



## Gnostic Symbolism and Sufi Encoding from the Perspective of Modernist Reading

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The encodings of foundational Sufi texts are examined and studied by multiple scientific disciplines and fields of knowledge that attempt to decipher their symbols by following various reading methodologies, including modernist (=Western) ones. Among the outcomes of their reductive and simplificationist interpretations has been the trivialization of Sufism through vulgar public dissemination, or clientelism, via the technique of functional laudatory modification for folkloric and playful attraction. As for alienation, functional defamatory wounding is also employed, through belittling and diminishing the مقام of Sufism. The disparaging reading alienates by labeling Sufi texts with descriptions such as irrationality, nihilism, passivity, inertia, and other descriptive offenses and dogmatic controls, most of which are mediating reading projections through the technique of delegating conclusions without any verification. As for the clientelist gnostic reading, although it presents itself as a defensive conception, it is more dangerous; its stance is emotional, misleading, and non-revealing, because its motives are implicit. Hostile denial may erupt with equivalent explicitness; thus, the contradiction between the two readings is only apparent, for both are functional, desire-driven readings. Considering that judgment of a thing derives from its conception, our intervention will clarify some of the truncations and interpretive abuses of modernist readings of the Sufi text.

**Keywords:** Sufism, symbolism, inner tongue, modernist reading, spiritual ascension.

### Introduction:

It is difficult for sensory, superficial understandings to decipher Sufi encoding, that barzakh-like construction of opposites and Khidr-like meanings; because they are led by inferential rational logic and its strict binary measures. Within this pattern fall modernist and postmodernist readings that slip across the surface of the text, deprived of passage to the interior. The modernist reception of the Sufi text is biased toward the model and practices the violence of methodological delegation, contradicting its own premises; for it neutralizes or rejects reading foundational Sufi corpora through the gnostic method, in adherence to the condition of objectivity—separate representation (neutralizing visionary affiliation)—to guarantee a scientific reading! Yet the result is interpretive and hermeneutic controls that claim cognitive empowerment and penetration into the interior. Some have indulged in excessive

simplification and reduction and fell into trivialization; others have adopted the technique of obscuratization, imagining that explicating and clarifying meanings and approximating significations lowers the Sufi status, because its transcendence—according to them—requires secretive veiling, although “Initiatique transmission” (initiation of secrets) is among the constants of the path’s chain to temporalize the process of Sufi succession. However, the aim of this modernist reading is not to safeguard spiritual knowledge from vulgar public dissemination, but rather “attractive clientelism” in accordance with the whim of a group trapped by the noose of obscurity and coercive authority over modern selves, who believe it to be depth they failed to grasp, especially if its possessor holds the privilege of elite status, class, and academic recognition; and on the other hand, fascination with the strangeness of concepts even if the content is neither abundant nor expressive. Since the source of wisdom is celestial, it required conveyance in a language inspired by its nature—sacred symbolism—given the capacity of heavenly wisdom for earthly encoding; for (God) brings nearer the realities of the ascensional world through symbols from the Isra’i world. Yet the “defamatory reading” of the Sufi text, for reasons foremost among them symbolic encoding—despite many sciences employing it as an instrument of creativity—removes it from the Sufi text and suddenly transforms it into a stylistic vice, expressive arrogance, and communicative elitism driven by monopolizing secrecy. It is counted among the opposites of “objectivity” as understood by moderns, which conditions scientificity upon clarity of expression and avoidance of dense allusion and rhetorical eloquence, conveying meaning through the most common and manifest words for shared comprehension.

We open our intervention with the following questions: Is allusive symbolism a communicative means or a methodological and epistemic necessity? Why is Sufi encoding understood as protective dissimulation or a discursive strategy? Why do modernist readings indict Sufism with ascetic inertia and spiritual arrogance? How have clientelist emotional and desire-driven disparaging readings contributed to lowering the status of the Sufi text?

### **1. The Symbolic Encoding of Sufism Confounds and Silences Modernist Understandings:**

Symbolism is one of the instruments for conveying wisdom, and among the deepest methodological inaugurating tools for expressing the meanings of the concealed unfolded parchment and opening expanded possibilities for fertilizing the spiritual meaning of the world, since “the supra employment of speech is possible, especially when sacred languages are intended, for they are precisely susceptible to such employment because they are formed in a manner that makes them bear within themselves this symbolic character specifically.” Since the truths of revelation are entrusted to prophets to convey in their perfection and completion,

whereas human infallibility is relative according to proximity to Truth, expression does not require perfection of transmission; therefore language is mediating signs that approximate and make comprehensible spirituality and transcendent wisdom, the subject of the Sufi text. In the eloquence of Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi, “In this path words are hollow”; they are in all cases deficient and error is not immune from human beings.

