

**Jāmī's *Sharh-i rubā'īyyāt dar wahdat-i wujūd*:
Merging Akbarian Doctrine, Naqshbandi Practice,
and Persian Mystical Quatrain**

– DR. EVE FEUILLIBOIS-PIERUNEK –

Sufi, scholar, poet, and often presented as the last great classical Persian writer, Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī (1414-1492) wrote a prolific amount of poetry and prose in both Persian and Arabic. He turned his hand to every genre of Persian poetry and authored numerous treatises on a wide range of topics, mainly in the religious sciences and literature¹.

Two biographers have described the events of his life, notably 'Abd al-Ghafūr Lārī (his disciple, d. 1506) and Mīr 'Alī Shir Nawā'ī (a famous minister under the Timurids, a great scholar, and founder of Chaghatay poetry). Apart from two pilgrimages, one to Mashhad and the other to the holy cities of the Ḥijāz (in 1472, with further short stays in Baghdad, Damascus, and Tabrīz), Jāmī lived quietly in Harāt, dividing his time between his studies, poetry, and spiritual exercises, and being honored by the sovereigns of his time. Although he wrote a great deal in prose, he is mainly known for his poetic works, which consist of three collections of lyrical poems (*Dīwān*) and seven *mathnawīs* collected under the title, *Haft Awrang* (or “The Seven Thrones,” which is one of the names of the Great Bear constellation).

Jāmī's work represents the fullest summation of the long history integrating Ibn al-'Arabī's² Sufi theosophy with the Persian literary tradition. Many of his works are in fact

¹ Apart from the general articles in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition* and *Encyclopedia Iranica* (C. Huart, H. Massé, "Djāmī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill Online, 2013, 05 March 2013, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/djami-SIM_1971; P. Losensky, "Jāmī i. Life and Works," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, available online <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jami-i>, 05 March 2013, H. Algar, "Jāmī ii. and Sufism," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, available online <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jami-ii>, 05 March 2013), several important studies are dedicated to Jāmī: 'Alī 'Aṣḡar Ḥekmat, *Jāmī: motaẓammen-e taḥqīqāt dar tāriḳ-e aḥwāl wa āṭār-e manẓum va manẓur-e kātām al-šo'arā*, Tehran, 1941, Najīb Māyel-Heravi, *Sheyḳ 'Abd-al-Rahmān Jāmī*, Tehran, 1998, A'lāḳān Afsaḥzād, *Naqd va barrasi-ye āṭār va šarḥ-e aḥwāl-e Jāmī*, Tehran, 1999, Susan Āl-e Rasul, *Erfān-e Jāmī dar majmu'a-ye āṭāraš*, Tehran, 2006.

² Muhyī al-Dīn Muhammad ibn 'Alī ibn al-'Arabī (1165-1240), known to his disciples as the “Greatest Master,” has exercised a deep influence over the intellectual life of the Muslim community over the past 700 years. Among the immense number of works attributed to him, one must mention the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiya*, a vast encyclopedia of the Islamic sciences seen within the context of *tawḥīd*, the profession of God's Unity, as well as the *Fusūs al-Hikam*, which, according the author, was handed to him by the Prophet in a vision. The latter text was abundantly commented on by his disciples and followers, including Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1274), Mu'ayyad al-Dīn Jandī (d. 1291), Sa'd-al-Din Farḡāni (d. ca. 1299-1300), 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī (d. 1330),

dedicated to explaining the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī. His first commentary in Arabic and Persian, *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ naqsh al-fuṣūṣ*³, was written in 1458-59 and draws on Qūnawī and other previous commentators, such as Jandī, Farghānī, Kāshānī, and Qayṣarī. About 65% of the book comprises verbatim quotation from these commentators, with particular attention given to the concept of the “Perfect Man.” The commentary begins with a general introduction to the thought of the “Greatest Shaykh.” In 1490-91, Jāmī later wrote an Arabic commentary on the full text of the *Fuṣūṣ*, entitled *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*⁴, in which he confines himself to elucidating the immediate meaning of each sentence in the original text and shuns any theoretical digressions.

I will today focus on a less ‘studied work: Jāmī’s *Sharḥ-i rubā’iyāt*⁵, an eighty-page commentary on his own quatrains, which imitates Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Tarjumān al-ashwāq*. He first illustrates some of the important topics discussed by the “Greatest Shaykh” before expounding the Naqshbandi practice of *dhikr*.

The book begins with a quatrain in praise of God, who is conceived as an endless sea engulfing all atoms, followed by a quatrain devoted to the Prophet, who is portrayed as a mirror of the divine Essence and Attributes, and the only way to God. In his introduction, the author explains that he composed these quatrains to present the doctrine of the Oneness of Being and God’s descent into the degrees of Manifestation (*shuhūd*). But these divine mysteries can only be truly understood through personal unveiling (*kashf*) and spiritual perception (*dhawq*). For this reason, he felt it necessary to explain the poems in a prose commentary in order to reveal all of their nuances.

In fact, although the quatrains seem apparent to anyone with some knowledge of the thought of Ibn al-‘Arabī, the prose commentary is full of technical terms and Arabic passages, and comprised of long, complex sentences, which often makes it much more difficult to

and Dāwūd Qaysarī (d. 1350) in the Arabic language, and Bābā Rokn-al-Dīn Šīrāzī (d. 1367), Tāj-al-Dīn Ḥosayn b. Ḥasan Kāzīmī (d. ca. 1432), and Sayyed ‘Alī Hamadānī (d. 1385) in the Persian language. Numerous Western studies have been published on his thought: Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism – A comparative study of key philosophical concepts*, Los Angeles, 1983; Henri Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabī*, Princeton, 1969; M. Takeshita, *Ibn ‘Arabī’s Theory of the Perfect Man and its Place in the History of Islamic Thought*, Tokyo, 1987; Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints. Prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d’ Ibn Arabī*, Paris, 1986; tr. as *The Seal of the Saints*, Cambridge, 1993, *Un océan sans rivage. Ibn ‘Arabī, le Livre et la Loi*, Paris, 1992; tr. as *An Ocean without Shore*, Albany, 1993, *Les Illuminations de la Mecque/The Meccan Illuminations. Textes choisis/Selected Texts*, Paris, 1988; William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Metaphysics of Imagination*, Albany, 1989.

³ Ed. William Chittick, Tehran, 1977.

⁴ Ed. ‘Āṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī al-Ḥusaynī al-Shādhilī al-Darqawī, Beirut, 2004.

⁵ ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Si risāla dar tasawwuf: Lawāyi’ wa Lawāmih, Sharḥ-i rubā’iyāt dar wahdat-i wujūd*, introd. by Iraj Afshār, Tehran, Kitābkhāna-yi Manuchihirī, (1360/1981), p. 44. Henceforth abridged as ShR, followed by the page number. Ed. Najib Māyel-Heravi, Kabul, 1964.

understand! The poor state of the text does not help matters: the editor did not restore the punctuation and retained the archaic writing style, while there are obvious errors in the copy. Some passages are borrowed from the introduction of *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ* in which they appear in a more correct and understandable manner. The study of this latter text and Chittick's comprehensive analysis of Ibn al-ʿArabī's doctrine helped me immensely in grasping the meaning of *Sharḥ-i rubāʿiyyāt*.

