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Author: James Winston Morris

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Transfiguring Love: Perspective Shifts and the Contextualization of Experience in the Ghazals of Ḥāfīz

James Morris

The following observations grow out of several decades of experience teaching the ghazals of Ḥāfīz to students lacking any direct access to the original Persian—and out of an even longer period of immersion in the multilingual complex of now largely unfamiliar spiritual, philosophic, scientific and theological disciplines which provided the original cultural context and network of symbolic allusions that were once intimately familiar to this poet and his original learned courtly audiences, together with his connoisseurs and imitators throughout subsequent centuries. Not surprisingly, the greatest challenge and frustration of that contemporary pedagogical situation is how to communicate clearly and adequately those implicit structures and assumptions which must be understood, in order to begin to appreciate the full poetic richness and spiritual depths of Ḥāfīz’s lyrics.

The focus of this chapter is on only one key dimension of that wider hermeneutical and pedagogical problem: the characteristic progression of metaphysical and existential shifts in perspective—first revealing, and then potentially transforming each reader’s love, desire, will and self-understanding—that typically structures and unifies each of Ḥāfīz’s ghazals. As we shall see, that distinctive underlying structural feature of Ḥāfīz’s writing (which is normally invisible in English translation) also helps to explain some of the mysterious spiritual efficacy of his poetry in the therapeutic process of spiritual divination and illumination, the longstanding ritual of fa’l, paralleling the familiar uses of the I Ching.

One way to begin explaining that distinctive process of transformation is to start with the fundamental existential challenge with which this poet actually concludes each of his lyrics, with all that is actually evoked and intended by the far-reaching implications of his poetic penname ‘Ḥāfīz’, a deeply problematic expression which is too often taken simply in its familiar social usage referring to someone who has memorized the Qur’ān. With a heightened appreciation of the potential aims and demands highlighted by that repeated concluding reminder, we then move on to introduce the intended effects and forms of participation suggested by this poet’s distinctive unifying rhetoric of carefully orchestrated, progressively shifting
perspectives, voices and audiences, before briefly illustrating concretely how those unifying poetic features are developed in two typical shorter ghazals.

Background and Contexts

Becoming ‘Hāfiz’: The Ḥ-F-Ẓ Root and its Wider Qur’ānic Resonances

The spiritual world view assumed by Hāfiz and his original audiences – a perspective at once metaphysical, religious, aesthetic and ethical – can be summed up as an infinite play of unique, ever-renewed theophanies, in which all of our experience is understood as the constantly shifting Self-manifestation of the One divine Source, the ever-renewed ‘Signs’ of the creative Breath, as they are reflected in the mirror of each divine-human spirit. Yet Hāfiz’s lyrics, of course, are not intended to teach or explain that familiar metaphysical perspective or the richly complex, constantly intersecting registers of its symbolic expression – both of which were already intimately familiar to his original learned and courtly audiences. Instead, they are designed to awaken the actual realization of that reality within the uniquely personal and shifting situations of his individual readers. That guiding intention, and its far-reaching demands and implications, are beautifully summarized in the multivalent meanings and associations of his concluding pen-name.

To begin with, the familiar Qur’ānic divine attribute or distinctive quality of Being, that is suggested by the Arabic active present participle ḥāfiz immediately evokes in each informed reader a complex semantic family of divine Qualities and corresponding human responses and responsibilities, while it simultaneously heightens our awareness of our relative realization of that particular divine Name, including our deeply rooted failures to do justice to its demands. The resulting ironic complicity of the poet and his readers is of course one of the most familiar features of the concluding verses of Hāfiz’s ghazals. At a second, deeper stage of reflection and attention, which necessarily resonates with the reader’s active assimilation of each preceding line of Hāfiz’s ghazal, we are reminded that this same familiar concluding expression can often also be read (in its original Arabic) as an even more compelling singular imperative, demanding that we realize and put into action – ‘assiduously, constantly, and perseveringly’, as the intensive third-form imperative implies1 – all the implications and responsibilities of our true human spiritual reality and ultimate destiny, as someone who is indeed ‘Hāfiz’.

So let us start with the multiple meanings of that key Arabic root (ḥ-ｆ-ｚ), which occurs a total of 44 times in the Qur’ān: 15 times in relation to God (and 3 more regarding His angels or spiritual intermediaries); 6 times in relation to the Prophet; with the remaining 20 verses referring to corresponding human qualities and responsibilities, or the lack thereof. As with each of the other divine Names and attributes in the Qur’ān, the dramatic interplay of these two equally essential metaphysical perspectives – the divine Reality and its ongoing human manifestations and
discoveries – lies at the heart of all the love-imagery of Ḥāfīz and the wider poetic tradition culminating in his work; that is, in its pervasive symbolic framework of the ongoing mutual courtship of the human soul and divine Beloved. The complex range of meanings of this *h-f-z* root in the Qur’ān are very wide indeed, including: (a) to maintain, sustain, uphold; (b) to protect, guard, preserve. These first two meanings are most obviously involved in the verses referring to God’s creative and sustaining activities. But other related aspects of this Arabic root more obviously relating to our corresponding human demands and responsibilities include: (c) to watch out, take care, bear in mind; (d) to be heedful, mindful, attentive; and finally (e) to follow, observe, comply with (an oath, covenant, divine command, etc.). Thus, by the time we have reached the end of each of Ḥāfīz’s poems, he suggests, reminds us, and then often insists – in the immediate, insistently personal singular imperative – that we reflect on our actual realization of each of these fundamentally human spiritual responsibilities. In other words, the ‘Ḥāfīz’ penname and its corresponding imperative sense provide a constantly reinforced reminder of those fundamental human-divine covenants which, in the Qur’ānic perspectives familiar to the poet’s original readership, constitute our very being and ultimate purpose.

Equally importantly, the Arabic root *h-f-z* does not stand alone in the Qur’ān, so that at each concluding repetition Ḥāfīz’s readers (or at least those familiar with its underlying scriptural background) are also immediately reminded of an equally important set of closely associated symbols, realities and obligations. To begin with those 15 verses where this Arabic root explicitly describes God’s actions, this expression is directly connected to the most fundamental divine functions – that is, to God’s constant creation, sustaining and protecting of the heavens and the earth; of the divine Archetype of all creation and revelation, the heavenly ‘Book’ and cosmic ‘Reminder’ (*al-dhikr*); of the angels (*6:61*); of the ‘Pedestal’ (*kursi*) of the divine Throne (*2:255*), that encompasses all manifest being; and of that ‘Tablet’ recording the cosmic Qur’ān (*85:22*). Indeed, God is repeatedly described, using an intensive form of this same root and divine Name, as ‘Ḥāfīz of every thing’ (*11:57*; *34:21*; *42:6*) – a quality inseparably associated with His infinite creative Love and Compassion: God is the Best Sustainer/Protector (Ḥāfīz) and the Most Loving/Compassionate of the Loving Ones (*12:64*).

