

Licit Magic – GlobalLit Working Papers

No. 3

AMĪR KHUSRAW'S INTRODUCTION TO
HIS THIRD *DĪVĀN*,
THE FULL MOON OF PERFECTION



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Birmingham 2021

University of Birmingham
Global Literary Theory

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All working papers are downloadable on <https://globallit.hcommons.org/licit-magic-working-papers/>. This series is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 759346).

Cover image: © Amīr Khusraw, *Dīvān-i Ghurrat al-kamāl*. Double-page illumination, ff. 1b-2a. MS Elliott 79, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Headnote:

Nicknamed as the “Parrot of India” for his exceptional eloquence, Nāṣir al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan Amīr Khusraw of Delhi (1253–1325), was a well-known poet, author, literary critic, and musician, who was born in India to a Turkic military officer and an Indian mother. In 1272–73, he became a disciple of the prominent Sufī master of Delhi, Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā of the Chishtī order and maintained the relationship until his master passed away in 1324. Amīr Khusraw served different royal courts in India, but he wrote most of his works under the patronage of sultans Jalāl-al-Dīn Khaljī (1290–96) and ‘Alā’-al-Dīn Khaljī (1296–1315). He was a prolific writer in both poetry and prose, and his ability to write in Arabic, Persian, and pre-modern Indian vernaculars set him apart from other Persian-speaking poets of the time. His five *dīvāns* (poetry collections) contain poems in a variety of forms, but, along with his friend and rival Amīr Ḥasan Dihlavī (1253–1328), he is particularly associated with the Indian *ghazal* (lyric poem).

Amīr Khusraw wrote elaborate prose introductions to all his *dīvāns*, but the one he wrote to his *Ghurraṭ al-kamāl* (The Full Moon of Perfection)—compiled around 1293–94, at the approximate age of 43—is particularly important because of his critique of Arabic and Persian poetry in general, and the critique of his own writing in particular. As a literary critique by an author of Turko-Indian background, who emulated the styles of various great Persian poets from Ghazni (in modern-day Afghanistan) to Shiraz and Isfahan (in modern-day Iran), to Ganja (in modern-day Azerbaijan), Amīr Khusraw’s work would provide valuable insights into the literary sphere of the medieval Persianate world. The present paper summarizes the author’s first part of the introduction to his third *dīvān*, *Ghurraṭ al-kamāl* (The Full Moon of Perfection), followed by an English translation of the section where he critiques his own poetry and prose.

Typical of Amīr Khusraw’s style of writing, the title *Ghurraṭ al-kamāl*, conveys several meanings. *Ghurraṭ* is an Arabic term, which refers to a number of related concepts: the new moon, the beginning of the lunar month, the beginning of a book, the beauty (i.e., whiteness) of the face, the brightness of the face of the faithful on the day of judgement, a white spot on the forehead of a horse, the most excellent item in a category or group, a noble person, and anything that is brilliantly outstanding.¹ *Kamāl* is also an Arabic term, which means “perfection.” In view of Amīr Khusraw’s particular way of choosing titles for his works, and

¹ ‘Alī-Akbar Dihkhudā, *Lughat-nāma*, s.v. “ghurra.”

the opening verse of the work under discussion, “The Full Moon of Perfection” would seem to reflect the author’s first intended meaning best.

The titles Amīr Khusraw chose for his five *dīvāns* allude to the different stages of his life and career. He entitled his first *dīvān* *Tuḥfat al-ṣiḡhar* (A Gift from the Novice), his second *dīvān* is entitled *Vasaṭ al-ḥayāt* (The Middle of Life), the *Ghurraṭ al-kamāl* (The Full Moon of Perfection) is his third *dīvān*, his fourth *dīvān* is entitled *Baqiya-i naqiya* (The Remainder of the Exquisite), and his fifth *dīvān*, which he compiled just before his death, is entitled *Nihāyat al-kamāl* (The Utmost Perfection). Since the title of the fifth work suggests that he considered his utmost perfection to have taken place toward the end of his life, the title *Ghurraṭ al-kamāl* can be translated as the Rising Moon of Perfection too, that is, the beginning of an illustrious career. If *ghurraṭ* is taken to mean the introduction to a book, the title can also mean The Preface to the Book of Perfection, that is, the book of Amīr Khusraw’s illustrious career. And, referring to the glorious status he had achieved when he completed his *Ghurraṭ al-kamāl*, the title can also mean The Illustrious Perfection.

However, since short vowels are not shown in the original script, *ghurraṭ* can also be read as *ghirraṭ*, meaning “promise,” “deception,” and “imperfect.” In this reading, the title would mean “The Promise of Perfection,” “Deceptive Perfection,” and “Imperfect Perfection.” As explained below, Amīr Khusraw considered himself to be a master in certain areas of writing and novice in others and thus called himself a “half-complete” master. Amīr Khusraw’s view of his own writing skills is brilliantly reflected in the paradoxical meanings that the title of this work conveys.

