



The Sun Shining in a Mirror: Poetic Knowing in ‘Irāqī’s *Lama‘āt*

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Abstract

This article argues that the form of a text matters as much as, if not more than, its content. Using Fakhr al-Din ‘Irāqī’s *Lama‘āt* (*Divine Flashes*) as a case study, this article explores the significance of the poetic form and the role of the reader/listener in interpreting and experiencing the poem. The article argues that a close analysis of ‘Irāqī’s work reveals a careful deployment of literary devices and rhetorical strategies to induce an affective experience in the reader, which facilitates a distinct form of “knowing.” I argue that by shifting our focus from what a poetic work says to what it does, we can glimpse hitherto unappreciated varieties and textures of Islamic philosophy, broadly construed. This approach allows us to glean not only the meaning of the text but also how it moves the reader, drawing upon the reader’s full range of senses, imagination, and intellect.

Keywords Sufism · *Lama‘āt* (*Divine Flashes*) · Affect · Metaphor · Imagery

The current special issue emphasizes that forms such as poetry and storytelling deserve significant consideration as vehicles for philosophical expression. While acknowledging that such forms were not the dominant mode of philosophical expression in Islam, it remains the case that they were “an indispensable component of the tradition’s complex and variegated development in the classical and post-classical contexts” (Ben Hammed & Sartell, 2024, p. 170). This issue, therefore, aims to give due recognition to such forms of philosophical thinking.

In this vein, the present article contributes to this initiative by focusing on *Lama‘āt* (*Divine Flashes*) by Fakhr al-Din ‘Irāqī (d. 688/1289). Scholars have long noted the influence of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240) and his systematizers, such as Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1274), on ‘Irāqī; yet, attending to ‘Irāqī’s work on its own terms—especially its

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formal features and their engagement with the reader—requires further exploration.¹ Because Islamic philosophy encompassed diverse forms, including a mode of philosophizing through poetry and poetic prose that was “living” in nature, insofar as it required the reader/listener as an active agent in meaning-making, it shaped how knowledge was experienced. Therefore, ‘Irāqī’s work must also be understood in terms of how its formal features shape the experience of receiving poetic speech. I use the term poetic speech instead of poetry because *Lama‘āt* (*Divine Flashes*) is a work interweaving poetry and prose, and is neither prose nor poetry in a strict sense. It is often characterized as rhymed prose (*nathr-i-musajjā*) or “prose that is like poetry” (Barati, 2008, p. 29). Therefore, I use the term “poetic speech” to denote speech that possesses features associated with poetry, such as rhyme (*qāfiyah*), rhythm, flow (*ravānī*), ambiguity (*ihām*), metaphor (*isti‘ārah*), and simile (*tashbīh*).

The article contends that for ‘Irāqī, form and the affective engagement it produces in the readers are not merely ornamental but integral to meaning. To this end, I first offer a brief overview of ‘Irāqī’s life and works, contextualizing his work within broader literary and philosophical trends. I then briefly sketch how Sufi writers such as Rūmī (d.1273), Aḥmad Ghazālī (d.1123/1126), and Ibn ‘Arabī (d.1240) viewed language and poetic form. Since the article argues that poetic form functions as a mode of knowing, it is important to situate ‘Irāqī within the broader intellectual and literary traditions from which he emerged. The aim is to show, however briefly, how these thinkers understood language as deeply limited in its capacity to convey meaning, and yet an intensely powerful—even “divine”—medium that shapes and relays meaning. With this sense of Sufi poetics and the significance of literary form in place, the article turns to a brief discussion on rhetoric (*‘ilm al-balāghah*) and how it conceives formal features such as metaphor (*isti‘ārah*), simile (*tashbīh*), and analogy (*tamthīl*) in order to lay out tools for a formal literary analysis of ‘Irāqī’s work. More specifically, the article will draw from Sirāj al-Dīn al-Sakkākī (d.1229) and Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī’s (d.1078) notion of metaphor (*isti‘ārah*) and simile (*tashbīh*) for analyzing ‘Irāqī’s *Lama‘āt*.² Overall, Sufi poetics illuminates the significance of poetic language, and *‘ilm al-balāghah* provides the technical vocabulary necessary to analyze formal features and demonstrate how literary form produces meaning.

‘Irāqī’s Life and Works

Fakhr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Hamadānī, known as ‘Irāqī (d. 688/1289), lived during the peak of the revival and flourishing of Islamic spirituality in the thirteenth century (Lapidus, 2013). ‘Irāqī was a contemporary of Rūmī (d.1273) and Sa’dī (d.1291/2), and is canonized as one of the finest poets of the Persianate canon. He is especially remembered for his role in synthesizing two divergent schools of thought, namely, the Persian literary school of love (*Mazhab-i-‘Ishq*) associated with Aḥmad Ghazālī

¹ For a detailed overview of how various scholars have studied ‘Irāqī, see, See Chittick and Wilson (1982); Zargar (2011); Miller (2016); Miller (2018); ‘Irāqī (1939); Cheema (1994); Ahuja (1948); Nafīsī and ‘Irāqī (1959); Mohtsham (n.d); ‘Irāqī & Nūrbakhsh (1974); Chittick, 1998; and Feuillebois (2017).

² On Jurjānī’s distinction between *tashbīh* and *tamthīl*, see Harb (2020, p. 139).

(d.1123/1126) and the philosophical Sufism of the Akbarian school associated with Ibn 'Arabī (d.1240). 'Irāqī takes Aḥmad Ghazālī's emphasis on love as tasting (*dhawq*), a direct and experiential mode of knowing, and Ibn 'Arabī's notion of being (*wujūd*) as the sole reality underlying the cosmos, and reconfigures both through the concept of love (*'ishq*). However, this is not merely a semantic substitution. Through *'ishq*, 'Irāqī demonstrates that love is not simply an abstract principle to be grasped discursively; rather, it permeates all dimensions of human life and material reality alike. The language of love, together with the use of metaphors and similes, renders the immediacy of love more palpable and affectively present to the reader.

Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī was born in Komijān, which is a district of Hamadān in Persia. 'Irāqī was highly educated in both theology and literary disciplines, possessing extensive knowledge of the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, Qur'ānic commentary (*tafsīr*), and Islamic theology (*kalām*). Additionally, 'Irāqī was well-versed in both Persian and Arabic literature (Hamadānī, 1996; Chittick & Wilson, 1982). At the age of eighteen, 'Irāqī fell in love with a *qalandar* (wandering dervish) ('Irāqī, 1939). He decided to join them and traveled with them to Multan (Miller, 2016). In Multan, he eventually entered the service of Bahā'al-Dīn Zakariyyā' Multānī (d.1262), who was the head of the Suhrawardiyya Sufi order. 'Irāqī stayed with Bahā'al-Dīn Zakariyyā' Multānī for twenty-five years (Chittick & Wilson, 1982).

A few years after Bahā'al-Dīn Zakariyyā' Multānī's death, 'Irāqī left for Konya in present-day Turkey. Konya was a rich center of Islamic thought and learning, with major Islamic philosophers and poets such as Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d.1274) and Rūmī. 'Irāqī began studying Ibn 'Arabī's works with Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, a key disciple and a major systematizer of his metaphysical teachings within the school of Akbarian Sufism, and was deeply moved and inspired by Ibn 'Arabī's works (Browne, 1956).

'Irāqī wrote prolifically, and works attributed to him include *Divine Flashes* (*Lama'āt*), a mixture of *masnavīs* and *ghazals* titled *The Song of Lovers* (*'Ushshāq-nāmāh*), also known as *Dah-namah*, and some *ghazals* and poetic quatrains (*rubā'iyāt*). His *dīvān* comprises approximately 4,500 double verses (*bayts*) (Chittick, 1998; Feuillebois, 2017). Approximately twenty *qaṣīdahs* (panegyrics) are dedicated to spiritual matters and praise of the Prophet and his spiritual guide, Bahā'al-Dīn Zakariyyā' Multānī (Chittick, 1998; Feuillebois, 2017).

'Irāqī penned *Lama'āt* during a period in which Persian ornate prose (*nathr-i fannī*) had reached its peak. One of the most distinctive features of thirteenth-century Persian prose is the interweaving of prose with poetry, and the use of rhymed prose that evokes rhythm and rhyme without being poetry per se (Barati, 2008, p. 30). *Lama'āt* is composed in rhymed prose (*nathr-i-musajjā*) and highly ornate prose (*nathr-i fannī*). Due to this, it is often referred to as "prose that is like poetry" (Barati, 2008, p. 29). Ali Gheissari (2021) points out that it is hard to categorize a text like *Lama'āt* as it does not fit neatly into conventional categories of prose or poetry, as it is neither poetry nor prose in a strict sense.

Broadly, *Lama'āt* belongs to the same genre as Aḥmad al-Ghazālī's (d.1126) *Savānīh*, 'Ayn al-Qudāt's (d.1131) *Tamhīdāt*, Sam'ānī's (d.1140) *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*, and Maybudī's (d.1524) *Kashf al-Asrār* (Lumbard, 2016). The mixing of poetry with prose is similar to Aḥmad Ghazālī's *Savānīh* and Sa'dī's *Gulistān*; however, in terms

of intellectual thought and the organization of content, it mirrors Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (Barati, 2008, p. 34). ‘Irāqī penned the *Lama‘āt*, inspired by Qūnawī’s lectures on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ* and after its completion brought the text to Qūnawī. Upon reading the text, Qūnawī is said to have exclaimed to ‘Irāqī, “You have published the secret of men’s words. Now the *Lama‘āt* is really the pith of the *Fuṣūṣ*” (Arberry, 2016, pp. 265–266).

