

“Shoring Ghazals Against the Ruins”: A Comparative Modernist Reading of Eliot in Hafez

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Abstract:

Often revered as the pinnacle of classical Persian lyric poetry, Hafez Shirazi is traditionally viewed as a quintessential classical poet whose sonnets embody the timeless elegance of Sufi mysticism, romantic longing, and rhetorical mastery rooted in medieval Islamic literary traditions. However, conventional interpretations often emphasise his adherence to tradition, thereby underestimating certain proto-modernist features in his oeuvre, such as deliberate ambiguity, structural fragmentation, ironic detachment, heightened subjectivity, and the destabilisation of truths and normative structures. Informed by T. S. Eliot’s notions of “Objective Correlative” and “Mythical Method,” the present study comparatively examines selected “ghazals” from Hafez’s corpus against emblematic poems from Eliot’s canon, such as *The Waste Land* and “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” through close textual and thematic analysis, focusing on selections rich in semantic ambiguity, interpretive openness, and structural rupture. This study aims to address three central issues: the elements in Hafez’s poetry that correspond to Eliot’s poetic strategies for evoking emotional states; Hafez’s pioneering elements that echo modernist disruptions in Eliot’s fragmented narratives and ironic voices; and the ways in which Hafez mediates between classical Persian conventions and modernist sensibility. The analysis also incorporates comparative scholarship on “negative capability” and “rhythmic unity” to strengthen the cross-cultural argument and addresses potential charges of anachronism by demonstrating formal and affective convergences. This research frames Hafez as a harbinger of modernism, concluding that his poetry emerges as proto-modernist, where symbols and situations systematically evoke complex emotions, subverting classical norms and fostering fragmentation. This study reveals that while rooted in 14th-century Iran, Hafez anticipates modernism’s sensory precision, thus underscoring his enduring significance in linking Eastern lyrical traditions with Western modernist innovations and inviting broader explorations of cross-cultural poetic resonances.

Keywords: Fragmentation, Hafez Shirazi, Modernism, Semantic Ambiguity, T. S. Eliot, *Divan-e Hafez*

1. Introduction

Hafez Shirazi (1315-1390), also hailed as the “Tongue of the Unseen,” is often celebrated as one of the most canonical theosophical poets of Persian literature, blending Sufi mysticism, romanticism,

and rhetorical finesse (Moein 1996, 273). Compiled after his death, *Divan-e Hafez* is a collection of his surviving poems, which includes Persian, macaronic (Persian/Arabic), and completely Arabic ghazals¹. The profound impact of Hafez on Persian-speaking communities is evident in the integration of his ghazals into traditional Persian music, visual arts, and calligraphy, as well as in the enduring practice of bibliomancy, also known in Iran as "*fāl-e Hāfez*," whereby individuals seek guidance or insight by randomly selecting verses from his *Divan*. Beneath Hafez's classical veneer lie elements that resonate with literary modernism, particularly in their fragmentation, ambiguity, and critique of societal hypocrisy. In his *Faces of Love: Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz* (2013), Dick Davis notes:

Persian medieval lyric poetry is, then, often profoundly, and deliberately, ambiguous. An apparent 'he' in a poem might equally well signify a 'she' or 'He.' A poem might address a lover, or a patron, or God, or some combination of these three, and occasionally some other entity altogether. A reference to wine or a lover might be just that, but it might also be part of an allegory of Sufi aspiration towards the divine. (21-22)

His reception in the 19th and 20th century literature further underscores these notions; Russian modernists engaged his work for experimental, cosmopolitan experimentation (Yahyapour et al. 2018, 13), while Persian modernists such as Mohammad Hossein Shahriyar adapted his ironic tone and equivocal structures (Tousi 2017, 399). Such appropriations highlight how his innovations prefigure modernism and serve as a bridge between historical tradition and emergent modernist sensibilities, positioning his *Divan* as the crossroad between past conventions and contemporary disruption.

This proto-modernist orientation aligns closely with the theoretical frameworks of English modernism. In his *Modernism* (2000), Peter Childs characterises modernism "by a rejection of nineteenth-century traditions ... In poetry, this meant a move away from the sentimentality and moral certainty of Victorian verse towards experimentation with form and a more fragmented style" (17). He further notes that modernist works often employ "allusion to myth and literature" to address the "dislocation and fragmentation" of modern experience, contrasting this with the individualism and narrative coherence of Romantic and Victorian predecessors (14-18). In other words, Modernism in English poetry rejected Victorian sentimentality and romantic individualism, favouring instead experimentation with form, fragmented narratives, and allusions to myth, history, and diverse cultural traditions to capture the disorientation of modern life. One of the canonical poets of English modernism is T. S. Eliot, whose work exemplifies this shift, particularly in his seminal poems, *The Waste Land* (1922) and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915). As a critic, Eliot shaped modernist aesthetics through essays that emphasized impersonality, tradition, and structural innovation, influencing poets like Ezra Pound and W.H. Auden.

