

انوار کائنات
موسلمین علیہ السلام

انوار کائنات
موسلمین علیہ السلام

Earthly and Heavenly

Love, Loyalty, and Music in Persian Mystic Poetry



Alan Williams

Rumi and Shams: Two in the Singular

Rokus de Groot

Rumi and Music

Kamran Talattof

Is There More Than One Way of Reading Nezami?

Faith, Facts, and Fantasy in Five Treasures

Asghar Seyed-Gohrab

The Journey of the Faithful to the Place of Return

Venue: Huizinga Building,

Room 006

Leiden University

Time: Friday 14 June 2019

From 13.00-17.00

For information contact:

Asghar Seyed-Gohrab

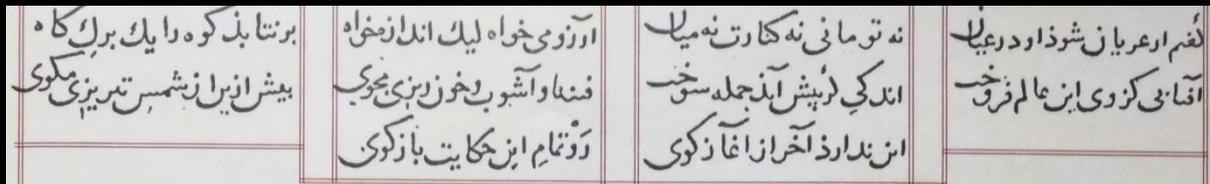
Rumi and Shams: Two in the Singular



Can we even think in such 20th /21st century terms about the nature of the ‘relationship’ between these two great figures of Persian literature and Sufi thought? Hence, the telling subtitle ‘Two in the singular’. We do not use *ordinary* English to talk about the basics of classical Persian Sufi teachings – ‘heart’ (قلب), ‘spirit’ (معنى), ‘the lover’ (عاشق), ‘the beloved’ (معشوق), ‘love’ (عشق), ‘knowledge/wisdom’ (عرفان), ‘extinction’ (فنا), ‘union’ (توحيد) – even ‘man’ (مرد، انسان) – all these are all technical terms in this discourse. Yet, we tend easily to slip into thinking biographically when talking about these two teachers, as if it were unproblematic to discuss their human interaction. In recent decades, among some popular writers and pundits, there has been a considerable sexualisation of their relationship. In this paper, I aim to stimulate reflection on the problems of understanding their companionship (صحبت) and friendship (دوستی). One problem is the inscrutability of the subject, since whatever happened between them in private was by definition esoteric. Second is the barrier of anachronism and cultural distance, removed as we are by more than 750 years; another is that the medieval Persian sources are themselves difficult to assess, since they are poetic or hagiographical, or both. The *Masnavi*, which mentions Shams

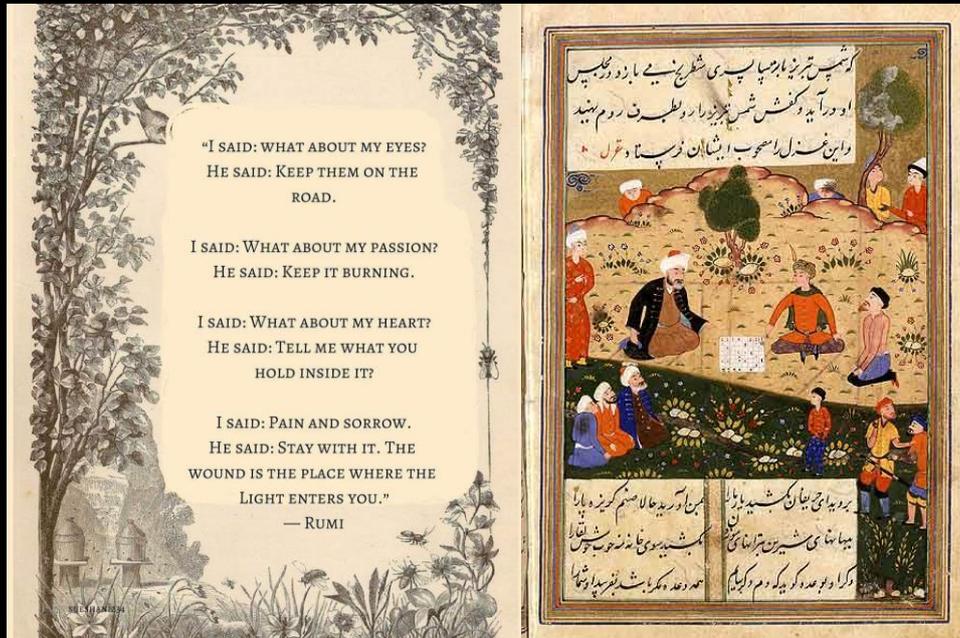
only four times in its entirety, is very reserved about Shams: a main undercurrent of the work seems to be Rumi's sense of grief and separation from his beloved Shams (see the quotation below). I consider the clues given in Rumi's works and in the *Maqālāt* of Shams, as well as the later biographies by Aflāki, Sepahsālār and others. I also reflect on views of modern authorities, such as the Iranian scholar Foruzānfar, and the Cambridge scholar R.A. Nicholson and others, and contrast them with the romanticising and eroticising tendencies of some modern popularists, both pro- and anti-Şufi.

