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Wonder, Self-Awareness and the Symbolism of Light in the Poetry of Naim Frashëri and Hafez Shirazi *¹

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Abstract

Wonder is the first step towards the seeking of Truth. As in Philosophy, it also plays an essential role in mysticism; in this case, in Islamic Mysticism (*Sufism*). Wonder in Sufism is deeply connected with the beauty of Creation which is in itself the beauty of the Creator. One of the ways to express this sense of Wonder aesthetically and metaphysically is undoubtedly through poetry. Many Sufi Masters, *tariqas*, mystics and poets have used poetry to express their sense of wonder and to describe their mystical experiences or their Self-Awareness of Divine Love. The scope of this paper is to emphasize and treat the element of wonder as a ladder that climbs you up to this Self-Awareness and to explain the symbolism of Light and its role in the poetry of the Albanian National Poet, Naim Frashëri and the National Poet of Iran, Hafez Shirazi. This paper is divided into three sections. A brief introduction will describe how Bektaşism was created and spread and how Hafiz together with the Persian language and Literature were acquired from Naim and other Albanian Intellectuals under the Ottoman Empire. The first part gives a general account of the sense of wonder in the poetry of both respective poets. The second deals with how this sense of wonder has brought both poets into Divine Self-Awareness, illustrating it with some examples from their poetry and the last section is focused on the symbolism of Light and the different ways that it is used in the poetry of Naim Frashëri and Hafez Shirazi, accompanied with some concluding remarks.

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1. Introduction

There are many common points that connect Persian classic literature with Albanian literature of the Renaissance and “Lisan al Ghayb” (Hafez) with “The Nightingale of Albanian Language” (Naim) albeit approximately 5 Centuries that divide the two poets. Bektaşism, a Sufi Order which has Naim as his most representative poet in Albania, traces its origin in Khorasan of Iran, in the figure of a charismatic leader as Hajji Baktāsh Wālī. Initially, this sect was influenced by the ideas of Qalandarī ascetic dervishes and later by Hurūfism. It was spread *en masse* in Anatolian Peninsula and Balkan Region through his disciples. Annemarie Schimmel, a world-recognized scholar of Islamic Mysticism, also adds that ‘from the fifteenth century on, Bektaşî leaders (*bābā*) lived close to the Janissary barracks to give spiritual guidance to the soldiers.’¹ They were mainly Albanian Janissaries as followers of these Spiritual leaders who brought Bektaşism into Albania.

Secondly, as Reynold A. Nicholson intelligently observes, the Ottoman Divan is an imitation of the Persian Divan and even Sultan Suleiman-The Magnificent (1494–1566) composed poetries imitating Hafez and others.² The Ottoman Sultans stimulated and promoted learning of the Persian language and literature in their court.³ During 16th Century, The Divan of Hafiz was commented on in Ottoman Turkish by three great commentators: Muşliḥ al-Dīn Surūrī, Şem'ullah Şem'i and Ahmed Sudi.⁴ Alongside the languages of the Ottoman Administration as Turkish and Arabic, it was a “*conditio sine qua non*” for the learned and cultured men to know Persian. There were three ways of learning and acquiring this high language and culture; 1) Through Private Teachers, 2) Through Religious Schools (Mekteps and Madrasas) and 3) Through the Sufi Orders (In the Albanian case, the Bektaşîs were the main). ‘Up until the early 20th century, the study of the Persian language was compulsory in

all Turkish schools, and most of the high dignitaries of the Ottoman Court used to recite Persian verses of Hafiz and Sa'adi and other great poets of Iran and considered it as a sign of cultural refinement.'⁵

Naim, like many other prominent Albanian intellectuals under the Ottoman Empire, had mastered this language⁶ and quite surprisingly not only his first poetic work called "*Tekharryulāt*"(1884) is written in Persian (under the influence of Rumi, Sa'adi, Hafez, Attar, Sanai, etc) but also his principal work as a linguist was in Persian; "*Kavâid-i farisiyye dar tarz-i nevîn*" (Rules of the Persian Language according to the New Method-1871), a year before "*Dastur-e Soḡan*"(1872) of Mirza Habib Esfahani, which makes it practically the First Modern Grammar of the Persian language. Naim and Hafez, despite the fact that they are "*rends*" in their own ways and do not strictly follow Sufi Doctrines, have many Sufi terms in their poetry, and their mystical way of thinking makes us wonder.

