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ABOUT THE „BLACK-AND-WHITE THREAD”
IN ŠĀH-NĀME

Comments about the structure of Ferdousi's *Šāh-nāme* have not been until now, very numerous. They were rather occasional and chiefly included into the more general descriptions of this great poem.

Among the scholars who wrote on this subject chiefly the Russians tried to connect the composition of the poem with its author's view of reality. However, the solution proposed by Bertels¹ and followed, among the others, by Starikov², Gafurov³, partly by Braginskiy⁴, and also by such non-Russian scholars as e.g. Rypka⁵ and Machalski⁶ can raise certain doubts and does not seem to be based on firm foundations. At the same time, being plain and suggestive, Bertels' idea is particularly suitable for a wide popularisation.

Bertels writes: „Ferdousi has created a strikingly clear composition basing the whole of his poem on an idea which is not Moslem

¹ Ye. E. Bertels, *Ferdovski i yego tvorčestvo* [in:] *Ferdovski* 934—1934, Leningrad 1934, pp. 92—118 and *Ferdousi* [in:] *Istoriya persidsko-tadžikskoy literatury*, Moskva 1960, pp. 169—238.

² A. A. Starikov, *Firdousi i yego poema Šahname* [in:] *Firdousi, Šahname* (translation), ed. I. B. Banu, A. Lahuti, Moskva 1957, pp. 169—238.

³ B. Gafurov, *Firdousi — slava i gordost' mirovoy kultury* [introd. to] *Firdousi, Šāh-nāme*, perevod s farsi, Moskva 1972, pp. 5—18.

⁴ I. S. Braginskiy, *K izučeniyu Šahname*, [in:] *Iz istorii tadžikskoy i persidskoy literatury*, Moskva 1972, pp. 243—302.

⁵ I. Rypka, *History of the Iranian Literature*, Dordrecht 1968, pp. 154—162.

⁶ F. Machalski, *Firdausi i yego „Szāh-nāme”*, Kraków 1970, p. 35.

but Zoroastrian — the idea of the fight of two principles: Good and Evil, the righteous god Ormuzd and the dark army of Ahri-man" ⁷. And later on: „In this way all the [...] parts [of the poem] stringed on the two threads — black and white, interweave with one another and form a close unity" ⁸.

According to Bertels, the fight of the two opposite moral principles is supposed to be the leitmotif of the whole book, in which the part of good is represented by Iran, and the powers of evil take the shape of its successive political enemies, the most important of them being the neighbouring Turan:

„... for a long time Turan takes the part of one who realizes the evil intentions of Ahri-man" ⁹.

Starikov: „Turan in the *Šāhname* is the kingdom, or more exactly the sphere of influence of Ahri-man" ¹⁰; and later on: „The conception of a struggle of good and evil found its incarnation and realization in the fight of Iran and Turan" ¹¹.

Starikov speaks of Ahri-man in such a manner, as if he were an always present and really acting character of the epic, and the hidden mover of history: „All the efforts of Ahri-man in order to kill the hero [i.e. *Rostam*] failed. Ahri-man prepares a finishing stroke for him..." ¹².

The attribution of the Mazdaean convictions to Ferdousi and the interpretation of his book as a story about a series of successive stages of the fight between good and evil must lead to the conclusion about the generally optimistic implication of the work and its obvious drift towards a happy end. This conclusion stands in contradiction with the significance of the facts and is the source of difficulties for the above mentioned adherents of the dualistic interpretation of the poem. The juxtaposition of two passages from Rypka's work may illustrate these difficulties:

„But there are still other factors that bring unity into this immense mass of verse... [one of them is] the contrast between

Good and Evil, and the final victory of the former" ¹³, also expressed in the religious dualism Ormuzd — Ahri-man and thus resolving a priori the ever-old struggle between Iran and Turan" ¹⁴.

Later on Rypka writes about the lack of unity in the poet's view on history: „He conceals the antithesis of these two views [Moslem and Zoroastrian] by a slight touch of melancholy, evoked in him by the instability of things which always, in his opinion, show a tendency towards the less favourable, more wicked" ¹⁵.

The careful analysis of the text does not provide sufficient proofs which would allow to impute to Ferdousi the dualistic view of life and still less, to see in it the main principle of the composition of his poem.