Central to Eliot's modernist poetics is the concept of the 'objective correlative,' introduced in his essay "Hamlet and His Problems" (1922). This idea addresses how emotions in art should be evoked indirectly through external elements rather than direct expression, ensuring artistic objectivity and avoiding sentimental excess. Eliot defines it thus: "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts,

which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked” (Eliot 1922, 92). He critiques Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as an artistic failure because the protagonist’s emotions lack adequate external equivalents, resulting in unfocused intensity.

Equally influential is his notion of the ‘mythical method.’ In his *Ulysses, Order, and Myth* (1923), Eliot describes the mythical method as a modernist innovation: “In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him... It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (483). Eliot posits that modernism replaces outdated narrative forms with mythical structures to impose order on modern chaos, drawing parallels between the present and ancient myths to critique and signify contemporary disillusionment.

Applying this framework to Hafez, his poetry – set against the anarchy of post-Mongol invasion Iran, marked by political instability, religious hypocrisy, and social fragmentation – employs traditional Persian and Sufi “myths” to parallel and order the futility of his era. Hafez’s innovations, such as ambiguity, thematic fragmentation, irony, and normative subversion, function as mythical parallels that give shape to chaos, anticipating Eliot’s vision of modernism as a means to make the modern world “possible for art.” This study aims to demonstrate how Hafez bridges classical tradition and modernist sensibility. Extending this, a comparison with Eliot’s own poetry, particularly *The Waste Land*, further bridges Eastern and Western modernisms, as both poets deploy mythical parallels to navigate spiritual desolation, with Hafez’s Sufi mysticism echoing Eliot’s incorporation of Eastern philosophies amid Western fragmentation. While Modernism is historically a Western 20th-century phenomenon, proto-modernist traits in non-Western texts like Hafez highlight global convergences in poetic response to crisis (Hillman 1972, 32-33).

1.2 Literature Review

Hafez has received extensive critical attention, much of it centered on mysticism. While some studies touch on semantic ambiguity and fragmentation, a sustained modernist reading remains scarce. The poetry of Hafez has long been examined through the lens of medieval Islamic traditions, highlighting themes of Sufi mysticism, romantic longing, rhetorical mastery, and adherence to conventional forms, with Hafez’s verses seen as expressions of divine union, spiritual ecstasy, and a longing for the divine, often symbolized through earthly love and intoxication. For instance, Memarzadeh and Ariyan (2016) examine the central antithesis between the *rend* (the rogue or libertine) and the Sufi, portraying this opposition as a core element of Hafez’s worldview and poetic critique of religious hypocrisy. They argue that this dichotomy intertwines mysticism with rogue ethics (*rendi*), mediating between Sufi symbolism and anti-establishment critique, ultimately affirming Hafez’s proto-humanistic stance that elevates the *rend*’s balanced, non-extremist approach to life, love, and spirituality. In a similar vein, Daryoush Ashuri’s *Mysticism and Rendi in Hafez’s Poetry* (2000) frames the *rend*-Sufi antithesis as a core structural and ideological opposition, portraying the *rend* as an irreverent, sincere figure who rejects hypocritical piety.

Hafez's enduring influence on Persian culture extends beyond literary circles, manifesting in practices like bibliomancy, where his *Divan* is consulted for divination, earning him the epithet "Tongue of the Unseen." Recent phenomenological studies confirm that even educated audiences continue to find profound interpretive value in this practice (Najafi et al. 2024). In his "A Review of the History of Bibliomancy and Augury and Their Reflection in Some Persian Historical Chronicles and Literary Texts" (2003), Esmail Hakemi provides a historical overview of the practices of bibliomancy and augury in Persian cultural and literary traditions. A central focus is the prominence of bibliomancy through Hafez Shirazi's *Divan*, often paralleling the use of the Quran. The article underscores the deep integration of these divinatory traditions into Persian cultural life, from pre-Islamic Iranian customs of reading good or bad omens to their enduring literary manifestations in medieval and later periods, portraying them as longstanding mechanisms for interpreting fate and navigating uncertainty within the broader framework of Persian literary heritage. A testament to his relevance in the contemporary era is Ali Najafi and colleagues' "Phenomenological Case Study of Audience Perception of Bibliomancy through Hafez's *Divan*" (2024). They employ a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine how educated audiences, specifically professors and teachers of Persian language and literature, perceive and engage with the traditional Iranian practice of bibliomancy. They reveal that while bibliomancy remains a broad cultural ritual offering hope, empowerment, and aesthetic pleasure, Persian literature experts experience a perceptual shift toward deeper scholarly study and interpretation, unlocking richer, more complex layers of meaning in Hafez's verses through exegesis, thereby transforming a popular divinatory tradition into a profound tool for literary and spiritual reflection, affirming the non-exclusive yet profoundly enriched appeal of Hafez among educated interpreters and up-coming generations. In his *Treatises on Poetics and Rhetoric of the Sixteenth Century* (1972), Lorenzo Giacomini noted how the great Italian poet, Torquato Tasso, had "avoided that superfluous facility of being at once understood, and ... chose the novel, the unfamiliar, the unexpected, the admirable, both in ideas and in words" (128-129). Davis argues that "Giacomini meant this as high praise, and if he could have read Hafez's verse, he would have recognized a kindred spirit, someone who, like Tasso, cherished complexity and 'the unfamiliar, the unexpected'" (*Faces of Love* 23). In this regard, although traditional scholarship views his work through lenses of Sufism or romanticism, contemporary literary theory reveals layers of complexity that align with post/modernism.

