

# Islamic Thought and the Art of Translation

*Texts and Studies in Honor of William C. Chittick  
and Sachiko Murata*

*Edited by*

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*The author has no share save the post of translator, and no portion but the trade of speaker.*

From the preface of Jāmī, *Lawā'ih*, trans. William C. Chittick in Sachiko Murata, *Chinese gleams of Sufi light: Wang Tai-yü's Great learning of the pure and real and Liu Chih's Displaying the concealment of the real realm*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000, 134





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# Mirrors in the Dream of the Alone: A Glimpse at the Poetry of Bīdil

*Ali Karjoo-Ravary*

## 1 Introduction

Mīrzā ‘Abd al-Qādir b. ‘Abd al-Khāliq, known as Bīdil-i Dihlawī, was born in ‘Aẓīmābād (modern day Patna, India) in 1054/1644. His family was of Turkic descent from the Arlās tribe of the Chaghatay and was, in keeping with the time, multilingual.<sup>1</sup> He moved to Delhi at the age of twenty and took it up as place of residence, though he travelled widely throughout his life and, in his own recounting, met many scholars and sages from different religious communities. His works are extant and well-preserved. In addition to the collection of his *ghazals* and shorter *mathnawīs*, he has an autobiography titled *Chahār ‘unṣur* (*The four elements*) written between 1094/1683 and 1116/1704, and four large *mathnawīs*.<sup>2</sup> The longest of these, entitled *‘Irfān*, is 11,000 verses long and was completed in 1122/1711. Mīrzā Bīdil died nine years after *‘Irfān*’s completion in Delhi in 1133/1720, and the reputed (but recently recovered) site of his burial is now a shrine devoted to poetic performance and competition (*mushā‘ara*).<sup>3</sup>

Mīrzā Bīdil’s influence is a subject in and of its own.<sup>4</sup> Of the many poets indebted to him, Mīrzā Ghālib (d. 1285/1869) and ‘Allāma Iqbāl (d. 1357/1938) are two notable examples, and through them he left his mark on Urdu liter-

1 For his basic biographical sketch in English, see Siddiqi, Moazzam, “Bīdil, ‘Abd-al-Qādir,” in *Elr Online*, iv.3, 244–246, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/bidel-bedil-mirza-abd-al-qader-b> (last accessed: 31 October 2021).

2 On his autobiography, see Qasemi, Sharif H., “Čahār onṣor,” in *Elr Online*, iv.6, 623–624, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cahar-onsor> (last accessed: 31 October 2021) and Keshavmurthy, Prashant, *Persian authorship and canonicity in late-Mughal Delhi: Building an ark*, New York: Routledge, 2016, 15–60. On *Chahār ‘unṣur*’s designation as an autobiography, see 16–17. Keshavmurthy also analyzes Bīdil’s refrains and devotes a chapter to the tale of Madan and Kāmdī in *‘Irfān*.

3 Safvi, Rana, “Bagh-e Bedil,” <https://ranasafvi.com/bagh-e-bedil/> (last accessed: 31 October 2021).

4 On Bīdil’s afterlives, see Schwartz, Kevin L., “The local lives of a transregional poet: ‘Abd al-Qādir Bīdil and the writing of Persianate literary history,” in *Journal of Persianate Studies* 9.1 (2016), 83–106.



ature.<sup>5</sup> He has been the poet par excellence in Afghanistan and Central Asia for over the past two centuries and remains so even in the diaspora. In Iran, where modernists criticized his work in the 20th century, there has been a major revival of interest in his poetry over the last few decades. This has led to a robust body of secondary literature on Bidil in Persian and Urdu, as well as multiple European languages.<sup>6</sup>

The present paper is primarily an exploration through translation of some aspects of Ibn ‘Arabī’s (d. 638/1240) influence as enshrined in Bidil’s *Irfān*.<sup>7</sup> The influence of Ibn ‘Arabī on Bidil was clearly stated in 1992 by William C. Chittick, who identified *Irfān* as the prime locus of this influence.<sup>8</sup> Since then, it has been explored in depth by Prashant Keshavmurthy and ‘Alī Akbar Shūbku-lāyī.<sup>9</sup> The principle behind the translations presented below is simply to give a

5 On Ghālīb and Bidil, see Aḥsan al-Ẓafar, Sayyid [also: Ahsan-uz-Zafar, Syed], *Bidil wa-Ghālīb*, New Delhi: Ghalib Institute, 2012.

6 On his life and work, see ‘Abdulghani, *Rūḥ-i Bidil*, Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-i Adab, 1968; Shafī’ī Kadkanī, Muḥammad R., *Shā’ir-i āyina-hā: Barrisī-yi sabk-i hindī wa-shi’r-i Bidil*, Tehran: Āqā, 1989; Aḥsan al-Ẓafar, Sayyid [also: Ahsan-uz-Zafar, Syed], *Mirzā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bidil: Ḥayat aur kārnāmāh*, 2 vols., Rampur: Rampur Raza Library, 2009. On another one of his *mathnawīs*, see Kovacs, Hajnalka, “The tavern of the manifestation of realities”: *The Maṣnavī muḥīt-i a’zam by Mirzā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bedil (1644–1720)*, Chicago (PhD Diss.): University of Chicago, 2013; Fiṭrat, Muḥammad Ḥusaynī, *Jahān-i Bidil*, Tehran: Intishārāt-i ‘Irfān, 2014. In terms of poetics, see Gould, Rebecca, “Form without a home: On translating the Indo-Persian Radif,” in *Translation Review* 90 (2014), 15–28; Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Mahdī, “Bunmaya-yi ḥubāb wa-shabaka-yi taṣwīrḥā-yi ān dar ghazaliyyāt-i ‘Abd al-Qādir Bidil-i Dihlawī,” in *Matn-pizuhu’-yi Adabī* 18.62 (2014), 82–123; Mikkelson, Jane, “Of parrots and crows: Bidil and Ḥazīn in their own words,” in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37.3 (2017), 510–530; Mikkelson, Jane, “Flights of imagination: Avicenna’s Phoenix (‘Anqā) and Bedil’s figuration for the lyric self,” in *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History* 2 (2019), 28–72; and Pellò, Stefano, “Two passing clouds: The rainy season of Mirzā Bidil and Amānat Rāy’s Persian version of Bhāgavata Purāṇa 10.20,” in *Iran and the Caucasus* 24.4 (2020), 408–418 as well as Pellò, Stefano, “The portrait and its doubles: Nāṣir ‘Alī Sirhindī, Mirzā Bidil and the comparative semiotics of portraiture in late seventeenth-century Indo-Persian literature,” in *Eurasian Studies* 15.1 (2017), 1–35. On this phase of Persian poetry see Losensky, Paul, *Welcoming Fighānī: Imitation and poetic individuality in the Safavid-Mughal Ghazal*, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1998; Faruqī, Shamsur Rahman, “A stranger in the city: The poetics of Sabk-e Hindi,” in *Annual of Urdu Studies* 19 (2004), 1–93 and the introduction to Keshavmurthy, *Persian authorship*.

