



GOLŠAN-E RĀZ

GOLŠAN-E RĀZ (The Rose Garden of Mysteries), a concise didactic *matnawi* in a little over a thousand distichs on the key terms and concepts of Sufism, which has for long served as a principal text of theoretical mysticism in the Persian-speaking and Persian-influenced world. It was written in Šawwāl 717/December 1317 by Shaikh Maḥmud b. ‘Abd-al-Karim Šabestari (d. ca. 740/1339-40; see Mowaḥḥed’s intro. to his edition of *Majmu‘a-ye ātār-e Šayḫ Maḥmud Šabestari*, p. 3), of whose relatively meager corpus it constitutes by far the most influential portion. Written in a sober and economic style, the *Golšan-e rāz* is often reminiscent of the works of Shaikh Farid-al-Din ‘Aṭṭār, for whom indeed Šabestari professes a reverential admiration and several of whose verses he consciously imitated (for a partial list of parallels between the *Golšan-e rāz* and the *Asrār-nāma* of ‘Aṭṭār, see Mowaḥḥed’s intro., p. 11).

As Šabestari himself tells it at the beginning of the work, in the section entitled *dar sabab-e nazm-e ketāb wa tāriḫ* (on the reason for composing the work and its date), a messenger coming from Herat in the winter of 717/1317 delivered to the circle of which he was a part in Tabriz a series of questions on Sufi doctrine, versified in the *hazaj* meter (see ‘ARŪŽ). The one who had sent the questions, Amir Ḥosayn Ḥosayni (d. 718/1318), was himself a distinguished writer and Sufi of the Sohrawardi order (Jāmi, pp. 602-3). It is therefore unlikely that he was in actual need of an answer, or that he should have breached Sufi etiquette with an attempt to test the credentials of his colleagues in Tabriz. His intention was most probably to initiate a scholarly interchange by eliciting the composition of precisely the type of work that did emerge in



response to his questions. Šabestari claims, conventionally enough, that he set to work on answering Ḥosayni's questions only because of the insistence of his friends, for he had only rarely tried his hand at poetry. He was able nonetheless "immediately" (*dar dam*) to write complete answers to the questions in the same meter in which they had been couched; these were conveyed back to Herat by the same anonymous messenger. Whether Ḥosayni had the opportunity to write back to Šabestari before his death almost exactly a year later is unknown. Not long after Šabestari had written the answers, one of his associates in Tabriz proposed that he expand on them, and despite initial reluctance, he complied and entitled the resulting work *Golšan-e rāz* (*Majmu'a-ye ātār*, pp. 68-69). The supplementary sections, generally longer than the original answers, are set off from them by headings such as *tamīl* and *qā'eda*.

Ḥosayni's questions, fifteen in number and all posed in a single distich, with one exception, deal with the definition of meditation (*tafakkor*); meritorious and sinful types of thought (*fekr*); the meaning of the self and travel within the self; the nature of the true wayfarer (*mosāfer, rahrow*) on the Sufi path; the unity of being (*waḥdat*); how the knower and the known (*ma'ruf o 'āref*) may both be identical with the divine essence; the sense, if any, of Ḥosayn b. Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj's famous utterance, *ana'l-ḥaqq*; how a created being can be described as having attained union (*wāṣel*); what is the union of Necessary (*wājeb*) and contingent (*momken*) beings; what is meant by closeness to God and distance from Him (*qorb o bo'd*); how speech (*noṭq*) may be described as the shore of the ocean of being; the relationship between partial (*jozw*) and universal (*koll*) being; the sense in which the uncreated (*qadim*) and the created (*moḥdat*) can be said to have separated from each other; and the various metaphors conventionally employed in Sufi poetry pertaining either to the beautiful person of the beloved, to wine and the tavern (*karābāt*), or to unbelief (*kofr*) and its sumptuary indicator, the belt known as *zonnār*.

Most of Šabestari's answers bear the clear mark of Ebn al-'Arabi's (q.v.) doctrines and formulations. This is hardly surprising, for in his second book of verse, the *Sa'adat-nāma* (in *Majmu'a-ye ātār*, p. 168), he boasts of having studied both the *Foṣuṣ al-ḥekam* and the *Fotuḥāt al-makkiya* in detail during prolonged travels in Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz. The *Golšan-e rāz* is also replete with echoes of Jalāl-al-Din Moḥammad Rumi's *Maṭnawī*, verses from which are often cited in commentaries on the work. Šabestari defines *tafakkor*



as “moving from the false/unreal (*bāṭel*) to the Real (*Ḥaqq*) and seeing the Absolute Whole (*koll-e moṭlaq*) in the part (*jozw*)” (*Golšan-e rāz*, p. 70). Reflection should be focused on the divine attributes alone, not on the essence, for the light of the essence cannot be encompassed even by the entirety of the manifest realm, apart from which reason is inherently incapable of perceiving that light, just as the bat cannot endure the glare of the sun (*Golšan-e rāz*, pp. 71-72). Man’s journey within himself consists of first realizing that he is a microcosm that includes all levels of created being and then tracing out an arc of return to the immediate presence of the Creator: “Once the final point is joined to the first, a station is reached where there is no room for angel or prophet” (*Golšan-e rāz*, p. 80). The meaning of unity is the recognition that there is no existent other than the True Existent (*ḥast-e ḥaqiqi*). This recognition is attainable not by mental exertion but only by sweeping clean one’s abode with the broom of *lā*, i.e., negating all other than God: “When you have left, He will enter, and display His beauty to you in your absence” (*Golšan-e rāz*, p. 83). As for Ḥallāj’s exclamation, it was nothing other than an echo of the proclamation of God’s transcendence made by all creation, a proclamation audible to all who remove the wool from their ears. Union (*woṣul*) means the discarding of createdness, shaking oneself free of “the dust of contingency (*gard-eemkān*)” (*Golšan-e rāz*, p. 86). Closeness and distance, increase and decrease, all arise from the manifestation of being in the realm of non-being, i.e., man’s illusory separative self; once the light of that being shines forth, man is delivered from the self and from the pitiless alternation of hope and fear to which it is perpetually subject (*Golšan-e rāz*, pp. 88-89). Speech is the shore of the ocean of being in the sense that its waves unceasingly carry to the shore the pearls of revelation and inspired speech that are enclosed in the shells of letter and sound (*Golšan-e rāz*, p. 90). Partial being, with its visible multiplicity, is the means whereby universal being manifests itself; however, at the same time it bears an invisible imprint of the unity from which that multiplicity springs (*Golšan-e rāz*, p. 93). It is erroneous to suppose that the created and the Uncreated could ever have separated from each other, one becoming the world and the other God, because the world is only a suppositional affair (*amr-e e’tebāri*; *Golšan-e rāz*, p. 96).