I will now examine the different ideas discussed by Jāmī. One of the major difficulties in this task lies in the interrelationship between all of his discussions: in order to understand one aspect, you have to understand all the rest. Consequently, it is hard to find an appropriate starting point: here, I made the easy choice and decided to follow the same sequence as the author.

1. The Doctrine of the Oneness of Being

1.1 Being (wujūd) and the modes of existence

Jāmī begins with a discussion on ontology. First, let us say a few words about the terms used in this discussion. Ibn al-ʿArabī employs the term *wujūd* in two main contexts, which demand two different translations in English for the single term. On the one hand, "existence" can be said of all things, but these things also "exist" in different modes. On the other hand, *wujūd* is employed when speaking about the substance or nature of God Himself: in this context, we are better choosing the standard philosophical term "Being." For Ibn al-ʿArabī, it is not fully appropriate to qualify anything other than God as "being." Without doubt, only God is being. So to refer to the existing things, he instead uses the term "existent" (*mawjūd*), which suggests the derivative nature of their existence⁶.

Jāmī starts by identifying three modes of existence among existing things (*mawjūdāt*). According to the first mode, things derive their being from something other than themselves. Their being (*wujūd*) is therefore different from their essence (*dhāt*): they are thus called "possible beings" (*mumkināt-i mawjūda*). According to the second mode, being is similarly different from essence, although it is impossible to separate being and essence in any other way but theoretically: these things are called "necessary beings" (*wājib al-wujūd*). According to the third mode, being is identical to essence, a feature that can only be applied to the Divine

⁶ Chittick 1989, 6-7.

Reality, which is also called Necessary Being (*wujūd-i wājib*). The third mode is indeed the highest degree of perfection of being⁷.

The terminology employed here borrows from philosophers and theologians who referred to the Divine Reality as the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*) in order to differentiate it from “possible things” (*mumkin*) and impossible things (*mumtani’*, *muhāl*). Necessary Being is the reality that cannot not be. The impossible things, on the other hand, cannot come into existence in the cosmos, while the possible things may or may not exist, depending on the will of the Necessary Being⁸. Here, Jāmī coins a new term for qualifying the Divine Reality, namely *wujūd-i wājib*, thus acknowledging a new “intermediate” mode of being, to which he attributes the term *wājib al-wujūd*.

In fact, being (*wūjud*, *hasṭī*) can only be attributed to God alone, because being is God’s Essence and does not come from “outside,” as in the case of the other existing things, which receive their existence from the Necessary Being: instead, they are “made existent” (*mawjūd*). To clarify this point, Jāmī uses the metaphor of light in the following manner:

Thanks to the being that is essentially manifested as light,
atoms of the created things appear.
Anything that strays from its clarity
remains hidden in the darkness of nonexistence⁹.

Jāmī distinguishes three levels of clarity. Some things derive their light from something other than themselves, like the earth that receives its light from the sun, requiring the cooperation of three entities: the moon, the sunrays reaching the moon, and the sun providing the rays. Other things, however, provide light that is an indispensable attribute of their essence. The solar body itself is not light, but it is inconceivable without light; two entities are thus brought into play, the solar body and the light. Finally, there is one thing that is luminous by itself: its essence is light, diffusing the highest level of brightness and allowing things to become visible according to their capacity. In this last case, a single element is involved, namely Light. In this manner, God is like light: He is the only one whose being and essence are unified, and He provides existence to all other things¹⁰.

⁷ ShR 44

⁸ Chittick 1989, 81-82.

⁹ ShR 45

¹⁰ ShR 45-46

The Koranic metaphor of God as Light (24/35) was already used by Ibn al-‘Arabī who employed the symbolism of visible light to explain the relationship between Being and nonexistence. God is nothing but Light, while all else is only the rays reflected from Light’s substance. In one respect, they are light, and in another respect, they are darkness, since they are not identical with the Light itself. Darkness has no positive reality of its own: it is the absence of Light. Hence, the defining characteristic of each existent thing is its absence of being, but the reflecting Light allows it exist. Light radiates and gives of itself. Hence, there are three “things”: Light, radiance, and darkness, or Being, existence, and nonexistence¹¹, or, according to Jāmī’s metaphor, Light, sunrays, and the moon.

1.2 Unknowability and Self-Disclosure of Being

The Reality of Being (*haqīqat-i wujūd*) or Essence (*dhāt*) is absolutely unknowable, indescribable, and incomparable: it is not even qualified by eternity or apparition in time (*qidam wa hudūth*), or by unity or plurality (*wahdat wa kathrat*). Nothing can be said about it. God is hidden from sight, but at the same time, He is apparent (*zāhir*), and even more apparent than anything else, because being is what is most visible, and the degree of God’s being is the most perfect. Jāmī writes:

Intelligence is blind to the Essence of the Necessary Being,
but being is more manifest than anything.
His Essence is too hidden to appear,
his Being too obvious to hide¹².

All things in the cosmos are reflections of His Light, or in the language of the theologians, they are manifestations of His “Acts” (*af’āl*), Names (*asmā’*), and Attributes (*sifāt*). In other words, the Essence is God in Himself without reference to anything else. As such, God is unknowable to anyone but Himself. However, God enters into relationships with the cosmos, relationships that are denoted by various divine names. Inasmuch as God’s Essence is independent of the worlds, the cosmos is not Him, but inasmuch as God freely assumes relationships with the world through His Attributes, the cosmos manifests Him¹³:

Apprehend God in this way:

¹¹ Chittick 1989, 7.

¹² ShR 50.

¹³ ShR 51-53; Chittick 1989, 9.

see Him at every moment in every face!
Gaze at the Creator every morning:
the creature is where the Creator reveals Himself.
In heaven and on earth, and all that they contain,
see only God and do not show the superficial.

O you whose heart mourns because of exile,
why are you crying like Noah?
You are at the heart of Contemplation, where is the separation?
Open your eyes and see who you are looking at!¹⁴

There are two ways of knowing God. The first is through the knowledge of the Essence, free from any entification (*ta'ayyunāt*¹⁵) of His Names and Attributes and unveiled through the manifestations of creatures: but only God knows Himself in this way. The second way is through the knowledge of God through His manifold manifestations in the mirrors of creatures: this kind of knowledge is available to man, but with two variants. The first is knowledge without consciousness of the fact, while the second is conscious knowledge of it¹⁶.

1.3 Degrees of being (marātib al-wujūd)

When the Necessary Being manifests from the Essence,
it does so through five processions according to the degree (of being):
the Hidden World, the World of Manifestation, and between these two, spirits and images,
while the fifth one encompasses the previous four Presences¹⁷.