7 This is rooted in a project that first began under the tutelage of Professor William C. Chittick and Professor Sachiko Murata as an undergraduate and which later expanded under the guidance of Professor Jamal J. Elias during my graduate education.

8 Chittick, William C., “Notes on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s influence in the subcontinent,” in *MW* 82.3–4 (1992), 218–241, 237.

9 Keshavmurthy, *Persian authorship*; Shūbku-lāyī, ‘Alī A., *Ṣulḥ-i kull: Jāyghāh-i ‘irfān-i Ibn ‘Arabī dar shi’r-i Bidil-i Dihlawī*, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā, 2019. Ibn ‘Arabī is, of course, not the only influence on Bidil, and Keshavmurthy shows how Bidil’s lyric masterfully interweaves Indic

taste of the ways in which Bīdil stretches and articulates, through verse, unarticulated or implied aspects of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought. I will begin with Bīdil’s cosmology (with a touch of my own commentary) and end with some of his prescriptive verses that address the human situation.

## 2 The Loneliness of God

The world arrived as proof of oneness  
 because loneliness brings imagination.  
 The Essence has neither defect nor perfection,  
 but whoever is alone never lacks imagination. (Ins. 522–523)  
 Love keeps so many images with itself;  
 a lonely person imagines so much.  
 Here, multiplicity is the affirmation of unity.  
 Here, awareness is effaced in bewilderment. (Ins. 525–526)<sup>10</sup>

God being “alone” before creation is a standard feature of Islamic theology connected to His oneness (*tawhīd*). Bīdil’s perspective considers the implication of this solitude by drawing a parallel with the human experience of loneliness. The consolation of loneliness is the imagination. Thus, even the solitude associated with God’s utter unity caused Him to imagine. What did He imagine? Everything that exists. Bīdil takes a standard aspect of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, the cosmos as God’s imagination, and connects it to God’s being alone and His love for another.<sup>11</sup> In so doing, he links imagination not only to creation, but to a love that brings about imaginal worlds without cease.

Aware of the full implications of human loneliness, Bīdil is quick to assert that “the Essence has neither defect nor perfection.” The Essence (*dhāt*) is a technical term referring to God’s selfness or He-ness, and is the referent to

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philosophy and cosmology. See also, in this regard, Pellò, Stefano, “Black curls in a mirror: The eighteenth-century Persian Kīṣṣā of Lāla Amānat Rāy’s *Jihwa-yi zāt* and the tongue of Bīdil,” in *Hindu Studies* 22 (2018), 71–103. On other possible influences and thinking through Bīdil with Avicenna (as well as complicating the notion of influence itself), see Mikkelsen, “Flights.”

10 All translations of Bīdil are mine and from the following edition: Bīdil, ‘Abd al-Qādir, *Shu‘la-yi āwāz: Mathnawihā-yi Bīdil-i Dihlawī*, ed. Akbar Bihdārband, Tehran: Nigāh, 2009, 48.

11 On the cosmos as God’s imagination, see Chittick, William C., *The sufi path of knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysics of imagination*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989, 112–129.

which all of God's names point. It is ontologically prior to any designation, manifestation, or relationship. While Bīdil affirms that the Essence is without any lack, he also marks that it is without any perfection. Rather, it is beyond any sense of either, and there is no room in that utter unity for any duality, distinction, or hierarchy.

The turn towards imagination is not out of any fundamental lack, but rather, is simply part of being alone. This is a clear reference to a well-known *ḥadīth qudsī* wherein God says, "I was a Hidden Treasure and I loved to be known, so I created creation so that they may know Me."<sup>12</sup> For Bīdil, in keeping with Ibn 'Arabī, this creation is identical to God's imagining. He was a hidden treasure, that is, a storehouse for limitless beauties, and His love drew these things out. Ultimately, these are nothing but Him; He simply loved for His own self to be known by Himself. But He is also limitless, and the Essence in its utter unity can never fully be known. Thus, the drawing out of all things, God's imagination, is the way through which every possible thing comes to be known. The never-ending world of multiplicity is God's journey of self-knowledge, and every self-disclosure is an image from His imagination. This is why multiplicity is the proof of His unity, and the relationship between the two effaces understanding in "bewilderment." Bewilderment, in keeping with Ibn 'Arabī and his followers, is the ultimate form of knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

In every disclosure, in this expanse of self-disclosure,  
 the Real has no need for appearing as two.  
 Behind every work, there is an illusionless face;  
 and where He is the face, the back is He too.  
 The drunkenness of your unity is without sobriety—  
 this means duality is effaced from your face. (lns. 289–291)  
 The seed of unity does not bring two flowers:  
 from reality, duality does not laugh. (ln. 293)<sup>14</sup>

Behind every existent thing there is God's face, an allusion to the Quranic verse "Wherever you turn, there is the face of God" (Q 2:115). The inward reality of existence is one, and thus, all its manifestations are one even as they differ in

12 On the use of this *ḥadīth* in Ibn 'Arabī's school, see Murata, Sachiko, *The Tao of Islam: A sourcebook on gender relationships in Islamic thought*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992, 61–63.

