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From Word to World: Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, Iqbāl, and the Limits of Formalism

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Abstract

The Urdu literary critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (1935–2020) favored a formalist style of literary criticism, and applied it productively to the reading of major Urdu poets like Mīr and Ġhālib. Despite its formidable success, Faruqi's approach had certain limitations in some cases. This article examines some of these limitations in the context of Faruqi's writings on the poet Muḥammad Iqbāl, and in doing so explores more generally the analytical as well as political limits of the non-cognitivist assumptions of formalism when applied to certain modalities of reading, writing and understanding Persian and Urdu poetry. It thus makes the case for more flexible and pluralistic models of literary criticism that can better understand and accommodate multiple ways of apprehending Persian and Urdu poetry, including those which treat poetry as a possible source of knowledge, truth, and ethical guidance.

Keywords

formalism – New Criticism – Urdu criticism – Shamsur Rahman Faruqi – Iqbāl – Persian poetry – Urdu poetry – religion and poetry

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Introduction

The eminent Urdu literary critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (1935–2020) notes that Muḥammad Iqbāl (1877–1938)—widely considered to be one of the greatest Urdu poets—often appears anxious to distance himself from the "charge" of being a poet.[1] In his seminal English essay "How to Read Iqbal," Faruqi notes that "it is quite right to say that Iqbāl often professed a lack of interest in his poetry *qua* poetry and this encouraged misreadings of his poetry inasmuch as attention was concentrated on Iqbāl's philosophical and religio-political message."[2] Why would Iqbāl do such a thing? One explanation that Faruqi offers in another essay is that this "lapse" on Iqbāl's part results from the *ahl-e zabān* (literally, "the people of the language") problem that he faced as his poetry began to increase in popularity across South Asia.[3] The *ahl-e zabān* problem consisted of the unfortunate idea that only the Urdu written and spoken in Delhi (and later Lucknow) was "authentic" idiomatically and otherwise, and Urdu poets and writers from all other places—whether the Deccan, the Punjab, Bengal, Bihar and so on—were somehow linguistically suspect and therefore inferior. This kind of small-minded discrimination was especially visible when it came to the matter of presenting verses as *sanad*s, or reliable examples of "correct" usage.[4] In Iqbāl's case—a Punjabi with Kashmiri ancestry—this meant that nitpickers who prided themselves on being *ahl-e zabān* started finding faults in his use of Urdu idiom and for transgressing conventions of Urdu poetry.[5] For

1 I am very grateful to the anonymous reviewers for reading this article carefully and critically. Their insightful comments greatly helped this article to evolve into its present form. Likewise, I am grateful to Gregory Maxwell Bruce for his helpful comments, criticisms and corrections. I also wish to thank Ahmad Javaid Sahib for early discussions on Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's literary criticism and for encouraging me to pursue my line of thought. Thank you to my friends Mustafa Aziz, Taimur Aziz, and Ali Altaf Mian for their careful readings and helpful comments on earlier drafts. Ali Altaf Mian was always available to answer my questions kindly and patiently on various aspects of this article. Thank you also to my friend Justin Smolin for reading the paper and for his encouragement and support. Gaut Berys very kindly answered a few of my questions over email, and ongoing conversations with James Chandler have been invaluable. C. M. Naim has been very kind and patient in answering many little questions over email. All errors are of course my own. Finally, I would like to dedicate this paper to my father Tariq Mahmood Khan, who had the good taste and the wisdom to tell me—when I was still a young boy—to buy Shamsur Rahman Faruqi Sahib's books wherever I find them, and to my mother Najma Khan, who always happily gave me the money to do so.

2 Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," 3.

3 Faruqi, "Iqbāl ke Ḥaqq meñ Radd-e ʿAmal."

4 Faruqi, "Iqbāl ke Ḥaqq meñ Radd-e ʿAmal," 100–101.

5 For an example see C. M. Naim, "'Pseudo-Dramatic' Poems of Iqbāl," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 1, no. 2 (December 1977): 58.

Faruqi, it was this that eventually forced Iqbāl—in order to save himself from petty, prejudiced, and hair-splitting formal squabbles—to come up with the "story" of not being a poet at all.[6]

It is an undeniable historical fact that Iqbāl had to face *ahl-e zabān*-type linguistic chauvinism, as well as the hair-splitting it entailed. But whether this caused Iqbāl to lapse into a kind of avoidance behavior that made him deny being a poet altogether is not so obvious. For one, Iqbāl was not the first poet to be called out for such "mistakes." As Faruqi notes, many poets not from Delhi or Lucknow have faced discrimination of this kind one way or another.[7] Valī Dakanī (b. circa 1665–1667) is a classic example. Valī certainly revolutionized Urdu poetry, but as Faruqi himself notes, "standard Urdu literary historiography and thought have tried their best, over the last two and a half centuries, to diminish the achievement of Valī."[8] One could in fact say something similar for the entire Deccani tradition of Urdu poetry. In the case of the Punjab, the Persian-Urdu poet Ḥafīẓ Jālandharī (1900–1982) vividly recounts the literary wars that raged between Urdu poets from the Punjab and their so-called *ahl-e zabān* rivals from the United Provinces (UP) region in the 1920s and 1930s. These rivalries even took institutional form: to defend the Punjabi front, a group called the *Bazm-e Adab Panjāb* (Punjab Literary Society) was formed by the likes of ʿAbd ul-Majīd Sālik (1894–1959), M. D. Tās̄īr (1902–1950), Harī Chand Aḳhtar (1901–1958), and Ḥafīẓ Jālandharī.[9] All these poets and litterateurs, like many others before and after, faced the brunt of *ahl-e zabān*-type chauvinism. And yet none of them gave up their claims to poetry because of this. Faruqi's answer thus begs the question: Why did these other poets not do what Iqbāl often did—claim that he was not a poet in the conventional sense—and thereby save themselves from petty literary feuds?

Faruqi also writes that Iqbāl's gesture of downplaying his status as a poet was only a later development, forced by the increase in *ahl-e zabān* squabbling as his popularity grew. Thus, according to Faruqi, Iqbāl endorses his status as a conventional poet in letters dating as late as 1918 and 1919, but by 1926 he was claiming that it was not his desire to be counted among the poets of his

6 Faruqi, "Iqbāl ke Ḥaqq meñ Radd-e ʿAmal," 104.

7 Faruqi, "Iqbāl ke Ḥaqq meñ Radd-e ʿAmal," 101. Faruqi also notes that the calling out of poets for "mistakes" is a much more widespread phenomenon, giving the example of the linguist ʿAbd us-Sattār Ṣiddiquī (1885–1972) who showed that the Persian poetry of Ḥāfiẓ was a "bag full of mistakes" (102).

8 Faruqi, *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History*, 131.

9 Ḥafīẓ Jālandharī, *Soz o Sāz*, 240. The group was later also called the *Niyāzmandān-e Lāhaur* or "Devotees of Lahore."

time.[10] For Faruqi, this proves that Iqbāl was initially comfortable with being considered a conventional poet, but eventually, once the pedants were on his tail, had to come up with the story of not being interested in poetry per se. The fact of the matter is, however, that we find Iqbāl distancing himself from the categories of "poet" and "poetry" as early as 1915 in his very first published work of poetry, *Asrār-e Ḳhudī* (Secrets of the Self). Right at the beginning of the preface (*tamhīd*) of this poem, Iqbāl declares unequivocally:

shāʿirī z'īn maṡnavī maqṣūd nīst
but-parastī but-garī maqṣūd nīst

Poetry is not the purpose of this work
Neither idol-worshipping, nor idol-making.[11]

This too raises some doubts about Faruqi's explanation, since it is clear that instead of being a gradual development forced by a particular controversy, Iqbāl's position is surprisingly clear and consistent right from his first publication. However, Faruqi does not bring into consideration Iqbāl's poetry while exploring this question, resorting mostly to his prose. Looking at the poetry, we find the distancing posture in abundance. In the poem *Gulshan-e Rāz Jadīd* (The New Garden of Secrets) found in *Zabūr-e ʿAjam* (The Persian Psalms) (1927), Iqbāl writes:

nah bīnī ḳhair az ān mard-e firo-dast
kih bar man tuhmat-e shiʿr o suḳhan bast

Don't expect any good from that base man
Who accuses me of poetry.[12]

Similarly, Iqbāl often writes about conventional poets of his time, and his disappointment with them:

zi bazm-e shāʿirān afsurdah raftam
navā-hā murdah berūn uftad az nai

10 Faruqi, "Iqbāl ke Ḥaqq meñ Radd-e ʿAmal," 104.
11 Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl: Fārsī*, 11.
12 Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl: Fārsī*, 538.