When we turn to consider those 20 verses where this same Arabic root (*h-f-z*) is used to describe specifically human spiritual virtues, the fields of semantic association are equally fundamental and far-reaching. Most simply, that verb is often applied to our human responsibility for upholding and carrying out our oaths and agreements (*5:89*), an emphasis immediately recalling the central Qur’ānic theme of God’s primordial Covenant with all human souls, the famous *ruz-i alast* (at *7:174*) that is alluded to throughout Ḥāfīz’s poetry and the traditions of which it was a part. Thus this same root is applied to our responsibility to follow God’s commandments (*9:112*); to preserve modesty and self-restraint (*24:30–1* and four other verses); to properly uphold and bear witness to ‘the Book of God’ (*5:44*); or – in ironic contrast to the behaviour of Joseph’s siblings (*12:12, 81*) – to properly care for
all our human brothers. Moreover, in a number of other key Qur’anic passages (at 4:34; 50:31–5; and especially 33:35), this distinctive human attribute of being ḥāfīz is closely tied to a long catalogue of closely related, near-synonymous central spiritual virtues characterizing the very highest rank of prophets, saints and realized human beings, those granted ‘the Day of Eternity’ (50:34). These spiritual qualities and obligations include remembering God greatly/repeatedly (33:35); being contrite and penitent (50:32); and most pointedly and mysteriously, safeguarding and preserving the Unseen (ghayb) which God has preserved (4:34; 12:81). Finally, the essential dependence of all these active human qualities, expressed by this ҳ-f-з root upon the foundation of divinely inspired awareness or direct spiritual knowing (‘ilm), is explicitly highlighted in the prophet Joseph’s emphatic self-description (12:55), using Arabic expressions ordinarily reserved in the Qur’an for divine Names: ‘Verily I am ḥāfīz and truly knowing (‘alīm)!’

Given the range and spiritual depth of all these pre-eminently human responsibilities and spiritual imperatives associated by the Qur’an with the qualities of being truly ḥāfīz, it is not surprising that the concluding lines of Ḥāfīz’s poems often convey a profoundly ironic and realistically self-deprecating, sometimes openly humorous note, even as they necessarily evoke the full range of qualities and ideals evoked by this far-reaching divine – and potentially human – Name.

Finally, it is particularly important to note how insistently and repeatedly the Qur’an stresses that the Prophet Muḥammad (6:104 and five other verses) – and more generally, all those with true faith (at 83:33) – are not themselves responsible (ҳ-f-з) for the spiritual decisions and ultimate fate of other human beings who may fail to follow and put into right practice the divine guidance. Being ḥāfīz, as the Qur’an pointedly insists in all these verses, is necessarily a uniquely individual spiritual responsibility, and the emphasis on that uncompromising spiritual individuality is surely one of the most familiar distinguishing hallmarks of all of Ḥāfīz’s poetry. Thus these particular Qur’anic verses, in so pointedly stressing the necessarily individual nature of each human being’s spiritual responsibilities, directly point to some of the most recurrent themes and dramatic contrasts throughout his ghazals. They are directly mirrored in Ḥāfīz’s paradoxical glorification of the inner freedom and true responsibility of the inspired ‘free spirit’ (rind) and one who intentionally incurs blame (malāmati), whose conscious spiritual integrity poignantly exposes the recurrent human tendency – epitomized in his ghazals by the hypocritical pretensions of the judgemental ‘critic’ and the ‘prosecutor/pretender’ (the muh-tasīb and mudda‘ī), in all their familiar inner and outer masks – to replace each soul’s unique experience and inalienable individual responsibility by careful outward conformity to a safely limited set of shared social conventions.

*From Assumption to Awareness: Dialogical Perspective Shifts in the Poetic Journey*

Thus from the perspective evoked and suggested by this multi-faceted and revealing pen-name, each ghazal of Ḥāfīz constitutes a very particular kind of inner
journey, whose goal is to become – at least momentarily and relative to each reader’s unique existential starting point – Ḥāfīz, in all the senses of that term we have just briefly outlined. While the aim of this chapter is to highlight that characteristic pattern of progressive shifts in perspective that are meant to be elicited within the reader in the course of that poetic journey, it may be helpful to recall a few of the more visible beginnings and conclusions of that overall process of spiritual transformation, since each poem understandably highlights only a few recurrent phases, stages and manifestations of that wider process. Thus, to mention only a small sample of those unifying and guiding parameters familiar to any reader of Ḥāfīz, we can speak of the perspective shifts from the mortal human-animal (bashar) to the theomorphic, spiritual and fully human being (insān); from duality and lonely separation (from the divine Beloved) to realized presence and reunion; from random likes and aversions to reasoned choice and intentional union with the One Will; from unconscious ignorance or delusion to spiritual awareness and inspired knowing; from self-centred impulses and desires to true mutual love and compassion; from a painful sense of cosmic determinism to the realization of true freedom; from inevitable conflict to providential harmony; or from the prison of earthly time to the timeless realm of the Spirit.

Now while the list of those contrasting metaphysical perspectives typically opening and closing each ghazal could be expanded indefinitely, what is most crucial for understanding the inner working and distinctive progression of these lyrics is something much simpler and more directly experienced. That is to say, each individual normally begins this particular spiritual and poetic journey, not with a conscious set of determinant metaphysical or theological ideas, but instead with a particular, immediate and undeniable emotional state (often anxious, fragile or uncomfortable), which itself has apparently been ‘caused’ or occasioned by the particular outward circumstances and constraints of our momentary mundane condition. At a deeper level, of course, that specific initial existential state reflects and is ultimately generated by an underlying, normally unconscious interpretive framework, by an apparently given set of determining psychological assumptions. But normally we all quickly learn how practically ineffective it is to attempt to change or remove such particular states and feelings simply through the purely abstract discussion and manipulation of such deeply embedded concepts and belief-patterns – all the more so as that kind of metaphysical reflection often tends to arrive only at still further intellectual paradoxes and antinomies. As with any effective therapy, actual spiritual transformation requires the mysterious awakening and engagement of unsuspected spiritual resources of desire, intention and understanding – whether those openings subjectively appear to us as either inner or external – that at first seem invisible or impossibly remote.

Hence what is practically needed in this recurrent initial predicament posed by each ghazal – and what is so richly provided already in the unique rhetorical structures of the Qur’ān and their creative reflections in the immense earlier Sufi literature familiar to Ḥāfīz (both poetry and prose) – is an operative repertoire of literary
tools that are particularly effective in first eliciting and then ultimately transforming our unconsciously governing inner metaphysical assumptions. And this requisite transformation of perspective cannot be primarily abstract and conceptual, but rather must bring into play all the intimately associated personal memories, choices, emotions and earlier experiences that together give our largely unconscious assumptions their existentially dominant influence on our outlook and experience at this particular point in time. This is where the unique artistry and extraordinary guiding wisdom of Ḥāfīz are so powerfully evident, as attested by centuries of repeated efforts, in many subsequent Islamicate languages and poetic traditions, to somehow re-create his poetry's distinctive spiritually transforming effects. Thus it is essential to keep in mind, as we continue to identify, analyse and illustrate some of the key formal elements contributing to this particular dialogical pattern of perspective shifts in Ḥāfīz, that the outlining of these literary techniques is not an end in itself. What we are seeking to understand is rather their unifying goal and final cause; that is, how and why these different constituent rhetorical features actually work – as they certainly so often do – in gradually moving each actively engaged reader towards a more effective and memorable realization of genuinely becoming 'ḥāfīz', including the particularly urgent individual obligations which that rediscovered divine attribute (and human imperative) reveals and entails each time.

