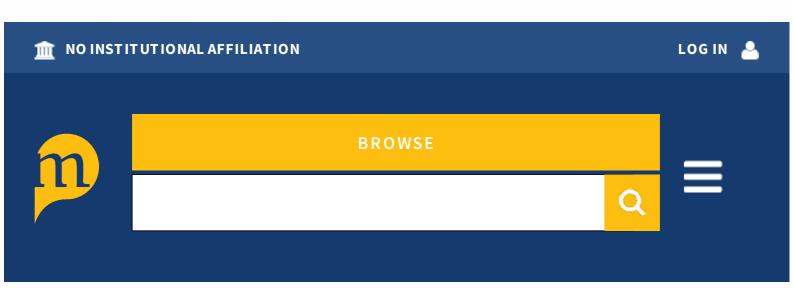
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The Crisis of Identity in Rumi's Tale of the Reed.



The Crisis of Identity in Rumi's Tale of the Reed

Firoozeh Papan-Matin

Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East

Who Present, Past, & Future, sees;

Duke University Press

Volume 23, Number 1&2, 2003

pp. 246-253

ARTICLE

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

The Crisis of Identity in Rumi's Tale of the Reed

Firoozeh Papan-Matin

Hear the voice of the Bard!

Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walk'd among the ancient trees

William Blake, *Introduction tothe Songs of*Experience²

Jallal al-Din Rumi was born in Balkh in 1207 and died in Konya in 1273. A celebrated mystic and poet, Rumi scarcely needs any introduction.³ Rumi's exceptional achievements in mysticism and poetry, along with his intriguing relationship with Shams al-Din of Tabriz (d.1247), has kept him in the foreground of literary and mystical discussions all over the world.⁴ Rumi's intimate relationship with Shams—a mysterious dervish whom he met in Konya in 1244—had a formative influence on his life and his poetry.⁵ Rumi considered Shams to be the perfect image of the beloved and the supreme companion he had been seeking in his spiritual life. After the disappearance of Shams from his life, Rumi maintained intense relationships with two other companions, Salah al-Din Faridun Zarkub (d. 1258) and Husam al-Din Chelebi (d. 1284-85); Rumi assigned both of these men, respectively, to instruct his disciples. These friendships are important in understanding Rumi's work;. 6 Rumi saw in these men a spiritual mirror for his own complex mystical experiences. This article will evaluate an instance of such complexities in a reading of *The Tale of the* Reed (Nay Namih).⁷

The Tale of the Reed (Nay Namih)—the well known opening thirty-five lines of the great Persian mystic magnum opus, the Masnavi—is the account of the separation of the lover, personified as the reed, from the Fatherland, the reed-bed, where it had belonged in the presence of God, the beloved. It has been argued that this prelude to the Masnavi captures the major themes that appear in the ensuing several thousand rhyming couplets. Considering the significance of Nay Namih, the central role of the reed in this poem becomes an important subject of inquiry. In other words, what the reed stands for in Rumi's life as well as in the life of the poem is an essential question in understanding both the Nay Namih and the Masnavi. This article will address this question within the context

of separation and union between the lover and the beloved and will demonstrate how the exchanges between the lover and the beloved correspond to Rumi's transcendence in his relationship with Shams. Rumi has chosen a poetic medium for communicating a conscious recollection of a mystical state that he seems to have experienced with Shams. The metaphor of the reed and its relationship to the poetic narrator correspond to this relationship.

In Nay Namih, the cry of the reed permeates the poem with its song of ecstasy even as it recalls a fateful reality: an anxiety-inducing separateness that has marked the destiny of the reed. Alongside the voice of the reed, there is a poetic narrator who stands in curious affinity with the reed. As will be discussed below, the relationship between the voice of the reed and that of the poetic narrator accentuate the complexities involved in discussing the question posed earlier: the identity of the reed and its function in the life of the poem. Badi al-Zaman Furuzanfar, the renowned critic of Persian literature, considers the voice of the reed to be Rumi's Self, purged of his self. He states that in this poem, Rumi is filled with the sound of love or the beloved, be it Shams or Husam al-Din, both of whom Rumi considered to have been united with the divine.⁸ Reynold A. Nicholson, like Furuzanfar, argues against the interpretation that takes the nay to be "the Most Exalted Pen," the prophet Muhammad, as Logos. According to Nicholson, the personified reed is the soul of the deified perfect man, the disciple, Husam al-Din, who is one with the divine. ¹⁰ He further explains, the voice of the reed could be perceived as the soul of the poet himself who is filled with divine inspiration, singing the songs of the "deified...



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