According to Jāmī, there are five degrees of Being known as the Five Presences. The first Presence is the degree of the Hidden (*ghayb*) and the essential realities (*ma'ānī*), which includes the Essence (*dhāt*) passing through the primary and secondary manifestation (*tajallī*) and entification (*ta'ayyun*). The second Presence is the degree of the Apparent (*shahādat*) and the sensible (*hiss*), and encompasses the Cosmos from the Throne through to the terrestrial world, including all species, genres, and individuals. The third Presence is the degree of the

¹⁴ ShR 52.

¹⁵ This term, the fifth verbal form of “’ayn,” has been given an important role by Sadr al-dīn al-Qunawī. It signifies “the state of being specified and particularized” or “becoming an entity.”

¹⁶ ShR 52-54.

¹⁷ ShR 57.

Spirits, and the fourth is the Imaginal world (*'ālam-i mithāl wa khiyāl*). The fifth Presence encompasses the previous four and corresponds to the Reality of the world and human form.

Jāmī explains that some scholars enumerate six degrees of Being. Within the Hidden (*ghayb*), they make a distinction between the first entification (*ta'ayyun-i awwal*), notably the Essence, and the second entification (*ta'ayyun-i thānī*), which further splits into three degrees: the degree of the Spirits, the degree of the imaginal world, and the degree of bodies (*ajsām*), also termed the world of the sensible or the world of manifestation. The sixth degree, being the Reality of the Perfect Man (*insān kāmil*), encompasses the other five¹⁸.

For a better understanding, we must turn to Ibn al-'Arabī's cosmology. The *Shaykh al-akbar* speaks about worlds (*'ālam*) in the plural, conceived as subsystems of the "Not He": thus, we find the "greater" world or macrocosm, the "lesser" world or microcosm, the spiritual world, imaginal world, and corporeal world. However, the existing things are considered as not other than God and so referred to as "Presences" (*hazra*). Ibn al-'Arabī's followers wrote about the "Five Divine Presences," by which they meant the five domains in which God is to be perceived: namely, 1) God Himself, 2) the spiritual world, 3) the imaginal world, 4) the corporeal world, and 5) the Perfect Man¹⁹.

Jāmī devotes the following chapters to describing the two first "worlds" previously mentioned, giving peculiar attention to the second. In the first degree or first entification (*ta'ayyun-i awwal*), there is no distinction or separation between the terrestrial world (*mulk*), the world of the spirits (*malakūt*), the world of the Attributes (*jabarūt*), and the Essence (*Lāhūt*). All are merged together in total unity.

The second entification (*ta'ayyun-e thānī*) is characterized by the distinction of all essential realities (*ma'ānī*), although they are unaware of their own essence. They are qualified by existence (*mawjudiyat*), because being is added to them. In some way, being becomes multiple, but this multiplicity (*ti'dād*) and the distinction (*tamyīz*) within it is only perceived through divine Science, and not by the essential realities that emerge. Thus, we read:

In the world of the essential reality,
things are conscious of neither themselves nor others.
From the edge of being, they are but one.

¹⁸ ShR 57-59

¹⁹ Chittick 1989, 5.

Only the clarity of Science distinguishes them from each other²⁰.

To distinguish between the first and the second entifications, Jāmī uses the metaphor of the seed and the tree. The seed is the origin of the tree, with its roots, branches, foliage, flowers, and fruit. If we consider the seed in itself, it is devoid of plurality and distinction: this is the degree of the first entification. However, if we consider all the things that will manifest from the seed, we envisage the second entification: while the objective plurality of things does not yet exist, science can still anticipate it²¹. The essential realities are also named '*ayān-i thābita*, a fundamental concept of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought and variously translated as “permanent archetypes” or “immutable entities.”

1.4 Immutable entities

'*Ayn* is the term employed to denote things opposed to being, referring to specificity, particularization, and designation. God creates the cosmos in accordance with His eternal knowledge of it, and He gives existence in the universe to each entity that is immutably fixed within His knowledge. The term’s common translation as “archetype” is somewhat misleading, because it suggests that '*ayn thābita* becomes the model for individuals in the manner of Platonic philosophy. In fact, what corresponds to Platonic ideas in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teaching is the notion of Divine Names, while immutable entities are the things themselves “before” they are given existence in the world. Both the immutable entity ('*ayn thābita*) and existent entity ('*ayn mawjūda*) represent the same reality, but the former does not exist in the cosmos, while the latter does²².

According to Jāmī, immutable entities are intelligible forms that are essentially nonexistent, remaining unaware of the external being (*wujūd-i khārijī*). They are hidden, but provide places of manifestation (*mazhar*) for the external being, which manifests through their “properties” (*ahkām*) and “effects” (*āthār*). As Jāmī writes:

Immutable entities conceal the secret of the Eternal.

They are the veils of the sanctuary in the realm of subsistence.

They are all places of manifestation for the light of Being,
while themselves remaining in the darkness of nonexistence²³.

²⁰ ShR 60

²¹ ShR 60-61

²² Chittick 1989, 84.

²³ ShR 63

To make the relationship between the Being and immutable entities easier to grasp, Jāmī compares them to mirrors. We may consider the immutable entities to be the mirrors of the Being of God as well as His Names and Attributes. In this case, we must admit that nothing is visible outside of the Being of God, multiplied by the plurality of immutable entities that ensure His manifestation: this is the perspective of the unified man (*muwahhid*) in whom the contemplation of God (*shuhūd-i haqq*) dominates and who is also called “the owner of the eye” (*dhū al-‘ayn*). On the other hand, we may consider the Being of God to be the mirror of the immutable entities. In this case, the Being remains hidden and only the immutable entities are visible: this is the perspective of the “owner of the intellect” (*dhū al-‘aql*) in whom the contemplation of the created world (*shuhūd-i khalq*) predominates. However, the man who is spiritually accomplished (*muhaqqiq*) contemplates the two mirrors simultaneously – that of God and that of the immutable entities – and sees the same images (*suwwar*) in both. He is called *dhū al-‘ayn wa al-‘aql*, because he contemplates God in the creation and the creation in God, simultaneously perceiving the multiplicity (*kathrat*) of the existent and the Unity (*wahdat*) of Being²⁴. Thus, we read:

Immutable entities are mirrors in which God manifests himself,
or perhaps it is the Divine Light that is the mirror and immutable entities the forms.
The wise man easily understands
that each of the two mirrors is identical to the other²⁵.

The wise man described here resembles the Possessor of Two Eyes (*dhū al-‘aynayn*) in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s doctrine, the perfect gnostic who sees God from various perspectives from the edge of incomparability (*tanzīh*) or similarity (*tashbīh*). The eye that looks in the direction of the non-manifest declares God’s incomparability and places all emphasis upon His Unity, since it does not perceive the multiplicity of forms. The eye that looks in the direction of the manifest acknowledges the reality of multiplicity and declares His similarity, since it observes all things as God’s self-disclosures²⁶.