Within the ghazals of Ḥāfīz, these typical progressive shifts in metaphysical perspective are expressed through the masterly use of a familiar set of rhetorical devices, each of which have their own operative and literary equivalents in Rūmī and other earlier classics of this spiritual and poetic tradition. Most fundamental in Ḥāfīz, of course, is the richly evocative dramatic dialogical embedding of these shifting perspectives, whose mysterious and intentionally provocative development is best illustrated through the actual analysis of the short poems later in this chapter. In other words, just as throughout the Qur'ān, each line of Ḥāfīz normally suggests and requires the most careful attention to the dynamic, often highly unstable, inner connection or implicit 'conversation' between four equally essential elements. These elements of metaphysical dialogue include the particular momentary existential situation (at once spiritual, psychological, material) of the external reader/listener; the corresponding apparent, imagined state of the internal speaker(s) of each line; the potential audience(s) for the internal speaker(s); and, finally, the spectrum of possible tones, purposes and (mis-)understandings connecting the first three essential participants (reader, internal speaker and that speaker's audiences).

As indicated by the complexities of this already simplified schematic summary, Ḥāfīz notoriously revels in creating – often already within each line of his ghazals – a richly contrasting set of intensely dramatic, intentionally mysterious, open-ended and multi-faceted potential constellations of understanding. In consequence, the awakening and effective application of those potential alternative understandings, at each moment, entirely depends on the particular range of imagined meanings
which each reader is able to supply for each of these indispensable dialogical components, embedded in the intensely condensed internal dramatic speech of each line of the ghazal. Perhaps the most immediate way for modern, non-expert readers of Ḥāfīz in translation to begin to appreciate all that is potentially going on within these short ghazals – indeed, often within a single line – is to encounter some of the extraordinarily dramatic, richly evocative miniature paintings, which were later inspired by and devoted to mirroring and elucidating these unique poetic masterpieces.\(^3\)

The particular demands of this uniquely polyvalent, multi-dimensional dramatic dialogical structure of each line of the ghazal on the properly prepared and seriously engaged reader can perhaps best be appreciated by students approaching Ḥāfīz’s ghazals with little or no prior cultural preparation, by analogy to the similar degree of active intellectual and affective participation (and preparation) required by Plato’s dramatic dialogues, or by the hexagrams of the I Ching, which itself so closely mirrors the traditional divinatory rituals and expectations surrounding the Divān of Ḥāfīz. Perhaps an even closer analogy, for some readers, may be suggested by the familiar features of complex role-playing computer games; or by recent cinematic thinkers fascinated with depicting the complex interplay between each human actor’s outward destiny, character and inner history, fateful decisions, and the revealing consequences of our inner and outward acts of free will.\(^4\) For within each distinctively multi-faceted line of Ḥāfīz, the actively engaged reader is unavoidably challenged to ‘write out’ – and simultaneously to act out, since it is our own self and inner personal history and imagination that is so pointedly mirrored in our particular hypothetical understandings of the possible speakers, audiences and speech-situations at issue – several plausible, but necessarily contrasting, mini-dramas, along with the further consideration of their eventual outcomes.

Next, in the following line or two, Ḥāfīz typically moves on to evoke a radically different perspective (both metaphysical and practical) that – just as with the interplay of different characters and personalities in Plato’s dialogues or other great dramas – immediately tends to cast a very different light on the issues and alternatives raised by the immediately preceding lines. Thus each reader’s simultaneous active inner creation and subsequent reflective re-consideration of each of these alternating mini-dramas – only further enriched by their interactions with the further dramas and perspectives of each succeeding line – precisely mirrors the familiar existential processes by which participants in therapy gradually become more aware of – and eventually responsible for and relatively detached from – the largely unconscious, non-reflective, and painfully one-dimensional dramas and dilemmas that originally brought them into the therapeutic quest. This is also why, just as with the study of Plato and other great dramatists, teachers quickly discover that the best practical initiation into these typically individualized and unavoidably interactive psychospiritual complexities of Ḥāfīz’s poetry is through carefully attentive group reading and study. For such shared discussion quickly reveals and highlights the dramatic alternative perspectives and resulting dialogues (together with
their manifold individual implications and outcomes) so carefully embedded in each successive line and half-line of his ghazals.

In short, these progressive dialogical perspective shifts are part of a carefully crafted process designed to elicit from Ḥāfiz's readers both new relevant experiences and contrasting interpretative alternatives, through such familiar devices as evocative but initially puzzling symbols (paralleling a key feature of the earliest Qur'ānic surahs); contrasting schemas of interpretation, including the elaborate metaphysical and philosophical traditions well known to Ḥāfiz and his original audiences; and the familiar Qur'ānic principles of explicit metaphysical paradox and incongruity. Second, these dramatic shifts help to heighten each reader's awareness of key unconscious elements (i.e., our inwardly operative assumptions, blinders, prejudices, and so on) and previously unexamined possibilities, through the carefully suggestive mirroring of those inadequate assumptions or their destructive consequences, emotionally heightened by Ḥāfiz's frequent (and often disarming self-deprecating) use of humour and irony. Third, Ḥāfiz often uses these sudden perspective shifts to elicit each reader's habitual forms of projection (i.e., the emotionally charged mirroring of our own inner impulses in others), through more openly voicing our inner conflicts and assumptions in the guise of those familiar, recurrent conflicts and dramas that run through all his poems. Finally, each ghazal as a whole integrates those preceding elements in the reader's gradual movement from an opening state of one-sided egoistic desire and associated emotions (needfulness, anxiety, longing, nostalgia, despair; or transient sensual distraction from that deeper suffering) to the potential transfiguration of that desire in the active reciprocity of true mutual love and spiritual awareness; that is, in all the states and actions of the divine Ḥāfiz – and His or Her human mirrors – which are so pointedly and insistently recalled in each ghazal's concluding line.

For the poet's concluding pen-name is at once divine Name, human description and obligation, and singular active imperative. As such, however we may encounter it at the end of each ghazal, it constitutes an unavoidably revealing litmus test of where this challenging poetic voyage has left us, especially in contrast to the uniquely personal situation and dilemmas with which each of us necessarily begins this journey. Like the 'Book' of all our actions, thoughts and influences that each soul, according to the Qur'ān, is given to contemplate at its judgement, each ghazal brings us face to face with our own humanity, and with the immediate imperatives we discover there.

Two Illustrative Ghazals

Due to practical pedagogical concerns relevant to English-language students of Ḥāfiz who are unable to read the Persian (including the ready availability, range and variety of translated ghazals, their relative literalness, and the helpful provision of a
facing Persian text), I have based the following two illustrations on my own slightly revised versions of the translations by Elizabeth T. Gray in *The Green Sea of Heaven: Fifty Ghazals from the Diwan of Hafiz*, pp. 49 and 69. The original translations have been supplemented here only as necessary to indicate particular important original textual key words or clues (usually more literal or in some cases underlying Arabic meanings) that are referred to in the following discussion of each ghazal. The particular numbers identifying each ghazal here (6, 13) refer to their original order in that published volume of English translations.

