

## CHAPTER THREE: QIṢṢAH-E ḤĀTIM ṬĀḤ

O God, give me brilliance of speech  
That the hidden secret may reveal itself to my heart.

Make my tongue a treasury of speech,  
Fill my mouth with pearls of meaning.

Give wings to the stallion of my pen,  
Make me a swimmer in the ocean of meaning.

Give me the crimson cup to drink  
So that the story of Ḥātīm may be traversed.

That having heard it, the masters of Urdu may say  
That this is a rare pearl of Urdu.<sup>1</sup>

Of all the Fort William qissas, only **Qiṣṣah-e chahār darvesh** (The Four Dervishes), also called **Bāgh o bahār** (Garden and Spring), by Mīr Amman Dihlavī, has been taken seriously as a work of literature. It has been repeatedly translated into English, and has been the subject of a number of critical studies in Urdu. **Gul-e bakāvalī** (The Bakavali Flower), or **Mazhab-e ,ishq** (The Way of Love), by Nihāl Chand, has been translated into English and French, and has also attracted some scholarly attention in recent years. **Qiṣṣah-e Ḥātīm ṬāḤ**, or **Ārā fsh-e maḥfil** (The Ornament of the Assembly), by Ḥaidar Baḫsh Ḥaidarī, has by comparison been much neglected.

Two other early-nineteenth-century qissas from among the perennials have strong affinities with these Fort William works. **Gul o Ṣanobar** (1836), by Nemchand Khattrī, supplanted all earlier versions of this tale (including a Fort William one) in popularity, and remains the basic source of all qissa editions today; Khattrī's text has been translated into French. The fate of the other qissa, Rajab ,Alī Beg Surūr's **Fasānah-e ,ajā f** (Story of Wonders) (1824), has been ironic. Originally valued by educated Urdu speakers for its consummately elaborate use of wordplay, it has come down in the world. While its Urdu qissa versions often remain close to the original, it has become even more popular in Hindi editions called **Mohanī charitra** (Fascinating History). Because its original text was so difficult and Persianized, it has undergone a more profound process of simplification and vocabulary substitution than any other qissa--yet the story in its essentials remains quite close to the original. Bibliographical information about all these texts will be found in Appendix B.

These works are very much part of the classical, Persianized qissa/dastan tradition. All of them have as heroes superior, virtuous young men of high (usually royal) birth, who undertake journeys and quests. Their adventures include marvelous happenings of all kinds, pursuit of beautiful human and Parī princesses, great dangers crowned by success and lasting happiness. These works have been part of the "core" of the printed qissa genre since its inception.

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<sup>1</sup>Ḥaidar Baḫsh Ḥaidarī, **Qiṣṣah-e Ḥātīm ṬāḤ**, ed. by Aḥḥār Parvez (Delhi: Maktabah Jāmi,ah, 1972), p. 19.

Of them all, however, **Qiṣṣah-e Ḥātim Ṭāf** is perhaps the best representative of the classical tradition. For Ḥātim is not just a typical handsome prince, interchangeable with other handsome princes. Rather, Ḥātim has a strong moral dimension to his character--as does Amīr Ḥamzah himself. He is an archetypal qissa hero, and has been one for centuries. His generosity is the subject of a whole cycle of Arabic folktales, and of an anecdote in the Arabian Nights.<sup>2</sup> An anecdote about his generosity is told in **Qiṣṣah-e chahār darvesh**, and other versified accounts of his adventures exist in both Urdu and Hindi.<sup>3</sup> In North India, however, the Fort William prose text **Qiṣṣah-e Ḥātim Ṭāf** (1803) has been far and away the most popular version. After only a handful of editions during most of the nineteenth century, as mass publishing developed the work began to find a wide audience. Appendix A provides a detailed list of the 48 Urdu and Hindi editions (108,500 copies) mentioned in the S.A.M.P. collection of publication records.

The author of this particular version of the Ḥātim story, Ḥaidar Baḫsh Ḥaidarī, writes in his introduction that he has taken the story from “someone’s” Persian text, but has amplified and extended it at suitable points “to please the listeners.”<sup>4</sup> In both his admiration for increased length, and his evocation of a listening audience, Ḥaidarī reflects the influence of the Persian qissa and Urdu dastan tradition. Also in the classic qissa tradition is Ḥaidarī’s way of clearly demarcating his narrative world, by setting it off both from the “real” world, and from the present time.

