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# Literary Imitation in Three Poems Attributed to Tahirih Qurrat al-‘Ayn

*Sahba Shayani*

The University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA

*sahba@ucla.edu*

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## Abstract

Throughout both modern and contemporary periods of Iranian poetry, the figure of Tahirih Qurrat al-‘Ayn as a poet has been largely ignored, while some focus has been placed upon her historical roles. Although a large part of this active disregard for her poetry has undoubtedly stemmed from politico-religious intolerance, it has also partially resulted from a lack of detailed information and primary sources. This article advances our understanding of Tahirih the poet by comparing three of the most famous poems attributed to her – “*Ay ‘āshiqān, ay ‘āshiqān shud āshikārā wāj-i ḥaqq,*” “*Ay bi sar-i zulf-i tu sawdā-yi man,*” and “*Jadhabāt shawqik uljimat bi-salāsil al-ghamm wa-l-balā*” – all of which are “literary imitations” (*istiqbāl*), with the original pieces composed by Rumi, Hātif, and Jāmī, respectively. By comparing Tahirih’s poems with the previous pieces, we gain access to the subtleties and nuances that inform us about the poetic persona of this historical figure.

## Keywords

Tahirih – Qurrat al-‘Ayn – women – women writers – Persian poetry – literary imitation – Qājār – Bābī – 19th century literature – Iran

Tahirih Qurrat al-‘Ayn (Fāṭima Baraghānī; 1814 or 1817/8–1852) not only left behind a legacy as a revolutionary religious thinker and a prominent Bābī leader but also one as a woman of literary prowess in both prose and poetry.<sup>1</sup> In regard to her poetic output, proving the authenticity of these works is often a philological challenge, a question which is further complicated by a paucity of early manuscripts of her writings and by her being a woman and an ardent Bābī.<sup>2</sup> In Persian literary history, female poets have often been discredited of their work because of a scarcity of primary sources and traditional socio-religious perspectives on women’s roles as seen in the cases of some of Tahirih’s literary predecessors, including Mahsatī Ganjavī (12th century), Jahān-Malik Khātūn (14th century) and even her literary successors such as Parwīn I’tiṣāmī (1907–1941) and Furūgh Farrukhzād (1935–1967). Even when the authenticity of their work is accepted, these poets and their works are often belittled because of their gender.<sup>3</sup> Tahirih’s “transgression” exceeded that of her predecessors, however,

- 1 For a detailed account of Tahirih’s life and her activities, see Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 295–331.
- 2 For an explanation of the reasons for such a challenge, see Amin Banani et al., *Tāhirih: A Portrait in Poetry* (Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 2005), 4–11. For recent discussions of poems attributed to Tahirih Qurrat al-‘Ayn, see *Ibid.*, 20–30 and 109–145; John. S. Hatcher and Amrollah Hemmat, *The Poetry of Tāhirih* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2002); Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 107–16; and Nosratollah Mohammad-Hosseini, *Haḍrat-i Tahirih* (Madrid: Fundación Nehal, 2012), 411–72.
- 3 Not much is known regarding the life of Mahsatī Ganjavī and no original *dīwān* remains of her work. However, there have been attempts to historically place her and fragments of her quatrains have been gathered through secondary sources. For more on Mahsatī, see Mahsatī Ganjavī, ed. Mu‘īn al-Dīn Miḥrābī, *Mahsatī-yi Ganja‘ī: Buzurgtarīn Zan-i Shā‘ir-i Rubā‘ī-sarā* (Tehran: Tūs, 2003), 7–52. Although a contemporary of Ḥāfiẓ and ‘Ubayd-i Zākānī and the composer of over fifteen hundred verses in a variety of styles, appropriate attention had not been paid to Jahān-Malik Khātūn until relatively recently. This is, of course, influenced by the fact that none of the manuscripts that remain of her *dīwān* are in Iran and because she has been overshadowed by the likes of Ḥāfiẓ. However, it is most certainly also influenced by her gender. Additionally, when she is mentioned by her contemporaries, as seen in some of the writings of Kamāl Khujandī, it is in humiliating language where both her and her poetry are degraded solely because of her sex. On Jahān-Malik Khātūn, see Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, “Odes of a Poet-Princess: The *Ghazals* of Jahān-Malik Khātūn”, *Iran: Journal of Persian Studies* XLIII (2005): 173–195 and Domenico Ingenito, “Jahān Malik Khātūn: Gender, Canon and Persona in the Poems of a Premodern Persian Princess”, in *The Beloved in Middle Eastern Literatures: The Culture of Love and Languishing*, ed. Hanadi Al-Samman, Michael Beard, and Alireza Korangy (London: IB Tauris, 2017), 195–99. When she began to publish her poems in a variety of papers, Parwīn I’tiṣāmī was accused of plagiarism, with people claiming that the works were composed by her father. Furūgh Farrukhzād faced similar accusations as well as being called a wanton and morally loose; she was not taken seriously until much later in her career. On Parwīn I’tiṣāmī, see Parwīn I’tiṣāmī, ed. Heshmat Moayyad, *Dīwān-i Parwīn-i*

in that she was not only a woman active in a male-dominated field of writing but also the daughter and niece/ex-daughter-in-law of two renowned Usuli clerics and a woman who had, as a result of her conversion first to the Shaykhi movement and then the Bābī religion, left her family to propagate the message of her newfound faith.<sup>4</sup> As a result of such “transgressions”, Tahiriḥ not only suffered throughout her life and was ultimately executed but even her memory has and continues to suffer the attempts of erasure and censure at the hands of those who, whether because of her religious affiliation, her gender or both, attempt to rob her of her historical and literary legacy.

Both in the East and in the West a variety of “reasons” are often conjured to “prove” why specific female writers did not compose what is attributed to them or, even if they did, why it is not of high quality.<sup>5</sup> And while Tahiriḥ’s knowledge and eloquence have been acknowledged by friend and foe alike, she has not been spared such maledictions. At times, poems that have been traditionally attributed to her are, without concrete evidence, dismissed as misattributions and coupled with baseless ridicule of the very movement for which she gave her life.<sup>6</sup> On other occasions, works attributed to her are modified to remove her *nom de plume* or any hint of her or her Bābī beliefs and, then, they

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*I’tiṣāmī* (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1987), 118–19 and on Furūgh Farrukhḏād, see Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Nasrin Rahimieh, ed., *Forugh Farrokhzad, Poet of Modern Iran: Iconic Woman and Feminine Pioneer of New Persian Poetry* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023) and Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (London: IB Tauris, 1992), 127–53.

4 Mullā Ṣāliḥ Baraghānī (1760/1–1854/5) was Tahiriḥ’s father and his brother, Mullā Taqī Baraghānī (1769–1847), was her uncle and father-in-law. For more on Tahiriḥ’s father, uncle and the Baraghānī family, see Moojan Momen, “Usuli, Akhbari, Shaykhi, Babi: The Tribulations of a Qazvin Family”, *Iranian Studies* 36 (2003): 317–37.

5 For more on this subject, see Pamela J. Benson and Victoria Kirkham, ed., *Strong Voices, Weak History: Early Women Writers and Canons in England, France, and Italy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005); Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Writing Women’s Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1993); Tricia A. Lootens, *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1996); Lilian S. Robinson, “Treason Our Text: Feminine Challenges to the Literary Canon”, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 2 (1983): 83–98 and Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women’s Writing* (Austin: University of Texas, 1983). My sincerest thanks to Michelle Quay for emphasizing the importance of this issue in regard to women’s writings whilst editing this paper and for introducing me to the aforementioned sources.