Šabestari’s explanation of the metaphors employed in Sufi poetry follows the established habit of transferring to divine attributes and manifestations the sense of the terms used. This, he declares, is justified because “everything that exists in the perceptible realm (*‘ālam-e ‘eyān*) is like a reflection of the sun in that other world [the world of the unseen].” He warns, however, that such



affinities between the profane and the sacred, the metaphorical and the real, should not give rise to conduct censured by the *šari'a* (*Golšan-e rāz*, p. 97).

The unusual combination of concision and comprehensiveness found in the *Golšan-e rāz* inspired the writing of as many as thirty-five commentaries in the Perso-Islamic world (Golčīn-e Ma'āni, quoted by Mowaḥḥed, p. 58; for a partial list, see Tarbiat, pp. 337-38). Many of them were, like the text itself, replete with the terms and concepts associated with Ebn al-'Arabi, and thus served as an important channel for the transmission of his influence. Best known among these commentaries is the *Mafātiḥ al-e'jāz* of Šams-al-Din Moḥammad Lāhijī (d. 912/1506), who presided over a hospice of the Nurbakṣī order in Shiraz. Infinitely bulkier than the original work and massively repetitious on occasion, this commentary has nonetheless enjoyed continuous popularity in Persia because of the clarity of its style and its integration of specifically Shi'ite themes into the understanding of Šabestari's work. A précis of Lāhijī's commentary was prepared by a certain Mo'in-al-Din Dehdār Fāni (*Ijāz Mafātiḥ al-e'jāz*) Noteworthy among other commentaries are those of Shah Ne'mat-Allāh Wali (d. 834/1437), eponym of the Ne'mat-Allāhi order, who was married to the granddaughter of Amir Ḥosayn Ḥosayni; a Naqšbandī, Bābā Ne'mat-Allāh Naqjavāni (d. 920/1514); and the celebrated Kurdish historian, Edris Bedlisi (d. 939/1532: *Šarḥ-e manẓuma-ye Golšan-e rāz*), who also wrote a commentary on Šabestari's *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (*Ḥaqq al-mobīn fi šarḥ Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*). A special case is presented by a partial commentary of Isma'ili authorship, sometimes attributed to Šāh Ṭāher (d. ca. 956/1549), a claimant to the imamate in the Moḥammadšāhi line, who resided at Ahmadnagar in the Deccan (*Bā'z-i az ta'wilāt-e Golšan-e rāz*, see Corbin, text, pp. 131-61, tr., pp. 1-174). The belief reflected in this work that Šabestari himself was an Isma'ili is unsupported by the text of the *Golšan-e rāz* and seems to be of a piece with similar Isma'ili attempts to appropriate Sanā'i, 'Aṭṭār, and Rumi (Daftary, pp. 453-54).

Beyond the Persian-speaking lands, the *Golšan-e rāz* was particularly influential in the Ottoman realm. It was first translated into Turkish by Alwān Šīrazi (Elvān Šīrāzī) in 829/1426 in a somewhat expanded form that contributed greatly to the development of a Sufi vocabulary in the nascent poetry of the Ottomans. This version became the basis for *Golzār-e ma'nawī*, a work similar in content and meter by Ebrāhim Tennuri (d. 887/1482), a shaikh of the Bayrāmi order, which showed a lasting fondness for the *Golšan-e rāz*. Also inspired by Alvān Šīrazi's version was the *Golšan-e rāz-e 'ārefān* of 'Abd-



Allāh Bosnawī (d. 1054/1644). A contemporary of Bosnawī, Jamāl-al-Dīn Ḥolwī (d. 1064/1654), a shāikh of the Kālwatī order, prepared an abbreviated Turkish translation of Lāhijī's commentary under the title *Jām-e delnawāz*.

Numerous poets incorporated lines of the *Golšan-e rāz* in their works by way of *taẓmīn* or conscious imitation. The earliest example may well have been provided by 'Emād-al-Dīn Faqīh Kermānī (q.v., d. 773/1371), who opens his *Ṭarīqat-nāma* with a line clearly modeled on the first verse of the *Golšan-e rāz* (*Ṭarīqat-nāma*, p. 29). Especially worthy of note is the use made of lines from the work by a Češti shāikh, 'Abd-al-Qoddus Gangōhī (d. 944/1537), in a Hindi poem suggesting similarity between theoretical Sufism and certain forms of Yoga (Rizvī, I, p. 339).

A number of *naẓīras* have been written in close imitation of the *Golšan-e rāz*, the most recent being *Golšan-e rāz-e jadīd* by the Indo-Persian poet and thinker, Moḥammad Eqbāl Lāhurī (d. 1938). He provides answers to nine of the original fifteen questions, in some cases expanding them with two or more verses of his own composition.

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