1.5 Ahadiyya and Wāhidiyya

²⁴ ShR 63-65.

²⁵ ShR 63

²⁶ Chittick 1989, 361-363.

Jāmī then defines two concepts initially coined by Sadr al-dīn al-Qūnawī as an extension of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought, notably “exclusive unity” (*al-ahadiyya*) and “inclusive unity” (*al-wāhidiyya*)²⁷. As exclusive unity, God is not determined in any manner and not subject to any qualification, because His Essence and Being cannot be distinguished from one another. As inclusive unity, God is the cause of both unity and the entification of all creation: this double aspect allows us to consider God in Himself or in relation to the cosmos. Immutable entities conceal and reveal the Divine Unity: each of them revealing but a small facet of the Oneness of God. Only the Perfect Man, a unified reality reflecting the complete overflowing of Being, can reveal God in His pure unity²⁸.

When the Being was overflowed through the levels,
every moment He revealed something else.
At the final level, that of man,
all these things were unified in their description.

The One sees all the numbers included in the number one.
At the heart of the numbers, He also sees the One.
Through the perfection of His Essence and His Names,
He sees everything in Himself and Himself in all things²⁹.

Regarding His essential perfection (*kamāl-i dhātī*), God has no need for the existence of the world and its creatures. Nevertheless, the manifestation of His perfection through the Names (*kamāl-i asmā’i*) requires the existence of the immutable entities, as mirrors of the Attributes (*sifāt*), which can be called “other” (than God, *ghayr*), knowing that the “other” is perfect nothingness (*‘adam-i mahz*)³⁰.

The essential realities (*haqāyiq*) of existing things are the entifications of the Absolute Being (*wujūd-i mutlaq*) within the Divine Knowledge. From the perspective of the reality of Being, they are identical (*‘ayn*) to each other and to the Absolute Being; from the perspective of entification (*ta’ayyun*), they are different (*ghayr*) from each other and from the Absolute Being in the sense that each is a particular entification of the unique Being³¹. Sometimes, Jāmī

²⁷ *Ahadiyya* is God’s oneness taken from the point of view that precludes there being anything in existence but Him. *Wāhidiyya* is God’s oneness as it relates to the created world by means of His names. Chittick, “The Five Divine Presences: From al-Qūnawī to al-Qaysarī,” *Muslim World* 72, 1982, p. 116-117.

²⁸ ShR 65-66.

²⁹ ShR 67.

³⁰ ShR 69.

³¹ ShR 70.

expresses the same idea using the concepts of exteriority (*zāhir* or manifestation) and interiority (*bātin* or occultation): interiority means lack of entification, while exteriority is equivalent to the different degrees of entification through the immutable entities³².

This issue is difficult to understand without turning to theology and the distinction between the Essence, Attributes, and Acts. The Essence is God in Himself without reference to the relationships that can be envisaged between Him and the existent beings. The Acts (*af'āl*) are the created things (*mukawwanāt*). The Attributes or Names (*sifāt, asmā'*) are the isthmus (*barzakh*) between the Essence and the cosmos. The Names are relationships, not entities or existing things. Each name denotes both the Essence and a specific meaning known as its “reality” (*haqīqa*) or “root” (*asl*). The reality of the name determines its “effects” (*āthār*) or “properties” (*ahkām*) within the cosmos³³. God rules the existent things through their realities.

Excepting the One, nothing is permanent (*thabāt wa qarār*). Each reality in this world is in itself “nothingness,” but God spreads being to it by effusion (*fayz*) according to its ability to receive existence. Nevertheless, soon after receiving existence, the reality tends to return to its origin, which is nonexistence (*nīstī*). This means that God continually renews His gift of existence. This can be explained in another way: the Divine Essence reveals itself through its Names and Attributes activated in the immutable entities. Some of its Names require the existence of things, while others require nonexistence (for example, *al-Mumīt* “He who creates death”). Thus, at every moment, things return to their original nothingness (*'adam-i aslī*) and their essential annihilation (*fanā'-yi dhātī*), but due to the constantly renewed support of the Divine subsistence (*baqā'*), these things are given a new existence without being aware of the fact: this is what Ibn al-'Arabī calls “perpetual creation” (*khalq-i jadīd*). Their outlook does not change, but being is incessantly renewed³⁴.

1.6 Oneness and multiplicity

God is one, and the emanation of God is unique.

The multiplicity of Attributes is the origin of the plurality of the receptacles of all that is possible.

So ascribe the differences you may observe to the receptacles³⁵.

³² ShR 71

³³ Chittick 1989, 33 sqq.

³⁴ ShR 74-75.

³⁵ ShR 77.

The multiplicity that we observe in this world is due to the amount of different receptacles into which the Unique is poured. Not all possible things are equally receptive to being: for example, dry wood burns more easily than green wood because it shares the same properties as fire, namely heat and dryness³⁶. The existents in all their diversities are the manifestation of God in the entities of possible things in accordance with the readiness of these possible things. Hence, the Attributes of God are diverse, since the entities in which He manifests are diverse. The existent things thus become distinct or plural through the plurality of the entities³⁷.

The cosmos is the manifestation of the Divine Light through the multiplicity of its Attributes that give birth to the multiplicity of forms. In fact, there are two levels of manifestation: the level of Divine Knowledge is the manifestation of immutable entities or the “realities” of things that remain hidden (*bātin*); the level of the things (*‘ayn*) is manifestation of the being of things in the cosmos or “outward” world (*zāhir*)³⁸.

To clarify the interaction between unity and multiplicity, Jāmī uses several metaphors:

The realities of the immutable entities are like different glasses
on which the sunray of the Being falls.
Although these glasses are red, yellow, or blue,
The sun reveals in all of them but one and the same color³⁹.

When the sea breathes, this is called steam.
When the steam condenses, this is called a cloud.
When drops begin to fall, the cloud becomes rain,
and the rain becomes the river, and the river finally returns to the sea⁴⁰.

The beloved is unique but she placed before her
hundreds of thousands of mirrors offered to our eyes.
In each of these mirrors, she made appear
her face according to the purity and clarity of the mirror⁴¹.

2. Naqshbandī Spiritual Training

³⁶ ShR 77-78.

³⁷ Chittick 1989, 94-95.

³⁸ ShR 79

³⁹ ShR 80.

⁴⁰ ShR 81.

⁴¹ ShR 85.

You should sweep the dust of multiplicity from the surface of the heart.
Do not cultivate vain eloquence about Oneness!
Do not be proud of your rhetorical skills!
The profession of the Oneness of God is to see things in their unity, not talk about it!⁴²

The truly wise acquire knowledge by personal experience and “ecstatic tasting” (*dhawq-i vujdānī*), not by hearsay (*naql*), imitation (*taqlīd*), or reason (*‘aql*): the latter is like hearing about the fragrance of musk and the former like smelling it! Wayfaring is not just about listening to the masters or reading books. It requires a personal commitment to the Path, and the straightest and shortest Path is the Naqshbandī, because it begins where others end⁴³. At this point, the orientation of the text dramatically changes: Jāmī devotes the last ten pages of his treatise to the explanation of spiritual practices within the Naqshbandī brotherhood⁴⁴.