The Iranian epic in its synthetic form, such as recorded by Ferdousi, developed gradually from the mythical passages, some of which belong to the old common Indo-Iranian heritage ¹⁶. The fragments composing the cycle of Turanian wars can be partly found already in this oldest layer. Its central plot, the vengeance for the killing of *Siyāvush*, can be found in Avestan *Yāsts*. More details on the Turanians are provided by the Pahlavi texts ¹⁷.

It appears from these passages that the antagonists in the original version are neither the two anthropomorphised cosmical principles nor even two peoples ethnically differentiated, but rather two formerly closely connected tribes, or even two clans

¹³ In this quotation and the next one spacing by the author of this paper.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 159.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁶ Cf. J. Darmesteter, *Points de contact entre le Mahābhārata et le Šāhnāme*, Journal Asiatique 2, 1887, pp. 38—75; S. Wikander, *Sur le fond commun indo-iranien des épopées de la Perse et de l'Inde*, La Nouvelle Clé 1—2, 1949, pp. 310—329; M. Molé, *Deux notes sur le Rāmāyana* [in:] *Homages to G. Dumézil*, Bruxelles 1960, p. 140—150.

¹⁷ The Avestan and Middle Persian passages concerning the Turanians are listed e.g. by: E. Herzfeld, *Zoroaster and his World*, vol. II, Princeton 1947, pp. 704—720 (*Anērān — Turān*); also A. Christensen, *Les Kayanides*, København 1932, pp. 85—91 and J. Darmesteter, *Études Iranienues*, vol. II, Paris 1883, pp. 225—231.

⁷ *Ferdousi i yego tvorčestvo*, p. 102.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁹ *Ferdousi*, p. 223.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, 565.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 566.

¹² *L. cit.*

of the same tribe (if we decide to treat the terms *Kavi* and *Tura* as designations of family affiliation). In the literary tradition their conflict is enlarged to the dimension of a dramatic event. The myth of the common origin of the two antagonists is recorded in a Middle Persian text (Bd. 31, 9—14). According to the preserved fragments, the pre-Zoroastrian tale of the revenge for *Siyāvus* was not strongly marked by any ethical notions. This tale was always connected with a set of very old myths of cosmogony and fertility. The myths of this category are usually ethically indifferent, which is proved by the ambivalent meaning of murder in them. The main villain of the epic, *Afrāsiyāb* Avestan *Fransrāyan* has many features of a demon of drought¹⁸. His marriage with the holy goddess of the earth, *Spandarmaz* in a very ancient mythical fragment reconstructed by Benveniste¹⁹ indicates it distinctly.

No doubt the epic tradition has been incorporated into the Zoroastrian dualistic system, and the fighting parties found their own places within the two opposing worlds. But this must have happened relatively late, as an effect of the intensive efforts of the learned dasturs, aiming at classification and unification of the religious and mythical tradition.

Thus the dualistic interpretation of the epic, based on one of the meanings present in its background, is possible, but only as one among many ways of interpretation. We do not know how deeply could such a dualized version penetrate into the oral tradition, existing and developing parallelly with the written one, but having a wider social resonance. At any rate Ferdousi seems to continue the older version. The dualistic interpretation of *Šāh-nāme* by the European scholars seems to be based rather on the general knowledge of Zoroastrian literature than on a careful analysis of the text itself.

Let us look at the facts. Wikander comparing some passages of *Šāh-nāme* and *Mahābhārata* states:

¹⁸ E. Benveniste, *Le témoignage de Théodore bar Kōnay sur le zoroastrisme*, *Le Monde Oriental* 1932—33, pp. 170—215. For a general scheme of the Indo-Iranian myths of fertility and drought see G. Widengren, *Les religions de l'Iran*, Paris 1968, pp. 59 ff.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 192—200.

„Le Mbh traite d'une grande mais brève campagne, qui, pendant 18 jours, met aux prises deux groupes de cousins princiers; dans le ShN, il s'agit d'une phase importante d'une lutte séculaire entre Iran et Touran”²⁰.

Putting in opposition a struggle of the two branches of the same family and a struggle of two nations which are strange to each other, Wikander ignores the fact that, similar to the Indian epic, the Iranian and Turanian kings of Ferdousi are relations, too.

The enmity and duty of revenge (*kin*) arose among them because of a fratricide that took place in the family of *Feridun*²¹. Ferdousi shows their conflict as a gradual increase of strangeness and hostility as the time goes by and the range of vendetta gets wider and wider.

