

HOMAYRA ZIAD

The Nature and Art of Discourse in the Religious Writings of Khvaja Mir Dard (Student Paper)

KHVAJA MIR DARD, Sufi poet and theologian of eighteenth-century Delhi, is a unique representative of the Naqshbandī Mujaddidī lineage.¹ Descended from a prominent religious line in Delhi, he became the leader and theoretician of the Muḥammadī path (*ṭarīqa muḥammadiyya*), a spiritual path propounded by his father, Muḥammad Nāṣir ‘Andalīb, that fashioned itself as the all-embracing and original “pure religion of Muḥammad.”² Dard is a renowned poet in Persian and is ranked also among the “four pillars” (foundational poets) of the Urdu poetical tradition. Not only did he substantially influence Urdu poetical forms and vocabulary, he is also acknowledged as the greatest mystical poet in the language.

¹For more on the Naqshbandī Mujaddidī lineage, refer to Buehler 1996, Damrel 2000, Fusfeld 1988, Friedmann 1971, and Gaborieau, Popovic, and Zarccone 1991. For biographical sources on Dard’s life, see the list of biographical citations in Umar 1993, 150, 423n, and Ansari 1965. For Dard’s life and thought, refer to Aḥmad 1964, Akhtar 1971, Firāq 1925, Schimmel 1971, 1973, 1976, 1979, and Aḥmad and Ṣiddīq 1993.

²True to the Mujaddidī tradition, Dard believes that there appears from among the saints of the *umma* one who renews and revivifies (*iḥyā’* and *tajdid*) the clear religion (*dīn*) of God (1890, 587). According to him, his father, Muḥammad Nāṣir ‘Andalīb, was sent by God to proclaim the rejuvenating message of Muḥammad: that guidance and salvation lie in the Muḥammadī path and the *sharī‘at* of Muḥammad (*ibid.*, 613). The Muḥammadī path is the meat, essence, and goal of all paths (*ibid.*, 466). Its all-encompassing nature and nearness to God derive from the emphasis its followers place on the Qur’ān and *ḥadīṣ* (*ibid.*, 610–11). Its goal is to unveil the mysteries of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīṣ*, intellectually as well as experientially (through “tasting”), in order to achieve communion with God by verifying the call of the Prophet (*ibid.*, 579).

This article addresses Dard's striking emphasis on the importance of speech and writing, and his resultant theory and analysis of discourse. Being both a poet and a product of Mujaddidī learning, it is understandable that he would accord pride of place to the art of expression. Dard-as-theologian belongs to the Mujaddidī tradition of literary systematization that began with the letters of Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564–1624) (Buehler 1998, 80–1).³ The literary genre of collected letters (*maḳṭūbāt*) of a very personal, autobiographical, and descriptive nature is a product of the Mujaddidī emphasis on a written body of teaching as well as the order's appropriation of theological and legalistic discourse as part of a greater claim to moral authority (*ibid.*, 224–5).

As a poet, however, Dard belongs to an even longer tradition of writing on the nature of expression, particularly poetical, in the Muslim world. An example is that of the renowned Persian poet Niẓāmī Ganjavī (1121–1209),⁴ whose reflections on the art of *sukban* (speech, word, poetry) are discussed in Johann Bürgel's work on the "licit magic" of the arts in the medieval Muslim world. According to Bürgel, Niẓāmī's interpretation of poetry as a type of magic was tied to his conception of the "perfect man"⁵ as well as his self-understanding in reference to the concept. Poetry/discourse has a metaphysical nature, and thus Niẓāmī presents a philosophy of speech as a prelude to his main discussion on the superiority of poetry to prose. Niẓāmī himself is depicted in his writings as "a magician, a cosmic man and an inspired messenger who comes next to the Prophet"—that is, a true poet. In fact, in his view, real poetry can only be created by one who has internalized religious law (1988, 60).

Similarly, Dard's idea of perfect human beings or, in his words, pure Muḥammadīs (*muḥammadiyān-e khālīṣ*), drives his emphasis on the art

³There is a special emphasis among the Naqshbandī Mujaddidīs, particularly from the eighteenth century onwards, on book-learning as an addition to or substitute for keeping company (*ṣuḥbat*) with a sheikh. Several theories have been advanced to explain this development. For example, the decline of imperial power in late Mughal Delhi led to the increased influence of the Naqshbandī Sufi order among the literate classes, such as the merchants, poets, and the lower nobility (Hermansen 1999, 324). For other suggestions, see *ibid.*, 320–3 and Buehler (1998, 80–1, 234–40).

⁴For more on Niẓāmī, see Chelkowski 1995.

⁵For the concept of the "perfect man" in Sufi thought, see Chittick (1989, 274–88), Ibn al 'Arabi (2002, 43–4), and Schimmel (2003, chapter 6 *passim*).

of discourse. The pure Muḥammadi has successfully traversed the stages and states of the Muḥammadi path to become an aggregate of the Divine Names (Dard 1890, 195–6, 566–7). He or she lives and acts in the world but is absorbed in constant awareness and witnessing of the divine. This rank (*mansab*) is the closest man can hope to get to the equilibrium of divine traits (*iʿtidāl-e ḥaqīqī*) that characterized the Prophet (*ibid.*, 140). As true heirs to the Prophet, pure Muḥammadis by necessity possess the power of inspirational, transformative speech. The Muḥammadi pen must perform the same function as Moses' staff—draw others to the light of belief (*ibid.*, 513).