I walked away disappointed from the soiree of poets:
Only dead songs emerged from the flute.[13]

A very relevant passage in this regard occurs in the *Jāved-nāmah* (The Book of Javed) (1932), where Iqbāl writes:

ai basā shāʿir kih az saḥr-e hunar
rahzan-e qalb ast o Iblīs-e naẓar

shāʿir-e Hindī ḳhudāyash yār bād
jān-e ū be-laẕẕat-e guftār bād

ʿishq rā ḳhunyāgarī āmoḳhtah
bā Ḳhalīlān Āzarī āmoḳhtah

Many a poet, through the magic of art,
Is a robber of the heart and an Iblīs for the eyes.

The *Hindī* poet, God help him—
May his soul be without the pleasure of speech!

For he taught minstrelsy to Love
To the followers of Abraham, he taught the ways of Āzar.[14]

Reading such verses, we realize that Iqbal is not simply reiterating his disavowal of poetry, but also stating his own reasons and explanations for such a disavowal. For example, the three verses quoted above from the *Jāved-nāmāh* indicate that these reasons relate not to annoyance with linguistic chauvinism, but instead to questions about poetry's effect on its readers, and to its treatment of the higher ideals of love (*ʿishq*). As to what the ideal work of poetry is for Iqbāl, one could hardly sum it up better than this verse that occurs in the same section of the *Jāved-nāmāh* quoted above:

shiʿr rā maqṣūd agar Ādamgarī'st
shāʿirī ham vāriṡ-e paiġhambarī'st

13 Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl: Fārsī*, 922.
14 Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl: Fārsī*, 632.

> If the purpose of poetry is "human-making,"
> Then poetry, too, is an inheritor of prophethood.[15]

The idea that certain kinds of poetry are related to the work of prophets is an old and widespread one.[16] Iqbāl's masterstroke here is to reconceptualize and name this kind of prophetic work precisely and pithily as *Ādamgarī*, or the building of human souls. Only clumsily translated into English as "human-making" or "Adam-formation," *Ādamgarī* is a remarkably meaningful coinage that contains a rich array of meanings and possiblities for a cognitivist vision of poetry. However one expands on *Ādamgarī*, at its heart is an ethico-didactic conception of art and poetry, a creative mode that concerns itself with telling the reader something—with instructing, teaching, and perhaps even more appropriately *revealing* something—in order to construct and form a human being. When poetry is engaged in *Ādamgarī*, it is tasked with imparting knowledge—whether spiritual, ethical, or practical—which upbuilds and transforms. It is thus a mode that sees art and poetry as asking and responding to that most central of all human questions: how should one live?

Even this brief examination of Iqbāl's verses on the subject of poetry is enough to indicate that Iqbāl actually has a specific, fairly developed, and reasonably consistent conception of poetry. One can of course very justifiably find this conception problematic, disagreeable, or limiting, but that there *is* such a conception is undeniable. Even more importantly for us, it very easily explains Iqbāl's gestures of distancing himself from what he understands as the conventional sense of poetry current at the time, and quickly eliminates the need for an involved explanation such as Faruqi's *ahl-e zabān* theory. Why does Faruqi not explore Iqbāl's poetic self-confessions and explanations on this question in his essay, or take seriously the possibility that Iqbāl's apparent "lack of interest in his poetry qua poetry" comes out of a particular conception of poetry?[17] One possible answer is that this conception emerges out of a poetics that runs counter to and is excluded by Faruqi's own methodological preferences and commitments, and the assumptions about poetry and its place in the world that they entail.

This article analyzes this and other related problems in Faruqi's writings on Iqbāl, and argues that these problems have their roots in Faruqi's predilection

15 Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl: Fārsī*, 632.

16 The line "*shāʿirī juzvīʾst az paiġhambarī*" (poetry is a part of prophecy) is a popular saying well known in Persian and Urdu. See also P. B. Shelley's famous "A Defence of Poetry" for similar ideas in the English tradition.

17 Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," 3.

for formalism, understood here as a critical approach that emphasizes artistic form at the expense of content or subject matter. I argue that while this formalist predilection is crucial to Faruqi's critical project as well as key to its resounding success and productivity, it encounters important limits when it faces a poet like Iqbāl, and more broadly the particular modality of writing and reading poetry within the Perso-Urdu tradition to which Iqbāl belongs. I thus treat the problems in Faruqi's Iqbāl criticism as an instructive case-study within a broader set of inquiries: What are the strengths of formalist critical approaches when these are applied to poetry in the Perso-Urdu tradition? Which modalities and practices within these poetic traditions are responsive to formalism, and where does this approach encounter serious limitations? Finally, can such limits sometimes be *desired*? In other words, can there be a politics of formalism? This article is written with the conviction that an investigation of these limits and the poetic modalities that lie beyond them is crucial for a better understanding of poetry's many lives in Perso-Urdu lifeworlds, as well as for the evolution of pluralistic critical methods more sensitive to the specific literary and extra-literary dynamics that animate these worlds.

Faruqi's Formalism

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's vast oeuvre contains a substantial engagement with Iqbāl. In both his English and Urdu writings on the poet, Faruqi laments the state of Iqbāl criticism, calling Iqbāl one of Urdu's unluckiest poets.[18] According to Faruqi, this is because Iqbāl has been read by his critics as a philosopher, a thinker, a *ḥakīm ul-ummat* (sage of the [Muslim] community), the founding figure of a nation, and so much more, but hardly ever as a *poet*. In other words, Faruqi (very rightly) complains of the sheer lack of attention to Iqbāl's *poetic* (as opposed to philosophical, religious, or political) greatness in his critical reception. As Faruqi himself shows, most critical writings on Iqbāl in Urdu are inevitably obsessed with some aspect of his thought, philosophy, politics, or religion—to the exclusion of any consideration of his remarkable *poetics* in a formal sense.

Faruqi's problem with Iqbāl's critics is thus consistent with his preference for formalism. This preference is also characteristic of Faruqi's broader critical practice, especially with regard to Urdu poetry. As early as his first major work of criticism in Urdu, *Lafẓ o Maʿnī* (Word and Meaning) (1967), Faruqi declares

18 Faruqi, "Iqbāl ke Ḥaqq meñ Radd-e ʿAmal," 99.

formalism to be "more or less the best method to understand poetry."[19] It is also an approach that served Faruqi well throughout his literary career, distinguishing him from other critics, and even allowing him to pull Urdu criticism out of certain methodological quagmires that threatened the understanding and appreciation of traditional forms of Urdu and Persian poetry. By rehabilitating the traditional poetic concepts of *maẓmūn* (theme), *maʿnī* (meaning), *īhām* (punning), *munāsabat* (affinity) and *riʿāyat* (wordplay) with remarkable sensitivity, Faruqi was able to "re-teach" us key formal aspects of how a ghazal was read and enjoyed before it was bogged down by new and misdirected colonial concerns about "truth," "nature," "reality," "decency," "sincerity," and "reform"—as seen most characteristically in the writings of the poet-critics Ḥālī (1837–1914) and Āzād (1830–1910)—with the beginning of British colonial rule in India. Faruqi's formalism thus went hand in hand with his postcolonialism. Through form-sensitive readings of the Urdu poets Ġhālib (1797–1869) and Mīr (1723–1810), Faruqi produced masterworks such as *Tafhīm-e Ġhālib* (Explaining Ġhālib) and *Shiʿr-e Shor-angez* (The Tumultuous Verse), both of which elaborated a traditional-formal poetics of the ghazal and applied it productively to these poets.

Faurqi's formalist approach also bore fruit beyond readings of classical poetry. A key example comes from his critiques of Progressive ideas about poetry.[20] According to Faruqi, the Progressives, too, were in significant ways inheritors of the Ḥālī-Āzād Victorian-inspired paradigm of "natural poetry," and thus also inherited their problems: an excessive concern with the content of poetry (whether it is "progressive" enough, or whether the poet is "Red" enough, for example) and almost none with form. With his remarkable grasp on classical poetics, Faruqi was able to launch pointed attacks on Progressive ideas about poetry, as well as effect surgically precise formalistic demolitions of Progressive poets such as Josh Malīḥābādī (1898–1982).[21] In all these senses then, Faruqi's formalist predilection is right at the heart of his critical project, and in many ways produced felicitous results for Urdu literary culture and criticism in general.

In the case of Iqbāl too, Faruqi's prioritization of questions of form is highly productive. His refreshingly clear first principle—that Iqbāl is first and

19 Faruqi, *Lafẓ o Maʿnī*, 112. The 2009 edition was revised and republished with a new preface by the author. His positions on the issues under discussion did not receive any revision.

20 The Progressive Writers' Movement of the 1930s championed the use of literature for political and social revolution. For a scholarly account of the movement, see Coppola, *Urdu Poetry, 1935–1970*.

