of expectation or as a joke). That is, the relationship is basically that of a courtier to his prince, and the rhetoric in which it is expressed ultimately derives from rhetoric considered to be appropriate to such a relationship. The addressee of a ghazal can be a beloved/lover, a patron, or God. In the work of some poets, it's crystal clear which of these three is being evoked; in the work of others, the situation is more ambiguous and a whole poem can be read as addressed to either a lover or to God, or perhaps to a patron. In still other poems, the verse can seem to glide from one referent to another – at times it seems that a lover is addressed, at times God, at times a patron. This indeterminacy can seem irritating to a reader, who may be impatiently asking himself, "Well, which is it?" But such implied ambiguity of reference was a prized strategy for medieval Persian poets, something regarded as particularly the province of poetry.

This seems fairly distant from the conventions of European verse, but in reality it isn't that far away from some medieval and Renaissance European practices. To go back to the analogy of the sonnet, Giles Fletcher in the introduction to his sonnet sequence *Licia,* published in 1593, wrote:

> If thou muse what my Licia is: take her to be some Diana, at the least chaste; or some Minerva; no Venus – fairer far. It may be she is learning's image, or some heavenly wonder, which the precisest may not mislike. Perhaps under that name I have shadowed Discipline. It may be I mean that kind courtesy which I found at the patroness of these poems; it may be some college. It may be my conceit, and portend nothing.

In effect, Fletcher is saying his "Licia" might be a mistress or a divinity ("some heavenly wonder"), or an emblem of learning or poetic genius ("Discipline"), or an acknowledgment of patronage, or an institution, or simply "my conceit, and portending nothing." Among his alternatives Fletcher includes a lover, a divine being, and a patron, and he refuses to be pinned down between them. These three – lover, God, patron – were the alternatives a Persian poet also played with in lyric verse, and the possibility is always there in a Persian lyric as well as in Fletcher's sonnets that the subject is simply "my conceit . . . nothing," that is, no more than an exercise in rhetorical skill.

Perhaps because the speaker's mind is conceived of as being wholly focused on the poem's subject, to the exclusion of everything else, this subject can be referred to as both "you" and "he" in the course of a poem. This can be confusing for the western reader, who usually expects a "you" and a "he" in the one poem to refer to two different people. Sometimes in a Persian poem they do, but very often they don't. To further complicate things, sometimes more than one person is referred to as "you" (the reader might be so addressed, for example, as well as the poem's addressee); sometimes more than one person is referred to as "he" (the beloved, but also a rival). A reader of Persian lyric poetry has to be alert to the possibilities; as a rule of thumb, if both the "he" and the "you" are extravagantly praised, the odds are they are referring to the same person, the subject of the poem. Although the device seems to be relatively rare in European poetry after the medieval period, this use of both "you" and "he" to refer to the same person was present in both western Classical poetry (the

Greek critic Longinus remarks on it) and in biblical verse (in Psalm 23, for example, God is referred to at first as "He" and then, as the psalm proceeds, as "You").

This shifting from second person to third person and perhaps back again, together with the sometimes apparently ambiguous identity of the addressee from moment to moment in the poem, are both similar to a third kind of strategy that, to a western reader, can seem equally disjunctive. Run-on lines are extremely rare in medieval Persian lyric poetry, and each line constitutes, normally, a complete thought unto itself; the apparent disjunctions can come when one moves from line to line – how one line is connected with its predecessor or successor is sometimes not immediately obvious. A sudden shift in what is apparently being talked about is a prized strategy in such poems, and it is the reader's job to ferret out the underlying continuity. One way to approach such poems is to think of them as meditations on a theme, with each line (sometimes groups of lines) approaching the theme from a slightly different angle. The theme might be mutability, for example, and the poem could open with a few lines on the fickleness of the beloved; then there might be a line on the fall of princes, and an apparent excursion for a line or two on ancient pre-Islamic kings; then the poem could return to the fickle lover, and perhaps close with a hope that the poet, who is referred to by name, will be delivered from mutability in some way. It is usual, though not obligatory, for such poems to close with a mention of the poet's name; this can be spoken in the first person, or addressed in the second, or referred to in the

third person as if it represented someone quite different from the poem's speaker.

So far I have been referring, deliberately, to "he" rather than "she" when talking about the addressee in these poems. Persian pronouns have no gender distinctions, so that the same word may be translated as "he," "she," or "it." In addition, Persian poetry, when it focuses on physical appearance, only occasionally mentions sexual characteristics (such as a girl's breasts, or a boy's incipient beard). Descriptions of beauty tend to be androgynous, ambi-sexual; there is usually no way of telling whether a boy or a girl is being talked about. But scholars have generally assumed that, in reality, we are fairly safe in assuming that a medieval Persian ghazal's subject, if it is a beloved, is a boy. The Iranian scholar Sirus Shamisa goes so far as to write that, "the beloved in . . . the independent (Persian) love poem is a boy ninety percent of the time."[1] There is a curious gender distinction in medieval Persian poetic genres: narrative poems such as romances, of which there are many, are virtually always about heterosexual relationships; short lyrical poems tend to be about pederastic ones. The speaker of a short lyric is, all other things being equal, assumed to be a male adult, and the addressee is assumed to be a male adolescent or boy. This has European precedents and parallels, of course: a great deal of Latin and especially Greek lyric poetry was addressed to boys, and Latin poetry to boys continued to be written

1. Sirus Shamisa, *Sayr-e ghazal dar sh`er-e farsi az aghaz ta emruz* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Ferdowsi, 1362/1983), p. 34.

into the Middle Ages.[2] The practice seems more or less to cease in Europe around the time that poetry began to be written in the European vernacular languages, and the two developments may be connected (it was fine for the educated to hear about such things, but God forbid they should reach the ears of the laity). However, there were still, occasionally, poems written to boys well into the Renaissance (by which time it was of course dangerous to commit such notions to print – sodomy was a capital offence in much of Europe): Richard Barnfield's *Certain Sonnets* (1595) and his poem *The Affectionate Shepherd* (1594) are both, albeit rather coyly, about – among other things – the love of boys; Marlowe in one or two passages from his plays and poems makes it quite clear that he finds boys sexy. For such preoccupations Persian poetry had a prestigious precedent much closer to home, in Arabic poetry; among many others, the eight-century poet Abu Nawas, whose mother was Persian and who grew up in a linguistically and culturally hybrid Arab-Persian milieu, was notorious for his poems to boys.

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2. A number of critics, including Ernst Curtius in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages,* translated by Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973) have drawn attention to a considerable continuity of rhetoric and themes between late antique/Hellenistic literature and medieval Islamic literature, and the lyric treatment of pederasty is one instance of many. Whether this is simply a case of Hellenistic literary traditions persisting in the Near East, or the result of the fact that much of Hellenistic rhetoric was itself in origin "Asiatic" (as was acknowledged by the literature itself), or, as seems most likely, some combination of the two, is unclear.

