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An Ecocritical Reading of Sa‘dī’s “The Mocaddamah; or, Introduction to the Gulistan of Shaikh Sadi”

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Abstract

In his article, “An Ecocritical Reading of Sa‘dī’s ‘The Mocaddamah; or, Introduction to the Gulistan of Shaikh Sadi’” Massih Zekavat argues that some aspects of ecological conceptualizations seem to have remained unchanged in Iran since the thirteenth century. He also explores the possibility of applying one of the most recent western critical approaches to a distinguished text in the Persian literary canon and offers the novel understanding that such reading can provide. After a brief introduction to the main pertinent tenets of ecocriticism, a rhetorical reading of Sa‘dī’s “Introduction” to *Gulistān* within the framework of ecocriticism explicates its environmental attitudes, some of which are still prevalent in the contemporary Iranian episteme. Cornucopia is a dominant notion in the “Introduction” and some of its descriptions resemble those of the pastoral tradition. Moreover, human/nature, man/woman, and culture/nature binary oppositions partly shape the logic of domination in the “Introduction”; and the privileged status of the dominator in these binaries leads to the otherness of nature, androcentrism and anthropocentrism.

Keywords: Sa‘dī’s *Gulistān* (*The Rose Garden*), ecocriticism, rhetorical reading, metaphor

Introduction

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Literary and cultural studies in the west have witnessed dramatic changes since the 1960s partly due to the great developments in critical theory which have convinced Vincent B. Leitch to refer to this period as the renaissance of literary theory and criticism (1). At the wake of theory, however, divergent trends were introduced since the 1990s, and ecocriticism is among the most recently-institutionalized critical approaches in literary studies and humanities. The aim of this paper is to provide an ecocritical reading of Sa'dī's "The Mocaddamah; or, Introduction" to *Gulistān* (*The Rose Garden*)¹, completed in 1258, to explicate some of the ecological bearings of this work. As "the imaginative potency of literature can change values and behavior," we need imaginative literary works besides science for comprehending and facing current ecological crises (Christensen 192-193). Accordingly, this article aims to suggest the urgent inevitability of adopting a more ethical conceptualization of and friendlier attitude toward nature and environment by revisiting *Gulistān* and explicating its ecological implications. The object of this study is delimited to the "Introduction" due to space restraints. It is among Sa'dī's most widely read and influential pieces that many, including Jāmī in his *Bahāristān*, and Ghā'ānī in his *Parishān*, have tried to emulate and imitate. *Gulistān* was used as a textbook in traditional education and its "Introduction" is still present in Iranian textbooks. Some critics, like Zarqānī, argue that Sa'dī mentions all the main themes of *Gulistān* in "The Mocaddamah" (111). Zarqānī goes so far as claiming that "we can guess *Gulistān*'s themes by reading its 'Mocaddamah'" [my translation] (110). He also contends that eight major issues form Sa'dī's thought, six of which are actually discussed in "The Mocaddamah" (113). Accordingly, one might be tempted to extend the results of this investigation to the whole book. In exploring Sa'dī's ecocritical thought in "The Mocaddamah", however, this article does not intend to imply such a generalization which demands further studies. Furthermore, an ecocritical

¹ I am using a reprint of Saadi. *Gulistan; or, Flower-garden*. Trans. James Ross. London: W. Scott, 1890. It is also available on <<http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/diglib/books/P-T/S/sadi/gulistan.htm>> and <<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupname?key=Sa'di>>.

reading of "Introduction" does not look for contemporary concerns by projecting them into the text; rather, it explores the influence of a certain text in the history and evolution of ecological conceptualizations in Iran.

Before offering my ecocritical reading, I will provide a brief biographical sketch of Sa'dī's life and a short introduction to his *Gulistān* not only for the benefit of the western audience but also to underlie his cultural influence that grants him a privileged position in the perpetuation of certain ecological conceptions. Sa'dī, Persian poet and prose writer born in Shiraz, Iran (ca. 1208), left his hometown and travelled to many parts of the world for almost thirty years only to return to Shiraz where he died between 1291 and 1294. When he returned to Shiraz to write his *Būstān* (1257) and *Gulistān*, he was already known as a poet due to the circulation of his ghazals. He spent the last years of his life in Shiraz, but, as the literary influence of his poetry on distant places like India and Anatolia conveys, his reputation as a poet was spreading throughout the Persian-speaking regions during his lifetime. His works have circulated through translation since his own time, leading to his lasting international literary and cultural influence (Paul Losensky; Katouzian 1-2, 27) which is reinforced by their frequent inclusion in curricula.