21 See Faruqi, *Urdū Ġhazal ke Aham Moṛ*, 76–85.

foremost a poet par excellence, and all his other reputations are derivative of this primary identity—enables Faruqi to do what his critical predecessors had rarely done: get into the technical nuts and bolts of Iqbāl's poetry and thereby attempt to understand how it achieves its unparalleled effects. This allows Faruqi to contribute substantially to Iqbāl criticism with a number of illuminating essays in Urdu and English on various formal dimensions of Iqbāl's poetry, such as his metrical praxis, his use of symbols such as the *lālah* (tulip), his techniques of achieving unity in the longer poems, his art and innovation as a poet of the ghazal, the quality of *ravānī* (flow) in his verse, and so on.[22] These essays constitute some of the best formal appraisals of Iqbāl's poetry, and one hopes that Iqbal's verse receives more critical attention of this kind which foregrounds his extraordinary skill and sensitivity as a masterful poetic craftsman.

Formalism and Non-cognitivism

Faruqi's attention to form is thus very productive, and a much needed and welcome practice for readers and critics of Iqbal's poetry in particular and Urdu and Persian poetry in general. Problems begin to arise, however, when Faruqi moves into the epistemic dimensions of formalism, going from productive applications of formal criticism to much larger and totalizing claims about something like the fundamental nature or essence of "poetry." In other words, we begin to encounter some knotty difficulties when an *essential* dimension of reading Urdu-Persian poetry—i.e., attending to its form—is explicitly declared to be the *only* valid way of reading, to the exclusion of other possibilities which also consider *what* is said in a verse.[23] In the case of Faruqi on Iqbāl, this means moving from a valid claim that Iqbāl criticism has paid too much attention

22 Almost all of Faruqi's major writings on Iqbāl can be found in two collections, one in Urdu and the other in English. His collection of Urdu essays on Iqbāl are found in *Ḳhurshīd kā Sāmān-e Safar: Shiʿr-e Iqbāl par Kuchh Taḥrīreñ*. His English essays on Iqbāl are found in *How to Read Iqbal? Essays on Iqbal, Urdu Poetry, and Literary Theory*, edited by Muhammad Suheyl Umar.

23 Formalism in this article, as mentioned earlier, is understood in its more common meaning of a critical approach that values form *at the expense of* meaning, content, or subject matter. A less common meaning of formalism understands it as "attention to form," and does not take it to exclude considerations of content (see, for example, Cavanagh et al., *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. [2012], s.v. "formalism.") This article uses formalism in the first sense, which usually already tends towards exclusionary epistemic assumptions, though these are not always explicitly identified or declared as such.

to his "thoughts" or "philosophy" and too little to his poetics, to a totalizing claim that most readers and critics of Iqbāl are guilty of a fundamental misunderstanding about "poetry" itself, since poetry *in principle* cannot be read for truth or knowledge. Faruqi thus transitions from a historiographical to an epistemic claim.

This epistemic jump is made most conspicuously in Faruqi's seminal essay "How to Read Iqbal."[24] In this essay, after justly taking to task critics such as Majnun Gorakhpuri (1904–1988), Salim Ahmad (1927–1983), Asloob Ahmad Ansari (1925–2016), and to a somewhat lesser extent Ale Ahmad Suroor (1911–2002) for judging and evaluating Iqbāl's poetry on non-literary grounds, Faruqi suggests that over and above the misplaced priorities of these critics, there is a much deeper, *fundamental* misunderstanding here about "the true nature and function of poetry."[25] What exactly is this true nature and function of poetry? It is that poetry has no concern with the truth or falsity of the propositions or ideas implied, stated, or embedded in a poem, and that their truth or falsity has nothing to do with how good the poem is.[26] This move towards the rarefied and universal realm of the fundamental nature of poetry is accompanied by frequent recourse to the American literary critic and foundational figure of the formalist New Criticism I. A. Richards (1893–1979), whose pronouncements—such as "It is evident that the bulk of poetry consists of statements which only the very foolish would think of attempting to verify"—Faruqi quotes liberally and unquestioningly.

This conglomerate of ideas and positions constitutes the classic credo of "aesthetic non-cognitivism," a critical position about art (in our case, about poetry)—and one which usually accompanies formalism, implicitly or explicitly—which holds either or both of the following claims as true: that poetry cannot convey knowledge or teach us non-trivially (the epistemic claim); and/or that the knowledge or cognitive content that poetry provides has nothing to do with its aesthetic value (the aesthetic claim).[27] In the New Critical formalism, these claims usually co-exist with a conception of the poem

24 Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 20 (2005): 1–33.

25 Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," 10.

26 Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," 10.

27 See Gaut, "Art and Cognition." While there may be rare cases where formalism and non-cognitivism are not found together, for all practical purposes they can be considered as co-occurring. "Knowledge" here can encompass a range of meanings, from basic propositional knowledge to moral and ethical knowledge (see Gaut, *Art, Emotion and Ethics*, 141). We should also note that the problems under discussion in this article are distinct from the error of reading poetry or literature biographically, which is sometimes called the biographical fallacy.

as complete in itself, self-sufficient, referring only to itself, and thus detached from the world outside it.

In the essay "How to Read Iqbal," Faruqi's arguments about the nature of poetry often waver between the two claims of non-cognitivism, but it is safe to say that the two encompass the full range of Faruqi's non-cognitivism. How true are these claims about the nature of art, and in our case, poetry? A number of scholars have already addressed this problem.[28] Here we aim to illuminate this problem from a new angle: How do the claims and assumptions of aesthetic non-cognitvism fare when tested against the evidence from Perso-Urdu poetic traditions, and what does such an experiment reveal to us about these traditions?[29] The following sections consider the limits of first the epistemic and second the aesthetic claims of aesthetic non-cognitivism—and thus also of formalism more generally—when it is used to read Persian and Urdu poetry, especially the kind that Iqbāl writes.

The Epistemic Claim

Let us first consider the epistemic claim that poetry cannot provide knowledge. Non-cognitivists cite many reasons for this claim.[30] Faruqi argues for epistemic non-cognitivism on multiple levels. On the most general level, he makes universal claims about poetry and non-cognitivism, often resorting to the pronouncements of I. A. Richards. On a more specific level, he also makes the claim that non-cognitivism is native to Arabic and subsequently

28 For compelling critiques of the non-cognitivist assumptions of formalism see for example the works of Berys Gaut cited above; Danto, "Philosophy as/and/of Literature"; Booth, *The Company We Keep*, 3–20; Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, especially 3–53. For critiques specifically of I. A. Richards, see Constable, ed., *I. A. Richards and His Critics,* especially the essays by John Crowe Ransom and R. S. Crane; Wellek, *History of Modern Criticism, 1750–1950,* 5:237. For defenses of non-cognitivism, see Stolnitz, "On the Cognitive Triviality of Art"; Bell, *Art*; and Beardsley, *Aesthetics.*

29 The central aim of the article is to test these explicitly declared theoretical, non-cognitivist claims as made primarily in Faruqi's essay "How to Read Iqbal," and not to determine definitively or globally whether Faruqi is a formalist or not. That is a different question with its own complexities, such as the central importance of aesthetic and philological context to Faruqi's criticism (though even this does not necessarily exceed the bounds of formalism according to Faruqi himself, and is a kind of extended formalism). For our purposes it is sufficient to say that Faruqi had at any rate a strong formalist predilection. The Archimedean point of the essay, so to speak, remains testing the non-cognitivist claims made in "How to Read Iqbal."

30 For an excellent summary of (as well as effective responses to) anti-cognitivist epistemic objections, see Gaut, "Art and Knowledge."

to Persian and Urdu poetic traditions. His evidence for this comes mainly in the form of a statement by the Arab literary scholar and critic Qudāmah ibn-e Jaʿfar (d. 948). Finally, Faruqi also claims the above negatively; i.e., a concern with truth in poetry is a colonial principle foreign to Arabic, Persian, and Urdu traditions.[31] Related to this claim is an implicit assumption that cognitivism is always equivalent to a boring, moralizing didacticism. Let us now examine and test these various claims.

"Non-cognitivism Is True"

On the most basic level of argument in "How to Read Iqbal," Faruqi generally claims epistemic non-cognitivism as the self-evidently true "nature and function of poetry," and corroborates his position by citing I. A. Richards. For example, Faruqi cites Richards as saying that "the bulk of poetry consists of statements that only a fool would attempt to verify."[32] To begin with, notice the structure of such "Poetry is …" or "Poetry consists of …" claims: the predicates here usually describe a vast, universal, and unqualified subject called "poetry." It is precisely the recourse to a placeless, timeless, and genre-blind category of "poetry" which first raises suspicion. Do these pronouncements apply equally to all poetic traditions, and to all genres within each of them? Faruqi does not raise the important question: How applicable are these "universal" principles to a particular (in our case the Perso-Urdu) tradition of poetry, and to the manifold genres within it?