However, a consideration of the Classical precedent perhaps suggests that the issue is not simply a question of "These poems are about boys and that's that." We tend to pigeonhole sexuality, taking it for granted that most people are heterosexual, some people homosexual, and an indeterminate number bisexual. This was clearly not how the issue was seen in the ancient world. Horace, for example, refers to both boys and girls in his poems apparently impartially; what's more to the point is that he seems to take this for granted, as if he assumes this would be everyone's practice and preference (or lack of preference). In his satires he says he has "a thousand passions for girls, a thousand passions for boys" and in his odes he names specific boys and girls for whom he feels such passions. Taken together, his erotic poems imply that he was quite happy to have lovers of either sex, as long as they were young and pretty. Martial also has poems to both boys and girls, and even Ovid, who has been considered as a kind of prototype of a later emphatic European heterosexuality (no male poet had taken women's emotional and erotic lives so seriously before, or had seemed so interested in them), wrote in his *Amores* that his concerns could center on "Either a boy, or a pretty girl with long hair."

Interestingly enough, the one Persian poet who repeatedly breaks the taboo on mentioning the sexuality of partners other than in an unspecific androgynous way, is Obayd-e Zakani. Seemingly delighted to talk about sexual characteristics obsessively and at length, he, like Horace, indicates that he was quite happy to have lovers of either sex, again preferably if they were young and pretty. It's also significant in this context that when the princess Jahan

Khatun writes love poems in which a lover is identified by gender, she seems to be talking about a heterosexual relationship. (As we'll see, this is given a bizarre twist by the fact that she often writes as "the man" and the addressee is the woman; nevertheless, the point remains that Jahan Khatun clearly sees the ghazal as a vehicle for celebrating heterosexual as well as homoerotic relationships.) Despite the fact that the conventions of the short love poem in Persian presuppose a pederastic relationship (and it's true that, when on the rare occasions gender identity or sexual characteristics are mentioned in such poems, it's usually clear that a boy rather than a girl is being referred to), I believe it is a mistake to be too dogmatic about this. In the same way that some Victorian commentators and translators tended to bowdlerize these poems by making them always about girls, a blanket insistence that they are always about boys seems to me to be equally tendentious. I believe the situation was probably similar to that which we find in Horace and Obayd (and to some extent Jahan Khatun): both genders are being talked about, sometimes one, sometimes the other, and sometimes it isn't of major importance which – the real subject is longing and desire, polymorphous and overwhelming – and the lack of gender specificity in Persian makes this not only possible but likely.

The most obvious Arab precedent for the conventions of the pederastic lyric in Persian, Abu Nawas (756–814), provides a precedent for another motif that is extremely common in medieval Persian lyric poems, the celebration of wine drinking, often to the point of drunkenness. Again, the fact that these are court poems

is significant. Iran had been a Moslem country, nominally since the seventh century, and actually (in the sense that the vast majority of the country's inhabitants had converted by this time) since at least the tenth century, and wine drinking is of course forbidden by Islam. But the prohibition never really took in the Persian courts. As is clear from many pre-Islamic stories that survived the conquest, the courts were centers of wine drinking, often to excess. Local Persian dynasties in the early Islamic period tended to derive their legitimacy from a claimed descent from pre-Islamic kings or heroes, and at their courts the kings assiduously carried on many ancient traditions, in so far as they were aware of them, and these sometimes included wine drinking. They were saying, in effect, "This is a part of our culture; get over it." From the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, Iran was overrun by successive waves of invaders from Central Asia; many of these came from hard-drinking cultures, and so the courts of the conquerors remained places where wine was flagrantly and often excessively drunk. It may be that the large mass of the populace acquiesced in the Islamic ban on wine, but in general the courts didn't, and the populace of the towns in which the courts were located, taking their cue from the local aristocracy, often didn't either. Though there were always exceptions, such as kings who became seriously religious for one reason or another, one gets the impression that for a monarch to ban wine from his court was thought to be a bit of a social faux pas; something a jumped-up brutal parvenu like Mobarez al-din might do.

Wine and boys are associated together in the figure of the wine-server *(saqi)* or adolescent who serves the wine,

who, it is implied, is often also an object of desire to the speaker of a poem (it's possible that – exceptionally – the wine-server might sometimes have been a young woman). Again there is a precedent in Abu Nawas's poems, which celebrate the pleasures of both wine and beautiful boys, and associate the two together. And again, ancient and Hellenistic Greek culture provides a parallel and a precedent, going back at least as far as the fourth century BCE, to Plato's *Symposium*. The frisson of transgression generated by Islam's ban both on wine and on boys as lovers could be part of the attraction.[3] As the eleventh-century poet Manuchehri puts it:

> I like my slave-boy and my wine glass
> This is no place for blame or contempt
> I know that both are forbidden
> It's this very "forbidden" that makes
> them so pleasurable.

There is no getting away from the fact that both wine and the love of boys were and are taboo in orthodox Islam, and equally there is no getting away from the fact that medieval Persian poems contain a great many references to both of them. One way of dealing with this was (and is) to say that the poems are not really about wine and boys at all, but about something much more respectable, such as the love of God. Once again, the precedent of Plato comes to mind, *Phaedrus* in particular ("The love of boys is actually a step towards the divine . . . ").

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3. Willem Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran* (Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers, 2008).

This strategy can seem both evasive and casuistic, but in our desire to call a spade a spade we have to tread with caution. The tradition of explaining the secular as an allegory of the spiritual is an ancient one in the Middle East, and it cannot be dismissed out of hand as being inapplicable in this case. The biblical *Song of Songs*, which at first glance seems to most contemporary readers to be about secular love and desire, was for over a thousand years considered to be, by Jewish and Christian commentators alike, an allegory of divine love (for Israel, for the church, for the human soul). It was only in the sixteenth century that a French writer, Sébastien Castellion, won some support for what to us is the "obvious" literal, secular interpretation. Such an interpretation had not appeared to be "obvious" to anyone before; merely, perhaps, reductively beside the point.

The interpretation of Persian poetry that apparently deals with secular love and wine as being in reality mystical and Sufi in its subject matter was well established by the fourteenth century. In the previous century the Sufi poet Eraqi had written a glossary of the secular terms he had used in his own poetry, explaining what was "actually" – that is, mystically/in Sufi terms – meant by them. A number of other glossaries and commentaries, with the same intention of explaining apparently secular poetry in terms of a Sufi/mystical content, were subsequently written by other poets and mystics, the most famous of which was the poet Shabestari's *Golshan-e Raz* ("The Rose Garden of Secrets"), written in 1311, a few years before Hafez was born. If our poets were indeed interested

in Sufism, they were heirs to this tradition, and could draw on it at will.

And yet it is undeniable that a great deal of perfectly real wine was drunk in the courts and cities where some of this supposedly Sufi poetry was written, and it's also undeniable that Sufis periodically got themselves into trouble over their excessive attachment to all too tangibly flesh-and-blood adolescents (including, it seems, Eraqi himself, for all his claims that the boys in his poems were allegorical). The assumption that the wine and the boys were in many cases real wine and real boys, whatever else they might plausibly be in a Sufi context, could not be dismissed as mere obtuseness. And if a poet wished to write a poem that was, simply and plainly, about a sexual partner and wine, what vocabulary was available to him apart from that which the Sufi commentators were insisting must be allegorical? How would a poem that talked about a lover and wine look if it actually *was* about a lover and wine? A further factor to take into account is that each generation tends to read back into the poetry of the past its own prejudices and presuppositions. In the fourteenth century it was still common practice to write wholly secular poems that utilized vocabulary which in a Sufi poem would be designated as symbolic. In this book, many of Jahan Khatun's poems, which contain virtually no trace of any serious interest in Sufism (though she jokes about it a couple of times), are examples of this practice. But by the sixteenth century it was understood that virtually all ghazals were to be understood in Sufi, or at least nebulously mystical, terms; virtually every secular reference could be taken as allegorical, symbolic of a

"mystical" meaning. Once this became the case, it was all but inevitable that earlier ghazals, such as those written by the three poets in this book, were read in these terms whenever possible.