Scholarly engagement with modernist or postmodernist interpretations of Hafez remains limited. In their "Postmodernist Elements in the Ghazals of Hafez Shirazi" (2017), Alizadeh and Nazari explore proto-postmodern features, adopting Western theories (Lyotard's metanarrative collapse, McHale's ontological dominant, Bakhtin's carnival) to argue that his ghazals rebel against monolithic beliefs through deliberate ambiguity and the subversion of grand narratives. This postmodern lens serves as a useful foil to the present modernist focus, revealing how Hafez's ambiguity prefigures both movements (Alizadeh and Nazari 2017, 155–156). A significant gap persists: No substantive direct comparisons between Hafez and Eliot have yet been undertaken. Recent scholarship, however, offers

indirect bridges – such as Abbasi and Salimian’s (2012) comparison of Hafez and Keats on negative capability (a concept that influenced Eliot’s impersonality) – and Hillman’s analysis of Hafez’s rhythmic unity, which explicitly references Eliot’s views on rhythm in poetry (Hillman 1972, 32). These studies provide formal and affective grounds for the present comparison.

1.3 Approach and Methodology

This study employs a comparative close-reading approach informed by T. S. Eliot’s concepts of the “objective correlative” and the “mythical method” to examine selected ghazals from *Divan-e Hafez* (Ghani-Qazvini edition) alongside Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and *The Waste Land*. Poems are chosen for their high symbolic density, semantic ambiguity, structural fragmentation, ironic tone, and subversion of normative structures. The analysis addresses three questions: Which elements in Hafez’s poetry correspond to Eliot’s theoretical constructs? What specific innovations in his work may be characterised as modernist? And in what ways does Hafez mediate between classical Persian conventions and a distinctly modernist sensibility? To answer these questions, the article identifies Hafezian symbols (ruined tavern, fickle beloved, wine, *rend*) as objective correlatives that evoke complex emotions through precise sensory images, paralleling Eliot’s indirect evocation of alienation and spiritual desolation; it then examines how Hafez manipulates traditional Sufi and Persian motifs as a mythical method to impose order on the chaos of post-Mongol Iran, much as Eliot uses mythic parallels to structure modern futility. All interpretations remain subordinate to Eliot’s frameworks while respecting Persian poetic conventions, with translations adapted for accuracy from library sources, such as H. Wilberforce Clarke’s translation of the *Divan*, accompanied by the original Persian for fidelity. Although this study discusses some of the backbones of modernism, it is not concerned with the history of ideas. Following the introduction, the next section, titled “Discussion,” presents thematic textual analyses organised around the “objective correlative” and “mythical method” to demonstrate proto-modernist traits. Lastly, the “Conclusion” synthesises Hafez’s work as a proto-modernist bridge between classical tradition and modernist innovation, affirming its enduring cross-cultural relevance.

2. Discussion

This section investigates Hafez’s poetry in light of the proto-modernist elements and through the lenses of Eliot’s Objective Correlative and Mythical Method. The recurrent keywords, employed in this analysis, associated with modernism are semantic ambiguity, structural fragmentation, ironic detachment, heightened subjectivity, and the destabilisation of truths and normative structures.

2.1 Ambiguity and Multiplicity of Meanings

This section employs Eliot’s concept of the “mythical method” as a critical lens to analyse the technique of *ihām* (double meaning) in Hafez’s poetry. It argues that for both poets, ambiguity is not merely a decorative rhetorical device but a foundational structural principle that fragments

coherent narrative, subverts authoritative interpretation, and transfers the burden of meaning-making to the reader, thereby enacting a proto-modernist and modernist critique of unitary truth.

Hafez's manipulation of the inherited *ghazalyiat* tradition performs a function analogous to Eliot's mythical method: both engage with a cultural archive not for veneration but for strategic, often subversive, juxtaposition. Eliot proposed manipulating "a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" as a means to "control... the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (*Ulysses, Order, and Myth* 483). Hafez, writing in the turbulent post-Mongol era, executes a parallel maneuver. His *ihām* establishes a continuous dialectic between the immediate, often profane, realities of courtly life, political hypocrisy, and sensual desire, and the antique, sacred frameworks of Sufi metaphysics and Qur'anic morality. This technique does not resolve the tension between these poles but sustains it, transforming the poem into a field of subjectal interpretation.