Ḥaidarī achieves this distancing through a stylized introductory formula, written in a rhymed prose of which he otherwise makes little use: “The writers have written thus: that in an earlier age there was a king of Yemen named Ṭāf, extremely lordly, of exalted dignity, fortunate in his army, rich in gold and jewels, with eighteen thousand peasants and innumerable soldiers.” The reference to prior narratives and their writers gives the present story a family history: a descent from a series of stories, an identity at several removes from the world of daily experience. And the remoteness in time of “an earlier age” places another barrier between our world and the world of the narrative. Ḥaidarī’s concluding formula repeats the same elements: rhyme, an insistence on the primacy of the story as story, an emphasis on the barrier of time. “At last neither this remained nor that remained, a story to tell and hear remained.” The final couplet echoes this theme: “Where is Ṭāf in the world, where did Ḥātim remain? / Only their story remains among mankind.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Reynold A. Nicholson, **A Literary History of the Arabs** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 85-87; E. W. Lane, trans. and ed., **The Arabian Nights’ Entertainment--or The Thousand and One Nights** (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1944), pp. 1121-1122.

<sup>3</sup>Mir Amman, **The Tale of the Four Durvesh**, trans. by Lewis Ferdinand Smith, ed. by Katherine Smith Diehl (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 70-73; Garcin de Tassy, **Histoire de la Littérature Hindouie et Hindoustanie**, 2d ed., 3 vols. (Paris: Adolphe Labitte, 1870), 1:496-497, 3:147-148; Farmān Faṭḥpūrī, **Urdū kī manẓūm dāstāneñ**, pp. 447-448.

<sup>4</sup>Ḥaidarī’s text has much in common with a Persian version translated into English by Duncan Forbes, but the two texts are far from identical, and not even their chronological relationship is clear. Forbes himself did not know the provenance and date of his own text: his manuscript was “procured in the East in 1824,” and from its general appearance he was “inclined to think it was executed in Persia and not Hindustan” and was “at least a century old.” See Izzat Allah, **The Adventures of Hatim Tai; A Romance**, trans. by Duncan Forbes (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1830), p. vii.

<sup>5</sup>Ḥaidarī, **Ḥātim Ṭāf**, pp. 19-20, 305.

Ḥātim’s adventures are told to us by a typical qissa narrator. This narrator offers no personal asides or information about himself, and never intrudes his presence into the action; he is simply not a character in the story. He is a detached presence, but the focus of his attention and allegiance is certainly Ḥātim. He accompanies Ḥātim wherever he goes; he knows what Ḥātim knows and thinks, and as a rule does not go beyond Ḥātim’s perceptions. He is not tied absolutely to Ḥātim’s consciousness: once he tells us things that occur in Ḥātim’s vicinity while Ḥātim lies in a faint; on two occasions he briefly leaves Ḥātim’s side to eavesdrop on the plotting of evil magicians.<sup>6</sup> But his sympathies are with Ḥātim, and he is telling us Ḥātim’s story as directly as possible. He is an authoritative and absolutely reliable source of both facts and (implicit) value judgments.

Ḥātim’s story has, in a way, two beginnings. First we hear of his own birth and childhood, which are filled with incidents of precocious generosity. Then we hear of the princess Ḥusn Bāno, who decides, for reasons based on past experience, never to marry; she thus poses a set of seven impossible questions to discourage the numerous suitors whom her great beauty and wealth attract. While hunting, Ḥātim meets one such discouraged suitor, Munīr Shāmī, pining away in the forest and half-dead with misery. The compassionate Ḥātim vows to win Ḥusn Bāno for him. Like the heroes of **Chahār darvesh**, **Gul-e bakāvālī**, and **Fasānha-e ,ajāfb**, Ḥātim undertakes a “commonplace” quest for “union with some beloved”--but only Ḥātim undertakes it on behalf of another. His unique generosity is emphasized from the very beginning of his adventures. It gives him a powerful sense of *noblesse oblige*--and a conscious, oft-repeated claim to special divine help.

Even in Ḥātim’s early days, he was famous in Arabic story tradition as the impossibly generous host who killed his last camel to feast an unexpected guest. In the qissa version too, many of his adventures focus on his selfless providing of food at all costs.

In short, when Ḥātim had gone a little way he began to say to himself, “Now what shall I do, and who can I ask, where can I go without knowing, and how can I unravel the knot of this mystery? But I have undertaken this difficulty in God’s service, and He will make it easy. I can’t do anything myself.”

With this thought, he went on, trusting in God, and then what does he see but a wolf just on the point of capturing and rending and devouring a doe. When he saw the doe in this helpless state, he quickly went and called out in a frightening voice, “Oh wretch! Beware what you’re doing! This poor creature has children, milk is flowing from her teats!”