‘Irāqī’s *Lama‘āt* was so influential that it inspired love poetry and commentaries in the later Sufi tradition. Of the various commentaries on ‘Irāqī’s *Lama‘āt*, Jāmī’s *Ashī‘āt al-Lama‘āt* (*Gleams of the Flashes*) became the most famous (Rypka, 1968, p. 602). Jāmī’s commentary on the *Lama‘āt* is still used as an introductory text for the study of the science of ‘*irfān* (recognition) in Iran (Lumbard, 2016, p. 7).

Furthermore, *Lama‘āt*’s connection to Aḥmad Ghazālī’s *Savāniḥ* (*Inspirations*) can be seen in the introduction to the *Lama‘āt*, where ‘Irāqī states that he composed it in the style and tradition (*sunan*) of Aḥmad Ghazālī’s *Savāniḥ* (Chittick & Wilson, 1982, p. 45). While both texts deal with the theme of love, *Lama‘āt* is distinctive in articulating love (‘*ishq*) as Being.

‘Irāqī argues that the lover and the beloved are both derived from Love. Love existed by itself, and then it created the cosmos, where each thing is either a lover or a beloved. The lover and the beloved are mirrors through which Love appears in a different form at each moment. Love discloses Its own beauty to itself through the mirrors of the lover and the beloved. While the lover and the beloved appear as a duality, they are in fact a unity, since it is only Love viewing itself through the forms of the lover and the beloved (Chittick & Wilson, 1982).

‘Irāqī deploys multiple metaphors, such as those of the sun, the ocean, and the beautician, to denote this. Through these metaphors, he makes abstract concepts such as Being, existence, non-existence, immutable entities, and attributes legible. Each metaphor renders an abstract concept intelligible through a concrete, material reality rather than through another abstraction (Bakhtiyari-Nasab & Mahmoudi, 2021, p. 94). In doing so, they allow the reader to imagine these concepts as palpable, immediate, and existential realities.

Language, Form, and Poetic Knowing

Before we turn to a formal analysis of the text, it is important to underscore Sufi approaches to speech, language, and form in order to understand both the significance and pitfalls of attending to literary form. The critique of language as inherently limited can be commonly found in Sufi writings. The famous Sufi poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d.1273) writes, “Speech is like a hopper on the mill of meaning/the mill turns by water, not by regulating the hopper” (Lewis, 2008, p.259). A hopper is a funnel-shaped container that stores and feeds raw material, usually grain, into grinding machinery. By likening speech to a hopper, Rūmī highlights how speech merely channels meaning, but does not generate it. The grain is not ground because of the hopper itself but because of the force of water beneath the mill. Just as the hopper only regulates the flow but does not grind the grain, speech is merely a vessel through which meaning flows, rather than being a source of meaning. By likening water to

meaning, Rūmī underscores how meaning precedes speech and cannot be reduced to it. Yet meaning also powers and moves through speech, allowing speech to function as a vessel that contains and conveys meaning. For Sufi writers, water could point to inner reality (*haqiqah*) behind words or meaning (*ma'na*) itself.

To highlight the fact that Divine reality cannot be encapsulated by language, Rūmī writes: “Were I to praise Love in a hundred thousand languages/Love’s beauty far surpasses all such stammerings” (Lewis, 2008, p.61). Rūmī maintained that poetry was the most “maligned of professions” during his time and that “composing poetry was as disgusting to him as plunging one’s hands into the guts of an animal” (Lewis, 2008, p.140). He likens words and language to a veil that conceals Love’s beauty, rather than disclosing it (Arberry, 2000, p.352).

One might wonder: Why do Sufis insist that language is incapable of describing the Real, and yet use the very medium of language to do so? For example, despite Rūmī’s emphasis on the impotence of language, he produced over 60,000 lines of verse, equalling 120,000 lines of verse in English (Lewis, 2008, p.236).

To underscore both the limits and centrality of poetic speech, Aḥmad Ghazālī (d.1123/26) begins his highly poetic prose text about love, titled *Savānīḥ al-‘ushshāq* (*Inspirations From the World of Pure Spirits*), by writing:

“Here follow my words consisting of a few chapters about the (mystical) ideas (*ma'nā*) of love (*ishq*), though, in fact, love cannot be expressed in words nor contained in sentences; for the ideas of love are like virgins and the hand of words cannot reach the edge of the curtain of those virgins. Even though our task here is to marry the virgin ideas to the men of words in the private chambers of speech, yet outward expressions (*ibarat*) in this discourse cannot but be allusions to different ideas. Moreover, this indefiniteness (of words) exists only for those who have no “immediate tasting” (*dhawq*). From this idea originates two roots: the allusive meaning (*isharat*) of an outward expression (*ibarat*) and the outward expression of an allusive meaning. However, in the innermost heart of words is concealed the sharp edges of a sword, but they can be perceived only by inner vision (*basirat*).” (Ghazālī, 2014, p.15)

Aḥmad Ghazālī highlights that Divine love cannot be expressed through words, and words can only be signs and allusions that point to a reality greater than what language can encompass. However, these words are only indefinite to those who do not possess immediate tasting (*dhawq*). People who possess inner vision (*basīrat*) can pierce through the veil of language and glimpse into what it points towards. Therefore, while neither the reality nor the experience of love can be fully expressed through language, language can nevertheless signal what lies beyond it, allowing people of inner vision to perceive what it points toward. As the subsequent sections argue, it is poetic speech with its semantic richness, imagery, and formal properties that is best suited to perform this paradoxical function.

The question then remains: how can language be inadequate for expressing Divine reality and yet indispensable for communicating it? For Sufi thinkers, the limitations of language do not render it useless. Rather, language functions as a sign, a veil, and a mode

of disclosure that points beyond itself. Understanding this tension is crucial for appreciating why poetic speech occupies such a privileged position within the Sufi tradition.

Even though Rūmī posits that the veil of language conceals the beloved's face, we must note that a veil also offers a glimpse—however limited—of the Beloved's beauty (Lewis, 2008, p.7). A veil, like a niche, performs the dual function of concealing and revealing simultaneously. In one sense, the sun of God's reality is too resplendent to be seen by the naked eye, and the veil of language allows one to catch a glimpse of His beauty without being annihilated by it.

A related position, one that more explicitly elevates poetic speech as a medium of divine disclosure, can be found in Amīr Khusraw (d.1325). Khusraw contends that the world came into being through God's speech (*kun*), and therefore everything in the cosmos is essentially God's speech. Drawing from the Qur'ān (31:27), Khusraw writes that God is the ultimate scribe, writing each moment, such that each leaf, tree, branch, and human being is in fact God's writing (Khusrau Dehlavī, 1876, p.4). Similarly, 'Irāqī maintains speech to have a divine source as it is a self-disclosure (*tajallī*) of the Divine. He writes, "at each breath, with each tongue, it [Love] voices its secret to its hearing. At each instant, with each ear, it hears its own words from its tongue" ('Irāqī, 1984, pp. 1–2). With Love here referring to Divine Reality, 'Irāqī suggests that speech which appears to originate from human tongues ultimately arises from the Divine. Human speech thus becomes a medium through which the Divine speaks and hears Himself: it is the Divine who speaks through human tongues and, through human ears, listens to His own speech. Through words that appear to come from other people's tongues, it is, in fact, the Divine speaking to Himself.

If everything in the cosmos is God's speech and self-disclosure, are some modes of speech better mediums for disclosing the Divine? Khusraw posits that while all speech ultimately belongs to God, poetry represents a particularly perfected form of Divine speech insofar as it mirrors Qur'ānic discourse. Like Qur'ānic speech, poetry employs meter, figurative language, ambiguity (*ihām*), imagination (*khayāl*), and fluidity (*ravānī*) in the communication of wisdom. These poetic features preserve semantic multiplicity, allowing several—even seemingly contradictory—meanings to coexist within a single utterance. Poetry thereby resists interpretive closure, continually generating new meanings and enabling wisdom to reach hearts across different times, places, and circumstances. Additionally, he argues that while all human beings are God's speech, realized human beings (i.e., mystics) are like poetry: balanced and harmonious. Therefore, Khusraw renders poetry a superior medium for conveying meaning, likening poetry to a well through which infinite meanings may arise (Dihlavī & Nāgorī, 1914, p. 18).

Form as a Mode of Disclosure

If poetic speech occupies a privileged position among forms of language, we must ask why this is so. Is poetic speech merely a vessel, a container, a hopper, through which meaning flows? Is it an adornment? Or does it play an important role in meaning-making? For Ibn 'Arabī and 'Irāqī, forms are not merely vessels, but shape the kind of meaning that can be contained by that vessel, therefore being *central* to meaning. Even if language is not the *source* of meaning, attending to linguistic form is significant since it determines the kind of meaning that form can carry and disclose.

This idea can be found in the very title of Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, which translates to Ringstones of Wisdom. The “ringstone” (*ḥikmah*, or wisdom) is shaped by its bezel or setting (*fuṣṣ*), denoting the idea that the form of the ring-holder determines the shape of the jewel it contains. According to Ibn 'Arabī, this same relationship extends to the relationship between the human and the Divine. He argues that the specific form and disposition of each human being determine how God discloses Himself to them (Ibn al-'Arabī, 2004, p. 234). In other words, Divine self-disclosure or theophany (*tajallī*) is neither uniform nor static, but is contingent on the “shape” of the vessel/soul receiving it.

According to these thinkers, the ultimate goal remains the Divine, rather than bondage to the vessel itself. Yet, poetic speech is significant as it serves as a medium of Divine self-disclosure. The Divine is the ultimate source of speech, through whose “*kun*” the world came into Being. Thus, the formal features of poetic speech are not merely ornamental or incidental. Rather, formal features shape the reader's experience and the meaning of a text. To overlook form, according to Ibn 'Arabī, would be akin to overlooking the very mode through which the Divine, and by extension, poetic speech discloses meaning. For this reason, it is important to attend not only to meaning, but also to the form of poetic speech itself: the vessel that contains and conveys meaning.