In his "Īhām, or the Technique of Double Meaning in Literature" (2023), Shahrouz Khanjari notes that "Īhām is one of the most prominent semantic strategies in Persian and Arabic poetry ... This figure of speech becomes especially popular among both the Persian mannerist and mystic poets and is one of the essential features of their poetry" (458). In his *Ḥadā'iq al-Siḥr* (1929), Vatvat defines *ihām* as the following:

In Persian, *ihām* means 'to throw into an illusion.' They also call this artifice *takhyīl*. It consists of the prose writer or the poet utilizing in his prose or poetry words that have a double meaning, one near (*qarīb*) and the other strange (*gharīb*). When the listener hears these words, his mind turns immediately to the near meaning, though what is meant by the word in question is the strange one. (31)

This inherent ambiguity is emblemised in the poet's chosen name, Hafez, which is derived from an Arabic root that means "to preserve" or "to keep" (*Moein Encyclopedic Dictionary* 354). By extension, a Hafez is the "One who knows the Qur'an by heart." However, in medieval Iran, another knowledge was preserved by heart: A knowledge of musical technique, which "was passed on entirely by example and apprenticeship, not by texts, so music needed such 'preservers' if it was to survive from one generation to the next" (*Faces of Love* 25). It should be noted that in the eyes of the medieval Iranian society, musicians were the literal antithesis of the reciters of the Qur'an, who were respectable professionals "that presupposed a sober disposition," in contrast with musicians who were associated with "a lifestyle that to the religiously respectable would be considered immoral" (25). The name itself, therefore, operates as a perfect *ihām*: it is a compressed, self-referential objective correlative for the central conflict in his work – the irresolvable pull between sacred duty and secular beauty, between divine law (*shari'a*) and mystical truth (*haqiqa*). It prefigures the reader's experience of the *Divan*, where every symbol is split between its "near" (*qarīb*) and "strange" (*gharīb*) meanings.

Unlike classical poetry's often resolved allegories, Hafez's verses evoke a dissociated sensibility, where readers must navigate parallels to derive significance. For instance, in Ghazal 220, the word *hawā* oscillates between "air" (literal) and "desire" (figurative), or *Sineh*, meaning both "chest" and "heart," embedding ambiguity in the lover's plea:

«مادر درون سینه هوایی نهفته ایم / بر باد اگر رَوَد دل ما زان هوا رود»

Within the chest, a great air we have concealed

If, through that air, to the wind of destruction our heart goeth, it goeth. (Homayoun Far 301)

Similarly, the same oscillation is present in Ghazal 230:

«چمن خوش است و هوا دلکش است و می بی غش / کنون به جز دل خوش هیچ در نمی باید»

Pleasant is the sward, heart-alluring is the air, pure is the wine

Now, save the joyous heart, naught is wanting. (330)

This strategic undecidability is the engine of Hafez's proto-modernism. In Ghazal 220, the word *hawā* functions as a pivotal, unstable correlative. It can be read as the "air" concealed within the breast, or as "desire"/"passion" itself. The line, "Within the chest, a great air/desire we have concealed," becomes a psychological tableau. Is the "heart" (*dil*) carried away by a destructive wind (a literal reading implying fate), or consumed by its own overwhelming passion (a figurative, psychological reading)? The poem offers no synthesis. This dissociation of the poetic symbol from a single referent forces a subjective, participatory readership. The reader must choose, and in choosing, implicates their own sensibility, mirroring the modernists' rejection of objective, authorial dictate. This *ihām* evokes negative capability—tolerating uncertainty without resolution—linking to Eliot's impersonality (Abbasi and Salimian 5).

Eliot's *The Waste Land* achieves a remarkably similar effect through its encyclopedic, cross-cultural "mythical method." His use of the Sanskrit dictum "DA" in "What the Thunder Said" is a direct parallel to Hafez's *ihām*. The fragment "DA" is the irreducible, ambiguous core – like Hafez's *hawā* – that branches into three imperative interpretations: *Datta* (Give), *Dayadhvam* (Sympathize), *Damyata* (Control). Eliot does not privilege one; instead, he presents them as simultaneous, competing commands to a fractured civilisation. The thunder's utterance is not a clarified revelation but a polyvocal echo, demanding the reader's navigation. This technique, as Ramesh Adhikary notes, imports Upanishadic philosophy to diagnose Western postwar fragmentation (112-113). The ambiguity is not a lack of meaning, but an overabundance of competing meanings from disparate traditions (Vedic, Christian, Buddhist) that the poem's structure holds in tense, unresolved parallel:

Then spoke the thunder

DA

Datta: what have we given?