When the wolf heard this, he was afraid and stood still and said, “Perhaps you are Ḥātim, you who have shielded her at such a time.”

Ḥātim said, “How did you know?”

He said, “I know from your courage and compassion, but it’s famous throughout the land that you act on behalf of every creature. I don’t know why you took my prey out of my mouth today.”

Then Ḥātim said, “What do you want?”

He replied, “My food is meat--I eat any kind I can get.”

Ḥātim said, “Fine. Cut the meat from whatever part of my body you wish, eat, and go your way with a full stomach.”

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<sup>6</sup>Ḥaidarī, **Ḥātim Tāf**, pp. 52-54, 174-175, 184-185.

He said, “The meat of the hip is boneless; if you’d give me that, I’d relish it and bless you.”

Then Ḥātīm at once took his knife out of his belt, cut a goodsized chunk of flesh from his hip, and set it before him. He ate the meat, and when he was full he said, “Oh Ḥātīm! What kind of difficulty befell, that you left your city in Yemen, enduring troubles to such an extent, and arrived in this bloodthirsty jungle?”

Then Ḥātīm answered, “Munīr Shāmī has fallen in love with Ḥusn Bāno, and she has seven questions; whoever can answer them, she will accept. I have set forth on this task in the name of God.”<sup>7</sup>

Ḥātīm is not always such a paragon, however. He has frequent attacks of doubt and fear. In the course of his adventures he sometimes assumes false guises, and deceives those who accept him in good faith. In one particularly flagrant instance, he wriggles out of keeping his solemnly pledged word.<sup>8</sup> And he is capable of engaging human pettiness:

Suddenly two individuals emerged from the fountain which heads like men, feet like elephants, claws like tigers, very black in color. Fearful, Ḥātīm arose, thinking, “What calamity is this? If I run away, then shame will be upon me; and if I stay, I can’t bear it. Let’s see what’s in my fate.” Suddenly he took up his bow and arrow and shot an arrow. One individual seized it. Ḥātīm was about to shoot another arrow, when that one said reproachfully, “Oh Ḥātīm Ṭāḥ! You shoot at us out of fear for your life. We too are servants of God, we have not come to harm you.”

Ḥātīm put down the bow and arrow, and sat with his head bowed. Then he thought anxiously in his heart, “What do they want with me, that they’ve come here? They seized the arrow in midair. If I shoot another, how can it have any effect?”

In the meantime that individual came near and said, “Oh Ḥātīm! Weren’t you ashamed of coveting jewels?”

Ḥātīm said, “Whose jewels did I take, what greed did I show?”

He said, “You have brought jewels from a certain jungle, and you have them with you still.”

When he heard this Ḥātīm answered, “Oh friends! The realm of God is wide. If I took some from there, then what harm to anyone? Certainly none to you.”

He said, “God has set them aside for another race of beings.”

Ḥātīm said, “What race is that, that can be nobler than man? On the contrary, man is the best of all.”

He said, “This is true. But the Creator has put aside these jewels for the Parīs, so that they might make use of them.”

Ḥātīm said, “Is man not worthy of these jewels, that he might wear them, and have them at this disposal? I have taken them in order to show people what things God has created, in what abundance, in the jungles, so that all should see, and not deny His workmanship.”

When they heard the Devs said, “It is true, in reality you have not shown greed, but if you want to get safely home, take your hands off those jewels.”

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<sup>7</sup>Ḥaidarī, **Ḥātīm Ṭāḥ**, pp. 50-51. The paragraphing in this and other excerpts is not Ḥaidarī’s, but the editor’s.

<sup>8</sup>Ḥaidarī, **Ḥātīm Ṭāḥ**, pp. 113-114, 176-178.

The moment he heard this, Ḥātīm threw them all away and said, “You take them, but it’s a pity that I had brought them from so far, and gone to a great deal of trouble and pains over them. You did a serious wrong when you took them from me. I hadn’t stolen them. What kind of behavior is it, that you would waste someone’s labor for no reason?”

He said, “If you want wages for carrying them, you won’t get any, because how was it right to take so much property without anyone’s leave, and keep it with you? Rather, such labor must be punished.” When he heard these words, Ḥātīm bowed his head and fell silent.<sup>9</sup>

Yet Ḥātīm is staunchly true to his purpose. When he falls in love with a magician’s daughter and wins her for his bride, he overcomes the temptations of dalliance and sends her home to his parents to await his return.<sup>10</sup> He confronts adventure after adventure until at length, to answer the seventh and last question, he must nerve himself to enter a dangerous enchantment (**ṭilism**), the “Baths of the Whirlwind.” This concluding part of this ordeal forms the dramatic climax of the narrative; it is translated here in full.