Consequently, Dard believes the power of expression to be one of the finest gifts granted to mankind—and only to mankind—and he posits equality between possessing humanity and mastering the art of speech. Understanding this concept well and expressing it to others in a beautiful manner is, he believes, the mark of “manhood” (*ādamīyat*) (*ibid.*). Dard was furthermore a devout believer in the inspired nature and divine origin of his own writings, a claim that did not always sit well with many of his contemporaries (*ibid.*, 60–1). By elaborating on the distinction between inspired and other forms of writing, he gives his own words greater currency. Accordingly, he sets forth a philosophy of speech, both divine and human, as well as an analysis of the art of poetry, of different modes of writing, and the subjectivity of discourse.

Before moving on to the main discussion, it is important to keep in mind that Dard openly identified as the perfect Muḥammadi, granted by God the gift of transformative speech and appointed through divine audition to lead mankind towards a clear perception of reality. Throughout his writings, and partially illustrated by his discussion on speech, Dard employs terminology from a number of disciplines, from Sufism and philosophy to speculative theology, Qurʾān commentary, grammar, and literary theory. This conveys one of the overarching principles of Dard's venture, that of the essential unity of the key methods of self-understanding and access to the divine, (*ibid.*, 5)⁶ embodied by the Muḥammadi

⁶Here Dard discusses the unity of the four levels of revealed law (*sharīʿat*), the spiritual path (*ṭarīqat*), gnosis (*maʿrifat*), and reality (*ḥaqīqat*). *Sharīʿat* is the form of *ḥaqīqat*, *ḥaqīqat* is the inner meaning of *sharīʿat*, *ṭarīqat* means being characterized by the *sharīʿat*, and *maʿrifat* is the unveiling of *ḥaqīqat*. *Sharīʿat* is the outer level, connected to *islām*, *ṭarīqat* is the inner level, connected to faith (*īmān*), *maʿrifat* is the secret (*sirr*), connected to the essence (*kunh*) of each thing, and *ḥaqīqat* is the secret of the secret (*sirr-e sirr*).

reality. Appropriating the discourse of the main intellectual and experiential branches of Muslim learning also allowed him to communicate his ideas to a wider audience and so fulfill his divinely ordained mandate.

Because of his strong faith in the transformative power of the written word,⁷ Dard's religious writings are the natural entry into his thought-world and its implications. The primary work I will explore is *ʿIlmu'l-Kitāb*, which Dard likens to the Qurʾān itself. The *ʿIlmu'l-Kitāb* contains the bulk of his theology and metaphysics and is a Persian commentary on 111 quatrains that describe his philosophy of spiritual attainment and the institutions and ethics of the Muḥammadi path. The text is supported throughout by Qurʾānic verses and fragments of *ḥadīṣ*. His secondary works are the *Čahār Risālāt* (Dard 1892–3) and four shorter Persian texts consisting of spiritual diaries, prayers, aphorisms, and directions for travelers on the path.⁸

The Nature of Speech

Dard often uses the terms *sukhan* and *kalām* interchangeably for speech,⁹ though at other times he makes a clear distinction between the two. *Kalām* is largely used to specify the general category of speech, while *sukhan* can be seen as a subcategory of *kalām*, a synonym for *ḥusn-e kalām*, or a form of elegant and transformative speech.¹⁰ However, in several important instances—for example, in an introduction to his analysis of speech—Dard uses the term *sukhan* to encompass all types of speech, defining it as *kalām-e muṭlaq*, or non-delimited speech (Dard 1890, 513).¹¹ Of the two terms, *sukhan* holds greater importance for Dard

⁷See Schimmel (1976, chapter 3 passim), for an introduction to aspects of Dard's ideas on the art of speech, as well as translations of key passages from his five major works.

⁸Because of space considerations, I have not included an analysis of Dard's poetry, nor have I touched upon the extensive and highly personal testimonies in his five major works on his own literary and poetical inspiration and output.

⁹Dard uses both *sukhan* and *kalām* even in the case of divine speech. See (1892–3, Shamʿ 279) for the phrase “*sukhan-e ḥaqq*.” Two less important terms for speech that crop up in Dard's writings are *zabān* and *bayān*. See (*ibid.*, A.H. 292).

¹⁰See (1892–3, Nāla 132) for both of these terms. See Bürgel (1988, 58) for Niẓāmī's use of the term *sukhan*.

¹¹Here, he specifically states that he is not using the term *fann-e sukhan* to refer to its technical meaning of the poetical profession but rather to the general

because of the transformative power implied by the word.

Speech (*kalām*) is the illuminative force of society and of the world, possessing the quasi-magical ability to form an impression on the soul.¹² Its power lies in the fact that it is the intermediary by which the names, realities, and natures of all things are manifested. Even the Nameless Level and the reality of the Unknown Essence can be grasped through the mediation of speech. Furthermore, man is the only created existent that has been granted the special capacity to be attributed with the power of speech (*ibid.*, 519).

According to Dard, understanding the reality of transformative speech (*sukhan*) means comprehending the quiddity (*māhiyat*) of speech in general (*kalām*) and of what types it consists (*ibid.*, 513). Consequently, he presents a discussion on the nature and creation of divine speech and its derivative, human speech, as well as the significations, types, and modes of such expression.

The Creation of Divine Speech

Dard ascribes to the Ash‘arī doctrine of speech (*kalām*) as an attribute of God (*ibid.*, 515),¹³ subsisting within the Essence by virtue of the very existence of God.¹⁴ The will of God is the driving force behind the emergence of speech from its divine attributive existence into the outer world of forms (*‘ālam-e šūrat*). The process begins when the realities of existents (*ḥaqā’iq-e maujūdāt*) appear within the arena (*minaṣṣa*) of manifestation, and existence (*ḥaẓrat-e vujūd*)¹⁵ acquires differentiation at the level

meaning (*ma‘nā-e ‘ām*) of the word, which includes all possessors of speech (*arbāb-e sukhan*) and embraces non-delimited speech (*kalām-e muṭlaq*).