...

DA

Dayadhvam: I have heard the key

...

DA

Damyata: The boat responded (*Wasteland*, lines 400-402/ 411-412/ 418-419)

This echoes Hafez's *ihām*, where divine love ambiguously signifies earthly or spiritual union, bridging Eastern (Sufi/Iranian mysticism) and Western (Christian/modernist) traditions. Eliot's Harvard studies in Sanskrit and Pali influenced such parallels, showing "Indian thought" in his work (Adhikary 2025, 110), while Hafez's Quranic allusions anticipate this fusion, as both poets use ambiguity to order existential chaos.

Hillman argues Hafez's quantitative rhythms unify disparate couplets, creating "organic integration" beyond meaning, akin to Eliot's emphasis on rhythm disposing readers to deeper engagement (Hillman 1972, 32). This musicality fosters negative capability, tolerating ambiguities like *hawā*, paralleling Eliot's dissociated sensibility in *The Waste Land* (Eliot, "Tradition" 41).

2.2 The Beloved as Correlative for Fragmented Desire and Ambiguity

This subsection applies Eliot's concept of the "objective correlative" to comparatively analyze the figure of the beloved (*ma'shūq* or *negār*) in Hafez and analogous figures in Eliot's poetry, particularly the elusive, unattainable female presences in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*. The analysis demonstrates how the beloved functions as a precise "set of objects, a situation, a chain of events" that indirectly evokes complex emotions of unattainable desire, fragmentation, ironic disillusionment, and existential ambiguity, avoiding direct sentimental expression and instead relying on sensory and situational precision to "immediately evoke" the emotion ("Hamlet and His Problems" 92).

In Hafez, the beloved emerges as a quintessential objective correlative for the perpetual deferral of union – whether earthly, mystical, or both – through layered sensory details and situational chains that generate emotional multiplicity. Consider Ghazal 94, where the beloved's tress (*zolf*) becomes a lethal noose, the glance (*ghamze*) a blood-drinking weapon, and the act of Qur'anic recitation with "fourteen traditions" (*chahārdah rivāyat*) a paradoxical condition of salvation:

«در زلف چون کمندش ای دل مپیچ کآنجا / سرها بریده بینی بی جرم و بی جنایت
چشمیت به غمزه مارا خون خورد و می‌پسندی / جاناروا نباشد خونریز را حمایت
هرچند بردی آب روی از درت نتابم / جور از حبیب خوشتر کز مدعی رعایت
عشقت رسد به فریاد و خود به سان حافظ / قرآن ز بر بخوانی در چهارده روایت»

O Heart! In His tress-like noose, twist not; For there,
Thou seest severed heads, crimeless, guiltless.

With a glance, Thy eye drank our blood; and Thou approves:
O Soul! Lawful is not protection to the blood-shedder.

Although, thou snatchest my honour, I turn not my face from Thy door:
More pleasant is violence from the Beloved, than from the enemy, courtesy.

To thy complaint, love reacheth, if like Hafez
Thou recite the Kuran with the fourteen traditions. (Homayoun Far 190)

The chain of images forms a situational correlative that simultaneously evokes longing, devotion, irony, and interpretive fragmentation. The pronoun “His” (divine or human beloved) and the ambiguous last couplet can be read as: “if you recite the Qur’an fourteen ways like Hafez, love will come to your aid,” or “even fourteenfold recitation avails nothing without true love.” Thus, shatter singular meaning, mirroring the modernist stream-of-consciousness and resistance to closure. The beloved’s cruelty thus becomes a formula for the emotion of ecstatic yet painful deferral, where sensory violence (severed heads, blood) indirectly summons spiritual fragmentation and hope amid uncertainty.

A parallel dynamic appears in Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” where the “women [who] come and go / Talking of Michelangelo” (lines 13-14) and the imagined beloved in the speaker’s reveries function as an objective correlative for paralyzed desire and self-fragmentation. Prufrock’s obsessive cataloguing of trivial sensory details, “the yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes” (line 15), “the bald spot in the middle of my hair” (line 40), “arms that are braceleted and white and bare” (line 63), and his inability to act, “Do I dare / Disturb the universe?” (lines 45-46), evoke overwhelming feelings of insignificance, erotic anxiety, and existential dislocation without direct statement. Like Hafez’s beloved, Eliot’s female presence remains distant, capricious, and unattainable, her mere presence or imagined gaze fragmenting the speaker’s identity into ironic self-mockery: “I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be” (line 115).