I said, 'If He were naked in your sight,
 you'd not survive, nor would your breast nor waist.
 Ask for your wish, but ask with moderation:
 a blade of straw cannot support a mountain.
 The sun by which this world's illuminated
 will burn the lot if it comes any closer!
 Don't seek out trials and griefs and shedding blood!
 From now on, no more talk of Shams of Tabriz!'
 There is no end to this. Begin again,
 and go recite the ending of this tale. (*Masnavi* 1.139-143)



Alan Williams was educated at the universities of Oxford and SOAS, London. He is Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Religion at the University of Manchester and concurrently holder of a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship. His research interests span the literatures and cultures of pre-Islamic and Islamic Iran, with published studies of Pahlavi, Classical and Modern Persian texts. His most recent books are *Spiritual Verses* (Masnavi I), Penguin Classics, 2006 and *The Zoroastrian Myth of Migration ... Qeşse-ye Sanjān*, Brill, 2009. This year I.B. Tauris Press will

publish his new translation of *Masnavi* books 1 and 2, with full notes and Persian text, and the remaining four books are currently in preparation.



Rumi and Music

What do Rumi's texts say about the concept and practice of music? Are the texts about this subject understandable to us? How can we get access to their meanings? How did music function in *samâ*? This presentation explores these questions in combination with an analysis of some present-day musical settings of Rumi's texts.



Rokus de Groot, musicologist and composer, conducts research on music of the 20th and 21st centuries, especially about aesthetics and systems of composition, about the interaction between different cultural and religious traditions, and about musical concepts as a metaphor (polyphony, counterpoint). He had a personal chair "Music in the Netherlands since 1600" at the University of Utrecht (1994-2000), and was Professor of Musicology at the University of Amsterdam (2000-2012), at which University is at present Professor Emeritus. In 2009 he was invited to deliver the Edward Said Memorial Lecture at the American University in Cairo. See 'Edward Said and Polyphony', in A. Iskandar and H. Rustom (eds.), *Edward Said: A Legacy of Emancipation and Representation*, Berkeley: University of California Press (2010). He has taught widely as a guest professor. He is also a composer, working with musicians, singers and dancers from different cultural backgrounds on projects of mutual learning and intercultural polyphony. Among his works are the opera *Layla and Manjun*, *A Composition about the Night* (Amsterdam, 2006), based on Persian, Turkish, Arabic and Spanish texts (Nezami, Rumi, Juan de de Cruz), and *Bee bade mast: Drunk without wine* on texts by Rumi (Persian) and Omar Khayyam (FitzGerald, English) (2010). He has cooperated in many

scholarly and artistic projects with Dr Asghar Seyed-Gohrab. Among his publications are reflections on the mystical path, like 'Rumi and the Abyss of Longing', in *The Mawlana Rumi Review* Vol. 2 (2011).



Is There More Than One Way of Reading Nezami?

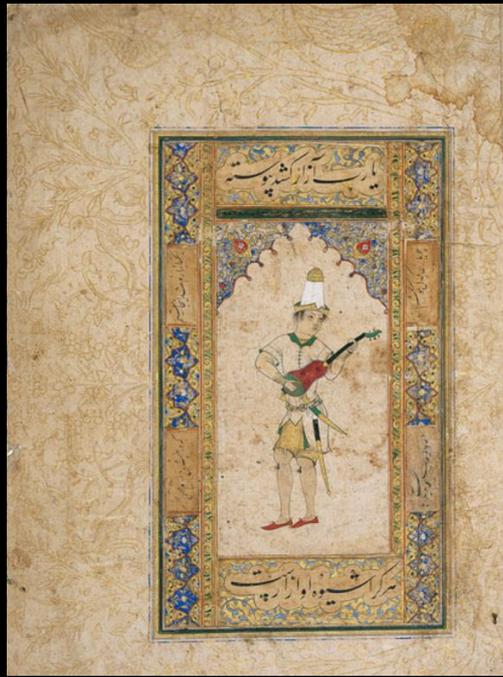
Faith, Facts, and Fantasy in Five Treasures

