

SHAMSUR RAHMAN FARUQI

How to Read Iqbal*

GIVEN a small twist of inflection, the question may very easily be understood to mean: How *can* one read Iqbal? The implication would be that he is such an uninteresting poet, how could one read him by choice? It is true that such a question would not be asked by someone who has the slightest feel for the Urdu language and the rhythms of its poetry, for even the dullest of Iqbal's poems rings and reverberates not just in the outer ear but deep within one's psyche and sets up vibrations of pleasure in one's soul. But the problem arises when one is made to read Iqbal not for pleasure, but for profit. For Iqbal is also a politician's poet, a religious thinker's poet, and a philosopher's poet, and much more besides. Iqbal has earned a lot of praise, and not a little blame as well, for being one or the other of these....

It is an interesting though sad fact of literary criticism that politics seems never to have left poetry to its own devices. Politicians love to make use of poetry, but are wise enough to leave alone poets like Shakespeare and Goethe whom they can't exploit for their own purposes. Literary critics are less wise. They try to read politics even in poets like Shakespeare and Keats who did their best not to profess any political creed and who made their poems apparently incapable of yielding interpretations that could be converted into political currency.

That Iqbal should have aroused interest and even devotion among politicians and political and religious thinkers all over the Muslim world, and particularly in those Muslim countries that were trying to come to

* Paper originally presented at the Iqbal Academy in Lahore, Pakistan, April 2004. All translations from Urdu and Persian have been made by the author. Thanks are due to Dr. Muhammad Suheyl Umar, Director of the Iqbal Academy, without whose urgings this paper would not have seen the light of day.

terms with the modern age and had been under colonial domination for many long years, is quite natural, for Iqbāl's poetry has strong overtones of modernity and makes serious efforts to find ways of fruitfully negotiating the postcolonial landscape in society and politics without losing what he regarded as fundamental elements of Islamic religious thought and socio-political identity. He was also passionately concerned with the historic reality of Islam and how its lost effects could be revived and perpetuated in the modern world. Such a project was bound to appeal to and have uses for the Muslim politician as well as the Muslim socio-political reformer and activist.

In the Urdu world, Iqbāl was and even now is often known by two appellatives: *Shā'ir-e Mashriq* (Poet of the East), and *Ḥakīmu'l-Ummat* (Physician/Philosopher of the [Muslim] People.) It might be interesting to note here that the latter appellative (*Ḥakīmu'l-Ummat*) has also been applied to Maulānā Shāh Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī (1863/4–1943), one of the two most influential Sufis and religious reformers and mentors of the Muslim community in South Asia during the first half of the twentieth century. Thānavī was not much interested in politics (though he favored Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League), but his influence can be seen and felt in the social and religious life of South Asian Muslims even today. The political life of Muslims, especially in Pakistan, also shows Thānavī's influence through the ulema of that country, particularly those of the Deobandi School who have a strong presence in Pakistan today.

A few more points are worth noting here about these appellatives: Iqbāl, the philosopher-activist, political and religious thinker, active in politics though not a full-time politician, was seen by the Muslim community of South Asia as performing an ongoing, meliorist role in the Muslim society of his time which was qualitatively the same role that was being discharged by Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī, practicing Sufi-intellectual and religious and social reformer. That is to say, Iqbāl's status as poet notwithstanding, he had another niche, or many other niches, in the political life and society of the Subcontinent. But what was lost in this assessment was the fact that whatever other status Iqbāl enjoyed had been conferred on him because of his status as a poet. So, any literary consideration of Iqbāl could ignore, so far as such a proceeding was possible, the philosophical or political content of his poetry, but could not ignore its literary content.

To be sure, both *Shā'ir-e Mashriq* and *Ḥakīmu'l-Ummat* are now falling into desuetude, more so in India than in Pakistan. That is, literary and even non-expert circles do not now use these appellatives freely. But the reason for this seems to be that Iqbāl criticism perhaps believes itself

to have grown in sophistication and subtlety, and these appellatives do seem simplistic if not naïve. A reason for their declining popularity with the common reader could be that he is not all that excited by Iqbāl's role as *ḥakīm*, and *mashriq* also has now grown in common perception to mean more than what it did five or six decades ago.

The "East" in *Shā'ir-e Mashriq* (Poet of the East) was not originally seen as subsuming anything more than the Subcontinent and maybe Afghanistan and Iran. Similarly, the "Poet" here didn't mean something like a "poet par excellence." It rather signified a poet whose poetry presented and represented the political, intellectual and maybe even spiritual aspirations of the "East." Yet, in some sense Iqbāl was also seen as the Poet of the Greater East, that is Asia. Perhaps Iqbāl also saw himself as the Poet of the East, and *Shā'ir-e Mashriq* seemed to see in Goethe the Poet of the West (*Shā'ir-e Mağrib*), that is, Europe. It was for this latter reason that Iqbāl composed *Payām-e Mashriq* (Message From the East, 1923) just as Goethe had sent his greetings to the East (Iran, in this case) through his *West-Ostlicher Divan* (Divan of the East and West, 1819). Iqbāl described his book on its title page as "Response to the German Poet Goethe" and wrote in the preface: "The purpose of *Payām-e Mashriq* is ... to present before the [people's] eyes those moral, religious and religio-national truths which relate to the inner education of the individuals and peoples" (1973, 181).

Thus Iqbāl gave advance intimation of his poetic intention to the reader and desired the poems of *Payām-e Mashriq* to be read principally, if not solely, as didactic-philosophical documents. This did not help the cause of Iqbāl the poet and led the uninitiated student to believe that the poems were something like Sanā'ī Ġaznavī's *Ḥadīqa* which Edward Granville Browne characterized (wrongly, in my opinion) as the dullest poem ever written (Browne 1964, 2:319). Thus the title "Poet of the East" easily flowed into "Physician/Philosopher of the [Muslim] People." It would be wrong to say that Iqbāl connived at this result, but it is quite right to say that Iqbāl often professed a lack of interest in his poetry qua poetry and this encouraged misreadings of his poetry inasmuch as attention was concentrated on Iqbāl's philosophical and religio-political message. There was a near exclusion by literary critics of his poetic content and a practical suppression of his claim to be treated as a poet, a claim, one might say, that is embedded almost everywhere in his poetry.

The detrimental effects of this suppression on Iqbāl the poet can be demonstrated by quoting from two important works of literary criticism on Iqbāl, both written from nearly opposing points of view. A period of a

little more than four decades separates the two. The following is from Majnūn Gōrakhpūrī (1904–1988), a leading Progressive critic of his time who was also well known for his expertise in classical Urdu and Persian poetry: “Iqbāl, despite his occasional reactionariness, ancestor-worship, and now and then taking a turn in the wrong direction, seems to be a poet of Life, Revolution and Progress ([1946?] 106).¹

Salīm Aḥmad (1927–1983)—a major modern poet and critic noted as much for his erudition as his brilliant wit—wrote his book on Iqbāl with the avowed purpose of rehabilitating the status of Iqbāl as a poet. He summed up Iqbāl the poet in the following words:

The central problem in Iqbāl is not Self-hood (*kbudī*), nor Love (*‘ishq*), nor Action (*‘amal*), nor yet Power and Dynamism (*quvvat-o-ḥarakat*), but rather, as opposed to all these, Death is Iqbāl’s central problem. This is the problem which informs his being with a tremor and upheaval that shakes his whole being. Here lies the foundation of that poetic experience which generates the poetic world that is peculiar to Iqbāl.²

(1978, 28)

Needless to say, neither critic does justice to Iqbāl, but the main point is that both critics judge Iqbāl in nonliterary terms. Poets of an earlier age are almost always at risk from misreading. This is true particularly in the case of Urdu whose history suffered a major literary/cultural discontinuity in the middle of the nineteenth century. Contemporary or near contemporary poets are rarely misread. More often than not they provoke bafflement if not resentment. The great Progressive critic Eḥtshām Ḥusain (1912–1972) once described Iqbāl as “a baffling figure” because he found unreconcilable differences in the philosophical and political positions taken by Iqbāl.³ But Eḥtshām Ḥusain’s bafflement is nothing compared to the systematic misreadings of Iqbāl that have resulted from his “art” being studied separately, if at all, from his “thought.” Majnūn Gōrakhpūrī made no pretence of judging Iqbāl on literary merits. He judged him, rather, as a fellow dialectician and a politically committed student of life and literature. In the ten or twelve short pages that he devotes to studying Western influences on Iqbāl, Majnūn Gōrakhpūrī mentions Goethe, Nietzsche, Hegel, Bergson, Wordsworth, Heine, Browning, Emerson, Ide-

¹Capitals added by me. Urdu has no capital letters but the three words here seemed to cry out for capitalization, at least in English.

²Capitalization here is again mine.