Ḥātīm hadn’t seen such a door in his whole life. When he raised his eyes and looked attentively, he saw written on it in Syrian script, “This enchantment was devised in the time of King Kiyūmarš. His monument will remain for ages, and whoever enters this enchantment will not leave it alive. He will wander, stupefied with hunger and thirst. If he is destined to live, he will be confined in a garden, and eat its fruits for the rest of his life, but he will never emerge from it.”

When Ḥātīm saw this inscription, and read it, he thought to himself, “I’ve found the facts written on the door--do I have to go inside?” He was about to turn away, but another thought struck him. “If Ḥusn Bāno should ask about the inside, then what would I say? I’d be put to shame. What’s to come, let it come--I should go inside.” Then he took leave of everyone, and went inside. After ten or twelve steps, when he turned to look back, he saw no one--nor even the door itself. Only a desolate forest, and nothing else, was visible. He was alarmed: “I haven’t even taken a dozen steps, and the door has disappeared without a trace. I’ll find it somehow, and then leave!”

He wandered in search of it all day, but the door was not to be found. Finally he thought, “The bath-house was only an illusion--the moment I set foot in it I fell into the hands of death, and now there’s no way I’ll escape with my life.”

He seemed to be looking where he was going, but really he wandered around aimlessly in desperation. After several days, he took a particular road. He hadn’t gone very far on it when his gaze fell on a human form. He felt that there would probably be a town nearby, and set off in that direction. Looking toward the form, he saw that it too was approaching. When it came near, this magical human form bowed, took out a mirror from under its arm, and gave it to Ḥātīm.

Ḥātīm accepted it, looked at his face in it, and asked, “Are the baths near here? And are you a barber, that you show me a mirror?”

He said, “Certainly.”

Then Ḥātīm asked, “Where are you going, since you’ve left the baths?”

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<sup>9</sup>Ḥaidarī, **Ḥātīm Ṭāf**, pp. 222-223.

<sup>10</sup>Ḥaidarī, **Ḥātīm Ṭāf**, pp. 189-191.

He said, “I’m a bath attendant. When I meet someone, I take him along to the baths, and bathe him, and then hope for payment. If you also will be kind enough to come along with me and bathe, then my anxiety will be relieved; thanks to you, I’ll earn something or other.”

Ḥātīm replied, “That’s fine. I’m covered with dust from travel. I want to get rid of it, to bathe and scrub myself thoroughly. But are you alone, or does someone else help you?”

He replied, “There are a number, but today it’s your humble servant’s turn.”

In short, Ḥātīm, followed by the attendant, went along happily. They had gone about five miles, when they saw a dome reaching up to the sky. When Ḥātīm came near it, the attendant entered the baths, and called to him. As soon as Ḥātīm entered, the door closed. When Ḥātīm looked around fearfully, it was really closed, but still visible. He went ahead, hopeful that he could leave when he wanted to.

At length the attendant led him to a pool, and said “You get into the pool, and I’ll pour water on your body and remove the dirt.”

Ḥātīm said, “If I take off my clothes, then I’ll get in; but without a loincloth, I can’t do it.” Then the attendant brought him a very clean, fine-quality loincloth.

Having put it on, Ḥātīm removed his clothes, and entered the pool. Then the attendant filled a jewelled pitcher with hot water, and handed it to him. Ḥātīm poured it on his head. The attendant refilled the pitcher, and Ḥātīm again poured it over himself. The third time, the moment he poured it on his head, there was the sound of a crash, and the bath-house became dark. After a time, as the darkness lessened, Ḥātīm looked around--and saw neither attendant, nor bath-house, nor pool, but rather a dome carved out of stone. Its whole floor was covered with water. Not even a moment had passed, when the water rose up to his calves.

Ḥātīm was helpless, and began to look around. When the water rose until it was even above his knees, he thought fearfully, “Oh God! The water is rising every moment, and I don’t see any way out. It seems that I’m going to drown.” Suddenly, in a panic, he went toward the door. He knocked his head on the wall all around, but couldn’t find it. In the meantime the water had risen to a drowning level, but he was a swimmer and began to swim. He thought, “This is the reason people can’t come out of the baths--they swim and swim until they’re tired, then drown. I, too, will struggle until I drown, because I don’t see any means of escape. I don’t know any way out. Ḥārīs Shāh used to warn me of this day, but I didn’t accept his word. Alas, that I die a forbidden, suicidal death!” Having said this, he began to encourage himself. “The merciful God is all-powerful--don’t be so afraid. ‘God’s boat lands on the mountain.’ If death has come this way, then that’s fine, because you haven’t gone through hardships for your own pleasure. Rather, it was to restore life to those who were dying that you have taken burdens on yourself. You should rejoice. If you lose a thousand lives in God’s service, then let them go. There’s no cause for sorrow.”