**Perspective Shifts in Ghazal 6: The ‘Absence’ of the Friend**

This short and relatively straightforward ghazal offers a richly illustrative introduction to Ḥāfīz’s typical use of subtle and rapidly shifting, typically ambivalent shifts in perspective and voice. To begin with, almost every phrase in the opening line – as we shall see in more detail below – offers a complexly evocative set of inescapable existential alternatives (engaging and awakening each reader’s will, love, understanding and intention), which are then articulated and given voice in an ongoing, gradually ascending internal dialogue throughout the rest of the poem. For the sake of simplicity, we could call these two parallel starting points the ‘two faces of the intellect’ (*aql*), already so familiar from the Qurʾān and centuries of earlier Islamic spiritual poetry; that is, the intrinsically limited, ego-mind of the human-animal (*bashar*), in contrast with the all-inclusive, inspired and penetrating spiritual Intelligence. Initially, each pair of verses retains a single similar formal perspective, while at the same time subtly preparing the way for the more comprehensive points of view articulated in the following set of lines. The final verse, as is usually the case with Ḥāfīz, stands alone as the definitive – hence almost always knowingly ironic and multi-faceted – response to all the preceding interrogations, inherently recapitulating and integrating all those possible multiple perspectives within the whole of each reader’s experience.

**Ghazal 6**

[1] O dawn wind, where is the Friend’s resting-place/shrine/tomb? Where is that moon’s stopping-place, that rogue, killer/enticer of lovers?

[2] The night is dark, the way to the valley of (the burning bush) is up ahead. Where is the fire of Sinai? Where is the promised time of seeing (the Friend)?

[3] Whoever comes into this world bears the mark of ruin/transience: In this tavern/ruins, say: Where is the sober/wise one?

[4] He who understands spiritual signs lives with glad tidings. There are so many subtleties: Where is the intimate of secrets?
[5] Every tip of my hair has thousands of works with You: We, where are we? And the work-less blamer, where is he?

[6] Reason has gone mad. Where are those dark/musk-scented chains? The Heart of/from Us went into retreat. Where is the eyebrow of the Heart-Holder (Friend)?

[7] Wine, musician and rose are all ready, but Life without the Friend is not ready! Where is the Friend?

[8] Ḥāfiz, don’t be pained by the wind of autumn across the plain of Eternity/time: Have a wise thought: say, where is the rose without thorns?

Lines 1-2: Lost and Indeterminate Subject and Object – but Richly Evocative Audience

In the first two opening lines here, both the speaker and the identity of the beloved Friend, the object of the speaker’s deepest longing, are all kept carefully and rigorously indeterminate – an indeterminacy which readily draws in and encourages each reader to read these lines as a strictly personal soliloquy, immediately substituting the peculiar situation of their own unique experience of love, loss and nostalgic longing. However, the audience and time of this recurrent plaint also suggest immediately concrete and undeniable signs of hope and presence: the first dawn light, and the wind-messenger of the divine Beloved, with its fresh spring reminders of the reality and proximity of the Garden. The second line – indeed, like each of the phrases in the opening verse – continues that opening question, but filled with the poignant reminder of the still abstract possibility of reunion: of those transforming theophanic encounters that tauntingly remain, at this moment, either in the mythical past (the burning bush and Mt. Sinai) or in the still distant eschatological future (each soul’s ‘promised seeing [ru’yā], and ultimate meeting with God). Yet that abstract reminder is itself enough to suggest and constitute that inner way and lifelong path which will be revealed and discovered in the rest of the poem. Hence the constant concluding ‘Where?’ refrain already begins to move away from the opening hopeless, helpless complaint to a nascent, more focused and hopeful inner quest.

Lines 3-4: The Voice of Abstract, Generalized Reason

In these lines, Ḥāfiz suddenly switches to the distant, all too annoying voice of abstract, detached and universal wisdom – to the familiar most outward (and equally abstract) ‘narrative’ voice of the Qur‘ān, that voice which pointedly speaks to the indeterminate ‘you-all’ (‘say’ here is unusually in the second-person plural). In the familiar modern imagery of animated cartoons, this reminder of the transient nature and dualistic conditions of ‘this lower life’ (dunyā/jahān) is the remonstrative
voice of the white angel on the protagonist’s shoulder, accurate and pertinent, but also painfully soft and distant. And in line 3, Hāfīz gives full ironic voice to the bitterly hopeless, despairing anger that such sober, abstract reasonableness tends to evoke among those (and each part of our self) still helplessly attached to these passing tavern-ruins. Surprisingly, then, line 4 unexpectedly provides the beginning of a real, effective – and necessarily individual – answer to that ironic query, pointing towards the radical transformation of perspective articulated in the first person in verses 5–6. Appropriately enough for the turning-point of the entire poem, the first half-line of verse 4 (together with the beginning of the second half) offers what is still a poignantly abstract reminder of those dozens of Qur’ānic verses emphasizing the omnipresence of the divine Signs, in every domain and instant of our inner and outer experience, and of the ‘glad tidings’ (bīshārat/bushrā) necessarily flowing from their proper appreciation and understanding.

Hence the conclusion of this line, marking the climactic transition of the whole ghazal, is a poignantly personal question, perhaps even the voice of an entirely different speaker (already the ‘I’ of lines 5–6?). For each of us, there is only one possible and indispensable ‘intimate of spiritual secrets’, and no real choice (or way out of this dilemma) but to turn in the direction of that Friend.

**Lines 5–6: The Heart’s Essential ‘Work’ of I and Thou**

In line 5, Hāfīz, at least, openly takes that inevitable turn inward, from the abstract, critical intellect to the necessarily personal and uniquely individual – powerfully marked here by the very first mention of ‘I’ and the divine, Buberian ‘Thou’ – to the Heart (dil/qalb), the dynamic, mutual meeting place of the divine Spirit and all its individual manifestations, and the unique locus of the defining human Work of creation, spiritual transformation and awakening. As the second half of line 5 indicates, those who are consciously busy with that infinite sacred Work of the divine-individual ‘We’ are indeed in a radically different place from that complaining, critical, fault-finding ‘ego-self whose many inner voices (already richly amplified in lines 1–4) are all too familiar to each of us. The forcefully emphasized ‘We’ opening the second half of line 5 is not a polite rhetorical substitute for Hāfīz’s or our own ego-self (much less a vague bunch of people), but rather a radical and far-reaching, truly transforming insight into this poet’s own distinctive reading and understanding of that peculiarly mysterious divine ‘We’-voice which so intimately speaks so much of the Qur’ān. The essential identity of this profoundly personal divine/human ‘We’ with the transforming presence of the Waif/Friend is highlighted here by its explicit opposition to the censorious ‘blamer’ (malāmatgar, the inner ego-‘blamer’). That opposition here is meant to openly echo the famous Qur’ānic verse 5:54 on the saving, restorative divine function of all the saintly Friends of God, ‘... who do not fear the blame of any blamer’.

Line 6 then moves on to describe more completely the decisive inner transformation – and the constantly available spiritual choice – between the real ‘We’ of the
Friend/Spirit and the self-separating, illusory ego, which was so sharply evoked in line 5. This inner union of the heart-self and its divine Creator-Beloved Friend always remains bewildering and ‘crazy’ (divâna/hayrân) to our limited ego-intellect. For our individual intellect alone – in Ḥâfîz’s already classic poetic imagery for conveying the foundational hadith of the blinding Face of the divine Beloved and its ‘70,000 veils’ of all created manifestation⁷ – by its very nature cannot see beyond the endless veils of created phenomena, which for it are always psychic ‘chains’ of distraction and temptation. Only the Heart, when it is properly focused or ‘withdrawn’ into itself (khalwa/gūsha-gîrîf), can follow the subtle fragrances of divine attraction – here echoing that perfumed dawn-breeze (nasîm) which so evocatively opens this ghazal – back to the very Eye/Essence (‘ayn/âbru) of the One ‘Heart-holder’ and always present Friend.

