

HENRI BROMS

Euphony and the Weltanschauung in Ḥāfiẓ's poetry

Orientalists have felt that it is "word music" that produces the special character of Ḥāfiẓ's poems. Figures of speech, it is pointed out, are unimportant in this poet's work because they are not original, having been used repeatedly by others for a long time. Only Ḥāfiẓ's "music" is his very own. It has been asserted that in Ḥāfiẓ's poetry there is not a single metaphor that had not appeared in the same form in countless lines from the pens of earlier poets - or that cannot be found elsewhere in Ḥāfiẓ's own output. The observations has been made that the word 'na-sīm' (wind), for example, recurs at least a couple of hundred times in Ḥāfiẓ's collected works. There are many, among them Wellek, who maintain, however, that there exists no verbal music with an independent life apart from word meanings.

This problem has been examined quite closely by Ju. Lotman in his work Vorlesungen zu einer strukturalen Poetik (Munich 1972). His argument is that the closer a poem adheres to the same phonetic form, the more the rhymes correspond to each other, the greater is the skill required of the poet to be able to imbue words of similar structure with the most unexpected and diverse meanings. The music of language, he contends, is the sum of the sound of words and surprising meanings.

Lotman cites three variants of a poem with progressive loss of effectiveness from first to third rhyme, owing to tautology. The poet has produced nothing which on the plane of meaning could fight against this tautology.

Contrary to contentions, Ḥāfiz's poems must therefore contain, besides music, something non-repetitive, related to meaning; for, in spite of the repetition of the words and images, they are capable of commanding attention in the multitude of other poems containing the same ideas and the same figures of speech. Among so much tautology, they have some element of diversity, which makes this tautology justifiable.

What then, is the special hallmark of Ḥāfiz's word music? What is it that has kept his voice audible for six centuries? Suppose - somewhat paradoxically, perhaps - we start to seek the answers by trying to determine what Ḥāfiz is not. Let us examine a certain well-known poem at the end of which, as is customary in Persian poetry, mention is made of the poet's name - in this instance, Ḥāfiz's, but which is nevertheless considered unauthentic.

Muṭrib-e khošnavā begū
 tāze betāze nou benou
 bāde-ye dilgušā bejū
 tāze betāze nou benou
 ba ṣanamī čū la^cbatī
 khoš benišīn be khalvatī
 būse sitān bekām az ū
 tāze betāze nou benou
 sāqī-ye sīmsāq-e man
 mast meyam beyār pīš
 zūd ke pur kunam sabū
 tāze betāze nou benou
 bar ze ḥayāt kei khōrī

garna modām mei khōrī
 bāde bekhōr beyāde ū
 tāze be tāze nou benou
 šāhid-e dilrobā-ye man
 mīkunad az berāye man
 naqš o nagār o rang o bū
 tāze betāze nou benou
 bāde šabā čū bogzarī
 bar sar-e kū-ye ān parī
 qiṣṣe-ye ḥāfiḏas begū
 tāze betāze nou benou
 Lovely voiced player, do sing
 afresh, over and over again
 Look for heart-warming wine
 of fresh vintage again and again
 With your pretty sweetheart
 do sit at ease in a peaceful spot
 Take from her kisses as you desire
 fresh ones over and over again
 My slim cupbearer
 bring me intoxicating wine
 That I might quickly fill my cup
 afresh, again and again
 If you won't now enjoy the fruits of life
 when, then, will you drink wine?
 Drink wine with her in mind
 afresh, over and over again
 My idol, that carries away my heart,
 prepares for me
 face creams of different colors and perfumes
 fresh ones, again and again
 West Wind, when you pass
 my angel's lane

tell her tales about Ḥāfiẓ
 fresh ones, over and over again

There is nothing wrong with the music of this poem in itself. It has a euphony, but the music is poor, thin, and this feeling of paucity comes from the monotony of its imagery. To be a poem by Ḥāfiẓ, it resembles too strongly Lotman's last variant, in which virtually the same thing was repeated in every line.