13 On bewilderment as the ultimate response to the way things are, see Chittick, William C., *The self-disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabī's cosmology*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998, 78–83.

14 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 40.

accord with standing and perspective. Every face and what lies behind it is He. His drunkenness, that is, the intoxication of His bewildering and continuous presence, is without sobriety.<sup>15</sup> By sobriety, *Bīdil* means the capacity to distinguish twoness. Everything that appears as different is not different yet also not the same—there is no possibility for anything but bewilderment. The limitless is fully present in the limited.

When He falls into attachment, He is named “corporeal.”  
 When He leaves entification, He is named “untouchable.”<sup>16</sup>  
 When He converses, He adorns temporality.  
 When He holds His breath, He constructs eternity.  
 Servanthood is with Godhood here.  
 The trap is opening your wings here.  
 The Real is apparent through him and he through the Real:  
 Unbounded from bounded and bounded from Unbounded. (Ins. 62–65)<sup>17</sup>

*Bīdil* says that all phenomenal differences are merely aspects of the Real. The “corporeal” marks attachment to form, the process through which something becomes an entity. When He leaves “entification,” He is named the opposite, that which is without body or form. Entification is a technical term taken from Ibn ‘Arabī. The entities are the possible things, that is, the objects of God’s knowledge. “The fixed entities” are the individual things as known by God, while the “possible” or “actual” entities refer to their status in creation. Entification is the process whereby an undifferentiated part of God’s knowledge (the Hidden Treasure) is differentiated and distinguished.<sup>18</sup> Attachment means that God drapes the possible things with His own being and attributes so that they may exist.

God’s speech is the adornment of temporality, that is, the entire phenomenal cosmos, which is the canvas of His imagination. When He holds His breath

15 To read more about what this specific intoxication may mean, cf. Chittick, *The Sufi path* 199.

16 This is the Arabic word *ṣamad*, a name of God presented here as the opposite of *jasad*, corporeal body. *Ṣamad* has a sense of everlasting refuge, a safe haven which is inaccessible. On the difficulties of this word, see Rosenthal, Franz, “Some minor problems in the Qur’ān,” in *The Joshua Starr memorial volume: Studies in history and philology*, New York: Conference on Jewish Relations, 1953, 67–84.

17 *Bīdil*, *Shu’la* 31.

18 On the entities, see Chittick, *The self-disclosure* 29–46.

and remains silent, He “constructs eternity.” The image here is taken from Ibn ‘Arabī’s identification of the cosmos with the breath of God, calling it “the Breath of the All-Merciful.” He writes, “the Breath of the All-Merciful bestows existence upon the forms of the possible things, just as the human breath bestows existence upon letters. Hence the cosmos is the words of God in respect to this breath ...”<sup>19</sup> On His breath, He articulates every possible thing. But every exhalation, as Bidil points out, has an inhalation. He holds His breath and marks eternity, where everything remains undifferentiated, hidden, and non-manifest. But He breathes, so His inhalation and exhalation are perpetual, and thus, creation is perpetual. Ibn ‘Arabī calls this “the Renewal of Creation.”<sup>20</sup> Since everything is forever changing and in flux, one needs to witness reality from the widest perspective possible through the eyes of bewilderment, not understanding. Only this perspective allows one to grasp that ultimately, servanthood is godhood. In other words, when He, through His breath, made manifest the cosmos, He manifested both “god” and “servant,” two aspects of the same reality.<sup>21</sup> Bidil uses an ambiguous line to warn that “opening your wings,” that is, affirming your own identity and choice at this level, is a trap, for it affirms duality. This is because from the perspective of sheer unity, the differences of identity and personhood are effaced. At the same time, that line also means that “opening your wings,” that is, freedom, can only be found in the “trap,” that is, the world of delimitation. Being demands a locus for manifestation.

The ambiguous “he” refers, in one aspect, to every created thing, pointing out thereby that the relationship between God and the cosmos is reciprocal.<sup>22</sup> But it also specifically refers to the “Muhammadan Reality” or the “Perfect Human Being.” God loved to be known, so the manifestation of His knowledge demands a perfect knower. This reality is the “image” upon which humanity was created, and thus, ultimately, nothing other than God-as-Divinity (as opposed to God-as-Essence). For the sake of this reality, God created the cosmos so that He could truly be known, and it is ultimately nothing other than God knowing Himself through love. Ibn ‘Arabī writes: “The Breath of the All-Merciful made the cosmos manifest in order to release the property of love and relieve what the Lover found in Himself. So He knew Himself through witnessing in

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19 Chittick, *The Sufi path* 131.

20 Chittick, *The Sufi path* 97–98.

21 On the mutual need between servant and God, see Murata, *The Tao* 190–191.

22 This ambiguity is increased by the Persian language wherein the word is ungendered and can also mean “it.”

the Manifest ..."<sup>23</sup> The Perfect Human Being is the one who loves, knows, and witnesses God, or, in other words, he is God in the form of lover, knower, and witnesser.