Amīr Khusraw begins his introduction to the *Ghurraṭ al-kamāl* with a doxology, followed by the praise of the prophet Muḥammad. The praise of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs (i.e., the Prophet’s first four successors) follows next, and his encomia are concluded with the praise of his spiritual master, Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā. This entire section is written in a metaphorical language, and the metaphors are borrowed from literary terminology and jargons related to the study of writing and speech. For example, the first four caliphs are compared to *rubā’ī*, a form of poetry consisting of four hemistiches:

These four caliphs make the four corners of faith,
just like the four hemistiches of a *rubā’ī*.

(*Azīn chahār khalīfa chahār gūsha-yi dīn*
durust ham-chu rubā’ī bi-chār miṣrā’-ast)

As another example, he refers to his spiritual master as the theme (*maẓmūn*) of the book (*nāma*) of boundless secrets. These metaphors signal to the reader that the author's discussion will be about writing and speech. He uses the same technique in other parts of the text as well. For example, when he is alluding to philosophers and jurists, he uses the jargons of their relevant fields as metaphors or in their literal meanings, not as technical terms. Although it is impossible to show in translation the author's genius in his choice of words, I have provided supplementary notes to help English-speaking readers have a general insight into Amīr Khusraw's peculiar style of writing. I have also provided the original terms in brackets for the benefit of those who are familiar with the original language.

Following his praise of God and religious figures, Amīr Khusraw discusses the importance of speech as a special gift from God, given only to humans. Following his exaltation of the status of speech as the most valuable attribute of human beings, he comments on poetry as a form of speech that is superior to prose. To compare poetry to prose, Amīr Khusraw draws on numerous analogies. One that was favoured by him and other medieval Persian writers is the comparison of fine words to pearls. In this analogy, when scattered pearls are strung in a beautiful order, they look more impressive and make a deeper impact; they are not easily lost, so they are better preserved; and the form of their presentation cannot be altered. Similarly, fine words make a deeper impact when presented in poetry (*manẓūm*, lit., "ordered"); they can be memorized easily, so they are passed down through generations; and more importantly, it is difficult to alter the wording of poetry, as each word is carefully chosen to fit a particular meter. Amīr Khusraw provides many other reasons for the superiority of poetry over prose, such as poetry being an intimate companion to lovers, and its bringing great fame and recognition to its composer.

To support his advocacy of poetry from the perspective of religion, Amīr Khusraw draws evidence from the Qur'ān and Traditions (i.e., the words and deeds of the prophet Muḥammad) and cites verses from two leading figures in Islamic jurisprudence, Abū Ḥanīfa (699–767) and Imām Shāfi'ī (767–819), to reject any ideas in opposition to poetry—since the Qur'ān was revealed to the Prophet in prose, and since one of the Qur'ānic verses asserts that the Prophet was not taught poetry,² poetry was not favoured by some Muslims.

Amīr Khusraw's emphasis on the superiority of poetry over prose, however, does not mean that he aimed to encourage people to write poems, as he stresses that only those who have been favoured by God can compose poetry. In his view, people may acquire the required

² Qur'ān 36:69.

skills to compose poetry through education and practice, but their compositions would never touch hearts.

Having established that poetry is superior to prose, he argues that, although Arabic is superior to Persian from the perspective of religion and law, Arabic poetry cannot reach the level of Persian poetry in ingenuity. In his opinion, it is much easier to compose Arabic poetry for three reasons. First, the rules of metre in Arabic are not as rigid as in Persian. He explains that, while the Arabic rules of metre allow for the modification or even omission of a syllable, the slightest modification in Persian metre ruins the metre. Second, the formation of new words is much easier in Arabic. He does not explain his reasoning, but he must be referring to the root system and patterns in Arabic that theoretically allow for making countless words. And third, there is no refrain (*radīf*)—repetition of a word or phrase at the end of every verse in certain forms of poems—in Arabic poetry. In Amīr Khusraw’s opinion, the rigid rules and restrictions of Persian poetry have made poets to create more elegant metres and more subtle meanings, plus the ornament of refrain. He thus concludes that the meanings produced in Arabic poetry are not as mature and sophisticated as those in Persian poetry.

Amīr Khusraw further comments that Persians are more talented in language skills, as they can easily write in Arabic and speak it just like the Arabs, whereas Arabs have never written anything in Persian, nor can they speak Persian properly. Alluding to his own Persian language skills, he adds that, similarly, Muslims in India are more talented in language skills than both Arabs and Persians, because, in addition to their own vernaculars, they fluently speak and write in both languages, while neither Arabs nor Persians peoples speak or write in Indian vernaculars.