The neutral objective reader receives the symbolisms of foundational and foundationalizing Sufi corpora—possessing representative antiquity and generous encoding—like a cellar of ṭawāsīn; because he is ignorant of the inner tongue in knowledge and immersed in spiritual practice (journeying and realization), thus direct entry is difficult, even mediation may mislead. Therefore he will not attain a spark of knowledge from the concealed wisdom in the authentic Sufi text, even if he acquires theoretical familiarity from commentaries of intermediaries who knew what was facilitated of its flashes at the hand of those to whom Truth made Truth known, expanding little or much of what is hidden. His reception remains tainted by short-sightedness, misunderstanding, and interpretive arbitrariness even if his intention is sincere and he possesses ample instrumental sciences. This is the state of one who approaches the foundational Sufi text sincerely seeking from some of its channels without sustained inner discipline through systematic spiritual تربية. How then of one who approaches it detached from both, equipped with modernist methodologies as a transversal, unified, and complete passage of reading and a guarantor of entry without mediation of the traditional Sufi reading method, despite their acknowledgment that language and method are inspired by the nature of the subject imposed by specialization to enable understanding and avoid truncated conceptions or judgments?

Because modernist readings have breached the condition of homogeneity and practiced methodological coercion, their understanding of ancient Sufi symbolism was silenced, escaping strict systematization and dry logic; they did not even reach the shell of concealed meaning. Foundational Sufi texts have an exterior and an interior; the first indicates the features of theoretical qualification to understand the shell of meaning, not surpassing the cover of expression or encoding. Whoever stands at it attains the mirage of knowledge, for “whoever’s knowledge is confined to the outward forms and images of things, which are like shells over pearls, his knowledge is exposed to every suspicion and subject to every doubt, thus he has no certainty.” The second provides features of passage to the interior and extraction of the fruit of concealed wisdom. Yet neither offers the keys of inner realization, even if the reader’s quest is sincere, because Sufism is realization and qualification; the Sufi knower is a niche, not a container. Thus studying books may yield cataloging, classification, and verification of transmission in terms of increase and decrease if the communicative reader adheres to the

etiquette of transmission and refrains from fabrication even if he disagrees with what is transmitted. But the aim of the Sufi text is stored in the throne of the Sufi's عقل (the heart) from the Creator's perspective and unveiling. Each traveler has a chisel stained with it by which he strikes, and each resident has a key by which he enters, fashioning words and lessons from his spiritual ascension.

Symbolic encoding or dense allusion is not an acquired skill matured by cumulative reading and writing, employed as a functional tool, rhetorical embellishment, or beautifier of Sufi discourse style; rather it is in itself a bestowed unveiling. Since wisdom is limitless, it cannot be conveyed except through symbolism that is likewise limitless by any logical or rational system-bound language. The symbolic acts upon language outside the domain of linguistic or terminological circulation, until the explicit becomes implicit, the declarative allusive, and the allusive declarative; opposites gather and contradictions harmonize in the Khidr-like barzakh state. Because non-symbolic languages based on exoteric sciences rely on the logic of expression, they cannot be relied upon to convey Sufi truths, including religious jurisprudential/theological or kalām language. The language of expression is narrower in expression and communication. Spiritual thought of a wisdom-type does not require much debate, demonstrative logic, or inferential reason; symbolism suffices to convey spiritual subtleties and delicacies. Spiritual consideration and realization do not always require analytic systematic speech; the logic of allusion is often more eloquent and abundant.

The subject of Sufism or gnostic science is “divine wisdom,” some of whose manifestations are scattered in foundational Sufi texts (poetry and prose). It is an inspirational bestowed grace, not acquired even if lifetimes are spent studying the Fuṣūṣ and Muqābasāt of those realized in the divine secret and accompanying those filled with sacred blessing. The Sufi writes with his inner ascension not to immortalize egoity or document cultural or societal particularity, but as overflow of spiritual subtleties and fine sciences. Foundational Sufi texts are not individualistic systems for nominal idolization; they are path narratives documenting experiences of transcendent contemplation—insight for observers and travelers and reminder for saints, relatively necessary mediating aids guiding in the Isra’i journey, or contemplative ascensional supererogations; and the path of both aims is the connected chain through the “guru” (the spiritual guide), inner or outer.