In *The Waste Land*, the fragmented female figures, such as Lil, the typist, the hyacinth girl, the Thames-daughters, collectively serve as objective correlatives for post-war spiritual sterility and thwarted desire. The typist’s mechanical encounter, “The time is now propitious, as he guesses, / The meal is ended, she is bored and tired” (lines 235-236), and the hyacinth girl’s ambiguous gift, “You gave me hyacinths first a year ago; / ‘They called me the hyacinth girl’” (lines 35-36), evoke a chain of sensory impressions that immediately summon emotions of disillusionment, emotional numbness, and the collapse of romantic transcendence, paralleling Hafez’s oscillation between earthly and divine longing. Ghazal 167 further exemplifies this correlative function through the paradox of the “illiterate beloved”:

«نگار من که به مکتب نرفت و خط ننوشت / به غمزه مسئله آموز صد مدرس شد»

My beloved, who never went to school nor learnt to write
By a glance became the teacher of a hundred scholars. (Homayoun Far 240)

Here, the beloved (*negār*), often symbolizing divine beauty, earthly love, or a mystical ideal, is described

as completely "illiterate." Yet, through one effortless coquettish glance, this beloved instantly teaches profound lessons to learned scholars. In this regard, this concrete scene serves as the formula (objective correlative) for ironic wisdom: the insight is the ironic realisation that profound, transformative knowledge often comes from humble, non-academic, even "sinful" or sensual sources. This situational correlative subverts religious orthodoxy, academic hierarchy, and social norms central to medieval Iran, much as Eliot's typist and hyacinth girl undermine Victorian ideals of romantic purity and intellectual mastery. The "*rend*" persona in Hafez – reveling in the beloved's unlettered gaze – organises chaotic learning into a transcendent formula, evoking emotions of subversive unity and ecstatic humility. In both poets, the beloved's elusiveness and ambiguity thus become a modernist instrument: a precise mechanism that, through sensory indirection, evokes the fragmented, unattainable nature of desire itself, bridging Hafez's Sufi-inflected irony with Eliot's post-war existential rupture.

The beloved in Hafez parallels the "hyacinth girl" in Eliot's *The Waste Land* in evoking loss through floral imagery, but Hafez's "ghamze" adds erotic subversion absent in Eliot's sterility (Kanojia 2025, 56). This distinction underscores Hafez's proto-modernist blend of sensuality and spirituality, enriching the comparative analysis by highlighting cultural nuances in emotional evocation.

2.3 Irony and Subversion as Critique of Contemporary Futility

Informed by Eliot's "mythical method" and "objective correlative," this subsection conducts a comparative investigation into the roles of irony and subversive critique in Hafez's ghazals and Eliot's poetry, focusing on how both poets dismantle religious and social hypocrisies. The analysis reveals how ambiguity in Hafez parallels the futility of his era's norms, while the "*rend*" persona juxtaposes antique spiritual ideals with contemporary defiance, using Eliot's mythical lens to signify and structure societal anarchy.

Eliot emphasizes the mythical method's capacity to confront and shape "the immense panorama of futility" in contemporary history (*Ulysses, Order, and Myth* 483). Similarly, Hafez's irony inverts traditional motifs of piety and debauchery to parallel the religious and social hypocrisies of post-Mongol Iran with mythic archetypes, thereby critiquing chaos while imposing a provisional order through subversive reversals. Central to this is Hafez's conviction that "the greatest sin is hypocrisy" (*Faces of Love* 24), a stance that deploys irony to unmask pretense, resonating with modernism's disillusionment in the wake of The Great War. In Ghazal 200, Hafez lists archetypal figures – the sheikh (spiritual guide), Hafez (Qur'an memorizer, punning on his own name and musical "preservers"), *mufti* (jurist), and *mohtaseb* (censor) – to expose their shared duplicity:

«می خور که شیخ و حافظ و مفتی و محتسب / چون نیک بنگری همه تزویر می کنند»

Drink wine. For the Sheikh, and Hafez, and the Mufti, and the Muhtaseb
All when thou lookest well are frauds. (Homayoun Far 290)

This ambiguity parallels the futility of Hafez's hypocritical society. Through claiming that everybody is a deceiver, Hafez fragments the poem's voice, while dismantling religious authority, all of which are a proto-modernist subversion of grand narratives, much as Eliot's ironic voices in *The Waste Land* mock bourgeois pretensions and spiritual emptiness. The ambiguity of "Hafez" as both pious reciter and profane musician parallels societal futility, evoking a sensory disillusionment that functions as an objective correlative for collective hypocrisy. The external list of roles indirectly summons emotions of defiant liberation and existential skepticism without overt moralising. Ghazal 202 extends this subversion by contrasting the tavern (*kharābāt*, mythic refuge of authenticity) with the mosque (site of hypocritical antiquity):

«در میخانه بیستند خدایا میسند / که در خانه تزویر و ریا بگشایند
حافظ این خرقة که داری تو ببینی فردا / که چه زُنار ز زیرش به دغا بگشایند.»

O God! They closed the door of the wine-house; approve not
For the door of deception and of hypocrisy, they will open.