Following his comments about the language skills of different peoples, Amīr Khusraw goes back to his defence of poetry, this time, in terms of meaning not form. He states that panegyrics (*madh*) and satires (*qadh*) are two types of poems that are despised the most, because of their content. The former praises people for the virtues they lack, so it is untruthful, and the latter devastates a person by insults. Amīr Khusraw’s response to those who criticize poetry for its untruthful praise and insults, is that the same criticism can be directed at prose, with the difference that in poetry, the most hideous lies and the most bitter insults are presented in the most beautiful language. In other words, since praise and insult are found in both forms of speech, it is better to present them beautifully. He asserts that atrocity is not in what is said, but in how it is said.

Amīr Khusraw also responds to the criticism of poetry by two other groups of people, whom he does not name but hints at by employing the jargons used in their fields; although,

as mentioned above, he does not use the jargons in their technical meanings. These two groups are Muslim jurists and philosophers. In his opinion, one has to see if these people know how to compose poetry perfectly. If they do but avoid it because of their extreme piety, Amīr Khusraw humbles himself before them. But he has no tolerance for those who know nothing about poetry and yet criticize it. He calls them unreasonable and bull-headed and refers to them as donkeys who acquire knowledge only by repetition and without any understanding.

Having responded to the criticism of four different groups who oppose poetry—those who consider its form to be inferior to prose because God chose to reveal His words in prose, those who oppose the untruthful and vicious content of poetry, those who oppose poetry because of their extreme piety, and those who are simply biased against poetry—Amīr Khusraw’s final defence of poetry concerns those who maintain that poets often live in poverty. In response to this group, Amīr Khusraw relates an account, the moral lesson of which is that the affluent can lose their wealth in this world and cannot take it with them to the other world either, but the poets’ immaterial wealth cannot be taken away from them in this world, and when they pass away, too, they continue to be recognized as owners of their own wealth.

Amīr Khusraw then asks his audience to pay attention to what he presents next on the subtleties of poetry and hardships of becoming a master poet. He explains that good poetry is based on three foundations: form, meaning, and passion. The first concerns the ABCs of wording, that is, the visual and aural forms of words. For example, by changing the diacritical points or short vowels, poets can come up with words that look similar in writing, but convey different meanings (*tahrīf* and *taṣhīf*). Poets can also choose words that look different in writing, but sound the same in pronunciation. According to Amīr Khusraw, many poets focus on this foundation, as one can easily learn and master it. He compares this technique to colourful images that excite children.

The second foundation of good poetry concerns the form of conveying the meaning, that is, how creatively a particular meaning is conveyed. To incorporate this foundation of good poetry in their works, poets employ imagination (*khiyāl*), amphibology (*īhām*), hyperbole (*mubālagha*), and the likes of these. This is not an easy task, comments Amīr Khusraw, as the created meanings should sound pleasant and agreeable to the sound minds. According to Amīr Khusraw, there are only three to four poets in every era, who can master this foundation of good poetry.

The third foundation of good poetry concerns passion and desire, but this is not something to be acquired through education and practice. Amīr Khusraw states that in every era, only

one poet is favoured by the Divine and given the passion and desire to compose perfect poetry.

Amīr Khusraw then describes four types of poetry, using the terminology used for the four temperaments in traditional medicine: dry, moderate, wet, and hot. He describes the poetry of those who pay too much attention to verbal devices as dry. In his view, the predominance of verbal devices is suitable in prose, not poetry. In the moderate type, the focus on verbal devices is moderate, and more attention is given to the form of conveying the meaning, for example, by employing the devices of hyperbole (*mubāligha*), amphibology (*īhām*), and imagination (*khiyāl*). The wet type of poetry flows very smoothly just like the running water. And the poets of the fourth type are those who have been consumed by the flames of passion and desire, which God has placed in their hearts. This type of poetry cannot be composed or understood by everybody.

Amīr Khusraw then divides poets into five groups according to how they acquire their poetical knowledge and skills. The first group acquires their knowledge through education. The primary focus of this group is wording, that is, how their words look and sound. The second group acquires their knowledge through studying the poetry of poet-sages. The primary concern of this group is to convey wisdom and advice through poetry. The third group is interested in lyric poetry, and that is all they have learned and can compose. The fourth group is born with an innate passion for poetry and is affected by any type of poem that they hear. And the knowledge and skills of the fifth group are acquired through education, studying the works of poet-sages, studying lyrics, and an innate passion for poetry. An ideal poet, according to Amīr Khusraw, belongs to the fifth group.

