

The Metaphysics of Creativity: Imagination in Sufism, from the Qurʾān into Ibn al-ʿArabī

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And not an ordinary Arab, someone who is a poet ... is needed to understand that writing [of Ibn al-ʿArabī].

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1 Introduction

In his survey of Islamic theology, *Theologie Und Gesellschaft*, Joseph Van Ess offers the following remarks on the condition of the Muslim community after the passing of the prophet Muḥammad: “One had to realize that the prophetic event had ended; of the Word, only the writing remains.”² Indeed, the ensuing chapters in that work – and countless others – that highlight the myriad of theological schools and sects with dissenting differences that emerged within the Muslim community, after this “prophetic event,” appear to support the proposition that only the “writing remains” of the Word that had been revealed to the Prophet.

And yet, for all the tremendous dissonance in dogma and pragma that had overwhelmed this nascent community of faith, the various groups who considered themselves “Muslims” still managed to find within the contours of the Word that had been revealed to the Prophet traces of that divine spark beyond the writing. Sometimes, this resurrection of the original prophetic state appeared as a common bond that united members of a sect, while other times it was used to marginalize entire peoples outside the fold of Islam.

Either way, the assessment offered in *Theologie Und Gesellschaft* seems to reflect only a partial reality of a religion that continues to survive fourteen centuries after its birth. A more recent survey on Islamic thought and practice,

1 Hisham Kabbani, “Invoking the Beloved,” Lecture, Yale University, February 24, 2013, <https://sufilive.com/Invoking-the-Beloved-4872-EN-print.html>.

2 Joseph Van Ess, *Theologie Und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 1, 3.

Shahab Ahmed's *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* – which might be considered a much-needed reformulation of the antiquated opinions voiced by Van Ess and others – focuses on this perplexing force that seems to tie the lives of countless Muslims together despite their differences in language, culture and contentious understandings of their faith.

Ahmed's solution is to focus less on the difference in beliefs and practices and more on the shared principles that sustain them in the collective imagination of the community. The author presents the *Pre-Text*, *Text* and *Con-Text* as key operators that account for the diversity of Muslims living in the "Balkans to Bengal complex."³ Ahmed describes the first of these concepts, the *Pre-Text*, as that which is "ontologically and alethically prior to the Text and is that upon which the Truth of the Text is contingent."⁴ Simply put, the *Pre-Text* is the "Unseen" spiritual realm, while the *Text*, at least in this excerpt, seems to refer solely to the Qur'ān as the scripture recited and experienced by Muslims.

However, such a limited designation of the *Text* quickly dissipates as one reads Ahmed's entire magnum opus. Muslim philosophers, for instance, do not perceive the Qur'ān as a necessary medium with which intelligent seekers need to engage in order to interact with the *Pre-Text*. Rather, the latter should simply refer to the writings of philosophers for this knowledge.⁵ On the other hand, for Sufis, the Qur'ān is but one of many texts that can channel the *Pre-Text* into the sphere of belief and social practice. Perhaps the most poignant example of this is the celebrated compendium of poetry, the *Mathnawī*, by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), which was – and still is – regarded by many Sufi devotees as the "Qur'ān in Persian."⁶ In this regard, it is the *Con-Text*, or "the body of meaning that is the product and outcome of previous hermeneutical engagement with Revelation,"⁷ which decides which texts predominate as channels to access the *Pre-Text* in a given society or culture.

These three constructs together allow Ahmed to present Islam not as a static object of analysis, but as the very idiom or language through which "people express themselves so as to communicate meaningfully."⁸ More than that, the author posits that Islam is "the reality of the experience itself," not only the "means by which an experience is given meaning."⁹ This creative rendering of

3 Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 32.

4 Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 347.

5 Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 348.

6 Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 307.

7 Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 356.

8 Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 323.

9 Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 323.

Islam as a movement to produce meaning, and meaning itself, pays homage to the name of the religion, which means – among many things – “to submit” and, thus, affirms an inward journey towards God, who is the ultimate meaning for believers.

In “Imaging Islam: Intellect and Imagination in Islamic Philosophy, Poetry and Painting,” James Morris highlights how Muslim philosophers and mystics have performed Ahmed’s rendition of Islam precisely through novel engagements with scripture (*Text*), in order to channel the *Pre-Text* into their *Con-Text*, using unique cultural and historical constructs. One of these figures, the celebrated *Shaykh al-Akbar* (Greatest Master) Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1240), Morris tells us, left us with a heritage that is “so profoundly rooted in both the letter and the deepest spirit of the Qur’ān.”¹⁰ Beyond this, it is also Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ability to communicate this “deepest spirit of the Qur’ān” not only to religious scholars, but also “secular interpreters, poets, teachers, and translators,”¹¹ some eight centuries after his passing that makes him truly unique. This is corroborated by the quote in the epigraph, attributed to the contemporary Sufi guide, Shaykh Hisham Kabbani, who emphasizes the poetic spirit needed to understand the Greatest Master’s writings.

A preliminary reading of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works does not help explain this unique dissemination among a diverse audience. On the contrary, his magnum opus, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* (Meccan Openings) and second most-important work, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (Bezels of Wisdom), both contain as many – if not more – convoluted discourses on dialectical theology and metaphysics as can be found in many classical tomes of Islamic thought. If readers are not deterred by this specialized terminology, then they might very well be dissuaded by the countless controversial excerpts wherein he contravenes normative Islamic orthodoxy and scholarly consensus.¹²

In order to partially explain this attraction to Ibn al-‘Arabī and his writings by scholars and artists alike,¹³ I suggest we return to Ahmed’s definition of

10 James J. Morris, “Imaging Islam: Intellect and Imagination in Islamic Philosophy, Poetry, and Painting,” *Religion and the Arts* 12 (2008): 306.

11 Morris, “Imaging Islam,” 306.

12 Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1999), VII, 339, and Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 2002), 201 respectively.

