

A parallel between the first verse of the biblical genesis, the poem “The Secret Rose Garden” and the Sephirotic Tree of Kabbalah

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Abstract

This article proposes a study on the border between comparative literature and the hermeneutics of symbols. Although the traditional literature of the Middle East offers many possibilities, the context of the analysis will focus mainly on a parallel between the representation of the Sephirotic Tree of Kabbalah (also called the Tree of Life) and certain verses from the poem “The Secret Rose Garden” written by Mahmūd Shabestari. At the same time, we will use as a link between the two contexts a symbolic interpretation of the first verse of the biblical genesis. Along with highlighting some of the peculiarities involved in deciphering the Hebrew alphabet, this approach aims at an approach that facilitates the transition from a type of intellectual Kabbalah to a reception related to intuitive Kabbalah. Consequently, the comparative literature appears more as a pretext for contextualizing the method of approach, as well as for presenting illustrative examples.

“Sun-reflections from the unseen world
Are all the objects of this mortal sphere,
As curl, down, mole, and brow on a fair face.
For Beauty absolute reigns over all.”
(Mahmūd Shabestari, *The Secret Rose Garden*[†])

1. Preliminary considerations

Given the many possibilities of receiving, associating, and interpreting the letters of the Hebrew words, the verse: “In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth”¹ can also be translated as: “In the beginning, the son of *Aelohim*: the heavens and the earth”² – and the examples of variants of reading could continue. Given that an exhaustive commentary on the hermeneutical possibilities of the first verse of *Genesis* would transcend the narrow boundaries of this article, we will limit the role of that verse to the link between the representation of the Sephirotic Tree and the description of the genesis of traditional Persian poetry³. So, we will focus only on one interpretive perspective that will focus on all three elements mentioned in the title.

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[†]Translated by Florence Lederer. This text is in the public domain because it was published prior to 1923.

¹Bereshit (בראשית) bara (ברא) Elohim (אלהים) at (את) hashamaym (השמים) ve'at (ואת) ha'arets (הארץ). To follow the Hebrew text, I used: *Hebrew-English Tanakh: the Jewish Bible*, 2009.

²Bereshit (בראשית) bar (בר) Aelohim (אלהים) et (את) hashamaym (השמים) ve'et (ואת) ha'arets (הארץ).

³Consequently, we are not interested in the utopian approach of deciphering all the levels of meaning of the respective passage of the Hebrew Bible – which, according to Kabbalah, could have infinite levels of meaning (due to the fact that each letter of the Hebrew alphabet represents a number and a symbol with multiple meanings and possibilities of association). Throughout the article, the reasons for using the first verse of the Bible as an analogical link between the two contexts will become much easier to understand.

We also emphasize the importance of the symbolism of the Tree of Life in all agrarian societies and cultures. The tree is a suggestive image of the fertile earth that rises to the sky, offering its fruits in exchange for the sun's rays. Due to a natural and harmonious reciprocity, the earth and the air support its growth, but are regenerated and enriched by its existence. In addition, bringing together elements that seem antagonistic, it is also an expression of the unity of opposites: through the mediation of the tree takes place the fusion of water with the solar "fire". As can be seen in the following pages, the alchemy of the four elements mentioned above also has a deep symbolic meaning.

2. General considerations about the representation of the Sephirotic Tree

The tree of life is present in all great cultures in the form of one of the oldest symbols known to man: the cosmic tree. Mentions about it can be found in many very important texts – for example: "It is said that there is an eternal fig tree, with its roots up and its branches down, whose leaves are the Vedic hymns; he who knows it knows the Veda" (*Bhagavad-Gitā*, 1992, XV, 1). The same "Eternal Tree", in Norse mythology, is called *Yggdrasill*, in the Bible it appears as the Tree of Life, in Celtic mythology it is identified with the oak, and in the tradition of the Romanian people it can be found in the symbolic form of the fir tree.

Beyond the mystery of the misunderstanding that often surrounds it, Kabbalah proves to be an abstract synthesis of many other sciences – astronomy, mathematics, physics and metaphysics being perhaps the most relevant examples. Kabbalah offers, first of all, a set of precise instructions to understand the manifestation of existence and life as a whole. Consequently, the interpretation and understanding of the Sephirotic Tree is equivalent to understanding the basic formula of existence. From top to bottom, the Tree of Life is structured as follows: three concentric circles (Ain – "Nothing", Ain Soph – "infinity" and Ain Soph Aur "limitless light"), representing the primary source of creation, followed by nine spheres (called, in Hebrew, *sephiroth* – *sephirah*, at singular form): *Kether*, *Chokmah*, *Binah*, *Chesed*, *Geburah*, *Tiphareth*, *Netzach*, *Hod*, and *Yesod*, representing the nine heavens (macrocosmically), followed by a point of connection (the physical world, *Malkuth*) between the upper and lower dimensions and, finally, the "Hell" (*Kilpoth*⁴) also made up of nine spheres.