6 As an example, see Muḥammad-Riḏā Shafī’ī-Kadkanī, *Bā Chirāgh wa Āyina* (Tehran: Sukhan, 2013), 79 and 613. Shafī’ī-Kadkanī is of course not the first to state that what Banani calls Tahiriḥ’s “signature poem”, “*Gar ba tu uftadam nazar*” (If my glance falls upon you), is not originally hers and he makes this claim in the insightful context that various poems can be re-born once uttered at the right moment in history by someone of significance which is what he claims happens with this *ghazal* and Tahiriḥ. Mohammad-Hosseini covers the

are publicly recited. An example of this is the use of one of her lesser known poems (the last poem discussed in this paper), modified and sung as an ode to the first Imam of Shi‘i Islam in honor of the anniversary of his birth. In this rendition, no mention is made of the author of the poem and where the poet refers directly to the Bab by using his title “the Most Exalted One” (*Ḥaḍrat-i A‘lā*), it has been modified to “the Master” (*Ḥaḍrat-i Mawlā*) in order to be a more suitable reference to the first imam.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of how hard men have tried for decades to deny Tahirih’s historical and literary presence, they have been unsuccessful. The problems of uncertainty in regard to what poetry was originally composed by her and what is attributed to her have failed to cast her out of her rightful place in the canon of Persian literary figures of the nineteenth century. The painstaking efforts of those in the past such as E. G. Browne, Asadullāh Fāḍil-i Māzandarānī and Nī‘matullāh Dhukā‘ī-Bayḍā‘ī as well as more recent scholars such as Amin Banani, Nosratollah Mohammad-Hosseini, Farzaneh Milani, John S. Hatcher, Amrollah Hemmat and Dominic Parviz Brookshaw have all made certain that Tahirih’s poetic presence is not only not forgotten but better expounded upon and understood. In addition, when thoroughly analyzed, we see that the poems themselves can potentially act as preservers of the legacy of their author; they present us with a poetic dialogue between Tahirih and her female and male literary predecessors and contemporaries and, when read against the backdrop of the historical information which we have of her, reflect the different aspects of her life. This should all be mentioned with an important caveat: that Tahirih’s main presence not only in history but almost certainly in her own mind, too, was not that of a poet. Her poetic output was a means by which she demonstrated her conviction in what she believed to be the truth and the beginning of a new age in humanity’s religious history: the abolition of the Islamic sharia, the ending of an old cycle of religion and the ushering in of a new era with new divinely-inspired laws brought forth by the Bāb. Her poetic works were thus tools through which she could incite the hearts of others to

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problems of attribution in regard to this poem more thoroughly. Mohammad-Hosseini, *Ḥaḍrat-i Tahirih*, 436–42.

- 7 The verse “O ‘Alī, the Master, ‘Alī, my Master” (*yā ‘Alī mawlā, ‘Alī mawlā-yi man*) is then interwoven throughout the song, coupled with the modified hemistich of “My every limb is filled with ‘Alī’s love” (*pur shud az ‘ishq-i ‘Alī a‘ḍā-yi man*) to replace “My every limb is filled with your love” (*pur shud-i az ‘ishq-i tu a‘ḍā-yi man*). The song’s title is the first hemistich of the poem, “*Ay ba sar-i zulf-i tu sawdā-yi man*”, sung by Hāmid Jalīlī. The song and its accompanying music video may be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Web-bouRnbo>.

join her in what she believed to be the fulfillment of long-awaited past prophecies and the coming of the Day of Judgement.<sup>8</sup>

Banani states that currently only “fewer than sixty ... poems” exist which are attributed to Tahirih and any compilation of these poems cannot be regarded as an authenticated and complete collection of her works since more texts may surface with the passing of time, the shift of perspectives and more critical analyses.<sup>9</sup> However, according to Brookshaw, the poetry that has been attributed to Tahirih up to this point in time can still be analyzed as a means to learn more about how she, as both a woman and as a poet, represented herself or has been represented.<sup>10</sup> An analysis of the poetry attributed to Tahirih and the placing of these poems within the context of the Persian literary canon can also help us understand how her role in the literary history of Iran has been overlooked as a poet who engages with both her literary precursors and contemporaries, and who, as part of the movement of Literary Return (*bāzgasht-i adabī*) and a predecessor to modern Persian poetry (*shīr-i mu‘āṣir*), incorporates, in her work, the style of the former and some of the new innovative subject matters of the latter.<sup>11</sup>

As a whole, the poetry attributed to Tahirih can be categorized into two groups: love poems with often heavy mystical undertones and poems which are a call to action in honor of the arrival of a new spiritual era. In this article, I will discuss three poems attributed to Tahirih, all of which address the dawn of a new day in religious history even if, outwardly, some are cloaked in the language of love.<sup>12</sup> In composing these pieces, Tahirih makes use of two poetic devices very commonly utilized in Persian poetry called *istiqbāl* and *taḍmīn*. *Istiqbāl* (welcoming), which is also referred to as *jawāb* (response),

8 For more on this, see Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 330–31.

9 Banani et al., *Tāhīrīh: A Portrait in Poetry*, 4–5.

10 Personal conversation with Dominic Brookshaw, December 2011. There is of course the issue of poetic persona/narrator versus historical poet which was brought to my attention by Domenico Ingenito who discusses it in detail in his aforementioned chapter; see Ingenito, “Jahān Malik Khātūn: Gender, Canon and Persona in the Poems of a Premodern Persian Princess”, 190–4. However, as I aim to demonstrate in my analysis of these selected poems, we can detect a number of direct links between the poetic voice of Tahirih and the historical Tahirih which leads me to believe that her poetic persona is not at all very far from her historical persona.

11 For an example of a poem of Tahirih's where traces of modern Persian poetry's new and innovative subject matters and ideas can be found, see “*Hān ṣubḥ-i hudā farmūd āghāz-i tanaffūs*” in Mohammad-Hosseini, *Ḥaḍrat-i Tāhīrīh*, 427, among others.

12 The use of the language of love as a means to describe the mystical or spiritual is a method commonly used by the so-called pillars of classical Persian poetry such as Ḥāfīz and Rumi. As a result, this act in itself can be viewed as a sort of homage by Tahirih to her literary predecessors.

is a poetic device with which the author composes a poem using the same meter and rhyme of a poem by another poet. *Taḍmīn* (safeguarding) is when a poet quotes a line or a hemistich from another poet in their own work.<sup>13</sup> In the implementation of *istiqbāl* and *taḍmīn*, the poet at once both illustrates the width and breadth of their knowledge of poetry and situates themselves within the larger tradition of Persian poets. Through *istiqbāl*, the poet hearkens their predecessor more subtly whereas in *taḍmīn*, the quotation of a renowned poem perhaps places the new poem in a more direct dialogue with the preceding work. In the three works that will be discussed in this paper, Tahirih utilizes *istiqbāl* and *taḍmīn* in reference to poems by Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī Rumi (13th century), ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Nūr al-Dīn Jāmī (15th century) and Muḥammad Bāqir Ṣuḥbat-i Lāri (19th century).

### “O Lovers! O Lovers!”

As Banani notes, for the reader familiar with this, the following poem immediately hearkens a set of *ghazals* by Rumi because by using *taḍmīn*, Tahirih opens her poem with Rumi’s renowned half-hemistich.<sup>14</sup> Her poem reads:

O Lovers! O Lovers! The face of Truth has been revealed!  
 The veil is rent asunder now, through the might of the Lord of the Dawn!<sup>15</sup>  
 Arise, for this time – in glory! – the face of God has been revealed;  
 Behold with immense pleasure and delight that face that is bright like  
 the morn!

Meaning: by the power of the Creator of Time this world became a verdant paradise;

13 *Istiqbāl* and *jawāb* are often translated into English as “literary imitation”. For more on *istiqbāl/jawāb*, *taḍmīn* and other literary devices in Persian poetry, see Paul E. Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid-Mughal Ghazal* (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1998), 106–13.

14 Banani et al., *Tāhīrih: A Portrait in Poetry*, 127.

15 Hatcher and Hemmat note that the use of the term “Lord of the Dawn” or “Lord of the Daybreak” (*Rabb al-Falaq*) is most likely a reference here by Tahirih to “Qur’ān 113:1–5 wherein Muḥammad reveals a prayer to the ‘Lord of the Dawn’ for protection against various sorts of evil. In essence, she is saying that this assistance has at long last arrived ... Rumi also uses this term when emphasizing the irresistible power of God.” See Hatcher and Hemmat, *The Poetry of Tāhīrih*, 154, fn. 58. Hatcher and Hemmat’s translations are accompanied by detailed and comprehensive footnotes which not only diligently discuss the Quranic references in the poems attributed to Tahirih but also illustrate their links to classical poems, particularly, those of Rumi.

It is the Day of Resurrection, O Nobles! The darksome night was annihilated!

The time of truth has come! Deceit has fallen!

That for which you've yearned has come: justice, lawfulness, and order.

Tyranny and oppression are destroyed! It is the time of kindness and grace!

Now strength and vigor have replaced all ailments!

True knowledge is manifested! Ignorance dispelled from [our] midst!

Instruct the Shaykh, "Arise this instant and turn the page!"

Though the state of the world was grim for a lifetime by dint of this and that

Now [sweet] milk flows instead of blood; you must change the bowl!