Thus line 6 leaves each reader faced directly with one essential question: with the apparent choice between seeing – and living – in perspective, in that loving awareness of Heart and Spirit which is both real and always connected with the divine Friend (every hair linked ‘by thousands of works’). Or else of disintegrating and returning to the lonely separation of the ego-intellect and all the familiar sufferings (the ‘thorns’ of the concluding line) inherent in its ‘nearer-world’ (dunyā) of transient material entities, space and time – all quite literally destined to the pervasive ruins (kharâbât) of line 3. Or between the divine Friend, the Beloved Herself, and her dark and endlessly veiling – but also fragrantly alluring! (mushkîn/mishkîn) – chain of tresses. More honestly, of course, we rarely seem to have much effective choice between these two alternatives, finding our conscious selves, from moment to moment, apparently entranced in one of these states or the other.

But Ḥâfîz’s final poignant ‘Where?’ here obviously does not mean that we have simply returned to the initial helplessness and despair that marked the beginning of the poem. For the poet has actually brought his readers a very long way at this point, and his final two lines in fact are devoted to clarifying the realization and deeper insight into the universal nature of each Heart’s individual path and work, which has only now become possible. In short, we are simply asked to begin to recognize that the ‘Path’ of this quintessentially human Work is not the apparent, dramatic motion from one lower spiritual point to another apparently higher one, as in the progression from line 1 here to line 5. Rather, that uniquely individual work, and resulting path, always lies in the ongoing dynamic process of spiritual learning and growth that constantly takes our heart back and forth from one state and momentary spiritual stopping-place (manzil, in line 1) to another. So that what we first took as separation, loss and failure is in reality the essential precondition for the ongoing human task of loving, of the striving and discovery of the Friend.

Lines 7-8: Recognizing the Friend’s Work: Recapitulation and Conclusion

Line 7 here, like the end of line 6, might at first appear like another simple and poignant repetition of the spiritual dilemmas first raised in the opening verse;
indeed, its opening (and pointedly eschatological) banquet-imagery, at first glance, is as close to familiar and banal as one will ever find in this poet. And Ḥāfīz clearly intends for that confusion to arise, since he leaves it quite ambiguous whether we are to read line 7 simply as a continuation of the very personal and intimate voice of lines 5–6, or as a return to the more inclusive, objective, wiser voice that his readers often expect from his conclusion – the kind of all-knowing, reproaching wisdom-voice we clearly do find in the last line here. The transforming answer to that dilemma, as we might expect, comes in the second half of line 7, where we are reminded that Life itself (‘aysh, which is far more than just enjoyment) is impossible without the Friend. So this time, what is pointedly absent from this scene is the opening pretence of the lost and lonely ego. Since we have been reminded that that Friend is ‘with you all wherever you may be’ (57:4), there can be no question now of who is asking, and who is really being asked.

The concluding line 8 of this ghazal is a particularly striking illustration of the essential double function and meaning of Ḥāfīz’s pen-name: both as vocative – addressed to every human being and to all the far-reaching responsibilities of our cosmic role and potential as Ḥāfīz; and in this case also as imperative, demanding (in the intensive third Arabic verbal form) that we actively, assiduously, constantly ‘be mindful, watch out, observe, uphold and be heedful’. And both functions, of course, are unavoidably in the necessarily individual singular form.

Beyond that telling form of address, the rest of the first half-line here appears at first as a beautiful poetic reworking of the famous hadith: ‘Don’t curse al-dahr [the apparent cyclical eternity, suffering and fatality of the material world’s order, often blamed in pre-Islamic poetry], because it is among God’s Names!’ But Ḥāfīz’s concluding, typically ironic formulation here – together with the rest of this ghazal – goes much deeper in offering a deeply insightful explanation of the reasons underlying that Prophetic prohibition. For as the preceding lines have made clear, it is in fact only through the transforming human Work of our own necessarily unique and individual experience of suffering, loss, distance and separation – through constantly discovering the cyclical polarities and oppositions inherent in all those divine Names that are mirrored in the fully human being (insān) – that we can ever begin to discover, appreciate, know and love that Friend whose apparent painful, arbitrary ‘absence’ (and constant guiding Presence) makes the whole drama of loss and redemption possible.

Voice and Perspective Shifts in Ghazal 13: Surrender or Separation?

This short, apparently simple ghazal well illustrates the particular challenges of interpretation that so often arise when Ḥāfīz leaves out some of the familiar grammatical and syntactical markers that normally signal important shifts in perspective and tone or voice. In the face of such intentional indeterminacy, each reader’s particular understanding of the shifts in question, both in voice and perspective, tends to be built – as we shall see below – on the basis of apparent allusions to
connected problems, meanings and frameworks of interpretation familiar from other ghazals and from the poet's wider cultural and literary background. In this case, for example, we are obliged to assume from the start that the pointedly contrasting perspectives, quite clearly articulated in verses 5–7, must be read back into the first half of the poem, and particularly into the two halves of the opening verse.

**Ghazal 13**

[1] What is more happy than life/pleasure, spiritual conversation, the garden, and spring?
Where is the Sāqi? Say, what is the cause of waiting/expectation?

[2] Take as a blessing each instant of happiness that is given to you:
No one knows (for sure) what the outcome of the Work is.

[3] The connection of life is tied with a single hair: Be aware/wise!
Focus on (the cause of) your own pain – what is the pain of fate/time/the world?

[4] The real meaning of the Water of Life and the garden of Iram:
What is it but the edge of this flowing stream and wholesome/delicious wine?

[5] Since the sober ['veiled ones'] and the intoxicated are both from one tribe,
We, to whom should we give the Heart? What is (arbitrary) choosing?

[6] What does the heavenly sphere know of the Secret behind the veil?
Silence!
O critic/pretender/complainer, what is your quarrel with the Veil-Keeper?!

[7] The ascetic wants the drink of Kawthar, and Ḥāfīz wants the Cup (of the heart):
So between the two, which does the Creater/Doer choose!?

*Line 1: 'What is the Cause of this Waiting?'

The opening verse of this ghazal sets out the two opposing metaphysical perspectives that are contrasted throughout this poem. The first half-line, a purely rhetorical question – and in reality an ecstatic exclamation of pure delight – straightforwardly articulates Ḥāfīz's (and each accomplished spiritual Knower's) immediate perception of the inherent good of the Spirit and the realized divine Presence, of the 'Garden' of divine proximity as already present in the purified and
receptive human Heart, and in the active 'spiritual conversation' (suhbat) or interaction with the Beloved that fills it. In poignant contrast - both emotionally and spiritually - the twin questions forming the second half of this opening verse raise the recurrent problem of that unconscious spiritual blindness and profound 'veiling' of the heart (line 5), which leave the critic/plaintiff/pretender (mudda'i of line 6) and piously hopeful ascetic (zāhid of line 7) feeling painfully separated from God, unhappily waiting for the imagined future coming of the divine Wine-bearer (sāqi), and desperately searching for the presumably external cause (sabab) of this difficult separation and interminable state of expectation.