Poetic Speech and Poetic Knowing

However, we must ask: what is it about poetic speech that makes it such a suitable medium for conveying Divine reality and mystical experience? Zargar writes, the “mystical experience is often worded in the meta-language of poetic metaphor, that is, words that do not attempt to define but rather approximate mystical experience through drawing parallels (often relating such experiences to what is commonly accepted as overwhelming, infinite, or intoxicating). This is because God's beauty is indescribable, and the metaphor is most suited to describe it” (Zargar, 2011, p. 167).

Sells further demonstrates how the “mystical language of unsaying” deploys inherent paradoxes that exhibit the limitations of propositions. It results in “meaning events”, which he defines as semantic occurrences where sense, predication, and reference are fused into a single act. The dissolution of subject and object mirrors the mystical experience where the distinction between a subject and an object dissolves (Sells, 1994, pp. 9–10). Therefore, poetic language is formally suited to convey mystical experience because it carries referential multivalence, sustains paradox without requiring resolution, and demands that the reader participate in an event rather than receive content.

Furthermore, poetic speech acts as an isthmus (*barzakh*) that connects the Unseen World with the Seen world. *Barzakh* refers to an intermediate realm between the spiritual and the corporeal, with the term being synonymous with the world of imagination (*khayāl*) or images (*mithāl*). *Barzakh* is an isthmus/imaginal realm, where spirits become corporealized, and corporeal forms become spiritualized (Chittick & Wilson, 1982, p. 13). Poetic speech employs imagination (*khayāl*), which is an *isthmus* as it constitutes an intermediary realm between the macrocosm (the cosmos) and the microcosm (the human being), an isthmus between the world of spirit and the sensory world. Poetic speech connects these two worlds. As Zargar notes, the imaginal realm “allows form to envelop spirit and allows meaning to be found in material or sensory things” (Zargar, 2011, p. 18).

To understand why poetic speech functions as a *barzakh*, it is necessary to briefly consider Ibn ‘Arabī’s understanding of the imaginal realm itself. According to Ibn ‘Arabī, the imaginal realm is more real than the corporeal realm because it is closer to the world of light, yet it is less real than the luminous realm of angels. Whatever lies within this domain is ambiguous and characterized by a both/and quality. Imaginal existents are both/and in the sense that they are neither purely dark nor purely luminous, but are understood in relation to what lies above and below them. Chittick writes, “imaginal things are subtle in relation to the corporeal world but dense in relation to the spiritual world.” For example, angels are luminous in comparison to human beings, yet dark in comparison to the light of God (Chittick, 1989, pp. 14–16). More broadly, anything that functions as a *barzakh* possesses this both/and quality. Poetic speech, through its use of symbolic language, is likewise a *barzakh*, for it is both a veil that conceals God’s beauty and a prism through which subtle realities may be unveiled.

According to Ibn ‘Arabī, “all things in the world are a combination of meaning and form” (Ibn al-‘Arabī, 2004, p. 69). Here, meaning corresponds to the essence of a thing. Different forms, then, express the same meaning with varying degrees of directness. Additionally, the nature of disclosure depends on the form through which it is encountered. In dreams, for example, the imaginal and intellectual realms, more fluid than the sensory world, allow meaning to appear in rapidly changing and variegated forms (Ibn al-‘Arabī, 2004, p. 230). Moreover, a single symbol can hold multiple simultaneous meanings. A tree, for instance, can be a tree, or it can stand in for one’s father, one’s growth, and so forth. In dreams, all of these meanings can appear to be true simultaneously without rupturing our sense of reality. Poetic speech mirrors the imaginal realm in that it can hold multiple meanings simultaneously, all of which may be true.

‘Irāqī maintains that meaning is revealed each moment through a different form, and God’s self-disclosure is never repeated. ‘Irāqī states in the Fifth Flash that the Divine discloses Himself in a different form each moment, becoming a new mirror each moment (‘Irāqī, 1984, p. 7). “Meaning transcends all forms, linguistic and otherwise, but all of these forms are self-disclosures (*tajalliyāt*) or delimitations (*taqayyudāt*) of this Divine meaning” (Ogunnaike, 2025, p. 19). Out of these forms, poetic speech mirrors the multiplicity of delimited forms scattered across the cosmos and their interrelatedness in the best manner. For example, *lālah* could at once refer to a tulip, a wild flower, a lover, or the lip of a mistress. Through its semantic richness and ambiguity, poetic speech mirrors the ontological makeup of the cosmos (Qureshi 2025a, b). A word or phrase can possess multiple meanings, each corresponding not only to various referents in the material realm, but also to realities in the imaginal and spiritual realms of the cosmos. In this sense, poetic speech does not merely describe reality but mirrors its very structure. Just as a single form in the cosmos can disclose multiple layers of meaning simultaneously, a poetic image can gather multiple levels of reality within a single expression. Poetic speech thus becomes a privileged medium for perceiving the interconnectedness of existence and the many forms through which Divine meaning is disclosed. In this sense, poetic speech is not merely a vehicle for communicating knowledge; it is

itself a mode of knowing. The following section introduces the technical vocabulary of *'ilm al-balāghah*, particularly the concepts of simile (*tashbīh*), metaphor (*isti'ārah*), and analogy (*tamthīl*), which provide the tools through which this claim can be demonstrated through close reading.

Rhetoric and Literary Form

According to the principles of rhetoric (*'ilm al-balāghah*), every metaphor is ultimately grounded in a simile, though a simile becomes a metaphor when certain conditions are met. A simile (*tashbīh*) occurs when two things are compared on the basis of a shared quality or attribute. At the same time, the two things being compared must differ in other respects for the comparison to be meaningful.³ For example, if 'Alī is compared to a lion, the two share a quality such as courage, while remaining distinct in all other respects. The more distinct the two things being compared are, the more eloquent the comparison becomes (Geraghty 2013a, b, p. 15). Furthermore, the shared quality should be common and widely recognized among people (al-Sakkākī, 1987, pp. 387–388).

A simile consists of the following parts:

- a) *al-mushabbah*: the thing being compared; the subject.
- b) *al-mushabbah bih*: the thing to which the subject is compared.
- c) *ḥarf/adāt-i tashbīh*: the word or expression that signals comparison (for example, “like” or “as”).
- d) *wajh al-shabah*: the shared quality that serves as the basis of comparison.⁴

A simile such as “My son is beautiful like the moon” may be analyzed as follows. “My son” would be the *al-mushabbah*, the moon would be the *al-mushabbah bih*, the word “like” would be the *ḥarf-i tashbīh*, and the reason for comparison would be the beauty found in both the moon and the son. We must note that for a comparison to be effective, the object of comparison (*al-mushabbah bih*) should possess the quality in question to a greater degree and should already be conventionally associated with that quality. Thus, the moon must be regarded as especially beautiful for the comparison to succeed. A comparison such as “the moon is like my son,” by contrast, would not be regarded as an excellent simile according to pre-modern Persian literary criticism, because the object to which the subject is compared should possess a greater degree of beauty, intensity, or excellence.

³ For detailed treatments of different types of metaphors, see al-Sakkākī (1987, pp. 379–385) and al-Jurjānī (1954, pp. 44, 302–306).

⁴ For an in-depth treatment of metaphors and their connection to similes, see al-Sakkākī (1987, pp. 379–385), Harb (2020, p. 179), and Najmī Rampūrī (2006, vol. 2).

We may now turn to the formation of metaphor (*isti 'ārah*). A metaphor is a simile in which the *al-mushabbah* is omitted and only the *al-mushabbah bih* remains. When the *al-mushabbah* is dropped, and only the *al-mushabbah bih* is present, the simile becomes an *isti 'ārah*. Thus, a simile becomes a metaphor when one refers to a son simply as “my moon,” omitting the explicit comparison found in the statement “my son is beautiful like the moon.” In this manner, the moon “lends” its qualities to the son. A metaphor (*isti 'ārah*), therefore, functions through borrowing (*isti 'ārah*) and is grounded in an underlying simile (*tashbīh*) between *al-musta'ār lahu* (the borrower) and *al-musta'ār minhu* (the lender). The quality shared between them is termed *al-musta'ār* (the borrowed quality).

al-musta'ār lahu (the borrower): the entity that receives the borrowed quality.
al-musta'ār minhu (the lender): the entity from which the quality is borrowed.
al-musta'ār: the borrowed quality itself.

While *isti 'ārah* is grounded in a relationship between two entities, al-Jurjānī also identifies more complex forms of comparison that operate at the level of situations, relations, and broader patterns of meaning. For al-Jurjānī, analogy (*tamthīl*) is a more complex form of *tashbīh* because it requires deeper reflection and contemplation. Rather than relying on a readily apparent similarity between objects, prior to *tamthīl* establishes affinity between situations, relations, or broader configurations of meaning. Furthermore, *tamthīl* is intellectual (*'aqlī*) in nature, as it requires the deduction of the relationships being compared.⁵ The reader must therefore discern a hidden correspondence between seemingly disparate domains of reality (Geraghty 2013a, b). The following close readings demonstrate how these formal devices function not merely as ornaments of style but as the very means by which 'Irāqī produces the reader's experience of poetic knowing.

The Poetics of Musk and Clove

The preceding sections argued that poetic speech functions as a mode of knowing because its formal features engage the reader in an active process of interpretation and discovery. The following examples demonstrate how 'Irāqī deploys literary devices such as simile, metaphor, and analogy (*tamthīl*) to produce this experience. Rather than merely conveying metaphysical ideas discursively, 'Irāqī invites readers to arrive at these insights through imaginative participation in the poetic world of the text.