The poem quoted lacks the rich use of metaphors typical of Ḥāfiẓ, and, what is more important, it lacks the ambiguities typical of Ḥāfiẓ's mental domain. It is quite clearly a worldly love song. In genuine poetry by Ḥāfiẓ, words change meaning and become ambiguous. Rhythm covers what the reader has just begun to suspect, namely, the seriousness of Ḥāfiẓ's words, and he simply moves on, carried away by the rhythm. But the ambiguities make the tautologies, which are so typical to Persian poetry, justifiable.

The cited poem fails to function on the two or three planes on which the poetry of Ḥāfiẓ functions simultaneously in the main, that is, the planes represented by the spheres of worldly love, transcendental love and panegyric verse. It is characteristic of Ḥāfiẓ that he was able to render the meanings of his metaphors in such a way we are never really sure whether the mystic "Secret Tongue" is speaking, or the friend of wine, girls and boys, or the minstrel anxious to impress and please his patron.

The poem does, however, contain lines that transcend the rest. The following stanza is an example:

bar ze ḥayāt kei khōrī
 garna modām mei khōrī

The combined effect of the melody and semantics of this stanza can be explained in rational terms. In it has been realized the rhythm in strict fashion without incomplete

(zahāf) feet. The inner rhyme is longer than in other stanzas not repeating the main rhyme: ḥayāt kei khōrī ... modām mei khōrī. The words 'ḥayāt' and 'modām' enhance the rhyme through their long vowel 'a'.

The strong sonance alters, even in this unauthentic stanza, the meaning of the words and gives some of the words (ḥayāt, mei, life and wine) in it different feature, one characteristic of Ḥāfiz's poetry, to wit, ambiguity. This integrating process, the alternation of meaning on the strength of melody, takes place, of course, only when the two main features of Ḥāfiz's poetry, ambiguity of meaning and a strong melodic content, are known from previous experience.

If we examine its sonant arrangement, we cannot deny that the long final melodic twist, tāze be tāze nou benou, given this poem, unauthentic though it be branded, makes a grand initial impression. Yet, the words that differentiate the several stanzas semantically, are rather poor, evaluated on the basis of the variety of their semantic content. We have already noted that euphony is the sum of sounds and unexpected meanings, and in this respect we must judge the poem, taken as a whole, to be melodically poor. Muṭrib begū, bāde bejū, būse siṭān az ū, qiṣse begū. None of these stanza beginnings leading to a rhyme at the end contains the kind of signification on more than one plane of meaning that we have been discussing. Bāde bejū, az ū - these might be equivocal, but this quality is not strengthened by any other word of ambiguous content in the same stanza.

It can be stated that Ḥāfiz's own style does not differ from the imitation in the skilful fabrication of uniform phonetic factors (like end-rhyme and assonance) but rather in the skilful differentiation of identical phonetic fac-

tors and in the setting up of contradictions on the semantic plane.

When Ḥāfiẓ's words fall into his poetic system, especially his melodic arrangement, they lose their independent meaning. Even serious words are given a kind of playful twist; they turn into elements of a new semantic system, the ultimate signification of which the poet does not spell out. A whole work becomes, as Jurij Lotman observes, "the uniform sign of a single content, or, in the words of A. Potebnja, the text of an entire literary work appears to be reduced to a single word".

What the essence of Ḥāfiẓ's message is, emerged, perhaps, to some extent upon our studying the connection of individual words and metaphors to the melodic system of separate stanzas and poems as a whole. To a significant degree, Ḥāfiẓ's 'Weltanschauung', or philosophy of life, was subordinated to this system.

In the traditional view, euphony and 'Weltanschauung' have nothing in common. However, in Ḥāfiẓ's case, we can see that they are closely connected. By allowing the potentialities of mysticism, realism and panegyric verse to vary with separate words, he assured himself a change of philosophical outlook through melody. We have already noted how expressly melody had the effect of changing meanings in Ḥāfiẓ's stanzas. This change of meaning certainly has a bearing on his 'Weltanschauung', as his words do not have a very fixed semantic content.

What, then, is the sense of this observation? For centuries the theoreticians have talked about form and content. Sometimes they have separated, sometimes united form and content in their theories. Only during this century efforts have been made to show the actual locus or spot where form and content meet. In the case of Ḥāfiẓ such a locus

is here presented.