Gulistān contains a mixture of prose, poetic rhythmic prose, and poetry.² It is arranged in eight bābs, or chapters, the titles of which partly reveal their thematic concerns: "Of the Customs of Kings," "Of the Morals of Darweshes," "Of the Preciousness of Contentment," "Of the Benefit of Being Silent," "Of Love and Youth," "Of Imbecility and Old Age," "Of the Impressions of Education," and "Of the Duties of Society." "In order to understand the social and political background against which the works were composed," Davis maintains,

it is only necessary to point out that the *Gulistan* was completed in the same year as the sack of Baghdad and the extinction of the Abbasid caliphate by the Mongols. Accommodation with those in power, a preternatural awareness of the vicissitudes of fortune, an extreme wariness of personal and political enemies, the frequent necessity to

² For an introduction to *Gulistān* see Katouzian 29-33.

mask one's true feelings, and the advice to be content with even indigent survival, far from centres of power and influence, are themes that are repeatedly stressed by the author. (Davis 720)

The impact of societal and political climates on Sa'dī's works, discussed by many scholars, cannot be exaggerated. However, exploration of his ecocritical understanding has not attracted enough attention. This is especially significant because of his continuing cultural impact in Iran. Before proffering an ecocritical reading of Sa'dī's "Introduction" to *Gulistān* and explicating its implications, it is necessary to briefly review the pertinent tenets of ecocriticism and the methodology employed.

Ecocriticism:

Since its institutionalization as a field of study in the 1990s, ecocriticism has greatly diversified. Various trends exist on the spectrum of ecocriticism that develop divergent or even opposing understandings of the relationship between nature and environment, on the one hand, and culture and literature, on the other. This is especially evident in the relationship between ecocriticism and theory, and the resulting realist versus discursive understandings of nature. Ecocriticism has also allied itself with different other trends of thought like, among others, environmental justice, feminism, postcolonialism, subaltern studies, and animal studies. But despite its growing diversity, ecocriticism, as Heise also remarks, has a "triple allegiance to the scientific study of nature, the scholarly analysis of cultural representation, and the political struggle for more sustainable ways of inhabiting the natural world" (506). Garrard also maintains that,

Environmental problems require analysis in cultural as well as scientific terms, because they are the outcome of an interaction between ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflection. This will involve interdisciplinary scholarship that draws on literary and cultural theory, philosophy, sociology, psychology and environmental history, as well as ecology. (16)

Therefore, the objectives of the study of literature and environment are manifold. Buell mentions scientific inquiries, "textual, theoretical, and historical analysis of . . . human experience," ethical concerns, study of the relationship of writing and pedagogy, exploration of the literary representation of nature, and of rhetoric and discourse as some of these objectives (Buell, "Forum" 1091). Different methodologies have been employed to investigate these issues, one of which is the formalist explication of rhetorical and figurative language in works of literature.

In their *Ecospeak: Rhetoric and Environmental Politics in America*, Killingsworth and Palmer analyze the rhetoric of environment politics discourse. They assert that, "human thought and conduct are rarely, if ever, unmediated by language and other kinds of signs" (Killingsworth and Palmer 3). In a 2006 article, Killingsworth underlines the significance of rhetoric, maintaining that "people's language works like a badge of identity, which they use to form alliances and set up psychological and social boundaries" (85). Similarly, Chakrabarty points out how figurative language writes a human history of nature (12). In *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Buell also introduces different methodologies employed in ecocritical studies including rhetorical reading (45-46). In his study of the toxic discourse, he underscores metaphors and their cultural and ethical significance (Buell, "Toxic" 640). Buell maintains that, "There is considerable warrant for believing that even dead metaphors (for example, a black-and-white situation) shape or at least reinforce cultural values" (Buell, "Toxic" 663-664). Garrard also founds his *Ecocriticism* on rhetorical analysis, where he arranges his material according to what he calls "large-scale metaphors" (8). He notes that two issues are significant in rhetorical readings. First, "the meaning of tropes is closely related to their wider social context" (8). Another significant issue is that, "tropes are assumed to take part in wider social struggles between genders, classes and ethnic groups. . . . and we must remain aware that even tropes that might potentially confront or subvert environmentally damaging practices may be appropriated" (9). As a result, rhetoric can both serve to promote eco-friendly attitudes and to develop indifference toward the environment.