Action, the flowering of His signs;  
 Names, the form of His stations.  
 He let out a breath and morning dawned.  
 He let His tears fall and clouds rained.  
 The meadow: a page from the lesson of His color.  
 The ocean: a drop of sweat from the heat of His yearning.  
 Eternity-without-beginning: the fable of His start.  
 Eternity-without-end: the thought of His finish.  
 The meaning of the words: knower and known,  
 body and spirit, apparent and secret,  
 from the world of necessity to possibility itself,  
 whatever you think, hidden or visible,  
 He is spring and these are all His color.  
 He is the instrument and all this His song. (Ins. 104–110)<sup>24</sup>

Actions and Names refer to aspects of God. The Names, also called the Attributes, designate the different aspects through which God becomes manifest. Actions are how those aspects relate to creation. God's action is the flowering of the Muhammadan Reality in the cosmos, and the Names of God are the forms of that reality's stations. Station is a technical term from Sufism designating the waypoints of the path to (or with) God. Bīdil is pointing out that God's creation and self-disclosure are all for the sake of this reality, a reality that is simultaneously what it means to be God and what it means to be human. The cosmic world is but a manifestation of the states of this reality.

Eternity-without-beginning is a translation of the Arabic word *azal* and signifies the eternity preceding the now. It is a direction that is ontological, not temporal, and signifies a relationship with the eternally present. Bīdil identifies it with the fable or myth of creation and beginning, in other words, where we came from, marking that the origin of the human being is rooted in the imagination of God. Eternity-without-end, *abad*, is eternity in the other direction. It is the thought of the end, the imagination of consummation and fulfilment which will forever continue. As the other side of the story, Bīdil is saying that the

<sup>23</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi path* 131.

<sup>24</sup> Bīdil, *Shu'la* 33.

tale of return is also within the imagination and thus, a place that will never be reached, only eternally sought. Coming and going are all rooted in God, whose own Essence is where every opposite is rooted and every path is completed. That is why Bīdil calls Him “spring” and the phenomenal world His “color.” Like “spring,” that reality appears only through other things. God’s instrument plays, but all we hear is the music.

He is a sun but kneads dust,  
 He has a heaven but never boasts.  
 Lord, what is this play of bewilderment?  
 Who is this Resurrection-seller of possibility?  
 The dust of a sigh carries heaven;  
 a tear drop holds the ocean in embrace. (Ins. 71–73)  
 A glance spreads its wings before the eyelashes,  
 with all, without all, not this, not that.  
 His work is outside the exertion of choice.  
 His color is outside the garment of spring.  
 With every negation of an other, still thinking of another;  
 the circling of His flirtation draws him closer to Himself.  
 This means that in that place where nothing can be found,  
 besides this wave and curl,  
 nothing can be found. (Ins. 75–78)<sup>25</sup>

Bewilderment, as mentioned before, is the only proper response to the way things are for Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers. The reason for this is that reality is the union of all opposites. Everything in the cosmos is God and not God simultaneously. Ibn ‘Arabī is clear that “this is a place of bewilderment: He/not He.” Then, commenting on Q 8:17, “you did not throw when you threw, but God threw,” he writes:

He is saying, “You are not you when you are you, but God is you.” This is the meaning of our words concerning the Manifest and the loci of manifestation and the fact that He is identical with them, even though the forms of the loci of manifestation are diverse ... The “other” is in reality affirmed/not affirmed, He/not He.<sup>26</sup>

25 Bīdil, *Shu‘la* 31–32.

26 Chittick, *The Sufi path* 115.

Thus, for Bīdil, the cosmos is a “play of bewilderment” wherein God’s appearance is also a veil. He is the sun of existence but He molds with His own hands the form of an earthly body, the lowest of the low. The heavens belong to him but His most perfect manifestation is the form of a slave. Ibn ‘Arabi makes it doubly clear: “knowledge of God is bewilderment, and knowledge of creation is bewilderment.”<sup>27</sup> God is a “Resurrection-seller,” that is, He sells to the world of possibility, aka the objects of His knowledge, a “Resurrection,” an entering into forms. But Bīdil keeps asking who He is because the answer is both clear and unclear. The name of that reality conceals as much as it reveals. And in all of this, Bīdil reminds, He is “with all, without all, not this, not that.” He has a work that is outside all exertion, let alone choice, though “each day He is upon a task” (Q 55:29). And He has a color, though outside of all the colors of the phenomenal world (spring) which is, “the coloring of God, and who colors better than God?” (Q 2:138). Despite all His negation of what is other than Him (“there is no god but God”), He is forever thinking of “the other,” an other He always wanted. Bīdil thus depicts creation as flirtation, as the play of love, where God as both Lover and Beloved, veils and unveils, chases and hides. He constantly seeks what is other than Him and leaves the objects of His affection, if receptive, in wonder, bewilderment, and awe. God, alone, imagines an entire cosmic order wherein human beings, in their every love, find and lose parts of Him. All this is a dream, God’s dream, which is identical with reality itself. And in this dream, what are human beings?

We are the imaginings of the veil of the Unseen,  
 the conversation of the book “wherein is no doubt” [Q 2:2].  
 The goal of this image is an illusion.  
 The meaning of this speech is non-existent.  
 Silence: the lesson of our signlessness.  
 Lament: the composition of our inability. (lns. 471–473)  
 Finding is nonexistent while seeking subsists;  
 the cup is in dust and conversation pours drinks. (ln. 475)

The Unseen is God’s knowledge and the veil is God’s imagination, and human being are pictures drawn upon the veil. God breathes, and human beings are His articulations, the conversation of God, each individual an act of revelation. The goal of the image of their being is “illusion,” that is, imagination itself is the goal. And their meaning, as words of God, is fundamentally non-existent,

<sup>27</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi path* 380.



for it resides in God's knowledge where nothing has yet reached "existence." Their silence shows that they, in themselves, have no signs. They only operate based on the signs given to them, that is, based on how they are articulated by Being itself. Their lament is the admission of their inability, that is, their fundamental poverty towards God. Bīdil is saying that human beings are nothing but an image, or rather, streams of images that come in and out of the Unseen. The image itself has no access to the Unseen, only receiving what comes out of it. Thus, they never find because that would mean reaching the end of God's knowledge, which does not exist. Rather, they are always seeking, for seeking itself was the goal of creation. The cup, that is, the receptivity which defines the human being, is in dust, earth, the lowest of the low. And conversation, that is, God's articulations upon the breath, pours wine and is the Saqi who determines the portion of each. All existence is the play of images which "loved to be" seen, and humanity exists only for this game of love.