'Irāqī employs a “show rather than tell” approach, inviting readers to experience his ideas through imagination, sense perception, and active participation in the poetic world of the text. Overall, he achieves this by using vivid images, personification, and a non-linear manner of illustration that often disrupts what he had established earlier

⁵ For al-Jurjānī, the term *aqlī* refers to abstract matters such as psychological states, instincts, ethical dispositions (e.g., knowledge, forbearance, etc.). It is contrasted with matters perceptible to the senses, and thus points to the realm of the abstract. However, as Harb stresses, beyond its abstract quality, it also requires intellectual reasoning and interpretation (*ta'awwul*) (Harb, 2020, pp. 165–166).

through paradoxes, rhetorical questions, or the sudden introduction of new themes. Through these, 'Irāqī invites the reader to discover and know through immersing themselves in the poetic world of the text.⁶ In the Eighteenth Flash, he writes:

every fragrance of musk and clove you smell,
 you smell from those hyacinth-like tresses.
 whenever you hear the nightingale's song to the rose,
 even though you hear it through the nightingale
 it was [in fact] the rose speaking ('Irāqī, 1984, p. 106)⁷

It can be parsed as follows:

al-mushabbah: every fragrance of musk and clove
al-mushabbah bih: every song that you hear from the nightingale
wajh al-shabah: the phenomenon of not recognizing the source

The passage may be analyzed as a form of *tamthīl* (analogy), which operates through an underlying structure of *tashbīh*. It is a *tamthīl* that likens a phenomenon to a phenomenon. The first two *miṣrā'*s (hemistichs) constitute the *mushabbah*, while the last two constitute the *mushabbah bih*. It can be parsed as follows: the phenomenon of perceiving fragrance in musk and clove is likened to the phenomenon of hearing a melody through a nightingale. Just as the song appears to originate from the nightingale, and musk and clove appear to be the source of their fragrance, these are merely outward manifestations and not the true source. The fragrance of musk and clove, in fact, derives from the beloved's tresses, just as the song, in fact, comes from the rose. This analogy compares the phenomenon of attributing an effect to its apparent source with the phenomenon of mistaking an intermediary for the true origin of what is perceived. The *wajh al-shabah* is the appearance of an effect through an intermediary such that the true source remains hidden behind its manifestation. More importantly, the analogy does not merely communicate this relationship conceptually; it requires the reader to uncover it through interpretation, thereby transforming understanding into an experiential process of discovery.

⁶ This mode of discovery allows a possibility of various meanings and interpretation, depending on the knowledge, experience and positionality of the reader. For example, one reader may imagine a certain mirror or not focus on the mirror at all. This generality invites a larger pool of readers as each can use the metaphor and apply it to their own existing knowledge gained through sense perception or cognition and make the text their own. For example, when 'Irāqī mentions how Love shifts love from one beloved to another, one reader may imagine how they once loved painting but now love music, and another may think of how they loved one friend but then the love shifted to another. The non-specificity or ambiguity laden in the text allows for multiple interpretations to be possible.

⁷ Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own and are based on the edition of the *Lama'āt* edited by M. Khwājavi.

When one encounters the fragrance of musk and clove, one mistakenly assumes that the fragrance belongs to the musk and clove themselves. This image highlights that when one encounters the Beloved's attributes in the lover, one likewise presumes that they belong to the lover, whereas they in fact originate from the Beloved. Thus, musk and clove receive their fragrance from the Beloved's tresses, just as the nightingale receives its song from the rose. Every melody and fragrance one encounters ultimately comes from the Beloved, since according to 'Irāqī, all manifestations are modes of Divine self-disclosure to Himself through the mirrors of creation.

This is a quatrain (*rubā'ī*) with *shanavī* (you hear/you smell) functioning as a *radīf* (refrain) across all four hemistichs, lending the poem a rhythmic tenor. The images evoked above are bewildering. How can one smell everything through the hyacinth tresses of the beloved? What does the smell of musk have to do with the beloved's tresses? When the nightingale calls to the rose, how can it be the voice of the rose and not the nightingale? The scent of musk and clove is compared to the smell of the hyacinth tresses in terms of its intoxication. They share a subtle and earthy touch and an intoxicating quality that draws one to them. In pre-modern Persian poetry, in addition to denoting fragrance and darkness, musk is often used to describe the earthy yet ethereal beauty of the beloved. The symbol appears across Arabic and Persian poetry, from Imru' al-Qays's (d.544) and Firdawsī's (d.1020) *Shāhnāmah* to Ḥafīz (d.1390) and beyond.⁸

The poem suggests that each fragrance one encounters, such as the scent of clove or musk, is ultimately the fragrance of the Beloved. Likewise, every melody ultimately originates from the Beloved (through the rose).⁹ The imagery evokes a lush garden scene in which a nightingale calls out to a rose, drawing upon a familiar poetic convention in Persian literature. Yet the significance of the poem lies not merely in the imagery it evokes, but in the way it disrupts the reader's expectations. This reading is not available through the content itself. Rather, it is the formal structure of the *tamthīl* and the interpretive labor of uncovering the analogical relationship that leads to this discovery.

The second couplet then subtly overturns the natural order of things in the world, thereby inducing shock in the reader. It begins with the ordinary order of things as one experiences them in both the phenomenal and poetic worlds, i.e., a nightingale cooing and calling out to a rose. Here, the metaphor of the nightingale refers to the longing lover in need of the beloved (*niyāz*), and the fully bloomed, pristine rose refers to the indifferent (*nāz*) beloved.¹⁰ However, 'Irāqī then subverts the metaphor by writing that when the nightingale calls out to the rose, it is the rose speaking through the nightingale. Put another way, when the lover longs and pleads to the Beloved, it is ultimately the Beloved yearning and speaking through the lover. Love begins with the Beloved rather than the lover. The Beloved is not merely a passive object that incites desire through beauty; rather, the Beloved actively loves and seeks

⁸ See Howard (1830, p. 31).

⁹ On the trope of the beloved's tresses in Persian poetry, see Sharma (2000, p. 90), Schimmel (1992), and Browne (1956).

¹⁰ For more on the trope of *nāz* o *niyāz* in Persian poetry, see de Bruijn (2014). For examples in Urdu poetry, see Kugle (2016).

Himself through the intermediary of the lover. This reflects the well-known *ḥadīth* that God loved to be known and therefore created the world. For 'Irāqī, love and knowledge are inseparable. The cosmos exists because the Divine desires to know and love Himself through the mirrors of creation. However, according to 'Irāqī, *tawḥīd* (Oneness of God) does not merely mean believing that there is one God; it means recognizing that no being truly exists apart from God. Everything else is a mere reflection and a shadow that depends on the object of light for its existence and is thus a borrowed existence.

This not only shows the deep interconnected dialectical relation between the lover and the beloved but also that what appears to be is not, in fact, the case. The lover yearns for and beseeches the beloved, but it is the beloved yearning for the lover or, in fact, “through” the lover for itself. Secondly, it shows that 'Irāqī overturns our normal existential and poetic conventions (nightingale calling to a rose) to shock and invite the reader to think deeper and reach a profound knowing.¹¹ Rather than merely writing “God loves Himself through other things,” which does not have the same rhetorical impact as the couplet above, 'Irāqī invites and engages the reader in an active process of “knowing” through evoking their imagination, sense data from the phenomenal world, poetic knowledge, and interpretive capacities.

As Harb maintains, the type of simile known as analogy (*tamthīl*) especially engages the reader in an interactive mode of knowing, as it requires interpretive labor to deduce the relationship between two aspects being compared (Harb, 2020, p. 166). This uncovering involves an unraveling of meaning, which produces “an experience of discovery in the listener” (Harb, 2020, p. 152). A *tamthīl* functions through the discovery of an affinity between seemingly dissimilar domains of reality, forcing the reader to encounter the cosmos with fresh eyes. Through this, “poetry stops the train of ordinary thought and ‘defamiliarizes’ the familiar, causing us to discover it afresh, to see it in a new light and savor the joy of discovery” (Ogunnaike, 2022). In this sense, poetic speech, through its use of metaphor, simile, and analogy, functions as a linguistic *barzakh*, bringing together seemingly distinct domains of reality without collapsing their differences. Just as a *barzakh* mediates between multiple levels of reality, poetic speech allows the reader to perceive hidden affinities between seemingly distinct phenomena and levels of reality. For 'Irāqī, this mode of perception is particularly significant because the cosmos is at once composed of countless forms and mirrors reflecting different faces of Love, while simultaneously being undergirded by a deeper unity in which Love is the sole ontological principle underlying all existence. The reader must therefore learn to perceive both dimensions simultaneously: the multiplicity of forms and the unity that underlies them. In this way, poetic speech does not simply describe a truth; it engages the reader in a process of discovery that transforms how they perceive reality. The form of the poem, therefore, becomes inseparable from the knowledge it conveys.

¹¹ Regarding the rose and nightingale trope in Persian poetry, see Diba (2001); Meisami (1987, p. 127); Schimmel (2014, p. 171); and de Bruijn (2014, p. 78). For the nightingale in English poetry, see Ford (1960) and Fruit (1897). See Arberry (1957, pp. 60–61), on Imru' al-Qays's description of the “fragrance of cloves” in the *Mu'allāqa*.