If the first half-line represents a kind of immediate, uncomplicated spiritual communication (suhbat) between Ḥāfīz and each of his receptive readers, the perspective of estrangement and longing assumed in the second half-line is much more problematic, in that the relationship of the questioner and his or her intended audience assumed there can be understood on at least three distinct levels, each with very different meanings. To begin with, from the perspective of the speaker of the first half-line (whether we conceive of that voice as Ḥāfīz himself, or his persona of the idealized spiritual Knower familiar to his readers from many other ghazals), the two parallel questions in the second half-line are entirely ironic, perhaps even openly mocking, since that opening speaker is well aware that he or she is not waiting or expectant, and always knows (as we are told again and again in the Qur'ān and hadīth) that the divine Sāqi and promised Gardens are already with us and at hand. Instead, if we do assume that same opening speaker is also raising these two questions, then most charitably he can only be doing so as an initially pointed, well-intentioned challenge to that host of deeply 'veiled' (lines 5-6) critics, ascetics and hypocritically pious 'pretenders' - familiar characters in each of Ḥāfīz's spiritual dramas - inquiring inwardly as to why they still find themselves waiting for that same God whose Face, as they must paradoxically admit, we all must see 'wherever we turn' (2:115). Finally, we can understand these two questions as reflecting the inner state of all those 'veiled' individuals, plaintively wondering why God still keeps them personally 'waiting' (until death or some other future time) to reappear and fulfil all those repeated metaphysical assurances and scriptural promises - assertions which the Qur'ān itself tellingly places in the present continuous tense, though they paradoxically insist on reading them into their own imagined or wished-for future.

The particular word for 'cause' (sabab) in the second opening question here also suggests the underlying metaphysical issue or controversy shaping the entire poem, since in the longstanding language of Islamic philosophy and spirituality this technical term referred specifically to our mind's grasp of the complex chains of relative, secondary, spatio-temporal 'occasions' for the manifest appearances in this world: or in other words, to the conception of our destiny as depicted according to the deterministic material world view of the philosopher-scientists of that time. For Ḥāfīz, of course, that opening analytical perspective of the ego-intellect here is dramatically contrasted to the spiritual Knower's immediate perception of God as the One and Unique Cause, the ever-renewed Creator (kardagār) at every instant,
whose Presence in the Heart is so emphatically recalled and celebrated at the very end of this ghazal (line 7).

**Lines 2-3: The ‘Instant’ and its Demands**

In these following verses, it is not immediately clear whether the speaker and intended audience (apparently an undetermined singular ‘you’, effectively identified with each engaged reader) is the same as the opening voice (= Ḥāfīz’s own persona?) at the very beginning of the poem. Certainly the tone of confidence and particular emphasis of its spiritual teachings in these two lines closely echo the advice of the wise pir, Magus, and related spiritual guide-figures familiar from so many other ghazals. What more particularly distinguishes this mature voice of wisdom here is its immediate, careful correction – first theoretical, and then intensely practical – of the recurrent human illusions underlying those two initial pained questions offered by the critic/ascetic/pretender at the end of the opening line. The Sufi, according to a famous traditional phrase, is the ‘child of the present instant’ (of the Heart’s waqt or ‘eternal now’ that tellingly opens line 2 here), and his spiritual Work is to remain attentive in the Heart with God, filled with the awareness of each new instant of the ever-renewed creation – the essential point with which Ḥāfīz concludes this poem. For the ‘veiled’ ones (in lines 5–7), of course, all the meanings and realities described in scripture are envisaged as ‘elsewhere’ and in an imagined ‘another time’ than this real now – an illusion (and self-delusion) so profound that the sad ascetic of this ghazal’s final line would happily trade wilful suffering and self-imposed separation for his imagined future reward.

The next line 3 then moves on to the more practical spiritual consequences of this initial metaphysical reminder: ‘Be conscious!’ and closely attentive to that subtle life-connection (‘a single hair’) of the Spirit-breath always connecting the human Heart and its Creator at every instant. (Essentially, this command suggests the same meaning and central human responsibility conveyed by the Arabic verbal imperative form hāfiz, as explained earlier in this chapter.) Above all, the second half of line 3 reminds us that this inner spiritual attentiveness, that quintessential human ‘Work’ and duty just highlighted in line 2, quickly reveals the ways that the real hidden cause of our apparent separation from the Beloved – answering the poignant initial query at the end of line 1 – lies nowhere but in our own distractions, expectations and deeper veils of self-delusion.

**Line 4: Here and Now**

Whatever its speaker and audience, line 4 provides perfectly balanced and centrally situated aesthetic continuation of this ghazal’s beatific opening half-line, which is recalled and reaffirmed yet again in the contrasting terms of the poem’s closing comparison (line 7). It is certainly possible to read this central verse as a direct continuation of the same voice in lines 2–3, poignantly – and no doubt somewhat
provocatively – expressing the natural consequence of those preceding lines' emphasis on the immediacy of the Heart's direct Knowing of the divine theophanies. For the divine Presence is certainly to be found exclusively in each human soul's unique 'here', just as it can be found solely in the Heart's unique present instant (lines 2–3). But the apparent coincidence between the poet's opening self-described idyll and these particular ostensible scriptural-symbolic correlates – only valid if we assume that the speaker is indeed still the same here and in the ghazal's opening half-line – also suggests a naive and highly problematic attitude. It is almost as though Hāfīz were instead ironically reminding his less perceptive readers of the recurrent dangers and classic misunderstandings that flow from such symbolic attempts to communicate the most essential spiritual realities to unprepared audiences. For such naively literalist (if not forthrightly stupid) readers might well read this middle line, like the opening verse, as though the poet were actually speaking only of this particular outward wine and stream of Shīrāz – rather than of that Wine and Stream and spiritual Conversation of ever-renewed creation, which fills each human heart at every moment. In that case, one might imagine this line being spoken instead, with heavy implicit irony, by a rather gullible and uncritical, easily tempted and already intoxicated adolescent listener, who is excitedly responding to his own fantasy image of this poem's three opening lines.

Line 5: Divine 'Veiling', Wisdom and Surrender

Line 5 marks the essential turning-point in this ghazal, in that the speaker (who may still be the same sage in these concluding lines as in lines 2–3) now reminds his readers – and simultaneously includes them all, in the sudden emphatically repeated 'We' at the very beginning of the second half-line – that our common humanity means that we all find ourselves, from time to time, in the contrasting states of sober uprightness and befuddled intoxication, of painful 'veiling' (the underlying Qur'anic meaning of mastūr), and of spiritual illumination and union. We have already noted Hāfīz's repeated allusions in so many other poems (including the preceding ghazal just discussed here) to the spiritual necessity, in the divine school of each soul's earthly life, of experiencing and passing through the constant cyclical phases and oppositions of the different divine Names, before we can reach the realized state of insān, of the fully human being's theomorphic perfection. Likewise here, the radically opposed perspectives, expressed in the preceding and concluding lines by the fully enlightened sage (the inspired spiritual Knower) and the self-centred, egoistic complaints and hypocritical manipulations of the critic/pretender/ascetic, are brought together in such a way that Hāfīz's readers – as an integral part of this 'one tribe' of Adam – are obliged to recognize those dimensions and polarities within themselves.