Though the King of the Worlds has appeared to admonish the nations,

He shall liberate them from their fetters through eternal kindness!<sup>16</sup>

The *ghazal* is composed in the meter of *rajaz-i muthamman-i sālīm* which is the same meter as seven of Rumi's poems in *Kullīyāt-i Shams-i Tabrīzī* that also begin with the half-hemistich, "O Lovers! O Lovers!" (*ay 'āshiqān, ay 'āshiqān*). Banani states that, in this poem, Tahiriḥ is making use of *taḍmīn* "to begin her poem with the same words that are found in the first line of one of Rumi's well-known poems. But, while the opening words and the form of the poem echo the style of Rumi, the rhyme is distinctly different."<sup>17</sup> As a matter of fact, Tahiriḥ's rendition does not share the same rhyme as any of Rumi's set of poems that begin with the opening "O Lovers! O Lovers!" The poem to which Banani is most likely referring is Rumi's renowned *ghazal* beginning with "O Lovers! O Lovers! It is time to abandon the world!" (*Ay 'āshiqān, ay 'āshiqān, hangām-i kūch ast az jahān*). While this may be true, based on more prominently shared themes and a similarity in length, I believe that Tahiriḥ's poem may actually be referencing the following *ghazal* by Rumi:

O Lovers! O Lovers! The time of union and encounter has come!  
From the heavens came the call, "O Moon-Faced Beauties, come!"

16 In order to remain as close as possible to the original texts, I have opted to carry out my own translations of the non-English poems and texts cited in this paper. Therefore, all translations are my own unless stated and cited otherwise. For alternative translations of this specific poem, see Banani et al., *Tāhiriḥ: A Portrait in Poetry*, 79, and Hatcher and Hemmat, *The Poetry of Tāhiriḥ*, 45–46. Due to space constraints, I am unable to include the poems in their original Persian in this article. For the original Persian of this poem, see Mohammad-Hosseini, *Ḥaḍrat-i Tahiriḥ*, 425–26.

17 Banani et al., *Tāhiriḥ: A Portrait in Poetry*, 127.

O Joyful Ones! O Joyful Ones! Joy has come, struttingly;  
 [As] we hold tight his chains, and he holds the hem of our robe.  
 The Blazing Wine has come! O Demon of Sorrow sit aside!  
 Go, O death-dwelling soul; Arise, O Eternal Cupbearer!  
 O You by Whom the seven heavens are intoxicated, and we a [mere]  
 pawn in Your palm;  
 O You from Whose being our being is in constant praise;  
 O Sweet-Breathed minstrel who rings the caravan-bells at every instant;  
 O Life! saddle the steed; Freshen our soul, O Zephyr!  
 O Melody of the sweet-storied reed; [You] Whose melody tastes of sugar;  
 From Your melody the scent of loyalty wafts over me, day and night!  
 Begin, once more; Tune those frets!  
 Coquette with the fair ones, O fair-faced Sun!  
 Silence [it]! Have shame! Drink [from] the jug of the silent ones!  
 Veil the sins of others! Veil the sins of others! Take a portion of God's  
 patience!<sup>18</sup>

Both poems are exactly eight lines long and share the same theme: they are about the divine beloved. While Rumi's vocabulary and choice of imagery are more enigmatic and playful, leaving room for further interpretations as to whether or not the beloved is human or divine, his use of terms in the opening such as "the time of union and encounter" (*gah-i vaṣṭ u liqā*) clearly set a mystical tone for the reader familiar with this. On the other hand, through her direct and un-enigmatic imagery and language, Tahirih demonstrates, from the very beginning, that her poem is about a divine beloved and the beginning of a new long-awaited time.

While both poems begin with an announcement regarding the arrival of a new day, the day of reunion with the beloved or the manifestation of his countenance, their ensuing approach to the topic is quite different. From the opening line of his *ghazal* onwards, Rumi continues with a variety of panegyric invocations of the beloved and turns the poem into a celebration of the beloved, admonition of those forces contrary to the joy and happiness brought by Him and a couple of lines of advice either to himself or his audience (or both) which are inspired by the beloved. Tahirih's rendition, on the other hand, turns into a call to action. Throughout the entire poem, verbs in the imperative tense are utilized as a means to guide the listener (who is presumably a seeker) to act as she demands her audience to arise (*barkhūz*), to gaze (*bingar*), to

18 For the original Persian, see Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī-yi Rumi, *Kullīyāt-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, ed. M. Darvish, (Tehran: Jāwīdān, 1962), 19.



instruct (*bargū*) and to turn (*bigardān*). To the reader familiar with the historical Tahirih, these calls to action are easily reminiscent of what we know of her: a woman who, in a time of great social restrictions on female movement, made her way from Qazvin to Karbala, to Baghdad, to Kermanshah and Hamadan and then to Badasht and the north of Iran as well as to the capital city of Tehran all the while engaging in debates with prominent clergymen, speaking before groups and teaching them the tenants of her newfound faith and challenging the authority of the clergy.<sup>19</sup> The emphasis in this poem on concrete action versus beautiful words reminds one of the anecdote which ‘Abdu’l-Bahā relays in *Tadhkirat al-Wafā’* when giving his account of Tahirih. He recalls that one day while Tahirih was a guest of Bahā’u’llāh’s in his home in Tehran, Siyyid Yahyā Dārābī (entitled Vaḥid-i Akbar by the Bāb) came to the house and spoke eloquently about the importance of the Bāb’s cause while producing verses and hadiths to demonstrate its validity. Suddenly, in the middle of his words and while seated behind the customary curtain, Tahirih proclaims:

O Yahyā! Bring forth deeds, if you are a possessor of true knowledge. Now is not the time for recounting traditions; it is the time for visible proofs, the time for steadfastness, the time for tearing the veils of superstition, it is the time to raise the Word of God, the time for martyrdom in the path of God. Deeds are needed, deeds!<sup>20</sup>

In addition to a tangible sense of urgency and a very clear call to action, Tahirih seems to implement other images in this poem as well which certainly reference her beliefs and possibly even her life story. The poem opens with the image of the face of Truth being unveiled and this is again repeated in hemistiches three and four of the *ghazal*. This act of unveiling and the references to the unveiled face as the face of Truth (*wajh-i ḥaqq*) and the face of God (*wajh-i khudā*) are undoubtedly primarily allusions to her belief in the appearance of the Bāb as the Promised One, especially, since in Shi’i tradition, the Fourteen Infallibles are believed to be visible proofs of the face of God. Banani also notes that these verses “signal the end of the era of expectations, the advent of the Promised One, the arrival of the beloved”.<sup>21</sup>

Although the date of the *ghazal*’s composition is unknown and, therefore, it is impossible to ascertain if Tahirih wrote this poem before or after the

19 See Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 299–332 and Mohammad-Hosseini, *Ḥaḍrat-i Tahirih*, 135–401.

20 For the original Persian, see ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, *Tadhkirat al-wafā’ fi tarjamat ḥayāt qudamā’ al-aḥibbā’* (Haifa: Al-Abbāsiyya, 1924), 306.

21 Banani et al., *Tāhīrīh: A Portrait in Poetry*, 12.

conference of Badasht, the constant allusions to the unveiling of a face in the beginning of the poem also remind the reader of that momentous gathering in the summer of 1848. At this event, Tahirih is famed to have entered the gathering of all men without her face-veil – an act which caused great uproar both within and without the Bābī community – as an active symbol of the breaking of the Bābī movement with Islamic tradition and the implementation of a new sharia.<sup>22</sup> The reference to the world becoming a “verdant Paradise” in the wake of such evocative imagery of the removal of the veil can be seen to further add to the allusions to the incident in the gardens in Badasht. Interestingly enough, Tahirih then adds, in the fourth line, a command coupled with advice: “Behold, with much pleasure and delight, that face that is bright like the morn!” Read in the context of her unveiling, it can be understood as a paradigm on how her revolutionary act in this garden should be regarded. She is also clearly playing with the imagery of the gaze and the unveiling which is a common trope in mystical poetry and further intensifies the lover’s longing for and attraction towards his/her beloved. Finally, her reference to the Day of Resurrection in the second hemistich of the third line, immediately after the mention of the world turning into a “verdant Paradise” is again reminiscent of her Bābī beliefs (and perhaps particularly the events at Badasht), which emphasized that the day in which they lived *was* the Day of Judgement itself and that the first eighteen disciples of the Bāb – the Letters of Living – who had come to believe in him independently were reincarnations of key Shi‘i figures and that Tahirih, specifically, was the return of Fatima.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to references to Bābī history, which may be gleaned from the earlier lines of the poem, the later lines may be perceived as referring more to Bābī ideology, specifically, to concepts such as kindness, grace and gentleness. We see these when Tahirih proclaims,

Tyranny and oppression are destroyed! It is the time of kindness and  
 grace!  
 Now strength and vigor have replaced all ailments!

22 On Badasht, Tahirih’s role and the gathering’s role as a turning point for the Bābī religion, see Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 324–7.