2.1 Jāmī and the Naqshbandiyya

Jāmī’s association with this order began when he was still a child: when Khwāja Muḥammad Pārsā was passing through Herat in 1419, he received his blessing. The link to the brotherhood became effective when Jāmī joined the following of Sa’d-al-Dīn Kāshgharī. After Kāshgharī’s death in 1456, he became close to Khwāja ‘Ubayd-Allāh Ahrār. Although authorized by Kāshgharī to provide spiritual guidance, Jāmī was notoriously averse to the tasks of mentoring. Nevertheless, several individuals are said to have been formally trained by him in the *ṭarīqa*: Mawlānā Shāhidī Qumī, Khwāja Zīā’ al-Dīn Yūsuf, Jāmī’s third son (d. 1513), ‘Alīshīr Navā’ī (d. 1501), and Radī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ghafūr Lārī (d. 1506), who was

⁴² ShR 86.

⁴³ ShR 87.

⁴⁴ The Naqshbandiyya order derives its name from Baha’uddin Naqshband (d. 1389), the epithet of its spiritual master, Muhammad al-Uwaysi of Bukhara. The Naqshbandiyya can trace its beginnings farther back to the Khwājagān, the spiritual masters of Central Asia: the legendary founder of this tradition was ‘Abd al-Khāliq Ghijduwānī at the turn of the 13th century. In the following generation, the leading figures were ‘Alā’ al-dīn ‘Attār (d. 1400), Bahā al-dīn’s charismatic son-in-law who was recognized as his successor, Muhammad Parsa (d. 1420), an outstanding religious scholar, and Ya’qub Charkhī (d. 1447). The three figures complemented each other in formulating the new tradition and spread the order to Balkh, Herat, and Samarqand. Parsa introduced numerous classical Sufi authors into the tradition, including Ghazali, Qushayri, and Hujwiri, and above all the central concept associated with Ibn al-‘Arabi, the Unity of Being, although he hardly mentions the “Greatest Shaykh” by name, perhaps to avoid the polemics raging around the latter’s teachings. As successors, ‘Alā al-dīn left behind his son Hasan-i Attār (d. 1423) and Nizām al-dīn Khāmush (d. unknown). In the 15th century, Herat became a major religious and cultural center under the patronage of the Timurids and consequently, very attractive to the Naqshbandis: Sa’d al-dīn Kāshgharī (d. 1456), the charismatic disciple of Khāmush, managed to establish the brotherhood firmly in this town and attract important figures, such as ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī and ‘Alī Shir Navā’ī (d. 1501). On Kāshgharī’s death, ‘Ubayd Allāh Ahrār (d. 1490), Ya’qub Charkhī’s disciple, brought most of the Naqshbandi groups of Central Asia together within a well-organized network and sent emissaries outside of Transoxiana (Weismann, 2007, 14-34).

renowned for a number of writings, especially his supplement (*Takmila*) to Jāmī’s *Nafahāt al-uns*⁴⁵.

Jāmī expounded the fundamental principles of the Naqshbandiya in a brief treatise entitled *Sar-rishta-yi tarīq-i Khwājagān* “The Quintessence of the Path of the Masters”⁴⁶. He also gathered some of the sayings of Khwāja Muḥammad Pārsā and supplemented them with a commentary in a brief treatise called *Sukhanān-i Khwāja Pārsā*. Finally, his maṭnawī *Silsilat al-Dhahab* “The Golden Chain” tackles some distinctively Naqshbandī matters, such as the true nature of silent *dhikr*.

2.2 The Naqshbandiyya Spiritual Rule

Vocal *dhikr* (public recollection of God, *dhikr jahrī*, or uttered by the tongue, *dhikr al-lisān*) was a prevalent practice among Sufī brotherhoods, including the Khwājagān. However, Bahā’al-dīn Naqshband adopted silent *dhikr* from the spiritual heritage of ‘Abd al-Khāliq Ghijduwānī and refused to take part in the sessions of vocal *dhikr* performed by his master, Amīr Kulal, leading to the subsequent establishment of a distinct group, the Naqshbandiyya. Silent *dhikr* (hidden recollection of God, *dhikr khafī*, or whispered in the heart, *dhikr al-qalb*) became the dominant practice in this new group, but the masters had greatly divergent opinions as to the attitude to be taken toward vocal *dhikr*. Muhammad Pārsā permitted vocal *dhikr* in addition to the more elevated silent form, describing the former as appropriate for beginners. However, Charkhī rejected vocal *dhikr* altogether.

Along with silent *dhikr*, Bahā al-dīn accepted Ghijduwānī’s set of eight principles that define the path of the Khwājagān, supplementing them with three of his own. Thus, we find the eleven “sacred words” (*kalimāt-i qudsiyya*):

1. *Yād kard*, recollection;
2. *Bāz gasht*, return;
3. *Nigāh dāsht*, watchfulness;
4. *Yād dāsht*, remembrance;
5. *Hush dar dam*, awareness in breathing;
6. *Nazar dar qadam*, watching the steps;
7. *Safar dar watan*, travelling in the homeland;
8. *Khalwat dar anjuman*, solitude in the crowd;

⁴⁵ Algar, 2003, pp. 24-25; Lāmiū, *Nefehat Tercemesi*, p. 458

⁴⁶ Ed. Juyā Jahānbaḡš in *Bahārestān*, pp. 483-91; also published under the title *Resāla-ye sar-rešta* in Kabul in 1963.

9. *Wuqūf-i zamānī*, awareness of time;
10. *Wuqūf-i ‘adadī*, awareness of multiplicity;
11. *Wuqūf-i qalbī*, awareness of the heart.

The first four principles refer to the foundations of *dhikr*: constant recollection of the unitary formula, “There is no god but God;” returning to consciousness while keeping God in mind; guarding the heart against distracting thoughts; and remembering, which signifies the heart’s continual presence with God. The two next principles, “awareness in breathing” and “watching the steps,” allude to an Indian influence on the Naqshbandiyya: both practices aid concentration and avoid distraction. “Traveling in the homeland” and “solitude in the crowd” are paradoxical in nature and betray a Malāmātī origin. “Traveling in the homeland” is opposed to the common Sufi practice of travelling from place to place in order to meet different masters, benefit from their blessing, and acquire spiritual knowledge. “Solitude in the crowd” means being outwardly with the creatures and inwardly with God, which is opposed to the Sufi practice of seclusion (*khalwat*), which the Naqshbandiyya describes as befitting weak souls. These two principles could thus be interpreted as encouraging brothers to be involved in the world and accompany a master (*suhba*). The final three principles were designed to increase self-awareness, an awareness of the world around, and an awareness of the constant presence of God. On a practical level, they entail daily moral self-examination, counting the number of utterances of *dhikr*, breath control, and permanent concentration on the movements of the heart in order to ensure its purity and permanent attention to God⁴⁷.