Most of the solar symbols of ancient civilizations refer to that "limitless light" (*Ain Soph Aur*) which sends its "rays" to illuminate all existence. Analyzing the way in which the "ray of creation" (*Ain Soph Aur*) enters into manifestation, we find that it traverses four "worlds": "the world of archetypes" (called *Atziluth* – in the Kabbalistic tradition), "the world of creation" (*Briach*), "the world of formation" or of the angels (*Yetzirach*), "the physical world" (*Assiah*). From a certain interpretive perspective, the gods (or angels) are *Elohim*⁵, and the supreme deity (God) is *Aelohim*⁶. Using the Tree of Life of Kabbalah, we will notice that *Aelohim* is *Ain*, *Ain Soph* and *Ain Soph Aur*, its first manifestation being the Trinity (*Kether*, *Chokmah*, *Binah*), only then following the other (*Chesed*, *Geburah* și *Tiphereth*).

The first manifestation of the Creator is in the form of a Trinity: the Father – who appears under various names, depending on the culture to which we refer: Yahweh, Odin, Ometeótl, Brahma (*Kether*, "crown"); Son – Christ, Baldr, Quetzalqóatl, Vishnu (identified with the sphere of *Chokmah*, who "stands at the right of the Father") and the Holy Spirit, Thor – in northern mythology, the god Tlaloc – in the Aztec pantheon, and in Hinduism being symbolized under the form of the dual deity Śhiva – Shakti (in Kabbalah, this principle is called *Binah*, manifested as *Abba* and *Aima*, both masculine and feminine energy). The deepest mystery of creation is synthesized by another *sephira*, *Daath* – omitted from some

⁴*Klipa* (sg.) means "shell" in Hebrew. "The world of shells" (קליפות) or the "Tree of Death" is the "shadow" of the Tree of Life.

⁵*Elohim* (Hebrew: אֱלֹהִים), grammatically, it is a plural word (sg. *El* – אֵל) which is used for the gods in both modern Hebrew and ancient Hebrew. *Elohim* has the meaning of "gods" or "powers" and the translation "God" (singular) is obviously wrong.

⁶*Aelohim* (אֵלֹהִים) or *Ain-Elohim* is the unmanifest deity from whom *Elohim* emerges.

representations – who symbolizes the “wisdom” of creative duality, which can give birth to other *sephiroth* through the union of the two hypostases of the creative divinity: the Father and the Divine Mother.

Following the meanings of the same symbolic and microcosmic scheme, we point out that *Chesed* is the “spirit” or “archetypal father” (being likened to Abraham from the biblical imaginary perspective), *Geburah* is the “divine soul” (or “conscience”), *Tiphareth* is the “human soul”, *Netzach* and *Hod* represent thoughts and emotions, *Yesod* and *Malkuth* represent the vital energy and the physical body, and *Kilpoth* is the inner hell. The other spheres of the Sephirotic Tree refer to much deeper aspects, related to the divine image (in a potential state) inside the human being. Summarizing, we can see that the Sephirotic Tree is a synthetic and symbolic variant of the organizing principle of creation, having the role of a “map” of creation that represents both the macrocosmic and the microcosmic universe.

2.1. Representation of the Sephirotic Tree in literature

The representation of the cosmic fullness of existence through the mediation of the Sephirotic Tree exceeds the limits of a simple literary motif. Beyond the very obvious examples of traditional religious texts, there are quite a few literary texts that can be interpreted through the prism of symbolic structures specific to Kabbalah. For example, in folk tales, the young prince who falls in love with the daughter of an emperor (*Chesed*) is the symbol of the human soul (*Tiphareth*) who wants to unite with the divine soul (*Geburah*). The “hand of the emperor’s daughter” and that “half of the kingdom” with which the hero of the fairy tales is rewarded represent exactly the six lower *sephiroth* over which he becomes master.

Another much more suggestive example in the Western literature is Dante Alighieri’s masterpiece. The representation of the *sephiroth* is very suggestive, starting with the circles of Hell, following the detours of Purgatory, the nine heavens of Paradise and, finally, ending with the Empyrean. Following the symbolic analysis of the realms of the Divine Comedy, one can see a strong resemblance between the universe presented by Dante and the Tree of Life of Kabbalah (for more information, see [Cojocaru, 2021](#), p. 168–199).