Amīr Khusraw then presents his own views about the meaning of “master” (*ustād*) and “pupil” (*shāgird*) in composing poetry, and acknowledges that it is a disputed matter. Here too, he repeats that, although it is possible to learn how to compose poetry by studying it with a master, true poetry, which he calls “creation” (*inshā*) as opposed to “composition” (*inshād*), cannot be learned by books. In his opinion, pupils must first have a talent for literary creation, then seek the guidance of a master to show them their flaws and the ways to correct them. When pupils complete their training with a master, they should use the works of classical and modern poets as models to hone their skills. At this stage, some pupils cannot go beyond the ABCs of wording, that is, the superficial beauty of the poem. But, those who possess the right disposition delve into the creative ways that great poets have employed to convey meanings and try to emulate those ways. The efforts of the latter group eventually comes to fruition and they achieve recognition. At this stage, pupils may be divided into three groups: those who

develop a distinct style of their own, those who follow the styles of others, and those who engage in stealing from the works of great poets.

Those who belong to the first group are perfect masters, and the ones in the second group are only half-masters. In Amīr Khusraw’s opinion, the half-masters remain pupils, as they continue to follow the styles of others. As for the third group, if they acknowledge the sources of their theft, they may be forgiven for their wrongdoing. But, if they deny their plagiarism by stating “great minds think alike,” all their works should be thoroughly examined to confirm if they tell the truth. One or two occasions of similarity to other poets’ works is acceptable, but more than that is certainly a clear sign of plagiarism, even if the thieves keep denying it.

Amīr Khusraw then enumerates four conditions for poets to be considered perfect masters. First, the high quality of their works should challenge others, that is, it stimulates others to compose something better. Second, their speech should be in the style of poets, not preachers and Sufis. He does not describe the styles of preachers and Sufis, but he probably means that the works of poets should neither be admonishing, like the works of preachers, nor sorrowful, like the works of Sufis. Third, their works should not contain any errors. And, fourth, they should not plagiarize.

Before turning to the critique of his own poetry, Amīr Khusraw divides pupils into three groups. Those in the first group are “the pupils of guidance” (*ishārat*). They always seek guidance from a master to improve their skills. The pupils in the second group try to improve their skills by referring to the works of great poets. They constantly read and make notes of great compositions. He calls this group “the pupils of words” (*ibārat*). And, the third group are “the pupils of plunder” (*ghārat*). This group has a deep desire for composing poetry, but lacks the resolution to produce original works, so they steal from their masters and present what they have stolen as their own works.

Amīr Khusraw starts the critique of his own works by stating that he does not meet all the conditions for a perfect master of poetry. To explain which conditions he lacks, he compares his collection of works to a tree with many branches, rooted in four dispositions. He uses the four elements of fire, water, wind, and earth as metaphors for the four dispositions and describes each group of his works according to the attributes of these four elements.

He begins with the assessment of his poetry and acknowledges that in his didactical works, he has followed the styles of Sanā’ī (d. ca. 1131) and Khāqānī (d. between 1186–87 and 1199), whose styles he compares to fire, which constantly reaches high. In his panegyrics, he declares to have followed the styles of Rażī al-Dīn ‘Alī Lālā of Ghazni (d. 1244), and Kamāl al-Dīn of Isfahan (d. 1237), the flow of whose styles he compares to water. In all his lyric

poetry (*ghazal*) and rhyming couplets (*masnavī*), he confesses to have followed the styles of Nizāmī of Ganja (d. 1209) and Sa‘dī of Shiraz (d. 1291 or 1292), the delicacy of whose styles he compares to wind. And, finally, he states that in the rest of his poetry, that is, in his fragments (*muqatta‘āt*), quatrains (*rubā‘iyāt*), riddles (*mu‘ammā*), and puzzles (*lughuz*), he has not emulated anybody. He compares his own style to earth, which is lowly in status, but some valuable things may be found in it.

In assessing his prose, Amīr Khusraw asserts that it has not been affected by any of the four elements, thereby suggesting that the disposition that enables him to produce his prose is not from this material world. He believes that his prose style is unique and no one has ever composed anything like it.

In concluding, he admits that he is not a perfect master in poetry, because he does not meet two of the conditions required for perfect mastery of poetry: unique style and error-free works. He acknowledges that he is a follower of other great poets’ styles, and that sometimes his Turkish background interferes with his Persian language. As for the other two conditions, he is confident that he meets both, as he neither writes in the style of preachers and Sufis nor plagiarizes.

It is noteworthy that in his assertion of not ever having stolen anything from the works of others, Amīr Khusraw says that poets like Suzanī (d. 1173–74) and ‘Umar Khayyām (d. 1131) would not need to plagiarize. By naming these two poets, he compares himself to two celebrated figures, who were not necessarily known for their great poetical skills, but were admired as poets too. Khayyām was a polymath in many area of science, including mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and music, and he wrote poetry as well. And Sūzanī’s greatest skill in poetry was composing satires, and supposedly, he was a master embroiderer as well. Amīr Khusraw’s wording in the passage about Sūzanī and Khayyām provides another good example of how he borrows metaphors from the terminology of a field that is not directly related to his discussion, but he intends to allude to it—the two poets he names were masters of astronomy and embroidery, and the metaphors he uses to assert that he has never plagiarized are borrowed from these two fields.