³Reference to published source not available. —*Editor*

alism, Voluntarism, Activism, Leibnitz, the Theory of Monads, Dialectics, Marx, Life-Force, Rudolf Eichen (I couldn't identify him, but Majnūn Gōrakhpūrī describes him as “the famous *ḥakīm* [philosopher] of Europe”)—in that order.⁴

Salīm Aḥmad has no such pretensions. He is, by his declared intention, on a demolition mission. He wants to read Iqbāl as a poet. He says:

Ninety percent of all that has been written about Iqbāl so far consists of commentary on and explication of his thought and his theories. Such writings have two fundamental faults: They do not, as a general rule, address Iqbāl's poetry. Their other fault is that they present Iqbāl's thoughts as things which are already there, ready to use. This latter point needs a bit of elucidation. Iqbāl's thought (if his thought is at all something separate from his poetic personality) is a part of his being.... We cannot view his thought as having existence outside his being, and as if Iqbāl has used them in the same way that we can use merchandise we buy in the market.

(1978, 19)

Apart from the fact that here Salīm Aḥmad flies dangerously close to T. S. Eliot's false theory of “felt thought” (which I think he repudiated later), the point to be noted is that, in spite of his good intentions, Salīm Aḥmad can't do more than indulge in flights of impressionistic-phenomenological fancy in trying to tell us why he thinks Iqbāl's *Masjid-e Qurṭuba* is a great poem:

Gradually, we find ourselves being submerged in Iqbāl's experience.... Now it is not Iqbāl's thought that we gain acquaintance with: we go down into Iqbāl's heart, and in its depths we experience a vitality of life that we have never felt before. In the depths of our beings we become more capable of feeling, more disturbed, more alive. Now the poem's rhythms become the rhythms of our blood. And the poem, percolating down from our head, softens and melts our whole being and reverberates even in the soles of our feet.

(*ibid.*, 105)

Well, a little of such writing can go a long way, but we are not nearer to any demonstrable reason why *Masjid-e Qurṭuba* is a great poem. If, in designating “death” as Iqbāl's central concern and the reason for his greatness (which he denies is the case in *Masjid-e Qurṭuba*), Salīm

⁴Reference to published source not available. —*Editor*

Aḥmad was being nonliterary, his raptures over *Masjid-e Qurṭuba* leave us a little uncomfortable and puzzled, for here he is being literary in a superficially belles altruistic rather than in any kind of critical mode.

Salīm Aḥmad is not alone in his failure to tackle Iqbāl's greatness as a poet. In a somewhat uncharacteristic access of malice, or pique, or both, Salīm Aḥmad wrote at the beginning of his book that "most of those who have written on Iqbāl have been persons whom Urdu literature doesn't recognize with much honor or respect" (*ibid.*, 18). This is not quite true, for Āl-e Aḥmad Surūr (1911–2002), regarded as among the greatest of Urdu critics, wrote extensively about Iqbāl, and he was mostly concerned with Iqbāl the poet. However, his problem was his inability or unwillingness to make sustained and focused texts of literary criticism. His eclecticism obliged him to look at all possible aspects of a poem, however briefly. Thus the reader was left with a multiplicity of impressions. One reason for his not casting a searching analytical eye on Iqbāl's poetry was that he took the notion of Iqbāl's high poetic station as a given, as something which need not be elaborated on too much. This of course was not the case, especially not in the post-1947 world when, in the young people's eyes, many truths had turned out to be illusions, much of the gold of science and philosophy had been shown to be the basest dross, and the sensibility of the "third world" was undergoing a serious change in the face of challenges and inroads made by postcolonial cultural and economic imperialism.

At such a time in our history, many of us found it difficult to accept the lofty self-assured tone of Iqbāl's political and philosophical voice. It was, after all, the voice of a person who, for all his wisdom and sagacity and uncanny ability to predict the moral and cultural decline of the West, hadn't actually seen the Second World War, didn't know about the atomic bomb and Hiroshima, couldn't even have conceived of the horrors of tyranny and genocide in Palestine and Afghanistan and Bosnia and Iraq and elsewhere. Thus Iqbāl's prophetic voice failed to carry conviction, if taken on its own.

Things might have been different if our literary critics had risen to the occasion and told us that Iqbāl was a truly great poet and here are the reasons for his greatness; never mind the fact that his "message" and his certainties seem slightly dated and his "philosophy" sounds somewhat simplistic. His glory begins with his poetry, even if Iqbāl may have occasionally lapsed into denying that he was a poet in the conventional

sense.⁵ Unfortunately, our literary critics were apparently so overwhelmed by the “Poet-Physician-Philosopher of the East and the [Muslim] People” that they regarded as futile any exercise to examine and establish Iqbāl’s right to be placed among the poets of the world, and not just the poets of Urdu or Persian.

In a conference on Iqbāl organized in New Delhi in 1987, Āl-e Aḥmad Surūr began his short paper with the words:

The emphasis in Iqbāl studies so far has been on his thought. His art has not been given sufficient and proper attention. Iqbāl’s greatness is not because of his philosophy, or because of the depth and strength of his thoughts, but because of the thought having been molded into poetry.

(1983, 34)

But he hedged his bets and wrote in his concluding paragraph as follows:

Today, when there is greater attention on the breaking and disintegration of beliefs, expression of [the poet’s] self, [poetry as] soliloquy, irony, distortion and shattering of language, we should not ignore the Taj Mahal of Art that we find in Iqbāl and which proves to us that no exalted purpose injures poetry, provided the content of that purpose comes to us as [integrated] form and whose thought observes and follows the rules of poetry-ness. Again, in this age of the breaking and disintegration of beliefs, one mustn’t forget that the authoritativeness of [the truth of] personality that is the distinguishing mark of true and unalloyed poetry develops through a

⁵In a letter dated 3 January 1919, Iqbāl wrote to Saiyid Shaukat Ḥusain, “Poetryness in my poems has but a secondary place. I don’t at all have aspirations to be counted among the poets of this age.” In a letter dated 16 March 1919, Iqbāl wrote to Maulānā Girāmī, “It’s a wonder that people regard me as a poet and press me to recite my poems to them, although I have nothing to do with poetry.” On 3 April of the same year he wrote to Maulānā Saiyid Sulaimān Nadvī, “The aim of this poetry composition [of mine] is neither poetry [as literature] nor [the pleasure of] language.” See Barnī (1991, 43, 67, 78). The letter to Saiyid Shaukat Ḥusain was in English. I don’t have the English original before me and have translated back from the Urdu version in Barnī’s book. Another translation exists in Shaikh ‘Aḥḥād-l-Lāh (1951, 254). In this translation, the word translated by me as “poetryness” is *she‘riyat*, while the Barnī text has *shā‘irī*, which strictly means “poetry” but can be translated as “poetryness” given the proper context. In any case, there are other instances where Iqbāl clearly implies that he is a serious poet in his own right.

taste and joy of certainty.⁶

(*ibid.*, 43)

The problem with most Urdu criticism about Iqbāl is that it fails to appreciate the fact that “great thinker” is not synonymous with “great poet.” In fact it may be easier to write poetry in philosophy than to write philosophy in poetry. One recalls Coleridge writing to Wordsworth, “Whatever in Lucretius is poetry is not philosophical, whatever is philosophical is not poetry....” He was talking about Wordsworth’s “Excursion” which was published in 1814 as a fragment of a larger poem called “The Recluse” about which he went on to say, “I expected the colours, music, imaginative life, and passion of *poetry*, but the matter and arrangement of *philosophy*...” (1957, 130).

The philosophical poet’s problem thus was of dissolving the one into the other, or of “wedding” truth to verse. Coleridge made an interesting point about the enjoyment of poetry, particularly philosophical poetry when he asked how a person could “fully enjoy Wordsworth who has never meditated on the truths which Wordsworth has wedded to immortal verse?” (1896, 407). Although Coleridge didn’t explain what he meant here by “truths,” or how the “truths” should be “wedded” to verse, his point was that full enjoyment of philosophical poetry is not possible unless one shares the belief-system of the poet, or at least has sufficient empathy with it to enable one to “meditate on the truths” set out through that belief-system.

This is an apparent though not real similarity in Coleridge and Surūr’s positions. Surūr seems to imply that Iqbāl’s *zauq-e yaqīn* can be, or in fact should be shared by all his readers. Coleridge is in fact saying something quite the opposite: if one cannot meditate upon (is out of empathy with) what Coleridge terms as “truths,” one can’t enjoy Wordsworth’s poetry

⁶The phrase “taste and joy of certainty” is my translation for *zauq-e yaqīn*. Surūr is alluding to a *she’r* in Iqbāl’s poem “Ṭulū’-e Islām” (The Dawning of Islam, 1922) printed in his first collection *Bāñg-e Darā* (The Clarion, 1924):

*ḡulāmī mēñ na kām ātī haiñ shamshīrēñ na
tadbīrēñ*

jō hō zauq-e yaqīñ paidā tō ka jātī haiñ zanjīrēñ

Neither stratagems nor belief in fate work
In slavery. Shackles are disjointed
When the taste and joy of certainty develops.

(1975, 271)

fully. Surūr's position is simplistic, but can be rescued somewhat by postulating that it is possible for all of us to at least respond emotionally to someone else's "taste and joy of certainty." But Aslūb Aḥmad Anṣārī, another major critic who is keen to establish Iqbāl's position as a great poet, is very nearly naïve in his formulation:

Iqbāl's is great poetry because it has bejeweled artistic embellishment and is moreover the creation of a great mind and consciousness, one which has derived inspiration and benefit from diverse intellectual, philosophical, cultural and political streams of the East and the West and has imbibed into the unity of its inner self the fruits of such derivation and has transformed them from its own standpoint and has stamped the impress of its personality on them. And over and above this, it [the poetry of Iqbāl] distills its light and song from values which are those of a world religion and the civilization based on that religion.