13 A prominent example of a poet who has incorporated Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Weltanschauung into his work is Abdelwahab Meddeb’s *Tombeau of Ibn ‘Arabī and White Traverses*. Oludamini Ogunnaike has also shown the presence of Akbarian motifs in the film *Inception*, see Oludamini Ogunnaike, “Inception and Ibn ‘Arabī,” *Journal of Religion & Film* 17, no. 2 (2013): 1–52.

Islam, as the “means through which an experience is given meaning.” It is the very language and rhetorical style which the Greatest Master uses to express his own journey that, I posit, continues to attract readers today, in addition to the novel ideas in his works. In this regard, Ibn al-‘Arabī brilliantly conveys a subtle trait prevalent in many Sufi writings: the mystical experience is inseparable from the very language used to describe it.

In the ensuing paragraphs, we will attempt to decipher this creative rhetorical style by analyzing selections from the *Meccan Openings* and *Bezels of Wisdom*. Our focus will be on those discussions pertaining to *khayāl* (imagination) and how the author travels, semantically and spiritually, back and forth from language to meaning, and from body to spirit. Our journey will begin with the prophet Muḥammad and then delve into the significance of ‘Īsā b. Maryam (Jesus son of Mary), as an archetype of divine creativity and imagination. Thenceforth, we will conclude by synthesizing Ibn al-‘Arabī’s portrayals of Muḥammad, Jesus and *khayāl* (imagination), with some final remarks on the significance of this discourse on our understanding of human creativity and art.

As will become evident, for Ibn al-‘Arabī, *‘ālam al-khayāl* (the realm of imagination) is one where dense bodies are spiritualized and subtle spirits are embodied. Alternatively, it is a realm that resides at the *barzakh* (interstice), between the physical residence of bodies and spiritual abode of spirits. In this sense, imagination for Ibn al-‘Arabī is what connects Ahmed’s *Pre-Text* to both the *Text* and *Con-Text*. It is the very process of rendering what is ineffable and beyond language in the various mediums of human expression.

It is from this perspective also that art emerges in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought as any attempt by humans – and perhaps any other created being – to reside in the imaginal realm and travel back and forth between the *Pre-Text* of creative divine inspiration and the *Con-Text* of art in all its forms. More importantly, from this perspective, scripture emerges not entirely separate from human art, but rather the ideal archetype for eloquence and sacred creativity. Simply, the Word in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought is a blueprint for all human artistry.

2 Akbarian Muḥammadology

If there is such a body of knowledge in Christianity known as Christology, or “the part of theology, concerned with the body and work of Jesus,”¹⁴ then a

14 Matt Stephon, and Hans Hillerbrand, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 8th ed. s.v. “Christology,” 2016.

similar designation of “Muḥammadology” should also be used to describe the overarching narrative of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysics, and many other Sufi mystics for that matter.¹⁵

One cannot overemphasize the centrality of the prophet Muḥammad to the entire structure of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought. Consider what he says in the *Meccan Openings* regarding the Prophet’s cosmological primacy: “What honor is greater than that of Muḥammad, for he was the beginning of this circle [of existence], he is connected to its end and its completion is through him. In this way, through him things began and through him they are perfected.”¹⁶

A similar sentiment can also be found in the *Bezels of Wisdom*, wherein the author references the title of the chapter devoted to Muḥammad, “The Bezel of a Singular Wisdom in a Muḥammadan Word”: “His wisdom is singular because he is the most perfect being in this human species. This is why the affair began with him and, as such, it is also sealed.”¹⁷

The cornerstone of this superiority, which Ibn al-‘Arabī alludes to in these excerpts, is that the Prophet is both the first creation and spring for the rest of creation. Here, the Andalusian mystic is relying upon a well-known *ḥadīth* (prophetic narration) where the Prophet is asked by one of his companions about God’s first creative act, to which the former responds: “The first thing that God created is the light of your Prophet.”¹⁸ From this perspective, it is the spirit or essence of Muḥammad that is perceived as the first creation, not his physical body.

And it is this essence-beyond-form of the Prophet that became known as *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* (Muḥammadan Reality) among Muslim mystics, most notably Ibn al-‘Arabī.¹⁹ Returning to the reference to Christology, one might say that the Muḥammadan Reality plays a similar – central – role in Muḥammadology as the Logos does in Christian theology.

15 The superiority of the Prophet Muḥammad’s rank has been the focus of numerous Muslim authors, going back to the first generation of Muslims. As Michael Sells shows in “Early Sufi Qur’ān Interpretation,” the sixth-generation descendant of the Prophet, Imām Ja’far al-Ṣādiq (d. 765) was already expounding upon *al-nūr al-muḥammadi* (Muḥammadan Light) a mere century after the former’s passing.

16 Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*, 369.

17 Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 214.

18 Aḥmad Al-Qaṣṭalānī, *Al-Mawāhib al-Ladunniyya bi-l-Minaḥ al-Muḥammadiyya*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 2004), 71. It should be known that while many religious scholars doubt the authenticity of this *ḥadīth*, it is still considered foundational for Sufi mystics like Ibn al-‘Arabī.

19 Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* 1, 276. On page 247, in the same volume, the author also describes *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* as *ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā’iq* (the reality of realities).

As Ibn al-ʿArabī proposes in the excerpts above, the cosmogenic importance of the Prophet is not simply a matter of sequence, but that his essence and spirit are also the very fabric of creation. In this grand cosmic theater of sacred history, Muḥammad is simultaneously the stage, actors, props and audience. He fulfills and unfolds the direction and production of the creative divine will.

And truly, it would not be a farfetched analogy to portray the mystic's perception of creation in its entirety as theater; a fortunate happenstance considering the focus of this volume on "art and imagination." For alongside the *ḥadīth* of the original creation, there is another narration, also central to Sufi thought, known as the "*ḥadīth* of the hidden treasure." In this instance, the prophet Muḥammad is not the speaker, but God himself who explains the original spark of life in the universe: "I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known. Therefore, I created creation so that I may be known by them."²⁰

These two narrations harmonize with one another in the Sufi cosmology to which Ibn al-ʿArabī adheres. In combination with Aḥmed's definition of Islam as the "means to experience meaning," we can deduce that if the initial divine motivation for creating is love, then the light of the Prophet, *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya*, is not only that original object of love, but divine amour itself. Likewise, if the consequence of God acting upon his love is that his creation will come to know him, then the Muḥammadan Reality is not only knowledge of God, but the very process of knowing him as well.