Amīr Khusraw’s prose style in his introduction to the *dīvān* of *Ghurrah al-kamāl* provides a clear example of what he considers to be a unique style of his own. In his explanation of the foundations of good poetry, he mentions that the predominant use of verbal devices is suitable for prose, not poetry. The use of verbal devices to enhance the visual and aural beauty of the text is indeed predominant in his own prose writing. One of his favourite devices is *jinās*, which can loosely be translated as paronomasia, that is, the use of words that are harmonious

in writing, sound, or both. For example, the phrase *bi-ghaḥab va ta ‘aṣṣub* (with anger and bias), which is used in the text, contains a visual harmony in the original script, as *bi-ghaḥab* (بغضب) and *ta ‘aṣṣub* (تعصب) look almost identical—only the number and position of their diacritical points are different; two things that are not carefully observed in handwriting. Wherever possible Amīr Khusraw makes sure to use harmonious words not only in writing but also in sounds. For example, *rāst nārāst u nārāst ārāst* (it did not adorn the truths and embellished the lies), which is written in the original as راست ناراست و ناراست آراست, contains an audio-visual harmony. He even preferred to use a word in its remotest meaning if its visual form could bring visual harmony to the text. For example, in the sentence “a warm sweat (*khvay*) of embarrassment (*khvay*) flew down his body” (از گرمی خوی خوی از بغل روان شد), the second *khvay* (خوی), which means “sweat,” is used in its remote meaning.

It must also be noted here that, outside its context, the first *khvay* “embarrassment” would read as *khūy* “temperament,” because it is used in conjunction with “warm” (*garm*)—“the warmth of temperament” (*garmī-i khūy*) is the immediate meaning conveyed to the mind when *garm* and *khūy/khvay* are put together. But, Amīr Khusraw has used these two words in a context that gives them different sounds and meanings. Similar examples, where common combinations of words convey uncommon meanings, abound in Amīr Khusraw’s prose.

In addition to his obsession with the harmony of sounds and looks of the words, Amīr Khusraw paid attention to the meanings conveyed through the audio-visual harmony of his words. That is, he chose a combination of words together that visually appeared as antonyms or synonyms but did not convey synonymous or opposite meanings in their context. For example, in the following phrase, he has used derivatives of the verbs “fall” and “rise,” and “come” and “go,” which, in the first glance appear as antonyms, but they do not convey opposite meanings in the context they are used:

Ham-nishīnān-i nau-khīz uftāda āyand u ravān khvāhand...

The newly-risen companions come humbly and immediately ask ...

In the context of this phrase, the derivative of “fall” (*uftāda*) means “humbly” and the derivative of “go” (*ravān*) means “immediately”. But, visually, “fall” appears as the opposite of “rise” and “come” as the opposite of “go.”

Another favourite device of Amīr Khusraw is *ihām*, the use of words and sentences that convey more than one meaning at the same time, all of which are intended. This device is very difficult to render in translation, as the equivalents in the target language do not always

carry the variety of meanings that the original word conveys. So, the translator is forced to choose one meaning from among several. Here is an example from the text, where all the key words in the original sentence convey more than one meaning, and the sentence conveys two separate, unrelated meanings:

Naqsh-i shi'r 'ayn-i dar sharr ast.

The literal meaning of this sentence is that the visual form (*naqsh*) of the word *shi'r* (شعر) is 'ayn (ع) between *sh* (ش) and *r* (ر) (ش.ع.ر), with 'ayn referring to the letter ع in the Arabic alphabet. However, the sentence also means that “the writing of poetry is, in essence, poverty.” In this second meaning, 'ayn means “essence” or “the thing itself” and a remote meaning of *sharr* is “poverty.” The context of the sentence makes the latter meaning the first one to come to mind, but Amīr Khusraw is also showing his ingenuity to those who are familiar with his prose style and pay attention to the visual forms of his chosen words.

Amīr Khusraw's frequent use of devices that attract the attention of the audience to the visual and aural forms of the words, and his frequent employment of the device that causes ambiguity (*īhām*), forces the audience to move slowly from word to word and sentence to sentence to understand the points he makes. This style of writing makes meaning subordinate to form and causes delays in understanding the points made. Many of the subtleties of Amīr Khusraw's prose style remain hidden even to the experts of Persian language and literature and, regrettably, his ingenuity in the use of words is most often lost in translation.

A presentation of the selected text:³

Presented here in English translation is an excerpt from Amīr Khusraw's introduction (*dībācha*) to his third poetry collection, *The Full Moon of Perfection (Ghurrat al-kamāl)*. The translation is based on the manuscripts and lithograph editions listed below.⁴ The page numbers provided in the square brackets are to MS Elliott 78, which seemed to be the most accurate text.

³ I would like to thank Kayvan Tahmasebian and Rebecca Ruth Gould for reviewing the initial drafts of my translation and providing helpful comments and suggestions.