2.2. Intellectual Kabbalah and Intuitive Kabbalah

There are two diametrically opposed types of Kabbalah: the intellectual and the intuitive. In order to understand the specifics of each of them, we can draw a parallel with the two types of knowledge called “luciferic” and “paradisical” ([Blaga, 2013](#), p. 245 ff.). Intellectual Kabbalah falls within the realm of luciferic knowledge, while intuitive Kabbalah adheres to the characteristic principles of paradisical knowledge. On the one hand, the first will “crush” or, at best, limit the “corollary of the wonders of the world” to a simple perspective of scientific or theoretical, historical or literary approach. On the other hand, intuitive Kabbalah starts from the premise that it has to do with a living and dynamic reality, which can be understood through direct experience and, ultimately, through a genuine revelation.

Certain observations are required on the latter concept, given that “revelation” is part of the series of words that – through use and abuse – have been partially or totally emptied of meaning in the current language. Revelation, in the traditional and religious sense, presupposes an absence of egocentric individuality and a (temporary) inhabitation of the consciousness of a limited being in a supra-individual type of being⁷. “Dwelling” is, of course, a replacement for limited perception with a new perspective – thus, through man, it will look through the “eye of God”, according to one of the most important representatives of traditional Persian poetry, Mahmūd Shabestārī (*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 278). For this reason, the poet, in a state of ecstasy, looks at the world with the eye of God – and understands that the whole creation is only His mirror.

Most representations of the world in Sufi poetry involve a series of symbols that do not address, first and foremost, reason, but intuition. In fact, any form of discursive exposition proves inadequate to explain

⁷Given the doctrinal load of certain terms that may unduly direct the interpretation, we will not use the term “God” here – even if this kind of supra-individual being refers to the same reality (which is the source of all names and concepts that cannot encompass it).

what the Truth is. In answer to the question of whether there is an understanding outside of conventional language, Persian poets prove that only beyond these limits is born or deep understanding: “Because only symbolic language allows the revelation of a hidden meaning, without discursive movement” (de Vitray-Mayerovitch, 2003, p. 151). Such language is, in fact, a contemplation during which subjective reason disappears, being replaced by a certain type of inspiration.

Because Persian poetry often uses symbolic language that transcends the boundaries of rational language, any attempt of discursive exposition proves incapable of fully rendering the meanings of a poem — and this is even more evident in the context of the interpretation of mystical poems. With special rules of interpretation, mystical poetry must be “rooted” in the reader’s heart in order to be understood. The meaning of a particular poem is naturally revealed by the intuitive rather than rational decryption of the symbols present in the text — all the more so as the symbol itself is essentially a mirror of its receiver’s inner universe. As the “soil” of each heart is different, the interpretation of each symbol will be different – at least in terms of nuances.

3. A correlation between the “root” of the Sephirotic Tree and the genesis described in the poem “The Secret Rose Garden”

Through its structure, the Tree of Life proves that the created world has a precise organization plan – as Vulcănescu (1991, p. 94) notes: “the created world does not emerge from chaos, for no reason, to return to chaos”. To understand the organization and purpose of creation, one must understand what is “beyond” the immediate – the internal principle of all things. This principle can be understood as a superior force⁸ which, in its ultimate aspect, has no form, but which can appear in any form. In fact, the limitation of the object of knowledge in the boundaries of changing (and even illusory) forms is due to the ignorance⁹ of the knowing subject: “The true reality is, in the beginning, only one, but the degrees of ignorance are infinite” (Bardo Thödol, 1992, p. 136).

Without the connection between the two worlds (that of creation and that of the spirit which transcends the constraints of matter) it would not be possible to manifest metaphysical principles. Analyzing this connection, it can be seen that nothing can exist outside matter; for this reason, a precise distinction *is* needed between being and existing: what is does not depend on any external factor, while what *exists* is in constant interdependence.