As stated previously, this primary role granted to the spiritual reality of the Prophet Muḥammad in Ibn al-ʿArabī's Sufi metaphysics presents *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* in a similar light as the Logos in Christology. As the "divine reason implicit in the cosmos, ordering it and giving it form and meaning,"²¹ the Sufi Logos is perceived as being identical with the Prophet's essence, at least in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought. The latter explicitly states in the *Meccan Openings* that *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* is the "[divine] creative object ... and the First Intellect for others. It is also the Higher Pen which God created from nothing."²²

This allows us to transition to another aspect of Sufi Muḥammadology, pertaining to the intimate relationship between the Prophet and the Qur'ān. This is a necessary step in order to venture into Christ's metaphysical significance in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, as a symbol of divine creativity and imagination. If identifying the Prophet's essence with the Logos presents his spiritual reality

20 Ibn al-ʿArabī himself mentions this *ḥadīth* approximately ten times in the *Meccan Openings*.

21 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 8th ed., s.v. "Logos." Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2009.

22 Muḥammad Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* 1, 276.

as the creative force that animates the entire cosmos, then establishing a connection between him and the Qurʾān will situate him as the particular archetypal spring for all prophetic figures, including Jesus.

For Ibn al-ʿArabī, the quintessential narration that establishes this connection is one attributed to the Prophet’s wife ʿĀ’isha, who was asked about his character after his passing. According to varying narrations, she is reported to have either said that “his character was the Qurʾān” or “he was a walking Qurʾān.” This allows the Andalusian mystic to deduce that:

She said this because he is most singular among all creation. Such a unique creation must encompass the best of manners. Moreover, God has described this character with “greatness.” He also described the Qurʾān as “great.” This is why the Qurʾān is his character.

Thus, whoever wanted to see the Messenger from among his community who did not live during his time, then let them look at the Qurʾān. There is no difference between looking at it and gazing at the Messenger of God. It is as if the Qurʾān has been molded into a human form named Muḥammad.

Moreover, the Qurʾān is divine speech and God’s attribute. In turn, Muḥammad is the attribute of the Real (God), in his entirety.²³

The Andalusian mystic extends the identification found in this narration, of the recited Qurʾān with the physical – or historical – persona of the Prophet, to the transcendent and timeless divine speech (Logos), in turn presenting the provocative image of the Prophet as a divine attribute.²⁴

The key to deciphering the connection between the Prophet and the Qurʾān, on the one hand, and between him and other prophetic figures, on the other hand, resides in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s second most important work, the *Bezels of Wisdom*. Specifically, it is the organization of this monograph that provides a glimpse into the author’s vision of *nubuwwa* (prophethood). In contrast to the *Meccan Openings*, an encyclopedic work with a rather enigmatic structure,²⁵ the *Bezels* is neatly categorized according to names of divine prophets and messengers.

²³ Muḥammad Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* I, 109.

²⁴ Nevertheless, it is not clear whether the author intends here that the name “Muḥammad” is a divine attribute (i.e. “Muḥammad” is one of the names of God), the Prophet himself is a divine attribute or both.

²⁵ Although, Michel Chodkiewicz has hypothesized in *Ocean Without Shore* that the *Meccan Openings* does indeed have a thoroughly Qurʾānic organization and structure.

The 27 chapters in this book follow, rather loosely, the order of prophets found in Islamic sacred history, with the first focusing on Adam and last on Muḥammad. With that in mind, Ibn al-ʿArabī creatively departs from this historical sequence in order to augment the nuances of his mystical vision. For instance, although Jesus immediately precedes Muḥammad in Islamic prophethood, that is not the case in the *Bezels*. On the contrary, the author has chosen an enigmatic figure named Khālid as the placeholder for this penultimate phase, prior to the coming of the prophet of Islam.

Despite these differences, we can still surmise the contours of the vision that motivates the entire work. We begin with imagery that undergirds the title of the book itself, *Bezels of Wisdom*. Ibn al-ʿArabī's mastery of the Arabic language and his ability to decipher connections between homophones (similar sounding words), using his own creative etymology, appears clearly in this instance. For it is the relationship between *al-khātām* (ring) and *khātim* (seal) that animates the entire spirit of the *Bezels*: just as the Prophet Muḥammad is *khātim al-anbiyāʾ* (seal of prophets), he is also the *khātām* (ring) on the hand of God, who encompasses the prophetic bezels of all different shapes and sizes, from Adam to Jesus.²⁶

This should not be surprising, considering that the Andalusian mystic also regards the spiritual reality of the Prophet, *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya*, to be the Logos, the original created being and means through which the cosmos continues to unfold, which includes other prophets and messengers. However, what Ibn al-ʿArabī is implicitly presenting in the *Bezels* is a much deeper and more significant idea, that just as the recited Qurʾān was revealed in stages (23 years), so was the walking Qurʾān, Prophet Muḥammad, also "revealed" in phases, according to the gradual historical appearance of those prophets and messengers mentioned in the *Bezels*.

What supports this hypothesis are the individual chapter titles in this work that focus on a single theme (e.g. prophethood, spirituality, light), whereas the culminating section, focusing on Muḥammad, designates "singularity" as the unique attribute fit solely for the prophet of Islam.²⁷ This presents us with a truly remarkable reworking of Islamic prophethood. From this perspective,

26 It is highly probable also that Ibn al-ʿArabī took into consideration the *ḥadīth*: "The black stone is the right hand of God, whoever kisses it has kissed his hand." Although this narration is considered weak according to the science of *ḥadīth*, this would not deter the author of the *Bezels* from relying upon it in his writings. Consider what he says about referencing weak *ḥadīths* that are, nevertheless, authenticated by the mystical visions of saints. See Muḥammad Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* 1, 524.