2. Wonder

A profound intellectual of the 20th Century once wrote: 'Awareness of the Divine begins with Wonder.'⁷ In fact, wonder is not only the root of faith and religion but also of Western and Eastern Mysticism too. In Sufism it also plays a crucial role. Wonder in Sufism, is deeply connected with the Beauty of Creation, which is in itself the Beauty of the Creator and His Greatness. We are encircled by this Beauty and Harmony, which according, to Sufi Doctrines, is God Himself. Following Ibn Arabi Pantheistic creed "There is nothing but God," Naim, for example, in his "*Bektaşî Notebook*," states that 'for Bektaşism the whole Cosmos is God Himself'⁸ and that:

'Everything we see in this vast universe,
Are Him and the Beauty of His face '⁹

“When Beauty (*Jamal*) manifests to us here – and Beauty is the welcoming openness of the Truth (*Haqq*) towards us, while Majesty (*Jalal*) is its unattainable exaltation over us – then His expansiveness in His Beauty is countered by our state of wonder and awe.”¹⁰ Hafez also expresses with exaltation his wonder regarding the Beauty of Creation in one of his ghazals:

‘Arise! Let’s offer our lives to the pen of that painter,
Who conjured all these wonderful images within the compass of the circle.’¹¹

The wonder of both poets is directed towards small and great created things, because manifestations are many, but the Essence is ONE (*wahdat al-wujud*);¹² from a little flower into a valley to the endless night sky blossomed with stars, from a dance of a butterfly to the celestial spheres. Naim, as Sa’adi Shirazi in his Divan, looks for the greatness of God in small things:

‘And a flower when you see,
Or a leaf under the sun
The wise, in these things, will see
The face of the Real One!’¹³

Hafez, from the other side, ‘ghazals of him as Hamid Dabashi emphasizes, also exudes a powerful philosophical resonance’¹⁴, speaks about the time to stand still, to consider everything and his awareness for the Truth: (I am using here the translation of the British Orientalist, Arthur John Arberry)

‘What is the truth shall light me to heaven's strait thoroughfare?
Whither, O heart, thou hastest? Stop now and be aware!’¹⁵

3. Self-Awareness

In their wonder, both poets reach self-awareness that they are part of the Divine, that God is in them and they are in God, and everything in this universe is connected; that God is Love, they are created for the sake of Love, that Human Beings are the highest manifestation of this Love, that the Throne of the Divine is in the man’s heart and so on. That means seeing things with an inner eye (*Ayn*

al basirah). Or to have what Sir Reynold Nicholson calls an “intuitive deduction” (*Instinbāt*).¹⁶ More the man knows his God, the deeper is his wonder after Him and *vice versa*. How mesmerizing is this ghazal of Hafez:

‘Truly the art of Love I know, it is the greatest that gives birth
The seventh sky, the seventh lawn, blossoms life in Earth’¹⁷

Or when in his complete self-awareness gives us another pearl:

‘The flaming torch of the sun
that rises in the eastern sky

is lit from the hidden fire inside my breast.’¹⁸

Naim, for example, expresses in a very synthesized way the famous “*Gnothi seauton*” (Know yourself) of Socrates and “*Men a’rafe nefsehu, fekad a’rafe rabbehu*” (Who knows Himself, knows His God) of the Prophet Muhammad (a.s.) when he says:

‘In man, you have the mirror of Divine
Who knows Himself knows ME fine.’¹⁹

Or the blessed “*Lisan al Ghayb*” Hafez with his self-conscious trumpeting:

‘Son of Paradise I am, but I have chosen the way of a traveler.’²⁰

Knowing the temporality of life on Earth, for Hafez and Naim, the world is not a place for mourning but a place to celebrate life and build happiness. In this sense, they are not like the Classical believers or ascetic mystics who expect this happiness in the afterlife. For both poets, the World is an unsolvable mystery. Especially, Hafez does not believe that we can understand or know its deepness through intellect and reason. In this ghazal, Hafez brilliantly describes his position:

‘Speak not of fate: ah! Change the theme,
And talk of odors, talk of wine,
Talk of the flowers that round us bloom:
Tis all a cloud, 'tis all a dream;

To love and joy thy thoughts confine,
Nor hope to pierce the sacred gloom.’²¹

A point that differentiates the two poets in their self-awareness is related to the nature of the soul. Naim believes that the soul is material. (We feel Baruch Spinoza behind the curtain. For Spinoza, no immortal soul or self persists beyond this life.) Quite the contrary, in Hafez, we have the ‘recognition that the “I” of every self-aware entity is a pure, immaterial light.’²² Even the verse that I have quoted above: ‘*Son of Paradise I am, but I have chosen the way of a traveler,*’ gives it in a meaningful way his inner enlightenment; He is a Traveling Light!

4. Symbolism of Light

Love, Knowledge and Light are essential terms and form the perfect triangle of Sufism. Many mystics and poets have used it to describe their emotions, spiritual experiences, mental states, etc. In the Persian Divan, starting with Sanā’ī, we have many of these examples.²³ In this section we will see how Naim and Hafez use the symbolism of light in their respective poetries. Given that the God in Quran is called “The Light of Lights” (*Nur-un’ ala Nur*) first use of it by both poets is as a manifestation of Beauty and Goodness. Naim speaks about the “Light of Goodness” which makes us Ethical Persons and Hafez is about “The Light of the Sun in Gulistān.” (When the Sun is God and the Gulistān- Earth) The second use of it is as the enlightenment of the heart. Naim expresses it in a very profound way:

‘Enlighten the heart, from the evils keep apart
Let the Friend pouring down his great light.’²⁴

But the ghazal of Hafez is much more beautiful when he describes this light transformation:

‘Flame of heart lit my soul and with faith co-employ,
Light comes from the deepness and transmutes the pain in joy.’²⁵

Forth, it is given as the enlightenment of the mind. Hafez is disinterested in this point because he believes you can’t grasp the world through reason and

intellect. Naim, quite contrary as a representative of the Albanian Renaissance and deeply influenced by the French Illuminist Ideas, speaks about the “Sun of Reason” and “Enlightenment of the Mind”:

‘Blessed be you, O happy day,
Rising from the West
You have enlightened it,
Why not, we-the rest?!
Light of Life,
Light of Truth,
Light of Reason,
Light of Joy-
Awake and enlighten us!’²⁶

A final example of this symbolism that I have traced in both poets’ poetry is Light as a spiritual guide, sacrifice and union with GOD. Both poets use it in their verses with this meaning. Naim, specifically in “*The Words of the Candle*” and Hafez in His Divan “*Book Sad I*” (I am referring to the translation of the Austrian Orientalist, Joseph Von Hammer-Purgstall) Let hear the voice of Hafez firstly:

‘Like the moth around the candle
Burnt inside from the desire
This love torture I can’t handle,
I will give myself to Fire!’²⁷

And Naim (I am referring to the translation of the Canadian Albanologist, Robert Elsie):

‘Here among you have I risen,
And aflame am I now blazing,
Just a bit of light to give you,
That I change your night to daytime,
I’ll combust, and I will wither,

Be consumed and be extinguished,
To give you brightness, vision,
That you notice one another,
For you will I fade and tarnish,
Of me, there will be no remnant,
I will burn, in tears lamenting,
My desire I cannot suffer.
Of the fire, I am not fearful,
I will never be extinguished
If I burn off my desire,
Try to shine as best I'm able.
When you see that I have vanished,
Do not think that I have perished,
I'm alive, among the living,
In the rays of truth, I'm standing.²⁸

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I described how Bektaşizm, a Sufi Tariqa that traces its origin in Khorasan of Iran, was spread in Albania and the way how Naim and many prominent Albanian intellectuals under the Ottoman Empire knew the Persian language and the Great Literature of Divan and were familiar with the poems of Hafez, Sa'adi, Rumi, Attar, etc.