⁴ Unfortunately, I did not have access to the more recent edition of the work: Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī. *Dībāchah-yi dīvān-i ghurrat al-kamāl*, ed. Vazīr al-Hasan 'Ābidī (Lahore: National Committee for 700th Anniversary of Amīr Khusraw, 1975).

1) MS Elliott 78, Bodleian Library, Oxford. (Clear handwriting, no illumination/illustration, occasional errors and missing words)

2) MS Elliott 79, Bodleian Library, Oxford. (Beautiful handwriting, one double-page illumination, no illustration, careless scribe, full of errors)

3) Amīr Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī. *Dībācha-yi dīvān-i Ghurrat al-kamāl*. Delhi: Kutubkhāna-yi Nizāmiya, [1874]. (Lithograph, handwritten, not a critical edition, missing pages)

4) Amīr Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī. *Dībācha-yi dīvān-i Ghurrat al-kamāl*. Edited by Sayyid ‘Alī Ḥaydar. Patnah, Bihār, India: Idāra-yi taḥqīqāt-i fārsī va ‘arabī, 1988. (Lithograph, handwritten, edited based on one manuscript and one lithograph edition)

Suggested reading:

Alyssa Gabbay, “Splitting Hairs and Trimming Tresses: Translating Amīr Khusraw’s Persian Locks into An American ‘Do’”, *Middle Eastern Literatures* 19/3 (2016): 316–324.

Muhammad Wahid Mirza. “The life and works of Amir Khusrau” (PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, 1929).

Sunil Sharma, *Amir Khusraw: The Poet of Sultans and Sufis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

Sunil Sharma and Paul E. Losensky. *In the Bazaar of Love: The Selected Poetry of Amir Khusrau* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2011).

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, “Stranger in the City: The Poetics of *Sabk-i Hindī*”, *Annual of Urdu Studies* 29 (2004): 1–93.

<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00fwp/srf/sabkihindi/srf_sabk_i_hindi.pdf>

Keywords:

Medieval Persian literature – Arabic vs. Persian poetry – Persian poetics – Persian prose – mastering poetry – style of writing – Persianate literary world – Indo-Persian

Translation:

[THE CONDITIONS FOR PERFECT MASTERY OF POETRY]

Now, it must be known that the poets who meet the [following] four conditions (*sharṭ*) are considered by the farsighted (*dūrbīnān*) as absolute (*muṭlaq*) masters. First, they set up the standard (‘*alam*) of speech in a style (*tarz*) that its magnificence challenges others. Second, the flow (*ravish*) of the water of speech from the fountain (‘*ayn*) of their meanings is in the style (*nahj*) of poets in purity (‘*uzūbat*) and fluidity (*salāsat*), and not in the manner (*namaṭ*) of preachers (*muṣakkir*) and Sufis. Third, their embroidered works are far from erroneous weaves. Fourth, they are not like treacherous (*khā’in*) tailors, who make (*taqīṭ*)⁵ a one-thousand-patch dress with people’s fabrics.

Tell anyone who meets these four conditions of mastery,
to hit anyone with their cane of the conditions of mastery.⁶

(*Har ki rā īn char sharṭ-i ūstādī dād dast*
Chūb-i sharṭ-i ūstādī gū bizan bar har ki hast.)

[DIFFERENT TYPES OF PUPILS]

The pupils of poetry are of three types: pupils of guidance (*ishārat*), pupils of [written] words (‘*ibārat*), and pupils of plunder (*ghārat*). The first type, pupils of guidance, are those who refer to an insightful master whenever they find flaws in metres or distortions in meanings, and the master guides them on how to correct them by saying do this here and do that there, so the beginner learns about the abstruse matters (*ghavāmiṣ*) of the work through that guidance. These are the pupils of guidance.

The second [type] are the pupils of [written] words. They are the novices (*mubtadī*), who follow the style of finished compositions (‘*ibārat-i muntahī*) and take as samples the words and meanings that they find in the masters’ writings. These are the pupils of [written] words.

The third [type] are the pupils of plunder (*ghārat*). They have an irresistible desire (*havas*) to compose (*taṣnīf*) and a failing resolution (*himmat*) to produce. They constantly dig (*naqb*) through the masters’ verses and carry their treasury (*khazāna*) to their own ruins (*kharāba*).^[p]

⁵ In literary terminology, *taqīṭ* ‘ means “scansion.”

⁶ The point of the verse is that anyone who meets the four conditions of a master is eligible to criticize others.

^{25b)} They take possession of the blood spilled from the heart of the wise, they copy from the masters and recite it to them. They steal from the masters and present it to them. Surely, they are the pupils of the masters' words, but plundering pupils. These are called pupils of plunder. May God protect the speaker and listener from the evil of such shameless [pupils] who are the embodiment of endless shame. Amen.