The formalist and rhetorical methodology is also in line with the recent revival of interest in form. As Levinson's review conveys, literary studies have witnessed a revival of interest in a return to new formalism which resorts to close reading as its methodology (Levinson 560). Similarly, advocating commitment to form, Mitchell maintains, "a commitment to form is also finally a commitment to emancipatory, progressive political practices united with a scrupulous attention to ethical means. Insofar as formalism insists on paying attention to a way of being in the path rather than to where the path leads, it seems to me central to any notion of right action" (Mitchell 324). But a rhetorical reading necessarily requires a theory of metaphor. As Abrams and Harpham summarize, there are four major theories of metaphor: "the similarity view," "the interaction view," "the pragmatic view," and "the cognitive (or conceptual) view" (189-192). According to the cognitive view, in addition to the poetic, the everyday use of language is also metaphoric. It is believed that "in all uses (including in the language of the sciences) cross-domain metaphors play an ineradicable part in determining what we know, how we reason, what values we assign, and the ways we conduct our lives" (192). Accordingly, a rhetorical study of metaphors, their constituent parts, as well as their syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations with other textual elements can explicate some aspects of the mentality and culture of their audience in various epochs.

Therefore, a rhetorical study of Sa'dī's "Introduction" can foreground ethical and political concerns. Paying attention to tropes can reveal some aspects of the environmental discourse, yet as Garrard warns, "To confront the vast, complex, multifarious agglomeration of ecological crises with the apparently flimsy tools of cultural analysis must be seen by the ecocritic as a moral and political necessity, even though the problems seem perpetually to dwarf the solutions" (16).

Discussion:

The first metaphor of *Gulistān* conveys two ecological prejudices. "The shower of his infinite mercy has been sprinkled upon all, and the table of his

all-comprehensive bounty is spread forth everywhere”³ (62). For Sa' dī and many other poets of his time, nature is a book that reveals divine wisdom, they study this book only to find the divine presence. God's infinite mercy is likened to rain on the ground that all benefit from it, so precipitation is seen as infinite and equally benefiting all. Rain and nature, as significant examples of God's bounty, are depicted as if they are inexhaustible. This sounds like the modern cornucopia thesis that denies any environmental crisis altogether. Its proponents do not believe in nature's intrinsic value and think of it merely in terms of anthropocentric interests. Sa' dī lived in a pre-capitalist society where there was no environmental crisis (at least in the modern form that we experience today), hence the idea that natural resources are infinite and all creatures equally enjoy them.

Moreover, God's bounty is compared to a spread. Frequently, there is no intrinsic value attributed to food because it is merely an instrument to appease hunger. In Persian culture, only the host is responsible for the table, and all the guests have to do is to enjoy it. According to the similarity view of metaphor, therefore, God's bounty is like a table set for human beings to enjoy it while bearing no responsibility in its preparation and maintenance. The Persian phrase that Sa' dī uses reminds us of Khān-i Yaghmā,⁴ an extremely generous feast to which everyone was invited. In the end, everything that was prepared for the feast, including the food, dishes, and even the spread itself, was pillaged by guests. Human beings are only guests in the feast of nature and should employ and consume it, and nature, created only for the benefit of Homo sapiens, just has an instrumental value.