Therefore, among the obstacles to balanced reading and just understanding of Sufism, according to the Afghan Sufi master Idries Shah, is that “the external theorist has not passed through the door of one of the Sufi schools.” Because modernist readings are ignorant of everything pertaining to Sufism and gnosis, they separated the subject (the Sufi text) from the speaking

self-according to the theory of “the death of the author” of Roland Barthes, whereby the work becomes the property of the reader, apart from the Sufi’s inner experience. The text becomes semantically open to various approaches, interpretations, and projections to generate meaning, but as play or surface signs according to the deconstructive method of Jacques Derrida, or discourse play of Michel Foucault. Is it reasonable to apply nihilistic methodologies to read the flashes of divine wisdom recorded or orally transmitted by Sufis? These modernist and postmodernist methods are not even bound by the objectivity condition of scientism; thus the results are hollow knowledges, even of the lowest exoteric truths of Sufism, fallen into nihilism. Meaning, which grants everything value in its degrees, ranks, and stations, is not considered; relativism, the central rule of modernist readings, abolishes truth and the idea of meaning from existence and the world.

The Sufi writes based on his spiritual ascension and according to the degree of journeying and station of attainment, not according to a specific social culture. Any reading conditioned by scientific objectivity is merely the practice of delegational violence instead of inner foundational reading. Symbolism is a wisdom-type language enabling conveyance of spiritual truths in the highest expressive language liberated from all forms of verbal restriction and semantic limitation, befitting the infinite wisdom that is the subject of Sufism, which modernist readings ignore because they wrap themselves in observers distant from the divine station: “Seek first the kingdom of heaven and the rest shall be given to you,” “And whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him!” The essence of Sufi writing, whose code modernist readings failed to decipher, is not documentation of abstract theoretical wisdom, but qualification—what is called “practical wisdom” or “practical Sufism.” By combining both, the Sufi’s interior fills with spiritual knowledge—transmission, knowledge, and practice. Al-Niffari (d. after 354 AH) says: “If you stand in the right of knowledge, you are knower of God; if you do not stand in the right of knowledge, you are knower of what you knew, and your known is what you conceal in secret. So do not mind, if you are with it, what else you missed.” Thus modernist readings err in thinking that handling foundational Sufi books through study, reading, commentary, and interpretation grants encompassing knowledge of what is apparent and hidden. They do not realize that transcendent wisdom is not acquired knowledge attained merely through external intellectual النظر, but a gifted knowledge unveiled through practice to those of understanding after inner realization in the heart, throne of reason.

Symbol often becomes a safe refuge to convey a message or idea that explicit speech failed to deliver; it is more eloquent in impact and efficacy. Here appears the Sufi’s sense and imagination with its astonishing ability to create and transfer what is customary into another

completely different field of circulation; such as transferring the meaning of wine to another wine that revives the soul by its drink—the divine wine. Thus the word wine is not ugly in itself because it includes different referents in external reality. In the Sufi lexicon, wine is divine love; this wine has no sin nor suspicion like fermented drink. Whoever has not tasted it will not reach the Supreme Essence; it is the fuel of arrival for the masters of arrival.

Sufi symbolism appears as the language of a master enchanter; opposing binaries dissolve and contradictions merge, as manifested in the corpus of Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi, reflecting his inner experience in the world of the secret and what he endured of time's vicissitudes and trials. He found certainty only in what he expressed as wine, meaning divine love liberated from all lower attachments. He said: "My pen shatters into fragments when I write the word love." The German orientalist Annemarie Schimmel, companion of the Sufi heritage, says about Rumi's legacy: "However simple his idea may be, complete treatment of his works is impossible; the diversity of expressions, the rich ornamentation of simple material, and the radiant nature of images captivate anew each time one approaches the sanctuary of his standpoints.

Sufi symbolism, cloaking foundational texts, is an ascensional bridge medium with spiritual efficacy penetrating the depth and interior of the individual more than dry, cold, strict logical language. "The symbol is a 'rule' or point of support for contemplation; thus it is merely a 'helper' and nothing more." Error in interpretation results from ignorance of its motives. "The secret language possesses the advantage of linking worldly thinking to larger dimensions, that is, to the other world from which ordinary humans are separated." It is a thinking that integrates the human in the perpetual now and grants him timeless awareness wherein all dimensions of time synchronize through permanent divine presence, outward and inward, filling worldly space where place and time dissolve into one another.