27 The previously quoted excerpt from this chapter also corroborates this singular encompassing rank granted only to the prophet Muḥammad.

the appearance of prophets are not discrete events, but rather the gradual emergence of a single being, the Prophet Muḥammad, also known in Sufism as *al-insān al-kāmil* (perfect human),²⁸ in stages.

And so, the appearance of the first prophet, Adam, whom Ibn al-‘Arabī associates with the perfection of the human form, can also be described as the manifestation of the prophet Muḥammad’s own bodily perfection. Inversely, one can say that the human form of the Prophet is simply called “Adam.” Likewise, the appearance of Jesus, whose unique physiology and birth is the author’s main concern, can be viewed as the manifestation of the Prophet as *Logos*, as the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya* in its entirety.

Indeed, it is for this very reason that ‘Īsā b. Maryam (Jesus son of Mary) may be considered the most quintessential – penultimate – stage in the revelation of the walking Qur’ān, Muḥammad. This is because the former contains all those aspects that appeared before him, through previous prophets, with the addition of this last and most necessary dimension: the embodiment of the Word.

3 Akbarian Christology, Creativity and Imagination

There are several concepts pertaining to Christ’s image in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings which we must first consider prior to venturing into the presence of creativity and imagination in his thought, eventually returning to the Muḥammadan Reality as the metaphysical thread that ties this entire apparatus together.

As expected, the Andalusian mystic’s foundation in exploring the figure of Jesus is thoroughly Qur’ānic. He focuses on the three scriptural descriptions of Christ as: “Messenger of God, His Word that He cast to Mary and a spirit from Him.”²⁹ Our concern in the ensuing paragraphs will be the son of Mary’s status as *kalimatu Allāh* (Word of God) and a *rūḥun minh* (spirit from Him).

We begin with an excerpt from the *Meccan Openings* where the author discusses Jesus as the *kalima* (Word of God). His focus here is to situate this single Word within God’s other – countless – Words, *kalimātu Allāh* (plural form):

And He said regarding Jesus peace be upon him that he is: “His Word which He sent to Mary” and He also said about her: “she believed in the

28 To find out more about this concept, refer to William Chittick’s *Sufi Path of Knowledge and Self-Disclosure of God*.

29 Qur’ān 4:171.

kalimāt (Words) of her lord” and they [these Words] are nothing other than Jesus. He made him as Words [plural] for her because he is abundant from the perspective of his outward and inward composition. Thus, every part of him is a Word ... It is like a human being when he utters the various letters that form one word that is intended by the speaker who seeks to create these words; so that he might express through them what is in his soul.³⁰

The Andalusian mystic creatively extends what begins as a conversation on grammar to a profound reimagining of both Jesus and God as divine language and divine speaker, respectively. What emerges from all of this is the son of Mary not only as a single Word, but actually multiple divine expressions.

In turn, the entire universe appears as God’s stream of consciousness and a constantly unfolding story. Per our discussion above, we can say that this tale began with the *ḥadīth* of the “hidden treasure.” Since God loved to be known in the mirror of his creation, he has been incessantly “speaking” this creation into existence. In this case, the reality of the prophet Muḥammad is not only this uttered cosmos, but the very act of divine speech as well.

However, Ibn al-‘Arabī is not satisfied to stop at this meta-cosmic perspective but returns to the human being’s ability to speak as an imitation of divine speech. For just as God utters the universe into existence, we also speak micro-universes into being through our words and conversations. We ponder here two open-ended questions that arise from this creative portrayal and to which we will return later on. First, since human beings are capable of speaking in different registers (i.e. prose or poetry), and since Jesus and the rest of creation are God’s uttered Words, is the son of Mary an instance of divine prose or poetry? Second, what kind of microcosms are we bringing into existence through our words and conversations?

In two *mi‘rāj* (ascension) narratives found in the *Meccan Openings*, where Ibn al-‘Arabī recounts his mythic celestial travels to the divine presence, retracing the Prophet Muḥammad’s own journey, the former continues to explore the connection between Jesus and divine language. In the first of these accounts, Ibn al-‘Arabī describes the journey in the third person, covering the tracts of a *tābī’ muḥammadī* (Muḥammadan follower), or Sufi mystic, and his companion the *ṣāhib al-fikr* (rational philosopher). While the “Muḥammadan follower” receives a ceremonious welcome from the angels and prophets guarding each of the seven heavens, the philosopher-companion is forced to

³⁰ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* v, 418.

speak with the planets orbiting these spheres, reflecting the lower rank of the latter's knowledge.

Upon reaching the second heaven, Ibn al-ʿArabī tells the reader that the “Muḥammadan follower” is greeted by the cousins, Jesus and John the Baptist. He also provides important details on the specific knowledge imparted by these two prophets to their visitor:

They reveal to him the authenticity of the message of the teacher, God's messenger [Muḥammad] prayers and blessings be upon him, through the miraculous nature of the Qurʾān. This is because this presence is that of *al-khiṭāba* [oration], *al-awzān* [poetic meters], *ḥusn mawāqīʿ al-kalām* [the beauty of appropriate speech], *imtizāj al-umūr* [the mixture of affairs] and *zuhūr al-maʿnā al-wāḥid fī-l-ṣuwar al-kathīra* [the appearance of one meaning in a multiplicity of forms]. He also receives the *furqān* [clear criterion for understanding] and the understanding of *kharq al-ʿawāʿid* [breaking of habits].

He also comes to know from this presence the *ʿilm al-sīmīyāʿ*, which pertains to working with letters and names as opposed to vapors, blood and other things [i.e. as in *ʿilm al-kīmīyāʿ* (Alchemy)]. He also come to know the honor of words, *jawāmiʿ al-kalīm* [the most encompassing of speech] and reality of *kun* [Be!] and its designation as *kalimat al-amr* [the word of command], not the past, future or *ḥāl* [state that is bound time].