Love Appears in Many Forms

According to ‘Irāqī, although Love is formless, it desires to behold its own beauty and therefore appears in different forms through which it gazes upon itself. In its essence, Love is infinite and non-delimited. Yet in order to be known and witnessed, it manifests as lover and beloved, using both as mirrors through which it contemplates its own perfection. In the First Flash, ‘Irāqī writes:

“Lover” and “Beloved” are derived from “Love,” but Love upon Its mighty Throne is purified of all entification, in the sanctuary of Its Reality too holy to be touched by inwardness or outwardness. Thus, that It might manifest Its perfection (a perfection identical both with Its own Essence and Its own Attributes), It showed Itself to Itself in the looking-glass of “lover” and “Beloved.” It displayed Its own loveliness to Its own eyes, and became viewer and viewed; the names “lover” and “Beloved,” the attributes of seeker and Sought, then appeared. When Love revealed the Outward to the Inward, It made the lover’s fame; when It embellished the Inward with the Outward, It made known the Beloved’s name. (Chittick & Wilson, 1982, p. 73)

Love’s admiration for itself results in love manifesting perfection through names and letting itself be displayed through the mirrors of the lover and the beloved. The names lover and Beloved (‘*āshiqī*, *ma ‘shūqī*),¹² together with the attributes of seeker and sought (*tālibī*, *maṭlūbī*),¹³ spring forth from Love’s contemplation of its own beauty in the mirror of lover and Beloved. (Zargar, 2011, p. 32)

What does it mean for love to appear in different forms? The following example illustrates how ‘Irāqī renders the abstract process of Divine self-disclosure through concrete and sensory imagery. Rather than explaining these ideas through philosophical terminology alone, he invites readers to imagine them through mirrors, reflections, beauty, and human relationships. In doing so, the poem exemplifies the article’s central claim that poetic form functions as a mode of knowing. In the Fifth Flash, ‘Irāqī conveys the idea of *tahawwul*, or the continual transmutation of the cosmos, as follows:¹⁴ each moment, in each mirror, the Beloved shows a different face. Each moment, the beloved appears in a different form. Such that images change each moment, according to the differing mirrors, and the mirror [itself] changes, each moment, according to the changing states. (‘Irāqī, 1984, p. 62)

While ‘Ibn al-Arabi’s idea of *tahawwul* helps us understand the meaning of the passage,

¹² Regarding the meaning of *‘ishq*, see Wehr (2020, s.v. “‘ishq”); Lane (1885, s.v. “‘ishq”); and Steingass (1892, s.v. “‘ishq”).

¹³ On the various meanings of *ṭalab*, see Wehr (2020, s.v. “Ṭalab”); Lane (1885, s.v. “Ṭalab”); and Steingass (1892, s.v. “Ṭalab”).

¹⁴ See Chittick (1989).

'Irāqī's rendering of that idea through the metaphor of the mirror makes it vivid, palpable, and experiential. Continuing the metaphor of the mirror, 'Irāqī personifies the Beloved as a human being looking into a mirror. The reader may imagine a beautiful woman or a man, gracefully dressed and looking into the mirror. With this image, what follows is visually and intellectually provocative. The beloved can change shapes and forms in an instant. However, it is not only the shape that changes each moment, but the mirror as well. At one moment, there may be a wall-length mirror in which the Beloved may appear as a beautiful woman, and at other moments, the Beloved may appear as an ocean in a mirror that spreads endlessly on earth. Since the beloved is something the reader may have experienced in the world, unlike the abstract notion of *tahawwul*, the idea takes on a personal, existential, and practical dimension. The reader can imagine and relate to it, rather than merely grasping it conceptually. 'Irāqī develops this idea further in the Fifth Flash:

in each mirror, each moment.

a new face reveals His beauty.

sometimes He arises in the form of Adam,

sometimes He comes dressed as Eve. ('Irāqī, 1984, p. 62)

Drawing on the metaphor of the mirror and one face appearing in different mirrors, 'Irāqī continues to develop that love can sometimes take the robe (*kiswat*) of Eve and at other times the form (*ṣurāh*) of Adam. In one sense, the form does not matter. Love chooses these various forms and dresses itself in whatever form it pleases. Here, 'Irāqī's choice of words leads the reader to imagine love as a beloved who tries various dresses and sometimes comes in one dress and at other times in another. Here, *kiswat* is used to refer to the form of a human being.

It can be parsed as follows:

al-mushabbah: Entities ('*ayān*).

al-mushabbah bih: Mirror ('*āyinā*).

wajh al-shabah: emptiness, the inability to show itself, only able to reflect the other.

'*Āyān thābita* are non-existent, possible things that may or may not exist in the cosmos. They are immutable entities that never change. '*Āyān thābita* are the same as existent entities ('*ayān mawjūda*), with the only difference being the fact that while the latter exist in the cosmos, the former do not. They are possibilities that haven't been existentiated but remain in God's knowledge (Chittick, 1989, pp. 12, 84).

In this example, '*ayān* are *mushabbah*; the mirror is the *al-mushabbah bih*. *Wajh al-shabah* is emptiness and inability to reveal itself apart from what is reflected within it. Since *mushabbah bih* is not mentioned, it is not a simile but a metaphor. It is a simple *isti'ārah-i muta'liqa* (absolute metaphor) (Faruqi, 1989). What does it mean for mirror (*āina*) to be the metaphor for '*ayān*? It means that '*ayān* are like a mirror.

Just as a mirror is empty, unable to show itself, and can only reflect, similarly, ‘*ayān* only reflect the other. Just as a mirror may or may not reflect an image, similarly, the empty ‘*ayān thābita* may or may not carry “existence.”

In the same line, ‘Irāqī employs another metaphor. Beauty (*jamāl*) is a metaphor for manifestation (*tajallī*). *Tajallī* is *mushabbah*, *jamāl* is *mushabbah bih*, and *Wajh al-shabah* is irresistibility. *Tajallī* is irresistible just as beauty is irresistible. Just as beauty can be seen in a mirror, *tajallī* can be seen in ‘*ayān*. In each ‘*ayn*, a different *tajallī* can be seen at each moment. *Tajallī* here does not only refer to something sudden and fantastical, like Moses seeing a burning bush, but also to the seemingly mundane. Thus, one may get accustomed to *tajallīāt* and not notice them as such. Yet, according to ‘Irāqī, everything, from a rose to one’s flesh cut open in surgery, to someone walking in a garden is akin to a *tajallī* of God in a different mirror or a different form. ‘Irāqī extends this argument in the Sixth Flash, in which love is personified as a beautician who adorns forms to draw out love.

love the color-mixing beautician (*mashshāṭa*).

makes reality through the color of metaphor.

in order to ensnare Maḥmud’s heart;

it adorns Ayaz’s hair with a comb. (‘Irāqī, 1984, p.66)

Using visually evocative imagery, ‘Irāqī personifies Love as a beautician who dyes reality with metaphor. What does it mean for reality to be colored by metaphor (*majāz*)? We must note that through the use of mirror metaphor, the personification of love as a beautician, vivid imagery, and recognizable settings and backdrops through sense perception, ‘Irāqī delineates the complex process of God causing various forms in the world, changing them, and causing love in the world through forms. The word *mashshāṭa* can mean a comber, a waiting-maid, a bride-dresser, a hairdresser, or a beautician. A pre-modern reader/listener might envision a hairdresser or a bride-dresser at a bride’s house to adorn her before the wedding. A contemporary reader, by contrast, may imagine a beautician in a salon, adorning a client, in a room full of mirrors. However, in both cases, ‘Irāqī’s choice of deploying everyday examples to denote complex philosophical ideas, as opposed to using abstract philosophical terms such as non-delimited Being, ‘*ayn thābita*, or *wujūd*, allows the reader to envision those ideas concretely.

His metaphors evoke a sensory response and cause an immediate knowing by distilling abstract ideas into discernible, concrete, and often material things. For example, by employing the metaphor of the mirror, which a reader/listener knows through experience and sense perception, he lifts the idea to denote multiple things and their relations. Through this, he concretizes the abstract and then, using that knowledge, lifts it to something higher. The metaphor of the mirror first makes the reader imagine a mirror and then takes that knowledge to make them imagine a “mirror of the world,” which is in one sense beyond sense perception as it is abstract, but since it

is rooted in sense perception, the reader is able to imagine the world as a mirror in which forms come and go, just as images come and go on a mirror. Sometimes, an image of someone dressed as Eve shines, and an adorned Adam emerges at other moments. Through this, 'Irāqī can delineate how Love, i.e., God, allows it to be reflected onto the tablet of existence through various forms. At the same time, it highlights how, in one sense, the image is unreal because it is merely an image and not the entity behind it, and in another sense, the only way to glimpse the entity behind it. However, rather than pointing this out discursively, 'Irāqī employs imagery, personification, and the mirror metaphor to allow a knowing that not only occurs in the mind but filters through imagination and sense perception, and then lifts to a metaphysical idea that lies beyond sense-perception. This allows "form to envelop spirit" and meaning to become manifest through material or sensory things in the imaginal realm (Zargar, 2011, p.18). In this sense, reality itself is "colored" by metaphor because the relationship between forms and meanings in language mirrors the relationship between forms and meanings in the cosmos. Just as a metaphor allows one thing to disclose another while never being identical to it, created forms disclose deeper realities while never exhausting them. Metaphor is therefore not merely a literary device but reflects the very structure of existence, where visible forms serve as vehicles for meanings that transcend them.

In addition, the second example suggests that God adorns one person in the eyes of another. In this sense, it is not merely forms themselves that generate love, but the Divine source that causes those forms to appear beautiful. Readers may recognize this experience from their own lives: the beloved often appears uniquely beautiful and flawless when one is deeply in love. Drawing upon this familiar experience, the couplet reorients the reader's understanding by suggesting that it is the Divine hairdresser, rather than the beloved alone, who adorns the beloved with beauty and thereby sets the trap of love. Elsewhere, 'Irāqī writes that Love may shift from one beloved to another, reflecting the human experience of loving different people or objects at different moments in life. By drawing upon experiences familiar to his audience and reinterpreting them through poetic imagery, 'Irāqī invites readers to imagine love from a new perspective. In this way, metaphor does not simply describe reality; it trains readers to perceive the relationship between forms and meanings that underlie both language and the cosmos. The form of the poem, therefore, becomes inseparable from the knowledge it conveys.