One way of answering this question would be to resort to Perso-Urdu literary theory, beginning from the poet-critic ʿArūẓī Samarqandī's famous twelfth-century Persian treatise *Chahār Maqālah* ("Four Discourses"). But a different kind of evidence—that of lived historical and contemporary practice—is much vaster and even more compelling. When we consider the case of Persian and Urdu poetry in their socio-historical settings, we find that while some modalities and genres of poetry, such as the ghazal, do seem to be read under a formalistic and non-cognitivist framework (though even for the ghazal this is not completely true, as we will see later in this article), there are many more modalities of writing and reading Persian and Urdu poetry where the situation is almost the opposite of a formalist divorce between word

31 Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," 14–15.

32 Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," 11. This is closely related to Richards' idea that poetry consists of "pseudo-statements," and also to his scientistic distinction between the emotive use of language (which is the domain of poetry) and the referential use of language (which is the domain of science and knowledge). See Richards, *Science and Poetry*, 62; and Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, 241.

and world. Thus, many kinds of poetry in these worlds—whether the *ḥamd* (praise of God), *naʿt* (praise of the Prophet), *marṡiyah* (elegy), *hajv* (satire), *qaṣīdah* (ode), *tārīḵh* (chronogram) and so on—appear to be deeply and even inextricably intertwined with ethics, religion, philosophy, society, history, and politics—in short, with the world and with life—and very often read for their cognitive content, knowledge, or truth along with their aesthetic pleasure and excellence.[33] Between the word of poetry and the world of life, there seems to be here—in place of the foramlist barricade—an easy passage.

While any of these genres and modalities of poetry and their reception can be shown to dispute the epistemic claims of non-cognitivism, I look more closely at one particular modality of poetry—one we can call *Ādamgarī*—for this purpose, not least since Iqbāl himself can be fruitfully understood as belonging to it. Persian poets like Anvarī, ʿAṭṭ̤ār, Niẓ̤āmī, Sanāʾī, Saʿdī, Rūmī, Jāmī, and Ḥāfiẓ̤—let us call them the Persian *Ādamgarī* poets—are all excellent examples of some of the greatest Persian poets whose poetry has also been read as a bearer of the true, and as holding up models of human perfection, virtue, and truth. This poetry is richly engaged with key human practical concerns and questions about how one should live, as well as with guiding the reader towards such a life. In addition to being ethically illuminating, then, it also aims to be therapeutic and transformative. The poetry of most of these poets has performed this work of *Ādamgarī* on civilizational scales in Perso-Islamic societies. Rūmī's six-volume poetic masterpiece, the *Maṡnavī*, for example, has been called and in fact treated as the Quran in Persian, and has been a key ethico-religious text in Perso-Islamic societies for centuries. If we imagine applying Faruqi's or Richard's non-cognitivism to it, the result would be a statement such as this: Rūmī is a maker of fictions, and his poetry consists of statements only the foolish will attempt to verify. Or: Rūmī's *Maṡnavī* consists of pseudo-statements, and it tells us, or should tell us, nothing. Surely

33 It is important to note that the argument here is not that these (or any) poetic traditions *must* have or *always* have a relationship with knowledge, but that they *can* and in many cases *do* have such a relationship. It thus embraces a plurality of artistic values, of which cognitive values are just one (see Gaut, "Art and Cognition," 115). We should also note that *any* modality or genre of poetry that is read cognitively—i.e., is taken to be saying or implying something true about something—is sufficient for disputing the epistemic claims of non-cognitivism. Even though I focus on what I, following Iqbāl, call *Ādamgarī*, a mode such as the *hajv*—which is certainly not primarily concerned with ethical instruction—could work equally well in disputing the epistemic claim of non-cognitivism. What is common to these very different modalities is that in all of them poetry is read cognitively—i.e., as saying something potentially true about something. The *hajv*'s legendary sting—evidenced not least by the number of fights it caused (and possibly even an execution)—is good testimony to its being read cognitively.

this contrasts sharply with how an entire civilization understands "the Quran in Persian"—far from being only or merely a source of aesthetic and literary pleasure, it is understood as a companion to and in fact a kind of exegesis of revelation, thus concerned with questions of the deepest human significance for the individual and for the community. The problem is immediately clear—these totalizing proclamations about poetry do not account for the lived realities of how Rūmī has been understood, read, and lived in the Islamic world for at least seven centuries. The experiment can be repeated with similar results for ʿAṯṯār's *Manṯiq uṯ-Ṯair* (Conference of the Birds), Anvarī's *qaṣīdah*s, Niẕāmī's *maśnavī*s, Ḥāfiẕ's *Dīvān* (Ḥāfiẕ is popularly known as the *Lisān ul-Ġhaib*, or "Tongue of the Unseen"), and so on up to Iqbāl.[34]

In fact, Iqbāl's poetry and its reception represents the most prominent continuation in Urdu of the *Ādamgarī* modality, especially in terms of its intentions, its content, and that particular intertwining with socio-historical life that is so characteristic of the Persian *Ādamgarī* tradition in its reception. If the earlier *Ādamgarī* poets ask the crucial human and practical question of how one should live, Iqbāl asks the same, but in the new context of colonial modernity. Moreover, this continuity with the Persian *Ādamgarī* poets is not just observed objectively—it is also a crucial part of Iqbāl's own poetic self-image. Iqbāl's poetic corpus contains not just the greatest number of invocations and citations of the Persian *Ādamgarī* poets by any Urdu poet, it also contains a significant number of places where Iqbāl likens himself and his poetic task to that of one of these poets. In the following verse, for example, Iqbāl reworks the meanings of the fourteenth-century Persian poet Shabistarī's verse to hint that he is not ashamed of his poetry-writing, since the appearance of a poet like ʿAṯṯār is a rare occurence:

marā z'īn shāʿirī ḳhud ʿār n'āyad
kih dar ṣad qarn yak ʿAṯṯār n'āyad

I am not ashamed of this poetry,
Since an ʿAṯṯar isn't born in a hundred centuries.[35]

34 See Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* for an excellent study of the often complex didactic and ethical ends of Persian poetry, which she illustrates through detailed treatment of genres such as the *qaṣīdah*, *maśnavī*, and ghazal. For ʿAṯṯār in particular, see the recent work of Austin O'Malley, who describes ʿAṯṯār's poetry as embodying a poetics of spiritual and ethical instruction through which the reader, in the act of reading, can be "trained, transformed and elevated towards God" (O'Malley, *Poetics of Spiritual Instruction*, 1).

35 Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl: Fārsī*, 538.

But it is again Rūmī with whom he most closely identifies:

cho Rūmī dar ḥaram dādam ażān man
az ū āmoḳhtam asrār-e jān man
bah daur-e fitnah-e ʿaṣr-e kuhan ū
bah daur-e fitnah-e ʿaṣr-e ravān man

Like Rūmī, I gave the call to prayer in the sacred sanctuary
From him I learnt the secrets of the soul
In the tumult of the ancient age, he
In the tumult of the present age, I.[36]

This beautiful quatrain is a powerful expression of Iqbāl's understanding that his poetic vocation is the same as Rūmī's, the only difference being that of historical period. Iqbāl's storied relationship with Rūmī and his poetry is indeed a powerful corroboration of the suggestion that Iqbāl himself can be read and understood as belonging to the *Ādamgarī* tradition of which Rūmī is a central pillar. When Iqbāl identifies himself and his poetry so closely with that of ʿAṭṭār and Rūmī, it is clear that an important way to read Iqbāl would be through a poetics relevant to these poets—a poetics of instruction, illumination, and transformation, one in which considerations of meaning in poetry are not foolish or superfluous, but central.

Understanding Iqbāl within the *Ādamgarī* paradigm also supplies us with an important key to understanding his disclaimers about not being a poet, the problem with which we began this article. This is the realization that in lifeworlds where poetry is often involved in *Ādamgarī*, such claims that wish to prioritize the *Ādamgarī* modalities of poetry over (without of course excluding) its *muraṣṣaʿ-sāzī* or "stone-setting" (the Urdu poet Ātish's lapidary descriptor for the more "craft-centric" dimensions of writing poetry) must be both expected and fairly common. As a matter of fact, Iqbāl is neither the first nor the last to make such a claim. An excellent and highly instructive example comes from the following verses of the Iranian-Deccani Shīʿī-Ṣūfī poet Āżarī Ṭūsī (fl. 1382–1462):

agarchih shāʿirān az ruy-e ashʿār
zi yak jām-and dar bazm-e suḳhan mast

36 Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl: Fārsī*, 938.

valī bā bādah-e baʿẓī ḥarīfān
fareb-e chasm-e sāqī nez paivast

dahān-e ṭūṭī-e guftār-e īshān
zabān az nuktah-e ṣūrat firo bast

kamand-e fikrat-e īshān zahe naẓm
bah daryā-e ḥaqīqat afganad shast

hamah ġhavvāṣ-e daryā-e kamāl-and
kih bar durr-e ḥaqīqat yāftah dast

mabīn yaksān kih dar ashʿār-e īn qaum
birūn az shāʿirī chīz-e digar hast

Even though poets, from the point of view of poetry,
Are all drunk at the literary soiree from the same wine-cup,

In the wine of some of these fellows
The play of the cup-bearer's glance has also been mixed.