Companionship was considered the most effective way of reaching God: through it, the master could not only teach the disciples, but also directly transmit his spiritual qualities and attributes to them. To reinforce the link between the master and disciple, the Naqshbandis introduced the complementary method of *rābita*. Literally meaning “binding,” *rābita* refers to the technique of retaining the master’s image in the disciple’s heart, regardless of whether the master is present or absent. This is reciprocated by the practice of *tawajjuh*, which requires the master to direct his heart toward the disciple⁴⁸.

2.3 Jāmī’s Discussion of Dhikr

It is precisely with a description of “binding” that Jāmī begins his discussion on the excellence of Naqshbandi wayfaring:

⁴⁷ Weismann, 25-28.

⁴⁸ Weismann, 29.

When you will the King seated on the throne of Poverty,
you will acquire a certain knowledge about the secrets.
If you engrave His image on the tablet of your heart,
Beginning with this image, you will find the way to the Naqshbandiyya⁴⁹.

In this brotherhood, the inner link with the shaykh is so strong that whenever a disciple seeks to progress in the knowledge of secrets, he begins by calling to mind the image of his master, which mirrors the Universal Spirit (*rūh-i mutlaq*). He then focuses on his heart, which encompasses the entire human reality in which beings are individuated parts. This allows him to reach a state of absence from the self (*ghaybat*) and unconsciousness (*bīkhūdī*). He constantly strives to reject inappropriate thoughts, which is easier when calling upon the image of his master, thus benefiting from the power of his spiritual state⁵⁰.

The disciple then engages in the remembrance of God, forcefully repeating the *shahāda*, “There is no god but God,” and making it penetrate into the heart. He does not allow temptations or visions to disturb him, keeping in mind that everything, good or bad, is a manifestation of God. If the first step is synonymous with reaching the state of *bīkhūdī* and keeping the mind concentrated on God, then the second leads to the contemplation of God in everything and seeing all creatures as mirrors of the Unique Beauty. In this state, the disciple sees himself in everything and everything in himself. He strives to maintain this interior state at all times, even when busy with everyday tasks, such as talking, walking, or eating. Jāmī thus writes:

Grasp in your hand the quintessence of felicity, o brother,
and do not spoil in vain your dear life!
Always and in all places, whatever you are doing and with whom,
always keep the eye of your heart secretly fixed on the Friend⁵¹.

If a distraction or spiritual difficulty occurs and troubles the disciple, he is advised to proceed to the great ablution (*ghusl*), if possible with cold water (which is more purifying), otherwise with hot, and then to dress in clean clothes and perform two *rak'as* of prayer in a

⁴⁹ ShR 88

⁵⁰ ShR 88-90

⁵¹ ShR 91

secluded and quiet place. He must then empty his mind and perform *dhikr* again. If the problem persists, he should confide in his master who is the mirror of the Lord⁵².

Some people do not call the image of the master to mind, but instead the image of the Book or the holy name (Allāh), imagining it outside of themselves or in their chest. Others choose a single inanimate object, like a stone, and concentrate their outward and inward eyes on it, thus eliminating all thought, suggestion, or distraction, except for God. The goal is “permanent presence with God” (*dawām-i ḥudūr ma’ā’ al-Ḥaqq*), a state that brings great happiness and results in witnessing the divine manifestation in all things (*mushāhida*). The *muhaqqiq* sees the Being through all the levels of the Divine manifestations and acknowledges the true meaning of *ittihād* and *ittisāl*. *Ittihād* is the vision (*shuhūd*) of God, the One by whom everything exists, although it is nonexistent by itself. *Ittisāl* is the servant’s observation of himself, as his “reality” (*‘ayn*) is united with the unique Being and so existing through it⁵³.

Najm al-Dīn Kubrā said that the *dhikr* of animals (or breathing species) was found in their breathing and that successive inspirations and expirations were signs of God being hidden within them and of the letters forming His name (Allāh). The intelligent seeker (of God) should remember this, and when reciting the name of God, he should let the divine essence penetrate and fill him, being attentive to the entry and exit of his breath, so that the presence of God becomes permanent within him⁵⁴.

Dhikr is evolutionary: at the beginning, it does not involve the release from all external and internal links. However, it enhances the compatibility (*munāsibat*) between God and man, by turning the disciple’s attention more and more exclusively to God and severing his links with the world of multiplicity. The Muslim profession of faith, consisting of the negation of everything other than God and the affirmation of His oneness, is the most effective *dhikr*, being the perfect remedy for healing man’s primary disease: that is, his interest in the outside world, which is in fact the negation of God and the affirmation of the “other”⁵⁵.

Anyone who engages in *dhikr* should strive to keep his heart in accordance with his tongue: while uttering the negative part of the *shahāda*, he mentally annihilates (*fanā’*) all creatures, and while uttering the affirmative part of it, he makes the subsistence (*baqā’*) of the eternal Being appear. In this way, the profession of faith is gradually engraved on his heart

⁵² ShR 91-92

⁵³ ShR 93-95

⁵⁴ ShR 96

⁵⁵ ShR 97-98.

and so becomes a constant attribute, thus pervading its substance (*jawhar*). Even if the oral recitation (*dhikr-i lisānī*) stops, the internal recitation of the heart continues. The man engaged in *dhikr* (*dhākir*) becomes unified with the recollection (*dhikr*), while the recollection is annihilated in the Recollected (*madhkūr*)⁵⁶.

We must note here that Jāmī permits both vocal and silent *dhikr*. He addresses the issue in his treatise entitled *Risāla-yi ʿarṭiq-i Khwājagān*, also known as *Risāla-yi sharāyīʿ-i dhikr*, in which he does not advocate the exclusive recourse to silent *dhikr*. He discerns certain qualities in vocal *dhikr* that are useful to beginners and rejects the arguments that its practice is hypocritical⁵⁷.

The correct performance of recollection is greatly aided both by the “awareness of the heart” (*wuqūf-i qalbī*), which empties thoughts from the mind, and by “counting” (*ra’āyat-i ‘adad*), which sustains concentration. Some people think that holding the breath during recollection favors the advent of spiritual revelations (*latīfa*) or sweet rapture (*wujdān*). However, according to Jāmī, the founder of the Naqshbandiyya did not consider that holding the breath (*bāz dāshtan-i nafas*) or *dhikr* counting (*ra’āyat-i ‘adad*) were necessary. On the contrary, he attached great importance to the awareness of the heart.

The Naqshbandiyya uses the following terms: *yād kard* is the performance of oral or silent recollection; *bāz gasht* is repeating at each recollection the words, “My God, You are my goal and Your satisfaction is my desire,” in order to repel all thoughts and purify *dhikr*; *nigah dāsht* is spiritual self-examination and concentration (*murāqiba-yi khawātir*), leading to vision and annihilation⁵⁸. While some people go directly to the state of *nigah dāsht*, most require longer training through oral and then silent recollection⁵⁹.