(1994, 3)

Well, one can only say about such criticism, if criticism it is, that having such friends and advocates, Iqbāl's poetry needs no enemies. The case for Iqbāl's poetry to have "the colours, music, imaginative life, and passion of *poetry*, but the matter and arrangement of *philosophy*" is at best not proven, and the demand from the reader to accept the claim that certain poetry should be termed great because "it distills its light and song" from Islam is like asking him to place all religious and devotional poetry on a rung equally high with Iqbāl, or claim a special niche of greatness for Iqbāl's poetry and all Islam-inspired poetry to the exclusion of other poetries springing from other faiths. Neither position, it is obvious, can be sustained even for a second. The question of "literary" against other kinds of merit—philosophical, religious, whatever, still remains tantalizingly open.

One might like, then, to discard Coleridge as too old-fashioned and argue for the poetry of belief—any belief, and say that it is belief (something like Surūr's *zauq-e yaqīn*) which makes poetry great by itself. One need not share that belief, and in fact even "suspend" that belief, as Eliot recommended: "If you can read poetry as poetry, you will 'believe' in Dante's theology exactly as you believe in the physical reality of his journey; that is, you suspend both belief and disbelief" (1956 [1934a, 258]).

But Eliot's counsel on this matter is not disinterested, and is dangerous advice to boot. He believes that since Dante has a philosophy, so too every poet as great as Dante should have a philosophy (1956 [1934c, 135]).

Ignoring the glib oversimplicity of the argument and the vagueness of the terms “philosophy” and “great,” one would still want to know which poets are as great as Dante and what are the means to identify them? Eliot responds with a stunningly nonliterary and loaded answer: “The ‘greatness’ of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards”; then, as a gesture of Christian grace, he adds in the same breath: “though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards” (1956 [1934]b, 388).

Since Eliot has already warned us in his essay on Dante that one “cannot afford to ignore Dante’s philosophical and theological beliefs” (1956 [1934]a, 257), we know which way his critical wind is blowing. It’ll blow no good to Iqbāl, and its Christian obscurantist odor should have been strong in the noses of our professors of literature long ago. As Ezra Pound wrote in his review of Eliot’s *After Strange Gods*, “all the implications” of Eliot’s ideas about man’s “need for more religion” are “such as to lead the reader’s mind into a fog” (quoted in Ackroyd 1989, 220).

In *After Strange Gods*, Eliot was trying to elucidate a matter that was important to him. Peter Ackroyd summarizes Eliot’s position in *After Strange Gods* in the following words:

What he wished to attack was the absence of moral, and therefore religious, criteria in the criticism of contemporary literature. Having at Harvard rebuked the dogmatism of those critics who considered literature (and especially poetry) to be some kind of substitute for religion, he was now reversing the equation he wished to introduce in the appreciation of modern literature those concepts of good and evil which were part of the religious comprehension.

(*ibid.*)

The point that emerges now is that to validate the ideas implied, embedded or stated in a poem as true in a religious, philosophical or scientific sense, and therefore acceptable or desirable, and to decide that the poem therefore is a good one, is actually a denial of the true nature and function of poetry. I. A. Richards made this clear a long time ago when he said:

The “Truth” of *Robinson Crusoe* is the acceptability of the things we are told, their acceptability in the interests of the effects of the narrative, not their correspondence with any actual facts.... It is in this sense that “Truth” is equivalent to ‘internal necessity’ or rightness. That is ‘true’ or ‘internally necessary’ which completes or accords with the rest of the experience,

which co-operates to arouse our ordered response, whether the response of Beauty or another....

It is evident that the bulk of poetry consists of statements which only the very foolish would think of attempting to verify. They are not the kind of things which can be verified....

But even when they are, on examination, frankly false, this is no defect.... And equally, a point more often misunderstood, their truth, when they are true, is no merit.

(1961 [1924], 269, 272)

In Urdu we often talk of the “universality” of poetry’s appeal, or of the “universal truths” that poetry deals in. Simplistic as these notions are, they are even more dangerous to a proper literary appreciation of poetry because they tend to be based upon the assumption that a classification of “truths” exists and they lead us to the further assumption that those “truths” that strike us as “universal” must be truly so, and that they may even have the force of Science. Thus we have Ḥāmīdī Kāshmirī, another leading critic and admirer of Iqbāl telling us in all seriousness that, as opposed to his Western counterparts, Iqbāl found himself in confrontation with regional and collective problems like colonialism and backwardness. His appreciation and cognition of these, and other human problems created by industrial society, was on a purely personal, individual level. Thus his poetic being was able to attain a “truth” and “universality” which was denied to other Urdu poets of that time (1983, 18).

Ḥāmīdī Kāshmirī is trying to establish that Iqbāl “felt” rather than just “thought about” the political and social problems of his times and this is what gives “universality” to his poetry. Apart from the fact that we are not told how “feeling” rather than “thinking about” a problem confers “universality” and “truth” on the end product of the process, we are left with a somewhat uncomfortable impression that it is the “problems” and the “truth” of their solutions that the critic wants us to attend to; the poetry will then take care of itself. That’s why we find him saying a page later that while making questions of “Nationalism, Patriotism, Sufism or Philosophy ... part and parcel of his thought, Iqbāl didn’t deal with them in a doctrinally passive way,” and that is why he

described philosophy as being “distant from life,” made Hegel and Bergson targets of his critique, in Sufism he approved of *vahdatu’sb- shabūd* (Unity of Manifestation) instead of *vahdatu’l-vajūd* (Unity of Being) ... and as regards Politics, he granted the critical importance of the Individual in the

shaping of the collective systems, and censured Democracy.

(*ibid.*, 19–20)

The other problem with this kind of thinking is that it treats the poet's philosophical or ratiocinative thinking as scientific, and therefore reliable and even true. We know now that even scientific truths are tentative. After Karl Popper, no one can think differently. But there is a greater problem, as Richards realized, and as Coleridge dimly understood more than a century before. Science cannot be reduced to impulses or emotions, while poetry is mainly a matter of impulses and emotions:

The essential point, however, is that Science is autonomous. The impulses developed in it are modified only by one another, with a view to the greatest possible completeness and systematisation.... [S]o far as any body of references is undistorted it belongs to Science.... And just as there are innumerable human activities which require undistorted references if they are to be satisfied, so there are innumerable other human activities not less important which equally require distorted references or, more plainly, *fictions*.

(Richards 1961 [1924], 266)

Poetry, of course, is fictive in character, and the poet is the maker of fictions. This was known to Qudāma Ibn Ja'far seven centuries before Shakespeare and nearly a thousand years before Richards.⁷ It is only in our time, and with great but discomfiting poets like Iqbāl, that such questions are raised. Denying the fictive character of poetry enables us to impose our own notions of truth and falsehood on poetry. As Richards astutely noted, even poets are not immune from this temptation. With his characteristic gentle irony Richards says:

Many attitudes ... can be momentarily encouraged by suitable beliefs

⁷The original sentence of Qudāma is *ahsanu'sb-sbe'ri akzabuhū*, translated by S.A. Bonebakker as, "The best poetry is the most lying." It is quite probable that this formulation is original to Qudāma and owes little to Greek thought. See (Bonebakker 1956, 19, 36–7). I am grateful to Professor Nišār Aḥmad Fārūqī for making this text available to me. As for Shakespeare, see *As You Like It* 3.3.13–16:

Audrey: I do not know what "poetical" is. Is it honest
in deed and word? Is it a true thing?
Touchstone: No, truly; for the truest poetry is the
most feigning; ...

held as scientific beliefs are held.... When the attitude is important, the temptation to base it upon some reference which is treated as scientific truth is very great, and the poet easily comes to invite destruction of his work; Wordsworth puts forward his Pantheism, and other people doctrines of Inspiration, Ideals, and Revelation.

(*ibid.*, 274–5)

I won't say that Aslūb Aḥmad Anṣārī or Salīm Aḥmad didn't read these words, but I wish they had remembered them while writing about Iqbāl. And I suspect that even Iqbāl fell into the temptation in some of his poems. But it was up to us, the literary critics, to read him and love him for his fictions rather than his "lectures."

As we saw above, Eliot said that it is perfectly possible to believe in Dante's theology if we read poetry as poetry. Richards had made this point five years earlier, and better. For the question is not whether Dante's theology is believable: the question rather is whether Dante's poetry is believable. And a cognate question is whether it is at all necessary to believe, or even to accept Dante's theology before we can "fully enjoy" Dante's work. Eliot was unwilling to shed the baggage of what he thought was Christian belief, so he answered in the negative. Yet both the history and theory of reading poetry belies Eliot. Richards made this point in his *Practical Criticism*:

For it would seem evident that poetry which has built upon firm and definite beliefs about the world, *The Divine Comedy* or *Paradise Lost*, or Dunne's *Divine Poems*, or Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, or Hardy's *The Dynasts*, must appear differently to readers who do and readers who do not hold similar beliefs. Yet in fact most readers, and nearly all good readers, are very little disturbed by even a direct opposition between their own beliefs and the beliefs of the poet.