Oneness of Love

One of the central ideas of the text is the oneness of Love, i.e., the oneness of God. The text begins with this idea by mentioning that before the cosmos came into being, only Love existed.¹⁵ It then illustrates how oneness filters into multiplicity once Love

¹⁵ Two possibilities latent within the text pertaining to creation are as follows. One is that everything already existed, and love merely cast light on it as the ray of existence spread over the world making everything manifest. The other is that only love existed at first, and then it created the lover and the beloved. A third possibility may be read as a reconciliation: love alone existed, then it created the furniture of the universe, and finally it created human beings who discover it as "manifest" upon creation. This approach privileges the second view that love alone existed, while incorporating the first as a subsequent stage.

gives way to creation, i.e., the lover and the beloved. The text then outlines the process the lover goes through to realize the inherent oneness latent within the apparent multiplicity. 'Irāqī writes in the Third Flash,

Many and differing forms of ocean's waves (*amwāj-i baḥr*) do not make the ocean (*baḥr*) a multiplicity; nor does the Named become multiple due to all its faces [names]. When the sea (*daryā*) exhales, they call it mist (*bukhār*); when mist thickens, they call it cloud (*abr*). When it begins to trickle down, they name it rain (*bārān*); when it gathers, it joins the sea (*daryā*). They call it sea (*daryā*)—the very same sea (*daryā*) that [it] was.¹⁶ ('Irāqī, 1984, p.57)

The metaphor rests on an underlying simile (*tashbīḥ*): existence is like a sea. Rather than defining existence discursively, the image renders an otherwise abstract metaphysical concept imaginable through a familiar sensory phenomenon.

This metaphor's underlying simile (*tashbīḥ*) is that existence is like a sea. The reason for comparison is that existence and the sea can take various shapes. Hence, they are similar in the sense that both are capable of possessing various states and forms. In addition, metaphors of mist, clouds, rain, and flood refer to various forms of existence. The underlying simile is as follows: forms of existence are similar to mist, clouds, rain, and flood. The reason for comparison (*wajh al-shabah*) is that just as mist, clouds, rain, and flood arise and go back to the sea, various forms of existence arise from existence/Being (*wujūd*) and return to it.

Moreover, they are all water in one sense and are various forms of water in another sense. Just as the underlying, shared element is water across all these various forms, similarly, existence is shared across all these various forms of being. Furthermore, various forms of the sea (mist, rain, clouds, floods, and so forth) do not make the "sea" many, as water remains the essence that merely changes form and is shared across the various combinations. Similarly, the various forms of existence, the apparent many-ness, do not make Being/existence many. Rather, Being/existence is shared across the various forms.

Lastly, various states of existence are compared to breathing, piling up, falling, and joining. Just as breathing, piling up, falling, and joining represent various states that water can take, so too can Being issue forth and take back (inhale and exhale), coagulate, and disperse various forms. Just as different variations of water and gas lead to different forms, such as mist, clouds, etc., similarly, different combinations of form and matter render various instantiations of existence. For example, in *barzakh* (isthmus/imaginal realm), spirits become corporealized, and corporeal forms become spiritualized. Hence, when form takes on matter or sheds it, different variations of form emerge (Chittick & Wilson, 1982, p. 13).

Importantly, *Lama'āt* not only employs the metaphor of the sea to render existence imaginable to the reader, but does so in a rhythmic manner as well. Furthermore, 'Irāqī employs metaphors and verbs from the same ground (*zamīn*), which is to say

¹⁶ We must note that while *baḥr* only refers to ocean, *daryā* has a broader semantic range and can refer to sea, ocean, or the river. *Daryā* is often used in Islamic mystical writings to refer to God's essence (Nafīsī & 'Irāqī, 1959, p. 380; 'Irāqī, 1984, p. 57).

that they are rhythmic and found together conventionally, which offers the text a harmonious and evocative quality.¹⁷ The passage, therefore, does not merely explain the unity of Being; through rhythm, repetition, and a network of related images, it enables the reader to perceive that unity imaginatively and affectively.

O you,
do not think
that this thread (*rishta*)
is two:
root (*aṣl*) and branch (*far'*)
are one
Look closely, [O] you:
this is all He
but He is apparent (*paidā*)
through me
There is no doubt
that it is all I,
but
through Him. ('Irāqī, 1984, p. 57)

In the Fourth Flash, 'Irāqī further develops this idea by evoking the metaphor of branches and roots. The metaphor rests on an underlying simile in which existence is likened to a thread on account of its singularity. In the first couplet, the narrator has a commanding voice that strives to make the listener aware of not committing the mistake of duality. In the second part, he invites the reader by bringing himself into the conversation and addressing the audience directly. Through this, he suggests that whatever appears or shines through him is, in fact, God. In the first couplet, through the metaphor of branches and roots, 'Irāqī establishes a similarity between human beings and God with branches and roots. The symbolism of branches and roots strikes an implicit comparison that human beings and God are similar to branches and roots, as human beings cannot exist without God, just as branches cannot exist

¹⁷ For more on *zamīn* in Urdu poetry, see Pritchett (1994, p. 200).

without roots. A tree cannot bloom without roots, and branches cannot sprout without roots. In addition, just as branches depend on roots for survival, humans depend on God for survival. Lastly, roots and branches share something of a “tree” in them.

The branches are distinct from the roots in some ways; they have leaves, and they are visible outside, whereas the roots remain beneath the ground, without leaves, and are not visible. However, since branches cannot exist without roots, in one sense, the branches are roots. Thus, he stresses that one must not think the root and the branch are separate. They are, in fact, one. Here, the image of root and tree is used to explain their shared attributes, the deep reliance of one on the other, and thereby the interconnected nature and the robust relation between them. By inviting the reader to contemplate a relationship already known through ordinary experience, the metaphor transforms an abstract claim into something graspable through imagination. In the Fourth Flash, ‘Irāqī further develops this idea through the metaphor of the sun and the mirror. He writes,

The sun (*āftāb*) shines, and a mirror (*āyina*) imagines itself to be the sun. Inevitably, it loves itself. For everything is predisposed to love itself. And in reality, its it-ness is the sun, for the manifestation (*zahūr*) belongs to it: the mirror is nothing more than a receptacle (*qābilī*).

love’s sun appeared;

so I vanished in it.

the light you see now

is my shining! (‘Irāqī, 1984, p. 60)

Here, ‘Irāqī begins with the voice of an omniscient narrator through third-person narration. However, he later switches to the first person: “Love’s Sun appeared/I hid myself within it/The light you see now/is my shining!” This shift in narrative voice, along with the direct address to the reader (“you see now”), creates an oratorical and conversational tone that draws the reader into the passage. Rather than appearing as an abstract platitude with little rhetorical force, the statement becomes personal, immediate, and effectively resonant.

In addition to this, he employs the metaphor of the mirror to explain the phenomenon that the reality behind everything is God. When the sun shines in a mirror, it imagines itself to be the sun; however, in fact, it merely reflects the sun. Imagining the sun to be itself, it loves itself. This is because everyone has been crafted and disposed to love themselves. The thing that makes it its “it-ness” is, in fact, the sun, as the mirror is merely the receptacle, and it is only the sun shining through the mirror.¹⁸

The metaphor of the sun and the mirror underscores that while the mirror can think it is the sun, it must remember that it only reflects the sun. The metaphor guides the

¹⁸ On the metaphor of mirror in Persian poetry, see Schimmel (1992, p. 293). For the image of the mirror and ethical self-cultivation, see Zargar (2017).

reader toward understanding the human-divine relation through analogy rather than direct exposition. While human beings can think that they are God or have something of God, they must remember that they do not exist. It is only God. As soon as the text establishes *tashbīh* and the similitude between Divine and Human, it is quick to point out that God alone exists, and the duality is merely “apparent.”

A question then arises: does the mirror have any real existence or borrowed existence? The question would not make sense, as, according to the text, the mirror does not exist. It has a borrowed existence, as there is only the sun. However, from one point of view, does the mirror exist or appear to exist? Can the mirror not be fully unreal? The answer would depend on the vantage point. From the Divine perspective, the mirror or human being does not exist independently; from the human perspective, however, existence appears real and immediate.

love's sun appeared;
so I vanished in it.
the light you see now
is my shining! ('Irāqī, 1984, p. 60)

Here, it underscores that God's brilliance or manifestation does two things: Firstly, when it shines, one disappears, as if hidden in it. This can mean that only God exists. However, if that were the case, the sun's appearance did not have to cause a person's disappearance. Thus, it could point to the experiential journey of the wayfarer, where, when the sun shines, or the sun's shining is understood, one disappears. One either loses one's soul in self-annihilation or realizes they do not exist.

The passage highlights the fact that it is indeed God who loves Himself. It is indeed God that sees Himself. Thus, while the previous prose section had established a duality that there is a sun and a mirror, and in fact, it is only the sun shining in the mirror, the poetry that follows breaks that duality and shows the process of breaking. Then, as if after that stage has been reached, it says that there is, in fact, no duality. In reality, it is only God. Only God exists.

In this text, a duality is first established and then broken down. This process mirrors the stages on the spiritual path and serves a pedagogical purpose. Rather than presenting metaphysical truth as a conclusion to be accepted, 'Irāqī leads readers through a sequence of imaginative realizations that allow them to discover that truth for themselves. Rather than the narrator jumping in and didactically declaring that God alone exists, imagery and personification first acclimatize the reader/listener to one position, one aspect of the Divine, one stage of the journey. Then, suddenly, the sheet is pulled out from under their feet, and the previous understanding is completely overturned.