To continue the analysis of the genesis of Sufi poetry, we will refer to the first two verses of the prologue of Mahmūd Shabestari’s poem, entitled “The Secret Rose Garden” (*Golšan-e Roz*): “În numele Acelui ce-n duh iscat-a gîndul/ și-a inimii făclie s-o-aprindă-apoi făcându-l” (*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 253). First of all, we notice how the burning impulse of inspiration goes through successive levels of manifestation. The first change of the creative impulse takes place when it passes from “the One” to the “spirit”, and the second change of the creative impulse occurs at the transition from the “spirit” to the “thought”. The next stage of the descent of the creative impulse occurs when the “thought” descends into the “torch of the heart”. The origin of this impulse is “That” – “The unspeakable one, whose name can only be uttered by silence!” (Hermes, 2015, p. 43) – which the poet invokes at the beginning of the poem. “That” is Allah, the Absolute, the All and the “Nothing” (*Ain*) which is a state of pure potentiality, constituting, at the same time, both the source and the boundary of the whole manifested existence. The demonstrative pronominal adjective in the first verse is also an indirect reference to the fact that there are a multitude of names by which God can be called, but none of these names fully reflect the nature of the divine. In the culture of the Middle East, there are, for example, the 99 names of Allah (contained in the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah*), each of which reflects one of the attributes of divinity (for a complete list of names, see Olaru, 2013, p. 137–140).

⁸In this case, the term “force” (manifested as a sum of “forces”) has nothing to do with anything mechanical, but with a pure intelligence, incomprehensible to human reason.

⁹With the meaning of “not knowing” (*a-gnosis*) the mysteries of existence.

In summary, it can be stated that, on the one hand, the beginning of the poem is a presentation of the way in which inspiration occurs, in its highest form. On the other hand, in the first two verses, the process by which the transition from non-existence to existence takes place is synthesized and represented in a symbolic way: “În lumile-amîndouă-al Său har a-adus lumină/ și haru-I preschimbă-a țărîna în grădină” (*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 253). Developing the description of the genesis and the existential path of man in the world, the “The Secret Rose Garden” continues with the following verses:

“Iar lumile-amîndouă sînt rodu-unui balsam,
sufflare ce născut-a și duhul lui Adam,
iscîndu-i judecata, puțința de-a pătrunde
pricina-a toate cele, ce-o Taină o ascunde.
Cînd se văzu că este-o ființă mai anume,
el se-ntrebă de-ndată: *Eu cine-s oare-n lume?*
Și-atuncea dinspre parte spre Tot el o porni,
spre-a reveni pe urmă în lumea de aci.
Și pricepu că lumea e doar o-nchipuire,
cum unu-n orice număr mereu e-n repetire.
Căci lumile-amîndouă un suflu le-a creat,
ce-a revenit pe urmă de unde a plecat.
Venirea și plecarea le naște-o-nchipuire.
în fapt nici nu există plecare și venire.
Se-ntoarce orice lucru l-al său izvor prea sfînt.
Văzute-ori nevăzute, doar una toate sînt”
(*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 253–254)

Man’s ability to conceptualize the mystery of creation is “judgment” (or “the ability to penetrate/ all that a Mystery conceals”). This faculty will be discussed in detail in the first of the 15 questions of Shabestari’s poem. In this context, we are interested in understanding how the knowing subject begins to understand the problem of the One and the multiple (“from one side to the other he starts it”) by asking: “Who am I in the world?”. When creation asks the question “who am I?”, at a final level of understanding, the term “I” has nothing to do with this equation because it would alter the objective perception of the problem in question. The ego is a subjective way of interacting with the surrounding universe, being the cause of “microcosmic chaos”. The “I” is the imperfect multiple unit, implying a manifestation of multiplicity understood as separation (on the one hand: I - you, I - the others; on the other hand: a certain self in contradiction with another self). Returning to the question “who am I?”, We will state that just as “I” is something that implies a separation, “who” is a term that implies a problematization. The statement “I am!” becomes the most appropriate answer – for this reason, “I am who I am”¹⁰ (*Biblia*, *Ex*, 3, 14) is the expression that denotes the maximum of objective perception.

3.1. *The One and the multiple*

The Tree of Life can also be understood as a graphic representation (synthetic and symbolic) of the manifestation of God through creation. This is how Mahmūd Shabestari verses reflect the previous hypothesis:

“Căci Dumnezeu cel Veșnic cu o suflare nouă
tot iscă și sfîrșește iar lumile-amîndouă.
Dar lumile-amîndouă se-ntorc iar la Cel Unic,

¹⁰Hebrew: *ehyeh ašer ehyeh* – אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה.

căci unu, -ajuns multiplu, devine iarăși unic.
 Iar formele multiple le naște-nchipuirea,
 căci punctul cerc devine când iute-i e rotirea.
 Un cerc e drumul de la-nceput pîn-la sfîrșit,
 drum ce-l străbat cei care pe lume au venit.”
 (*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 253–254)

Particularly revealing is the fact that the “One” (*Aelohim*) that Persian poets often invoke at the beginning of the poems is not “This” (*Elohim*) and is therefore remembered as the “Unnamed One”. “The Unnamed One” refers to a reality that transcends the realm of immediate perception, and therefore can never be fully understood from the realm of manifestation. If the manifestation of “Him” is contemplated by the poet, that nameless reality (which is also the “source of all names”) becomes “This”, the one who can be seen and understood.