23 According to the Bāb, the Letters of the Living are the return of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones, plus the four emissaries of the Twelfth Imam who had been in occultation. Tahirih is understood to be the return of Fatima. For more on this topic, see Todd Lawson, “The Authority of the Feminine and Fatima’s Place in an Early Work of the Bab”, in *The Most Learned of the Shi‘a*, ed. Linda S. Walbridge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 94–127.

And, again, in the penultimate line where she converts the image of spilt blood which is associated here with tribulation and war, to that of flowing milk, which has both Biblical and Quranic undertones and represents abundance and peace.<sup>24</sup> Tahirih's emphasis on love and grace recalls the Báb's declaration in the fifth chapter of the fourth *wāḥid* of the *Persian Bayān*:

And all this hath been commanded in the *Bayān* that no person should sadden another, so that the Lord of commandment and all creation may not be saddened ...<sup>25</sup>

The ideas of kindness and munificence are then even further elevated to represent divine attributes when Tahirih declares:

Though the King of the Worlds has appeared to admonish the nations,  
He shall liberate them from their fetters through eternal kindness!

Here, again, Tahirih's words echo those of the Báb's in the *Persian Bayān* where he states:

The path to guidance is one of love and compassion, not of force and coercion. This hath been God's method in the past, and shall continue to be in the future!<sup>26</sup>

In Tahirih's closing of the poem we are presented with two elements, one practical and the other theoretical. Tahirih's final line tells us that although God has returned "to admonish the nations" (presumably for deviating from truth, righteousness and all the other virtues which she declares the return of earlier on), this admonishment will not be carried out by means of punishment or violence but through kindness. From a practical perspective, this is Tahirih's embracement of kindness as the most effective method of dealing with one another – even one's enemies – as this is how God reacts. From a theoretical perspective and again in line with the Báb's own teachings as manifested in

24 For further discussion on this topic, see Hatcher and Hemmat, *The Poetry of Ṭāhirih*, 155–56, fn. 67.

25 For the original Persian, see the Báb, *Kitāb-i Mustafāḥ-i Bayān-i Fārsī*, Iranian National Bahā'ī Archives (INBA), vol. 62, 119.

26 The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice and translated by Habib Tahezadeh with the assistance of a Committee at the Bahā'ī World Centre (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Centre, 1976), 77. For the original Persian, see INBA 62: 63.

the Persian Bayān, Tahirih is introducing a shift in the traditional notions of a vengeful God with reprimand and retribution as godly attributes and instead emphasizes the importance and perhaps even sacredness of kindness as the method which the Bāb even refers to as “God’s method in the past” and from hereafter. As a result, we see another break between the traditions of the past and the Bābī religion, which continued to establish its independence from its predecessor religions.

### “The Passion of Longing for You ...”

Another example of *istiqbāl* in the poetry attributed to Tahirih is the following:

The passion of longing for you constrains with the chains of sorrow and  
calamity  
All the broken-hearted lovers who offer up their souls in this path!  
If that idol in tyranny sets his gaze on killing me  
And thus raises his sword, I shall be satisfied with his will!  
At dawn-tide my cruel charmer stepped into my chamber  
And when I beheld his beauty, it was as though the morning dawned.  
No musk in all of Tartary is like his sweet-scented locks,  
No idolatry in all of Cathay compares to the calamity of his eyes!  
You who are blind to the beloved and wine in search of the pious and the  
hermit:  
What can I do for you are an idolator and bereft of the pure intentions of  
the righteous!  
You languish in yearning for dangling locks, seeking a steed and gilded  
saddle!  
All your life you are utterly unaware of the unrestrained, unfortunate  
mendicant.  
To you the dominion and pomp of Alexander; to me the ways and path  
of the *qalandar*;<sup>27</sup>  
If that is good, then it suits you! If this is bad, then it is what I deserve!

27 On qalandars and the tradition of *Qalandarīyya* in mystical Persian poetry, see J. T. P. de Bruijn, “The *Qalandarīyyāt* in Persian Mystical Poetry, from Sanā’ī Onwards”, in *The Heritage of Sufism: The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism (1150–1500)*, Vol. II, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003), 75–86.

Pass through the dwelling of “I” and “we” and choose the dominion of utter nothingness (*fanā*) as your abode:<sup>28</sup>

For if you follow this, then you shall achieve that for which you yearn!<sup>29</sup>

This *ghazal* is composed in the meter of *baḥr-i kāmīl* which is not commonly found in the classical corpus but is used by at least three of Tahirih’s predecessors, namely, Jāmī (1414–1492), Bīdil (1644–1721) and Hātif (d. 1783). It is also the meter of another *ghazal* which although at times attributed to Tahirih, is believed to belong to Ṣuḥbat-i Lārī (1749–1836), an eighteenth-century poet from the region of Fars.<sup>30</sup> Ṣuḥbat’s poem is very visibly an *istiqbāl* of one of

28 On the Sufi concept of *fanā*’ which is often coupled with and in contradiction to *baqā*’, see Gerhard Böwering, “Baqā’ wa Fanā”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 3 (1988): 722–24.

29 For the original Persian of this piece, see Mohammad-Hosseini, *Ḥaḍrat-i Tahirih*, 415–16. In an article written for the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* in October of 1889, E. G. Browne says that he received a copy of this poem along with another one (discussed in footnote 30) while in Yazd and was told that they are both poems by Tahirih. He then wrote to a friend in Shiraz who responded saying that while the other poem did not belong to Tahirih, this one most certainly did. He notes that others also confirmed this claim. He likewise mentions that he found a verse of this *ghazal* in a “Persian grammar” called *Tanbih al-Atfāl* printed in Constantinople in 1881 which claimed the line to be by Mīrzā ‘Abd al-Karīm, better known by his penname Simā. Browne follows this discussion of the poem with a good explanation of why there is such a problem with attribution of Tahirih’s poetry in Iran of his time. See E. G. Browne, “Article XII. – The Bābīs of Persia. II. Their Literature and Doctrines”, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21, (1889): 934–36. Also see Edward G. Browne, ed. and trans., *A Traveller’s Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), vol. 2, 309–316 and E. G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bābī Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 347–49. In his book, *Bahā’īgarī*, Aḥmad Kasrawī attributes this poem to Tahirih although the order of the verses slightly differs in the version that he has quoted. See Aḥmad Kasrawī, *Bahā’īgarī* (Tehran: Paymān, 1944), 63–64. For alternative translations, see Banani et al., *Tāhirih: A Portrait in Poetry*, 87, Browne, “Article XII. – The Bābīs of Persia. II. Their Literature and Doctrines”, 21, n. 4, 936–37 and Hatcher and Hemmat, *The Poetry of Tāhirih*, 108–9.

30 Ṣuḥbat-i Lārī (Muhammad Bāqir Lārī; 1749–1836) was a poet, scholar and jurist who lived in the city of Lār in the province of Fars during the reign of Fatḥ-‘Alī Shah Qajar (1772–1834) and was a contemporary of poets such as Viṣāl and Qā‘ānī. For more on Ṣuḥbat’s life, see Muhammad Bāqir Ṣuḥbat-i Lārī, ed. Ḥusayn Ma‘rifat, *Dīwān-i Ṣuḥbat-i Lārī* (Shiraz: Kitābfurūshī-yi Ma‘rifat-i Shirāz, 1954), *ḥ-yab*. The poem in question, which appears on pages 129–30 of Ṣuḥbat’s *dīwān*, begins with the hemistich, “*Lama’ātu wajhika ashraḡat wa shu’ā’u ṭal’atika i’talā*”. E. G. Browne references the poem in his aforementioned article, saying that while in Yazd, he saw a copy of this poem attributed to Tahirih which, upon further investigation, he learned actually belonged to Ṣuḥbat. See E. G. Browne, “Article XII. – The Bābīs of Persia. II. Their Literature and Doctrines”, 21, n. 4, 934–35. In some other sources such as Kasrawī’s *Bahā’īgarī*, this *ghazal* is produced and combined with the poem we recently read (*Jadhabātu shawqika*) and presented as what seems to be one

Jāmī’s *ghazals*, sharing with it not only the same meter but also the exact same placement of Arabic, Persian and mixed verses. Tahirih’s poem, on the other hand, while sharing the same meter as both poems, substantially varies in the placement of its Arabic, Persian and mixed verses. None of the poems share the exact same rhyme although they are similar in that they all end with *-ā* (*-ā*, *-shā*, and *-lā*, respectively).

