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

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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*¹

Firoozeh Papan-Matin

Hear the voice of the Bard!

Who Present, Past, & Future, sees;

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

William Blake, *Introduction to the Songs of Experience*²

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.⁹ 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...

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

FIROOZEH PAPAN-MATIN

Like the stars of the world
We're proven, here, & known, there;
We're not and have not
The Holy Word
That walk among the angels here.

Walt Whitman, "Walt Whitman to his Song of Experience"

Billal and Durr Banu were born in Baghdad in 1207 and died in Konya in 1273. A celebrated *maghribi* poet, Rumi greatly enriches our understanding of Sufi's exceptional aesthetic concepts of metaphor and how to align with it, bridging relationship with Shams' notion of "Wahy" (1447), the key term in the long poem of *Lawā'ih* and the final discussion of *Lawā'ih* this world. Rumi's intimate relationship with Shams is a spiritual bond which he met in Konya in 1211. The actions he influenced on his life and his poetry. Rumi considered Shams as "the perfect image of the beloved and the superior companion he had been seeking in his spiritual life. After the disappearance of Shams from his life, Rumi maintained intense relationship with two other companions, Bahā' al-Dīn Farīdī and Zadrāb (c. 1256, and Thomas of Dik-Chikha (c. 1261-85); Rumi assigned both of these men, respectively, to continue his life's path. These friendships are essential in understanding Rumi's world." Rumi says in the poem "Sawā'ih" (1267) for his own complex mystical experience: "This work will be done in the moment" as a response to a reader of *The Tale of the Reed* (*Qasṣe Nāwāb*).

The Tale of the Reed (*Qasṣe Nāwāb*)—the well known opening thirty lines of *Lawā'ih*. *Qasṣe Nāwāb* opens *Maghribi*, the *Maghribi* is the account of the separation of the reed, personified as the reed, from the fertile and the reed bed, which had belonged in the presence of God, the beloved. It has been argued that this episode in the *Maghribi* captures the major theme that appears in the opening several thousand lines of *Lawā'ih*. Considering the significance of *Qasṣe Nāwāb*, 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 poet as an essential question in understanding his life. *Qasṣe Nāwāb*, as the *Maghribi*. This article will address this question within the context of separation and union between the lover and the beloved and will demonstrate

how the exchange between the lover and the beloved corresponds to Rumi's transcendence in his relationship with Shams. Rumi has chosen a *qasṣe nāwāb* for commemorating a companion on the last of a great life. The metaphor of the reed and its relationship to the poetic language correspond to this relationship.

The *Qasṣe Nāwāb* is one of the reed poems; the poem was the song of reed, even if it recalls a careful reading on a reed, an ordinary appearance, there is a clear flexibility of the reed. Alongside the voice of the reed, there is a poetic narrative also stands in various affinity with the reed. As will be discussed below, the relationship between the voice of the reed and that of a poetic persona accentuate the complex relationship of the reed and its function in the life of the reed. Both a Zānīn (transmitter, the reed) and a *qasṣe nāwāb* (transmitter, the voice of the reed) as the Rumi's Self, parted or his self. He says: "but in his poem, Rumi is filled with the sound of love of the beloved, he is Shams in his own skin, both of them Rumi speak, even if he has been called with the name of *Reza* (J. A. Nicholas), like *Reza* (J. A. Nicholas), the interpretation that takes the reed to be "the Most 'loved' Person" the people. *Maghribi*, at *Lawā'ih*. According to *Maghribi*, the metaphorical reed is the soul of the delicate *qasṣe nāwāb*, the *qasṣe nāwāb*, *Reza* (J. A. Nicholas), who is one with the beloved. He has an explanation: the voice of the reed, reed, he perceived as the soul of the poet himself who is filled with divine inspiration, saying the songs of the "deified" *Qasṣe Nāwāb*.

While it is evident that the reed is primarily a symbol of itself, this article cannot deal with the symbolism of the relationship between the poetic persona and the reed. The symmetry between Rumi and his reed, the symmetry between Rumi and his reed, is not meant to be a dualism. Shams, Self and Durr, or *Maghribi*, Durr, and reed contribute to a unified ending.

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