In order to become an integral part of the One, the multiple must be brought to unity. The subjective elements, accumulated as a consequence of the process of separation from the Creator, are those that do not allow the return of the “ray” in the “One”. Like the macrocosm, which is divided into several forms, the microcosmic man lives divided into numerous egos. In order to understand that “the world is only an illusion”, and that “in fact there is no departure and coming”, it is necessary to guide those who have already reached this stage of understanding, and for this reason Shabestari’s poem continues:

“Profeții-s călăuze pe drumu-acesta-anume,
 și caravana vieții doar ei știu s-o îndrume.
 În fruntea lor se află al nostru Mahomed.
 El a premers prorociei și-i ultimul profet.
 Iar sfinții ce pășit-au în timp pe-acest drumeag,
 făcut-au și popasuri, ce le-au dat în vileag.
 Când inima-mi cerut-a Prea-naltului să-i dea
 acestei cărți un nume, i-a zis: «Grădina mea».”
 (*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 254)

Intuitive Kabbalah can be equated with mystical inspiration that transcends rational knowledge, being the result of contemplating the mysteries of creation and even of a conversation with God. This kind of dialogue is not specific to a particular culture, but universal – therefore examples are numerous and can be found in all the great cultures of mankind¹¹. Shabestari’s poem is also structured in this way, as a series of 15 questions addressed to divinity. Following the answers received, it becomes very clear that trying to frame Ultimate Reality in a definition would mean limiting it to a concept and then it would no longer be Ultimate Reality. Drawing a parallel with a Western poem, it can be mentioned that the whole vision of Paradise and the way of being of the three concentric “circles” of the Empyrean cannot be understood by Dante only by rational understanding. The “lightning” that illuminates Dante’s vision is the artistic representation of intuition that knows spontaneously, being guided by divinity (Alighieri, 2010, p. 854–855). In the same way, Shabestari “knows that he does not know”, and because of this the poet only asked the question and waited, in the silence of contemplation, for the answer.

The questions the poet asks are always beyond the bounds of reason, and other faculties must be used to understand them. Thus, the answers are received by the poet by the way of intuition and not “snatched” by the way of rationalization: “Pe cel ce prea departe îl duce-acum gîndirea,/ îl paște pîn-la urmă pe drumu-i rătăcirea./ Nu-ndură cugetarea lumina feței Lui./ Alți ochi, ca s-o contempli, tu trebuie să-ți pui” (*Poeme*

¹¹The famous Sanskrit epic text *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Poimandres* dialogue of Hermes Trismegistus are illustrative examples in this sense.

persane, 2014, p. 256). These “other eyes” are, in fact, the “contemplation” – In the full sense of the word. As Eliade (1992, p. 22) states: “man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself”. In order to perceive the sacred, man (as a “philosophical earth”) must calm his own “waters” in order for their surface to reflect the mysteries above him:

De aceea ochiul nematerial iese din trup ca să contemple frumusețea, ridicându-se și adorînd nu forma, nici trupul, nici aparența, ci ceea ce este dincolo de ele, este calm, liniștit, statornic, neschimbător; ceea ce este totul, singurul și unul, ceea ce este prin sine însuși și în sine însuși, identic cu sine însuși și neschimbător.” (Hermes, 2015, p. 261).

The Creator – who seeks the emptiness¹² of the human heart to fill it – uses the poet’s body as a writing pen, and the poet gladly and humbly accepts his role as an instrument through which creative grace is poured out. Consequently, the poet does not assume the role of “creator”, but, at most, that of messenger or intermediary between God and the world. Even after a brief analysis of Sufi poetry, it is clear that its symbolic valences converge at one point: *the burning*. The “butterfly” burned by the candle flame dies (the disappearance of ego-centrism), but also goes through a creation (or “rebirth”), its sacrifice becoming edifying. From this point of view, the burning involves not only the attainment of perfection in virtue, but also the total dissolution of one’s ego:

“Bea vin, căci de-al tău sine ți-aduce liberarea,
să poată stropul vieții-a se contopi cu Marea.