What is the point of brawling when your words on the page testify to your inner skill in robbery?

(*Chi sūd 'arbada chun az zamīr-i duzd fanat
bi-rūy-i safḥa guvāhī hamī dahad sukhanat?*)

[KHUSRAW'S MASTERY OF POETRY AND PROSE]

This servant, Khusraw, who is a master of mastery and pupil of pupillage, mentioned the above, so that the people of certainty (*ahl-i yaqīn*) would not suspect (*gumān*) that he intended to make himself superior (*rājih*) and invalidate (*jāriḥ*) others. Aside from this, he had another intention in mind, and that was for the wise to know that, on account of the favourable regard (*partaw-i naẓar*) of the people of perception (*ulū al-abṣār*) toward this servant, he has an insight (*baṣīrat*) in this matter (i.e., composition), but the title of "master" in these professions (*ḥiraf*) is not appropriate for the defective me (*man-i shikasta*), because from the four conditions of mastery, which was mentioned above, some do not exist in me.

So, the tree of my speech (*shajara-yi sukhan*) has many branches (*shu 'ab*) rooted in four dispositions (*ṭab*).⁷ To sum up, first, the rule (*ḥukm*) of anything that I have composed on the topics (*mavāẓi*) of advice (*mavā 'iz*) and wisdom (*ḥikam*) follows (*muṭābi*) the disposition (*ṭabī 'at*) of Sanā'ī and Khāqānī, and that style (*ṭarīq*) is like fire, which has an inclination for height (*'uluv*).

Any panegyric (*takhalluṣ*)⁸ and essence (*khulāṣa*) of imagination, which I have put out from my heart's enclosure, follows the laudable (*marzī*) disposition (*ṭab*) of Raẓī⁹ and

⁷ In what follows, he describes the four dispositions in connection with the four elements of fire, water, earth, and air.

⁸ *Takhalluṣ* (lit., liberation) is a poem that includes the name of the patron.

⁹ Raẓī (lit., pleased) is a proper name, which must refer to Sheikh Raẓī al-Dīn 'Alī Lālā of Ghazni (d. 1244), a Sufi poet who was a relative of Sanā'ī. See Sa'īd Karīmī, "Raẓī al-Dīn 'Alī Lālā" in *Dānish-nāma-yi jahān-i Islam*. < <https://rch.ac.ir/article/Details/14024>>. Accessed 03.11.2020.

Kamāl¹⁰, and that is a flood; it is like water, the purity and fluidity of which stimulates the imagination (*khiyāl-angīz*) and engages the soul (*jān-āvīz*).

Any rhyming-couplets (*masnavī*) and lyrics (*ghazal*) that I have flown follows the disposition of Nizāmī and Sa‘dī, and that is something like wind, more delicate (*laṭīf-tar*) than pure water [p. 26a] in fineness (*liṭāfat*) and freshness (*tarī*).

And, any fragment (*muqaṭṭa‘āt*), quatrain (*rubā‘iyāt*), riddle (*mu‘ammā*), and puzzle (*lughuz*) is the dust (*ghubār*) from my earthen being (*vujūd-i khākī*), and that is a mixture (*ma‘jūn*) like the earth (*khāk*), into which several delicate things have fallen and become dirty (*kasīf*).

Yes, yes, anything that falls into dust turns into dust.

Ārī, Ārī, khāk gardad har chi dar khāk ūftad.

As a result, I have grown such a renowned tree from four dispositions (*tab‘*). May God grant [me] the fruit of acceptance, God willing (*Inshā Allāh*). However, my prose is [from] a special disposition (*tābī‘at*), not affected by any element (*‘unṣur*). It is particular (*khāṣṣ*) to the substance (*khulāṣa*) of my own essence (*jawhar*).

The masters of imagination (*aṣḥāb-i takhayyul*) know very well that my point in all of this is that of the four conditions of mastery mentioned above, I do not meet the first one, which is the ownership of the property of style (*milkiyyat-i mulk-i ṭarz*), because, as explained, I have been following the words (*kalamāt*) and perfection (*kamālāt*) of several masters.

Since I follow the style of every writing,
I am thus a pupil, not a master.

*(Chun pas-raw-i ṭarz-i har savādam
pas shāgirdam, na ūstādam.)*

As for the second condition, that is, not having the smell of Turkistan (i.e., error, *khaṭā*) in the black navel [of musk],¹¹ I cannot claim that either. Although my poetry is mostly fluid

¹⁰ Kamāl (lit., perfection) is a proper noun, which must refer to Kamāl al-Dīn Iṣfahānī (d. 1237), a celebrated panegyrist and highly learned poet from Isfahan, who had studied Islamic jurisprudence, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and Arabic. See David Durand-Guédy, “Kamāl-al-Din Eṣfahānī” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. <<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kamal-al-din-esfahani>>. Accessed 3.11.2020.