In short, with this kind of talk he comforted his heart. Meanwhile, the water had gotten so high that his head was pressed against the top of the dome, and

he was exhausted. His arms and legs were without strength. He was on the verge of giving up when he saw a hanging chain. Ḥātim gripped it forcefully with both hands, thinking to rest a moment--when there came the same noise. He was outside the dome. He found himself standing in a forest, and began to look around in all directions. Except for an open field, there was nothing to be seen. He was happy: “Thanks to that whirlwind, I was saved, and released from the enchantment!” He went on.

In short, he wandered for three days. Then he saw a magnificent building shining in the distance. In the hope of finding a town, he went toward it. When he came near, he saw a graceful, spacious garden. “Who has made this spring-like garden?” he wondered. “Surely there must be some town nearby.”

When he reached the garden, he found the door open, and entered. When he had gone a few steps he looked back, and didn’t see even a trace of the door. Then he thought anxiously, “What calamity is this? After enduring so many misfortunes, now I’m still not out of that **ḥilism**!” Finally, having no choice, he set out toward a pavilion. There he saw trees laden with different kinds of fruit. However much he ate, his stomach didn’t feel full. In short he ate almost eight hundred pounds, but still wasn’t satisfied. But eating, and strolling along, and observing the scene, he came to the pavilion. All around it were standing many stone images of men, nearly naked--but they were wearing loincloths, and those too were of stone! Ḥātim was astonished: “What mystery is this, and how shall I unravel it?”

As he was wondering this, a female parrot called out, “Oh young man! Why are you standing there? Anyone who comes here has already washed his hands of life!”

When Ḥātim lifted his head, he saw the parrot in a cage. And he saw this message written on the portico: “Oh servant of God! You will never escape with your life from these Baths of the Whirlwind! This enchantment belongs to King Kiyūmarš. One day while hunting, King Kiyūmarš came here. By chance he saw a diamond and picked it up. Then when he had it weighed, it was of three hundred **miṣqāl**. He was astonished, and asked his wise men, ‘Can its match be found, or not?’

They replied, ‘From the time of Adam to the present, none such has been seen or heard of.’

Then he said, ‘It is necessary to keep it in a place where no one can get at it.’ Having decided this, he had the **ḥilism** of these Baths of the Whirlwind created. He caused this parrot to swallow the diamond and put her in a cage and hung it here. And on a jewelled chair he had a bow and arrow placed so that if anyone is trapped in this **ḥilism** and seeks to escape, he may take up the bow and arrow. He should shoot an arrow into this parrot’s head. If he hits it, he is instantly out of this enchantment, and gets the diamond as well; if he does not, he will be turned to stone.”

Having read this, Ḥātim looked toward the stone figures which were standing here and there. They couldn’t even quiver. He reflected, “Oh Ḥātim, if you can’t get out of this **ḥilism**, then you’ll lose your life in wandering. It is better to join these others quickly, to become stone and remain so. If you save yourself, as long as

you live you'll know only grief, and you won't be able to find any means of getting out. Munīr Shāmī, furthermore, will die waiting for you. All these confusions and complications are part of life. It's better to let go of life and turn to stone, you'll be free from all cares. God is all-powerful--he'll do his *own* work.”

Having decided this, he approached the chair. Taking the name of God, he picked up the bow and arrow, and prepared to shoot. The parrot fluttered. The arrow missed, and struck the roof of the cage. Hātim became stone up to the knees. She returned to her former perch, and spoke: “Oh young man! Go from here. You're not worthy of this pavilion.”

Hātim sprang up, and, with the bow and arrow, went a hundred paces away. His feet had gotten so heavy that he could scarcely lift them.

This condition he was in brought tears to his eyes, and he thought, “What disaster is this? What evil and weakness have brought you in one moment to this pass? Now what pleasure is it to die by slow torture? Rather than this, it's better to shoot one more arrow, and join those stone images.”

With this thought, he then shot a second arrow. It also missed. He became stone up to the navel. The parrot again said the same thing: “Oh young man! Move away somewhere else. You are not worthy of this place.”