The common origin of the antagonists is not treated by the author as an accidental fact. On the contrary, the fact of this kinship is constantly present in the heroes' consciousness, and exerts a considerable influence on their deeds.

In the first stage of the conflict the awareness of its origin is very strong in both parties. Several efforts are repeated in order to restore the peace and to demarcate the borderline between Iran and Turan²². When a calamity of drought and hunger emerges as a consequence of their wars, both parties feel equally guilty²³. As the years go by, the memory of relationship gets weaker, but it never disappears completely.

The historical ties of blood are often renewed by the mixed marriages. Here the plot is seen from an Iranian perspective: the Iranian men marry Turanian women, but it never happens vice versa.

Thus, the kings of Iran and Turan have common ancestors, the great mythical heroes, and also a large part of common history. They are perfectly aware of this:

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 312.

²¹ *Feridun*, v. 400 ff; vol. I, pp. 103 f. (All the quotations according to the edition of A. Ye. Bertels and A. Nušin, *Šāh-nāme-ye Ferdousi*, vol. I—IX, Moskva 1960—1971).

²² *Nouzar* 30—35, vol. II, p. 45; *Keyqobād* 124 ff, vol. II, p. 70.

²³ *Nouzar* 20—30, vol. II, p. 44 f.

az iraǰ ke bi gonāh košte šod ze mayz-e bozorgān xeraǰ gašte
 šod
 ze turān be irān jodā'i nabud ke bā kin o ǰang āšnā'i nabud

„When *Iraǰ* was murdered without guilt, reason went out from the heads of the nobles. There was no separation between Turan and Iran till they were not acquainted with hatred and war”²⁴.

Just as in *Avesta* where they worship the same gods, in the *Šāh-nāme* Iranians and Turanians are confessors of one religion: *Afrāsiyāb* prays in a fire-temple built by his grandfather *Feridun* in Kondož²⁵ (according to *Šahrastānīhā-ī Erān* he himself built one in Zrang)²⁵, the Turanians use the same epithets to describe God as Iranians do. When they speak of God, they seem to refer to a reality common to both²⁷.

Iranians and Turanians represent the same culture, both material and spiritual, and the same hierarchy of values. The problem of language difference appears for the first time relatively late, i.e. in the tale of *Siyāvuš*²⁸.

According to the above mentioned authors, Turan is supposed to be the sphere of influence of Ahriman. In this case its inhabitants should show some demonical or supernatural qualities. This is not the case, however. It is true, that Iblis appears several times and lures some of the heroes, as the usurper *Zahhak* who is of Arab origin or *Key Kā'us*, the legitimate ruler of Iran. But there is only one passage in which the devil gets into touch with a Turanian character (i.e. the king of China) it is the fragment of *Daqiqi*²⁹

²⁴ *Siyāvuš* 808, vol. III, p. 54; Cf. *Nouzar* 71, vol. II, p. 11; *Siyāvuš* 2305, vol. III, p. 150; *Davāzdah rox* 158—9, vol. V, p. 95; *ǰang-e bozorg* 2365, vol. V, p. 376.

²⁵ *ǰang-e bozorg* 215—17, vol. V, p. 248.

²⁶ Benveniste, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

²⁷ Cf. the opening sentences of the letters — of *Afrāsiyāb* (*Siyāvuš* 1144—46, vol. III, p. 74) and *Pirān* (*Davāzdah rox* 1109—10, vol. V, p. 148).

²⁸ *Siyāvuš* 1350, vol. III, p. 88. T. Kowalski in his *Studia nad Šāh-nāme*, (vol. I, Kraków 1952, pp. 243—258) quotes many examples for the similarities and differences of culture between Iran and Turan in *Šāh-nāme*, believing that Ferdousi describes the iranized Turks of his days, confusing them with some historical Iranian people.

²⁹ *Soxan-e Daqiqi* 97 ff., vol. VI, p. 71.

and Ferdousi clearly keeps distance from it. In the declarations of the poem's characters about both Iranian and Turanian heroes we often meet with an expression that Ahriman has „changed” or „led astray” somebody's mind. This expression cannot be considered as literally as Starikov would like it. Some of the Turanians, as *Bidarafš* or *Afrāsiyāb* himself, are gifted with a magical power, but it is also the case for some of the Iranians, as well (*Feridun*, *Key Xosrou*, and, first of all, *Zāl*).