¹²Elsewhere, Dard addresses the belief that words have powerful effects and consequences which is the principle underlying personal prayers, bibliomancy, Qur’ān recitation, recollection of God’s Names, and the seeking of refuge and forgiveness through formulae (1890, 550–6).

¹³For a discussion of the various theological approaches to speech in Muslim history, see Gardet 1978.

¹⁴Thus, divine internal speech (*kalām nafsī-e ḥaqq*), which is signified (*madlūl*) by Qur’ānic words, has been established from time immemorial at a level of pure incomparability (*tanzīb*) (1890, 514).

¹⁵Literally, “presence of existence.” According to Chittick in his analysis of Ibn ‘Arabī’s theology, because “the Essence is forever beyond our grasp and understanding ... each standpoint in respect of which God and the cosmos are

of God's knowledge.¹⁶ Universalities and particularities are differentiated from each other. At this level, knowledge (*ḥaẓrat-e 'ilm*)¹⁷ grants each reality a special knowledge form (*ṣuvar-e 'ilmīya*), like a robe of honor. In the same manner, it appoints in opposition to each thing (*shai'*) the form of a signifier (*dāll bar ān bāshad*) that relates the former to the latter. With the grace of its essential unity (*ittihād-e nafsī*), existence gathers together the signifier and signified, granting them a special mutual relationship which it manifests at its own inner level (*martaba*). These existents are a compound subtlety (*latīfa-e murakkaba*) of the world of signification or inner meaning (*'alam-e ma'ānī*). The signifiers are signifying words (*alfāz ma'navīya*) and the signified are cognitive meanings (*ma'ānī 'ilmīya*), the combination of which are divine, sacred words (*kalimāt-e qudsīya ilāhiya*).

When God wishes to move these existents of the world of signification from the level of inner to the level of outer existence, they

perceived becomes a "relative absolute" or a "presence" (*ḥaḍra*) from which certain conclusions can be drawn ... which will be valid for that point of view" (1989, 29). Dard was heavily influenced by Ibn 'Arabī's philosophical and theological vocabulary, and expresses his indebtedness to the great sheikh throughout his writings (1890, 401).

¹⁶Existence acquires *i'tibārī* and *izāfī* differentiation. *I'tibār* and *izāfat* both refer to relative ontological conditions that have no real existence in and of themselves. In his essay analyzing the concept of the unity of existence, (*vahdat-e vujūd*), Izutsu describes *izāfat* as a relation, that is, "the things of the empirical world [*izāfāt*] are established as partial realities only through the illuminative and self-manifesting act of the one absolute Reality." He translates *i'tibārī* as fictitious, that is, possessing no existence without relation to the underlying Reality (1994, 80). Both terms can be used synonymously, but Dard implies a distinction between the two. The level of Nondelimited Existence, which corresponds to the Essence, is the Level Without Condition (*martaba bilā shart-e shai'*). If one regards it from the point of view that it requires the negation of all illusory things (*salb-e i'tibārāt*), Existence becomes conditional on this negation (*martaba be shart-e shai'*). If one regards it from the point of view that it requires that all be ascribed to it (*ijāb-e izāfat*), it becomes conditional on this necessity (*martaba be shart-e shai'*). Both levels are subsumed within the Level Without Condition. *I'tibārāt* are related to negation, non-being, non-existents, and the conditional existential level of *be shart-e lā shai'*, while *izāfāt* are related to necessity, being, existents, and the conditional existential level of *be shart-e shai'* (1890, 104–5). For the various uses of *i'tibār*, *i'tibārī*, *izāfat*, and *izāfī*, also see Dehkhudā (1947, 2856, 2861, 2927–9).

¹⁷Literally, "presence of knowledge." See note 15 above.

are cast onto the mirror of outer existence. In this manner, knowledge becomes manifest in the world of forms (*‘ālam-e šūrat*). At this level, the signifiers are called signs (*ishārāt*), the signified are called external existents (*maujūdāt-e khārijīyā*), and the combination of the two are perfect lordly words (*kalimāt-e tāmmāt-e rabbānī*), spoken by the omnipotent tongue of the True Speaker (*ibid.*, 513–4).

Human Speech

Man’s speech is a ray of divine speech and has only metaphorical existence. Regardless, it is the locus for its perfect manifestation.¹⁸ Man is the only created existent that can be attributed by speech (*kalām*) because he alone can achieve a perfect union of inner and outer (*ibid.*, 515), and because speech, like man, enjoys an external and internal dimension.¹⁹ Speech is a divine trust (*amānat*) (*ibid.*, 518); it emerges from the pure earth of Adam and becomes a mirror that reflects humanity’s beauty and goodness (*ibid.*, 519).

Dard goes so far as to posit equality between speech and humanity. Man emerged as speech (*sukhan*) from the mouth of divine power and became the locus of manifestation of the divine mysteries.²⁰ Speech is captured in the form of words and letters, while human beings are captured in bodily forms, and each possesses an inner meaning or signification (*ma‘nā*) far superior to its outer shell. As God’s speech, all individuals comprise different meanings, for each person’s potentialities (*isti‘dād*) and realities (*ḥaqā‘iq*) can be compared to meanings revealed in the guise of words (*ibid.*).

¹⁸Dard cites Qur’ān 55:3 to support this statement.