It is impossible to ascertain whether Jāmī’s poem or that of Şuḥbat’s acted as the key source of *istiqbāl* for Tahirih’s poem. Given that Şuḥbat’s piece has often been mistakenly attributed to Tahirih or combined with her poem, perhaps we could say that her poem is more likely an *istiqbāl* of his work. Likewise, unlike Jāmī’s *ghazal*, both Şuḥbat and Tahirih’s poems end with the narrator admonishing someone (not the beloved) in the second person singular, thereby making them even more similar. However, as it is uncertain which preceding poem acted as the source of *istiqbāl* and as the next poem which we will analyze is very clearly an *istiqbāl* and a *taḍmīn* of a poem by Şuḥbat, I have chosen to compare this *ghazal* of Tahirih’s with Jāmī’s *ghazal*, which, if not directly the source of her inspiration for this work, was most certainly the foundational piece on which Şuḥbat’s poem was based. Jāmī’s *ghazal* reads:

The breaths of union with you kindled the embers of longing for you in  
the inward parts of my soul  
[In place of] the flames that did not set ablaze my breast, as they should  
have!  
What kind of a manifestation are you that from your splendor the cries  
of the Sufis  
Pass from the pinnacle of placelessness, saying, “Hail to the beauty of  
eternity, hail!”

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poem by Tahirih. See Kasrawī, *Bahārīgarī*, 63–64. In his history of the Bābī religion, Nābil Zarandī writes that when Tahirih heard that her brother-in-law was embarking on a journey, she entrusted him with a sealed letter, stating that should he discover the anticipated Promised One on his journey, he should deliver to him the letter and say to him on her behalf, “*Lama’ātu wajhika ashraḡat wa shu’ā’u ḡal’atik i’tilā/ Zi cha rū alastu bi-rabbikum nazanī? Bīzan ka balā balā*” (“The light of your face shined forth and the rays of your dawning flashed forward/ Why do you not call forth, “Am I not your Lord?” Call, so [we can reply], “Yea! Yea!”). After meeting the Bāb and becoming a believer, the brother-in-law delivered Tahirih’s message and letter which the Bāb accepted as a token of her faith and declared her as the seventeenth of his apostles. See [Nābil Zarandī], *Maṭālī’ al-anwār: Talkhīṣ-i tārikh-i Nabil-i Zarandī*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāḡ Khāwarī (New Delhi: Mir’āt, 1991), 66. The linking of this verse with Tahirih’s declaration of her faith in the Bāb may be the reason behind why some have thought this poem to belong to her.

All the dwellers of the mosque and the monastery are busied with morning incantations and evening prayers,  
 [And] I [with] the mention of your dawning and your ringlets, from sunrise to sunset!  
 Every break in the lasso of your locks has made [an impregnable] knot in my endeavors,  
 By opening your ruby [lips], open this knot [tied up] in my endeavors.  
 In your love my heart sets its foot of loyalty upon the path of longing,  
 And when it walked it walked for it and when it strove it strove for it.  
 This bloodied heart yearned for you! [Only] in you will my heart find rest.  
 [Yet] you have forsaken me and made me to be wandering and beast-like!  
 What afflictions the heart-broken Jāmī doesn't endure in separation from you?  
 Hold your steps from the path of cruelty [and instead step] towards the cruelty-enduring lovers!<sup>31</sup>

As is the common theme of *ghazals*, both of these works focus on love and although their wording is different, both poems open with the same sentence structure in Arabic.<sup>32</sup> Jāmī's poem, however, has only two characters: the lover, who is also the narrator, and the beloved, who is being addressed. Tahiri's poem, on the other hand, involves three characters: the lover (who is again the narrator), the beloved and the addressee. In Jāmī's poem, the narrator attempts to interact with the beloved: he confesses his love to the beloved, complains of his longing and pleads for reciprocation. On the other hand, Tahiri's narrator opens the poem by addressing the beloved only in the first line and then goes on to tell the reader of his/her interactions with the beloved, all in the past tense. Unlike Jāmī's narrator, this narrator has already experienced the long sought after reunion with the beloved and is now set on guiding the addressee – who is lost in material love – to his heart's true desire. Jāmī's narrator speaks of possibilities while Tahiri's speaks of experience and then goes on to take it one step further by inviting the addressee to also experience this love.

31 For the original Persian, see 'Abd al-Rahmān Nūr al-Dīn Jāmī, *Dīvān-i Jāmī*, ed. A'lā-Khān Afshāzād (Tehran: Markaz-i Muṭāli'āt-i Irānī, 1999), 75–76. My sincerest gratitude to Amr Ahmad for guiding me to this poem and to Levi Thompson for his kindness in helping me with the translations of the Arabic lines in this and the previous poem. Denis MacEoin also makes note of the connection between Tahiri's poetry and this *ghazal* by Jāmī; however, he links it to the aforementioned poem by Ṣuḥbat (*Lama'ātu wajhika* ...). See Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History*, 115.

32 Subject (feminine sound plural noun – *idāfa* with noun + *-ak* pronominal ending) – Verb (fourth form past tense) – Object. Thanks to Michelle Quay for drawing my attention to this.

Another noteworthy aspect of this work is that it uses the poetic device of *mulamma‘* (macaronic verses) – flowing effortlessly between Persian and Arabic. By composing in this style Tahirih is again following in the path of her predecessors, such as Ḥāfiẓ. However, what is unique about this poem is how it has been linguistically divided. The first eight lines of the *ghazal* are dedicated to the beloved and here Tahirih composes mainly in both Arabic and Persian. In the next seven lines, where she admonishes the addressee, the poet composes only in Persian. The eighth line of the second section (i.e. the last line of the poem), where she gives the result of what will happen were the addressee to follow her advice, is again composed in Arabic. Therefore, it could be suggested that Arabic here symbolizes the divine and Persian the earthly; the first half of the poem is composed in a mix of the two, as it is emulating the Manifestation of God (being both human and divine) and the second half representing the misguided human who is chasing materialistic pleasures and sham piety. If this seeker accepts Tahirih’s guidance, however, he will then enter the realm of the divine (therefore the last line being in Arabic).

While dwelling on the possibility of such an analogy, one cannot help but be reminded of an anecdote which Martha Root recalls in her book, *Tāhirih the Pure*.<sup>33</sup> Root states that during her trip to Qazvin in 1925, she was told by one of Tahirih’s relatives that not long after her return from Badasht, Tahirih was summoned to the court by Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah (1831–1896) who, upon meeting her, was said to have remarked, “I like her looks; leave her, and let her be.” Soon after a letter was delivered to Tahirih on behalf of the king, stating that should she deny the Bāb and return to the “right” path, he would “give her an exalted position as the guardian of the ladies of his house” and “make her his bride”.<sup>34</sup> Tahirih is said to have replied to the king’s message by sending back his letter with the following lines written on the back:

To you the dominion and pomp of Alexander; to me the ways and path  
of the *qalandar*:  
If that is good, it suits you! If this is bad, then it’s what I deserve!

33 At the end of her book on Tahirih, Root has added an appendix in which she includes seven poems in the original Persian, as poems attributed to Tahirih. She also includes part of Browne’s explanation of Tahirih and her poetry from the aforementioned article from *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* and his translation of this *ghazal*. See Martha L. Root, *Tāhirih the Pure* (Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 2000), 93–105. Root’s book is one of the many sources taken into consideration by Mohammad-Hosseini in *Hadrat-i Tahirih*.

34 Root, *Tāhirih the Pure*, 69–70.



If we use this account as a lens through which to further analyze the poem, we could hypothetically project the three characters of the poem unto three historical figures. The narrator may be seen as Tahiriḥ herself, her beloved as the Bāb, whose nascent mission she has chosen to uphold and promulgate with her very life and the addressee as Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah whom Tahiriḥ admonishes for seeking the Alexandrian pomp and glory of the material world.

“O From Your Locks ...”

The final example of *istiqbāl* and *taḍmīn* in the poetry attributed to Tahiriḥ which will be analyzed in this paper is a *mukhammas*, a longer poem in which each stanza includes five hemistiches.<sup>35</sup> The poem reads:

O from your locks trail my tribulation  
 And the sorrow of your parting incites my lamentation  
 The garnet of your lips [is] my pure nectar  
 Your love has consumed me from head to foot;  
 I have passed [and] you have taken my place!

Though I have carried the pain of your anguish for long  
 [And] drunk cup after cup of calamities  
 [Yet] I am aglow with love, even if in grief  
 [And] my heart is vibrant with life, though I've died from sorrow;  
 For your lips are my Messiah!