An obvious literary manifestation of the conception of instrumental value of nature can be seen in pastoral poetry. The pastoral frequently represents a serene idealization of nature and rural life, so it can obscure its actual predicaments. Playing their reeds, lonely shepherds sing of love in pastures or elegize upon a fellow shepherd; therefore pastoral poetry does not concern nature in and for itself, it merely tends to use it as a backdrop for human reflections. Persian literary heritage does not feature pastoral poetry

^۳ باران رحمت بی حسابش همه را رسیده و خوان نعمت بی دریغش همه جا کشیده

^۴ Dr. Manijeh Abdolahi mentioned this association after reading the first draft of the article.

as a distinct genre, still some of Sa'dī's descriptions seem very similar to pastoral descriptions. After the invocation, Sa'dī tells the story of "a good and pious man [who] reclined his head on the bosom of contemplation, and was immersed in the ocean of reverie."⁵ His friend asked him, "What rare gift have you brought us from that garden where you have been recreating?"⁶ He answers, "I fancied to myself and said, when I can reach the rose-bower I will fill my lap with the flowers, and bring them as a present to my friends; but when I got there the fragrance of the roses so intoxicated me that the skirt dropped from my hands."⁷ This is followed by two lines of poetry which further develop the theme: "O bird of dawn! learn the warmth of affection from the moth, for that scorched creature gave up the ghost and uttered not a groan"⁸ (64). In both cases, then, Sa'dī draws an analogy between nature and metaphysical and spiritual worlds. He likens the world of meditation and mysticism to a garden, the mystic's souvenir from his spiritual journey to a flower, the mystic to a moth, and absorption and effacement of the existence of the mystic's being in that of the Absolute Being is likened to the burning of the moth in the candle's light. The groan of the morning bird is condemned while the moth's silent suffering is praised as exemplary. The real world of nature, in other words, is depicted in an idealized and abstract manner. This world does not feature any predicament and the end-result of the mystic's spiritual journey is nothing short of fulfillment. However, such an idealized and abstract description of nature is in contrast to the reality of the environment and anthropogenic disturbances while it does not facilitate political activism to preserve nature, because materialist activism cannot revive and preserve idealized abstractions. Similarly, the second description of a garden in *Gulistān* (70-71) is also akin to the depiction of nature in pastoral literature.

⁵ یکی از صاحب‌دلان سر به جیب مراقبت فرو برده بود و در بحر مکاشفت مستغرق شده.

⁶ ازین بستان که بودی ما را چه تحفه کرامت کردی؟

⁷ به خاطر داشتم که چون به درخت گل رسم دامنی پُر کنم هدیه اصحاب را. چون برسیدم بوی گلم چنان مست کرد که دامنم از دست برفت.

⁸ ای مرغ سحر عشق ز پروانه بیاموز / کان سوخته را جان شد و آواز نیامد

In addition to its similarities with cornucopia thesis and the pastoral tradition in its description of nature, "The Mocaddamah" also manifests three binary oppositions pertinent to ecocritical readings: human/nature, man/woman, and culture/nature. Human/nature binary opposition has two presuppositions: first, human is privileged over nature; second, human is not a part of nature but is placed against it. Based on this binary, human beings reserve an undeserved privilege for themselves to dominate nature, which in its turn leads to anthropocentrism. Also human/nature bipolarity leads to othering nature that will, consequently, represent it as a threat. This threatening face, in its turn, intensifies human beings' attempts to dominate nature. Human/nature bipolarity is explicitly mentioned in "The clouds, wind, moon, sun, and the sky act in co-operation; that thou mayst get thy daily bread, and not eat it with indifference: all revolve for thy sake, and are obedient to command; it must be an equitable condition that thou shalt be obedient"⁹ (62). Nature, therefore, has no intrinsic value and is to be mastered by human beings for their sustenance. All obediently revolve for the sake of human beings (the subversive, sublime might of earthquakes, tempests, and floods are ignored). Human beings, therefore, are stewards whose aim is to exploit nature over which they are privileged. This may cause an irresponsible exploitation of nature and its resources without any regard for it, other species, and future generations. Of course, the subversive power of nature is manifested in "What can he fear from the billows of the sea who has Noah for his pilot?"¹⁰ (63), but this does not invoke the sense of awe and sublimity; on the contrary, it intends to threaten and warn. The sea is a threat and a human being should conquer it. When it comes to "The Panegyric of the Prince of Islamism, or Reigning King; may God perpetuate his Reign," Sa'di calls Mozuffar-u'd-din Abubakr "the Shadow of the most high God on earth."¹¹ This appositive is anthropocentric where human beings are the shadows of God on earth and this legitimizes their domination of nature. After