Persian medieval lyric poetry is, then, often profoundly, and deliberately, ambiguous. An apparent "he" in a poem might equally well signify a "she" or "He." A poem might address a lover, or a patron, or God, or some combination of these three, and occasionally some other entity altogether. A reference to wine or a lover might be just that, but it might also be part of an allegory of Sufi aspiration towards the divine. Naturally, some poets avail themselves of these strategies of ambiguity more than others. Of the three poets represented in this book Obayd-e Zakani is the most direct and straightforward; the reader very rarely feels unsure of what is being talked about – what you see is more or less what you get. Jahan Malek Khatun draws on the ambiguous possibilities of medieval Persian lyrical rhetoric more than Obayd does, but she too tends to say one thing at a time, and only rarely seems to be asking her reader to consider alternative interpretations. Hafez is the Persian poet who more than any other constantly suggests multiple and shifting possibilities of meaning. This is certainly one of the reasons for his immense reputation, since his poems can be read – perfectly legitimately – in a number of ways, and this has in effect made him, in the Persian-speaking world, the poet who comes closest to being all things to all readers.

Despite the fact that by the time of his death Hafez's poems had become famous far beyond their author's hometown, very little is known about his life. Its course seems to have been fairly uneventful, in so far as the life of anyone living through such turbulent times in such a repeatedly contested city could be said to be uneventful. He was born in Shiraz, probably in 1315 (though as late as 1325 has also been suggested), and died in the same city in 1389 or 1390. To get some sense of his life, it's important to realize what a small city Shiraz was at this time; the town itself probably housed about 60,000 people, and the whole area of which it was the center had a population of perhaps 200,000. Among these 60,000 there was a high concentration of revered religious figures, and there were also many poets; it's clear that the two groups didn't always get along very well. Shiraz also had something of a reputation for debauchery, at least among some sections of the population. It was not a monoglot city: the majority spoke Persian, of which there was also a local dialect which had its own poetry, and there were Turkish and Arabic speakers, as well as speakers of Lori, the dialect of western Persia. Nor was it a city of one religion: the great majority were Sunni Moslems, but there were also Jewish and Christian inhabitants, and if Hafez is to be believed there was a Zoroastrian community there too (though it has been suggested that Hafez's Zoroastrians are more of a nostalgic fantasy than anything else – a way of saying "very Persian, but very heterodox"). As a center of trade, Shiraz had a flourishing bazaar, whose members often took to the streets during political upheavals. So although the city

was small, it was also very volatile and varied, in language, religion, and ways of life. It was comparatively wealthy too (partly from its trading advantages, partly from having been spared the Mongol conquest which had devastated northern Iran), and so able to support a relatively rich court life; but this very wealth attracted trouble from outsiders who wished to get their hands on it. And lastly, Shiraz was famous for the purity of its air and the beauty of its gardens and rural surroundings; indeed, no other Persian city has inspired its poets to produce such eloquent and affectionate tributes to its charm.

In his poems Hafez praises the kings of the Inju dynasty, and he is particularly grateful to his patron the Inju king Abu Es'haq, whom he lauds for his generosity, and for the splendor of his court, with which he was clearly familiar. Soon after the Injus were overthrown by the Mozaffarid warlord Mobarez al-din in 1353, Hafez probably left the city, and he may have gone to Baghdad where the Jalayerid prince Sultan Ovays ruled (he mentions this possibility in one of his poems). In 1358, when Mobarez al-din's son, Shah Shoja, deposed his father, Hafez returned to Shiraz, and became associated with his court. Like Abu Es'haq, Shah Shoja seems to have taken a keen interest in his poets, and there is an account (by Khandamir, the same historian who related the incidents illustrating the brutality of Mobarez al-din) of him discussing Hafez's poems with their author. We know that at some point in his life Hafez visited Isfahan, as he mentions the river there, and a particular part of the city, with fond nostalgia. By the time that he died, Hafez was the most famous poet in Persia, and his fame had spread to Central Asia and India.

Despite what seems to have been their almost immediate popularity, many of Hafez's poems are not at all transparent in their meaning. It's often hard enough simply to understand what a line means, quite literally. Once this has been established there can be other problems. For instance, how does a particular line relate to the lines immediately before and after it? The difficulty of working out how the lines of Hafez's ghazals connect with one another is said to have been something about which Shah Shoja personally complained to the poet. And then, is the literal meaning the only meaning, or is there an underlying allegorical one? If both literal and allegorical meanings are present, which should we consider to be the primary one, the one carrying the narrative of the poem? Hafez's poems are packed and dense, with, as Keats says, every rift loaded with ore. It's perhaps significant that, in a culture in which poets prided themselves on their fecundity, and the facility with which they produced verse, Hafez's *Divan* ("Complete Poems") is a relatively small volume (although still fairly large compared with the collected works of many European lyric poets).[4] It's estimated that he wrote about ten poems a year, a tiny number compared with the output of most of his colleagues; clearly he revised and polished

4. Hafez's Divan contains 486 ghazals, and only a fairly small number of other poems. Most writers of ghazals wrote more than this (to take an extreme example, Rumi's ghazals number over 3,500), and they also tended to write long poems in other forms as well (Rumi's major work, for example, is his long narrative poem, the *Masnavi,* in six volumes). Rumi's prolixity is extraordinary even by the standards of Persian poetry, but for a major Persian poet, Hafez's oeuvre is almost equally extraordinary in the other direction, for its comparative terseness.

extensively, and the density and frequent obscurity of his verse would seem to be deliberate.[5] Two hundred years after Hafez's death, in the course of his eulogy at the grave of Torquato Tasso, Lorenzo Giacomini commented how the great Italian poet had, "avoided that superfluous facility of being at once understood, and . . . chose the novel, the unfamiliar, the unexpected, the admirable, both in ideas and in words." Giacomini meant this as high praise, and if he could have read Hafez's verse he would have recognized a kindred spirit, someone who, like Tasso, cherished complexity and "the unfamiliar, the unexpected."