I am the treasure and you the keeper of the treasury,  
 I am the silver and you the master of the mine,

35 Citing *Tārīkh-i Shuhadā-yi Amr*, MacEoin states that this poem has also been attributed to Ḥājj Sulaymān Khān-i Tabrizī, a well-known Babi contemporary of Tahiriḥ's who was brutally murdered in the Bābī massacre of 1852. See MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History*, 115. ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Āyatī (surnamed Āwāriḥ), the author of *Al-Kawākib al-Durriya fi Ma’āthir al-Bahā’iyya*, states that everyone he has asked also attributes this poem to Sulaymān Khān. However, the quoted poem in Āyatī's book slightly differs from the one typically said to be Tahiriḥ's. See ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Āyatī, *Al-Kawākib al-Durriya fi Ma’āthir al-Bahā’iyya* (Cairo: 1923), 332–33. On ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Āyatī (Āwāriḥ), see Iraj Afshar, “Āyatī,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 3 (1987): 133. Other sources, however, attribute this poem to Tahiriḥ. See Abū al-Qāsim Afnān, *Chahār Risāla-yi Tārīkhī Darbāra-yi Tāhiriḥ Qurrat al-Ayn* (Germany: Aṣr-i-Jadīd, 1999), 94–96, Banani et al., *Tāhiriḥ: A Portrait in Poetry*, 98–105, ‘Alī-Akbar Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāma-yi Dihkhudā* (Tehran: Chāpkhāna-yi Majlis, 1946), “Tāhira,” and [Iranian Azali Community], *Biṯād-i Ṣadumīn Sāl-i Shahādāt-i Nābigha-yi Dawrān, Qurrat al-Ayn* (Iran: Unknown, 1949), 22–25.

I am the grain and you the reaper of the harvest;  
 What is my body if I am you?  
 If you are me then what is my essence?

By [the sun of] your affection I became an abject atom  
 And intoxicated from the chalice of the wine of your love!  
 From the instant we seized the tips of your locks  
 [And] as long as you are me, then I am a self-worshiper;  
 My altar has become my very own limbs!

If the heart is of you, then why do you make it bleed?  
 And if it is not, then why do you bewilder it?  
 Breath by breath you intensify the smoldering of my heart  
 Until you expel from me all of my selfness;  
 [And] make room in my lovelorn heart!

When the fire of your love went up in smoke  
 All matter of “am” and “was” burnt away from me!  
 It purified me of my heresy and Muslim-ness  
 So that I would kneel before the arch of your brow;  
 [Now] the Kaaba is no different than my church!

The instant the pen of eternity wrote upon paper  
 They embraced, like the “tablet and pen.”  
 No creature was created from nothingness!  
 [From the instant that] they breathed air into the body of Adam  
 Your love lived in my lovelorn heart!

When the hand of Divine Will kneaded Adam’s clay  
 It planted the seed of your love in the heart’s field  
 [And] your love became my destiny!  
 Now I am free from heaven and hell;  
 Save you I have no yearning!

I am bereft of the thought of self and am naught!  
 I am the drinker of the dregs of the divine wine!  
 I am the burnt-one of the valley of bewilderment!  
 I am the seeker of the desert of distraction!  
 What will become of my shameless heart?

When at the gate of the heart I said, "Behold Me!"  
 And, manifesting my effulgence, took to the streets,  
 I raised a clamor on every side!  
 He became all me and I him;  
 I became the heart and he, my sweetheart!

My Kaaba is the dust of your alleyway,  
 The torch-lighter of the world is your face!  
 The bond of life is the twist of your hair  
 [And] the Qiblah of the heart are the two arches of your brow;  
 Your locks are my cross in the church!

I am enamored with his holiness the Exalted One  
 I am in love with reunion with the sweetheart  
 I am the one who treads the valley of tribulation  
 And having forsaken all, I want you!  
 My every limb is filled with your love!

'Til when, [O] 'til when must I pay heed to counsels?  
 For how long must I incite [the hearts with your glad tidings] in secret?  
 For how long must I speak not of [the pangs of] separation from you?  
 [And] feign piety before others,  
 So that they may be inclined to what I offer?

I will toss away both prayer mat and religious garb  
 [And] pour wine in the crystal chalice!  
 I will spill light into the Valley of Sinai  
 [And] tear down gates and roofs in [the madness of] love;  
 The threshold to the tavern shall be my abode!

Love thrust its flag upon my remains  
 And called out, before the gate of my beloved!  
 He poured the wine of Truth in my cup  
 [And now] I am lost to both myself and the world;  
 Truth calls forth my high endeavor!

When the cup-bearer of the tavern of the Primal Day  
 Poured wine in every cup with his own hand  
 Every lowly speck became atom-like

[And] the wine, made drunk by us, came into being;  
By the intoxicating power of my wine!

Love beckons at every instant,  
And calls forth every creature,  
“Whoever yearns for Our path –  
If he is weary of the waves of calamity –  
He should not step before My sea!”

I am the slave upon Your rooftop,  
The wandering bird [captive] in Your snare!  
I am the bat of Your dark night,  
Lost from myself [and] alive in Your name;  
The pain of “me” and “we” is dispelled from me!<sup>36</sup>

In his analysis of the poem, Banani mentions that Tahirih’s “rondo has an important and well-known precursor that she was certainly aware of” and of which “any reader educated in the Persian poetic tradition would immediately be reminded of ... upon reading this work”.<sup>37</sup> The poem to which Banani refers is Hātīf’s renowned *mukhammas* “*Ay fadā-yi tu ham dil u ham jān*” (“O You for whom may both my heart and soul be a sacrifice!”) in which the poet converses with a magus, a nun and a wine-seller and ultimately comes to the realization that no matter from which horizon He manifests Himself, God is one.<sup>38</sup> While Tahirih’s poem may certainly remind the reader of Hātīf’s piece and although

36 For the original Persian, see Mohammad-Hosseini, *Ḥaḍrat-i Tahirih*, 454–56. Mohammad-Hosseini ends this poem in his book with the word “*tu*” (you) which I have edited here to “*man*” (I/me) as I believe this to be correct. The poem also ends with “*man*” in the sources that he refers to regarding it, namely, Afnān’s *Chahār Risāla-yi Tārikhī Darbāra-yi Ṭāhirih Qurrat al-‘Ayn* and the anonymous publication by the Iranian Azali community entitled, *Bīyād-i Ṣadumīn Sāl-i Shahādāt-i Nābigha-yi Dawrān, Qurrat al-‘Ayn*. The poem also ends with “*man*” in Banani’s book. For alternative translations, see Banani et al., *Tāhirih: A Portrait in Poetry*, 102–5, and Hatcher and Hemmat, *The Poetry of Ṭāhirih*, 70–75.

37 Banani et al., *Tāhirih: A Portrait in Poetry*, 138–39.

38 Banani writes that “in deliberate contrast [to Hātīf’s poem]” in which he thinks the poet is ultimately “called back to the true faith and rejects Christian heresies (of the Holy Trinity)”, Tahirih “uses her poem to affirm the unity and oneness of all religions”. See Banani et al., *Tāhirih: A Portrait in Poetry*, 139. Yet, Hātīf’s poem actually proves exactly the opposite, concluding that no matter the differences of religions, God is ultimately one. Even when he accuses the nun of worshipping the Holy Trinity instead of the one true God, she rebukes him saying that he should not label Christians as infidels if he claims to know the secret of oneness for though the eternal beloved may have manifested Himself in three different mirrors, in truth, He is one. For Hātīf’s poem, see Aḥmad Hātīf-i Iṣfahānī, ed.

Tahiriḥ must have been familiar with this poem when she composed her own, the latter's work neither shares in the former's rhyme or meter nor does it borrow from its lines, whether linguistically or thematically. On the other hand, as Mohammad-Hosseini has pointed out in his book, Tahiriḥ's poem shares both its meter and rhyme as well as a number of lines and various imagery with a *mukhammas* by Ṣuḥbat<sup>39</sup> whose poem reads:

O from your affection [stems] my kindness  
 And isolation from myself and strangers  
 Your gain is the sum of my calamity.  
 If they cut me open from head to foot  
 They will find naught but you in my limbs!

From grief I have cast my head forward in defeat  
 [And] my body – tumultuously – shrieks!  
 This is the melody of love, not the call of Surūsh,  
 Being heard whisper after whisper,  
 “Who resides in this body and these members of mine?”

You set clamor upon the nine spheres,  
 The moon and the sun take their command from you!  
 Khusraw's heart you make lovelorn for Shīrīn!  
 As you manifest splendor upon splendor  
 [And] another image from my [old] form.

The effulgence of your face raised the standard,  
 And drew the line of your catastrophe upon Shīrīn's lips.  
 The mole of your face planted the caraway seed;  
 I eye the chalice of wine with no expectations  
 So long as your eyes are my intoxication of wine!