The mouths of their parrots of speech
Have closed off their tongues to the points of appearance.

The line of their thoughts—bless poetry—
Has thrown the fish-hook into the sea of reality.

All these are divers in the sea of excellence
Who have laid their hands on the pearl of Truth.

Do not view all poets equally, for in the poetry of this group
There is something that is beyond poetry.[37]

Like Iqbāl (but perhaps with greater finesse and subtlety), Āżarī distinguishes here between "conventional" wine-drinkers (i.e., common poets) and those rarer ones whose wine has also been blessed by the "cupbearer's (*sāqī*'s) glance." Furthermore, these latter wine-drinkers have given up on singing

37 Kayānī and Rastāḳhez, eds., *Dīvān-e Āżarī Isfarāyinī*, 292.

about appearances (*ṣūrat*) and have instead thrown in their lot with truth or reality (*ḥaqīqat*). The verse-set (*qiṭʿah*) concludes with the strong (and in our case very appropriate) imperative to distinguish between poets instead of seeing them all as one and the same, ending with a highly quoted *miṣraʿ* (line) which reminds us that in the case of some poets, there exists "something else" (*chīz-e digar*) beyond conventional poetry.[38] However one interprets this *chīz-e digar*, it suggests an *alternative poetics*, one that can accommodate the manifold possibilities of truth (*ḥaqīqat*), knowledge (*ʿilm*), and a higher ethics (*Ādamgarī*). This alternative poetics is also commonly recognized, as shown by the fact that the last line has almost achieved proverbial status and continues to be quoted frequently.[39] It is clear that the poets themselves are often aware—in contrast to Faruqi's totalizing pronouncement—of a multiplicity of poetics at work in multiple zones of the poetic world, and claims such as Iqbāl's can be understood simply as a poet's anxious signaling of their "choice" paradigm or modality under which they wish to be read.

"Poetry Is Fictive in Character"

For some aesthetic non-cognitivists, one reason why poetry (or even more broadly, literature or art) cannot have a relationship with knowledge or truth is because these are fictional—hence Faruqi's statement about poetry being fictive in character.[40] The reasoning here, to put it simply, is that since poetry is fictional, and fiction does not convey facts or beliefs about the real world, it would be a mistake to think that poetry can provide knowledge or truth.

The first issue here is the "surprisingly common" problem of the conflation of *all* art or poetry with fiction.[41] The fact of the matter is that a lot of art or literature or poetry is simply *non*-fictional. On the most basic level, consider for example the huge amount of "versified treatises" in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. Is Ibn-e Sīnā's versified medical treatise, the *Urjūzah fī Ḥifẓ iṣ-Ṣiḥḥah* (Poem on the Protection of Health) "fictive" in character? Or Ṭaibuġhā al-Yūnānī's versified treatise on archery? Or Sharaf ud-Dīn Buḳhārī's Persian *Nām-e Ḥaqq* (The Name of Truth), on the rules of praying and fasting? How about Amīr Ḳhusrau's historical *maṡnavī*s such as the *Ḳhazāʾin ul-Futūḥ* (The Treasures of Victory)?

38 The final line of the poem is also popularly found in the form "*varā-e shāʿirī chīz-e digar hast.*"

39 I thank my teacher Muzaffar Alam for directing my attention to the relevance of this verse for my argument.

40 Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," 12. Richard's statement about poetry and verification can also be understood as related to the fictive nature of poetry.

41 Gaut, *Art, Emotion and Ethics*, 141.

Or the endlessly rich tradition of writing versified *tārīḵh*s (chronograms)? On the kinds of subjects that were versified in classical Arabic, one author writes,

> Almost any subject was versified: dogmatics, the law of inheritance, medicine, astronomy, history, rhetoric, prosody, calligraphy, cookery, the explication of dreams, algebra, bloodletting, logic, navigation, agriculture, sexual intercourse, alchemy, jurisprudence, Quranic sciences, the use of toothpicks—the list is endless.[42]

Thus, the assumption that all poetry is fictive in character is simply incorrect, and ignores important kinds of poetry in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu that are straightforwardly non-fictional. One may (not incorrectly) argue that some of this is not poetry in the *real* sense of the word. This may be true, but, again, these distinctions have to be made, the "real" sense defined, and so on—all work that Richards or Faruqi do not seem to do. This work itself is bound to reveal a complex but seamless spectrum on which it is very hard to locate a sharp cut-off point beyond which we enter the realm of "fictional" poetry that ceases to have a relationship with knowledge or truth.

But even more importantly, non-cognitivists may sometimes have an inadequate account of fiction which doesn't take full account of fiction's many possible relationships with truth and knowledge.[43] Thus, for Faruqi, simply claiming that "poetry is fictive in character" is already enough to prove that any attempt to find truth in poetry is misguided. But is fiction equated with falsity and non-knowledge in practices of reading Persian and Urdu poetry? In regard to the Persian *Ādamgarī* poets, for example, it is of course true that Rūmī's *Maṡnavī* often incorporates fictional stories, that ʿAṯṯār's *Conference of the Birds* is an imaginary tale, and that Ḥafiẕ's lover and beloved live and love in the fictional universe of the ghazal. But as we saw in our discussion of the *Ādamgarī* poets, this fictionality in no way precludes a close relationship with truth and knowledge in these works, which have been read as much for their aesthetic excellence as for the religious, philosophical, and ethical knowledge and insights they provide. The seven brides and the tales they tell Bahrām Gūr in Niẕāmī's *Haft Paikar* are indeed products of fiction, but this does not stop them from being "a further means by which the poet establishes his purpose,

42 Van Gelder, "Didactic poetry, Arabic." See also Carter, "The Use of Verse as a Pedagogical Medium," 449–50.

43 For accounts of the possible relationships between fiction and knowledge, see for example Berys, *Art, Emotion and Ethics*, 141–164; Novitz, *Knowledge, Fiction, and Imagination*; Sirridge, "Truth from Fiction?"; and Green, "Narrative Fiction as a Source of Knowledge."

for they stand in relation to Bahrām as Niẕāmī stands in relation to his audience: as a source of instruction and as an incitement to the acquisition of virtue and knowledge."[44] My point here is not to uncover the precise dynamics of how each genre of Perso-Urdu poetry potentially or actually conveys knowledge, but only to show that the Faruqi-Richards claim about the epistemic implications of fictionality does not stand up to scrutiny when tested against socio-historical practice in Perso-Urdu literary worlds.

One suspects that when Faruqi made his non-cognitivist claims about poetry, he actually had the specific genre of the ghazal in mind, and derived his general pronouncements from it. This may be true for multiple reasons. Of all the Perso-Urdu poetic genres, it is by and large the ghazal on which Faruqi focused and wrote the most. Furthermore, it is also true that of all Perso-Urdu poetic genres, the ghazal is perhaps the most stylized and "fictional." The poetry-knowledge-life relationship in the ghazal is clearly more complex and indirect than the *maśnavī*'s or the *hajv*'s, and its poetics are the most responsive to and most fruitfully approached by a formalist method. But even this does not solve the problem, firstly because once again Faruqi never seems to make this straightforward distinction, but more importantly because even if he were to make it, the fact of the matter is that the relationship between poetry, knowledge, and ethics even in the reading of the classical ghazal will ultimately still remain oversimplified in such an account.

If each genre of poetry has its own particular relationship (or lack thereof) with truth and knowledge, that of the ghazal—with its imaginary universe of stock characters and conventions—is probably the most allusive, subtle, and indirect. But that in the final analysis there is or at least can be such a relationship is nonetheless undeniable. So much is borne out even in a provisional socio-historical phenomenology of the ghazal, which quickly reveals that the ghazal, too, with all its "fictions" seems sometimes to be read under a considerably complex yet still cognitivist framework. For example, ghazal verses can often be seen cited in religious and ethical discourse in Persian and Urdu. Citation histories of and commentaries on the ghazals of Ḥāfiẕ, such as the one by the renowned Sufi scholar Ashraf ʿAlī Thānavī (1863–1943), reveal the ways in which a ghazal can be read "tropologically," and how it is precisely the fictions of the ghazal that can enable it "to perform the function of guiding the audience toward an understanding of the ideals of love and their transcendence of the realia of love's actuality."[45] In sum then, all poetry is *not* fictive in character, but more importantly, even when it is, it can still have a lot to tell us.