¹⁹Here Dard brings up a question he was asked in relation to this concept: if speech is attributed to creatures possessing exoteric and esoteric dimensions, how can God’s speech be considered speech? Dard answers that though the simple level (*martaba*) of reality, which is God, does not allow even the conceptualization of compoundness, He is, however, the esoteric and exoteric through His possessing essence and attributes, and incomparability and similarity. True speech is an attribute of the True Speaker (*mutakallim*), while man’s speech is only metaphorical (1890, 515).

²⁰Not only man, but all of creation, emerged through God’s word “Kun” (“Be!”). Dard writes: “All that exists is speech” (*Har ḥe hast sukhan ast*). See (1892–3, Sham‘ 157) for a poetic articulation of this concept.

Beautiful speech (*sukhan*) is the harvest when body and soul combine, and it opens the door of guidance to man. Beauty of speech (*ḥusn-e bayān*) signifies the beauty of being human, for humanity itself is eloquence (*sukhan dānī*) (*ibid.*, 518).²¹

Types of Speech

Dard differentiates between two types of speech (*kalām*), internal (*naḥṣī*) and verbal (*laḥẓī*), both occurring at the level of possible beings and at the Necessary, or Divine, level. Internal speech at the level of possibility is an individual's soul conceptualizing its own cognitive forms (*taṣavvur-e ṣuvar-e ʿilmīya-e kbud*, and the ordered recollection of these known things (*umūr*) in its own nature (conceptualizing form after form, and recollecting thing after thing).²² These are expressed as internal thoughts and speech, and can only be heard by the individual himself. The soul that hears its own speech is called the speaking soul (*naḥṣ mutakallim*). The hearing of internal speech expresses the extent (*iḥāṭa*) of a person's knowledge regarding the conceptualization of cognitive forms and the recollection of known things. At this level (*martaba*), the two attributes of speech and hearing are exactly the same, and the outward variance between them is due to a superficial (*iʿtibārī*) distinction.

Verbal speech at the level of possibility is the manifestation of internal meanings (*maṭālib*) through the tongue, in the form of words.²³ It is heard by the speaker, as well as by others, and is perceived by the curtain of the ear in the form of airwaves made up of words. At this level, the attribute of speech is separate from and contrary to the attribute of hearing—the first is confined to the use of the tongue, the second to the use of the ear. One extracts meanings (*maṭālib*) from the soul, while the other introduces external meanings to the soul.

Necessary or divine internal speech is an unveiling (*inkishāf*) of the knowledge forms of truth (*ṣuvar-e ʿilmīya-e ḥaqq*), without them being

²¹According to Dard, unpolished speech is like a speech impediment (1890, 517).

²²The form (*ṣūrat*) and the thing (*amr*) appear to be related, each thing appearing in a form. The form appears to be the “robe of honor” bestowed upon the realities of possible existents by the presence of knowledge, described above.

²³When these are manifested with the aid of a tool other than the tongue, they are called allusions (*īmāʿ*) or signs (*ishāra*) (1890, 516).

distinguished (*irtisām*) from each other in the soul. The division of these known things is in the order of preceding and following, in creation without alteration in the cognitive quality (*kaifīyat ‘ilmīya*) of the essence (*zāt*) of God. God’s internal speech is called the will of God (*irādat allāh*), or the pleasure of God (*mashīyat-e ḥaqq*), and God’s Essence hears its own speech. This hearing expresses the breadth of God’s knowledge regarding cognitive forms and willed things (*umūr-e muqaddara*). At this highest level (*martaba*), God’s attributes of hearing and speech are united and exactly the same. The variance of their natures, in the presence of God’s knowledge (*ḥazrat-e ‘ilm*), is due to a distinction that has been ascribed to them (*izāfī*).²⁴

Divine verbal speech is the descent of internal significations or esoteric meanings (*ma‘ānī*) upon prophets, in the form of words, through the mediation of Gabriel, and is expressed through revealed verses, pages, and books. God Himself hears this speech, by virtue of the attribute of Hearing added to His Essence, as do His servants. The hearing of verbal speech in relation to God is the comprehensive knowledge of these meanings and words, with differentiation. In relation to His servants, it is the hearing of this speech with the knowledge that it is the word of God revealed to Muḥammad (*ibid.*, 514).²⁵

The Significations and Esoteric Meanings of Speech

Speech consists of external (*zāhiri*) and internal (*baṭīni*) components (*ibid.*, 515). External written letters (*al-ḥurūf al-khaṭīya*) were invented to signify spoken letters (*al-ḥurūf al-lafẓīya*), which were invented to signify “thought” letters (*al-ḥurūf al-fikrīya*). The last are the root and inner level, known as meaning (*ma‘nā* or *maṭlab*). The meaning of speech is the spiritual intelligible (*amr-e rūḥānī-e ma‘qūl*) in the reflective thoughts (*afkār*) of souls, conceptualized within their substance (*jaubar*) before its extraction through words. It is the soul’s conceptualization

²⁴God’s Essence, or non-delimited Existence, subsumes all the divine attributes (such as hearing and speech). Attributes become distinct from each other only at the differentiated levels of the Essence, when the degrees of the Essence self-disclose through the attributes (1890, 196).

²⁵The discussion on divine speech ties into Dard’s theories on the process of revelation, which are not discussed in this article.