⁹ ابر و باد و مه و خورشید و فلک در کارند / تا تو نانی به کف آری و به غفلت نخوری
همه از بهر تو سرگشته و فرمانبردار / شرط انصاف نباشد که تو فرمان نبری
¹⁰ چه باک از موج بحر آن را که باشد نوح کشتی بان؟
¹¹ ضلّ الله تعالی فی ارضه

repeating this appositive in Persian as well—“such a godlike shadow”¹² (66), Sa‘dī continues to write,

The Persian territory has nothing to apprehend from the buffetings of fortune, so long as its head can find the shelter of such a godlike shadow as thou art. Throughout the expanse of the globe none in these days can afford such an asylum of resignation as that at the threshold at thy gate:—it is thine to comfort the afflicted; our duty to be grateful; and it rests with God the Creator to notice and to reward us. So long, O Providence! as earth and sky shall endure, preserve the land of Persia from the storm of anarchy and mischief!¹³ (66-67)

Anarchy and mischief are compared to storm on the ground that they are both threatening. The King, an emblem of civilization, must conquer this storm and bring peace to the land and its subjects. Anthropocentrism is again evident.

Man/woman binary opposition, a feature of patriarchy and a focus of attention in ecofeminism, works side by side the bipolarity of human/nature. Although gender distinction does not exist in Persian syntax, androcentrism is evident in Persian literature. Further, the parallelism between these two binary oppositions results in the association between woman and nature. As human being is privileged over nature, man is also privileged over woman. This is why, as Davion writes, “women have been associated with nature, the material, the emotional, and the particular, while men have been associated with culture, the nonmaterial, the rational, and the abstract” (qtd. in Garrard 26; also see Warren 50). Androcentrism is similarly dominant in Sa‘dī’s thought.

^{۱۲} سایه خدا

^{۱۳} اقلیم پارس را عم از آسیب دهر نیست / تا بر سرش بود چو تونی سایه خدا
امروز کس نشان ندهد در بسیط خاک / مانند آستان درت مأمین رضا
بر تست پاس خاطر بیچارگان و شکر / بر ما و بر خدای جهان آفرین جزا
یارب ز باد فتنه نگهدار خاک پارس / چندان که خاک را بود و باد را بقا

Sa'di feminizes nature and natural elements. For instance, when he is comparing the revival of nature in spring to the growth of young children, he writes:

He [i.e. God] directed his chamberlain, the breeze of the dawn, to spread abroad an emerald carpet; and he ordered his handmaid, the vernal cloud, to nurse the daughters of vegetation [or young herbage] in the cradle of the earth. As a new year's day [i.e. Nowrouz, at the beginning of spring in March] garment he covered the bosoms of the trees with mantles of verdant foliage; and on the approach of the spring season he crowned the infant twigs with garlands of smiling flowers; through his mighty power the juice of the sugar-cane reed waxed sweet as virgin honey; and by his fostering care the kernel of the date grew into a stately palm.¹⁴ (62)

The vehicles and tenors in metaphors 'handmaid, the vernal cloud' and 'the daughters of vegetation' identify female human beings with natural elements. Two more metaphors, that is 'the cradle of the earth' as well as 'the infant twigs,' connote feminine attributes. Also it should be noted that though patriarchy is dominant in Sa'di, nature is not attributed with masculine traits in the "Introduction". Attribution of feminine features to nature is still evident in contemporary Persian literature and culture: 'Ms. Sun'¹⁵ and 'aunt cockroach'¹⁶ are still female in Persian children's literature.