Us and I are entirely the measuring out of yearning;  
 there are no sides, it is just the exploration of oneness.  
 This means that the grasping and holding of love and desire  
 are ultimately nothing but the imagination of unity. (Ins. 517–518)<sup>28</sup>

Human identity was measured in and out of passion, that is, the only goal of individual identity is love. Human and divine identity are not sides but rather, perspectives of and upon unity, just like how what a dreamer sees in their dream is nothing but their own self, even if they see someone else. All the game of love and desire, the story of creation and its end, is all the imagination of unity, or, as mentioned before, the imagination of God, God's dream. As Ibn 'Arabī writes, "... the forms of the cosmos ... are the forms of a dream to the Dreamer. The interpretation of the dream is that those forms are His states, nothing else."<sup>29</sup> The play of the cosmos, with all its characters and relations, is nothing but the infinite states and stations of the One who dreamt and forever dreams it all.

Because that signless instrument subsists,  
 the melodies too subsist.  
 The imaginings have no end:  
 shorelessness cannot be tied by any limit. (Ins. 508–509)<sup>30</sup>

28 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 49.

29 Chittick, *The Sufi path* 120.

30 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 49.

The instrument, God's form-bestowing imagination, is outside of time and forever subsists, even as it perpetually changes due to its limitless nature.

Our melody is the clamor of the entities  
 appearing from the instrument of eternity.  
 The entities are not outside the eternal instrument;  
 the fermentation of wine is in wine itself. (Ins. 499–500)<sup>31</sup>

Creation is not outside of God but, as already mentioned, resides within Him as His dream.

The ocean of engendered things and all it contains  
 is the churning restlessness of His reality.  
 His outward and inward are temporality and eternity.  
 His form and meaning are existence and nonexistence. (Ins. 6–7)  
 His substance is the meaning of intellects and souls.  
 His accident: the color of the sensible world. (ln. 10)<sup>32</sup>  
 The East and West of which they speak  
 are the front and back of His turning face. (ln. 22)  
 The tumult of the nine oceans, with all its pomp and pride,  
 drowns beneath the image-wave of but one of His pearls. (ln. 25)  
 From His form, meaning is the springtime of witnessing.  
 From His meaning, form is the paradise of appearing.  
 The garden of the Names is full of roses through His Essence.  
 The feast of the things is radiant through His light. (Ins. 27–28)  
 His nearness and farness: the presence and absence of self.  
 Understanding His self leads to bewilderment of self. (ln. 32)<sup>33</sup>

The cosmos is an ocean in which the engendered things are never at rest, just like God's imagination, according to Bidil. Restlessness is a characteristic of love, and, in this context, connected to God's original love to be known.

God's substance, a term taken from philosophy, is the meaning of souls and intellects, their intelligible reality as known by God. Accident, the opposite of substance in philosophy, refers to a property that is secondary to a thing's existence. Bidil uses the pair to say that the color of the world (everything that can be

<sup>31</sup> Bidil, *Shu'la* 48.

<sup>32</sup> Bidil, *Shu'la* 29.

<sup>33</sup> Bidil, *Shu'la* 30.

sensed in it) is an accidental property of the reality of Being. While the meaning of a thing does not change, its color and how it is perceived always changes.

Like Ibn ‘Arabī, reality is a matter of perspective for Bīdil. East and west derive meaning from the turning of God’s face and need each other to make sense. Similarly, the classic pair of opposites in Sufi literature, form and meaning, are two interdependent aspects of the same reality. The form of God is what allows meaning to be witnessed while the meaning of God is what allows His form to appear. All language about God is either a perspective on the Real or a relational aspect of it. The Real is the ground of all identity. Nearness to and farness from God is also nearness and farness from the self, and Persian allows it to refer to either the human self or the self of God. Ultimately, the ambiguity is intentional as the two are one and the same. And since human beings are the imaginings of one who is Alone, they too find themselves alone in the world.

Because creation’s place of solitude is so narrow,  
The heart of solitude is where creation finds ease. (ln. 537)<sup>34</sup>

The word translated as “solitude,” *wahsha*, also means wilderness and dread. This place, that is the world wherein human beings have been imprisoned, is narrow and constricted. In one sense, this is a reference to the Quranic verse: “We created man in the most beautiful of statures, then we reduced him to the lowest of the low” (Q 95:4–5). Man was sent to the lowest of the low, that is, the most constricted of the constricted, a reference to their embodiment in a form that is more or less fixed.<sup>35</sup> As Ibn ‘Arabī writes,

here is nothing wider than the reality of man, and nothing narrower. As for its wideness, that is because it is not too narrow for anything at all, except one thing. As for its narrowness, that is because it cannot embrace two incoming thoughts at once, since it is one in essence, so it does not accept manyness.<sup>36</sup>

Being made in the image of God means that every human being is its own solitude. But being an image of something means that humans are its reflection, and like any mirror, humanity can only accept one image at a time. This is why the only ease for a human heart is in the heart of solitude, where one’s state most resembles the reality of their being.

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34 Bīdil, *Shu‘la* 50.