The fact that Hafez "avoided that superfluous facility of being at once understood" meant that his poetry very quickly attracted commentaries. One of the first, written within two generations of Hafez's death, and certainly the most celebrated, was that by the Turkish commentator Sudi. Sudi was born in Bosnia (an indication of how far Hafez's fame had spread), which was then part of the Ottoman Empire. He was a brilliant polymath from a small village, a local boy who made good; it's likely that Persian was his third or fourth language. His commentary, which is a tour de force, is in Turkish; it was written for an audience for whom knowing Persian would be an accomplishment, something they had learned rather than imbibed with their mother's milk. The fact that it was written for such an audience has had one immense advantage for subsequent generations; Sudi explains

5. This obscurity was probably a contributory factor in the elaboration of the mystical interpretation of Hafez's ghazals; if a poem didn't, at first sight, make sense in an obvious literal way, perhaps it did so in a secret, allegorical one.

virtually *everything* – every word, every grammatical point, every nuance that he can detect. His temporal proximity to Hafez, and his exhaustive thoroughness, have together given his commentary great authority; but later exegetes of Hafez's work tended to see Sudi's interpretations and paraphrases as a starting point for further elaboration rather than as a definitive guide to what the poet is saying. In his commentary, Sudi tends to stick to fairly literal meanings, and when he occasionally suggests mystical or spiritual interpretations this is usually warranted in an obvious way by the vocabulary of the particular poem on which he is commenting – by, for example, a reference to "angels," or "paradise," or something similar. But subsequent commentators greatly expanded the number of Hafez's poems that were interpreted as mystical/Sufi in orientation until virtually all of them were treated in this way, and the predominantly mystical interpretation of his poetry became the standard one.

In general, the further we get from Hafez's own time the more insistent the commentators become that mystical rather than secular concerns are what the poems are "really" about. But almost from the beginning, it seems, Hafez was a revered figure, and even Sudi, for all his usual adherence to the literal implications of Hafez's vocabulary, is at pains to defend him against charges of triviality or boorishness. For example, at the end of the poem translated on pp. 83–5, Hafez says that he is "ignorant," and Sudi's comment is that this is meant satirically, as a self-deprecating joke, not literally; and then he acidly adds that anyone who concludes from this line that Hafez was ignorant has come to an ignorant conclusion. The desire to preserve Hafez's

reputation from anything remotely reprehensible became standard in later commentaries, and activities such as drinking wine or flirting with pretty wine-servers, which were considered to be unworthy of so important a poet, were routinely explained away as mystical metaphors. Only in the twentieth century was this systematically mystical reading seriously challenged, and then only by a minority of critics and literary historians.

Advocates of the exclusively mystical and Sufi interpretation of Hafez's verse ("wine" in the poems means mystical doctrine or practice, which brings about the "intoxication" of mystical experience; the "friend" means God; "absence" means absence from the divine; the "wine-shop" means a Sufi meeting place, and so on) must contend with some strong contrary evidence within the poems themselves. Firstly, and very obviously, almost every time that Hafez mentions Sufis, or anything to do with Sufism, he does so with contempt. The great sin for Hafez is hypocrisy, and, as he frequently indicates, he considers Sufis to be just one more kind of hypocrite. It's been said that Hafez is deliberately leading the uninitiated astray here, or inviting contempt because the world's contempt was something that Sufis sought, but many readers will find it hard not to take him at his word. It's true that quite often Hafez indicates that he has worn the distinctive Sufi cloak himself, but when he says this he also indicates that he wasn't much of a Sufi underneath the cloak (as he believes many others who make a show of Sufism aren't either), and that the best thing to do is to shrug off the cloak. If at some point in his life he had been involved with Sufism, he seems to have thought better of it by the time that most of his poems were written.

Then there is the problem of wine in his verse. Hafez has a number of poems complaining about the closing of the wine-shops by Mobarez al-din, and other poems celebrating their reopening by Mobarez al-din's son, Shah Shoja. It's hard to see how the wine in these poems could be anything other than real. This is not to say that the wine in his poems can never have Sufi implications, since Hafez often appears to be playing with this possibility (playing with possibilities is a mode in which Hafez seems to be particularly at home), but my own feeling is that the wine in his poems is usually just that, literal wine. There is also the tone of Hafez's lyrics to consider, especially when we compare them with lyrics by self-proclaimed Sufis or Sufi sympathizers such as Eraqi, Attar, or Rumi. The tone in these poets' lyrical works tends to be consistent, focused, often relentless in its concentration; this is true of very few of Hafez's poems, which tend to shift abruptly in tone and register, and can draw on quite different areas of knowledge or experience within just a few lines. Hafez's poems often seem to seek to undermine any sense that there is one truth to be pursued at the cost of all others (which is of course the central tenet of Sufi poetry); his verse frequently slips or swerves from possibility to possibility in a way that is quite untypical of most unequivocally Sufi verse in Persian.

The assumption that Hafez's poems must be about more serious things than drinking wine and flirting with pretty wine-servers may derive, to some extent, from the accepted explanation of his pen-name, Hafez (his given name was Shams al-din Mohammad; like most Persian poets, he wrote under a pseudonym). It's pointed out that

"Hafez" means "One who knows the Qur'an by heart," and by extension "One who recites the Qur'an." The word comes from an Arabic root that means "to preserve" or "to keep," and a *hafez* is someone who preserves the Qur'an in his heart. To give so much attention to flirting and wine-drinking seems more than a little inappropriate for someone who is publicly announcing that he knows the Qur'an by heart. But *hafez* also had another meaning in medieval Persian, according to which what was preserved in the heart was not the Qur'an but a knowledge of musical technique (which was passed on entirely by example and apprenticeship, not by texts, so music needed such "preservers" if it was to survive from one generation to the next). In medieval Iran "Hafez" was a fairly common soubriquet for a professional musician, especially a singer (the Iranian writer Homa Nateq lists a number of medieval musicians who incorporated the word *hafez* into their performing name, as a kind of advertisement of their musical mastery[6]). Musicians in medieval Persian society suggested almost exactly the opposite of what would be suggested by a reciter of the Qur'an, which was necessarily a respectable profession that presupposed a sober disposition. Musicians, on the other hand, were considered to be a fairly disreputable bunch, associated with dissipated and sometimes riotous behavior, a lifestyle that to the religiously respectable would be considered immoral.

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6. Homa Nateq, *Hafez: khonyagari, may o shadi* (Los Angeles: Ketab Corporation, 2004), pp. 61–79.

On the other hand, some of Hafez's poems are undoubtedly about serious concerns that might be designated religious. More than once he says he is a bird from paradise trapped in the world, and that he wishes to return to a paradisal state. His mind is nagged by the unknowableness of life's purposes, and he sometimes wonders whether it has a purpose at all. His verse is full of imagery and individuals drawn from religious tradition, and he talks about God's forgiveness (of which he usually says he feels assured, despite the condemnation by others of the dissipated way in which he lives). His religious feelings are strong but unspecific, and he insists that they cross the boundaries of particular faiths; he says that Moslems, Christians, and Jews have an equal purchase on truth, but that love and compassion are the best guides to conduct, since dogmatic knowledge is unattainable. He doesn't know, and he says no one else can know either, but he quests and searches.

So does this mean that the religious, Qur'anic, meaning of *hafez* is, after all, the right one in his case? Possibly. But when we consider the jarring dichotomies within his poems, it seems most useful to recognize both meanings as being invoked by his pen-name: the lofty and religious on the one hand, and the dissipated and secular on the other. It's even plausible that the presence of these two meanings, with their contradictory connotations, was precisely the reason that he chose "Hafez" as his pen-name. The name is a constant pun, one that evokes both the serious and the scandalous, the exaltedly religious and the sexily secular, that moves between both worlds, as Hafez's poems do. To a medieval audience, the

name would also have invoked the idea of music; it's clear from his poems that Hafez loved music, and in his commentary Sudi remarks that Hafez was famous for the sweetness of his singing voice. It's virtually certain that his poems were meant to be sung as much as to be recited, and that their association with musical performance (which still continues) was a strong one from the time that they were written.