Bea vinul din pocalul Obrazului divin,
căci ochiul Lui e cupa cu cel mai limped vin.

Să cauți vinul fără de cupă sau ulcior,
căci vinu-i și paharnic, pocal și băutor.”

(*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 278)

Given that “His eye is the cup of the clearest wine”, Sufi poetry repeatedly emphasizes that this kind of experience is the only state in which it is possible for the knower to fully understand the object of knowledge. Thus, in order to understand God, the mystic becomes one with God and understands that “God is One”. The previous phrase refers to divinity as the Ultimate Principle (*Aelohim*) and not to divinity as a force manifested in the form of Elohim. Thus, although “exists” in various ways, God has only one way of “being”. The principle of similarity (“the like knows the like”) is an axiom often invoked by the great prophets and teachers of mankind: “Therefore, unless you are like God, you cannot know God. For what is like can be known [only] by what is like” (Hermes, 2015, p. 99). Finally, it can be seen that in Persian lyric, fire (or “wine”) is: knowledge, knowing, and known. The substance of the flame burns the boundary between the knower and the known – and from the interaction of the two (which become “One”) pure knowledge is born:

“Întreaga lume nu e decît o-nchipuire,
ca punctul ce-mplinește un cerc dup-o rotire.

Învîrte cu iuțeală-o scînteie, stînd pe loc!
Iuțeala învîrtirii-o preschimbă-n cerc de foc.

De-l pomenești pelinul mereu, nu doar o dată,
prin asta nu devine multiplu niciodată.

În chip multiplu numai ce-i trecător apare,
cum cameleonu-și schimbă întruna-a lui culoare.

¹²Understood, here, as a lack of egocentric individuality.

În toate-o existență doar dăinuie mereu,
vădind Unicitatea ce este Dumnezeu.”

(*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 274–275)

Fire is represented by Persian poets both in an igneous state and in a liquid state (in the form of wine). In this case, it can be seen that the *liquid fire* is a symbol of the manifested divinity, while the fire itself is a symbol of the unmanifested divine. In fact, the two forms of fire are one and the same, but their manifestation is different. So, in this context, the symbol of fire is dual: *manifested* (as *Elohim*) and *unmanifested* (as *Aelohim*). The act of creation has always been associated with the act of “utterance”. The externalization of unmanifested thought is, in itself, a creative act, and for this reason the utterance of the word (“logos”) is equivalent to genesis. The logos – as a manifestation of the creative Word – thus becomes the expression of the manifested divinity. However, because all existence inevitably returns to its own source, the unmanifested divine is ultimately one and the same with the manifested divine.

In Sufi poetry, God is like a burning flame: creative, destructive, and regenerating. Fire is also the “instrument” through which mystical death (*fana*) or “Achievement by annihilation” is attained. Usually, fire appears as “igneous water” that combines two (apparently) contradictory elements. Liquid fire is suggested by Sufi poets through the image of wine, and the contradictory duality (water – fire) that is present in the symbolism of wine is directly related to the problem of duality (I – you) within the subjective perception of the common man. The choice of this symbol proves to be extraordinarily suggestive: the one who consumes “fire” is consumed by “fire”. Therefore, what is touched by “fire” becomes “fire”, definitively abandoning the previous condition of this interaction.

3.2. *Self-knowledge as a mandatory stage of micro-genesis*

In Sufism, the process of self-knowledge is presented as a “journey” – man being a mere “traveler in the world”, but also an image of the divine: “Cum tu-ul tău e-aievea imaginii divine,/ tot ce-ți dorești ai grijă să cauți doar în tine” (*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 267). As mystical poets repeatedly note, the main purpose of the “journey” is to “walk within you”. One of the questions in “The Secret Rose Garden” details this issue:

“ÎNTREBAREA 3

Eu cine-s oare, cine? Și ce știi despre mine?
Și ce poate să-nsemne: «a drumeți în tine»?

RĂSPUNS

«Eu cine-s oare, cine?» — tu mă întrebi mereu —
«Vorbește-mi despre mine, să aflu cine-s eu!»

Suprema Existență când se vedește-n lume,
cuvîntul eu devine atuncea al Ei nume.

Și eu și tu deci sîntem sclipirile ce-apar
prin zăbrelita nișă din sfîntul Ei fanar.

Și trupuri ca și duhuri sînt toate o lumină,
ce din oglinzi sau facle țîșnește-atunci deplină.

(...)

Un rai e Existența și-un iad ce-i trecător,
și eu și tu la mijloc, drept vâl despărțitor.”