3. Commenting on poetry or teaching through poetry?

3.1 Jāmī’s poetry in the *Dīwan* and his use of the quatrain in prose works

Jāmī’s poetry was particularly effective in diffusing Ibn al-‘Arabī’s theosophical concepts in the Iranian world as well as in Central Asia, the Ottoman Empire, and India⁶⁰. In its final recension, prepared at the request of ‘Alī Shīr Navā’ī in 1491, Jāmī’s *dīwān* is divided into three separately titled sections: *Fātiḥat al-shabāb* “The Opening of Youth,” *Wāsiṭat al-’iqd* “The Middle of the Necklace,” and *Khātimat al-ḥayāt* “The End of

⁵⁶ ShR 98.

⁵⁷ Kāšefī, I, p. 266

⁵⁸ ShR 99

⁵⁹ ShR 99-100

⁶⁰ Weismann, 2007, 30.

Life.” The titles and arrangement, however, are somewhat misleading. Containing more than 9,000 verses, the first section is longer than the other two combined. A prose introduction preserved in some manuscripts shows that Jāmī first compiled his *dīwān* in 1463 and dedicated it to Sultan Abū Sa’īd. Afsaḥzād⁶¹ argues that Jāmī revised this *dīwān* in 1468 and again in 1475, when he added poems that he had written on his pilgrimage; a final version was then completed in 1479, for which he wrote a new introduction, dedicating the work to Sultan Ḥusayn Bāyqarā.

Fātiḥat al-shabāb thus contains the lyrical poetry that Jāmī wrote from the beginning of his writing career to his mid-60s. The bulk of the volume consists of some 1,000 *ghazals*, but it also includes poems composed in all of the prevalent shorter forms: *qaṣida*, *tarjī‘* and *tarkīb-band*, *qīṭ‘a*, and *rubā‘ī*, as well as thirteen short *mathnawīs*. This *dīwān* contains mystical and religious themes, love poetry, and panegyrics to various rulers, such as Abū Sa’īd, Jahānshāh Qarā Qyunlu, Sultān Ya‘qūb, and Mehmet the Conqueror. *Wāsiyat al-‘iqd* was apparently compiled around 1489 and once again, it mostly comprises *ghazals*; it is half as long as its predecessor is. The even shorter *Khātimat al-ḥayāt* was compiled a year or two later.

The *dīwāns* include 254 quatrains, about four percent of the totality of his lyrical poetry. The majority treat different mystical or religious topics: theosophy and the confession of the Oneness of God, with some being very clear allusions to the Akbarian doctrine. There are also descriptions of spiritual wayfaring and its various stages or experiences; of ascetics and wisdom; and of mystical love and antinomian themes. A few poems are even dedicated to profane topics, such as the glorification of nature or science.

Besides the *dīwān*, quatrain was Jāmī’s favorite form for enriching his prose treatises. Apart from the previously mentioned long studies on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s doctrine, he also wrote shorter and more attractive treatises in which poetic commentaries play an important role. It is within these works that Jāmī tries his best to conciliate *wahdat al-wujūd* with Persian poetical mysticism. *Lawā’ih* “Illuminations”⁶² is a set of thirty-six meditations of varying length on metaphysical topics; *Lawāmi‘*, “Gleams” (1470)⁶³ is a ‘commentary on the celebrated wine poem of Ibn al-Fāriḍ; *Sharh-i Qasīda-yi Tā’iyya* (1470)⁶⁴ is another commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poetry; *Ashi‘at al-lama‘āt* “Rays from the Flashes” (1481)⁶⁵ is a commentary on Fakhr

⁶¹ *Divān*, ed. Afsaḥzād, I, pp. 7-17.

⁶² ??

⁶³ ed. Hikmat Āl-āqā, Tehran, 1962; in *Bahāristān*, pp. 339-406.

⁶⁴ *Bahāristān*, pp. 409-38.

⁶⁵ ed. Ḥamid Rabbānī in *Ganj-i Ārifān*, Tehran, 1973.

al-dīn ‘Irāqī’s *Lama‘āt; Risāla-yi Nā‘iyya*⁶⁶ is an interpretation of the first two verses of the *Mathnawī-yi ma‘nawī* by Mawlānā Rūmī; finally, *Sharḥ-i bayt-i Amīr Khusraw* is a commentary on a verse from one of Amīr Khusraw’s *qaṣīdas*. Almost all of these treatises are adorned with Jāmī’s own expressly composed quatrains. Why did he choose this form and how did he employ it in his works?

It is not known when the quatrain first came into existence in the Persian world, but it is certainly of a pre-Islamic and popular origin. It followed the evolution of Persian poetry in general. The Iranian syllabic meter was subjected to Arabic quantitative prosody, while taking into account previous forms: including a syllabic meter, an accentual verse with caesura, and an irregular or inexistent rhyme. Rūdakī (d. 940) was credited with the invention of the genre. However, among the poets who preceded him, there are examples of poems that conform to the characteristic traits of the *rubā‘ī*. In Arabic, the *rubā‘ī* did not appear until the end of the 10th century in Khurāsān and evidently under Persian influence.

Quatrains were widely used in Sufī circles from the 10th century onwards. There is some evidence, emanating from the Ṣūfī circles in Khurāsān, but also in Baghdād, that testifies to the Persians’ usage of the quatrain to express their love for God. Attempts have thus been made to ascribe Abū Sa‘īd Abi ‘l-Khayr (d. 1049) as the inventor of the quatrain in Ṣūfism. During the same period, Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī al-Anṣārī (d. 1088) and the mountain-dwelling hermit Bābā Ṭāhir also expressed their experiences in this poetic form. Thereafter, all of the great Persian mystical poets used the quatrain. It is the perfect form to express short but penetrating spiritual insights, feelings, or experiences, and to summarize or conclude a prose discussion.

3.2 *The Legacy of Persian Spiritual Poetics*

The first poet to claim the existence of a secret meaning within his poetry was not recognized as a mystic. In the *Book of Kings*, Firdawsī advises the reader not to understand the narrated stories too literally, but to search for their true meaning. Rooted in the timeless wisdom of ancient Iran, the *Book of Kings* is thus allotted a spiritual and eschatological vocation. Iranian mystics have successfully exploited this potential, beginning with Yahyā al-Suhrawardī and his re-reading of some of the heroic stories as symbols of the Truth seeker’s struggle against the self. Poets, such as Sanā‘ī or ‘Attār, gave a similar mystical interpretation to the episodes or heroes of the *Shāhnama*.

⁶⁶ in *Bahāristān*, pp. 325-36.