While it's difficult to characterize Hafez in terms of western parallels, relating him to figures from European literature might be helpful to Anglophone readers. He can seem at times like Horace, in his simultaneous and paradoxical dependence on munificent patronage while advocating the joys of privacy and friendship away from centers of power; a love of wine and a ruefully acknowledged susceptibility to the pleasures and pains of Eros also unite them. He can seem like the medieval troubadours of southern Europe in his linking of poetry and music, and in the way that his verse is undoubtedly courtly and written for members of courts, but also has clear suggestions of a vagabond disreputableness about it. He can sound especially like those troubadours who practiced *trobar clus* ("closed form"), a style of verse deliberately packed with difficulties and allusions likely to be lost on outsiders – a technique which was, as Hafez says in one of his rubaiyat,[7] meant for "art's initiates," excluding those not in the know. He can seem like Shakespeare in his abrupt switches of tone and scope of reference, the way wholly disparate areas of human

7. Rubai (plural rubaiyat): a four-line epigrammatic poem, usually rhyming *aaba*, sometimes *aaaa*.

experience are drawn into the same poetic moment. If we jump forward in time to a poet of a very different kind, Hafez's poems can remind us of the songs of Bob Dylan, particularly his more meditative ones. Again, there is the music, and also the way a Dylan song often hovers at the edge of the paraphrasable, which might be because we don't have enough background information to attempt the paraphrase, or because there isn't a paraphrase, a back-story, to be found at all, simply a series of images that create a pervasive mood and suggest a thematic coherence. There is too the loathing of hypocrisy that comes through in some of Dylan's songs, the earnest sense, casually conveyed, that life is too serious for posturing and lies. "So let us not speak falsely now, the hour is getting late" could easily be a line from Hafez.

Jahan Malek Khatun

Hafez is among the two or three most famous Persian poets who have ever lived. Until quite recently, virtually no one had heard of Jahan Khatun. She had been known, locally at least, as a poet in her own lifetime, and after her death a few historians and retailers of literary anecdotes mentioned her, usually in passing, but to all intents and purposes she disappeared from view until her complete poems, in a bulky volume of over 550 pages, received their first publication in 1995. To have this extraordinary poet's fascinating and often very beautiful poems emerge from six hundred years of virtual oblivion seems almost miraculous.

Jahan Khatun's parents married in 1324, and it seems that Jahan was their only child. She herself married

at some time between 1343 and 1347; assuming that 1325 is the earliest she could have been born, she would have been in her early twenties, or (more probably) her teens at the time of her marriage. Her father, Masud Shah, king of Shiraz and Fars from 1336 to 1339, was murdered in 1342, soon after he had tried to take back the throne. Jahan Khatun cannot have been more than seventeen at the time of her father's death, and she was probably a few years younger than this. Her uncle, Abu Es'haq, who became king in 1343, looked after her, and she became a cherished member of his court. As we have seen, Abu Es'haq was famous for his love of poetry and his patronage of poets (including Hafez and Obayd-e Zakani) and it is very likely that he encouraged Jahan to write, despite the fact that it was at this time relatively unusual, though not unprecedented, for women to write poetry (or at least to write poetry that was circulated beyond an immediate circle of friends). One reason for this is that such an activity was thought to be immodest, and women tended not to be taught to read and write.[8] Jahan was a notable exception: literate from a young age, she was also clearly quite capable of deciding for herself how much modesty she needed

8. Writing was considered to belong to the world of public affairs, and also to be an intellectual accomplishment – women were considered to be "private" citizens who had no business in public affairs, as well as being intrinsically without intellectual potential. Another basic, perhaps subconscious, reason for illiteracy among women may be that access to reading and writing confers relative autonomy: once you can read and write, you can communicate with those who are absent/elsewhere – they can speak to you and you can speak to them – and, given the nature of society in Jahan's time, this was out of the question for most women.

to display. It also seems more than plausible that, given Jahan's dependence on her uncle and what we can imagine would be her feelings of gratitude toward him, she took up poetry partly as a way of pleasing him, as there were few surer ways of giving Abu Es'haq pleasure than writing him a good poem.

The man she married was her uncle's *nadim* – his bosom-buddy, drinking companion, and confidant – Amin al-din Jahromi. Whether this was in any way a love match we have no way of knowing. Certainly, whether or not mutual affection was involved, it will have been largely an arranged marriage. If Abu Es'haq had said, "You two should marry one another," it would have been virtually unthinkable for either of them to say in response, "I'd rather not."

The great majority of Jahan Khatun's poems are love poems, and they are usually about unhappiness in love. This is standard for lyric poets of her time, and nothing can be read into it. Indeed, taking a medieval poet's poems as evidence of his or her life is an extremely risky thing to do. But one or two hints are perhaps significant. For example, as Abu Es'haq's drinking companion, Amin al-din Jahromi was expected to stay up all night drinking with the king when this was what the king wished. More than once Jahan Khatun says that she doesn't like a lover who is drunk; this is distinctive – it's not a common trope in the poetry of the time. More than once, too, she says she lies awake all night waiting for her lover, who is off drinking somewhere, to come to her; or she mentions the fact that, when they share a bed, he's in a drunken stupor, and she doesn't like this either. In one poem she seems to refer to

the marriage vows as the only time she has ever heard her lover say "yes" to her (see p. 175). But then a number of her poems also refer to happiness in love, occasionally in the present, more often as something from the past that is now remembered with affectionate nostalgia.

Did she have other lovers besides her husband? Some of her poems seem to imply this, or at least to suggest that she has been in love with more than one person. To have taken a lover would have been very risky, if perhaps a bit less perilous for a favored princess than for most other women. There is some evidence that she married twice – two different possible husbands are referred to in biographical notices about her – though whether this was as the result of a divorce or her first husband's death is unclear. The biographical notices also say she was extremely beautiful. The few female poets of medieval Iran are virtually always described in this way, but then they would be, wouldn't they? Perhaps, though, she was indeed very beautiful; she certainly attracted notice, admiration, and envy. Some of her poems seem to indicate that she herself thought she was beautiful; this again is not a standard trope in the poetry of the period (boasting in medieval Persian poems is common enough, but it's usually about one's poetic abilities, rather than one's physical charms), and so perhaps it indicates something she genuinely believed about herself, or at least something a lot of people had told her. At some point in her life Jahan Khatun had a daughter who died while still an infant or very young child; the grief apparent in the poems that she wrote in her daughter's memory (there are twenty-three of them in all, varying from the longest, consisting

of thirty-one double lines – what in English would be considered as sixty-two lines – to a number of four-line poems) is very affecting, and is obviously genuine.