(*taṣavvur al-naḥs*) of the meaning of things in its essence (*zāḥ*), and it results from the impressing (*rusūm*) of tangibles in its substance and their specification (*tamyīz*) in its reflective thoughts (*ibid.*, 228). The relationship of speech (*sukhan*) to its inner meaning can be compared to that of a human being to his own signification and subtlety (*laṭāfat*), for example, the rational soul (*naḥs-e nāṭiqā*), which is established in the purity of transcendence (*ṣarāfat-e tanzīh*), and can only be perceived by those of perfect intellect and pure souls (*ibid.*, 519).

The Art of Speech (The Subjectivity of Expression)

Dard believes that every existent thing has the power to articulate in accordance with its nature and that all things praise God, whether through their speech (*ba zabān-e qāl*) or through their state of being (*ba zabān-e ḥāl*). The human makeup, however, is far superior to and more comprehensive than that of others, so human speech manifests itself in a more complete manner (*ibid.*, 516). Just as each rose has a unique color and perfume, each individual has a different manner and color of expression (*ibid.*).²⁶ The speech of a person whose soul was created at a higher (*ālī*) level, and whose body was fashioned closer to the true equilibrium (*iṭidāl-e ḥaqīqī*),²⁷ will display more beauty, and his declarations will be more comprehensive, polished, and sure. His verifications will be more correct, his compositions more sound, eloquent, and lucid, and his revelations and gnosis will carry more truth (*ibid.*, 516).²⁸

Speech is essentially subjective and differs according to circumstances, the state or condition of the writer and the audience's capability

²⁶Also see Dard (1892–3, Dard 225).

²⁷For the concept of *iṭidāl-e ḥaqīqī*, see p. 147 above.

²⁸Their lips express what is in the heart, and purity of speech attests to purity of heart (1890, 517). Elsewhere, Dard writes that “their life-bearing words resuscitate dead hearts, their inner and outer is the same, and their illuminated speech is the lamp of this bed-chamber” (1892–3, Nāla 273). In Nāla 132, however, Dard is careful to reiterate that real subtlety of speech and the granting of propensity in this art are in the hands of God and independent of literary style or the nobility of an individual. Also see (1892–3, Sham^c 31).

or readiness to receive.²⁹ Truly comprehending the discourse of “people of speech” (*ṣāhibān-e kalām*)³⁰ relies on awareness of the metaphysical state (*ḥāl*) in which they exist (*ibid.*, 513), for an individual’s manner of speech (*kalām*) attests to his stage (*maqām*) and level (*martaba*) on the path towards God and self-knowledge (1892–3, Nāla 165).

Because of the fluctuating and evolving nature of this quest, the words and writings of the friends of God may not appear consistent. Contradictions are due to contradicting circumstances and conditions. For example, a speaker may be expressing himself at the very beginning of a state (*bāl*), or at the endpoint of a station (*maqām*). The reader should not allow his regard for the true friends of God to fluctuate with any discrepancies in their words, unless there is a comprehensive (*kullī*) difference in the exoteric meanings (1890, 99).³¹ Those who imagine all discourse as monotone fail to understand that their own speech changes from state to state and period to period, for man, as a possible being, is in a constant state of flux.³² Only the speaker himself truly understands the

²⁹Similarly, according to Dard, the Qur’ān contains verses that abrogate each other and the *ḥadīṣ* contain contradictions based on the differing circumstances of revelation and the situation and capacities of the audience (1890, 99).

³⁰Dard defines these as the prophets, friends of God, knowers, and verifiers of the truth, as well as scholars, poets, and rhetoricians (1890, 513). Accordingly, Dard presents a terminology of the various modes by which speech descends and is expressed based on the individual receptor’s state of nearness to God, capacity to receive, purity of heart, and other related factors. If it descends on the heart of a prophet through the mediation of the angel Gabriel, it is called revelation (*vaḥy*), and if it enters the souls of friends of God (*awliyāʿ*) through divine alighting (*ilqāʿ*), it is called an inspiration (*ilḥām*). If it descends upon thinkers via the faculty of thought, it is called the expression of wisdom (*bayān-e ḥikmat*), and if it intentionally embraces meter, it is called poetry (*shēr*). If it is part of the acquired knowledge of an agreeable scholar, it is called fables and narratives (*naql-o-ḥikāyat*), but if it comes from a knower (*urafā*), according to his ability and vision, it is called verification (*teḥqīq*). If it comes from scholars (*ulamā*) who have merely gathered their knowledge from a few books, it is called compilation (*taʿlīf*), and if it is written by truth-verifiers (*muḥaqqiqīn*) based on the strength of their gnosis, it is called inspired writing (*taṣnīf*). If it is expressed by friends of God (*awliyāʿ*) by way of esoteric unveiling, it is called the revealed (*makshūf*) (*ibid.*, 516).

³¹It may be that a person’s worldly knowledge is inferior, writes Dard, but his verifications (*taḥqīqāt*) through unveiling are exalted.

³²Dard speaks of constant transformation and alteration (*taḡayyur-o-tabaddul*) at the level of possibility (1890, 286).

reality and aim of his speech (*ibid.*, 228).

The Nature of Written Expression

Speech necessarily connects to the art of written expression, and Dard goes into great detail on the art and nature of writing. Its importance to him also rests on the role of the written word in Islam. As he points out, religion and custom are book-based (i.e., the Qurʾān and gathered books of *ḥadīṣ*), legal schools and creeds are dependent on books, wisdom (*ḥikmat*)³³ and other sciences were learned through the books of ancients, and esoteric schools are illuminated through the written word (*ibid.*, 591).