[My] eyes linger naught upon you without reason  
 [And my] heart was not love-crazed and infatuated by mistake!  
 I penned not this *ghazal* out of ignorance!  
 Until you blossomed, flower-like,  
 the utterances of my eloquent nightingale did not blossom forth!

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Muḥammad 'Abbāsī, *Kulliyāt-i Dōwān-i Hātīf-i Isfahānī* (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-yi Fakhr-i Rāzī, 1983), 13–23.

39 Mohammad-Hosseini, *Haḡrat-i Tahiriḥ*, 457.

The causeless manifestation of the Primal Mind  
 Came forth and sought your company, before anyone else's;  
 [And] on that day my love rightfully became yours!  
 Drunk, annihilated, and confounded in you  
 Are my mind, my intellect, and my judgement!

The image of [all] things you draw upon yourself  
 [And] you bring yourself from nothingness into creation.  
 O you who keep count of each breath:  
 If you leave me alone for even a single breath,  
 [Then] woe unto me, woe unto me, woe unto me!

The temple of idols and the Brahman's monastery are of you;  
*Muzdalif*<sup>40</sup> and the Valley of Ayman are of you;  
 The idols of China and Armenia are of you.  
 If you are you, then who am I? O you from whom I am!  
 I have passed [and] you have taken my place!

The universe and all it encompasses is the mirror of your essence  
 [And] the heart ablaze is your lamp!  
 My tears are the polish of your mirror  
 Until my annihilation serves as proof of your existence  
 I will not complain in my suffering!

O you are grand and all the world is wretched!  
 What [else] can be my incantation, O Refuge?  
 Since you are the refuge and I your refugee  
 The claws of the tiger and the lion have become  
 [Mere] gifts before the gazelle of my field!

I am on the earth, [but] my howls ensnare the heavens  
 [And] with one cry I will draw down the Divine Lote-Tree!  
 Woe unto that moment when I sigh [in lamentation];  
 The wings of Gabriel will scatter musk  
 From my Holy Spirit-like breath!

40 "Muzdalifa" as identified by Dihkhudā is an open area located between Mecca and 'Arafāt, associated with the rites of pilgrimage. See Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāma-yi Dihkhudā*, "Muzdalifa". My thanks to Shahram Yazdani for helping me find the definition of this term.

If the shadow of love falls upon the church  
 Trembling will seize the altar's arches!  
 Convulsion will not only fall upon your [every] member,  
 [But even a] tumult will be raised in the Mosque of Aqṣā,  
 If I [so much as] step up to the pulpit!

From what was Ṣuḥbat's clay molded?  
 From the wine of the garden of the highest heaven!  
 How long shall I be an inhabitant in this dwelling of grief?<sup>41</sup>  
 Arise from this cell, [O] Ṣuḥbat, and behold  
 The apex of my most-exalted sight!<sup>42</sup>

Of the three poems discussed in this paper, this final work of Tahiriḥ's is the most obvious form of *istiqbāl* and *taḍmīn* as it not only shares the same meter of *sari'yi maṭvi-yi makshūf* and rhyme (“-āy-i man”) of its predecessor poem but it also uses many of the same words and phrases and quotes an entire hemistich. While Ṣuḥbat's original poem is made up of thirteen stanzas, Tahiriḥ's is composed of eighteen which does raise the question of whether or not this number was consciously chosen and a symbolic link to the Bāb's eighteen initial disciples of which Tahiriḥ was the seventeenth. Thematically, both poems are quite obviously mystical and revolve around the notion of the essential oneness of the lover (here the narrator/poet) and the beloved. A good example of this is the line shared by the two poems where the lover says to the beloved “I have passed [and] you have taken my place!”, thereby emphasizing the annihilation of the narrator's self and her being replaced by the beloved.

While the two poems are distinct in their own ways, one of the main differences is the format and purpose of each piece. Ṣuḥbat's is a *mukhammas* in praise of the beloved which begins as a panegyric for the beloved and ends with the last three stanzas in praise of the poet's own power and nature. He claims that should his shadow fall upon the church, it will cause an earthquake and were he to simply step onto the pulpit, tumult would be raised in the mosque. While we do find this sort of language in some of Tahiriḥ's *ghazals* as well, this *mukhammas* of hers is dedicated solely to the beloved and reads more like an intimate confiding of the lover in her beloved.<sup>43</sup> The beloved is of

41 “Dwelling of grief” is a reference to the material world.

42 For the original Persian, see Ṣuḥbat-i Lārī, *Dīvān-i Ṣuḥbat-i Lārī*, 144–45.

43 For an example of a poem in praise of her own power and prowess, see her *ghazal*, “*Agar ba bād diham zulf-i ‘anbar-āsā rā*” (If I set to the wind my amber-scented hair) in Mohammad-Hosseini, *Haḍrat-i Tahiriḥ*, 452.

course praised but in a manner that feels more personal, passionate and even, at times, playful.

Tahirih opens the poem with the first stanza by describing how her anguish stems from her separation from her beloved and then goes on to say in the following stanza that even though she has suffered for her love, all of this pain has given her life because the beloved's lips are like the Messiah unto her. In the third stanza, the tone shifts to an eloquent, yet playful one, where the poet uses the concept of objects and their respective keepers to describe herself and the beloved.<sup>44</sup> The fifth hemistich of the fourth stanza invokes a beautiful, rather rare and controversial image when she declares that because her and the beloved are one, she is now a self-worshipper and her "altar has become [her] very own limbs!" Following this in the fifth stanza, we see a change of tone where the narrator departs from her previous format of descriptions and instead poses a question to the beloved, asking him why does he afflict her heart if it does indeed belong to both of them (since they are one in union) and if it does not pertain to them both, then what use is there in driving it to madness? She then invokes the imagery of chasing one out of his abode by use of fire or smoke to describe how her selfness has been evicted from her own heart so to make room for the love of the beloved.

Following this stanza of questioning, Tahirih continues with the imagery of the fire burning away all self and links it to the common theme of being liberated from religion and dogma through the love of the beloved and instead finding faith in the personhood of the beloved. Her declaration that the fire of the beloved "purified [her] of heresy and Muslim-ness / So that [she] would kneel before the arch of [his] brow" and that, as a result of this, the church and the Kaaba are now one and the same for her, evoke similar images that are commonly used by ‘Attār, Rumi and Ḥāfiẓ in their own *ghazals*.

The seventh stanza – numerically correlating with the seven days of creation – ushers in the topics of eternity and creation. The first image which Tahirih uses to invoke the subject of creation is the touching of the pen of

44 For the reader familiar with Tahirih's poetry, this is reminiscent of another poem which is often mistakenly attributed to Tahirih but actually belongs to Ṭāi'ra. The poem begins with the line "*Dar rah-i 'ishqat ay šanam šifṭa-yi balā manam*" (In your path, O Idol, I am besotted by calamity) and in this piece, the poet calls the beloved a series of epithets and then juxtaposes herself against them as a means to further elevate the beloved's station. For a discussion on this poem and its proper attribution to the Bahā'ī poet Ṭāi'ra, see Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, "Women Poets, 3. Esmat Khānom Tehrāni, 'Tāyere' (1817–1911)", in *Literature of the Early Twentieth Century: From the Constitutional Period to Reza Shah*, ed. A. A. Seyed-Gohrab, and Ehsan Yarshater (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 247–58 and Mohammad-Hosseini, *Ḥaḍrat-i Tahirih*, 443–44.



eternity onto paper, an image which she likens to the uniting of the pen and the tablet that is a well-known and analyzed Quranic (and later Bahā'ī) trope and often regarded as the impetus for the creation of the Word (Logos) through which all things are then created and which is a vehicle of union between the divine and human realms.<sup>45</sup> She then continues with a play on words saying that none has been created from nothingness (*'adam*) and that since the instant when God breathed life into Adam (*ādam*), the love of the beloved existed in her heart. With this last line, Tahiriḥ eternalizes both herself and her love for the beloved by claiming that their link has existed since the creation of man. This claim most likely has its roots in the writings of the Bāb, for in the first *wāḥid* of the Persian Bayān, the Bāb declares that the eighteen Letters of Living were created by God prior to all other things (*kull-i shay'*) in order for them to bear witness unto His oneness. This then naturally applies to Tahiriḥ who is the seventeenth of these Letters and, as mentioned before, the return of Fatima.