[From this heaven also, one comes to know] the appearance of the two letters from this word, even though it is composed of three. [He also understands] why that third *barzakhīyya* [liminal] “word,” between the letter *kāf* and *nūn*, which is the spiritual *wāw*, was removed. This is the letter which gives [the realm] of *mulk* [dominion] the power to exercise influence upon the formation of created things. One also comes to know, from this presence, the secret of *takwīn* [formation].³¹

This single excerpt brings together all the various concepts discussed so far in this essay and furnishes all the necessary components needed for us to march towards the conclusion. First, Ibn al-ʿArabī establishes the connection between Christ's description as *kalimatu Allāh* (Word of God) and the recited Qurʾān, as God's eternal *kalām* (speech).

Second, the Andalusian mystic tethers Jesus, and John the Baptist, to the Prophet Muḥammad, who is the walking Qurʾān and whose spiritual reality – we had described – is the Sufi Logos. This connection with the Messenger of

31 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* v, 412..

Islam is reiterated in the second paragraph, albeit indirectly. The *jawāmiʿ al-kalim* (all-encompassing words) which the Muḥammadan follower is given to appreciate in this heaven is a reference to a well-known *ḥadīth* where the Prophet Muḥammad says according to the narrator: “I have been given *jawāmiʿ al-kalim*.”³² In another section in the *Meccan Openings*, Ibn al-ʿArabī provides a fascinating – and rather provocative – explanation of this unique rank given to the Prophet:

God said: “And His Word which He cast to Mary,”³³ and He said: “She [Mary] believed in the Words of her Lord and in His Book.”³⁴ It is also said that the “prince cut the hand of the thief” or “the prince beat the thief.” In this way, whoever fulfills the command of the one who orders them, it is they [the deputy] who performed it.

Know, then, that the one who cast [the Word] is Muḥammad. He cast, on behalf of God, the Words of the entire universe without exception. Some of these he cast by his own self, such as the spirits of angels and much of the higher realm, while other things he cast through causes. An example of the latter is the harvested grain that reaches your body as a spirit that glorifies and praises God. This only happens after many cycles and fluctuations. All of this comes from the one who has been given *jawāmiʿ al-kalim*.³⁵

And so, the intimate relationship between Jesus and Muḥammad unfolds in the most profound and creative fashion possible. Ibn al-ʿArabī is not satisfied to simply describe Christ, the Word of God, as a manifestation of the Muḥammadan Reality. Instead, the author explains in detail how the Prophet Muḥammad is the Logos: as the sole proprietor in charge of *jawāmiʿ al-kalim*, he alone has the power and authority to cast divine words into their designated forms, including Jesus. In other words, if Muḥammad is the Logos, then *jawāmiʿ al-kalim* explains how he fulfills this role.

There are still more insights to be deciphered from the *miʿrāj* excerpt mentioned above. Alongside the connections between Jesus, the Qurʾān and the Prophet Muḥammad, Ibn al-ʿArabī establishes a third association, between Jesus and the notion of *barzakhīya* (liminality). This key term will allow us to

32 This *ḥadīth* can be found in the second-most authentic compendium of prophetic narrations, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. See Muslim Al-Nīsābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiya, 1991).

33 Qurʾān 4:171.

34 Qurʾān 66:12.

35 Muḥammad Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* I, 261.

directly venture into Ibn al-‘Arabī’s understanding of *khayāl* (imagination). Only once we have taken this excursion, can we return one last time to this excerpt to appreciate the other descriptions of the second heaven that Ibn al-‘Arabī provides here.

In this instance, Ibn al-‘Arabī is relying upon an oft-quoted verse found in Chapter 55 of the Qur’ān, *al-Raḥmān* (The Most-Merciful): “He merged the two seas, they meet. Between them is a *barzakh* [isthmus], they do not transgress.”³⁶ As expected, he undertakes the following creative discourse on ontology using this verse:

Know that known things are three kinds without a fourth. These are *al-wujūd al-muṭlaq* (absolute being) which is never limited, and that is the being of God, who is the necessary existent. The second is the *al-‘adam al-muṭlaq* (absolute non-existence), which is non-existent in itself, cannot be limited and is what we call the impossible.

Thenceforth, there cannot be two opposites facing one another save that there be a barrier between them ... This barrier between the absolute existent and non-existent is *al-barzakh al-a‘lā* [loftiest isthmus] or *barzakh al-barāzikh* [the isthmus of isthmuses]. It has a direction towards being and another towards non-existence.

Within it [the *barzakh*] also are all the possible things, which never end. Each of these things has an immutable essence in this isthmus whereupon the absolute being [God] gazes. It is from this aspect that the things are named, and if He chooses to bring them into being, He says to it: “*Kun!*” [Be!] and it will be.

Moreover, every human who has a *khayāl* [imagination] and imagines something, then their contemplation is extending into this isthmus, even though they do not know they are imagining their object from this presence.³⁷

Ibn al-‘Arabī delivers us, finally, to the shore of imagination through the door of the *barzakh* and the entire backdrop of the foundation which we have discussed thus far in this chapter. In reference to the Qur’ānic verse, Ibn al-‘Arabī most probably perceives the meeting between the fresh and salty waters to correspond to the absolute existence and non-existence, respectively.

36 Qur’ān 55:11–12.

37 Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* v, 87.

However, that is by far the most trivial conclusion from the above excerpt. Much more important is the fact that the Andalusian mystic is – essentially – equating this *barzakh al-barāzikh* (greatest isthmus) with the Muḥammadan Reality, as the container wherein all possibly existent things reside. Just as the Prophet's dominion over *jawāmi' al-kalim* explains his status as Logos, here also it highlights – possibly – the emergence of the contingent beings from nothingness into existence via his agency.