Dard makes an important theoretical distinction between two types of writing, inspired composition (*taṣnīf*)³⁴ and compilation (*tāʾlīf*). Both types of writing differ in intent. The latter are the self-willed discourses of exoteric scholars who acquire knowledge externally. They are an indulgence of the ego, cobbled together in the hope of gaining fame and imparting a legacy (1892–3, Dard 3),³⁵ and follow a basic structured format of introduction and ordered chapters. The writer presents the moralistic sayings of wise men and ancestors (*salaf*) and rearranges the premises of others, yet calls this work an inspired composition (*taṣnīf*). For this reason, Dard casts doubt on his trustworthiness (1890, 92).

The man of truth, however, produces compositions whose content and structure are beyond human control (1892–3, Dard 3). He does not indulge in imitation, rather, meanings and ideas are revealed to him (1890, 92) and he doesn't seek the approval of others, for what he writes is the truth (1892–3, Nāla 165). Though some of his interpretations and knowledge may accord with those of others, his works cannot be mistaken for mere compilation (1890, 92).³⁶ The expressions and meanings (*maṭālib*) of

³³For background on *ḥikmat*, see Goichon 1971.

³⁴Dard calls his own writings *taṣānīf*. See (1892–3, Shamʿ 292).

³⁵Uninspired poets and scholars engage in this type of writing.

³⁶The writings of exoteric intellectuals and philosophers, commented on by their later followers and presumed to be their own compositions, are, in reality, only imitations of the principles and goals of those who came before them, expressed in new forms. The verifiers of the truth, however, have presented these above-mentioned distinctions in their writings with fresh points and niceties. For

a true composition are unlike that of any other. Such a composition is unique in every way, incorporating novel and noble meanings and employing fresh and subtle terminology that can be supported by the Qurʾān, *ḥadīṣ*, unveilings (*kashf*), and apodictic proof (*burhān*). It strengthens faith, quickens gnosis, and becomes the source of tranquility in life and prosperity in the afterlife (*ibid.*, 591). The transformative speech (*sukhan*) of the people of truth is a witness to their state (*ḥāl*) and a proof of their perfection (1892–3, Nāla 165). This type of composition is of such high stature that it surpasses all other good acts; accordingly, on the Day of Judgment, the ink of these writers will be held equal to the blood of martyrs in the path of God (1890, 591).³⁷ Dard adds, however, that even among the people of truth and the friends of God, only a handful are capable of producing a true inspired composition. He maintains that though the works of many of these individuals have been lauded by others as inspired compositions, this praise can only be taken in a metaphorical sense (*ibid.*).

In Dard's view, no deed is better than good composition, for it is the only action that can actually substitute for the actor and live on in his place. Whomsoever desires can keep posthumous "company" (*ṣuḥbat bā ʿū dārad*) with the writer through his books and continue to reap the fruits of his wisdom (*ibid.*, 592).³⁸ This has its downside. Dard describes writing as fetters around the writer's feet, for while his writings remain, it is as if he himself is still caught in life's prison, unable to escape the public's tongue (*ibid.*, 97–8). He also describes books as live creatures (*ibid.*, 591). A knower without a book is like a childless person who has left no trace of himself behind and whose grace has come to an end. An unpolished, discordant composition of corrupt meaning is akin to an ill-mannered

this reason, they have been lauded and their fame has spread far and wide (1890, 591).

³⁷It is clear that the Qurʾān, though incomparable, is the benchmark by which all inspired composition must be judged, for it embodies the perfection of all those qualities that distinguish the latter from compilation. The Qurʾān is the *taṣnīf* par excellence, and all inspired works partially mirror its beauty of form, structure, argument, psychological methodology, and impact. For some of Dard's descriptions of the Qurʾān, see (1890, 273, 280).

³⁸Though the essence of great writers is hidden among their inspired compositions and compilations, the real purport of these works is often hidden from those who do not understand (1890, 517).

child, a source of dishonor and disgrace to his father (*ibid.*, 592).³⁹

Furthermore, a writer reaps in the afterlife what he sows with his writings in this life. Pure writing, like kind actions, will necessarily lead to God.⁴⁰ Dard creates an allegory of a garden over which the writer has a claim, in which he sows both thorns and flowers. The flowers denote writing that boasts vibrancy of expression and exudes the scent of gnosis, bestowing strength of mind on intelligent people. The thorns signify writing that is frivolous and convoluted. It drives even people of understanding to heart-sickness, and places obstacles on the path to God while creating doubts and misgivings in the hearts of simpleminded folk. Those who write in this manner are merely bent on sowing thorns at their own feet (*ibid.*, 98).

Beautiful written speech is like a tree that continues to bear fruit.⁴¹ Companions and loved ones are the roots and fibers of this tree. Thanks to them, the tree blossoms and grows strong, for they learn and teach these words, ensure their continuing influence, and give them currency and the power to subsist. They write commentaries and summaries that popularize the work, praise and recommend it in company, and defend it in the presence of detractors (*ibid.*, 592). Study and recitation of the writings of the people of truth, with correct etiquette (*adab*) and strong conviction, comes within the act of keeping company (*ṣuḥbat*) (*ibid.*, 519). Understanding their speech is perfection in itself (1892–3, Nāla 165).

Dard clearly views inspired writing as the fulfillment of a divinely-ordained obligation. He comments that since every individual has not been given the capacity to write in such a manner, the command is, in fact, collective (1890, 273).⁴² Consequently, others can take part in the reward by reading and copying such works (*ibid.*, 591).

³⁹Dard expands on the metaphor of books as children in (1892–3, Nāla 308).

⁴⁰Here Dard cites Qurʾān 35:10: “To Him ascend all good words (*al-kalimu’l-ṭaiyibu*), and the righteous deed does He exalt,” (Asad 1980). All subsequent Qurʾān references will be to this translation.