Hātim of his own will hopped away from there two hundred paces, and arrived near the stone images. He began to weep and lament: “No one else is so unfortunate as I--my arrow flies false!” Then he sighed painfully from his troubled heart and said, “Oh Hātim! You shouldn't look upon your own death. It's better to tie a bandage over your eyes and take this one remaining arrow and, trusting in God, shoot it also and finish it, because to live like this is worse than dying.” This time, he stared at the parrot, tied a bandage over his eyes, repeated “God is great,” and shot that arrow too.

At that moment the parrot's soul took wing, and she fell out of her cage. At that time a whirlwind came, clouds lowered, lightning and commotion were so violent that Hātim fell unconscious, thinking, “I too have become a stone image.” After a time, the whirlwind became a wind, the clouds diminished, the noise and commotion ceased, and the sun came out. As soon as he opened his eyes, Hātim found himself lying like a stone image. When he became fully conscious and in possession of his senses, what did he see--neither baths remained, nor garden, nor chair, nor cage, nor parrot. But the diamond, lying on the ground, was gleaming like a star.<sup>11</sup>

The Baths of the Whirlwind is a **ṭilism** in the classic qissa tradition. It is not, certainly, as complex as the **ṭilisms** of the Ḥamzah cycle. Gyān Chand Jain complains, “There is no city in it, no magician, no ruler of magic--only the form of a bath attendant. The story of the **ṭilism** takes only three pages, and the afflictions which befall Hātim only last three or four hours.”<sup>12</sup> His objection to such inadequate length and insufficient elaboration is, itself, very much in the Urdu dastan tradition.

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<sup>11</sup>Haidarī, **Hātim Ṭāḥ**, pp. 295-300. Kiyūmarš was an early Persian king, a character in the **Shāh nāmāh**; see Hanaway, “Iranian Epics,” in **Heroic Epic and Saga; an Introduction to the World's Great Folk Epics**, ed. by Felix J. Oinas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 80.

<sup>12</sup>Gyān Chand, **Urdū kī naṣrī dāstāneñ**, p. 205.

But despite its comparative simplicity, the Baths of the Whirlwind is a true **ṭilism**: an enchanted narrative world-within-a-world, set off clearly from the surrounding story by the dramatic manner of Ḥātīm’s entry into it. Once inside, he is a prisoner, unable to escape, unable to even to see the door by which he entered. Also in proper qissa tradition, the **ṭilism** is so powerful that he can leave it only by destroying it--thus returning by default to the outside world. Moreover, within the **ṭilism** is a secondary **ṭilism**, the domed bath-house itself, governed by the same rules. Once Ḥātīm has entered the bath-house, he cannot leave until he destroys it--and finds himself back outside in the primary **ṭilism**. Within such a strictly bounded **ṭilism**, the narrator is freed from almost all external constraints: he can go far beyond the “natural” marvelous events of the dastan world, and create a small, transitory world governed only by his feeling for immediate artistic effect.

Showing proper (Muslim) scruples, Ḥātīm cannot fight magic with magic. When he grasps the hanging chain that destroys the bath-house, he unknowingly triggers the predestined end of that enchantment. Even after the fact, he attributes his escape from the bath-house to outside forces: “Thanks to that whirlwind, I was saved.” And when his third arrow strikes the parrot’s head, he is merely fulfilling the clearly advertised conditions for the end of the whole enchanted realm. In the first instance, he is lucky; in the second, he invokes, and obviously receives, divine aid. In each case his fear and helplessness, the extreme danger he is in, are steadily intensified--until the moment of his victory, which just misses being the moment of his death.

Even in the face of such threatening magic, Ḥātīm never quite loses heart; his spirits rise and fall in a very human way. Hopeful moods alternate with depressed ones: he is afraid to enter, nerves himself to do so bravely, finds himself trapped and becomes fearful, cheers up at the prospect of a hot bath, succumbs to panic when the water starts to rise, encourages himself with pious thoughts, exhausts his strength swimming, clutches the chain and is saved. Then he enjoys a respite--wandering along, entering a lovely garden, eating magic fruit--until his final ordeal, which culminates in final victory. This rhythmic alternation of Ḥātīm’s moods is an obvious way of manipulating the reader’s mood and responses as well. And in true qissa style, Ḥātīm’s final victory is greater than he imagined: it extends beyond the immediate object of quest to good fortune he had not even dreamed of. All he needed was information about the Baths of the Whirlwind that would be sufficient to answer Ḥusn Bāno’s question; he could perhaps have gotten by with merely reading the notice on the door, and not going in at all. But his integrity forced him to enter--and his ordeals have won him complete knowledge about the Baths of the Whirlwind, its utter destruction, life and freedom for the many stone images in the garden who were his predecessors, and a peerless diamond. (And we know what a soft spot in his heart Ḥātīm has for jewels!) Ḥātīm returns to his kingdom in triumph and happiness, and once again the reader shares his mood.