(1966 [1929], 271)

Such being the case, there seems hardly any need to be exercised about "proving" or not proving the statements made in a poem. As Richards pointed out, "disputable statements so constantly presented to us in poetry, are merely *assumptions* introduced for poetic purposes" (*ibid.*, 272). He went on to say:

It is better to say that the question of belief or disbelief, in the intellectual sense, never arises when we are reading well. If unfortunately it does arise, either through the poet's fault or our own, we have for the moment

ceased to be reading poetry and have become astronomers, or theologians, or moralists, persons engaged in quite a different type of activity.

(*ibid.*, 277)

But it is a sad fact of the human condition that even literary critics expect poets to perform like circus artists on the trapeze of meaning. Sartre once described Baudelaire's greatest failure to have been his attempt to achieve and establish a personal though false concept of good and evil. "Baudelaire submitted to Good in order to violate it" (quoted in Scarfe 1972, xv). Somebody made a very good reply to this by saying that Sartre forgot that Baudelaire was a poet, and thus had a right to a spurious philosophy. Sartre's displeasure was because Baudelaire consciously drove himself into a dead end, leaving no retreat open. And yet Erich Auerbach held that "[s]ouls such as Baudelaire are the *aines choisies* [chosen souls] of our time or of a time that is not too far in the past" (1962, 164). And in fact Lionel Johnson gave an even better, because literary, reply long before Sartre came out with his indictment. Johnson said that "Baudelaire sings sermons" (quoted in Scarfe 1972, xiv).

It is understandable for European literary critics to lapse into questions of philosophical, scientific or doctrinal Truth in poetry because Plato gave a permanent bad conscience to European poets and writers. George Steiner says, regrettably adopting a somewhat patronizing tone about Aristotle, that the only point where the classic view of poetry and drama touched on the nature of language was

... in the conflict between the Platonic theory of *mimesis* and the Aristotelian model of *katharsis*. The Platonic notion of the capacity of language, particularly when joined to music, to elicit imitative action, his insight into the possibility that verbal fictions weaken or corrupt our grasp on what Freud was to call "the reality principle," his attempt to distinguish negatively between verifiable and poetic truths—all these raise linguistic issues of final importance. Aristotle's rejoinder is based on a far less penetrating sense of language and inclines to a cursory identification of form with explicit content.

(1975, 139)

Yet the issue is hardly linguistic: it in fact relates to the performatives of language where our presence at a performance of poetry somehow enables us to participate, or at least to be in some sense present at the scene being narrated or the occasion being described. This may be pernicious from Plato's point of view, but it only goes to confer a sort of auton-

omy on poetry as regards questions of “truth” or the “reality principle.” The Arab theorists were quite correct in demanding that poems have words, rhyme, metre, and meaning. Whether the meaning was “true” in any particular sense was not the concern of poetry per se. What constituted “word,” “rhyme” and “metre” was the concern of the everyday language user and the poet. We Urdu critics who should have found interpretive and explicatory tools for Iqbāl from our own Arabo-Persian-Sanskrit traditions fell into the error of accepting Plato’s hegemonic role in the formulation of our modern theories of literary appreciation and interpretation. The loss has been ours.

2

So how should one go about reading Iqbāl? One thing, which our Ancients knew all the time but we have, of late, tended to forget, is that thanks to literary tradition, all poetry represents a kind of historical continuity:

Every writer writes within a tradition or complex of traditions and hews the wood of his or her experience of the world in terms conformable to the traditionally provided matrices thereof.... Literature is identifiable by this conformity of the individual work to the canon, which determines what will or can count as literature in a given time, place and cultural condition.

(White 1990, 15)

Salīm Aḥmad made a brilliantly perceptive remark about Naẓīr Akbarābādī (1740–1830) when he said that the “lack of a large tradition of *nazm* writing let one of our great men go to waste” (2003, 464). Iqbāl was placed better because he had, among others, Bēdil (1644–1720) in Persian and Mīr Anīs (1802–1874) in Urdu.

The mention of Mīr Anīs may surprise some of us until we realize it that Mīr Anīs’s *marṣiyas*⁸ are the best premodern model in Urdu of narrative-historical, narrative-lyrical, and oral-dramatic poetry, and Iqbāl’s poetry extends and exploits the possibilities created by Anīs. More importantly, in the context of our modern anxieties about poetry’s doc-

⁸I use the term here in its strict, formal sense to mean “poems written about the travails and ultimate martyrdom of Imām Ḥusain, the Prophet’s maternal grandson, and his companions in the battle at Karbalā on 10 Muḥarram 61 A.H./10 October 680.”

trinal or philosophical “truth,” Mīr Anīs provides the perfect example by the very great value placed on his poetry in the entire literary community. For Mīr Anīs’s original impulses arose from Shī‘ite beliefs and a generally Shī‘ite view of history. Yet the majority of his poetry’s admirers have been non-Shī‘ite, and the first major and still current critical articulation about Mīr Anīs was *Mavāzina-e Anīs-o-Dabīr* (1907) written by Shiblī Nu‘mānī, a staunch Sunni historian, critic, poet, and much else besides. It was Shiblī, and not some Shī‘ite divine, who said that “the poetic qualities and merits of Anīs are not matched by any other poet” (1957 [1907], 2).

I myself come from a strict family of Deobandis and had nothing in my background or environment to prepare me for the protocols of mourning and tragic lamentation that the *marṣīya* abounds in. In fact, I still do not find myself fully empathetic to the “weeping verses” which are an integral part of all *marṣīya*. It was my father, no great admirer of the Shī‘ite school of Islam, who introduced me to Shiblī’s book when I was very young, and I was able immediately to relate to it, and to the poetry of Mīr Anīs. I may not weep, but I can spend days in raptures at the beauty of verses like the following:

The refulgence, the awful splendor, the prime elegance,
The majestic luster ...
Moons of the House of Zahra,
And the Suns for all Times;
And suddenly something dark descended upon the world,
The sun had not yet receded but they
Went into decline.

(1968 [1931], 136)

These are just four lines, and by no means the best of their mode in Mīr Anīs, not to speak of his whole vast oeuvre. I am aware of the inadequacy of my translation, yet I feel I have conveyed some of the frisson of the majestic first two *miṣra*’s descending into the dark vale of shock and sorrow of the last two.

Iqbāl was aware of his legacy from Mīr Anīs, as his Urdu poems from all periods of his poetic activity amply demonstrate. But I bring up Mīr Anīs here with a different purpose. If, in spite of a cultural or even religious cleavage, Mīr Anīs the poet can remain valid for his myriad readers, should we not believe that Iqbāl, undoubtedly the greater poet, can be understood and enjoyed in his own right?

What does, then, Iqbāl the poet give to his reader? In the first place,

Iqbāl lets me have full or partial entry into five extremely powerful poetic traditions: the Arabo-Persian, the Indo-Persian, the European, the Indo-Sanskrit, and the Urdu. The first one is evident everywhere in his longer and shorter poems like “*Khizr-e Rāh*,” “*Zauq-o-Shauq*,” “*Masjid-e Qurṭuba*,” the ghazals of *Zabūr-e ‘Ajam*, the longish poem “*Ḥudī*” in *Payām-e Mashriq* and in much else besides. The Indo-Persian tradition speaks everywhere in the numbered pieces of *Bāl-e Jibrīl*, the long poem in that collection in imitation of Sanā’ī, the numerous poems of intellectual and emotional probing like “*Mihrāb Gul Afḡān kē Afkār*,” “*Lāla-e Ṣaḡrā*,” “*Jibrīl-o-Iblīs*,” and of course in the two *mašnavīs*, *Asrār-e Khudī* and *Rumūz-e Bēkhudī* where Bēdil speaks in many disguised voices. These *mašnavīs* also partake of the Indo-Sanskrit tradition, and their speculative tone occasionally recalls Swāmī Bḥūpat Rā’ē Bēḡam Bairāḡī’s (d. 1719) long *mašnavī* sometimes described as *Qiṣaṣ-e Fuqarā’-e Hind*. That poem clearly mixes Rūmī’s thought and Vedantic thought, and its discursive techniques too, especially in the dialogue mode, anticipate Iqbāl.⁹

If the ghazals of *Payām-e Mashriq* are in the Indo-Persian mode, its *nazms* like “*Tanhā’ī*,” “*Shabnam*,” and “*Ḥūr-o-Shā’ir*,” and the general tone of the whole collection recalls Western ways of poem-making and even poem-thinking. The long poem “*Sham’-o-Shā’ir*” is a triumph of the use of the Western soliloquizing, monologic mode in the Indo-Persian style. Bēdil seems to be much in evidence here again.

Iqbāl’s derivations from the Urdu tradition go back not just to Dāḡ, but also, and very much more considerably to Mīr Anīs, and Ḡālib, then Zauq and Saudā. It is not often realized that Iqbāl would have made a very great *qaṣīda* poet and would easily have rivaled Zauq and Saudā had he lived in premodern times.