35 Whatever is dominated by a single form is more constricted.

36 Chittick, *The Sufi path* 376.

What is man? The self-disclosure of perception:  
understanding the meaning of “were it not for you ...” (ln. 3)<sup>37</sup>

Self-disclosure is a translation of the Arabic word *tajallī*. Disclosure is an unveiling, revelation, or manifestation of something hidden. All disclosure is God’s self-disclosure because all creation happens “within” God. Perception is the means by which a thing is known, so man is the self-disclosure of God’s knowing of Himself. That is, they are the meaning of another popular *ḥadīth* in which Muhammad quotes God as saying to him, “were it not for you I would not have created the spheres.”<sup>38</sup> Bīdil uses this to say that God created the cosmos for the sake of that reality so that it may perceive the Real. Human beings are thus defined based on their capacity to know God and to witness His unbounded imagination and its never-repeating flow and change, an ocean which has always been and will always be.

From their ancient flowing, the departing waves  
have bound a form of stability (ln. 538)<sup>39</sup>

This short analysis aimed only to show glimmers of how Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmology features in Bīdil’s poetry. Bīdil is, in fact, the premier lyricist of Ibn ‘Arabī’s school, and his poems stretch and play with language itself so as to furnish a new perspective for his audience. In what follows, I will offer thematic selections from *‘Irfān* without commentary. Whereas the previous selections focused on Bīdil’s cosmology (“the Origin”), what follows are Bīdil’s prescriptions for how to go back to God (“the Return”).

### 3 Impediments

What path lies there in that direction? Look here, this way;  
in this direction see the indication of He.  
What appears there, belongs here:  
farseeing is the perfection of seeing.  
His otherness is nothing but slander,  
who can grasp man’s flirtatious glances? (lns. 79–81)

37 Bīdil, *Shu‘la* 29.

38 Furūzānfar, Badī‘ al-Zamān (ed.), *Aḥādīth-i Mathnawī*, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihārān, 1955, no. 546.

39 Bīdil, *Shu‘la* 50.

The eye is awake and the dream, an interpretation.  
 The lips are silent and the lament, a discourse.  
 This gardener is intensely colorless.  
 This world of disclosure—sheer deception.  
 Happy the heart that placed before Him a mirror!  
 The Rose Garden is an eye that saw His gait. (lns. 83–85)<sup>40</sup>

You've perceived a garden but there is no color.  
 There is a mountain before your eyes,  
 but not of stone. (ln. 168)<sup>41</sup>  
 You bind similarity to incomparability.  
 You join metaphor to reality.  
 You were beauty, but you held a mirror to yourself  
 and imagined that you were what you saw. (lns. 173–174)  
 Your being a mirror is duality:  
 to be before an "I" involves being a "You."  
 Become a clear mirror; this is perfection!  
 Efface your own picture; this is beauty! (lns. 176–177)<sup>42</sup>

Far from self but near to all,  
 a light in every place but dark before yourself. (ln. 223)  
 The cosmos is rid of the picture of love and hate:  
 your war and peace are but against yourself.  
 You are what you call out to, yet you still seek?  
 Home is in your arms, yet you still run away?  
 If you are hunted, you are hunted by yourself;  
 the moment you run, you fall into your own trap.  
 There is no trace of any other before or behind you.  
 You run, but from your own shadow.  
 You've dragged yourself into darkness;  
 how far you think yourself to be. (lns. 225–229)  
 No cup had this much residue.  
 No morning suffered such an assault of night.  
 Some dust rose and appeared from your body  
 and it covered you from your own sight.  
 Heedless of faith, on the verge of sleep,

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40 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 32.

41 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 35.

42 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 36.

who but you was ever trampled by their own shadow? (Ins. 236–238)  
 From this sleep, your life-work was thrown upside down.  
 Now, even shadows attack you by night. (ln. 240)<sup>43</sup>  
 Strive until this talisman that controls you melts;  
 until this shadow disappears and becomes a sun. (ln. 251)<sup>44</sup>

#### 4 Seeing Correctly

The substance of modesty is nothing but water:  
 become water and grasp the meaning of shame.  
 In the lesson of self-understanding,  
 no eyeglasses are better than covering the eyes.  
 Modesty does not see the air above one's head,  
 water sees nothing but what is before its feet.  
 Being this and that is nonsensical;  
 it is shamelessness to see others. (Ins. 219–222)<sup>45</sup>

The cause of your running this way and that  
 is because you do not look before your own feet. (ln. 446)<sup>46</sup>

Your sleep is the mirror-holder of deprivation,  
 even if it is life, it is non-existence.  
 You have given death the name "life,"  
 you have turned your own day, like a shadow, into night (Ins. 241–242).  
 What a storm ignorance threw upon your knowledge;  
 that, from your dawning, even the night cloister falls.  
 O illusion-caster of white and black,  
 night is your lashes and day, your glance.  
 Though you appear by a hundred veils at night,  
 when you open your eyes, you yourself are dawn.  
 For how long will you drink the cup of sleep?  
 You have shut your lashes to never open them again.  
 The time of sleep has passed, lift your head.  
 Lift your lashes from the path of vision.

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43 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 38.

44 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 39.

45 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 37.

46 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 46.

Closed lashes are the darkness of deprivation;  
 until you open your eyes, it is still night. (lns. 244–249).<sup>47</sup>  
 Ignorance keeps your mirror black;  
 God keep you from this affliction.  
 Do not set the table of doubts through illusion,  
 you are the mirror of the beauty of certainty.  
 I fear that your heart will be lost in passing breaths,  
 and in place of your mirror, only rust will grow.  
 Before the mirror goes to dust,  
 there is still a chance to polish it. (lns. 257–260)  
 There is no ill but your sleep.  
 If the eye opens,  
 there is no darkness left. (ln. 262)<sup>48</sup>

Before the candle of realization can be lit,  
 the eye must be fixed on traversing the self.  
 That which distracts it is a futile flight;  
 illusion is to run away from the self.  
 You seek another, but no other is visible;  
 these mannerisms are foolish and mistaken.  
 What is other? That which, at present, you are not;  
 or, in other words,  
 the very thought of the future. (lns. 410–413)<sup>49</sup>

## 5 Being Yourself

Creation, with all this manifestation of perfection,  
 is nothing but the mirror of an impossible thought. (ln. 266)  
 You become Him? What an impossible imagining.  
 He becomes you? This too is illusion and imagination.  
 Servanthood is not the world of Godhood,  
 the cage is not the mirror of freedom. (ln. 270–272)<sup>50</sup>

You are outward, let go of sorrow over the inward;  
 the possible cannot find the necessary.