There exists in the *Šāh-nāme* a very particular type of a hero, emerging from time to time in the course of history: it is a very young and noble-minded idealist, who, acting against the official policy, tries to restore the unity of the fighting parties. All his efforts result in failure: he comes into conflict with his own environment and perishes in tragic circumstances. Paradoxically, the death of such a hero makes the split still deeper and gives an occasion for a new cycle of revenge. This type of hero is represented by *Iraǰ*, whose murder began the whole conflict, by the Turanian *Ayriras*, brother of *Afrāsiyāb* and, most perfectly, by *Siyāvuš*. Some qualities similar to the heroes of this group are to be found in *Siyāmak*, *Sohrāb Forud* and *Sorǰe*.

The Turanian *Pirān* is a unique character and cannot be classified in any way. As a friend of the Iranian prince *Siyāvuš* and at the same time as a loyal subject of *Afrāsiyāb* and the chief of his army, he remains a puzzle for his fellow-characters³⁰. After the death of *Pirān Key Xosrou* explains his „metamorphosis” in this way:

čonān mehrabān bud deǰǰim šod va z-u šahr-e irān por az bim šod
 mar u-rā bebord ahriman del ze degar gune piš andar āvard pāy
 ǰāy

„He had been so kind, but he became malignant and spread terror all over the country of Iran. Ahriman has displaced his heart and he chose another path”³¹.

³⁰ *Pirān* is a puzzle for the scholars, too. E. g. Braginskiy (*op. cit.*, p. 301) believes that the heroes formerly belonging to the Saka epic tradition were afterwards divided between the two parties: some of them, as *Rostam*, became Iranians; the others, as *Pirān*, are to be found among the Turanians, but still bear some traces of their original righteousness.

³¹ *Davāzdah rox* 2400, vol. V, p. 222.

In fact, the personality of *Pirān* is much more complex. After the death of *Siyāvūš* *Pirān* fights the Iranians and refuses to take their side. He is also bound by the duty of bloody revenge for his sons and brothers. In spite of all this, he still makes some friendly gestures towards the Iranians: he rescues the life of *Bižan*³² and tries to save that of *Bahrām*³³, he proposes to spare the unnecessary bloodshed ending the war by a duel³⁴. *Pirān* understands the futility of the war in which he is involved:

miyān-e niyā o nabere do šāh nadānam čerā bāyad in kine gāh

„This hostility between the two kings, grandfather and grandson — I do not know what is it for”³⁵.

The Turanians motives to consider themselves as the offended side of the conflict are as valid as those of the Iranians. *Pašang*, preparing a new war after the death of *Manučehr*, says:

ke bā mā ce kardand irānīyān bādi rā bebandand yek yek miyān

„[Look] what have the Iranians done to us: they have all girded their waists to do evil”³⁶.

Often the Iranians prove to be just as cruel and cunning as they believe the Turanians to be e.g., *Key Ka'us* violates the peace concluded by *Siyāvūš*³⁷; *Rostam* rules Turan for six years: murdering and looting he draws upon him the hate of inhabitants³⁸, the slaying of *Siyāvūš*, bearing signs of a ritual murder³⁹ is reproduced mirror-like by the Iranians in the act of revenge on the innocent coeval of *Sijāvūš*, the Turanian prince *Sorxe*⁴⁰.

³² *Bižan o Maniže* 379 ff, vol. V, pp. 31 f.

³³ *Forud-e Siyavuš* 1510—17, vol. IV p. 106.

³⁴ *Davāzdah rox* 1164—68, vol. V, p. 151 f.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1460, p. 168.

³⁶ *Nouzar* 73, vol. II, p. 11.

³⁷ *Siyāvūš* 940 ff, vol. III, p. 62.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2973 ff, p. 194.

³⁹ The death of *Siyāvūš*, who was murdered „like a sheep” (*ču gusfand*) continues the mythical theme of the Primeval Ox (about the identity of *gao spenta* and *gusfand* — J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *Miettes iraniennes* [in:] *Hommages a G. Dumézil*, Bruxelles 1960, p. 98 f). Cf. also: M. Składankowa, *Irańska wersja legendy o umęczonym bogu*, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 78, 1970, pp. 61—75.

⁴⁰ *Siyāvūš* 2746 ff., vol. III, p. 180.