In turn, Ibn al-ʿArabī is informing us that the Prophet Muḥammad's reality is also cosmic imagination. This is not an abstract metaphysical concept. Rather, it is the tangible realm where human beings access and create their own contemplations and reflections. However, the underlying premise in both this last excerpt and the previous, pertaining to the *mī'rāj*, is that the property of *barzakhīyya* (liminality) is also attributed to the second heaven where Jesus and John the Baptist reside.

Earlier in our discussion, we described Ibn al-ʿArabī's vision of the prophets and messengers who appeared – historically – prior to Muḥammad as various dimensions or aspects of the Prophet of Islam. Now, we can also describe the Christic aspect of the Prophet's reality as this *barzakhīyya* and imagination. More than that, this dimension pertains to bringing things into being and casting the Words of God into their respective forms, whence they transition from nothingness into contingent existence.

The last piece of information that Ibn al-ʿArabī gives us in the *mī'rāj* narrative is the quintessential connection between this metaphysical discourse and art as a tangible human experience. By situating *khitāba* (oration), *awzān* (poetic meters) and *ḥusn mawāqī' al-kalām* (beautiful arrangement of speech) in this same heaven of Jesus and John the Baptist, the author is rooting human creativity within the cosmic divine epitomized by ingenuity, imagination and the Muḥammadan Reality.

There is an intricate network of analogies operating in this conversation that renders Ibn al-ʿArabī's sophisticated metaphysics a tangible panorama of physical performances. First, by comparing *kalimātu Allāh* (God's Words) to human speech and situating oration and poetry in the second heaven of Jesus, where *takwīn* (formation and bringing into being) is also located, the Andalusian mystic is definitively rooting these forms of human creativity in divine speech. They are not only the result of divine inspiration but are actual imitations of God's process of creating through breathing Words into forms.

In turn, Ibn al-ʿArabī is answering our first open-ended question, whether Jesus might be considered an instance of divine prose or poetry. Given that “poetic meters” flow forth from the same heaven where Jesus resides, it is possible that the Andalusian mystic perceives the former as an instance of God's poetry. Beyond this, however, Ibn al-ʿArabī is also endowing human poetry, and

speech generally, with the ability of *takwīn*, to bring created things into being. What those created beings exactly are is not clear from this passage. However, given that the author situates *barzakhīyya* (liminality), and by extension *khayāl* (imagination), in the same heaven of Christ, it is safe to assume that human speech also brings a micro-universe into being, each with its own *barzakh* and imagination.

This last inference leads us to the second phase in this network of analogies, pertaining to the presence of Christ in these excerpts. Jesus embodies, more vividly than other created beings, the way God creates through breathing. This unique embodiment manifests in Christ's ability to reenact his own creation and that of the universe through his own miraculous breath. In turn, whatever the son of Mary brings to life or resurrects through his breath is itself a Christic being.

Merging the analogies of human and divine speech with that of Christ's miraculous breaths and the divine *nafas al-rahmān* (breath of the most-merciful), we arrive at the conclusion that human speech itself is a Christic process, in two ways. First, the very act of breathing, in order to speak, imitates both God's bringing Christ into being through the divine breath and the latter's performance of miracles through breathing. Second, those things humans bring into being through breathing and speaking are Christic instances that imitate God's Words and those things which Christ himself brought to life or resurrected.

Lest this seems like a convoluted set of comparisons, Ibn al-'Arabī provides a fascinating description in the *Meccan Openings* of the life that he believes human language has. The following makes clear that the Andalusian mystic perceives the power of poetry, and human speech at large, to be intimately related to the inherent life found in the sacred spirit of language and *hurūf* (letters):

Know, may God grant you and us facilitation, that letters are a nation from those who are spoken to by God and commanded to follow His commands. They also have messengers from among them and names through which they are known. Only the people of spiritual unveiling from our path know this. The world of letters is also the most eloquent of realms in tongue and clearest in proclamation.³⁸

"When I mold him and breathe in him from my spirit." This is in reference to the appearance of accents upon the letters after their creation. Then, they emerge as another creation, known as a word, just as each of us is known as a human being. In this way, the world of words and expressions

38 Muḥammad Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* v, 214.

is created from the realm of letters. This is because letters are the materials for words, just as water, dust, fire and air are the matter from which our bodies are molded. Then, the commanded spirit flows forth and we are called human.³⁹

Ibn al-‘Arabī confirms our earlier conjecture by giving a fascinating portrayal of letters and words as a self-subsisting universe. In this vision, every time a person speaks, regardless of the content of their speech, they are imitating and reenacting the genesis of the universe. Essentially, they are unfolding their own “hidden treasure.”

We conclude this section of the essay with one final conceptual sojourn, at the above-mentioned notion of *nafas al-rahmān* (breath of the most-merciful). Ibn al-‘Arabī mentions this term numerous times in the *Meccan Openings*. In one example, he associates it with the origination of the cosmos: “The world appeared through *nafas al-rahmān*. This is because God has *naffasa* (alleviated) through it the pressure felt by the [divine] names, due to the absence of their effects [in the universe].”⁴⁰ The author’s creative etymology emerges again as he relies upon the connection between *nafas* (breath) and *tanfīs* (alleviation) to explain the role of *nafas al-rahmān* in bringing the world into being.

In other places, the Andalusian mystic extends this etymological network to embrace yet another key term and also include the son of Mary as a corroborating example:

Every *nafs* [soul] is afraid of non-existence ... Meanwhile, the divine spirit is *nafas al-rahmān*. This is why he associated it with breathing, due to the harmony between the spirit and breaths when He said: “I breathed in him from my spirit.” In this manner, also, He commanded Jesus to breathe in a mold of clay bird. Thus, spirits only appear through breaths.⁴¹

And so, words appear from letters, and letters from air, and air from *nafas al-rahmān*. Through the divine names also appear the traces in the universes, and at this halts *al-‘ilm al-‘īṣawī* [the Christic knowledge].⁴²

By rendering the *nafas* (breath) as Christic and tethering it to *tanfīs* (alleviation) and *nafs* (soul), Ibn al-‘Arabī is also positing the latter two notions as

39 Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* v, 259–60.