Beyond the narrative shifts and imagery analyzed above, 'Irāqī also deploys paradoxes to disrupt conventional conceptual categories. 'Irāqī writes, “All is nothing, nothing. All is He, all is He”, which is akin to X is Y and X is not Y at the same time ('Irāqī, 1984, p.60). According to Sells, such propositions deny the logical rule of the excluded middle. By writing that it is X and not X , he violates the law of noncontradiction. Rather than rendering such statements illogical, he argues that we ought to pay attention to the fact that such statements seek to capture meaning that escapes

the delimitations marked by language (Sells, 1994, p.21). If language seeks to point to the unlimited or infinite, it falls short by using propositions that map onto a specific conceptual space or a category that points merely to a certain meaning and not meaning beyond signification and delimitation. Thus, since 'Irāqī seeks to point to Being and illustrate to the reader its infinitude, he uses paradoxes to capture something of the nature and experience of Being rather than merely expositing it through propositional statements. In this sense, paradox functions as another mode of poetic knowing. By destabilizing ordinary conceptual categories, it compels readers to confront meanings that cannot be fully captured through discursive language alone. This paradoxical logic appears in the Fourth Flash as follows:

Junayd once said, "For thirty years, I've been speaking (*sukhan*) with the Real, yet people think that I am talking to them." Through the hearing of Moses, He heard Himself speaking by the tongue (*zabān*) of the bush:

He Himself speaks

He Himself listens

you and I are

but a pretext. ('Irāqī, 1984, p. 61)

We must note that conversations often stretch beyond the confines of time and space in Sufi texts, and interlocutors from the past form as much of an intellectual community as the present listeners. By quoting Junayd Baghdādī (d. 910), 'Irāqī in one sense converses with an early mystic from Baghdād.¹⁹ In terms of the speaker's tone, the narrator explains things to the audience in prose. The voice is like that of a wise person or a guide who knows better.

'Irāqī employs a seemingly conventional statement, as if casually recounting an experience to a friend, explaining whom they had been speaking to. Yet, he adds a twist at the end: the speaker says that he had been speaking with the Real, though people assume he was speaking with them. This makes the reader or listener pause and think: how can one be talking to the Real while others mistake it for a conversation with them? What is implied here is that in speaking with people, he was in fact conversing with the Real, for people are only intermediaries and pretexts; it is ultimately the Real who speaks through them. This also underscores the significance of a dialogue, revealing how a mystic may converse with the Real by means of others. The statement, therefore, requires the reader to reinterpret an ordinary act of communication as a site of divine disclosure, transforming a familiar experience into a vehicle for reflection.

¹⁹ For an account of early Sufism, see Sells (1996), Knysh (2017), and Renard (2004). For a historical overview of early Islam, see Lapidus (2013).

The second statement draws on the episode of Moses speaking to the bush, but then ventures even deeper.²⁰ It suggests that when Moses heard, it was God hearing Himself through the tongue of the bush. All speech is God speaking and listening to Himself. The tone then turns conversational again, as the speaker directly addresses the listener with the second-person pronoun, compelling them to pay attention. The speaker concludes by insisting that you and I are merely pretexts, for all along, it has only been the Real speaking to the Real.

'Irāqī employs the metaphor of the sun and the mirror alongside narrative techniques such as shifting the point of view between the second and first person voices. By addressing the reader directly in the second person, 'Irāqī captures the reader's attention and draws them into the text,²¹ inviting them to engage with his words through their own imagination and prior knowledge. As noted above, he also relies on other rhetorical strategies such as employing distinctive tones, adopting the symbolism of the sun and the mirror or of branches and roots to illustrate the relationship between humans and the divine, and preparing the reader for one response, only to overturn it dramatically, shocking the reader. In this way, 'Irāqī entangles the reader in a dialectic through which the deep connection between humans and the Divine is unraveled to the reader by means of their own imagination and interpretive labor. Thus, the reader actively participates in grasping meaning rather than merely receiving it. Through metaphor, narrative shifts, rhythm, paradox, and symbolic imagery, 'Irāqī transforms poetic form itself into a mode of knowing, one in which insight emerges through the reader's imaginative and interpretive participation.

Taken together, the water metaphor's rhythm, the branches analogy's immediacy, the sun metaphor's shifts in voice, and the paradox's defiance of conventional categories demonstrate that poetic form is not incidental to 'Irāqī's argument but one of the very means through which that meaning is generated and known.

The Art and the Artist

As seen above, 'Irāqī posits a deep relation between God and creation. According to him, the act of creation and God's manifestation bind God and creation. God created the universe, but the universe He crafted is not entirely distinct from Him; rather, just as the sun shines in a mirror, God shines through His creation. 'Irāqī employs two related metaphors of the painter and the shadow-puppeteer to demonstrate this relation more profoundly.

the painter's marvel

is upon his own canvas

There is no one in between,

²⁰ On the Sufi interpretation of Moses and the burning bush, see Knysh (2017, p. 100), Ernst (2017), and Keeler (2006, p. 255). On *ta'wīl* and hermeneutics, see Mayer (2015).

²¹ For more on voice, speaker, and point of view, see Greene (2012, p. 1025); and Abrams and Harpham (2014, p. 303).

so ... rejoice! ('Irāqī, 1984, p. 56)

Using the metaphor of the painter in the Third Flash, 'Irāqī likens God to a painter and the universe as His painting. The metaphor rests on a shared characteristic: both painters and God create and bring things into being. Just as a painter carefully strokes the canvas to draw a beautiful painting, God sketched various forms and filled them with color on the canvas of existence. At the end of the second hemistich, 'Irāqī switches from third-person narration (the painter's fascination) to second-person narration (There's no one else about/so...rejoice!) and addresses the reader directly, which heightens the rhetorical impact by inducing curiosity and wonder in the audience as to why the fact that the painter is entranced by his painting should make them happy.

Then the question arises: What is the relationship between a painter and his painting? Is the painting distinct from the painter? 'Irāqī would answer: yes, it is. It has a distinct, delimited form that makes it a painting. The painter, however, can create infinite paintings and cannot be reduced to one painting. Yet, is there something of the painter within his painting? 'Irāqī would respond: yes. The painting reflects the painter's imagination, dexterity, skill, and creativity. Can a painting exist without a painter? No, for it is the painter who must fill the canvas with color. In this case, God fills the canvas with color so that a blank canvas is tinged with the color(s) of existence.

Does the painting reflect the being of the painter? Yes, it does. Does it capture the entire being of the painter? No, it does not. Why? Because a painter can alter the painting at any moment. He can bring a painting into being and erase it. The painter can make numerous paintings, and each can be distinct. One painting might display the painter's brilliance in color combinations, another in the arrangement of shapes, and another in the elegance of long, beautiful strokes. The painter can do any of this and much more, and at each moment, an aspect of the painter is reflected, yet never his being in full. Thus, creation may be seen as an extension of the painter's being, but it does not encapsulate their being. It is, at once, the painter in one way, and distinct from the painter in another way. Ibn 'Arabī terms this the He/not He (*huwa la huwa*) aspect of God reflected in the universe. This means that while everything in the universe shares something with God and therefore is "HE"—reflecting His immanence and similarity (*tashbīh*) with creation—it simultaneously remains distinct from God, thus affirming His transcendence and incomparability (*tanzīh*).²² However, we must note that by underscoring that there is in fact no intermediary, it emphasizes the "He" aspect of God: the painting is in fact the painter, and there is, in one sense, no distinction between the painter and the painting. In the Sixteenth Flash, 'Irāqī develops this idea through the metaphor of shadow puppetry:

The shadow-play master (*ustād*), from behind the screen of imagination (*khayāl*), shows so many diverse forms and contradictory shapes. The motions, stillnesses, actions, and determinations are all by his command. And He is hid-

²² See Chittick (1989, p. 380).

den behind a curtain; when the veil is lifted, you will know what the reality and actions of those forms are. ('Irāqī, 1984, p. 97)

The narrator employs the metaphor of shadow puppetry to illustrate the link between the artist and their artwork and forms.²³ Shifting from third-person narration to the second, the speaker directly addresses the listener (you will know), which grabs the reader's attention and points out that this knowledge is directly linked to them. This indicates that the speaker is not merely describing a phenomenon but one that will culminate in a direct "knowing" for the listener ("you will know what the reality and actions of those forms are"). Rather than stating the point directly, the metaphor draws the reader into a process of discovery through which they move from the visible to the hidden, from the shadow to its source. In this way, the image itself becomes a mode of knowing.

The word that is employed here is *ustād*, which is contemporaneously often used to refer to the teacher, but its other possible meanings include master and artisan famed for any art or work of ingenuity.²⁴ We must note that the primary meaning of *ustādī* is "an art, trade, craft; workmanship; excellence, skill in any art or profession."²⁵ Thus, given its etymology, context, and usage here, *ustād* can safely be translated as "artist."

The metaphor exhibits a deep relationship between the artist and his art. 'Irāqī employs *isti'ārah bil-kināyah* (a metaphor that uses allusion), where *al-mushabbah* (subject) is alluded to and not mentioned. It can be parsed down as the following simile that has been turned into a metaphor: "God is like an artist in terms of His creative capacity."²⁶ Here, the *mushabbah* is God, the *mushabbah bih* is an artist, and the *ḥarf/adāt-i tashbīh* is the word like. Lastly, *wajh al-shabah* (the reason for comparison) is the creativity and ingenuity of the Creator. Hence, the artist's metaphor alludes to God and His creative capacity to bring creation into being and sustain relations with them. Hence, the metaphor invites the reader to reflect on the relationship between the artist and the artwork, and therefore between God and creation. Several implications follow:

The artist is one, but his artworks are many.
The artist commands, and the artwork follows.
The artist is hidden; the art shows.