(*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 257–258)

“Who am I, who?” – Through this question, one of the questions that appear in the prologue of the poem is repeated and analyzed in detail (“Who am I in the world?”). In Eastern philosophy (and in universal

mysticism) the ego is understood as a node in the flow of existence, being the main obstacle to liberation from the cyclical suffering of the world. This is because the ego is a false identity with which man has come to fully identify. All contradictions are rooted in the tendency to view individual existence as separate from universal existence. Inevitably, this perspective extends to God — and the divinity appears as a separate reality from one's own being. All the efforts of the mystic are channeled towards the breaking of the boundary between human and divine and even duality (me and you). Here is how Shabestari's verses present the previous ideas:

“Doar din doi pași drumețu-acest drum îl împlinește,
deși plin de primejdii de-a lungu-i se vădește.
Cu-ntiul pas ajunge pîn-la Unicitate.
Cu-al doilea pas al vieții pustiu el îl străbate.
În acel loc multiplul și Unul sînt totuna,
cum unu-n orice număr se află-ntotdeauna.
Tu ești pluralitatea ce-a-ajuns Unicitate.
Tu ești Unicitatea ce-a-ajuns pluralitate.
Dezleagă taina-aceia ce-alege calea dreaptă
și părăsește partea – și înspre Tot se-ndreaptă.”
(*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 258)

And the fourth question in Shabestari's poem specifically addresses the mystic's initiatic journey (“walking inside you”) and the distinct characteristics that characterized the one who decided to cross this path (*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 258–259). Those verses (like the ones that follow) are particularly suggestive for the study of the problem related to the ego:

“Vezi, tainei Unității ajunge să-i dea glas
doar cel care nu face pe drum niciun popas.
Suprema Existență cunoscătoru-o știe.
Supremei Existențe i-aduce mărturie.
El nu cunoaște-o altă existență-adevărată.
Decît oricare alta, Ea e cea mai curată.
Cum viața ta întreagă e doar o buruiană,
grăbește-te și smulge-o! Fii fără de prihană!
Și curăță prea bine al inimii lăcaș,
să-și facă îndrăgitul din el al Său sălaș.
Cînd vei pleca din tine,-nlăuntru-ți va intra,
și-n tine, făr' de tine, splendoarea-și v-arăta.”
(*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 264)

The expression “in you, without you” very successfully sums up the purpose of the Sufi mystic who wants to eliminate his own ego, so that, in the absence of that fleeting identity, the “beloved” (Allah) can manifest even through the terrestrial body. There are many examples in Persian literature that support this hypothesis. The complete annihilation of the ego gives rise to a new way of “being” by which man completes his condition. The necessity of this stage is due to the fact that the ego and the divinity are incompatible, neither one nor the other can be fully manifested except in the absence of the other. The consequences of eliminating one's ego are detailed in the following verses:

“Cît timp mai este omul de viață întinat,
cunoașterea n-ajunge l-al ei izvor curat.

(...)

Pîn-ce de al tău sine nu te vei lepăda,
cum crezi c-adevărată v-ajunge ruga ta?
Doar cînd a ta esență va fi făr-de-amalgam,
v-ajunge a ta rugă «al ochilor balsam».
Și orice deosebire va fi dispărut
între cel ce cunoaște și Cel cunoscut.”

(*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 265)

In other words, the human soul must regain its uniqueness, escaping from the chains of multiplicity and at the same time integrating the divine: “Bazayid of Bistham, the great Persian mystic (+ 875) says: I am the drinker, the wine, and the cupbearer. In the world of Unification, all are one” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1994, p. 451). By disappearing any distinction between the one who knows and the One who is known, man becomes able to fully understand the mysteries of existence:

“Cînd a-nțeles că toate se trag din Cel Divin,
ca Abraham se-ncrede în Domnul pe deplin.
Cînd îi ajunge vrerii divine-a-i fi unealtă,
el intră ca și Moise pe poarta cea mai ’naltă.
Și cînd se liberează de toată-a sa știință,
el ca Isus, în ceruri s-ajungă-are puțință.
Cînd sinele-și jertfește, de-ndată ce s-a-nfrînt,
lui Mahomed asemeni, se-nalță spre Cel Sfînt.
Și starea lui din urmă cu-ntîia se unește.
Niciun profet sau înger nu i se-asemuiește.”