¹¹ Musk, a black substance, which comes from the navel of a type of deer in Turkistan (northern China), is used as a metaphor for black ink, and by extension, as a metaphor for writing. The author is alluding to his own Turkish background and its effect on his Persian writing, suggesting that the errors in his Persian writing are due to his Turkish background. The term he has used for Turkistān (*Khaṭā*) also means “error.” As mentioned above, one of the conditions of the mastery of poetry is error-free works.

(*ravān*), lapses (*laghzīdan*) abound in my lyrics (*ghazal*) and riddles (*lughuz*). I acknowledge (*muta‘arrif*) and confess (*mu‘tarif*) that I cannot be wishful and boast of mastery of these two conditions.

Two more conditions remain. The first one is that the style of speech (*asālīb-i sukhan*) is according to the practice (*shi‘ār*) of poets (*shu‘arā*), not Sufis and preachers. In this regard, I can pour down before the eloquent of low and high ranks, the tale of the scattering of pearls from the rain-cloud of my pen without any preventing shyness. For, what exhilarates my speech (*harf*) is the admixture (*ma‘jūn*) of the best of poetry, not the preachers’ embroiling (*takhlīf*) and the Sufis’ amities (*tarashshī-hā*)¹².

And, the second condition of mastery is that the tents (*khiyām*) of speech are not made with people’s old and new broad borders (*navār*) sewn together. In this tent (*parda*), too, I can spread the carpet of nobility (*farsh-i sharaf*) and can throw the rug of speech (*qālī-i sukhan*), as I have not pulled out any thread (*rishta-tāb*) from anybody’s writing (*kitāba*) to sew into my own embroidery. For, if all of a sudden, the tip of a [stolen] thread sticks out, it will rip the curtain (*parda-darīdagī*).¹³ Even if it is as small as the tip of a needle, it will show when examined—[like the Qur’ānic description of the time of breaking the fast,] “**Until the white thread of dawn appears to you distinct from the black thread of dawn.**”¹⁴

Someone like Sūzanī¹⁵ and Khayyām, who can pull (*iṭnāb*)¹⁶ the rope of the tent (*khiyām*) of speech to the extent that it reaches all poles (*awtād*)¹⁷ of the world, and who can bring out from the tent (*parda*) of their heart several books of writing (*jarīda-yi sawdā*)—in whose honour, [the Qur’ānic verse] “**the fair ones restrained in pavilions**”¹⁸ seems to have been revealed—does not need [other] people’s patches (*payvand-hā*) to sew a curtain (*dihlīz*), which cannot be mounted anywhere other than inside their own house.

I am a king, [and] a world is in the shadow of my pavilion,
when would the tent of others [ever] interest me?

(*Pādshāham, ‘ālamī dar ḡill-i shādurvān-i man*)

¹² This word can also be read as *turshī-hā* “sorrows.”

¹³ The expression “to rip the curtain” means “to be shameful.”

¹⁴ Qur’ān 2:187.

¹⁵ Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Sūzanī (d. 1173–74), was a satirist born near Samarqand. According to ‘Aufī, the reason he was known as Sūzanī is that he was interested in embroidery (*sūzan* means “needle”) and had learned the craft. See Muḥammad ‘Aufī, *Lubāb al-albāb*, ed. Edward Browne and Muḥammad ‘Qazvīnī, ed. Sa‘īd Nafīsī (Tehran: Ibn Sīna, 1335/1956), 385.

¹⁶ *Iṭnāb* also means “proximity.”

¹⁷ *Awtād* also means “chiefs,” “grandees,” “Sufi saints,” and also refers to the “disyllabic parts of a metrical foot.”

¹⁸ Qur’ān 55:72.

gāv-pusht-i dīgarān kay pīsh-i chashm āyad marā?)

To conclude, I confessed (*iqrār*) that I am not established (*istiqrār*) in two of the four conditions of mastery, and that I do not have any independency (*istiqlāl*) in those areas. First, I do not have a style of my own, and second, I am not free from the territory of errors (*khiṭṭa-yi khaṭā*)¹⁹. But, in regard to the other two conditions, that is, the mode of speech (*siyāq-i sukhan*) being in accordance with the style (*nasq*) of poets, and the nonexistence of plagiarism (*‘adam-i intiḥāl*), thanks God, I can write a few lines free from any criticism. So, I became the judge of my own state and issued the verdict that I have the rank of a half-complete (*nīm-tamām*) master. If the complete (*tamām*) masters consider the servant Khusraw to be half-complete in mastery, that would be perfect (*tamām*).

I am completely fair here [to say],
I am incomplete, incomplete, incomplete.

*(Bidham az inṣāf-i khvīsh īnjā tamām
nā-tamāmam, nā-tamāmam, nā-tamām.)*

¹⁹ *Khiṭṭa-yi khaṭā* also means the region of Turkistan, where his paternal ancestors came from.