The emergence of a split between the two branches of the house of *Feridun* is not a unique phenomenon of this kind described in the *Šāh-nāme*. Ferdousi presents the origin of another analogical conflict: the ruling dynasty and the house of *Sām*, closely connected together for a very long time, start a war because of killing *Esfandiyār* by *Rostam*. This initiates a chain of revenges, brought promptly to an end, because of the extinction of the *Sistān* family⁴¹. The river of *Hirmand*, until now not very important in the topography of the epic, begins to play a major role of a border river, comparable to that of *Jeyhun* in the Turanian conflict.

From the facts quoted above it can be seen already that the depicted situation is far from conforming to any black-and-white pattern. What is more, Ferdousi is able to present the many-layered nature of reality due to his technique of narration. He uses a movable point of view which enables him to show events from different angles.

The characters and facts are seen most frequently through the eyes of the Iranians who evaluate them and comment upon them. From time to time, however, the action switches to the Turanian side, bringing the Turanian characters to the foreground. Now and again (e.g. the story of *Sohrāb*, that of *Siyāvūš* or of *Bižan* and *Maniže*) the author follows an Iranian hero to the country of his adversaries. The Turanians are in such cases observed more systematically in their everyday activities. Just as in the case of the description of internal conflicts (e.g. *Goštāsp* — *Esfandiyār* and *Esfandiyār* — *Rostam*) Ferdousi relates sometimes the controversies between Iran and Turan by confronting their different points of view. This effect is frequently achieved by quoting dialogues and letters (e.g. *Gudarz* — *Pirān*)⁴², or by switching repeatedly the focus of the action from one side of the scene to the other. This type of narration predominates for instance in the description of the wars in the tale of *Kāmus-e Kašāni*⁴³.

The development of action on the Iranian side can be followed by the reader in the continuous way, with all the motivations and

⁴¹ *Rostam o Esfandiyār*, vol. VI, pp. 216—321.

⁴² *Davāzdah rox*, vol. V.

⁴³ Vol. IV.

consequences of the events; on the other hand the proper Turanian story is shown in a haphazard way, as if by a kind of windows, opened to us from time to time by using the above mentioned technique. The procedure of changing the point of view may be compared metaphorically to the crossing of the Jeyhun river which is not only a frontier line in the geographical meaning but also a symbolical border limiting the reader's horizon. Therefore it is not possible to reconstruct a coherent picture of the history and the inner relations in Turan. These insights suggest, however, that there is a fundamental similarity between the two worlds, and that the attitudes of the Turanians are as diversified as those of the Iranians.

The author usually puts the opinions about the events and persons into the mouths of his characters⁴⁴ and he himself is keeping distance from them. His own estimating commentary is relatively scarce. Sometimes it takes a form of some short characterisation of a personage appearing for the first time, such as that of a Turanian hero, *Pilsam*:

ze *pirān* yeki bud kahtar be sāl barādar bod u-rā o farroḡ hamāl
koḡā *pilsam* bud nām-e ḡavān yeki por honar o roušan ravān

„*Pirān* had a brother younger than himself, but equally fortunate. The youth whose name was *Pilsam* was full of virtues and clear-headed”⁴⁵.

The larger passages in which Ferdousi expresses his views and convictions on his own behalf usually do not occur in the course of the narrative, but rather on its margins: they signal a beginning or end of any broader autonomous portion of the text and they often contain reflections of a more general character.

It can be said that the method consisting in confronting of opposite solutions or of many different aspects of the same situation is one of the main principles of composition of Ferdousi's text. This confrontation is often put discreetly enough to confuse the reader. Braginskiy⁴⁶ has already pointed to the phenomenon

⁴⁴ Cf. different opinions about *Afrāsiyāb*: Nouzar 83—4, vol. II, p. 11; *Siyāvuš* 573—6, vol. III, p. 40.

⁴⁵ *Siyāvuš* 2252, vol. III, p. 147.