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47 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 38.

48 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 39.

49 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 45.

50 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 39.

You want to unite heaven and earth?  
 There is no thought more impossible than this. (lns. 287–288)<sup>51</sup>

If you are heaven or if you are earth,  
 whatever you are, right now, you are that.  
 Until another time comes and you take another color,  
 becoming a rose or wine, a rock or clay. (lns. 415–416)<sup>52</sup>

The ease of the wounded is in impatience;  
 here, the ship is always in a whirlpool. (ln. 464)<sup>53</sup>

For as long as you are captive, desire not freedom.  
 For as long as you suffer, sorrow not happiness.  
 In lamentation, carry not the grief of silence;  
 for as long as crying is your coin, buy not laughter.  
 The goal is that you not rush forward  
 from the enclosure of self through the incantation of desire.  
 If, in pursuit of meaning, your self is not lost  
 even a wound is not empty of a smile.  
 And if your heart looks at your own state,  
 the wound becomes but a stroll through another rose-garden.  
 What an affliction, an abandonment, a racing madness,  
 that you are not content with yourself for even a moment.  
 You are an ocean but, from this fever and its heedlessness,  
 all your waves crash upon the shore.  
 Nested at home and you yearn for travel;  
 travel far and your glance is towards home.  
 A jewel and a restless heart together?  
 A house full of sun yet need for a candle?  
 All your profits are taken from yourself.  
 Everything you find, in reality, you lose. (lns. 272–281)<sup>54</sup>  
 Whatever you are, you are far from yourself;  
 far from self and utterly forsaken. (ln. 284)<sup>55</sup>

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51 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 40.

52 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 45.

53 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 47.

54 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 39–40.

55 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 40.



Journey one meadow, whether leaves or flowers.  
 Swim one direction, whether glass or wine.  
 You are all light, why think of darkness?  
 You are all awareness, why bring forth ignorance?  
 Until you know that end is beginning,  
 life remains an instrument with an uncouth song. (lns. 294–296)<sup>56</sup>

You are the workshop of high and low,  
 if you become naught, all that exists is you. (ln. 178)  
 Seek clarity from this obscurity;  
 leave your self and find union.  
 It is better to find meaning without writing.  
 It is better to receive disclosure without qualification or quantification.  
 Water has neither outward nor inward:  
 water writes a simple page. (lns. 180–182)  
 The wave of your flowering became separation.  
 Lifting your head became the form of duality. (ln. 185)  
 Every bubble and foam that rises up,  
 is nothing but froth, the rest is all wave. (ln. 189)  
 Both wave and whirlpool are nothing but the ocean;  
 other than this name, no other can be found.  
 Grasp the essence, names are many.  
 Become cooked, raw thoughts are many. (lns. 191–192).

Beholder of the world of imagination,  
 the disclosure is without veil, rub your eyes!  
 For how long will you look through your lashes?  
 For how long will the feet of your yearning trip on your skirt?  
 Rip off your skirt! Escape the trap!  
 Part your lashes and rid yourself of raw thoughts.  
 What is the skirt? The dust of the illusion of duality.  
 What are the lashes? The veil of what you are.  
 For how long will you carve duality out of your self?  
 For how long will you throw dust in the face of disclosure? (lns. 158–  
 162)<sup>57</sup>

56 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 40.

57 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 35.

## 6 Finding Home

Prepare for subsistence, where is perishing?  
Dive into the ocean whether waves or foam. (ln. 305)<sup>58</sup>

In your infancy, adolescence is not seen.  
In your youth, old age is not there.  
If you are night, day cannot be found in you.  
If you are dawn, evening cannot fall upon you.  
For as long as you are, awareness has no currency;  
the zenith has no ascent for as long as you are base.  
Ancient instrument of renewal's melody,  
the repetition of disclosure cannot be seen from you.  
In every breath of yours  
one reality spreads its wings into the garment of soul.  
That reality is your unbounded subsistence  
which, through your talisman, appears bounded.  
Through the bounded, be for the unbounded.  
This and that are both unreal, be with the Real.  
Home is from you, go no further;  
gather yourself so you do not lose yourself. (lns. 418–425)<sup>59</sup>

Everyone is left behind yet they pass ahead;  
on a journey, yet effaced in their own bosom.  
Like a candle, lives have left as you journey on.  
Every step, another home.  
Every step, another world, a place of refuge.  
Once you pass, that is no longer your place.  
The candle's goal is traversing its self.  
Wherever the eyes open,  
that is your homeland. (lns. 406–409)<sup>60</sup>

A homeland other than the present moment is an illusion.  
Whatever lies in that direction is non-existent.  
Whoever remembered the desert at home,

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58 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 41.

59 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 45.

60 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 45.

built hellfire in the middle of paradise. (lns. 385–386)  
 Whoever remembered home in the desert,  
 built a nest in hopelessness. (ln. 389)  
 Not only did the desert journey not bring presence,  
 but they remained deprived of the joy of home too. (ln. 388)<sup>61</sup>

Even those with feet stuck in mud move forward like bolts of lightning.  
 Even home has taken the road.  
 A world has downed the cup of madness;  
 it plays a song out of scale.  
 Wine pours glass into the vine.  
 Water sifts flame into stone.  
 Here, an entire creation chases vain desire.  
 Here, no one is in the house. (lns. 330–333)<sup>62</sup>

The fruit of the garden of your disposition is raw,  
 otherwise, how could existence be a place for rest? (ln. 448)<sup>63</sup>  
 When the road is not your home,  
 you will not find ease anywhere. (ln. 298)<sup>64</sup>

## 7 Love

Intellect and sense, hearing and seeing, spirit and body:  
 all are love, “He is God, the One” [Q 112:1].  
 From a fistful of Adam’s earth, love spilled  
 so much blood  
 that the world lost its color. (lns. 1–2)<sup>65</sup>

From eternity-without-beginning to eternity-without-end  
 this seed of bewilderment has led thought to roots.  
 Wherever disclosure appears, it faces Him  
 until that breath where He is with Him.