Ḥātīm’s adventures also effectively illustrate the complexity of “the marvelous” as an analytical category. As we have seen, Ḥātīm talks to wolves and deer as a matter of course, but is thunderstruck by the strange creatures sent by God to admonish his greed. (The narrator reports Ḥātīm’s feelings matter-of-factly.) At other times, however, Ḥātīm receives unexpected messengers from God without showing the least surprise. Or are we to imagine him too stupefied at times to express his amazement? The narrative gives us no clue. Ḥātīm takes some of the most bizarre encounters for granted, and recoils from others seemingly less strange. The “natural” marvelous alternates with events which cause amazement even in the qissa world.

If the qissa were expressing a clear and consistent view of the universe, it would in

principle be possible to extrapolate it from the text itself. But there is no reason to believe that this is the case. Rather, the story seems to take its marvelous creatures and events where it finds them. In the course of Ḥātim's fifth quest, we observe a series of encounters between Ḥātim and peoples with extraordinary attitudes to death, or extraordinary experiences of it. One group will not bury their dead until a passing stranger has been fed, another eat their dead, a third practice the Hindu custom of **satī** (in which the wife mounts her dead husband's funeral pyre), a fourth entomb either living spouse with the dead one. Members of another group do not die, but are summoned by a mysterious voice from a mountain.<sup>13</sup> These and other strange peoples are sources of wonder to Ḥātim, and within the narrative seem as much or as little "marvelous" as many of his more *outré* encounters. In fact, one of the most frightful monsters he meets--a **balā** with nine hands, nine feet, and nine mouths--does not cause him to marvel at all. On hearing her description, he recognizes her as matter-of-factly as possible: "Her name is Ḥalūqah. She will not die from anyone's weapon-stroke, and cannot be wounded by anyone." He then calmly arranges to kill her with the sight of her own reflection in a mirror.<sup>14</sup>

Qissas rely on the narrator's power to use his imagination freely, and the "uninhibited imagination, in the structural sense, produces highly conventionalized art." Frye continues,

Removing the necessity for telling a credible story enables the teller to concentrate on its structure, and when this happens, characters turn into imaginative projections, heroes becoming purely heroic and villains purely villainous. That is, they become assimilated to their functions in the plot.<sup>15</sup>

And, I would argue, in such imaginative art the same applies to "marvelous" (and other) events as well: they become assimilated to their functions in the plot. In the present case, they must advance the plot, evoke wonder in the audience, and give occasion for Ḥātim, through his actions and reactions, to reveal his nature. Ḥātim's encounters may be drawn from every source--traditional folklore, religious fables, cultural comparisons--but within the narrative they operate in the same way, and fill the same role. In the qissa universe the lines between normal and abnormal, ordinary and extraordinary, natural and supernatural, turn out to be not only hard to draw, but also unimportant. Only the line between **ṭilisms** and the "natural" qissa world is always clear and carefully maintained. The other lines are abstractly drawn by critics; only this line is drawn by qissa characters themselves, and affects their understanding of events.

Within the qissa world, events move in a rhythmic manner well described by Andras Hamori.

It could be argued that the structural properties of the tale, the neat and interesting relations among motifs and variations on motifs, are not unlike musical relations, and that the pleasure the audience derives from them is a musical pleasure. It could also be argued that periodicity is a storyteller's device for holding the audience's attention. You know something is destined to happen again, but you also know that it will come in by a different door, or even a window.<sup>16</sup> This periodicity is part of the

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<sup>13</sup>Ḥaidarī, **Ḥātim Ṭāḥ**, pp. 198-210, 215-218.

<sup>14</sup>Ḥaidarī, **Ḥātim Ṭāḥ**, pp. 80-82.

<sup>15</sup>Frye, **Fables of Identity**, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup>Hamori, **On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature**, p. 172.

basic pleasure of the traditional qissa. Events are of recognizable kinds, yet no two are identical, and they succeed each other in a pleasant pattern which combines familiarity with novelty.