Therefore, the parallelism between human/nature and man/woman associates their privileged nominators, on the one hand, and oppressed denominators, on the other. Karen J. Warren refers to this privileging hierarchical relation as the logic of domination. She considers logic of domination to be "a logical structure of argumentation that 'justifies' domination and subordination. A logic of domination assumes that superiority justifies subordination" (Warren 47). She goes on to quote Lori Gruen who

¹⁴ فراش باد صبا را گفته تا فرش زمردی بگسترده و دایه‌ی ابر بهاری را فرموده تا بنات نبات در مهد زمین بیرورد. درختان را به خلعت نوروزی قبای سبز ورق در برگرفته و اطفال شاخ را به قدم موسم ربیع کلاه شکوفه بر سر نهاده؛ عصاره‌ی نالی به قدرت او شهد فایق شده و تخم خرمائی به تربیتش نخل باسق گشته.

¹⁵ خورشید خانم

¹⁶ خاله سوسکه

believes that logic of domination “constructs inferior others and uses this inferiority to justify their oppression” (qtd. in Warren 48). This logic determines the relationships between man and woman as well as the one between human and nature. In other words, the alleged superiority that human beings and men suppose over nature and women leads to their subordination and suppression. Warren adds that “The logic of domination is necessary both to turn diversity (or difference) into domination and to justify that domination” (Warren 49). This is among the reasons why the dominance of *Homo sapiens* threatens bio-diversity. But we should remember that Sa‘dī’s *Gulistān* has been a distinguished text in Persian literary heritage, and has frequently been used in curricula (Katouzian 1). Its “Introduction” still appears in high school textbooks in contemporary Iran’s textbook-orientated curriculum. This guarantees a high level of influence among a wide variety of audience, thus its supreme impact in the episteme.¹⁷ Consequently, it has been instrumental in defining and disseminating gender roles in Persian culture.

As we have seen above, woman connotes nature and man culture (Garrard 26; Warren 50); this brings us to the third binary opposition. Culture/nature bipolarity¹⁸ privileges culture, the artificial, and the processed over nature, the raw, and the wild. The results of this attitude could be observed in various aspects of contemporary life including urban space and cuisine. Natural habitats are being destroyed as the result of human beings’ overindulgence, while, ironically, artificial niches are being established. Birds and their habitats are destroyed while we establish bird gardens; human

¹⁷ Michel Foucault defines episteme as “the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems; the way in which, in each of these discursive formations, the transitions to epistemologization, scientificity, and formalization are situated and operate; the distribution of these thresholds, which may coincide, be subordinated to one another, or be separated by shifts in time; the lateral relations that may exist between epistemological figures or sciences in so far as they belong to neighbouring, but distinct, discursive practices. The episteme is not a form of knowledge (connaissance) or type of rationality which, crossing the boundaries of the most varied sciences, manifests the sovereign unity of a subject, a spirit, or a period; it is the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities.” (Foucault 212)

¹⁸ See Lévi-Strauss and Zekavat.

rapacity threatens marine life, while tourists enjoy aquariums; and artificial lakes substitute the already dried ones. Human beings seek to strengthen their domination of nature by means of culture, civilization and technology.

Culture/nature binary opposition can also be traced in "The Introduction." In order to underline the beauty of natural elements, they are compared to artificial artifacts. In the last quotation from *Gulistān*, the grass was compared to an emerald carpet, the earth to a cradle, leaves to mantles of verdant foliage, and buds and blossoms to a crown. In other words, it is implied that natural elements are as beautiful as artificial ones in spring. Elsewhere, "The leafy vestments of the trees" are likened to "the holiday apparel of the . . . happy"¹⁹ and "the nightingales . . . [are] carolling on their pulpits"²⁰. Although "a garden"²¹ (*Būstān*, as opposed to woods and jungle, is cultivated, not wild and natural) is "a lovely and refreshing spot,"²² it is the "spangles of crystal, and clusters of fruit like the pleiades"²³ that underscore its beauty (70).