Emphasizing the centrality of Wonder in Sufism, I also analyzed how the internal sense of wonder, essentially connected with the Beauty of Creation, is expressed in the poetry of Naim and Hafez and how this deep feeling brought them to Self-Awareness of the Divine.

This Self-Awareness, or *seeing the world with the eye of the heart*, as I explained and illustrated with examples from the poetry of both poets is unique not only for the fact it unveils before our eyes a Gnostic or a secret wisdom, allowed only for those which are initiated but also it is expressed in a simple way

and with a language that everybody can understand; The Language of the People. In this Self-Awareness, despite their similarities, Naim and Hafez, as I compared, have different viewpoints regarding the nature of the soul; Naim, following Spinoza, thinks that the soul is material, and Hafez, quite oppositely, that it is pure and immaterial light.

Light is one of the most significant symbols in Mysticism and a key term in Sufism. Examining the poetry of Naim and Hafez and selecting some illustrative examples from their *opera*, I demonstrated how the symbolism of light is used in their respective verses; 1) as the symbol of God and Beauty of Creation, 2) as a symbol of Goodness and Ethical Life, 3) as the enlightenment of the Heart, 4) as the enlightenment of the Mind (Naim), 5) as a symbol of the Soul, 6) and as a symbol of spiritual guidance, sacrifice and union with God. In conclusion, I want to add that Albanian and Persian Literature would be incomplete without Naim and Hafez's presence. The beauty of their verses is like *Zamzam Well*, the more we drink in them, and the more we want to drink again!

6. Endnotes

¹ Schimmel, Annemarie. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina, 1975, p.339.

² Some of the Ottoman Sultans were gifted in poetry. They used a "*nom de plume*" to hide their real identity. Sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror, for example, bore the name "Avni (the Helper), Sultan Osman II the name "Faris" (the Knight) while Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent named "Muhibbi" (The Beloved). **See:** Gibb, Elias, J. W. *Ottoman Poems: Translated into English Verse in the Original Forms, with Introduction, Biographical Notices, and Notes*. London: Trubner & Co, 1882, p.99.

³ The oldest anthology manuscripts of Persian poetry, including here the Divan of Hafez are respectively "**MS 1589**" of the Köprülü Library (1408) and "**MS 3945**" of the Hagia Sophia Library (1410), both of 15th Century.

⁴ The Ottoman Commentators mentioned above have commented not only “The Divan” of Hafiz but also other Persian Poets and their principal works as: “Bustan and Gulistān” of Sa’adi Shirazi, “Mantiku’t-Tayr” of Farīd ud-Dīn Attar, “Masnavi” of Rumi, etc.

⁵ “Persian Language in the Court of Ottomans”. Hamsayegan, 4 Nov. 2016. Online. Internet. 17.11.2022. Available: <https://hamsayegan.com/en/2016/11/04/persian-language-in-the-court-of-ottomans/>.

⁶ The earliest Albanian poet that we know who mastered perfectly the Persian language and even adopted many topics from Persian Classical Poetry in his Diwān is **Yahya Bey Dukagjini** (1488–1582). Other examples who brought treasures of Persian Literature into Albanian are **Hafez Ali Korça** who translated “*Rubāiyāt*” of Omar Khayyām from the original in 1930, **Vexhi Buharaja** who translated two great Persian masterpieces; “*Shāh-nāme*” of Ferdowsi and “*Gulistān and Būstān*” of Sa’adi Shirazi and **Shaykh Muharrem Mitrovica** who has translated some poems of Sanā’ī, Hafez, Aṭṭār and Rūmī and has written for the first time their literary biographies into Albanian, a topic of which I am recently working on it.

⁷ Heschel, Abraham J. *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*. New York: Harper & Row, 1955, p.46.

⁸ Frashëri, Naim. *Fletore e Bektashinnjet* (The Bektashi Notebook). Tirana: Amfioni & Zeti, 2000, p.11.