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 259 ff.

of a whole underground current existing in the *Šāh-nāme*. He analyses it on the example of a passage about Mazdak's insurrection. The opinion of Braginskiy is that this stratification of the text is due to the presence of a hidden social bias coded in the *Šāh-nāme*. It seems, however, that the phenomenon is of a more general nature: it consists of a perpetual dissonance between the two coexisting levels of the depicted reality: the stereotype and its actual realisation. The stereotype consists of a general scheme of action with a precised definition of parts assigning to the characters' particular places in the hierarchy and in the social arrangements. At the same time it represents a postulated ideal situation. The whole pathetic and ceremonial ornamentation underlined by an archaic language functions in this strata. On this level the personalities presented in the book may be considered nothing but multiplications of one standard pattern. But the actual realisation contradicts the traditional patterns and modifies them incessantly. Particular individualities of the characters and some striking, untypical situations emerge from below the „official” layer of the text. The hero's personality is shaped by a number of historical, psychological and social factors. He undergoes some conflicts because of fulfilling at the same time several parts which exclude themselves respectively. (e.g. *Pirān*, *Forud*) or fulfilling his part in a manner different from the postulated one (*Key Kā'us*, *Iraḡ*). Thus for instance the kings whose deeds cannot be respectful in any way are referred to by the author with veneration, while being sharply criticized by their subjects.

So far as the dualistic scheme can belong somehow to the surface strata of the book, the deeper current blows it up systematically. The authors who try to deduce Ferdousi's philosophy from a stiff and superficial generalisation fall into contradiction with the full of meaning facts as those quoted above (pp. 223—7). Thus the question arises how the creative method of Ferdousi and his literary vision of the world is connected with his personal philosophy. Also those scholars⁴⁷ who wrote about Ferdousi's

⁴⁷ J. C. Coyajee, *Theology and philosophy in Firdausi*, Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute 33, 1939, p. 1—36. Cf. also relevant chapters in: Kowalski, *op. cit.* (p. 189—216); H. Massé, *Firdousi et l'épopée nationale*, Paris 1935 (p. 227—261).

outlook on life building their conclusions on the basis of the analysis of some aphorisms and maxims torn out of their context in *Šāh-nāme* could not render justice to this complex problem.

First of all, it is important to remember that the author's own reflections should be distinguished from those given through the mouths of his characters. The former can be regarded as a manifestation of Ferdousi's real attitudes; the latter should be treated with more prudence, seeing always the context in which they appear and the personality of the speaker. Of course, the characters' views will be partly identical with those of the author. What is more, these ideas which are particularly often repeated in the text in many different circumstances, may also be treated as a part of Ferdousi's own views.

Secondly, the author's metaphysical, ethical and historiosophic conceptions are expressed not only by the direct declarations, but also on a higher level of textual organisation. The higher and the lower level complement each other continually and we must take them both equally into consideration. When the author confronts without a comment contradictory rights of two persons, he is conscious of the two manners of argumentation and puts himself above them, without declaring himself openly in favour of any side.

The introduction to *Šāh-nāme* (*Āyāz-e ketāb*)⁴⁸ may be regarded as the principal declaration of Ferdousi's convictions and as the key to the whole book. From this short text Ferdousi's concept of God can be deduced, and, indirectly, his concept of history as well. Thus, God is „beyond all names, signs and conceptions”, he is „the artist who is above his creations”⁴⁹. He escapes all descriptions, because reason can make concepts only out of the visible world.⁵⁰ Another attribute of God, which often appears within the epic itself is a consequent enlargement of the preceding attributes: God is „beyond good and evil”, or he is even the „giver” or „creator” of good and evil⁵¹. Such concept of God

⁴⁸ Vol. I, p. 12—13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, v. 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, v. 8.

⁵¹ Cf. e.g.: *Manučehr* 1644, vol. I, p. 248; *Davāzdah rox* 985, vol. V, p. 141; *Rostam — Esfandiyār* 1125, vol. VI, p. 286.

implies the relativity of human ethical notions and, therefore, excludes any simplified black-and-white dualism. In the course of his introduction Ferdousi says that in spite of his imperfection and lacking the necessary means, the man should worship God with these means which are given to him i.e. with his reason, soul and language, looking for the way of truth and scrupulously inquiring into God's decrees⁵². This postulate was put by Ferdousi at the beginning of his exposition of history; that makes us believe that the poet treated history as a revelation to decipher, the meaning and rules of which are known only by the Supreme Consciousness.

At the same time Ferdousi, as the author of the book, assumes towards his imaginary world the part analogous to that which God plays towards his creation. The consciousness of the author creates in the world of his epic rules and regularities unknown to his characters, because he is above their limitations and outside the inner time sequence of the book.

⁵² *Āyāz-e ketāb* 11—13. vol. I, p. 12.