Even more pointedly and controversially – since the remaining lines continue to elaborate this point – Hāfīz forcefully reminds us here (following strict and repeated Qur'ānic precedents) that all the transformations and states of our Heart, at each
stage of our path, are inevitably and ultimately in God’s hands, not solely the result of our own illusion of ‘arbitrary choosing’ (ikhtiyār). For in reality they are always guided and determined by the ineluctable and all-Wise divine Will (khvāṣta/irādat), highlighted in the final words of this ghazal. From that perspective, once again, the ‘We’ significantly beginning the second half-line here refers not simply to our common humanity, but to the two dramatically contrasting possibilities which that human state always offers us. For to the extent that the ‘We’ in question is the loving dyad of I and Thou, of our true self in surrendered harmony with the Spirit and the Beloved’s Intention (the ‘amorous glance’, içsha, in all its infinite and constantly changing forms), then there is no illusion of arbitrary or random willing (ikhtiyār), where our choice and God’s are already the same. This is the familiar ‘spiritually intoxicated’ state of inner trusting surrender (taslim/islām) and proximity already beautifully conveyed by so many of the earlier lines here – and a state which even Hāfiz’s most recalcitrant readers may have experienced from time to time.

The other way of understanding and experiencing this ‘We’ is, of course, at least as familiar to every reader. Instead of the human soul and Spirit in union and surrender, we can also focus on the constantly struggling and competing tendencies, tropisms and aversions of our ego-self (nafs), whose complexities and deep-rooted contrariness readily give rise to our common illusion of arbitrary wilfulness (ikhtiyār), and to the endless oppositions, complaints and fruitless hidden scheming (makar) of the critic/plaintiff/pretender (mudda‘ī) and pious ascetic (zāhid) alike. That illusion – and the pathways to its eventual dissolution – are the subjects of the following line.

Since the theme of God’s ‘veiling’ of the normally ‘sober’ human soul (mastūr, in the first half of line 5) – understood here and throughout Hāfiz not as some sort of deserved punishment or arbitrary destiny, but as the most essential metaphysical precondition for our spiritual growth and perfection – is what most essentially connects lines 5 and 6 here (and, indeed, ultimately unifies all the verses of this ghazal), it is absolutely essential to refer back at this point to the underlying Qur’ānic description of this situation at verses 17:45–53. Not only is the inner state of those who are momentarily veiled beautifully described at this point (see the partial translation immediately below), but, more significantly, the Qur’ān here goes on to describe their railing and carping, blindness and illusions, and constant bitter questioning of God and the Prophet, in such vivid and dramatic terms that it is immediately clear that this whole ghazal can be seen as a beautiful poetic, orchestral transposition of that long scriptural passage. Here are the first two verses of that decisive Qur’ānic section, which also pointedly highlights the ultimate divine responsibility for all the states of the human Heart, the ongoing reality that Hāfiz so forcefully emphasizes in this line and throughout this ghazal:

And whenever you recite the Qur’ān, We place between you and between those who do not have faith [=spiritual certainty] in the spiritual world a veiled barrier (hijāb mastūr). And We place over their hearts shrouds, lest they
should understand it, and deafness upon their ears. So whenever you mention your Lord, the One Himself, in the Qur'ān, they turn their backs in loathing ...

(17:45–6).

Hāfiz's intelligent readers – in his own time, as today – would immediately recognize here the dramatic (and, one suspects, quite intentional) parallels to the almost identical forms of spiritual incomprehension and misunderstanding that his own inspired verses have so frequently encountered throughout history.

**Line 6: Discovering the Divine Secret**

In this penultimate line, Hāfiz – or the enlightened persona who has spoken throughout most of the preceding lines – directly addresses the strident, previously unnamed ‘pretentious critic’ (mudda'ī) whose voice we first encountered in the second half of the opening verse, who was looking there for the (humanly manipulable or knowable) this-worldly ‘cause’ (sabab) for all those reprehensible features of this world and creation, which such characters (within each of us!) unavoidably see as the signs of an inexplicable divine tardiness, absence or general failure to perfect the world according to the fantasies of their own imagination. The Mystery that lies beyond the veil of the celestial spheres (falak), of course, is the infinite divine domain of the spiritual and imaginal worlds of the Heart – a reality too often invisible and silent for such veiled and deafened characters, as the underlying Qur'ānic verse just cited so pointedly emphasizes.

But Hāfiz's essential point here has nothing to do with the relative merits of particular philosophical or theological schemas of causality. Instead, the poet's bold exhortation of 'Silence!' here – explicitly echoing one of Rumi's favourite closing injunctions in so many of his celebrated ghazals – is not so much an expression of impatience, as it is the indispensable first practical step towards the Heart's eventual spiritual opening and transformation. Even the slightest effort of attempted meditation and silence, as we can all only too easily verify, quickly reveals both the radical contrast between the inspirations and illuminations of the heart, on the one hand, and the endless chattering and quarrelling and plotting of the ego (nafs), of our recalcitrant 'monkey-mind' that is, indeed, so rarely truly silenced. Hāfiz's final question, at the end of the second half-line here, pushes the 'pretender-critic' to pursue that process of meditation and introspection – of the constant Qur'ānic injunction of dhikr or spiritual recollection, in all its senses – even more deeply, until we begin to discover all the depths of pride, impulse, manipulation and grandiose self-divination lurking beneath this only too familiar hidden quarrel with God.

Now precisely to the extent that Hāfiz's reader takes this injunction and question to heart, this penultimate verse will quickly begin to reveal another very different, entirely transformed meaning. For the complex cosmological associations of the key terms sabab and falak, as we have explained, inevitably suggest at first glance that the 'Veil' and 'Veil-Keeper' mentioned here must refer to God and to
the apparently impenetrable metaphysical barrier – or so the thickly veiled critic imagines it! – between this visible world of matter, space and time, and that vast spiritual realm whose infinite realities he can only imagine (as does the pious ascetic/zâhid of the final line) in terms of more familiar fantasies and parallels drawn from his experience of this lower world. But once the attentive reader begins to realize that the truly problematic veils and their ‘keeper’ in question are none other than the barriers of his own ego-self (nafs), of its profound ‘compound ignorance’, confusions and chattering distractions, then every word of this line takes on a radically ironic meaning – and above all, profoundly different practical implications and consequences.

The source and nature of the critic/pretender’s perennial illusions is further defined and highlighted at this point by the key term nîzâ’ (‘quarrelling’), whose many telling Qur’anic usages repeatedly focus on the multiplicity of conflicting perspectives and futile stratagems and plotting that characterize those who rely on their own limited means and worldly understanding, without true spiritual insight and inspired guidance. The description of the panicked reaction of Pharaoh and his counsellors to the challenges of Moses (at 20:62), for example, also emphasizes the intrinsic secrecy and hiddenness of these murky psychic depths of the nafs: ‘So they quarrelled among themselves about this matter, and they kept secret their plotting.’ That inner psychic realm is indeed a ‘secret behind a veil’, unknown to the heavenly spheres – but potentially very familiar to those who undertake the Work-path of silence and spiritual purification.