²³ On shadow play, see Moreh (1992); Moreh (1987); and Guo (2012).

²⁴ See Steingass (1892, s.v. "ustad," "ustadī").

²⁵ While the contemporary usage of *ustād* sometimes leans toward teacher as the primary meaning, its pre-modern usage encapsulated other modes as well. Painters, sculptors, weavers, and singers were considered teachers as well artists, with the art form transmitted when an *ustād* conferred a skill upon their students. Unlike the modern industrialized academy, where the name of the university and the degree signifies the transmission of knowledge, in pre-modern guilds artists/teachers maintained one-on-one relationships with their students and transmitted knowledge through giving permission (*ijāzah*) (Steingass, 1892, s.v. "ustad," "ustadī").

²⁶ For the broad semantic range of *adab*, including literature and ethics, see Encyclopedia Iranica (1983).

Thus, while the artist is one, their artworks can be many and mutually distinct. The artist can produce many different forms, whereas each artwork exhibits some aspect of their artistry. The artist is thus deeply tied to their creation, as the artwork cannot come into being without the artist, but similarly, the artist is beyond and greater than their artwork. While artwork reflects the artist, it does not encapsulate or limit the artist, as the artist can produce multiple, if not infinite, artworks.²⁷ Similarly, if the shadow artist moves his hand, the shadow moves. In this way, the artist wills the movement of his artwork. If we apply this to writing, it would mean that the writer wills how the words move to form the structure and syntax of writing. This, of course, does not mean that multiple interpretations are not possible, even if some possible interpretations may be limited due to a particular structure. Lastly, according to 'Irāqī, one can discern the artist from their artwork. The shadow artist is hidden, but the shadows show. From the movement of the shadows, one can discern that there is, in fact, someone behind the shadows who is moving the puppets/figures.

We must note here that 'Irāqī's use of the metaphor of the shadow puppeteer is intentional and serves many purposes.²⁸ The same effect would not be achieved if he had chosen the example of a writer and their writing. The imagery of shadow puppetry immediately provides a concrete setting the reader can visualize: puppets on a screen, a puppeteer sitting behind the curtain and moving them, and an audience that sees only the moving shadows.²⁹ Through this image, 'Irāqī offers the reader a layered perspective, akin to a cinematic shot that simultaneously reveals the stage, the audience, and the backstage. Yet in reality, each role affords only a partial view: the performing artist sees the audience, the puppeteer behind the screen sees only part

²⁷ This goes beyond the Barthian notion expounded in "Death of the author" which seeks to downplay traditional literary criticism's focus on the author and attempts to retrieve the "original intent and meaning of the author". Barthes (1977, p. 142) argued that meanings are constantly generated and must not be "discovered or retrieved" but rather spontaneously generated by the reader. Foucault (1977) in his lecture "What is an author?" complicated the notion of an author. According to him, rather than pointing to an individual being, an author's name serves a classificatory function, allowing a variety of texts across time and space to be classified under an author's name ("What is An Author?"). 'Irāqī would respond that neither of these positions dismiss the fact that someone wrote or brought an artwork into being. As far as multiple meanings and their spontaneous generation is concerned, the fact that an artist created an artwork and had a meaning in mind, does not dismiss the possibility of finding those meanings and creating new meanings simultaneously. Both options need not be mutually exclusive. Rather, due to the ambiguous nature of words and their wide semantic range in Persian, digging as well as generating new meanings is more fruitful as an interpretive praxis. Moreover, across historical epochs, new meanings are constantly attributed to words, so the attribution of meaning by an author does not preclude adding new meanings to the repository. Thus, there can be a network of meanings constantly generated an "author" that traverses the confines of time and space; the word 'Irāqī would point to the category of all writings that belong to 'Irāqī and were responding to him, yet, it does not discount the fact that someone he wrote. In this sense, an artist can be used as a metaphor for God. He brings human beings and the world (his artworks) into being and then allows for infinite meanings to be discovered and generated through them (Barthes, 1977, 142).

²⁸ Ibn Daniyāl (d. 1310) penned *Ṭayfal-Khayāl (The Phantom)*, a shadow play that exemplifies a Mamluk-era literary artifact employing rhetorical tools such as paronomasia (*jinās*) and styles such as rhythmic prose (*maqāma*). For more on performative arts in medieval Islam, see Guo (2020); Meisami and Starkey (1998); Meri (2005); and Moreh (1987). For Arabic prose literature and a survey of genres, see Leder and Kilpatrick (1992). On oration as an art specifically, see Qutbuddin (2007, 2019).

²⁹ Shadow play was enacted with leather figures and marionettes by presenters behind a curtain, with shadows cast by candle or lamp light, and was usually performed at night (Meri, 2005; Moreh, 1987).

of what is presented to the audience, and the audience perceives only what is shown on the stage. By employing this example, 'Irāqī gently guides the reader from the apparent (*zāhir*)—the shadows projected on the screen—to the hidden (*bāṭin*) that lies behind them, while encouraging both levels to be contemplated simultaneously.

From the point of view of the audience, the reader can envision only the shadows projected onto the screen, while from the perspective of the hidden puppeteer behind the curtain, they can envision how those shadows are, in fact, produced. As someone who can behold both perspectives, however, the reader is able to see that what appears is not the complete reality and that there is an inner reality (*bāṭinī*) hidden behind the outward (*zāhirī*) reality.

Much like the *barzakh* discussed above, which acts as a bridge between different ontological realms, the metaphor of the shadow puppeteer functions as a bridge that reveals God as the source behind all apparent forms. The reader is therefore encouraged to move continually between different levels of perception and, depending on their vantage point, to perceive reality differently. The metaphor does not merely state the distinction between the apparent and the hidden; it invites the reader to visualize and experience that distinction simultaneously, rendering the knowledge palpable, immediate, and experientially felt. In this sense, poetic speech compels the reader to discover affinities between seemingly dissimilar phenomena and, in doing so, mirrors reality itself, transforming poetic speech into a vehicle for knowing.

As Ansārī put it, “God wished to manifest His handiwork, so He created the world; He wished to manifest Himself, so He created Adam.” (Chittick & Wilson, 1982, p.119)

In the Twenty-Fourth Flash, 'Irāqī develops the artistic metaphor further by distinguishing between manifesting one's artistry and manifesting oneself through one's artwork. This points to a distinction between manifesting one's artistry versus manifesting oneself through their artwork. What does it mean for one's self to be reflected in one's artwork rather than merely one's artistry to be reflected? While artistry reflects one aspect of the artist's being, i.e., their skill and expertise in crafting an artwork, being manifest in one's artwork alludes to the possibility of more of one's being being reflected in their artwork. Ibn 'Arabī writes that while each thing in the cosmos reflects God's name, only a human being has the possibility of reflecting all of God's names (Ibn 'Arabī, 1980, pp. 47–48). Thus, while a mountain reflects one aspect or attribute of God, such as His grandeur or Majesty, it does not reflect His attribute of kindness or movement. However, Adam (and thus human beings) have the capacity to reflect all of God's names and attributes (Ibn 'Arabī, 1980, pp. 47–48). Thus, in that sense, Adam, as a reflection and manifestation of God, reflects God's artistry and more of God's Being, or rather God's names and attributes.

This shows that 'Irāqī employs metaphors of the painter and shadow puppetry to shed light on the relationship between the Creator and the creation. Both metaphors are densely layered with meaning and invite multiple interpretations, allowing the reader to understand the relationship more deeply. In addition, the setting and back-drop facilitate the shadow-puppetry metaphor, allowing the reader to imagine the scene as the imagery unfolds moment by moment. Furthermore, the sudden shifts

from third-person narration to the second person draw the reader into the text and highlight that whatever the speaker illustrates is meant directly for the listener. The switch to second-person narration points to the fact that the reader or the listener is an active participant in the dialectic and meaning-making of the text. Beyond this, through this exercise, the reader partakes in a “poetic knowing” that enables them to see the world differently through “the reality” they discover in this process. Thus, the text invites the reader to take poetic speech as a mode of knowing, engaging the imagination and the senses, allowing the reader to experience ideas as immediate and existential, pointing through beautiful speech to realities that lie beyond speech, and ultimately enabling the reader to discover reality anew.

Conclusion

This study has shown not only how philosophical and metaphysical ideas can be conveyed through poetic form, but also how they can be enacted through rhetoric, imagery, and paradox in ways that shape the reader’s very experience of knowing. A close analysis of the *Lama ‘āt* shows that through the careful use of rhetorical devices and metaphors, such as the mirror, branches and roots, the ocean, the hairdresser, the painter, and shadow puppetry, ‘Irāqī takes the reader on a journey in which ideas become experientially immediate. The reader is drawn into the text as their imagination and memory are ignited through vivid imagery, personification, and metaphor. Through this approach, ‘Irāqī renders the abstract concrete for the reader/listener, only then to lift it to a metaphysical register that cannot be reduced to knowledge gained through sense perception, even if it remains rooted in forms familiar from the sublunary realm. At other times, through paradox, ‘Irāqī first establishes a position only to dismantle it, producing a mode of knowing through wonder and bewilderment. Attending to these formal elements reveals how the text fosters an affective and imaginative dialogue with the reader, in which meaning is uncovered through participation, discovery, and interpretation. In this way, the *Lama ‘āt* demonstrates that poetic form is not merely a vehicle for conveying knowledge but can itself function as a mode of knowing. More broadly, this approach of attending to poetic form rather than content alone opens a path toward recovering modes of philosophical knowing that have been underrepresented in the study of Islamic intellectual thought.

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Conflicts of interest I have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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