44 Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry,* 226.

45 Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry,* 252. See also Mian, "Surviving Desire."

"Non-cognitivism Is a Native Principle"

Faruqi also presents evidence for his claims about poetry from *within* the tradition. In the essay "How to Read Iqbal," Faruqi quotes a line from an Arabic literary theorist, Qudāmah ibn-e Jaʿfar, who knew "a thousand years before Richards" that "the best poetry is the most lying."[46] Faruqi takes this as evidence of non-cognitivism being native to the Arabic and Perso-Urdu poetic traditions.

The problem here is that a single statement is asked to stand in for a vast body of poetry, which includes poetry that is not even in the same language and comes as much as a thousand years after the statement was made. In other words, there is a risk of oversimplification here. On looking closer, we find for example that Qudāmah's statement is merely one position in a series of complex discussions on the question of truth in poetry even within the Arabic literary tradition. These discussions encompassed other positions besides Qudāmah's, such as "*aḥsan ush-shiʿr aṣdaquhu*" (the best poetry is the truest) and "*aḥsan ush-shiʿr aqṣaduhu*" (the best poetry is the most appropriate to its purpose).[47] But even more important is the fact that the debates on *ṣidq* (truth) and *kiżb* (falsehood) in poetry that Qudāmah is participating in were not concerned with truth per se (i.e. truth in the sense of verification or reality), but with truth as it relates to metaphor (*istiʿārah*) and hyperbole (*ġhulū*). It is thus a discussion about poetics and not epistemology. In other words, the question is about whether figurative language should really "push the envelope" or remain within reasonable bounds. Poetry that "lies more" in this context is simply the quality of a metaphor being more exaggerated. Simplifying to the extreme: if the beloved's face can either be compared to another beautiful person's face or be called the rising sun, Qudāmah would think that the latter is likely to be better poetry, which is "more lying." Hence, lying or *kiżb* here is not an epistemic ruling on poetry, and it does not mean that the moment a statement is brought into verse, it becomes of necessity a fiction and a lie.

More broadly, it is also important to consider that the relation between poetry and knowledge may have changed over time within the Arab literary tradition, or that it may have seen some change when we cross over into the Persian literary tradition, or that it may have been somewhat altered when we move into the sphere of Urdu poetry (now at two significant cultural, linguistic, and historical removes from Qudāmah). The point here is only that things are far more complicated than a simple, timeless narrative suggests. To properly treat of how poetry was understood in the Islamic classical and post-classical

46 Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," 12.

47 Harb, *Arabic Poetics*, 34–37.

periods, for example, and to understand Qudāmah in this context, is a vast undertaking outside the scope of this article. Here we make our general point by noting a significant turning point on this timeline, as an example of what gets ironed over in generalization.

One important and fascinating development in the history of poetics in the Eurasian world occurs around the turn of the first millennium AD—what one scholar has called the "Islamization" of Aristotle's poetics at the hands of Ibn-e Rushd (Averroes) (1126–1198).[48] No less than a new literary paradigm emerges here, whereby poetry is now understood as a branch of ethics and thus of philosophy, opening up new possibilities of *Ādamgarī* for poetry.[49] The relationship between poetry, knowledge, and ethics is thus newly minted, and much stronger than was previously the case. It is under this new paradigm that a lot of the new poetry—both in Europe (Dante's *Divine Comedy*, for example) and in the Perso-Islamic world (including, in some ways, of Iqbal himself)—is written and understood.[50] The point here is not to present a full account of the niceties of this major event, but only to show that important breaks in poetic understanding are missed in overgeneralizing from Qudāmah's statement.

"Cognitivism Is a Colonial Principle"

If Faruqi thinks that non-cognitivism is a principle native to Arabic, Persian and Urdu poetic traditions, it is not surprising that he also argues for the negative complement of this claim: that cognitivism, or a poetics that concerns itself with anything like truth or knowledge, is a foreign or colonial principle in relation to these traditions. Faruqi usually takes the question of truth in poetry as a thoroughly Western phenomenon with its roots in Plato, a question that was "unknown to, or unrecognized by, Arab-Iranian and Indian literary theory."[51] This of course was the happy case until "the advent of Western ideas" into the Indian world through Ḥālī and Āzād, who "put Urdu literature in the dock," and began an inquisition to find out if it was being true, socially useful, and moral enough.[52] In Faruqi's criticism, then, the customary formalist apathy (or antipathy) to poetic content combines with a postcolonial repugnance to Victorian-style moralizing in the manner of Ḥālī and Āzād to give birth to a peculiar idea: that a poetics in Urdu that concerns itself with meaning,

48 Borrowman, "The Islamization of Rhetoric."

49 Boyce, *The Ethical-Poetic of the Later Middle Ages*, 11.

50 On Dante's poetry in relation to this paradigm see Boyce, *The Ethical-Poetic of the Later Middle Ages*, 41–50.

51 Faruqi, "Modern Urdu Literature," 423. See also Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," 14–15.

52 Faruqi, "Modern Urdu Literature," 424.

content, and worst of all "message" is colonial-inspired, "culturally alien," and hence anathema from a postcolonial perspective.[53]

This would also mean that for Faruqi, Iqbāl's conception of poetry too is nothing but a colonial fallacy borrowed wholesale from Ḥālī and Āzād. Interestingly, this is precisely what he claims in an earlier English essay from 1992. Here Faruqi writes that even though Iqbāl was "one of the few Indians of his generation not to have been abjectly dazzled by the West," this could not stop him from professing a West-inspired theory of poetry which could claim that poetry was no good if it did not "support and aid the forces of life." He finds that Iqbāl is thus "echoing Jeremy Bentham" and that his ideas about poetry are "in the Platonic (Ḥālī's) mold," and, put more straightforwardly, "West-based."[54]

It is worth mentioning once again that Faruqi has performed a priceless service for Urdu literary culture and criticism by drawing attention to the perncious effects of Ḥālī and Āzād's uncritical embrace of colonial ideas about poetry, as well as inspiring further important work in this direction.[55] But to think that before Ḥālī, there was never any way of reading poetry that took seriously the content of a poem, nor concerned itself with the true or the ethical in the reading or judgment of poetry, is surely a postcolonial overcorrection. In effect, this overcorrection ends up creating a kind of illusory dichotomy: either a purely aesthetic art which is native; or a Ḥālī-Āzād-inspired consideration of content which is foreign. That the Persian-Urdu traditions could themselves encompass traditions of reading and writing poetry in cognitivist ways rarely emerges in Faruqi's writing as a third possibility.

And likewise with Iqbāl. It is certainly true that in his censure of contemporary poets and poetry, Iqbāl flies too close to Ḥālī's unfortunate and characteristically modernist-reformist *nāpāk daftar* (unclean collection) judgment about traditional Persian-Urdu poetic traditions.[56] Iqbāl's deep concern with the political, social, and religious state of contemporary Muslims has much to do with such ready and unjust dismissal of anything that seems to approach art-for-art's-sake, and often results in declarations that betray a unidimensional conception of art and poetry. But to think that all this proves his own conception of poetry to be "West-based" and foreign to the tradition is an

53 Faruqi, "Modern Urdu Literature," 422; Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," 6, 23, 28.

54 Faruqi, "Modern Urdu Literature," 427–28. This may also suggest that Faruqi was familiar with Iqbāl's conception of poetry, even though later in *Khurshīd kā Sāmān-e Safar* he does not bring up the possibility that Iqbāl may have had such a conception, as we mention in the beginning of this article.

55 One of the most important examples remains Frances Pritchett's excellent *Nets of Awareness*.

56 Parekh, ed., *Ḥālī*, 17.

overadjustment that creates a new distortion in the other direction. For while it is true that Iqbāl's dismissal of contemporary poets and their concerns is surely a thing of its time and inspired by ideas and concerns similar to those which animated Ḥālī and Āzād, in his positive and best formulations of poetry as *Ādamgarī*, Iqbāl's conception and its poetic articulation is less about colonial reformism and more of a piece with a much a longer and richer tradition of the poet as guide and teacher that extends back to the classical Persian poets.