The palmy days of being a pampered princess at the center of a poetry-loving court did not last long, however. In 1353 Mobarez al-din marched an army out from Kerman, where he had his base, defeated Jahan Khatun's uncle on the battlefield, and took over the government of Shiraz. In 1357 her uncle was brought back from Isfahan, where he had taken refuge, and executed. What happened to Jahan Khatun in the immediate aftermath is unclear, but for a while her life must have been in real danger. One poem, significantly enough written in the "fragment" (*qate'*) form, which was often used for personal anecdote and reminiscence, describes her as being held prisoner in a school while her captors argue as to what should be done with her (see p. 355). Another poem mentions the fact that, while she was imprisoned, no one at court dared mention her name (see p. 369). Still other poems, some of them again in the personal *qate'* form, imply that she was forced into exile. Capture, imprisonment, and then exile seem to have been her fate; such a sequence of events seems more than plausible, but again we have to remember how unreliable medieval poetry can be as a source for autobiography, and no other sources mention what happened to her at this period in her life. It's possible too that her husband, as one of Abu Es'haq's closest associates, had shared the same fate as his prince, which would have meant that Jahan Khatun was now a widow. Certainly in the poems about exile it sounds as though she is really alone, with no one in whom she can confide. Perhaps it

was at this point that she turned to religion; in a number of her poems she indicates that, as the world has treated her so wretchedly, she will now put her faith in God alone, not in her fellow men and women. The trope is conventional enough, but it fits her probable circumstances, and these poems can have the ring of bitterness and belief, of a personal disillusionment with the world.

Events took a turn for the better for Jahan Khatun five years after Mobarez al-din had become the ruler of Shiraz, when his son Shah Shoja deposed him. Shah Shoja seems to have gone out of his way not only to reverse his father's austerely ascetic public policies, but also to make friendly overtures to the poets whom his father had alienated. Like Abu Es'haq, he made his court a center of poetic activity, though one gets the impression that he was more of a fairly generous, hale-fellow-well-met kind of a ruler than the connoisseur and crony of poets that Abu Es'haq had been. On the plus side, he was politically astute where Abu Es'haq had been self-indulgent to the point of incompetence, and for most of the time his reign was a much more secure affair than Abu Es'haq's had ever been. If Jahan Khatun was living in exile when Shah Shoja replaced his father as king, she returned to Shiraz soon after this, and seems to have remained there until her death. Whether she actually became a member of Shah Shoja's court or not is not known, but she wrote poems in his praise, and seems to have been allowed to live out her days unmolested and in reasonable dignity. Her last poem dateable by internal evidence (a reference to Shah Shoja's briefly reigning nephew) seems to have been written around 1393, by which time she will have been in her mid or late sixties; when she died is unknown.

Jahan Khatun's *Divan* ("Complete Poems") is quite substantial, as it contains 1,413 ghazals (three times as many as Hafez's *Divan*), the above-mentioned elegies for her daughter, over 300 rubaiyat, four praise poems (some of her ghazals are also, in effect, praise poems), and various fragments. It also contains a prose preface, written by herself, about her poems. While this is unique among the surviving works of Persian woman poets from the medieval period, it is frustratingly short on specific information both about her life and the circumstances in which her poems were written. Presumably she personally prepared the manuscript for copying, nevertheless the copies seem to be in a somewhat tentative state. For example, in a number of cases ghazals listed as separate poems look like drafts of the same poem, as they contain some of the same lines and rhymes juggled about in a different order. Four copies of the manuscript are known to have survived, two complete (and thought to have been copied either in her own lifetime or very shortly after her death), and two fragmentary – we can compare this with the, for example, over one thousand known manuscripts of Hafez's poems.

Even if their quality were fairly negligible (which is far from being the case), Jahan Khatun's poems would be of interest simply because hers is the only complete collection by a woman writing in Persian, at a time when it was considered anomalous for women to write poetry, to have come down to us from before the nineteenth century. Her preface may not give much away about her life, but it does touch on her ambitions as a poet. She had wanted to write poetry for some time (and she is eloquent as to why – as a stay against oblivion, as a comfort in her

solitude), and had begun to do so, but she was held back by two things. Firstly she felt that this was perhaps not a suitable occupation for a woman, and secondly she was not sure she had sufficient talent to consider herself a "real" poet. She asks her readers to excuse her faults; as she modestly puts it:

> Not every eye can gaze at the sun
> Not every drop can reach the sea

However, she was encouraged by the fact that various other women had written poetry before her in both Arabic and Persian (she lists a number of such poets by name), so she thought it would be allowable for her to do this too.

Most of Jahan Khatun's poems are ghazals, and, as we have seen, the rhetoric of the ghazal had been elaborated for a particular kind of poem, one supposedly written by an adult male to a younger lover who is in most cases considered to be a male adolescent. There is a paradoxical fiction at the heart of the ghazal: the rhetoric of the poem is that the speaker is inferior to the addressee, but in so far as these poems reflected any sort of social reality, the speaker was virtually always superior to the addressee – an older person, usually more powerful and wealthy, while the addressee was often a servant or a slave. When a woman uses such rhetoric some peculiar tensions are immediately set up: is she writing as a woman or is she writing as a man, and, if the latter, is this done with or without irony? And who is she writing to? Is this still basically a homoerotic poem, or can it now be assumed to be heterosexual, with the addressee to be considered as

male? And is the addressee still a younger person, a pretty adolescent? Or, now that a woman is writing, should we consider the addressee to be a man of the same age, or perhaps older? The ironies are compounded by the fact that it is not only a woman writing but a princess. How seriously can we take a princess when she presents herself as inferior to the addressee of her poem?

One way of solving, or at least sidestepping, these questions, is to say that Jahan Khatun simply observes the conventions of writing as if she were male, and that the poems are to be taken as exercises within a given genre. In other words, the author's gender should be neither here nor there when the poems are considered as examples of the particular genre to which they belong. This is true, up to a point.

It's certainly the case that Jahan Khatun usually writes "as" a male (and, which can be something of a break with the usual conventions of the ghazal, sometimes as a male apparently addressing a woman). That she is clearly writing from within male conventions is shown by the fact that she will use tropes natural to a male writer, but which can cause a readerly double-take coming from a female one. For example, she will ask people not to pluck at her beard (that is, deride her or tease her), or she will ask her lover not to veil him(?) self before her. Neither of these conventions makes literal sense spoken by a woman to a man. (A contemporary reader might possibly think that when she asks her lover not to veil herself, she is in reality talking to a woman, and that perhaps Jahan Khatun liked girls, but women didn't veil themselves before other women, and the trope still makes no literal sense.) This

means that she is using the tropes for their tenor (what they actually mean) rather than for the vehicle/metaphor that conveys the tenor: "don't pluck at my beard" means "don't bother me"; "don't veil yourself from me" means "don't disappear and leave me." In one ghazal she invokes a number of pairs of legendary pre-Islamic lovers, always casting herself as the male, the addressee as the female:[9]

> You are Layla, you are Layla . . .
> I am Majnun, I am Majnun, I am Majnun . . .
> You are Shirin . . .
> I am Farhad . . .
> You are Shirin, you are Shirin, you are Shirin. . .
> I am Khosrow . . .
> You are Azra, you are Azra . . .
> I am Vameq, I am Vameq . . .
> You are Golshah, you are Golshah . . .
> I am Varqeh, I am Varqeh . . .
> You are Vis . . .
> I am Ramin . . .