⁴¹This metaphor is clearly influenced by Qurʾān 14:24, in which a good word is likened to a good tree, firmly rooted.

⁴²A collective obligation (*farz kifāya*) as opposed to an individual obligation (*farz al-ʿain*).

Poetry

Dard is by turns an impassioned advocate of poetry and a humble apologist for the art. Certain passages of the *ʿIlmu'l-Kitāb* and *Ābār Risālāt* hint at the existence of adversaries, perhaps sections of the conservative *ʿulamā*, who clearly faulted him for his lifelong interest in poetry and called his religious sincerity into question.⁴³ Accordingly, many of Dard's statements in support of the art are accompanied by preemptive caveats that give the appearance of a more conservative stance than that attested to by his lived actions.

Despite the above, however, one cannot doubt Dard's sincere attachment to poetry. True to an extensive literary tradition, Dard considers poetry (*sheʿr*) a "licit magic" (*siḥr-e ḥalāl*) (*ibid.*, 148)⁴⁴ that expresses the meaning of unity (*tauhīd*) through metaphors. The subtlety of this art is not hidden from those who understand elegant speech, for it has a great effect on the human soul. The Qurʾān denounces poetry⁴⁵ only in relation to the Prophet and his detractors, who accused him of being a poet possessed by jinn. Poetry is not worthy of a prophet,⁴⁶ for it weakens the foundation of his prophethood. The Qurʾān further denounced the poets of the *kuffār* who misused verses to sow discord and whose poetry was a satire of the art itself. Dard reminds his readers that the Prophet's wife ʿĀ'isha, his daughter Fāṭima, the fourth caliph ʿAlī, and many other leaders (*a'imma*) and friends of God spoke and wrote poetry. Furthermore, he maintains that the Prophet himself praised believing poets and enjoyed their verse (*ibid.*).

⁴³Dard declares in an Arabic passage that he is not a "mad poet" (*shāʿir majnūn*) regardless of what others may say (1890, 60). Expressed in Qurʾānic language, this is clearly a reference to Qurʾān 37:36, where the Prophet is called a *shāʿir majnūn* by his detractors.

⁴⁴The words of a poet or other eloquent individual are a type of magic, with rare and skillful constructions (*ṣanāʿiʿ va'l-badāʿiʿ*), subtlety (*al-laṭāʿiʿif*), and dexterity (*al-ẓarāʿif*) (1890, 513). For the history of this expression, see Bürgel (1988, 53–88).

⁴⁵See, for example, Qurʾān 26:221–7; 21:5; 37:34–7.

⁴⁶Dard cites Qurʾān 36:69: "And [thus it is:] We have not imparted to this [Prophet the gift of] poetry, nor would [poetry] have suited this [message...]" (1890, 148). Prophetic speech is a type of miracle (*muʿjiza*) and saintly speech is the most superior type of charismatic act (*karāma*), but neither falls into the categories of poetry or magic (*ibid.*, 513).

Poetry, like all types of speech and forms of expression, contains exoteric, metaphorical, esoteric, and real meanings. Dard concludes, on the basis of *ḥadīṣ*, that poetry is a better type of speech (*kalām*). If it is well-meaning, it is beautiful, and if it means ill, it is ugly.⁴⁷ He is also quick to point out that poetry (*shāʿirī*), though often denounced by ignorant scholars, is not a simple art. Elegant speech requires a strong and intimate relationship with God and not every “man-shaped being” has the capacity to carry this trust (1892–3, Shamʿ 327). The most effective poetry boasts both perfection of form and meaning, and is a product of divine assistance. For example, the poetry of those who are unaware of reality is only the perfection of the *technique* of poetry. It consists of a hodgepodge of metaphors, exaggeration and barefaced lies; such poets have not experienced the reality of their verse and grant importance only to the “color” of their writing. If they happen to touch upon a higher meaning—by virtue of the volume of their output and the grace of attractive speech—it is only by chance. In this type of verse, the reader is unable to transcend the mundane, worldly level of speaker-as-actor (1890, 289).

On the other hand, the verses of most religious personalities—composed as sources of guidance in religious matters—barely give a nod to prosody and poetical technique.⁴⁸ Their poetry is no more than meter (*vazan*) and rhyme (*qāfiya*), and that too because the constraints of meter are an aid to memorization. If their poetry at times enjoys beauty of expression, it is unintended and due only to the natural grace of their speech.

A perfect marriage of form and meaning is rare. Those who produce such miracles of composition, or verses of wisdom (*sheʿr al-ḥikma*), are assisted by the holy spirit (*rūḥ al-aqdas*) itself which illuminates each chamber of their heart with “incomings” (*vāridāt*).⁴⁹ The speech of these disciples of the Merciful fits together in a manner that beguiles and absorbs exoteric scholars with its subtlety and measure (*andāz*), such that they are forced to acknowledge their own inabilities in the face of it

⁴⁷Though he doesn't cite it directly, Dard seems to be referring to the *ḥadīṣ*: “*Al-sheʿr bi-manzilat kalām, fa-ḥasanuhu ka-ḥasan al-kalām va-qabīḥuhu ka-qabīḥ al-kalām*” (Bukhārī 1986, 185). I am indebted to Dr. Alan Godlas for this suggestion.

⁴⁸Dard details these in (1890, 288).

⁴⁹The *ʿIlmuʾl-Kitāb* is Dard's commentary on his personal *vāridāt*.