The false dichotomy between a native pure aesthetics and a colonial cognitivism is further strengthened by the emotional charge that animates it. In other words, not only is a native formalism contrasted with a colonial/Platonic/Western "content-based" poetics, it is further accompanied by a more implicit *affective* dichotomy between a sophisticated, urbane, and disinterested aestheticism versus a drab, boring, heavy, and didactic moralizing and sermonizing. This favorite straw man of formalism is made even more repugnant for the postcolonial Faruqi by its identification with the "Victorian," painting it with additional overtones of being sombre, gaunt, steadfast, fun-hating, militaristic, and reformist. Thus, Faruqi commonly describes poetry not written under the sign of poetry-for-poetry's-sake with condescending irony as "social service," "lectures," "philosophical dissertations," or "politico-religious manifestos."[57] Likewise, Faruqi often reduces a concern with content in Iqbāl to the hackneyed and unattractive term "message"—almost always in scare quotes to convey his distaste. The point here is not to defend how the category of message has been used in discourse on Iqbāl, a distaste I share with Faruqi. It is rather that there is another false either/or here, this time between a sophisticated non-cognitivism and a boring, beaten-to-death, shallow "message" poetry.[58] The dichotomy leaves no space for a third possibility: a positive account of the cognitive and the didactic.

But it is precisely this kind of illusory either/or that the idea of *Ādamgarī* can help us overcome, since, at its best, *Ādamgarī* is less about the moralistic and more about the revelatory, less about lecturing and more about "rhapsodic didacticism."[59] It is not about drably stating rules and morals, but about richly imaginative and even entertaining invitations to virtue and excellence. Like Heidegger's great work of art, poetry in the *Ādamgarī* mode supplies not just the individual but the community with its sense of what is

57 Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," 13, 29.

58 Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," 6, 23, 28.

59 The phrase comes from the literary critics William K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks. See Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism*, 3:412.

and what matters—nothing less than its outlook on life.[60] When poetry performs the work of *Ādamgarī,* it does so not under the eye of an ex-military Victorian schoolmaster, but under the auspices of the visionary waxing lyrical—hence Iqbāl's close identification of *Ādamgarī* with the work of prophets (*paiġhambarī*). The invocation of *Ādam* (Adam) in *Ādamgarī*, especially in an Islamic intellectual-aesthetic context, instantly raises the bar much beyond anything Ḥālī's call for *pairavī-e Maġhribī* (following the West) is able to achieve.[61] When used in a coinage by Iqbāl, *Ādamgarī* is further charged with overtones of elevation and grandeur in line with his ideals of human perfection. Furthermore, the suffix *-garī* here points to a making, constructing, an upbuilding that is aesthetically sophisticated, complex, multiple, and ongoing. *Ādamgarī*, then, and the poetry we have considered under its sign, including Iqbāl's, is a perfect example of a modality of poetry—a theory and a practice—which can break the false dilemma between an urbane formalist non-cognitivism and a drab message-based poetics.

The Aesthetic Claim

At the beginning of this article, we mentioned that Faruqi's arguments in his essay "How to Read Iqbal" waver between the two possible claims encompassed by aesthetic non-cognitivism: the epistemic claim that art cannot provide knowledge, and the aesthetic claim that whatever knowledge art may provide is irrelevant to its aesthetic value.[62] After our discussion of the epistemic claim, we now turn to the aesthetic claim. In our case, this means arguing that Iqbāl's ideas, thoughts, or cognitive content as found in his poetry are irrelevant to determining his poetry's aesthetic merit. I will argue instead—in line with the aesthetic cognitivism of contemporary philosopher of art Berys Gaut—that in some cases (not every case), the cognitive merits of a work of art also

60 Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 42–45.

61 Ḥālī, in one of his verses, famously called for renouncing the ways of traditional Persian and Urdu poetry and following the West instead:
Ḥālī ab ā'o pairavī-e Maġhribī kareñ
bas iqtidā'-e Muṣḥafī o Mīr kar chuke

Come Ḥālī, let us now follow the West
Enough of following Mīr and Muṣḥafī.
PAREKH, *Ḥālī*, 62

62 For the aesthetic claim in Faruqi's article, see for example Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," 10–11.

contribute to its overall aesthetic value, and that Iqbāl's poetry affords such cases in abundance. And it is none other than Faruqi himself who—despite his theoretical claims—proves this.

According to Gaut, one type of evidence for the aesthetic claim of cognitivism—that what art teaches us can in some cases contribute to its aesthetic merit—comes from our use of words like "profound," "deep," or "revealing" in order to describe an artwork's excellence.[63] This kind of evaluative vocabulary implicitly acknowledges a cognitive component to the judgement of the artwork in question, and shows that our holistic evaluation about the overall excellence of the artwork is closely related to this cognitive component. This point is especially relevant in the case of responses to Iqbāl's poetry, which often feature evaluative terms like "profound," "true," "insightful," "revealing," and so forth. In fact, the best examples of this come from Faruqi himself.

A few such instances are found in Faruqi's preface to his important Urdu collection of essays on Iqbāl, *Ḳhurshīd kā Sāmān-e Safar* (Provisions for the Sun's Journey)—importantly, a collection aiming at a formalist treatment of Iqbāl's verse and which maintains and cites I. A. Richards' non-cognitivist pronouncements about poetry. While discussing Iqbāl's poem "Jamʿiyat-e Aqvām" (League of Nations) from *Ẓarb-e Kalīm* (Moses' Strike)—a biting satire on the post-World War I League of Nations—Faruqi describes his experience of reading the poem, saying that it taught him a lot, and gave him priceless insights and perspective on Western politics that have stayed with him since. After quoting the poem in full, he writes in fulsome praise: "These words are as true today as they were when Iqbāl penned them. The only difference is that the names have changed."[64] It looks like truth, knowledge, insight, and understanding *can* after all be found in poetry, and that truth can also be a central constituent of the aesthetic merit of the work. Faruqi himself finds this truth, and also makes it the only thing he talks about in his commentary on the excellence of these verses, to the almost total exclusion of anything about their form. Thus, not only do we have poetry conveying knowledge, but also evidence that knowledge is a significant part of what is so special about the verse in question.

Faruqi goes on to tell us that it was his father who first read this poem to him, and that all his understanding of colonialism began with it. He writes that it allowed him to see how the UN, especially in its hypocrisy with regard to Palestine, is also a puppet in the hands of the West just like the League of

63 Gaut, *Art and Cognition*, 122–26.

64 Faruqi, preface to *Ḳhurshīd kā Sāmān-e Safar,* ṛ.

Nations.[65] Forgetting his theoretical pronouncements for a precious moment, Faruqi beautifully describes the experience of reading some verses and the piercing insight, truth, and understanding he gains from them about global politics, colonialism, and Euro-American foreign policy. By his own confessions, Iqbāl's verse initiated the construction and upbuilding of something important in Faruqi—a sensibility, a perspective, and an outlook. Constructing, upbuilding, revealing, making—this is a kind of *Ādamgarī* in action.

A few lines later Faruqi claims that it was only coincidental that this particular poem whose content is so important to its excellence came up.[66] Yet even a single such coincidence is enough to contest non-cognitivism's totalizing assumptions. The fact of the matter, however, is that this is not the only such case. For example, Faruqi's insightful work on the Urdu poet and satirist Akbar Ilāhābādī (1846–1921) is occupied primarily with Akbar's remarkable postcolonial sensibility and oppositional politics as reflected in his poetry, and not to any similar degree with his technical mastery. In the pioneering paper on Akbar that Faruqi read as the fourteenth Zakir Hussain Memorial Lecturer in Delhi in 2002, Faruqi finds "truth" in poetry once again. In the paper, he claims that no one in Urdu poetry besides Akbar and Iqbāl better articulated the truth that the adoption of English intellectual and cultural views could not come without servitude to the colonists.[67] Faruqi is all praise for the soundness of Akbar's views, quoting verse upon verse to showcase Akbar's postcoloniality, historical perceptiveness, and even environmentalism. Almost all this implicitly assumes aesthetic cognitivism—Akbar's poetry conveys knowledge, and this knowledge at least partially constitutes its excellence as a work of art. Faruqi's paper on Akbar is no doubt brilliant and even groundbreaking, but it is a paper made possible only by refusing the theoretical non-cognitivist premises declared in "How to Read Iqbal." Indeed, Faruqi himself is the literary critic here who is enthralled to see a poet "perform like a circus artist on the trapeze of meaning."[68] Could the difference be that this time he is happy with the performance?

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65 Faruqi, Preface to *Ḳhurshīd kā Sāmān-e Safar,* ṛ.

66 Faruqi, Preface to *Ḳhurshīd kā Sāmān-e Safar,* z.

67 Faruqi, "Power Politics of Culture," 6.

68 Faruqi, "How to Read Iqbal," 14.

Can Formalism Have a Politics?