(*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 260–261)

From a religious perspective, the ultimate goal of the human soul is to follow the Creator’s pattern. In order to reach the state of perfection, the soul must first go through and conquer its own (psychological) hell. The human soul always remains the central point of existence, oscillating between the Creator and the infernal abyss, the “true life” and the “second death”, there being (ultimately) no middle ground between the two. Looking at cosmic evolution as a whole, Sufi mystics claim that the saint is only an intermediate stage between man and angel, and the archangel an intermediate stage between angel and salvation. This hypothesis is confirmed in numerous writings, both those of the mystics of the East and those of the West — here, for example, is a relevant quote in this regard: “But the purified man will not be less than the heavenly spirits, but will become fully like them” (Valentin, 2015, p. 85). Developing this idea, the “The Secret Rose Garden” will present, in an allegorical form, the steps taken by the one who “travels in himself”. The destination of this mystical journey is, of course, the reunion with God.

At the end of Shabestari’s poem, the meeting of the “traveler” with the “light-bearing” principle is described. It is well known that in many mystical-religious traditions of the Middle East the emphasis is on the fact that God (in his ultimate form) must not be represented in any way. Following this principle, Shabestari presents the divinity as a “limitless light” (*Ain Soph Aur*):

“Vezi, fața Celui care în lume-a-adus lumină
și lumea-a-mpodobit-o, mi s-a-arătat deplină.
Cuprins fui de rușine atunci și de-alean,

cînd mi-amintii de viața ce-am risipit-o-n van.
 Dar Astru-acei c-o față sclipind precum un soare,
 văzînd c-orice nădejde din suflet îmi dispare,
 pe loc umplu o cupă și-ndată mi-o întinse.
 Licoarea-atunci în mine o flacăra aprinse.
 «Cu vinu-acesta fără mireasmă și culoare,
 de pe tăblia vieții tu șterge-orice-nsemnare!»
 (*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 281)

Even if the Last Principle of existence is called God, Allah, the Absolute or the Truth, ultimately the name is irrelevant – what matters to the mystic is the full experience of the divine reality. The only way the Last Principle can be known is to “experience” it in all its aspects. The return of the multiple to One takes place in different stages, requiring the successive traversal and understanding of all spheres of manifested existence, beginning with the physical world and ending with the “melting” in the “Sun”. The accomplishment of this “melting” is accomplished through *knowledge*. In Sufism, this type of knowledge is called “ma’rifah” (معرفة), having as its equivalent the Greek term “gnôsis” (γνώσις). Thus, the mystic realizes that *gnosis* is the reason why the individual monad leaves the primordial “non-existence”.

Gnosis is not “knowledge based on reason”, but on experience. To understand life, it must be lived – the same principle applies to any “mystery of existence”: from the microcosm to the archetype. As many religions or philosophical currents have shown, *gnosis* (or *ma’rifah*) is situated beyond theories or beliefs and begins with self-knowledge: “There is no purifying instrument [on earth] like knowledge” (*Bhagavad-Gītā*, 1992, IV, 38). Experienced knowledge involves direct contact with the “unseen” principle of things and even with the very source of creation. In the West, this kind of purely spiritual living — beyond thoughts, reason, or material limits — is called “mystical ecstasy”, and in the East it is known as *samadhi*¹³.

In essence, mystical ecstasy is a way of “being” in the absence of the ego: the rest is just an illusion (*Guénon*, 2005, p. 57). Such an experience is described by Shabestari towards the end of “The Secret Rose Garden”: “Behold, the face of Him who has brought light into the world / and the world has adorned it has been shown to me”. In the verses quoted above, the poet openly calls a revelation (“it was shown to me”) by which it was possible to contemplate divinity.

4. Conclusions

In order to learn to cultivate his own “Secret Rose Garden”, the reader is invited to contemplate the mystery revealed through the poet’s mediation. In writing this poem, the author actually “writes” himself, and the reader is the witness and, at the same time, the disciple who has the chance to decipher the master’s teaching. For this reason, the prologue ends with the following verses:

“Cum Domnul denumit-a-a mea carte o grădină,
 vreau pentru ochii minții să fie o lumină.”
 (*Poeme persane*, 2014, p. 254)

Considering a parallel between the two literary-philosophical visions discussed throughout the article (the Jewish and the Islamic), we will notice that both the biblical Genesis and the poem “The Secret Rose Garden” may refer to macrocosmic creation, but also to the microcosmic creation that reflects, at least in part, the divine splendor. As for the differences between the two proposed contexts, they are more related to the formal representation of the concepts and, therefore, appear to be natural and necessary. However, following the analysis of the proposed passages, it becomes clear that any differences are overshadowed by the ultimate purpose of both texts.

¹³Sanskrit term literally meaning “union” or “combination”.

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