Line 7: Balance, Surrender and the Divine Perspective

The true hâfîz – in each of those transforming and far-reaching senses that we explored at the beginning of this chapter – already knows that the theophanic, mirroring Heart is indeed always filled with the wine of Kawthar and the Spirit at every instant – as is, of course, the deeper heart of the critic and ascetic as well, ‘if they only knew’. And in the course of life each reader, each human being, has passed back and forth between those polar states of ‘veiling’ (with its concomitant resistance, dissipation and empty imagining) and of ecstatic union and surrender (masti) enough to appreciate both perspectives, to at least recognize each of the contrasting voices and possibilities that are so beautifully articulated throughout the course of this ghazal. The apparent human choice, then, is as simple here at the end as it was in the first half-line of this verse: between wanting what is, the ever-renewed plenitude of created Being; and desiring an imagined illusion, while ignoring or even deprecating what actually is (and its Creator).

But to state the issue that bluntly in fact serves only to highlight our apparent existential helplessness and inability to influence or carry out that choice at all: neither the true hâfîz nor the veiled critic and ascetic seem to ‘choose’ what is actually gifted to each of them in every instant. Hence the paradox – and deeper existential challenge – of the poem’s final half-line, whose question likewise seems to be
equally rhetorical: 'So between them, what is the Wish of the Creator/Worker?' – of the One Whose Will, as the Qur'an insists countless times, is truly absolute and unimpeded. Again, the question itself seems at first a near truism: God's creation always Wills exactly what is. But that Willing of what is means not only these two nearly caricatured extremes of human surrender and desire, or of veiling and understanding, that unfold and intertwine in the course of this enchanting ghazal. That Willing also includes the more familiar inner movement back and forth between those extremes that constitutes the constant actual turnings and unveilings of our Heart (inqilab al-qalb).

So the simple recognition of these dramatic alternatives immediately provides its own ineluctable answer: Ḥāfīz the poet leaves us with the next, imperative stage of the divine Wish – with the appropriate action and intention of the true hāfīz (already so perfectly exemplified in each of these ghazals), whose silent, joyful surrender to that Wish means recognizing and upholding each of these covenants so deeply embedded in our being and creation.

Conclusion: Engagement, Participation and Communicating Ḥāfīz

Since the purpose of this chapter is simply to introduce certain basic rhetorical structures and presuppositions of Ḥāfīz's poetry for students limited to working with translations, the best possible conclusion is to move on to explore how those distinguishing features are developed in other, often more complex poems throughout his Divān. At the same time, it may be helpful to point out that comparable spiritual intentions and correspondingly inventive literary structures (or their visual and aural equivalents) can be found in many other fields of the later Islamic humanities, including other visual and musical arts, in ways I have suggested in a number of related studies. In each of those fields, much work is still needed in order to reveal and elaborate the still unappreciated role of such characteristic artistic devices – whether we are exploring them elsewhere in Ḥāfīz, in the Qur'ān, Rūmī's Mathnawī, the unique language of Ibn 'Arabi, or many other masterworks of the Islamic humanities – in ensuring the effective participation and engagement of each reader (or listener/viewer), a participation which is almost always at once spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic and certainly (in the comprehensive Platonic sense) erotic.

Engagement and Participation

My original discovery of the existence of these distinctive dialogical perspective shifts and their deeper functions in the ghazals of Ḥāfīz grew out of many years of experiencing and then reflecting on the extraordinary power and efficaciousness of his poems when consulted for spiritual guidance (the familiar process of divination known as fa'il or fa'lgiri, tafa'ul) – a mysterious but demonstrable quality and influence of his writing which I had repeatedly witnessed in the experience of
friends and colleagues from very different cultures, backgrounds and walks of life, and which I had only seen roughly paralleled in very similar uses of the Qur’ān and the I Ching. It was first in that long practical and therapeutic context of frequenting Ḥāfīz that I began to appreciate and explore the ways that the peculiar intense combination of this poet’s very different voices and perspectives perfectly mirrored—and so deeply engaged and revealed—different, often initially unconscious or inchoate dimensions of our soul (intellect, mind, desire, inner and outer conditioning, personality), which together shape and determine each individual’s unique perception of the world, of the depths and possibilities of each unique situation in which we find ourselves. Compared with the I Ching, however, with its relative emphasis on the archetypal regularities and patterns of the more visible human social and political worlds, the particular mastery (and mystery) of Ḥāfīz clearly lies in his extraordinary revelation of inner spiritual worlds and insights—in his long-acknowledged, but always mysterious, unique efficacy as the ‘voice of the Unseen’ (līsān al-ghayb). There is nothing like watching Ḥāfīz so fully and richly mirrored in the varying reactions of a classroom of committed students to realize how comprehensive and inclusive his cast of characters and archetypal dramas really are—and how powerfully even translations of his ghazals can continue to engage such new audiences today.

**Communicating Ḥāfīz**

Given the distinctive structural features of the two ghazals highlighted in this chapter, it should be obvious that students of Ḥāfīz interested in translations designed to more faithfully convey the forms and meanings of the original poetic text—a project which will always remain indispensable for any student or lover of poetry who is actually interested in learning to read and explore Ḥāfīz in something approaching the original Persian—must pay special attention to each of the key rhetorical and structural features illustrated above. Thus translators or teachers having that particular pedagogical aim in mind need to preserve, note or make visible in some way to their non-Persian readers at least the following basic information:

- The essential perspectival clues and signs—key pronouns, number (singular or plural), verb tenses, imperatives, questions, and so forth—embedded in each line and half-line of this poetry.

- The essential thematically unifying terms or themes, which are almost always deeply embedded in a bilingual, widely related semantic field drawn from the Qur’ān and subsequent literary and practical spiritual traditions (Sufism, philosophy, theology, and so on), which must be clearly and fully explained to modern, non-specialist audiences.

- Those intended key alternative meanings or potential levels of understanding (whether of whole lines or of key terms), which shift and transform kaleidoscopically as each reader’s own understanding and perspective is awakened.
According to the version in Ibn Māja’s Sunan (1, 44): ‘God has 70 [or 700/70,000] veils of light and darkness: if He were to remove them, the radiant splendours of His Face would burn up whoever was reached by His Gaze.’ Wensinck, Concordance (1, 464), also cites related versions of this same hadith from the collections of both Muslim and Ibn Hanbal.

Or at least on the surface, at first reading, since in fact the simple, curiously dangling ‘but’ (vali) at the end of the first half-line here is itself also the Qur’ānic Arabic term for the divine ‘Friend’ (yār), whose presence (and apparent absences) are the subject of the entire ghazal.

Bukhārī’s Sahih, chapter on taṣfīr (of Sura 45); also found in the hadith collections of Muslim and Ibn Hanbal.


Kār: intentionally echoing the eternally ‘Working-Creator’, Kardagar, who appears at and as the conclusion of this journey, at the very end of line 7. See also line 5 of the preceding ghazal.

The heavenly ‘spheres’ whose motions together were assumed, in the accepted Ptolemaic–Aristotelean cosmology of Hāfiz’s time, to be the ultimate (visible) instruments of the chains of divine causality, or the ultimate ground of those apparent secondary causes (sabab) that are inquired about at the end of the opening verse.