But the fact that she is in reality a woman, and that her audience would know this, frequently tweaks the poetic conventions, and much of the piquancy in her poems comes from this disjunction between what we as readers know about the author (that she was a woman, something her original audience of course also knew) and the "male" assumptions inherent in the genre in which she is writing.

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9. In one rubai, she does however refer to herself as "like Layla" – that is, as the woman of the pair – and her lover as Majnun, the man, though this identification of herself with a feminine heroine from the past is rare.

At such moments we have glimpses of the kind of complex, self-mirroring eroticism that happens in Shakespearian comedy, when boys pretending to be girls dress up as boys, which everyone knows they "really" are in the world outside the theatre, while remaining as "really" girls for as long as the play lasts. Jahan Khatun is really a woman, but for as long as the poem lasts, she is doing what a man does and assuming a male persona, and as that fictive man she can, as male poets do, assume traditionally inferior – that is "feminine" – roles (of submissiveness, begging, flirtation, midnight tears, and so on). As previously stated, the paradox of assumed submissiveness for the male writer of the ghazal is that the speaker is in fact almost always more socially powerful than the addressee, who is often a young servant or slave. Jahan Khatun, by the sheer fact of her sex, eroticizes, or more accurately "genderizes," this social disparity. And there is a further twist: as a princess she is superior to almost anyone she might address, but as a woman she is, in the gender terms of her social milieu, inferior to almost any male lover she might address. Her poems play with these paradoxes constantly, and the reader often glimpses her appearing to get a heady kick out of the game. Despite the extreme conventionality of the rhetoric and situations of her ghazals, their tone is often distinctive and memorable; this is in large part due, I think, to the ambiguity – almost duplicity – of the gender (and to a lesser extent social) roles in them. The issue of gender is a tense one in her poems, and she uses that tension to express tension about other things, such as social hierarchy and politics. Once the reader is attuned to this gender ambiguity and to the delicate interplay of power and powerlessness – the ways in which

the conventions of the poetic tradition within which she is writing, her gender, and her social status all meld and confirm and contradict one another in her poems – getting to know her oeuvre can be an extraordinarily subtle and moving experience. Another distinctive quality of her verse is that she can be both plangent and flippant in the same poem, sometimes in the same thought, a quality that can probably be traced back at least in part to a consciousness of the ambiguous gender and social status that she assumes in any given poem.

The fundamental and most common theme of her poetry is a sense of lost happiness, and given her history it is easy to see why this should be the case (the murder of her father when she was in her teens would probably have been enough to set her off on such a course, quite apart from everything that happened to her subsequently). What is so notable is the way that she can use the conventions of the love poem, in which the theme of lost happiness was considered natural and expected, to parley this general apprehension into poems about politics and social upheaval – the rhetoric and the emotional tenor are continuous, although the subjects she brings them to could hardly be more different from one another. But we should remember that this pervasive sadness is not her only tone: she can joke with her lover(s) too, and she can be light-heartedly excited at times, especially in her evocations of outdoor social gatherings. Like Hafez, she seems to have had a special love of music, particularly the music that accompanied poetry. In one of her ghazals she says,

If you get hold of Jahan's poems
Take up an instrument to pass the time,
And sing one or two of her lines with a sweet voice;
Let the sounds of the tambourine and flute delight you . . .

It is instructive to compare the poetry of Hafez and Jahan Khatun to see how what are basically the same conventions, the same metaphors, and the same rhetorical tropes, can produce poems that speak to us with such distinctly disparate, individual voices. Within the same deployed conventions of the ghazal, we can discern distinct psychological profiles, or at least stylistic emphases that can suggest psychological leanings beneath them. Hafez loves to imply a number of things at once; Jahan Khatun tends to say one thing at a time. Sufi notions hover around – many would say wholly pervade – a number of Hafez's poems; Jahan Khatun almost never mentions Sufism. Jahan Khatun is a more plaintive and direct writer than Hafez; Hafez is a more dismissive and evasive writer than Jahan Khatun. He is also much more Anacreontic, bibulous, crapulous, and generally wine-besotted than Jahan Khatun, who mentions wine according to the usual conventions but rarely dwells on it, and who more than once indicates that she doesn't much like it when her lover(s) are drunk. Jahan Khatun's tone, except when she is angry about politics, is almost always elegant and appropriately aristocratic; we feel she's a very well-brought-up young lady, if also one who has sometimes been ready to kick over the traces erotically (at least imaginatively, possibly actually). Hafez's tone is far more various and capricious; it's the tone of someone who doesn't have a respectable public persona to keep up; of someone, in fact, whose public persona is that

he *isn't* respectable. We can perhaps glimpse a particular difference in these two authors' sense of themselves *as poets* in their treatment of the convention that the author's pen-name should appear in a ghazal's closing lines. It was common for poets to boast about their poetic prowess at this moment (such poetic self-promotion had a particular name, *fakr*), and Hafez very often does this, announcing in effect that no better poet than himself can be found anywhere. Jahan Khatun almost never boasts in this way; instead she often puns on her name, Jahan, which means "world." This too might seem grandiose, like Hafez's *fakr*, but in reality the pun almost always diminishes her; it talks about a lost world, or a broken world, or a world upset, imprisoned, or in tears. The very fact that she puns on her name so often as her poems end, as if her identity is in doubt or dissolving into something else, seems indicative of her fluctuating sense of self.

It is often when poets who write largely within a stylized set of expectations innovate that we feel we come closest to their preoccupations and personalities. Hafez's vehemence against religious hypocrisy is one of his greatest themes, and he was virtually the first poet to give it such constant emphasis; here, we are convinced, is something dear to his heart. Jahan Khatun's most obvious departure from convention is that, though she often appears to speak in her poetic voice "as a man," her ghazals are fairly unequivocally heterosexual in their implications. A further distinctive feature of her poetry is her use of the rhetoric of hopeless love to comment on her hopeless political situation, after her immediate family lost power in Shiraz, and this too seems to bring us closer to her as a person,

rather than simply as a skilled manipulator of language. If we must always remember that these poems are above all exercises in style, we can also invoke Buffon's aphorism "*Le style, c'est l'homme même*" ("Style is the man himself"). The style is a fashion that everyone wears (everyone uses more or less the same conventions when he/she writes a ghazal), but the reader who becomes intimate with the fashion can discern distinctive traits that point to the personal preoccupations, predilections, and foibles of the wearer. And some people just do it so well that you feel a fundamental part of the personality is a flair and élan that lift them effortlessly above the crowd. For all their differences, Hafez and Jahan Khatun share this quality.

It is indicative, too, to see how these two poets built on and reacted to the inheritance of their great poetic predecessor in Shiraz, Sa'di. Sa'di had been born into a world that was much more coherent and cohesive culturally than that of his fourteenth-century successors, but the second half of his life was passed in as troubled times as theirs. His major work, the *Golestan* ("The Rose Garden"), was written in 1258, the year of the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols, and the subsequent destruction of the Abbasid caliphate, which had ruled most of the Islamic world since the eighth century. Sa'di's poetry was seen as exemplifying a previously unattained purity of form and sentiment. Formally, his verses were characterized by what was called his "difficult simplicity," a sophisticated limpidity of language that appeared guileless and easy, but which was thought to be almost inimitable. His sentiments advocated an easygoing humane tolerance, which was taken as the mark of a noble and generous

poetic nature. They are well typified by his verses now inscribed in the main hall of the United Nations Building:

> Man's sons are parts of one reality
> Since all have sprung from one identity;
> If one part of a body's hurt, the rest
> Cannot remain unmoved and undistressed;
> If you're not touched by others' pain, the name
> Of "man" is one you cannot rightly claim.