The Ismaili thinker and poet Nāsir Khusraw uses poetry as a means to convey wisdom to humanity. Leaning on the Ismaili *ta'wīl* or symbolic exegesis, he places the Holy Book and poetry side-by-side. As a mediator between the celestial and terrestrial worlds, the Qur'ān has two distinct sides: a part of the Message is material and literal, while the other one is spiritual and metaphorical. The analogy between the literal and metaphorical meanings is made possible by the homology between the celestial world, the physical macrocosm, and the human microcosm. Like the Qur'an, the created world is a Revelation, a revelation to be explored, in addition to the revelation that is to be heard. In the same way, human language and speech can serve as a means to convey the knowledge of God to all creatures, and poetry is particularly useful for this purpose. Nasīr Khusraw both composed and commented on poetry. If the poet uses his talent to earn money by talking about physical love or flattering corrupt men, and thus not satisfying God, his poetry is not only worthless, but it also distorts and pollutes the gift of speech, which was granted to him by God.

Comparing poetry to the Qur'anic revelation is also the starting point of 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī's meditation in the *Tamhīdāt* "Metaphysical Temptations." Within the Qur'ān, we must distinguish the general, but metaphorical statements (*itlāq-i majāzī*), formed with words and understandable to anybody knowing the Arabic language, from the true statements (*itlāq-i haqīqī*), the real meaning, whose perception varies depending on the individual and the moment⁶⁷. The author identifies three levels of perception arising in three different ways in order to consider the relationship between form and meaning. Some try to overcome form to reach the meaning, because they consider form to be a veil over the truth. Others believe that they can find the real meaning through form, with the form being like a container used to draw water. The most advanced group, however, believes that when the soul has reached its perfection, it sees no difference between form and meaning.

Samā' and the spiritual interpretation of poetry come under the third mode of perception. Poetry has no intrinsic value and no definite meaning. It is meaningful only in relation to a specific person at a specific time and in a specific place. What is understood by listening to poetry reflects the spiritual state of the soul. Once recited by the poet, the poem is emancipated from him, thus assuming different meanings depending on the listener. Poetry is the mirror of souls, which is why it is infinitely polysemous.

'Attār goes even further in his analysis of poetry. Speech is a Divine Attribute granted to man by God. It is the foundation of both worlds, since God creates by the Word. The

⁶⁷ *Tentations métaphysiques*, p. 166.

Prophet's speech is superior to any other man's, as it is inspired by God. Poetry is also higher than prose because its meter has a mysterious character, which brings perfection to human speech and makes it particularly apt for the unveiling of the secrets of creation. The created world has both a visible face (*zāhir*) and a hidden face (*bātin, sirr*); similarly, the poetic discourse has a visible face, being its form (*sūrat*), and a hidden face, being its meaning or "essential reality" (*ma'nā*). If the beauty of the world is a reflection of the Divine Beauty, then the beauty of poetry is a reflection of the nature of the poet who can either be rooted in this world or delighted by the celestial realities⁶⁸. This is why all poetry is not favorable: only spiritual poetry written by a pure soul brings enlightenment to fellowmen. 'Attār establishes a connection between good poetry and revelation: poetry unveils secrets to the heart, and the poet may be seen as an interpreter of the world of God. According to him, there are three categories of poetry corresponding to the three degrees of the soul. At the lowest degree, the perception by the physical senses, the poet imitates and represents the material world. At the second degree, the perception by the intellect, poetry becomes wisdom. Finally, at the third degree, the perception by the spirit, poetry is elevated to the rank of divine revelation.

This conception of poetry was adopted by later Persian mystical poets. For Jalāl al-dīn Rūmī, the poem is God's Speech, not the poet's. He compares himself to a reed into which God blows. Poetry points to the Divine Reality through analogies, and thus, it is comparable to the Qur'anic Revelation⁶⁹. Poetry is a wave in the boundless Ocean of Love⁷⁰, an echo of God's Word, dressed in various forms or distorted⁷¹. The poet speaks the language of the heart, which transcends all languages, being a "non-language," crafted with images, paradoxes, and allegories inspired by God and revealed through the World of Imagination (*'ālam-i khiyāl*)⁷².

3.3 The Legacy of Ibn al-'Arabī's mystical poetics

Denis MacAulay recently devoted a whole book to this topic⁷³. To most readers, Ibn al-'Arabī's poetry is synonymous with *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* "The Interpreter of Desires," a collection of love lyrics for which the author provided doctrinal interpretations in a commentary. However, this book accounts for only a tiny part of his poetic output. Ibn al-

⁶⁸ MN 741-745 et et Purjavādi, *She'r va Shar*, p. 16-23.

⁶⁹ FF 165/174, M IV 420-42; W.C. Chittick, *The Sufi Doctrine of Rûmî*, pp. 268-279

⁷⁰ D 729, 18

⁷¹ MM 1, 2107-2109

⁷² W.C. Chittick, *The Sufi Doctrine of Rûmî*, p. 248-267

⁷³ Denis E. McAulay, *Ibn 'Arabī's Mystical Poetics*, Oxford, OUP, 2012.

‘Arabī wrote thousands of verses, many of them scattered throughout his prose works. Most of these poems deal with mystical doctrine, but are too elusive to act as a teaching tool or medium. McAulay suggests that they were intended to be used for meditations by a more select audience or to be commented on, rather than be performed at gatherings⁷⁴.

McAulay studies three prose texts in which Ibn al-‘Arabī throws some light on his understanding of poetics, emphasizing the connection between poetry and the world of the imagination, claiming that the poetry was revealed to him by a spirit, and giving his views on the use of poetry for devotional purposes. He makes it clear that poems written in a secular context should not be used for preaching and he is wary about the use of poetry for Sufi rituals, such as *samā’*. Poetry reflects elements of the cosmos, which are the forms in which God is manifested, and the poetic verse is analogous to the structure of the world and creation, which enables it to become a vehicle for secret knowledge⁷⁵.

After Ibn al-‘Arabī’s time, poetry was increasingly considered as a means of instruction. However, his disciples preferred to reach out to Ibn al-Farīd’s poems rather than those of the Greatest Master or to compose their own poetry like Jāmī. What was needed was either a didactic poem that set out the doctrine in a systematic manner or a lyrical poem onto which a mystical reading could be superimposed, regardless of whether the interpretation corresponded to the poet’s own intentions. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s poems were neither didactic nor lyrical. Instead, they were elliptical, paradoxical, and difficult to pinpoint, necessitating a commentary in order to be properly understood⁷⁶.

Jāmī both taught through poetry and commented on poetry, resorting to the Persian mystical approach to poetry as well as Ibn al-‘Arabī’s model of commenting on poetry, as in the *Sharh-i rubā’iyyāt dar wahdat-i wujūd*. However, the method used in this work is not so convincing, because his quatrains are quite clear and require no comment: instead, they help to clarify the heavy prose developments, which in return destroys the beauty, lightness, and polysemy of the poetry by ascribing to them a single, intellectual meaning. This very fact is the negation of the Persian theory of poetry, functioning as a mirror to potentially reflect the innumerable facets of the Divinity.

⁷⁴ McAulay, 2012, 12

⁷⁵ McAulay, 2012, 32-58.

⁷⁶ McAulay, 2012, 214-215.

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