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61 Bīdil, *Shu’la* 44.

62 Bīdil, *Shu’la* 42.

63 Bīdil, *Shu’la* 46.

64 Bīdil, *Shu’la* 40.

65 Bīdil, *Shu’la* 29.

When He leaves self, only love knows—  
only flames can read the lines of firewood. (lns. 35–37)<sup>66</sup>

Love says, “Move beyond duality,  
hold unto me and move beyond you-ness.”  
Love has neither head nor foot,  
it holds no difference between hearing and sight.  
For as long as you are unaware of the submission of love,  
the problem is with you, even if you are completely a jewel.  
What is submission? Abiding by contentment;  
staying away from the meddling of I and us.  
If the heart wears the skirt of contentment  
even bleeding still has colors. (lns. 300–304)<sup>67</sup>

What is love? The root of the substance of His essence.  
Disclosure: the rising splendor of His signs.  
Beauty visible but love, hidden;  
the flame veiled but the candle waxing proud.  
The eye open, its glance cast that way;  
the ear and lip unaware of speaking or hearing. (lns. 38–40)  
The flash of the Essence was the killer’s blade;  
Attribute and Name were the blood of sacrifice. (ln. 44)<sup>68</sup>

Beauty: a color that joined His rose.  
Love: a fervor that escaped His mind.  
Awareness: the opening of His eyes  
Ignorance: the batting of His lashes. (lns. 54–55)<sup>69</sup>

## 8 The Footsteps of God

From the beginning hear the clamor of the end;  
see the footprint and hear the footstep.  
Everywhere, the dust of the departed rises.  
The six directions are filled with the sound of a single footstep.

66 Bīdil, *Shu’la* 30.

67 Bīdil, *Shu’la* 41.

68 Bīdil, *Shu’la* 30.

69 Bīdil, *Shu’la* 31.

The high points are nothing but the dust of low points:  
 it is a footprint, not the picture of being.  
 To realize the meaning of the world,  
 there is no model better than a footprint.<sup>70</sup>  
 If you're caught up in the footprint,  
 your journey through the possible is worthless to awareness. (lns. 555–  
 559)

Without doubt, form is the ambush of annihilation;  
 it is the frowning brow of the snare of desire. (ln. 561)<sup>71</sup>  
 The power of the workshop of our being  
 at times gave forth a dewdrop, at times a breeze.  
 When, from swooning, the breezes struck one another,  
 a footprint came to be from the dewdrop.  
 The dewdrop was effaced, it became air,  
 and the footprint became the sound of a footstep.  
 Before this, the imaginal dewdrop  
 opened its wings in the veil of air.  
 In this time, the dewdrop subsists through the air;  
 we have left and the footprint remains.  
 So through a footstep's sound and a footprint,  
 for how long will you ponder existence and nonexistence? (lns. 564–  
 569)<sup>72</sup>

If there are no eyes, find ears:  
 watch the disclosure of those who have left.  
 Consider these songs that reach your ears—  
 treasure them! Strive in their intellection.  
 What trace is there of the ancestors? What appearance?  
 Those images were without sign.  
 A few sparks and they opened their eyes,  
 only to shut them soon again.  
 Now, all those pictures of imagination  
 are effaced through devotion in the world of majesty.  
 Whoever seeks a sign from those disclosures,  
 seeks an illusory dust from no-place.

<sup>70</sup> This is playing on the word for foot (*qadam*) in Arabic which, without vowelizing, looks the same as eternity (*qidam*).

<sup>71</sup> Bīdil, *Shu'la* 50.

<sup>72</sup> Bīdil, *Shu'la* 51.

If you have a sign of your companions,  
 you still gaze at those who have gone.  
 All of these are the same in kind;  
 they are fairies in human form.  
 Though they are drawn on the page of sobriety,  
 as soon as you blink, they are effaced.  
 Your eyes are short-sighted:  
 you perceive absence as presence.  
 In a single moment, consider the being and subsistence  
 of this rootless world  
 gone from memory.  
 All of our seeing and hearing  
 is but a footprint and a footstep. (lns. 542–553)<sup>73</sup>

No matter how much exertion counts its steps,  
 the end sleeps within the beginning.  
 We are birds with no sign of wing or feather,  
 we are a caravan that leaves no trace.  
 We go, but leave no footsteps.  
 We leap in fear,  
 but there is no trap, no ambush. (lns. 480–482)<sup>74</sup>

Know: the flame is sought and the spark seeks;  
 the description of the Essence dominates the Attribute.  
 Where the sun discloses itself,  
 what can a shadow gain from its own shape?  
 When a shadow is dominated, it becomes light:  
 bounty is a flood on the structure of the Unseen.  
 What does a shadow dominated by light mean?  
 Open your eyes, what does awareness mean?  
 When lightning dominates over tinder,  
 tinder's picture is wiped away from the tablet of being. (lns. 145–149)<sup>75</sup>

Whatever was dominated, its existence left.  
 The perspectives of its being and subsistence left.  
 More so the one dominated by the presence of God

73 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 50.

74 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 47–48.

75 Bīdil, *Shu'la* 34.

to whose understanding duality can never reach.  
 If the Real dominates, where is the unreal?  
 Layla has unveiled herself;  
 where is the veil? (Ins. 151–153)<sup>76</sup>

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