Hafez! This Khirka that thou hast, Tomorrow thou wilt see
How, with violence, the religious cord of infidelity from beneath it, they will loosen. (294)

Hafez frequently evokes wine (*mev*) and the tavern (*kharābāt*) as objective correlatives for spiritual ecstasy tempered by irony, evoking disillusionment with societal piety, all of which serve as a modernist critique of hypocrisy. Here, the closed tavern and open "house of deceit" form a chain that evokes ironic rebellion; the sensory image of barred doors triggers emotions of exclusion and authenticity, which contrasts joy with religious pretense. This mirrors Eliot's portrayal of urban decay in *The Waste Land* as an objective correlative for spiritual aridity, where "the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief" (lines 23-24) indirectly evokes post-war desolation and hypocritical modernity (Jmukhadze 2023, 3-4). Hafez's *rend* persona, embracing the Sufi cloak (*kherqeh*) while exposing its hollowness, parallels ancient wisdom with defiant modernity, signifying anarchy through mythical inversion. In other words, though outwardly Sufi, the *rend* rejects superficial piety, much as Eliot's Fisher King, in *The Waste Land*, embodies futile quests for renewal amid barren landscapes.

Eliot's irony in *The Waste Land* similarly subverts norms by collocating Eastern and Western asceticism; The "Fire Sermon" draws on Buddhist renunciation to critique modern lust, "Burning burning burning burning," line 308), while the Upanishadic "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata" (lines 401-423) ironically urges compassion in a fragmented, uncompassionate world (Kanojia 2025, 55). This echoes Hafez's tavern as a mythic site of genuine spirituality amid hypocrisy, bridging Eastern Sufi defiance and Western modernist critique. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Eliot's ironic self-subversion, "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons" (line 51), parallels the *rend*'s mocking of his own pretensions, using trivial sensory details to evoke futility and reorder personal anarchy through detached observation. Thus, both poets employ irony and subversion as mythical

tools to confront historical rupture, with Hafez's proto-modernist *rend* anticipating Eliot's fragmented speakers in navigating spiritual desolation.

2.4 Fragmentation as Mythical Ordering of Chaos

This subsection utilizes Eliot's "mythical method" to comparatively dissect fragmentation in Hafez's ghazals and Eliot's poetry, illustrating how both achieve order through disjointed structures, imagistic mosaics, and abrupt shifts that replace linear narratives with subjective, polyphonic collages.

Eliot posits the mythical method as a means of "controlling, of ordering" the disarray of modernity, supplanting outdated forms like the novel with mythic parallels that lend "shape and significance" to chaos (*Ulysses, Order, and Myth* 483). Hafez's ghazals similarly manifest fragmentation: couplets often link tenuously, forming imagistic mosaics rather than cohesive plots, a departure from classical Persian thematic unity that aligns with modernist techniques in *The Waste Land*. In Ghazal 176, the beloved transforms across identities, from sweet sovereign (*khosrow-e shirin*) to idol (*sanam*), musk deer (*ābu-ye moshkin*), falcon (*shāhin*), and rose (*gol*), while the lover mirrors as worshiper, vagrant, pigeon, and nightingale, interwoven with personified elements like vigilant fortune and the spring breeze:

«سحرم دولت بیدار به بالین آمد / گفت برخیز که آن خسرو شیرین آمد
قدحی درکش و سرخوش به تماشا بخرام / تا ببینی که نگارت به چه آیین آمد
مژدگانی بده ای خلوتی نافه گشای / که ز صحرای ختن آهوی مشکین آمد
گریه آبی به رخ سوختگان باز آورد / ناله فریادرس عاشق مسکین آمد
مرغ دل باز هوادار کمان ابرویست / ای کبوتر نگران باش که شاهین آمد
رسم بدعهدی ایام چو دید ابر بهار / گریه اش بر سمن و سنبل و نسرين آمد
چون صبا گفته حافظ بشنید از بلبل / عنبر افشان به تماشای ریاحین آمد»

The passage may be approximately translated as follows:

In the morning, to my pillow, vigilant fortune came
Said arise for that thy sweet Khusru hath come

A goblet drink and, for seeing Him, merry of head go
That thou mayest see in what fashion, thy idol hath come

O musk-pod opener Khilvati! Give glad tidings that
From Khutan a musky deer hath come

To the cheek of those consumed, weeping hath brought back a great ruddy lustre
Weeping, the helper of the wretched lover, hath come

Again desirous of the eye – brow bow is the bird of my heart
O Pigeon! Be expectant, for the falcon hath come

When the spring-cloud beheld Time's bad faith
On the lily and the rose, its weeping rain came

When, from the nightingale, the morning breeze heard Hafez's utterance
At the spectacle of the sweet basil, ambergris-scattering, it came. (Homayoun Far 263-264)