Modernist reading cannot understand spiritual meanings without knowledge of the Sufi lexicon, which itself gives only relative knowledge, since each Sufi has his lexicon. The literal linguistic meaning from dictionaries must not be understood, because the Sufi lexicon is inspirational, product of his spiritual ascension, even if his words have parallels among others. The Sufi writes with the ink of God's inexhaustible words; thus symbolism perplexed modernist readings. There is no academic lexicon that can give final intended meanings except one lexicon: the heart of the knower, wherein the secrets of words reside. Only one who has something of his spirit reaches its spirit. What is from the heart is connected; what the tongue limits does not surpass it.

Wisdom dwelling in symbols is understood gradually; each traveler has a share proportionate to his capacity of ascensional rank. Attempting entry by the method of the historical or school

modernist researcher knocks but is not opened to, for “the highest truths are included in symbols concealed from many people, yet at the same time reveal themselves clearly to eyes that know how to look,” with the desert-like core intellect that sees through the kingdom of the unfolded parchment, not the superficial intellect slipping on the surface.

According to Idries Shah, no one can truly understand Sufism from translations of its literary forms or writings of many Eastern poets without intensive knowledge of the secret language (inner tongue). Modernists believe that etymological periodization, tracing linguistic migrations, new terminologies, and hermeneutic methods suffice to decipher the inner tongue of foundational texts. They do not realize that Sufi symbolic language was refined by the inner school and not through acquisitive linguistic instruction; thus those endowed with linguistic sciences cannot produce the ṭawāsīn of al-Hallaj or the Futūḥāt of Ibn Arabi without that school. It is unsurprising when one Sufi understands another; it is prophetic wisdom flowing among them: “Souls are enlisted soldiers; those who know one another harmonize, those who deny one another differ.” Thus “the encoding of Sufis, that is writing in code or secret language, is a means of communication among the enlightened.” It is also unsurprising when modernist readings defend one another and their understandings resemble if not coincide, because their foundational premises are shared; they consider Sufi symbolism a discursive strategy of dissimulation or expressive elitism.

Symbols carry supra truths; they are not narrative tales for entertainment nor myths and fantasies as some modernist readings claim. To remove misunderstanding about the inner tongue and its sacred symbols, Sufi language should not be interpreted by historical or linguistic method, for each studies it based on varied practical applications among nations and traditions, yielding only relative results and imaginary hypotheses that distort sacred meaning by diverting sacred symbols from their higher meaning to a lower one, depriving them of spiritual efficacy. The historical method, under the pretext of objectivity, studies Sufi symbols as independent objects detached from the whole traditional system, yielding reductive meanings due to inability to connect part to whole, thus failing to grasp the unifying unity among Sufi symbols and interpreting them as fabrications and plagiarisms.

## **2. Lowering the Status of the Sufi Text and Indicting Symbolism:**

Sufis—especially the early ones—were known for concise, measured speech free of verbal tricks and delusive semantics. Their words are the quintessence of speech, luminous flashes of divine inspirations. Words become for the recipient spiritual subtleties integrating him into the angelic world even if he lacks unveiling. Many who read wise aphorisms, though not travelers, cannot prevent being affected even outwardly. This was stated by the German orientalist

Annemarie Schimmel: “Who would not be enraptured reading poetry embodying Mawlana’s ecstasy, longing, and love?”

Sufi language—the inner tongue or logic of birds—remains inaccessible to sensory modernist understandings. According to the Muslim Sufi René Guénon, “Knowledge of the language of birds or secret language is a distinction specific to supreme spiritual gnosis,” whose subject is wisdom; lowering it to the masses debases its high station—not elitist arrogance, but to compel endurance of the path to burn the shells. Higher realities are ascended to; they do not descend to the heedless.

Since it is easy to belittle what one does not know—best means to ease the burden of one’s incapacity—Sufi language was condemned with various reproaches by those lacking epistemic humility. Instead of admitting inability to understand, condemnation is projected onto the subject. Defamation moved from ideas to persons, targeting central poles to allegedly demolish Sufi science by cutting the spiritual succession chain. Indeed, Sufi succession was weakened and modern generations mocked it openly after losing even epistemic modesty.

Symbolism was interpreted as “gnostic arrogance” or “gnostic dissimulation.” Those who read gnostic corpora through linear logic and superficial reason accused them of secrecy and hidden organizations. Modern mentality cannot tolerate any secret; ignorance makes it appear as privilege granted to some individuals.