In addition, we can also glean from this hemistich that the love of the beloved is seen as something which is inherently part of man from the moment of his creation and not something which is created or planted later in the heart. This notion is further emphasized in the following line when she declares that when the hand of destiny kneaded Adam's clay, it planted love for the beloved in the heart of all men and from then, this love became her destiny. This can also be read as an allusion to the creation of Adam in the Quran when God commands that the angels fall before Adam in prostration once He has breathed into him of His spirit.<sup>46</sup> Read through this lens, Tahiriḥ herself then may be identified as one of the believing angels who heeds her Lord's command.<sup>47</sup> She goes on to declare that she is now free from both heaven and hell and has no desire but the beloved. While the Bāb often makes mention of paradise and hell in his writings, in the fifth chapter of the fourth *wāḥid* of the Persian Bayān, he claims that none has understood the true meaning of these terms until then and goes

45 The use of the term *qalam* (pen) not only references the Sūrat al-Qalam – the sixty-eighth chapter of the Quran – but also a commonly accepted hadith that states that the first of God's creation was the pen which He then commanded to write all that there is and will ever be upon the "Preserved Tablet" (*Lawḥ-i Maḥfūẓ*). For more on the origins of the Islamic tradition of the pen and its later manifestations in Bābī/Bahā'ī writings, see Vahid Rafati, *Badāyī'-i Ma'ānī wa Tafṣīr: Majmū'a'ī az Āthār-i Ḥaḍrat-i 'Abd al-Bahā dar Tafṣīr-i Āyāt-i Qur'ānī wa Ahādīth-i Islāmī* (Germany: Irfān Colloquium, 2012), 119–52 and Nafeh Fananapazir and Kavian S. Milani, "A Study of the Pen Motif in the Bahā'ī Writings", *Journal of Bahā'ī Studies* 9 (1999). My thanks to Omid Ghaemmaghami for enlightening me on this topic and providing me with these sources.

46 See Quran 15:26–30.

47 My thanks to Sasha Dehghani for highlighting this intriguing connection to Quran 15:26–30.

on to give an intricate and detailed outline of paradise. Although the concept of being freed from heaven and hell because of the beloved is not unique to only Tahirih's poetry and is a trope used by others as well, it could well be that her use of this statement is informed by the new understanding expounded on by the Bāb and is therefore in reference to his theology.

In the twelfth stanza, we are presented with a direct mention of the Bāb through one of his most common titles: *Ḥaḍrat-i A'ālā* (the Most Exalted One). This rather direct mention to the Bāb which is nonetheless still somewhat veiled by the use of a title, is followed by a bold stanza which marks a turning point in the momentum and focus of the poem. This stanza, which is the thirteenth stanza and therefore correlating with Ṣuḥbat's final stanza, acts as an important shifting point. In these lines, the poet's focus re-shifts from praise of the beloved to asking a rhetorical question: until when must she "pay heed to counsels" of the cautious and "incite" the hearts of others with the glad tidings of the arrival of the Promised One "in secret?" She is agitated by the need to hide her devotion to her beloved and to stay within the confines of the status quo. From this point forward, she throws caution to the wind and implementing the common imagery of mystical *ghazals*, rails against the religious norms of her time and vibrantly depicts her state of annihilation to the self. She begins composing in the future tense, declaring that she will "toss away both prayer mat and religious garb" and instead pour wine "in the crystal chalice!" The stark contrast of the prayer mat and the religious garb juxtaposed against the wine, which is reminiscent of Ḥāfiẓ's *ghazals*, is cleverly used as a means to break with the earlier sense of the poem and to usher in a new spirit. She uses the next line to refer to the visibly religious – evoking the imagery of the Valley of Sinai – while also highlighting her own power as the one who is able to set this holy valley alight and to "tear down gates and roofs in [the madness of her] love".

The next stanza begins with a powerful and erotic image when the poet claims that "Love thrust its flag" upon her "remains" or "ruins" and "called out, before the gate of [her] beloved!"<sup>48</sup> She claims that Love "poured the wine of Truth in [her] cup" and thus she is now "lost both [to herself] and the world". She ends with the strong statement that the ultimate and single "Truth" (i.e.

48 The use of provocative and erotic imagery is quite common in mystical poetry. For more information on this topic and the beloved in general in Persian poetry, see J. T. P. de Bruijn, "Beloved", *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 4 (1989): 128–29. For more on the beloved and wine in classical Persian poetry, see Ehsan Yarshater, "The Themes of Wine-Drinking and the Concept of the Beloved in Early Persian Poetry", *Studia Islamica* 13 (1960): 43–53. For an example of eroticism used as a mystical motif in Bahā'ī literature, see Bahā'u'llāh's *Lawḥ-i Ḥūrīyya* (Tablet of the Maiden), INBA 66: 4–12.

God) now calls forth for her highest endeavor. We can see with this statement how the poet has progressed throughout this poem from being a lover enamored and uniting with her beloved to showing us that this is actually her communing and uniting ultimately with God. In the next stanza, she refers to how when the “cup-bearer of the tavern of the Primal Day” poured wine in every cup, all things began to take form and it was from *her* (Tahirih) that the wine – that ultimate symbol of union with the beloved – gained the ability to unite the two worlds (i.e. to intoxicate) and then came into existence! We see, therefore, how she and the beloved slowly begin to merge even in their attributes and abilities.

The poem reaches its peak in the seventeenth stanza – which correlates with Tahirih’s own position in the hierarchy of the Letters of Living as the seventeenth member – when the poet speaks in the voice of Love/God, declaring, “Whoever yearns for Our path – / If he is weary of the waves of calamity – / He should not step before My sea!” Tahirih here compares the love of the beloved to a sea and warns that the path to Him is one of trials and tribulations and if one is unprepared to suffer, then he need not even take the first step. In the final hemistich, the poet returns to her own voice and to the earlier motif of the poem where she again describes herself as one bound to the beloved in one way or another; as the “slave upon [His] rooftop”, the “wandering bird [captive in [His] snare]” and “the bat of [His] dark night”. Yet, she reiterates that she is “lost from [herself and] alive in [His] name” and cleverly brings the poem to an end by declaring that “the pain of ‘me’ and ‘we’ is now dispelled” from her, thereby, insinuating that her and the beloved are now only one; they are “I”. This is further embellished by the rhyme that she has chosen for the first four hemistiches of the final stanza which is *tu-am*. When looked upon in the context of each hemistich, this phrase means “yours”. However, when the word is broken into its smaller morphemes, we are left with *tu* (you) and *-am* (I am) which, as a single phrase in Persian, means, “I am You”. Thus, the poet subtly and skillfully concludes this poem which revolves around the union of humans with their Source, the lover with the beloved, with a powerful phrase, which encapsulates the essence of the entire piece.

## Conclusion

By analyzing such literary works attributed to Tahirih Qurrat al-‘Ayn, we come to see her literary connection to both canonical male poets of Persian literature (such as Rumi and Jāmi) and to male poets who were her own contemporaries

(such as Şuḥbat).<sup>49</sup> The positive effects of such an effort are two-fold: first, they offer us a better glimpse into both the realms of women poets and poetry at large in mid-nineteenth century Iran, a time of important changes and shifts in the country itself and in its relationship with the West – not too long before the Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911) – and the implementation of major changes in Persian poetic output. On a superficial level, they also help us see whose works the poets composing at that time were familiar with and referring to for inspiration. Secondly, they give us a better understanding of Tahirih as a poet. It is only through analysis of these works that we can see how and for what purpose Tahirih composed and used her poetry and this, ideally coupled with a study of her eschatological and theological prose works, may grant us deeper insight into her philosophy as one of the main pillars of the Bābī movement. My hope in carrying out this work is that through this and similar studies, Tahirih may become better known in the field of literature and beyond, that her poetic output be rightfully recognized and attributed to her and that perhaps those who may have access to unpublished manuscripts and documents of this erudite and passionate historical figure may feel compelled to bring them to light in the near future.

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49 Brookshaw notes that Tahirih was not an anomaly as a woman poet in Qajar Iran, there were a number of other talented women at work in the field of literature. He further points out in an upcoming book on Qajar women poets that there is also concrete evidence of Tahirih's literary interaction with other female poets who were her contemporaries. I have analyzed one of these poems in comparison to the preceding poems and presented my analyses in a talk at the Association for Iranian Studies conference in Vienna in 2016. The talk entitled "Unveiling the Re-veiled through Literary Imitation: Poems Attributed to Ṭāhere Qorrat al-'Ayn", served as the inspiration for this article. For more on this matter, see Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, "Qajar Confection: The Production and Dissemination of Women's Poetry in Early Nineteenth-century Iran", *Middle Eastern Literatures* 17 (2014): 113–46, and *ibid.*, "Women in Praise of Women: Female Poets and Female Patrons in Qajar Iran", *Iranian Studies* 46 (2013): 17–48.

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