⁹ Frashëri, Fletore, 2000, p.33.

¹⁰ Ibn Arabi, “On Majesty and Beauty: The Kitāb Al-Jalāl Wa-l Jamāl of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi.” Trans. by Rabia Terri Harris, *Journal of the Muhyiddin ibn ‘Arabi Society* 8, (1989): 5-32. Online. Internet. 19.11.2022. Available: https://ibnarabisociety.org/wp-content/uploads/PDFs/Harris_On-majesty-and-beauty.pdf

¹¹ Bruijn de, Johannes T. P. *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Persian Poems*. Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997, p.79.

¹² God, according to Ibn Arabi is multiplied only through His attributes or modifications. Considered in Himself, He is the Real (al-Haqq). Considered in relation to His attributes as manifested in the multiplicity of possible entities, He is the Creation (al-Khalq). The two, however-the one and the many, the first and the last, the eternal and the temporal, the necessary and the contingent-are essentially one and the same reality. **See:** Fakhry, Majid. *A History of Islamic Philosophy*. 3rd Edition. New York: Columbia University, 2004, p. 259.

¹³ Frashëri, Naim. *Lulet e Verës* (The Flowers of the Summer). Sofia: Prosperity Publishing, 1913, p.53.

¹⁴ Dabashi, Hamid. *The World of Persian Literary Humanism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2012, p.30.

¹⁵ Arberry, Arthur J. *Hāfiz: Fifty Poems*. Texts and Translations, Collected, Introduced and Annotated by the Author. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1974, p.84.

¹⁶ Nicholson, Reynold A. *The Mystics of Islam*. London: G. Bell & Sons, 1914, p.23.

¹⁷ Shaplo, Dalan. Trans. *Hafiz: Mysticism in the Universe of Persian Classical Poetry*. Tirana: Albas, 2011, p.67.

¹⁸ Ghanoonparvar, Mohammad R. Trans. Shahrokh Meskoob: In the Alley of the Friend. On the Poetry of Hafez. New York: Syracuse University, 2018, p.1.

¹⁹ Buharaja, Vexhi. Trans. Naim Frashëri: Tekhayyulāt (Ëndërrime). Tirana: Naimi Publishing, 2012, p.71.

²⁰ Shaplo, Hafiz, 2011, p.92.

²¹ Arberry, Hafiz, 1974, p.85.

²² Pearson, Nancy. Trans. Henry Corbin: The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism. New York: Omega Publications, 1994, p.5.

²³ Sanāi, as Reynold Nicholson and Arthur J. Arberry point out is considered as the first great mystical poet of Persia. He was a prolific poet, composing very freely in the two classical forms of Qasida (ode) and Ghazal (lyric), as well as in Ruba'iyat (quatrains) and Mathnawi (rhyming couplets); it was in the fourth of these forms that he wrote his epic "Hadiqat al-haqiqah," which set up a model followed by later authors. See: Arthur J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of The Mystics of Islam*. London: Routledge, 2008, p.106. Regarding the use of symbolism of Light by Sanāi, here is a meaningful example, in his poetry "Naked in the Bee-House":

'The sun doesn't need an announcer.

The lamp you carry is your self-reliance.'

See: Barks, Coleman. Trans. *The Hands of Poetry: Five Mystic Poets of Persia* (Sanai, Attar, Rumi, Sa'adi and Hafiz). Companioned with Lectures by Inayat Khan. New York: Omega Publications, 1993, p.24.

²⁴ Buharaja, Ëndërrime, 2012, p.72.

²⁵ Shaplo, Hafiz, 2011, p.80.

²⁶ Frashëri, *Lulet e Verës*, 1913, pp.8-9.

²⁷ Mommsen, Katharina. *Goethe and Islam*. Skopje: Nun, 2015, p.230.

²⁸ Elsie, Robert. Trans. *Naim Frashëri: The Words of the Candle*. Online. Internet. 30.11.2022. Available: http://www.albanianliterature.net/authors/classical/frasheri/frasheri_poetry.html

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