This imagistic collage rejects the organic unity, emphasizing subjective experience and psychological depth, all of which are in line with the modernist explorations of inner consciousness. Such fragmentation extends to voice as well; for example, the above Ghazal incorporates dialogues and personified elements (e.g., the wind as messenger), which disrupt monologic norms and anticipate modernist polyphony. This kaleidoscopic fragmentation echoes Hafez's chaotic era with Iranian mythical motifs, giving "shape and significance" to futility, just like Eliot's description of Ulysses as a step toward "making the modern world possible for art" (*Ulysses, Order, and Myth* 75). Dialogic elements in Hafez's Ghazals further fragment voice, using mythical winds or messengers to order interpersonal anarchy. Countering potential anachronism in applying modernist theory to medieval poetry, Hillman notes that Hafez's rhythms unify fragments organically, prefiguring Eliot's auditory poetics and demonstrating how formal elements transcend historical boundaries (Hillman 1972, 33). This rhythmic cohesion supports the argument that Hafez's fragmentation serves a modernist-like ordering function, even within classical constraints.

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot's fragmentation – shifting voices, languages (English, German, French, Sanskrit), and myths (Arthurian Grail, Buddhist Fire Sermon) – parallels the mosaic structure of Hafez. The "Fire Sermon" section juxtaposes modern urban squalor, "By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept" (line 182), with Eastern ascetic renunciation, paralleling desire's barrenness much as Hafez's shifting identities critique societal disarray. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," fragmentation manifests in non-linear reveries and imagistic bursts, "In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo," (lines 13-14), using mythic allusions (Lazarus, Hamlet) to structure personal futility. This cross-cultural resonance positions Hafez's Sufi-inflected fragments (tavern as mythic truth amid hypocrisy) as precursors to Eliot's syncretic collage, where the Upanishadic "Shantih shantih shantih" (line 434) invokes fragile peace in anarchy, akin to Hafez's ironic pursuit of union in a disjointed cosmos – fostering a unified vision of world literature through mythical ordering.

3. Conclusion

While Hafez Shirazi remains firmly anchored in the classical forms, Sufi traditions, and 14th-century Persian cultural milieu, his pervasive semantic ambiguity (*ībhām*), ironic detachment, structural fragmentation, and deliberate subversion of religious and social orthodoxies disclose unmistakable proto-modernist tendencies that complicate any reduction of his work to mere tradition. These elements not only deepened and invigorated Iranian lyric poetry but also resonate profoundly with the core impulses of global literary modernism. Through the dual lenses of T. S. Eliot's "objective correlative" and "mythical method," Hafez's ghazals reveal themselves as far more than relics of

medieval elegance: they function as sophisticated instruments for ordering existential and historical chaos. Recurring symbols—the fickle beloved, the ruined tavern, wine as perilous ecstasy, the *rend*'s defiant persona—serve as precise objective correlatives that evoke complex, often contradictory emotions (longing laced with disillusionment, spiritual yearning shadowed by irony) through sensory indirection rather than declarative excess, mirroring Eliot's own technique of indirect evocation in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (the coffee-spoon life measuring out paralysis) and *The Waste Land* (the heap of broken images crystallizing post-war sterility). Simultaneously, Hafez manipulates traditional Persian and Sufi mythic repertoires—rose and nightingale, *pir-e moḡān*, moth and candle—to forge continuous parallels between the hypocrisy and political fragmentation of post-Mongol Iran and archetypal quests for authenticity, thereby imposing provisional shape and significance on "the immense panorama of futility" in a manner strikingly akin to Eliot's deployment of Grail legends, fertility myths, Buddhist asceticism, and Upanishadic imperatives to structure modern desolation. This convergence underscores a shared response to spiritual barrenness across centuries and geographies: Hafez's *rend*, outwardly cloaked in Sufi garb yet inwardly rebelling against pious pretense, parallels Eliot's thunderous "DA" (Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata) issuing ironic calls for generosity, sympathy, and self-control amid a wasteland of emotional and moral exhaustion. Both poets deploy layered, ironic, and fragmented allusions to confront societal and personal anarchy—Hafez through the Eastern mysticism of wine-soaked taverns and hypocritical sheikhs, Eliot through a syncretic collage of Western crisis and Eastern philosophies—thus demonstrating how Hafez anticipates modernism's sensory precision, psychological depth, and refusal of easy resolutions. Future scholarship could productively extend this framework by undertaking sustained line-by-line comparisons between specific ghazals and poems such as *The Waste Land* or "Prufrock," or by applying Eliot's critical poetics (impersonality, tradition, dissociation of sensibility) to illuminate Hafez's rhetorical borrowings and innovations, thereby further illuminating the deep, reciprocal affinities between Eastern lyrical mysticism and Western modernist experiment.

Endnote:

1. A sonnet-like form of lyric poetry typically comprising 9-12 couplets bound by meter, rhyme, and often a refrain (*radif*), where individual lines appear disparate but contribute to a unified thematic scheme.

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