In some of his writings on Iqbāl, Faruqi does take exception not with a method of reading Iqbāl, but with what Iqbāl says in his poetry. A good example occurs in Faruqi's English essay "Iqbal's Romantic Dilemma," in which he reads the poem "Insān aur Bazm-e Qudrat" (Nature's Soiree and the Human Being) from Iqbāl's *Bāng-e Darā* (The Call of the Marching Bell).[69] In the poem, a human asks "Nature" about the darkness of human fate in contrast to the bright grandeur of the morning that nature puts on display every day.[70] In the last few verses, we get Nature's response, which concludes with the reproach that it is because the human has forgotten their essence that such days are upon them. Faruqi criticizes the poem for its "simplistic solution to existence" and expresses surprise that Iqbāl could *still* say such a thing, especially when he had been exposed in his youth to European modernism and German modernists.[71] The implication is that such solutions to existence are both simplistic as well as outdated, especially since European modernism has already shown the artist—if not the human—the way forward.

This passage holds our interest for two reasons. The first is as a piece of criticism that is in stark contrast to—and in fact a straightforward refutation of—aesthetic non-cognitivism. Not only is Faruqi considering *what* is said in the poem, he is also at least partially determining whether the poem fails or succeeds based on this. Multiple cognitive criteria for a poem's success appear here: for example, a poem's "solution to existence" should not be simplistic; it should not be dated; it should be in keeping with the times (in this case, with European time). But there is something else that is interesting here as well, for the passage also hints towards the contours of Faruqi's own "solution to existence"—in other words, a worldview, a politics—against which Iqbāl's appears simplistic. What might Faruqi's solution to existence look like? This is a large and complex question, best dealt with in work more directly about Faruqi's global critical practice. But since this question is not entirely unrelated to our inquiry about formalism, I offer in passing some preliminary observations, while still remaining anchored in Faruqi's writings on Iqbāl.

In two English essays on Iqbāl ("Iqbal's Romantic Dilemma" and "Iqbal, the Riddle of Lucretius, and Ghalib"), Faruqi displays his affinity for what he calls the "Romantic" worldview, and often critiques (or pities) Iqbāl for not fully

69 Faruqi, "Iqbal's Romantic Dilemma," 59–70.

70 Faruqi, "Iqbal's Romantic Dilemma," 64.

71 Faruqi, "Iqbal's Romantic Dilemma," 65.

being a Romantic. What is the Romantic worldview? One characteristic of the Romantic self is, according to Faruqi, being a worshipper of words (i.e., seeing language not as a means but an end). Another is believing that existence is utter wastefulness, ultimately futile, and sorrowful unfulfillment. The Romantic has no desire to explain the world, being content to reflect it through his consciousness. The Romantic is "Man speculant—not passive, but certainly not interested in doing things."[72] The Romantic is "inward looking and often sad without cause."[73] Finally, the "Romantic Truth" (Faruqi's capitals) is that convictions are prisons.[74] This is obviously in sharp contrast to Iqbāl's vision of the human, and this for Faruqi is often precisely where Iqbāl loses his way as a poet and artist.

An interesting question is raised here: Can one think about Faruqi's "Romantic self" as somehow related to *formalism*'s desired self, to its own vision of the world, and to its own "solution to existence?" The English literary theorist Terry Eagleton described the formalist New Criticism as a way of reading poetry that "meant committing yourself to nothing," and was "a recipe for political inertia." In this vision of poetry and the world, "all that poetry taught you was 'disinterestedness.'"[75] Is it merely coincidental that Faruqi's Romantic is also "often sad without cause," not committed to anything, and "certainly not interested in doing things"? It would be erroneous and a gross oversimplification to suggest that these characteristics describe the totality of Faruqi's own politics as reflected in his writing. Accounting for Faruqi's important postcolonial and even anticolonial sensibility alone should be enough to preclude such a misunderstanding. But if for a moment we treat formalism not as an apolitical and value-neutral critical method but as one that embodies its own desires and visions of the world, of the poet, and of the human, and if we treat Faruqi's Romanticism as at least one thrust implicit in his larger critical program, the affinities between the two may not be entirely accidental. And may it also be, then, that the problems and limits that formalism faces when it encounters the likes of Iqbāl's poetry—which often sings of conviction, religion, dizzying heights of human strength, perfection, action, and a faith and certitude that fly in the face of the "cultural logic of late capitalism"[76]—as well as it's very

72 Faruqi, "Iqbal, the Riddle of Lucretius, and Ghalib," 80.
73 Faruqi, "Iqbal, the Riddle of Lucretius, and Ghalib," 63.
74 Faruqi, "Iqbal's Romantic Dilemma," 63–64.
75 Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 43.
76 This phrase comes from the title of the American literary critic Fredric Jameson's well-known essay *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

"worldly" reception, involve differences not just of methods of reading but also of "solutions to existence," not just of form and poetics but also of worldviews and politics? Perhaps, but this is an inquiry that must be left to another time.

Conclusion

Faruqi considered formalism to be a most suitable method for reading and understanding Urdu poetry. We have seen that Faruqi's predilection for formalism was central to the success of his critical program, as well as to the effectiveness of his work towards decolonizing Urdu poetics. But it is also clear that there are modes of reading, understanding, and living Persian and Urdu poetry—our key example being what we called *Ādamgarī*—that fall outside formalism's non-cognitivist assumptions. When formalism encounters these modes, it also encounters its own limits. Faruqi encounters precisely such limits in his writings on Iqbāl and his readers, critical or otherwise. Far from "telling us nothing," making "pseudo-statements," and telling us things "that only a fool would attempt to verify," the Persian and Urdu poet in the *Ādamgarī* mode—such as Iqbāl himself—is commonly considered to be a kind of prophet and a teacher par excellence, one whose poetry is deeply entangled with the world, with history, and with life. They are often understood as having special access to the real (*ḥaqīqat*), and their poetry as a source of knowledge, insight, wisdom and ethical guidance worked into highly refined and complex aesthetic idioms. Finally, in spite of his non-cognitivist declarations in theory, Faruqi sometimes ended up reading Iqbāl in cognitivist ways himself, offering the best refutation of his own non-cognitivist premises, as well as suggesting deeper differences between the implicit worldviews and politics of formalism and the word-world relationship that underpins poetic modes such as *Ādamgarī*.

Interrogating formalism's exclusions allows us to understand the existent relationships between poetry and its readers instead of precluding or theoretically disqualifying them. Furthermore, vast regions of fruitful critical and intellectual inquiry that were hidden from view by formalism's self-referentiality open up. One such set of inquiries concerns the multiple complex intersections and intertwinings of poetry with politics, history, ethics, religion, philosophy—in short, of word with world—in historical as well as contemporary worlds of Persian and Urdu, but also of other languages. Another important and related line of inquiry, especially relevant in the case of Iqbāl, is that instead of cleanly separating form from content, we can ask: what might

be their interrelations? In the case of Iqbāl, how do aesthetics contribute to meaning in his poetry? If we agree with Martha Nussbaum that "style itself makes its claims, expresses its own sense of what matters," then the *Ādamgarī* poets represent a grand opportunity to explore the relations between style and meaning, and between beauty and truth.[77] For a poet like Iqbāl, where both profundity of thought and refinement of aesthetic idiom join at a rare height of excellence, such explorations are promising and much warranted.[78] This kind of approach also presupposes the importance and in fact indispensability of attending to and even prioritizing form while reading Iqbāl, something which we can fully agree on with Faruqi, without accepting the non-cognitivist premises of formalism.

Finally and more generally: reading, responding to, and enjoying poetry may come very easily and naturally to us. But when we attempt to capture this experience theoretically in a few neat formulae about the "fundamental nature of poetry," it should quickly become evident that the world of poetry (and art more broadly) is in fact not one but many worlds—countless global traditions themselves consisting of countless genres, each characterized by sometimes common but just as often distinct and particular ways, practices, and conventions of reading and understanding. Each of these traditions and the genres within them embody unique relationships between word, verse, and world. Understanding the manifold lives of poetry in historical and contemporary lifeworlds demands sensitivity, care, and attention to these unique and particular relationships. It also demands that we critically interrogate the totalizing application of categories like "poetry," "literature," and "*adab*" when they invoke universal and fundamental natures of, assumptions about, and orientations towards their referents. Much more viable is a methodological pluralism, one which is sensitive to the literary and extra-literary dynamics of particular traditions, genres, and modalities of reading, writing, and living poetry. Finally, we do well to remain vigilant about the political assumptions and desires underlying our critical choices and practices, making sure that they do not suppress the poet's voice when it speaks to us, nor obstruct our efforts to read and understand poetry, its readers, and the many worlds in which they coexist, with greater sensitivity and care—all that Faruqi himself taught us so well to do.

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77 Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 3.

78 See for example Majeed, *Muhammad Iqbal*.

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