Ḥātīm, for example, repeatedly seeks to befriend both predator and prey in the animal world; but the circumstances and results differ greatly in different instances. At the start of the story, while hunting, he offers himself and his horse to a hungry tiger, which slinks away with head bowed. During his first quest, he cuts flesh from his hip to save a doe from a hungry wolf, as we have seen. When he collapses from this loss of blood, two jackals recognize him, and restore him by killing a “fairy-faced animal” (which has a woman’s head and peacock’s body) and applying its head to his wound. Ḥātīm later reproaches them for this murder, and they accept the blame; he then asks how he can show his gratitude for his restored health. They beg for protection from two hyenas who kill all their young. Ḥātīm tries to reform the hyenas by argument, and when this fails, he rips out their teeth and claws. The hyenas then fear starvation, but the jackals promise to supply them with food.<sup>17</sup>

During his third quest, Ḥātīm offers his own flesh to a mongoose, in order to save a snake the mongoose is about to eat. The mongoose accepts, eats, and praises Ḥātīm; then both snake and mongoose reveal themselves as Jinn (demons). Later, Ḥātīm encounters a crocodile who complains of a huge vicious crab who has stolen his house and threatens him. When argument fails to move the crab, Ḥātīm cuts off his sting; the crab flees, and Ḥātīm prevents the crocodile from pursuing him. In the course of his sixth quest, Ḥātīm meets a grieving female fox whose mate and children have been trapped. He buys back their freedom, then gives his own blood to cure the dying male fox.<sup>18</sup>

Lest it be thought, however, that the character of Ḥātīm has been developed with perfect, didactic consistency, consider the following incidents. From Ḥātīm’s fifth quest:

...after going a little way, what does he see but a tiger, writhing with hunger on the ground. When he had understood this situation he hunted down and killed a deer, and placed it before that tiger. The tiger ate until his stomach was thoroughly full. Then, after prostrating himself in gratitude, he headed for the forest. Ḥātīm too, having eaten some kabobs, went to a pool and drank water.

From his sixth quest, a more detailed account:

Then, taking his bow and arrow, he stood up. He hunted and killed a stag and brought it back. Having cleaned it, he put some very good pieces of meat, which he had salted and peppered, on skewers. Then, having struck a spark with flint and steel and lit some pieces of wood, he roasted the kabobs and began to eat them.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly the interest is in the pleasure of story-telling, rather than the construction of an exemplary moral tale.

All these incidents appear at widely separated points in the narrative, interspersed among Ḥātīm’s other characteristic acts: helping wayfarers, battling magicians, killing demons, encountering Parīs, curing the sick, receiving messengers from God, accomplishing each quest in turn. As encounter follows encounter, the result is a sense of rhythm, of harmony, of suitability. Events in Ḥātīm’s world consist chiefly of such encounters. In one sentence, Ḥātīm wanders for three days, or travels for an indefinite distance, or continues his journey--until suddenly the next

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<sup>17</sup>Haidarī, **Ḥātīm Ṭāf**, pp. 20-23, 50-56.

<sup>18</sup>Haidarī, **Ḥātīm Ṭāf**, pp. 132-133, 135-137, 235-239.

<sup>19</sup>Haidarī, **Ḥātīm Ṭāf**, pp. 203, 260.

encounter takes place. The temporal and spatial isolation of each encounter permits the inclusion of many kinds of characters (both human and non-human) and events (both “marvelous” and natural) without confusion or incongruity.

And all these events work together to develop the character of Hātim. The events are conventionalized, and Hātim himself is a somewhat one-dimensional character. But a particularly effective process of “stereotype vitalization,” as described by Cawelti, consists of adding “significant touches of human complexity or frailty to a stereotypical figure.”<sup>20</sup> As I have tried to show, the qissa’s narrative art has given Hātim this kind of humanity. He is sometimes fearful, petty, rash, or inclined to despair. But he always pulls himself together, trusts in God, and does what he has to do. The reader can empathize with his weaknesses, and admire his gallantry: as he rises to the occasion, the reader’s heart somehow rises with him.

In this discussion a modern scholarly edition of Haidarī’s text has been used, partly for its guaranteed word-for-word accuracy, and partly for its convenience to the reader who may wish to check references. Urdu qissa editions are Haidarī’s text almost word for word. Modern Hindi qissa editions are sometimes a little simplified, abridged, or subject to changes in vocabulary. Qissa editions in general, however, preserve Haidarī’s text almost as faithfully as does the elite scholarly tradition.<sup>21</sup> The next four chapters will rely on ordinary, cheap qissa editions. Except in the case of the Vikram cycle, there is not even any choice. We will be moving in a world where scholars have rarely set foot: a world called into existence by those who read for pleasure, and sustained only by their continuing enjoyment.

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<sup>20</sup>Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup>Though many qissa editions, both Urdu and Hindi, insert a brief religious anecdote into Hātim’s sixth quest. The point of it is to justify Hātim as a Muslim, even though he lived before the coming of the Prophet. See, for example, *Āraḥsh-e maḥfil* (Lucknow: Rājā Rām Kumār Press, 1967, 192 p., Urdu), p. 149.