40 Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* v, 218.

41 Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* v, 621.

42 Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* v, 416.

artifacts that follow the archetype of Jesus. It is clear now that, for the Andalusian mystic, the words and letters we speak are universes that we give life to through our breaths, very much in the same way that God continuously brings into being. Not only that, but the source of the *nafas* (breath), which is the *nafis* (soul), and the remedy of breathing, which is *tanfis* (alleviation), and the things it creates, which are the letters and words, are all Christic.

In this way, Jesus son of Mary emerges in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Weltanschauung* as the meeting point between divine and human speech, imagination and creativity. The Andalusian mystic says much more in his writings about all the concepts we have discussed so far, including imagination. However, due to the limited scope of this chapter, we restrict ourselves to the excerpts and analyses in the preceding paragraphs. In the following final section, we try to synthesize the various analytical threads presented here and also offer some final remarks on the significance of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysics to our understanding of human creativity and imagination.

4 Conclusion

In “Representation in Painting and Drama: Arguments from Indian Aesthetics,” Ananta Sukla states that “the theater is superior to painting not because it creates the illusion of reality better, but because, for the peculiarity of its medium, it is capable of representing the indeterminate in its determinate form.”⁴³ It is from this perspective, of “representing the indeterminate in its determinate form,” that our previous exploration of the unfolding of the “hidden treasure,” through the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī, has been nothing but a sojourn amidst the divine drama of creation.

In the case of the Andalusian mystic and his theosophy, the “indeterminate” is the transcendent divine essence, the “hidden treasure” *par excellence*, while the “determinate forms” are the endless and incessantly unfolding theophanies that manifest this ineffable divine essence. As we mentioned previously, paying homage to Sukla’s mention of theater, in this divine drama of the “hidden treasure” the stage, play, characters and audience are all but mirrors of *al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya* (Muḥammadan Reality), which is at once God’s original creation and the very process of creation. The Prophet is at once the original object of divine love and the act of loving itself.

43 Ananta Sukla, “Representation in Painting and Drama: Arguments from Indian Aesthetics,” in *Art and Representation*, ed. Ananta Sukla (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 240.

However, if theater, painting and the arts are central components of human culture, then what Sukla informs us in “Oriya Culture: Legitimacy and Identity” is also relevant to the discussion in this chapter, in so far as “language and religion have been the central instrument in the emergence and identity of a culture.”⁴⁴ The central objective in the preceding paragraphs has been to show that, for Ibn al-‘Arabī, the social and worldly dimensions of imagination, art and creativity are very much rooted in metaphysics and divinity.

However, the Andalusian mystic is not interested in the least to subject human imagination and artistic expressions to the dogmatic prescriptions of legal strictures, but rather to decipher the infinitude of potentialities inherent in divine creativity through the variety of worldly forms and manifestations. His *Weltanschauung* is one where the physical is enchanted and sacralized towards the metaphysical, not vice versa. Equally important also is Ibn al-‘Arabī’s positioning of art forms like poetry and imagination squarely within Sufi theology. In other words, the creative dimensions of Akbarian Christology and Muḥammadology are not auxiliary to the “art” of knowing God but are central and indispensable components to that end.

Our objective in this concluding section is twofold. First, we will summarize and synthesize Ibn al-‘Arabī’s vision of Christ and his creative dimensions in Sufi metaphysics. Here, we will focus specifically on bringing together the discussions of the Muḥammadan Reality and Sufi Jesus in order to better appreciate the larger narrative of Logos and imagination in the Andalusian mystic’s thought. Second, we will attempt to extend Ibn al-‘Arabī’s vision of poetry and language to other forms of art. Our central concern will be to gauge whether the Sufi mystic would give painting and music specifically and other forms of creative expression generally the same station which he granted poetry.

We can summarize the two analytical threads in this chapter as Sufi Muḥammadology and Christology, both through the Akbarian prism. In the first, we saw that Ibn al-‘Arabī presents the spiritual reality of the Prophet Muḥammad as simultaneously the first entity created by God and the matter from which the entire universe, and all that it contains, is created. The Andalusian mystic also makes sure that the Prophet does not appear as a passive agent in this narrative, but as the one with authority and power to cast the divine words into their respective forms, stemming from his sole proprietorship over *jawāmi‘ al-kalīm* (the all-encompassing divine Words). This ontological and historical primacy of the Prophet enabled us to describe him as the Islamic equivalent of the Logos in Sufi metaphysics.

44 Ananta Sukla, “Oriya Culture: Legitimacy and Identity,” *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 30, no. 1–2 (2007): 5.

Transitioning to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Christology, we saw that the son of Mary facilitates an intricate network of analogies between God and human beings in the former’s thought. On the one hand, the Andalusian mystic perceives Jesus’ existence, as a divine Word(s), to be similar to human speech that contains letters, sentences and expressions. In order to fully appreciate this comparison, we also saw that Ibn al-‘Arabī regards those letters and words that we speak and write as living nations that are “spoken to by God.” In turn, all human speech, once uttered, exists in a microcosm of imagination. In this way, we reenact the original drama of creation by unfolding the “hidden treasure” within us outwardly.

Bringing these two threads together yields a few key points. First, as mentioned previously, Christ represents an aspect or dimension of the Muḥammadan Reality, specifically the *barzakhīyya* (liminality), imaginability and the narrative of the Logos. Alternatively, we can equate this Christic facet with *jawāmi‘ al-kalim* (all-encompassing words) of the Prophet’s essence. In other words, Jesus represents the Prophet’s sole proprietorship over casting divine words into their respective forms.

What the Andalusian mystic does in his writings is to extend the sphere of these divine words and their receptacles to also include art and creativity. The second heaven of Jesus (i.e. the second heaven of the Muḥammadan Reality), where imagination and liminality reside, is also where oration and poetic meters can be found. As we have seen, the letters and words that give life to poetry are a nation that are spoken to by God. In turn, they are also a cosmos of forms waiting to receive the divine breath and spirit to bring them to life. It is at this crucial juncture that the Muḥammadan Reality emerges in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought as *barzakh al-barāzikh* (greatest isthmus) and imagination itself.

