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Book Review

Bēdil and Composing Bewilderment: Understanding Bēdil 's Thirty last Ghazals of the Divan

Kavoos Hasanli, Tehran: Mo'een, 1399 (2020), 403 pp.

Bēdil and Charm of Bewilderment, Understanding Bēdil Dehlavī's Forty Ghazals.

Kavoos Hasanli, Tehran: Mo'een, 1400 (2021), 622 pp.

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Mīrzā Abdul-Qādir Bēdil, the son of the Mīrzā 'Abd al-Khāliq, also known as Bedil *Dehlavī* (1642–1720) is one of the great poets writing Indian style (sabk-e Hendi) Persian poetry in 11th and 12th centuries AH. He lived in Shah Jahanabad and was a contemporary of kings such as Muhammad 'Azam Shah, son of Aurangzeb and Mohamad Shah. Bēdil wrote prose and verse; some of his works are masnavi of 'arafat (عرفات), Charm of Bewilderment (طلسم حیرت), Mohit 'azam (محیط اعظم), divan of qaside and ghazal as well as Nokat (نکات) and Letters (مراسلات). He spoke Bengali, Urdu, Persian, Sanskrit and Arabic, was a follower of mysticism and familiar with Indian religions and philosophy. What distinguished him from other Persian speaking poets of the time is his poetic nuances, subtleties, and complexity in his choice of metaphors, symbols and syntax. His complicated ideas intertwined with philosophy and mysticism make his poetry difficult to comprehend as he himself mentioned that understanding his complex ideas requires sharp intelligence.

Hasanli, a professor of Persian language and literature at Shiraz University, believes that the complicated language of Bēdil has prevented his poetry to

become popular even among the academia; he considers the fact that he was borne in India leading to a lack of attention among scholars of Persian poetry (2021:12-13). Thus, Hasanli considers criticism and research on Bēdil important because of his poetry and in the context of Persian as the language a large part of Middle East. The critical works published are mainly on Bēdil's poetry not about it. Hence, he has applied a similar method in both books to analyze Bēdil's poetry (2022: 14-15). He has used the texts published in Kabul comparing the chosen ghazals with the edited versions of Tabatabaee-Qozve. He mentions in the introduction that he has noticed many differences with the Kabul prints which makes the Tabatabaee-Qozve edition more valuable (2021: 33).

The books comprise four sections, introduction, special words, analysis of ghazals and indexes. In the first book, *Bēdil and Composing Bewilderment*, Hasanli gives a short report on Bēdil's biography and his books such as *Chahar Unsur* (چهار عنصر). In order to unravel the complications of Bēdil's ghazals, Hasanli makes use of other poems; hence it may seem he is explaining and analyzing 30 and 40 ghazals, while hundreds of other ghazals are discussed and used to explain the chosen poems. Bēdil sometimes used a word in a specific way and with a special connotation peculiar to him. Knowing such a specific usage found in his poetry can help the reader to interpret the line easier.

Hasanli points out that many poems can be read and interpreted in various ways. To ignore different readings of Bēdil's ghazals is ignoring his versatile language and his artistic rendering of concepts.

The second section of both books is devoted to special words and expressions. In the first book, fifteen words and in the second one fourteen words have been analyzed and explained with a specific entry for each word. These words are specific to the thirty ghazals in first book and forty in the second one. The explanations provide a guide to the reader for a better understanding of the poems in section three.

In section three, Hasanli first presents the complete ghazal, then he analyzes each line followed by explanations. Words are explained with the help from other poems when necessary and aesthetic characteristics of the poem are discussed. He has tried to refer to other poems in order to explain each line.

The fourth section is index consisting of index to hemistiches and lines from other poems, index to sources used and a subject index. It would have made more sense if he had labeled subject index as index to words and expressions.

The bibliography shows that he has used a great many sources published in Iran or abroad. The overall appearance of the book with regards to the cover page, graphics, typography and punctuation is quite good. The titles of both books are taken from Bēdil's ghazals.

Hasanli has a lucid and clear prose style avoiding unnecessary lengthy sentences and repetitions. His background in Bēdil studies make the books worthwhile reading.