Let me speak here a bit more of Iqbāl’s allegiance to the European and Indo-Sanskrit poetic traditions. It must be obvious that all the dramatic poems and all the dialogue poems could not but owe their existence to the German Romantics, and to a certain extent to Goethe, in terms of general technique, and in any case even the conception of writing dramatic poems is Western, not Indian or Eastern. There does exist a favorite dialogue device in classical Persian *mašnavīs*, and occasionally in ghazal too. It is actually a rhetorical device called *savāl-o-javāb* (Question/Answer) where the poet frames questions in one *miṣra* and gives the reply in the second. The form is highly stylized and very often the

⁹For details about Swāmī Bḥūpat Rā’ē Bēḡam, see (Saiyid ‘Abdu’l-Lāh, 1992 [1943], 313–49).

poet seems to first frame the answer and then invent a suitable question for it. Whereas in Iqbāl, the dialogue, even a very short one like “Šubḥ-e Čaman” in *Ẓarb-e Kalīm*, middle-length ones like “Muḥāvāra-e ‘Ilm-o-‘Ishq” and “Muḥāvāra Mābain-e Khudā va Insān” (which recalls the influence of George Herbert in the reverse), or longer ones like “Pīr-o-Murīd” in *Bāl-e Jibrīl*, or the truly longer dialogues in *Jāvēd Nāma*, are proper dialogues and vehicles for exchange of subtle ideas. They have hardly any parallels in the non-Western traditions of poetry.

Then we have poems like “Iblīs kī Majlis-e Shūrā” in *Armuḡān-e Hījāz*, where the epic imagination seems at work in the Western manner even if briefly. “Ēk Ārzū” and “Rukḥṣat Ay Bazm-e Jahān,” and some other early poems of *Bānḡ-e Darā*, remind one of the early English Romantics, while the hortatory and celebratory poems like “Mānind-e Šabā Khēz Vazīdan Dīgar Āmōz” in *Zabūr-e ‘Ajam*, and the short poem “Rūmī Badlē Shāmī Badlē ...” in *Ẓarb-e Kalīm* remind us of Shelley’s passionate appeals to Irish peasants. The *Jāvēd Nāma*, of course, is an incredible masterpiece in terms of the fusion of the Western and Eastern, especially Ibn-e ‘Arabī and Dante.

Perhaps it is yet more important to observe that the fusion is not so much on the level of the borrowing of ideas or intellectual approaches as on the level of creative patterning. *Jāvēd Nāma* bears the same relation to Dante and Ibn-e ‘Arabī that the Bādshāhī Mosque in Lahore bears to the Jāma Masjid of Delhi or the Shēr dar Madrasa at Samarqand, built at almost the same time (1630s). While the Sher dar Madrasa itself recalls Mahmud Gawan Madrasa in Bidar, in the far south of India, built in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. Humayun’s tomb in Delhi bears the same resonances as Hōshaṅg Shāh’s tomb in Mandu in central India, built a century earlier around 1450. It is not so much a question of imitation as of kindred spirits making their appearance in an inspired series of flights of creativity.

The astonishing variety of Western modes and techniques, including experiments in meter and form, is rivaled by the numerous Western subjects, persons, ideas, places, and political situations that crowd Iqbāl’s poetry and give it the feel and air of a Western metropolis. The sheer imaginative reach and the wide range of the creative imagination are truly unparalleled in modern world poetry anywhere. The existence of such poems in such large numbers shows that Iqbāl was fully comfortable throughout the vast cultural and literary hinterland of Europe.

When I talk of the Indo-Sanskrit stream of poetic tradition as also enriching Iqbāl’s poetry, I do not merely mean the marvelous translation

of the Gayatri Mantra, which appears under the title “Āftāb” in *Bāñg-e Darā*, or the little gem from Bhatrihari in *Bāl-e Jibril*, nor yet the presence of Vishvamitra and Bhatrihari in *Jāvēd Nāma*. I do not even refer to the fact, important in itself, that Iqbāl intended to translate the whole of the *Ramayana* and also the *Bhagwat Gita* into Urdu.¹⁰ Nor do I refer specifically to poems in *Bāñg-e Darā* like “Rām,” and “Swāmī Rām Tīrath.” To my mind, Iqbāl’s most remarkable debt to the Sanskrit literary tradition lies in his knack for peopling his poetry with natural or cosmic objects—the sun, the stars, the moon, the morning, the night, the sunrise, the flower, birds, the dewdrop, the mountain, the ocean, even God himself—and treat them as characters in a semi-secret play whose scenes and significance are known only to himself. This imaginative device is rent in even the earliest poems like “Insān aur Bazm-e Quadrat,” “Čānd aur Tārē,” “Rāt aur Shā‘ir,” “Bazm-e Anjum,” “Sair-e Falak,” and the opening stanzas of “Javāb-e Shikva” in *Bāñg-e Darā*, and finds absolutely perfect expression in *Bāñg-e Darā* itself in the short poem called “Insān.” In later collections we have “Lāla-e Şahrā,” “Rūḥ-e Arzī Ādam kā Istiqbāl Kartī Hai,” and “Mullā aur Bihisht” in, for instance, *Bāl-e Jibril*, and many others. The first few pages of *Payām-e Mashriq* yield poems of bewildering imaginative power in this strain, like “Gul-e Nakhustīn,” “Taskhīr-e Fiṭrat,” “Bū‘-e Gul,” and “Sarūd-e Anjum.”

It is difficult to find such plenitude, such abundance of both the cosmic and the non-human on the one hand, and the earthly and human on the other, within the space of any poetic tradition other than Sanskrit. A look at the first few pages of a short anthology gives us the following (from Vedic literature): “Ushas: The Dawn,” “To Night,” “For Varuna,” “For Parjanya: Bearer of Rain,” “Aranyani: Forest Spirit,” “Two Birds,” “A Tree in Flashing Heaven”; (from secular verse): “Nightfall,” “Moonrise,” “Speed,” “Young Tree,” “Flower,” and so on (see Vatsyayan 1983). The reason for this treatment of the human and the non-human as one is not obscure or esoteric at all. As the editors inform us in their introduction, there are many strands of unity that form the fabric of Hindu literary and philosophic thought. One of them is

a world-view which does not allow for a dichotomy between matter and spirit, man and nature. In this holistic view all life is one, and inner and

¹⁰See Iqbāl’s letter to Mahārājā Sir Kishan Parshād Shād, dated 25 April 1919, and another letter to the Mahārājā dated 11 October 1921, regarding his intention to translate the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagwat Gita* into Urdu (Barnī, 1991, 86, 282).

external reality are mutually dependent. This world-view is held by all the languages of India...

(*ibid.*, 13)

Further on, we learn that Indian thought assumes a correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm, a perpetual identification of things created and uncreated with Being and Becoming.

“Yonder world is in the likeness of this world as this one is the likeness of that,” says the *Aitareya Brahmana*.... [M]an in Indian literature is operating simultaneously on two planes, one situated in time and space and the other transcending both.... According to Abhinava Gupta, the most significant exponent of the Indian aesthetic, Being is neither merely an atemporal visualisation of itself, nor an absolute separation from time and space....

(*ibid.*, 31)

It should be obvious that in spite of Iqbāl's great interest in the philosophy of Time and Being, what is relevant here to his student is the question of poetic technique, of how Iqbāl is able to draw upon strands of Indo-Sanskrit thought where, in Abhinava Gupta's words, Being is neither atemporal nor an absolute separation from time and space. Yet the question might be asked whether Iqbāl's interest in the Muslim philosophical questions of Time would not by itself have led him to a point where the route might have become open for him to create a poetic world in which the cosmic and the non-cosmic, the earthly human and non-human, could all become characters in his poems.

There are two answers to this: first, there is no other literary tradition on the immediate horizon of Iqbāl's literary world in which the human and the non-human world meet and interpenetrate all the time. The other answer is provided by Ananda Coomaraswamy who suggests the existence of a similarity if not a correspondence here among the traditions of the East. He says, “There are very few metaphysical doctrines in Islam that could not, if one made the attempt, be very plausibly derived from Vedic or Buddhist sources” (1990, 66). Coomaraswamy quotes Meister Eckhart as saying, “God is creating the world now, this instant” (*ibid.*) and he comments that this “might have been said by any Sufi” (*ibid.*). Doubtless, Coomaraswamy is more interested in the philosophical content than in what he calls “the literary history of ideas” (*ibid.*), but what he says here is sufficient for the literary students of Iqbāl.¹¹ Quoting from the Athirveda,

¹¹Compare Meister Eckhart's words with the famous Iqbāl *sheʿr*:

Coomaraswamy says that Time is not a “duration,” but rather the “Timeless” to which “all movable time is ever present,” and he goes on:

It is in these terms that the Maitri Upanishad distinguishes the “two forms” (*dve rūpe*) of Brahman, i. e., aspects of the “two natures” (*dvaitibhāva*) of the single essence (*tad ekam*).... There are, indeed, two forms of Brahma; time, and the Timeless.