What this means is that the Prophet Muḥammad’s essence is not only the original divine artwork, but also divine creativity in movement and the spiritual space from which human creativity springs and wherein it takes places. Of course, that is yet another way of describing the Christic aspect of the Muḥammadan Reality, since Jesus embodies and reenacts the divine creative power through breathing. In a similar fashion, artists also receive a “breath” of creative inspiration from the realm of *khayāl/barzakh* (imagination/isthmus) and reciprocate that process by breathing their “indeterminate” inspiration outwardly into a “determinate form” of art (i.e. poetry, painting, film etc.)

And so, we come to the issue of the usefulness of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Muḥammadology, Christology and imagination for discussing the metaphysics of art forms other than poetry, such as painting or music. In the case of painting, and all forms of imagery, Ibn al-‘Arabī provides a fascinating interpretation of the Islamic prohibition against statues and portraits, in the specific context of the

Christian idolization of Jesus. The excerpt begins with a mention of a special rank of Muslim saints known as *al-ʿīsawīyyūn al-thawānī* (the dualist Christic saints):

They are those whose way is that of *tawḥīd al-tajrīd min ʿarīq al-mithāl* (abstract monotheism through the path of form). This is because the existence of Jesus did not come through a male human, but rather through a spirit that appeared in a human form. For this reason, the majority of the community of Jesus son of Mary, more so than other nations, have advocated for the use of images, as exists in their churches. They worship God by directing themselves to these images.

As for us, [the Prophet] has sanctioned for us to worship God as though we see Him, whence he admitted Him into *khayāl* [imagination]. This is the meaning of *al-taṣwīr* [forming or putting into form]. But he forbade us from visualizing Him in the world of the senses.⁴⁵

As expected, Ibn al-ʿArabī creatively roots the Christian – read Catholic – practice of idolizing Jesus, Mary and saints through imagery within the very notion of *tawḥīd*, or monotheism and acknowledging the oneness of God, an association that would certainly seem heretical to many Muslim scholars who hold that imagery is a transgression against *tawḥīd* and who insist on iconoclasm.

The Andalusian mystic also expands the relevance of this discussion by simultaneously rooting the Islamic and Muḥammadan command to “see God” within *khayāl* (imagination) and *taṣwīr* (molding into form), or as Ananta Sukla would describe, “to put the indeterminate into determinate forms.” However, by emphasizing the departure of God in Islam from statues to imagination, Ibn al-ʿArabī is not actually restricting the permissible forms of visualizing God in the physical world.

On the contrary, the Sufi mystic is at once liberating the human perception of God from restricted sensual forms (e.g. statues) and transferring it instead to a higher spiritual realm (i.e. imagination), whereby it can become the “indeterminate” essence for the myriad of human creative expressions. In other words, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, it is not only statues or images of Jesus, saints and prophets that represent God, but the entire gamut of human expressions that necessarily communicate an aspect of the divine, through the means of the Muḥammadan Reality.

45 Muḥammad Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* I, 521.

As for the Akbarian perspective on music, this is the subject of future research that will soon be completed. For now, it suffices to say that Ibn al-‘Arabī discusses music and melodies approximately twenty-seven times in the *Meccan Openings*. Throughout these discourses, he emphasizes the need for listeners to transcend a “natural” or purely emotional enjoyment of sound, and instead to attempt and derive *ma‘rifa* (gnosis) from the power of the notes and cadences. Here again, Ibn al-‘Arabī is formulating a type of auditory *taṣwīr* in *khayāl* (imagination), whereby the basic units of music are no longer the end of the experience but a means and spring for more sophisticated listening acts.⁴⁶

Between poetry and music, language and sound, Ibn al-‘Arabī presents us with a truly remarkable understanding of human creativity and imagination. As is the case in all other areas of his thought, the Andalusian mystic is thoroughly fixed on divinity as the source of human creative expressions. From that singular transcendent essence, through the Muḥammadan Reality and its myriad of prophetic mirrors, the infinitude of aesthetic artifacts in our world emerge as mere refractions of that one source. This is a hierarchy that he beautifully portrays in an image of a *ṣūr* (horn), which he – unsurprisingly – etymologically tethers to *ṣuwar* (forms).⁴⁷

The findings of this essay should encourage us to undertake a deeper exploration of the relationship between Sufi metaphysics and the importance of art and creativity in pre-modern and contemporary times. In “Ibn al-‘Arabī and Joseph Campbell: Akbarian Mythology and the Metaphysics of Contemporary Art,” I do this by comparing and contrasting the Andalusian mystic’s thought with Campbell’s groundbreaking exposition on the enchantment of modern art, *The Power of Myth*. I show that Ibn al-‘Arabī would find metaphysical relevance in many of the creative expressions of our time, including – but not limited to – video games and even films that glorify the zombie apocalypse.⁴⁸

It is indeed a fortunate happenstance that this essay on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysics of imagination and creativity should find a place in a groundbreaking volume such as this one, on art and imagination in the humanities. As Shaykh Hisham Kabbani states in the epigraph at the beginning of this paper, the sophisticated mystical writings of a Sufi mystic like Ibn al-‘Arabī require the fineness of a poet in order to be understood. What Shaykh Kabbani is also telling

46 Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* 1, 496.

47 Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* 1, 680–86.

48 See Ali Hussain, “Ibn al-‘Arabī and Joseph Campbell: Akbarian Mythology and the Metaphysics of Contemporary Art,” *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society* 63 (2018): 71–86.

us, indirectly, is that art and creativity have always been married to the world's great religious traditions throughout history. From Andalusia to the Vatican, beautiful arrangements of colors, shapes and sounds immortalize the ineffable and fleeting moments of the mystical experience.

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