In a way, Jahan Khatun and Hafez can be said to have divided up, and internalized and intensified, Sa'di's legacy between them. Jahan Khatun's poems sometimes echo phrases by the Shirazi poet Khaju, and occasionally moments in her verse will seem to allude to comparable moments in Hafez's poems, but her most obvious stylistic debt, one she acknowledges, is to Sa'di. She consciously strives for his clarity and elegance, and her poems are often similar to his, both in the tropes they typically utilize and in the way they can at their best suggest a kind of distilled essence of pure lyric feeling. But Jahan Khatun's verse also takes Sa'di's achievement in a particular direction. For all the conventionality of their language, her poems suggest the inwardness of a specific individual sensibility; they use generic, conventional means to produce a distinctively personal voice. Hafez complicates and expands the legacy he receives from Sa'di; no one could accuse his poems of "simplicity," obscure or otherwise, and Sa'di's tolerance is taken by Hafez in directions the thirteenth-century poet could not have foreseen and perhaps would not have countenanced. It's clear from both his prose works and his poems that Sa'di's much vaunted tolerance tended to stop short at the boundaries of Islam; Hafez's emphatically

does not. And like Jahan Khatun, Hafez personalizes his inheritance from his great predecessor: if Sa'di very often seems to be saying in quietly deprecating tones, "Don't be censorious, leave others alone," Hafez equally often brings the sentiment abruptly home by saying in effect, "Don't be censorious, leave *me* alone."

Obayd-e Zakani

There is an interesting, rather eccentric Shirazi poet of a slightly later generation than the poets in this book (assumed to have been born in the mid fourteenth century, he died in 1427), Sheikh Bos'haq At`ameh Halaj Shirazi, commonly known simply as Bos'haq. He is often linked with Obayd, because both of them dealt with mundane or even sordid things, in a mock-heroic manner, and Bos'haq acknowledges his debt to the earlier poet. Bos'haq's specialty was writing about food and recipes (the word "At`ameh" in his name means "edibles"). Frequently his poems were gastronomic parodies of "classic" poems, as though an English-speaking poet might write a culinary poem parodying a well-known Shakespeare sonnet:

> Shall I compare thee to a lamb kebab?
> Thou art more tasty and more temperate . . .

Bos'haq parodies a number of poems by Hafez in this way. Take, for example, the poem on pp. 191–93, which begins:

> A loving friend, good wine, a place secure
> From enemies –
> What luck is yours if you can always lay
> Your hands on these!

Bos'haq's parody of this begins:

> A loving friend, good saffron rice,
> With oil inside it –
> What luck is yours, if there should be
> Halva beside it!

In bracketing himself with Obayd, Bos'haq pays the older poet a rather back-handed tribute:

> Imagine that each poet has contributed with his verses to the building of a house, but one that had neither a privy nor a kitchen. My master Obayd has built the privy, and your humble servant has built the kitchen. From his verses comes the smell of someone loosening his underwear, from mine the fragrance of a cloth spread with good things to eat.[10]

It is as Persian literature's prime "privy/lavatorial" poet that Obayd-e Zakani is best known, although his range is wider than this, and he could also on occasion write charming and wholly respectable lyric poems as well as, or better than, the next poet. He wrote prose as well as poetry, and his forte is satire, which generally goes with a hatred of hypocrisy (a hatred the three poets in this book shared). Obayd's satire is often quite dirty-minded, and it's written with great gusto. He can be simultaneously coarse and learned, like Rabelais, or he can indulge in vituperation and satirical fantasy, like Swift; his complaints about his debts and his unabashed boasting about begging his way

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10. Hosein Ma`refat (ed.), *Divan-e Molana Bos'haq Halaj-e Shirazi, Mashur be At`ameh* (Shiraz: Ketab Forushi-e Ma`refat-e Shiraz, 1320/1941), p. 181.

through life on the fringes of society can sometimes make him sound like a Persian François Villon.

Unlike Hafez, Jahan Khatun, and Bos'haq, Obayd was not born in Shiraz, but in Qazvin, in northern Iran, around 1300. The name Zakani was said to come from that of an Arab tribe from which his family claimed descent. The men of his family appear to have been career civil servants, happy to serve whichever local monarch might employ them. It's clear from Obayd's writings that he had received a good education as a young man; he might have used his learning for facetious and sometimes obscene purposes, but there was no doubt of its extent and sophistication. He moved to Shiraz at some point, perhaps attracted by reports of Abu Es'haq's liberality towards poets, and for a time was a member of his court. The constant complaints about his debts and poverty that repeatedly crop up in his poems are not unusual in the work of medieval poets, particularly itinerant ones, which Obayd was for a while, but he does seem to be especially insistent about it, which perhaps suggests that he couldn't hold any position down for long. His habitually sharp tongue, which he seems to have had difficulty controlling, might well have got him thrown out of more than one court. His poems express great affection for Shiraz, just as much as that expressed by the native-born Jahan Khatun and Hafez, but he seems not to have settled there. Not surprisingly, given his reputation for dissipation and generally appalling manners, he left town when Mobarez al-din took over, and returned to Shiraz when Shah Shoja became king. But by then he may have felt the glory days were over, or he may have fallen foul of Shah Shoja, as he seems to have been particularly

good at annoying his patrons. For whatever reason, he appears to have spent his last years back in his home town of Qazvin. He died in 1370.

There is a tradition of Obayd's poetic rivalry with Jahan Khatun, and the two poems ascribed to him that are about Jahan Khatun (one has survived only as a single-line fragment) are singularly nasty. These poems appeared in a fifteenth-century work on poets, *Tazkirat al-Sho`ara* ("Memorials of the Poets"), by Amir Dowlatshah Samarqandi, and it's possible they are not by Obayd at all (they have also been attributed to the poet Kamal Khojandi, 1320–1401), but because they seem typical of Obayd's manner, and are so specific in their target, they are usually assumed to be genuine. One warns a prospective husband not to marry Jahan, and Obayd uses the habitual pun in Jahan's poems (Jahan/world) against her. Typically of Obayd's poetic technique, he takes a commonplace of the poetic tradition ("the world is faithless") and twists it to make an obscene point. His language is as bluntly unpleasant as the translation indicates:

> My lord, the world's [i.e. Jahan's] a faithless whore;
> Aren't you ashamed of this whore's fame?
> Go, seek some other cunt out – God
> Himself can't make Jahan feel shame.

The surviving line from another poem states that even if her poems should reach India, it would be quite clear that they were written by a woman (this is obviously meant as dismissive), except that he uses the same obscenity as in the previous poem instead of the word for "woman." A sixteenth-century commentator wrote that Jahan Khatun