(*ibid.*, 8)

Coomaraswamy concludes his discussion of the Sufi concept of Time with these words: “Time, in other words, is an imitation of eternity, as becoming is of being, and as thinking is of knowing” (*ibid.*, 71).

Given such sources for the imagination, Iqbāl’s creativity was bound to take the course that it did. It is not relevant to the literary critic to ask whether Iqbāl actually believed these things. It is even less relevant for the literary critic to himself share his or anyone else’s beliefs about Time and Being. All we need to assert is that Iqbāl’s poetry gives us imaginative entrée into more worlds of literary and creative tradition than any other poetry of the twentieth century.

In addition to the general grace, power and elegance that Iqbāl’s poetry derived from his full use of the resources of the Indo-Persian tradition, Iqbāl’s remarkable intertextuality and plurivalence owe their power, and maybe even their existence to the Indo-Persian poetic tradition. It must be remembered that the main Arabo-Persian literary thought and praxis of which Iqbāl was the indirect but able inheritor did not have much to say about what Todorov has described as the “overflowing of the signifier by the signified.” This he defines as the signifier of a single proposition leading us to “knowledge of two signifieds, one direct and the other indirect” (Todorov 1982, 40). Todorov identifies three kinds of discourse, literal, ambiguous and transparent (*ibid.*, 53), and brings support for this classification by invoking Abhinavagupta through K. Kunjuni Raja:

*ye kā'ināt abhī nātāmāi hai shāyad
keh ā rahī hai damādam ṣādā'ē kun fa-yakuñ*

The universe perhaps is unfinished yet,
For all the time a Voice is heard:
“Be!” and there it is, becoming.

(Iqbāl 1975, 320)

Abhinavagupta says that when an expression gives its own literal meaning, and in addition suggests some other sense, we cannot regard both these distinct senses as conveyed by the same power. The former proceeds directly from the words, while the latter comes from this literal sense. *Tatparya* pertains to the expressed sense, whereas *dhvani* pertains to non-expressive factors also....

(1969, 301–2)

That is to say, the poet is able to attach new or unexpected meanings to the literal meaning and can construct meaning on two levels, between which there may not be any direct discernible relationship, and what is “literal” may not be so literal after all. This insight came into the Indo-Persian tradition through interactions between Sanskrit and Persian in India and through the Indian Style (*sabk-e hindī*) Persian poets, and is otherwise not to be found in mainline Arabic or Persian literary theory.

The quest of intertextuality is different, for intertextuality, in the sense of making poems from poems has been an established poetic practice in the Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and Urdu classical traditions. By the time of Iqbāl the principle and practice both fell into disrepute, or were at least looked at with discomfort and suspicion because the poet was now mostly seen as “doing his own thing” un beholden to others. Iqbāl here again demonstrated the creative and evocative power of poetry when images, themes, and poems of the past are made to serve as the foundation for other images, themes, or poems. With its wealth of allusion, its direct and indirect echoes of other poets, and its wide background studied with poems and poets of the past, Iqbāl’s poetry feels like a panorama of Persian, Urdu, Arabic, Sanskrit, German and English poets of the past. And there is never any doubt as to who is in control: the presiding genius is Iqbāl and none else. He manipulates, uses, abandons, re-embraces, refashions, and approaches from unexpected angles. This is not merely learned poetry. This is poetry whose wardrobe of jewels is like the “metaphor of the mind” described by ‘Abdu’l-Qāhir Jurjānī as a metaphor whose meaning is inexhaustible.

In “Ṭulū‘-e Islām” (1922) Iqbāl has a verse:

The Reality of all things—whether of fire or earth,
Is the same: Slash the particle’s heart, the sun’s blood
Will come dripping forth.

(1975, 271)

He went back to this stunning image through a different perspective thir-

teen years later in a short poem “Miḥrāb Gul Afġān Kē Afkār” in *Zarb-e Kalīm*:

Should a maestro of the art so desire,
The grace and plenitude of Art will make
The light drip from the sun’s body
Like dew.

(*ibid.*, 629)

I don’t want to go into the “message content” of these verses. I want merely to point out that the images actually go back to the Indo-Persian poet Faiḏī (1547–94) through another Indo-Persian poet Ṭālib Āmulī (d. 1626). Let’s hear Ṭālib Āmulī first:

I gather the flowers of her face
In the skirt of my thought,
I squeeze the sun and pour it
In my glass.

(Zakāvati Qarāġūzlū 1993, 136)

Now listen to this from Faiḏī:

Where Eternity’s light falls ever
On the heart:
Squeeze a particle and the sun
Will drip forth from it.

(*ibid.*, 70)

We can see that Iqbāl is reliving the images for a different purpose. He invests a moral power and an urgency of action in both cases, but what to us is more important is the greater sensuousness and the less abstract treatment. The first image is almost intolerably violent in its intensity, the next one engages our senses by its contradictoriness: the sun becoming cool, or hot, and oozing away his light out of embarrassment or excitement. Ṭālib Āmulī’s image in the first *miṣra*’ was too non-physical, too bloodless, and too abstract to create a visual or sensual effect. The purpose or result of Iqbāl’s operation on the particle is to remove the fetter on his being and let it shine forth in the amplitude of Unity. Iqbāl’s poem pulls in reverberations of caesarean birth and the ritual pulling out of the fetus of the infinite from the body of the finite. Yet there is also the disturbing suggestion of the sun weeping blood when the heart of the particle is torn open. Thus, the other suggestion is that it’s not a matter of

identity, but of empathy. The sun weeps when violence is done to the dust mote and its heart is ripped out. The “mighty heart” beats for everyone.

In the *sheʿr* about the miracle of Art, Iqbāl is doing much more with Faizī’s image, again because Iqbāl is more concrete. In Faizī it is difficult to visualize “eternity’s light” dropping ever on the heart. Iqbāl takes us to a more tangible world which obeys the rules and laws of Art. And Art’s grace and plenitude conquers the sun, makes it change its character. It is inevitable here to recall Yeats’ magic bird which the poet fashions and which sings of all that is past, or passing, or to come. But the magic bird can only sing, while the Art of the maestro can pull the sun down to the level of the human.

Creation of complex structures of meaning, images fashioned or refashioned anew, making poems so as to make statements that yield sidereal or even contradictory meanings are major features of the Indo-Persian and the Urdu tradition.¹² Writing as he did at a time when the Urdu poet was under constant pressure to abandon his native love of metaphor and work away from his tradition that valued abstractness and complexity, he saw poetry mainly as a play of meaning on ideas many of which could be found elsewhere but would not often be suspected to carry an extra charge of meaning. Iqbāl is our greatest modern *maʿnī āfrīn* (meaning-maker) poet since, unlike his younger “modern” contemporaries, Iqbāl makes his meanings within the realm of the Indo-Persian where poems went beyond “mere images” (in Yeats’s phrase) and poets went on even to say that not saying something was the best form of utterance. This was a discovery made by ʿUrfī and Faizī who had a strong sense of the frontiers to which the power of human utterance could be stretched. ʿUrfī said:

For the world
Is a foreign country,
No one here is from my people.

(2000, 242)

Thus, in a world of strangers, silence was the equivalent of an utterance in which meaning was so tightly folded as to make its unfolding nearly impossible. Ġanī Kashmīrī (d. 1666) declared:

¹²In her (1994), Pritchett has examined questions relating to Urdu in some detail. Also see (Faruqi 2004).

A person who has no understanding,
 Were he to glue his eye to a book
 He wouldn't still see meaning's visage
 Even in his dreams. The brainless ones do not
 Reflect on poems: the bubble
 Has no capability to dive into the ocean.

(1964, 227)

Iqbāl brought this tradition alive for us in all its glory; he made us feel proud of it. In a place and time when our literary critics chose to sneer at Bēdil, the greatest of the *sabk-e hindī* poets, for what was seen as his opacity and complexity, Iqbāl wrote:

Doubtless, Ġālib imitated Bēdil's manner, but Ġālib's harvest remained empty of Bēdil's themes and ideas. Bēdil was ahead of his contemporaries in regard to thought. Evidence can be produced to show that Bēdil's Indian and foreign contemporaries and the lovers of Persian verse have been unable to understand Bēdil's view of the world.

(In Barnī 1998, 467)

Many things are happening here, but I'll only point to one that is not articulated: In his role as *Ḥakīmu'l-Ummat* Iqbāl may have liked to believe that a poet's meaning should be entirely clear. But he had a curious theory regarding this. He wrote:

The lack of clarity in his [Mōmin's] (1800–1852) style viewed in the light of psychology appears as an important but painful proof of the decline of the Muslims' urge to rule. It is only among the people who are the ruling power that clarity of expression is essential. This state of lack of clarity, which is so common with Mōmin, is also found in minds far deeper than his, for instance, Ġālib and Bēdil [Here] ambiguity becomes a source of enjoyment and inadequacy of expression is savored as depth of thought.

(In Barnī 1993, 664)

The import of the two utterances above can be fully appreciated only when we read them side by side with this interesting critique of Bēdil and others offered by Iqbāl:

Ġālib wouldn't probably have understood Bēdil's thought. All [Ġālib's] admiration and praise of Bēdil is just because of Bēdil's [extraordinary-beautiful] Persian compounds [*tarkīb*], and that's it. Ġālib learned [the art of] *tarkīb* from Bēdil. I myself have gained benefit from Mirzā Bēdil in this

matter.