"[T]he flower of the garden has no continuance, nor can we confide in the promise of the rose-bower"²⁴ hints at the susceptibility of nature—although it attributes "infidelity" to it as well—yet the solution is not to responsibly attempt to preserve and sustain nature but to ignore it and turn to culture: "whatever is not lasting [i.e. nature] merits not our affection . . . [therefore] For the gratification of the beholders and recreation of spectators I can write such a Kitabi Gulistan [*Gulistān*], or a book of Flower-garden, as neither the rude storm of the autumn shall be able to lay the hand of usurpation upon its leaves, nor the revolution of the season convert the serenity of its summer into the gloom of winter."²⁵ Nature is not lasting and immutable, so we should ignore it and invest in the stable and durable culture. But

¹⁹ پیراهن برگ بر درختان / چون جامه‌ی عید نیک‌بختان

²⁰ بلبل گوینده بر منابر قضبان

²¹ بوستان

²² موضعی خوش و خرم

²³ خرده‌ی مینا بر خاکش ریخته و عقد ثریا از تارکش آویخته

²⁴ گل بوستان را چنانکه دانی بقانی و عهد گلستان را وفانی نباشد

²⁵ هر چه نباید دل بستگی را نشاید . . . طریق [آنکه] . . . برای زهت ناظران و فسحت حاضران کتاب *گلستان* توانم تصنیف کردن که باد خزان را بر ورق او دست تطاول نباشد و گردش زمان، عیش ربیعش را به طیش خریف مبدل نکند.

commitment and ‘affection’ are prerequisites of any serious attempt not only to recoup the previous damage to nature but also to avoid further damage and compensate for what is lost. This part is concluded by, “What can a basket (or nosegay) of flowers avail thee? Pluck but one leaf from my Flower-garden [pun on *Gulistān*]; a rose can thus continue five or six days, but this rose-bower must bloom to all eternity!”²⁶ (71). As flowers and garden do not last, they do not avail, but *Gulistān*, a cultural product, is always fresh and that is why it is superior.

In the end, many of these ecological prejudices are reiterated in the dedication of *Gulistān* to Sa’d. Sa’d was one of Salghurid atabegs who governed Shiraz and whom Sa’dī served. Sa’dī’s penname derives from the name of Sa’d.²⁷ He is called “the asylum of the world, shadow of omnipotence, ray of gracious providence, treasury of the age, . . . fortified from above”²⁸ (71-72) which manifest anthropocentrism. He is the “monarch of the sea and land”²⁹ and this underlines the sovereignty of human beings over nature and other species. Moreover, monarchy and sovereignty, which are among the major forming tenets of civilization, could be inferred from these descriptions. This is a clear indication of the superiority of culture over nature. “[R]efuge of the faith”³⁰ and “asylum of the indigent”³¹ (72) also resembles pastoral descriptions.³²

Conclusion:

Therefore, the “Introduction” to *Gulistān*’s attitude toward nature has certain similarities with those of cornucopia thesis and pastoral literary tradition, and it features anthropocentrism and androcentrism as the result of three binary

²⁶ به چه کار آیدت ز گل طبیعی / از گلستان من بپر ورقی
گل همین پنج روز و شش باشد / وین گلستان همیشه خوش باشد

²⁷ For the controversy over the exact attribution of this appellation see Losensky; Katouzian 12-13.

²⁸ شاه جهان پناه، سایه کردگار و پرتو لطف پروردگار، نذر زمان . . . المؤید من السماء

²⁹ سلطان البر و البحر

³⁰ كهف امان

³¹ كهف الفقراء

³² “Kahf,” the Arabic word for cave, actually appears in the original Persian text. It is translated into refuge and asylum by Ross.

oppositions. The ecological concepts underlining "Introduction" to *Gulistān* are shaped by its contemporary ecological discourse that belongs to the past, yet even today people hardly react to these ecological attitudes nor are they consciously aware of them. If this ecological discourse does not strike us today, it means that our contemporary ecological understanding and attitudes have not drastically changed. One might conclude, therefore, that contemporary Persian episteme presupposes a somehow similar ecological discourse.

Sa'di's *Gulistān* has always been revered as an iconic text in Persian literary heritage. Despite the bulk of the scholarship it has attracted, many of its various rich aspects have been ignored. The explication of ecological conceptualizations during history, to which many texts like *Gulistān* contribute, can explain the root of contemporary ecological attitudes and suggest revisionary solutions for adopting a more responsible and sustainable approach to nature and environment.

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