In my previous works on Nezami Ganjavi (12th century Persian poet), I have shown that he uses numerous concepts, subjects, and themes related to love, women, speech, fantasy, science, and even the holy site of the Muslim faith, the Ka'beh, to construct intricate poetic allegories. In those works, I challenge the notion that religion was the only source of inspiration and creativity for Nezami's literary output. I have also addressed Nezami's understanding of poetry arguing that he indeed possesses a systematic and, if you will, a theoretical approach to his art. I have reconstructed his notion of literature based on the meaning of the word Sakhon in his writings. This presentation is a continuation of my overall project on Nezami's poetry to demonstrate the connection between his treatment of different themes and subjects and his dedication to his poetic profession. To do so, I would argue the need for reading the works of Nezami without attributing / ascribing / assigning / ascribing any ideological advocacy to the poet. To support this contention, I analyze the story of ascension, which has appeared in all of his five books to argue for the possibility of alternative readings. The story of ascension is yet another literary allegory that provides exceptionally religious and yet fantastical material for his poetic process of imagination and the expression of his cosmic knowledge. As in his other allegorical constructs, all five representations of the story of ascension can be seen as

ambiguous. There are clear religious connections, but as my reading shows, they can also be understood in terms of their literariness. In fact, in those five depictions, the poet demonstrates that he understands not only the religious signification of the story, but also his contemporary astronomy, which are all rendered playfully, masterfully, and eloquently.



Kamran Talattof (Ph.D. University of Michigan, 1996) is professor of Persian language and literature and Iranian culture at the School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies and the Department of Women and Gender Studies and the Founding Chair of Roshan Graduate Interdisciplinary Program in Persian and Iranian Studies at the University of Arizona. Many of his research and publication focus on issues of gender, sexuality, ideology, culture, and language pedagogy. He examines how cultural artefacts are created both within and in response to dominant social conditions, political ideologies, and the dominant discourses of sexuality. Talattof is the author, co-author, or co-editor of more than a dozen books and tens of articles including the awarding winning *Modernity, Sexuality, and Ideology in Iran: The Life and Legacy of a Popular Female Artist*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011 and *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000.



The Journey of the Faithful to the Place of Return

Ḥakīm Sanā'ī is one of the most influential mystic poets in the Islamic world. Rūmī praises him as his wise teacher, as the 'eyes' showing him the vision of mysticism. Rūmī's *Mathnavī-yi ma'navī* is an imitation of Sanā'ī's masterpiece *The Garden of the Truth and the Path of the Law*. Sanā'ī possesses a massive *Dīvān* in which he introduces antinomian genre (*qalandariyyāt*), a collection of themes and motifs praising wine, homoerotic love, and problematizing several Sharia-based concepts such as Islam, faith and heresy. Sanā'ī also wrote several short *mathnavīs* dealing with various subjects ranging from ethical topics to reflections on the origin of the soul. In this presentation, I will deal with his treatise *Sayr al-'ibād*, describing the development of the human being from the moment of conception to the full realization of its qualities as a Perfect Man.

Asghar Seyed-Gohrab received his PhD from Leiden University where he has been teaching since 1997. He is Associate Professor of Persian at the Department of Middle Eastern Studies and is the track-leader of the Persian and Iranian Studies program. In addition to many articles, and chapters, he has authored, edited, and translated several books on Persian literature and culture, cinema, Sufism, and manuscript tradition. His recent publications include *The Layered Heart: Essays on Persian Poetry* (2019); *The True Dream: Indictment of the Shiite Clerics of Isfahan*, (2017 together with S. McGlinn); *Soefism: Een levende traditie*, (2015, third print); *Literature of*

the Early Twentieth Century: From the Constitutional Period to Reza Shah (ed., 2015); *Mirror of Dew: The Poetry of Ālam-Tāj Zhāle Qā'em-Maqāmi*, (2015); *Conflict and Development in Iranian Film*, (ed. together with K. Talattof, 2013); *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, (ed., 2012); *The Great Omar Khayyam: A Global Reception*, (ed., 2012); *Courtly Riddles: Enigmatic Embellishments in Early Persian Poetry*, (2010); *One Word: A 19th-Century Persian Treatise Introducing Western Codified Law* (2010, together with S. McGlinn); *The Treasury of Tabriz*, (ed. together with S. McGlinn, 2007); *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Nizāmī's Epic Romance*, (2003). He has translated several volumes of modern Persian poetry into Dutch, including the poetry of Sohrāb Sepehri, Forugh Farrokhzād, Mohammad-Rezā Shafi'i-Kadkani, and (together with J.T.P. de Bruijn) Ahmad Shāmlu, Nāder Nāderpur, and Hushang Ebtehāj. He is the founding general editor of the Iranian Studies Series at Leiden University Press and Chicago University Press (23 books since 2010) and the Modern Persian Poetry Series (15 volumes).