(*ibid.*, 976)

So Iqbāl as *Ḥakīmu'l-Ummat* may have wanted his prescription for the People to be unambiguous but Iqbāl the poet was like Baudelaire, quarrying the poems and texts of others for making his own images. Iqbāl had no shame in admitting that he made use of Bēdil's dazzling linguistic and metaphoric constructions as building blocks for his own texts. Peter Quennell said of Baudelaire, he was industrious and workmanlike, recording on little pieces of paper his "linguistic discoveries," storing them in a tea chest "against the moment when they should be embodied in a poem."¹³ Iqbāl the poet seems to have been little different in his love of words.

It was not for nothing that Iqbāl chose one of Bēdil's more obscure *she'rs* to explicate and unfold in a delightful little poem, thus establishing the supreme relevance of Bēdil's imagination forever in his own poetry. The poem occurs in *Zarb-e Kalīm* (1935), a collection of Urdu poems whose central importance for Iqbāl's literary criticism has not yet been fully recognized:

MIRZA BEDIL

Is this the Reality, or the mischief wrought
By my false-seeing eye?
The earth, the wilderness, the mountain range,
The dark-blue sky,
Some say: It is; others, it is not,
Who knows if this your world exists at all.
How well Mirzā Bēdil unknotted this knot
Whose unraveling has been
So hard for the Philosopher:
"If the heart had enough space, this garden
Were sightless: the wine's hue chose to come out
Because the wine-flask didn't have enough room."¹⁴

(1975, 584-5)

¹³Reference to published source not available. —*Editor*

¹⁴The *she'er* translated in quotes is from Bēdil. See (Bēdil 1997, 112). Bēdil's text as quoted by Iqbāl in the poem is slightly different in word order from the Iranian edition I cite from, but the difference is entirely inconsequential.

So this is how Iqbāl the poet gives us entry into our literary traditions, creatively, challengingly, and recuperatively. Take care of the poetry, he seems to say, and the philosophy will take care of itself. More than any other modern Urdu poet, it is Iqbāl who makes us respect and try to understand the foundations of our poetics. The structures of meaning that Iqbāl makes for us exist in their own right and also as continuities.

A question might be asked: So what about Iqbāl's originality? Should not a poet have an "individual voice," a "style of his own"? The first answer to this is that a great deal of truly great poetry passes beyond petty considerations of "individuality" and "style." All of us know about 'Umar Khayyām's "individuality" and all of us also know that out of the several hundred *rubā'iyāt* that pass as 'Umar Khayyām's, there are only about a handful that can with some certainty be ascribed to the poet. We know that some of the most famous and well-loved *she'rs*, and even whole ghazals, in the *Dīvān* of Ḥāfiẓ have now been shown to be not from Ḥāfiẓ, though they reflect Ḥāfiẓ's true "individuality" and "style." We know that scores of ghazals of Saudā's (1706–1781) contemporaries somehow found their way into Saudā's manuscript collections and continued to be quoted and studied as part of Saudā's work for two centuries and more. So questions of "individual style" are essentially contextual, not absolute.

That is not to say that Iqbāl has no style of his own. One way of putting the matter would be that he has many styles, he has different styles for different occasions. The style of *Shikva* and *Jawāb-e Shikva* is different from that of *Zauq-o-Shauq* whose style is again very different from that of the ghazals and ghazal-like poems in *Zabūr-e 'Ajam*. Then there is the grand Iqbālian manner, especially apparent in the Urdu but not so prominent or differentiated in the Persian. These matters can't be decided with a few bureaucratic pen strokes. Nor can we understand them by counting the so-called patterns of sounds, labial or dental or fricative or liquid or whatever, that scribal critics pretend to have discovered in Iqbāl. To believe that the existence of poetry could be explained by counting vowels and consonants is to believe that patterns of vowels and consonants do not exist elsewhere in the language. In fact, they would seem to occur more richly in film songs.

Iqbāl should be seen as a perfecter of different styles in Urdu poetry and as the inventor of many new ones, for instance, the dramatic dialogue, the verse style that is suited to speech rhythms, and the narrative of the imagined landscapes of the mind. Similarly his nature poems range from formal stylized narratives that recall the *qaṣīdas* of the Iranian Mirzā Ḥabīb Qā'ānī (1807–1853) to interior monologue-like poems that seem to

take us back to Wordsworth.

All modes, all manners of poem-making are within Iqbāl's practical range: the celebratory, the narrative, the lyrical, the dramatic, the hortatory, the speculative, the ironical, the satirical, the comic, the tender, everything melts in his hand and takes whatever shape he wants to give it. Nothing is a stranger here: the intensely introspective, the highly metaphorical, the plain, or the prophetic, all tones are present in their appropriate place. Iqbāl's poetry teaches us to recognize the most distant horizons of Urdu poetry as our own.

Majnūn Gōrakhpūrī said something perceptive about the music of Iqbāl, and I think he was the first to say that even the most difficult of Iqbāl's *she'rs* can be sung on the subtlest and most delicate of musical instruments ([1946?], 88). He didn't say this in precise or subtle enough words, but the point, sadly so often lost in the welter of words generated by us about Iqbāl's "truth" and "message," was a valuable one. Iqbāl wrote some of the world's most mellifluous poetry and that's a quality that takes its place right there where the highest poetry is. In fact it is to be doubted if there ever can be great poetry without the quality that Amīr Khusrau called *ravānī* ("flowingness").

"Flowingness" has been a quality about which it is impossible to frame theoretical statements, yet it is clear that some poems or poets have more of this and others have less. More importantly, since Khusrau the question of *ravānī* ("flowingness") has engaged the attention of many theorists in the Arabo-Persian-Urdu tradition. Even before Khusrau, the Arabs seem to have devoted some attention to the matter as an important aspect of literary appreciation. Adonis (ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd) quotes from Al-Fārābī's discussion of the musical quality or the "beauty of sound" in poetry. Among other elements, Al-Fārābī identified "purity: where there is nothing in the melody to spoil it qualitatively or quantitatively; ... suppleness and delicacy in long-drawn-out melodies," and above all, the harmonization of voweled letters (1990, 28–9). This doesn't take us very far, for Al-Fārābī was speaking as a musicologist, but Al-Jaḥīz had a somewhat more penetrating observation as a literary critic:

The letters of the words and the verses of the poem should seem harmonious and smooth, supple and easy ... gentle and pleasant, flexibly ordered, light on the tongue, *so that the entire verse is like one word, and one word is like a single letter.*

(*ibid.*, 29; italics added)

This is very much better, though still quite far from a precise, prescriptive description. Khusrau had much more to say on *ravānī*,¹⁵ and by the early eighteenth century in Delhi *ravānī* had become accepted as the prime quality of prime poetry. Miscellaneous attempts to find the principle or principles where *ravānī* may be located have been made with little success. The fact however remains that, for instance, the poetry of Mīr and that of Mīr Anīs is recognized as having more flowingness than any of the premodern poets. Similarly, Iqbāl should have been placed at the very highest pinnacle of *ravānī*, had we found time to read his poems as literature and not as philosophical dissertations or politico-religious manifestos whose truth, real or imagined, contradictions and falsehoods are disputatiously analyzed, confirmed, or rejected.

In the delight that he took and gave in the sheer music of poetry, Iqbāl reminds me of Mīr, who is the only Urdu poet whose *ravānī* is equal to that of Iqbāl, and of Coleridge, who, among all the great critics, placed the greatest positive value on the music of poetry. Hartley Nelson Coleridge remarks in his edition of Coleridge's *Table Talk* that Coleridge had "an eye, almost exclusively, for the ideal or universal in painting and music." But his demand from music was "either thought or feeling; mere addresses to the sensual ear" didn't appeal to him (1852, 267). The exact meaning of words like "universal," "thought," or "feeling" must differ from person to person; nonetheless, the general principle enunciated here is entirely sound for it makes an attempt to relate sound with sense which I. A. Richards also attempted to do a century later. Coleridge spoke of "the music of nobler thoughts" (Engell and Bate 1983, 46) and thus in a way glossed the terms "thought or feeling" used by Hartley Nelson Coleridge: there can be noble music only where there are noble thoughts. This is insufficient for it denies the property of music to satirical or hate poetry which Coleridge would not have granted the rank of "noble." We need therefore to rethink the matter a bit.

It is Coleridge again who provides the clue by informing us that:

But the sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it, is a gift of imagination; and this together with the power of reducing multitude into unity of effect, and modifying a series of thoughts by some one predominant thought or feeling, may be cultivated and improved, but can never be learnt.

(*ibid.*, 20)

¹⁵See (1916, 2–5). Also see Faruqi (2000, 81–105).

This implies or postulates a number of fundamental values about the nature of the music of poetry. The power to sense musical delight is complimentary to the power of producing it among others. Musical delight in a poem is obtainable only when the imagination is at work. It doesn't function in a vacuum, it has to emanate from a thought or feeling which itself has the power to pull together a number of disparate feelings or experiences.