(*ibid.*, 288–9).⁵⁰

Though masking his statements in some ambiguity, Dard appears to consider poetry a type of divine inspiration, attributing the believing poet with the *ḥadīṣ* fragment “The holy spirit strengthens him.”⁵¹ He differentiates, however, between inspirational (*ilhāmī*) words and those that appear through the strength of poetry alone. The difference appears to occur at the level of the manner and mode of reception. Just as there are great differences between the manner in and ontological levels at which inspiration is received,⁵² the descent of poetry and the incoming of inspiration (*vurūd-e ilhām*) are two separate things.

At times, there is a gathering of both meanings, that is, some verses are an inspiration⁵³ and some inspirations have the subtlety of poetry. More importantly, the inspiration of friends of God who are scholars and poets is at a truer and more elegant level *in both form and meaning* than the inspiration of those who are not (*ibid.*, 148–9). The above is significant, as Dard is granting poetry its own standing not only as elegant wordplay but as a source of deeper meaning that can add to divine inspiration received in another manner.

In a later work, however, Dard writes that poetry is not “perfect” enough to be taken up as a profession, nor as a regular indulgence. It is merely one talent among the many talents of humankind. He also condemns the loss of dignity inherent in any desperate search for patronage, and further disapproves of using poetry to praise or lampoon others, presumably for money. This, he declares, is a form of beggary and indicates covetousness and depravity of soul (1892–3, Nāla 28).

⁵⁰Dard is referring to his own speech here. After this discussion, he asks readers to turn their attention to the *vārid* and commentary around which the chapter is based, for “what is meant from among these verses of wisdom (*she‘r al-ḥikma*) are verses such as these, and what is intended by this magic of expression is expression such as this.”

⁵¹Dard appears to be referring to the *ḥadīṣ* that is included in, among others, Bukhārī (1864, 125).

⁵²For example, the inspiration received at the level of nearness of friendship (*qurb-e vilāyat*) is related to a lower level of ontological engagement than that received at the level of nearness of the perfections of prophecy (*qurb-e kamālāt-e nubuvvat*), which in turn is of a lesser degree than that received at the level of pure Muḥammadi-ism (*qurb-e muḥammadiyya-e kbālīṣā*) (1890, 148–9).

⁵³Or, inspirational (*ham ilhāmī mībāshad*).

Conclusion

Dard believes that every individual is distinguished by a specialization and that his is the divine gift of “clear speech” (*ibid.*, Dard 288). His entire exploration of the art and modes of speech, as well as his conclusions, are geared towards confirming his lofty spiritual rank as a pure Muḥammadī and universal religious leader. This is not surprising when we note the heightened sense of his own religious mission that appears as a recurrent theme in his writings. Dard often fashions himself in the image of the Prophet Muḥammad, appointed by God through divine audition, holding the *‘Ilmu’l-Kitāb* aloft as a guide to the Qur’ān. He is keenly aware of a need for spiritual reform in his age, and believes that he has been given a divine mandate to safeguard believing men and women (1890, 2-3, 60-1).

In this regard, Dard lays out the metaphysics of speech so that his readers, by comprehending the reality of speech, can learn to distinguish between inspired writing and mere compilation, and thus benefit from the transformative value of the *‘Ilmu’l-Kitāb*. Understanding the subjectivity of discourse and the constant flux inherent in the human condition equips the reader to avoid the common pitfalls (such as waywardness or misguided condemnation) encountered when grappling with the seemingly inconsistent nature of inspired discourse. For example, Dard’s poetry, like much mystical poetry, contains declarations and allusions to behavior that may be deemed inconsistent with the *shar‘ī* mores he espouses in the rest of his religious writings, yet he considers his verse to be a concentrated form of his prose. Similarly, Dard’s descriptions of himself range from poignant expressions of utter humility and servitude to almost fantastic descriptions of spiritual feats and insights, a contradiction that would be incomprehensible without an understanding of the nature of discourse.

Accepting that inspired writing displays a lack of formal, outward structure forces the reader to bend himself to its rhythm, which provokes insights through both substance and form for those who approach it as a seeker. Dard declares, for example, that the *‘Ilmu’l-Kitāb* is not bound by a formal structure, but rather, was written according to the dictates of a heart and conscience illuminated by God, through which the right words clicked into place at the right moment (*ibid.*, 4).⁵⁴ Accordingly, in Dard’s view, the textual flow of his work expresses, in the most perfect manner, the greater underlying drive behind all speech, reflection upon which will

⁵⁴According to Dard, God wished to manifest his secrets through Dard, using his tongue as a pen and his body as the burning bush of Moses.

yield infinite layers of meaning by virtue of its divine origin. The layers reveal themselves according to the capacities of the reader, that is, the text will invoke spiritual insights in accordance with the reader's stage of spiritual development.⁵⁵ Dard often refers his readers to certain passages and words in the *ʿIlmu'l-Kitāb*, noting that those of profound insight should not fail to perceive the subtle realities below the surface.⁵⁶

Dard's self-image as a reformer would necessitate, in his view, a means to ensure the continuing influence of his teachings in the turbulent times ahead. Furthermore, because he saw inspired writing as a sacred responsibility undertaken by a few for the good of the many, it was critical that it be put to the use for which it was divinely ordained. His theories on speech, then, embedded in his religious writings, can be viewed as a handbook for approaching and benefiting from those very same texts. □

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⁵⁵For a brilliant discussion of the nature of inspired writing in the context of Ibn ʿArabī, see the introduction by James Morris in Ibn al ʿArabi 2002.

⁵⁶Dard often does this in regard to the direct commentary on the quatrains that form the backbone of the *ʿIlmu'l-Kitāb*. For example, (1890, 293).

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