This does not fully explain the nearly autonomous nature of the music of poetry, or *ravānī*, though later in his discussion of metre Coleridge throws in another valuable insight in his typical offhand manner when he says, “[A]s the *elements* of metre owe their existence to a state of increased excitement, so the metre itself should be accompanied by the natural language of excitement” (*ibid.*, 65).

Walter Jackson Bate has an extremely interesting annotation here from Coleridge himself who wrote to William Southbey on 13 July 1802 as follows: “... *Metre itself* implies a *passion*, i.e. a state of excitement, both in the Poet's mind, & is expected in that of the Reader—” (*ibid.*).

At one place in *Zabūr-e 'Ajam* Iqbāl seems to be echoing or recalling Coleridge in some way when he characterizes poetry or the music of poetry as “lifeless,” without “meaning,” the term “meaning” here would seem to signify something like Coleridge's “nobler thoughts” or “predominant thought or feeling.” Characteristically, Iqbāl also brings in Rūmī who, among the Persian poets, had perhaps the most to say about “meaning” (*ma'ni*) in the sense of “Reality.” We read the following verses toward the end of *Zabūr-e 'Ajam*:

I do not know where *ma'ni*'s origins are,
Its form is apparent and familiar to me
Though; The song that has no meaning is
Dead, its words are from a fire that's ashen.
The Master of Rūm revealed the secret of meaning;
My thought bends its forehead at his doorstep. “Meaning
Is that which takes you away from yourself,
Leaves you in no want for the form. Meaning is not
That which renders you blind or deaf, or makes
Man even more in love with the form.”

(1973, 576–7)

In his dialogue with Bhartrihari in *Jāvēd Nāma*, Iqbāl makes the Sanskrit poet and linguistic philosopher describe the poet's music or mode of

existence to be “the crescendo and diminuendo of sound.” Other than this, “none in the world know where the poet is” (*ibid.*, 758). I think there can be no more fitting conclusion to our effort to understand the secret of Iqbāl’s music than to leave the matter here with Iqbāl’s prayer at the beginning of *Zabūr-e ‘Ajam*:

Make my clod of dirt blaze with the light
Of David’s song,
To every particle of my being give
Fire’s feathers and wings.

(*ibid.*, 396)

If there ever was a poet’s prayer answered, it was this. □

Works Cited

- Ackroyd, Peter. 1989. *T.S. Eliot*. London: Sphere Books.
- Adonis. 1990. *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*. Tr. by Catherine Cobham. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Anīs, Mīr. 1968 [1931]. “*Kyā Ghāziyān-e Fauj-e Khudā Kām Kar Ga’ī*.” In *Rūḥ-e Anīs*. Edited by Mas‘ūd Ḥasan Rizvī Adīb. Lucknow: Kitāb Nagar.
- Anṣārī, Aslūb Aḥmad. 1994. *Iqbāl kī Muntakhab Naẓmēn aur Ġazlēn (Tanqīdī Muṭāli‘a)*. New Delhi: Ġalīb Academy.
- Auerbach, Erich. 1962. “The Aesthetic Dignity of The *Fleurs du Mal*.” In *Baudelaire: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Edited by Henri Peyre. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Barnī, Saiyad Muẓaffar Ḥusain, ed. 1991. *Kulliyāt-e Makātīb-e Iqbāl*. Vol. II. Dihli: Urdū Akāḍmī.
- . 1993. *Kulliyāt-e Makātīb-e Iqbāl*. Vol. III. Dihli: Urdū Akāḍmī.
- . 1998. *Kulliyāt-e Makātīb-e Iqbāl*. Vol. IV. Dihli: Urdū Akāḍmī.
- Bēdil ‘Azīmābādī Dehlvi, Mirzā ‘Abdu’l-Qādir. 1376 (=1997). *Kulliyāt-e Bēdil*. Vol. II. Edited by Akbar Behdarvand and Parvēz ‘Abbāsī Dakanī. Tehran: Ilhām.
- Bonebakker, S.A., ed. 1956. *The Kitāb Naqd Al-Si‘r of Qudāma b. Ga‘far Al-Kātīb al-Baghdādī*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Brown, E.G. 1964. *A Literary History of Persia*. Vol. 2. Reprint of 1928 edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coleridge, H.N., ed. 1852. *Specimens of the Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. London: John Murray.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. 1896. *The Table Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Arranged and edited by T. Ashe. London: George Bell & Sons.
- . 1957. *Coleridge: Poems and Prose*. Selected with an introduction and notes by Kathleen Raine. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin.

- Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. 1990. *Time and Eternity*. 2nd rev. ed. Bangalore: Select Books.
- Eliot, T.S. 1956 [1934]a. "Dante." In *Selected Essays*. London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1956 [1934]b. "Religion and Literature." In *Selected Essays*. London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1956 [1934]c. "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca." In *Selected Essays*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Engell, James and W. Jackson Bate, eds. 1983. *Biographia Literaria*. Vol. II (The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. VII). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Faruqi, S.R. 2000. *Early Urdu Literary History and Culture*. New Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2004. "A Stranger in the City: The Poetics of *Sabk-e Hindi*." *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 19:1–93.
- Ġanī, Muḥammad Ṭāhir. 1964. *Dīwān-e Ġanī*. Edited by ‘Alī Javād Zaidī and Muḥammad Amīn Dārāb Kashmīrī. Srinagar: Jammūn va Kashmīr Akayḍimī āf Ār s Kulčār inḍ Layṅgvijiz.
- Hāmīdī Kāshmirī. 1983. *Ḥarf-e Rāz: Iqbāl kā Muṭāla‘a*. New Delhi: Mauḍarn Pabliḥing Hā’ūs.
- Iqbāl, Muḥammad. 1944. *Payām-e Mashriq*. Lahore: Milne ka Patah, Shaikh Mubarak ‘Alī.
- . 1973. *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl, Fārsī*. Lahore: Shaikh Ġulām ‘Alī and Sons.
- . 1975. *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl, Urdū*. Lahore: Shaikh Ġulām ‘Alī and Sons.
- Khusrau, Amīr Yamīnu’l-Dīn. 1916. *Kulliyāt*. Kanpur: n.p.
- Kunjnni Raja, K. 1969. *Indian Theories of Meaning*. 2nd ed. Madras: Adyar Library and Research Centre.
- Majnūn Gōrakḥpūrī. See Majnūn, Aḥmad Šiddīq.
- Majnūn, Aḥmad Šiddīq. [1946?]. *Iqbāl, Ijmālī Tabṣira*. Gorakḥpur: n.p.
- Pritchett, Frances W. 1994. *Nets of Awareness, Urdu Poetry and Its Critics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Richards, I.A. 1961 [1924]. *Principles of Literary Criticism*. New York and London: Harcourt, Brace.
- . 1966 [1929]. *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment*. London: Harcourt, Brace.
- Sayyid ‘Abdu’l-Lāh. 1992 [1943]. *Adabiyāt-e Fārsī mēn Hindu’ōn kā Ḥiṣṣa*. New Delhi: Anjuman Taraqqī-e Urdū, Hind.
- Salīm Aḥmad. 1978. *Iqbāl, ēk Shā‘ir*. Lahore: Naqsh-e Avval Kitāb Ḡhar.
- . 2003. "Čirāḡ lē kē Kahān Sāmnē Havā kē Čalē." In *Jāmi‘a* (New Delhi) 100 (7-12):461–70. Special issue on Mīr Anīs.
- Scarfe, Francis, ed. 1972. *Baudelaire*. Introduced and with plain prose translations by Francis Scarfe. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin.
- Shaikh ‘Aḡāu’l-Lāh, ed. 1951. *Iqbāl Nāma, Majmū‘a-e Makātīb Iqbāl*. Vol. II. Lahore: Shaikh Muḥammad Ashraf.

- Shibli Nu‘mānī, Muḥammad. 1957 [1907]. *Mavāzina-e Anīs-o-Dabir*. Allahabad.
- Steiner, George. 1975. *Extraterritorial; Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin.
- Surūr, Āl-e Aḥmad. 1983. “Khizr-e Rāh, Ēk Muḡālī‘a.” In *Iqbāl kā Fan*. Edited by Gōpī Čand Nāraṅg. Delhi: Educational Publishing House.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. 1982. *Symbolism and Interpretation*. Tr. by Catherine Porter. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- ‘Urfī Shīrāzī, Muḥammad. 2000. *Dīvān-e Ġazaliyāt*. Edited by Valīu’l-Ḥaq Anṣārī. Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library.
- Vatsyayan, Sachchidananda and Vidya Niwas Misra, eds. 1983. *The Indian Poetic Tradition: Select Readings from Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali and Apabhramsa Poetry*. Agra: Y.K. Publishers.
- White, Hayden. 1990. Kermode and Theory. Review of *An Appetite for Poetry* by Frank Kermode. *London Review of Books*, 11 October, 14–15.
- Zakāvātī Qarāgūzlū, ‘Alī Riḡā. 1371 (=1993). *Guzīda-e Ash‘ār-e Sabk-e Hindī*. Tehran: Markaz-e Nashr-e Dānishgāhī.