Modernist readings also justified labeling Sufism elitist by claiming that restricting entry to qualified elect monopolizes knowledge and creates classism, contradicting modern science itself which conditions specialization and competence. Modernists are filled with contradictions: accusing Sufis of elitism while modern science requires specialization.

Ignorance—often deliberate—of the aims of Sufi writing led to interpreting encoding as protective dissimulation or political strategy. Mohammed Abed al-Jabri stated: “Muslim gnostics use allusion and symbol in their discourse with the he common people either as ‘taqiyya,’ that is protection against reactions of exoteric scholars and authorities, or as part of a strategy of invitation relying on secrecy and insinuation of possessing secrets.”

The first justification accuses all Sufis of cowardice before authority; the second attributes political opportunism. Yet historical facts refute such generalization, such as the execution of the Sufi knower Al-Hallaj and Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi, who spoke openly without protective dissimulation. Likewise Ibn Arabi was received with honor by Seljuk princes and taught peacefully in Damascus until his death in 1240 CE.

Modernist reading thus reveals epistemic bias. The notion of “gnostic arrogance” collapses when examined: arrogance elevates egoity, whereas Sufism negates ego before the Real

Principle. “How strange to consider arrogance what leads to stripping individuality of all value before the Real Principle; how describe as egoism one who strives for final spiritual liberation where, by definition, the ‘I’ no longer exists?”

### **3. The Clientelist Sufi Reading for Public Propaganda and Attraction:**

In the past, as (Idries Shah) says, the Sufis lived Sufi ideas and teachings in daily life, and it was possible for a Sufi to exist without knowing a specific name for what he believed in. Then the modern ages came, which witnessed the presence of the name, but living according to it became impossible, and it became necessary to adapt it so that it might survive in concealment that begins in the cradle and ends only in the grave. Today, the vulgarization of receiving the Sufi text and trivializing its inner contents has reached the **ظهور** of the “Sufi intellectual,” in an instructional manner, who has amassed heaps of information from handling books through reading, thus becoming an eloquent speaker about metaphysics and gnosis, even being described as wise though he has no wisdom—especially as the concept of culture has regressed and become synonymous with accumulative encyclopedism. Everyone who speaks and inserts his mind into every field of knowledge earns the badge of “intellectual,” and is even counted among the elite, or in modern terminology, the “nakhba,” indicating intellectual distinction from the masses and crowds of the general public. This distinction is measured by rhetorical linguistic power mixed with mastery of ostentatious argumentative mechanisms. Hence the intellectual is described as the “elite,” as a preferential designation not subject to leveling or projection upon anyone other than the imams of spiritual succession; for in its traditional meaning it derives from “selection,” which is of a higher order.

In our time one sees those who claim expertise in Sufi knowledge; their speech captivates you with its echoes and reverberations, yet they are far from true Sufism and its divine pedagogical path. Rather, you find their conduct resembling that of coarse materialists, devoid of the gentleness and spiritual subtlety characteristic of gnostics and sages. This confirms that Sufism today is a name without a living spirit in hearts—written compilations containing devices and commentaries on the illuminations of the knowers, who only wrote them as an initiatory means for the traveler at the beginning of inner preparation for wisdom. As for the modern practitioners of gnostic clientele-ism, they have piled up writings around it, most of which lack any guiding order; they neither knew nor realized—whether out of ignorance or deliberate disregard—that wisdom is not pure contemplation detached from activity. No one will attain its rank by limiting his vision to contemplating the higher principles governing the fabric of the greater and lesser cosmos without actualizing supreme knowledge.

The expressive Sufi symbolism was understood as a guardianship over sublime knowledge, monopolistic against equality and vulgar public dissemination, whereas this type of knowledge is alien to the understanding of the lower ranks beneath the spiritual elite. It cannot be grasped by one equipped with the mental habits of philosophical, scientific, or even (literalist) religious methodologies that stop at the limits of outward knowledge. To strip what modern emotional readings considered guardianship over wisdom, they resorted to vulgar public dissemination through a clientele practice that reduces meaning and simplifies content, emptying the Sufi text of its sapiential essence. Writing about it thus becomes games of entertainment through arbitrary interpretations of the implicit meanings of sapiential symbols, whose true nature is only attained by one who approaches them from within. As for the intrusive pretenders, they have turned Sufi symbols into metaphors for folkloric substitutive writing—transplantation and recontextualization—as a kind of ornamental writing, as in the novel. Practitioners of Sufi clientele-ism are attracted by the encrypted expressions of ancient source texts and stirred by the aesthetic of enigmatic symbolic language. They read Sufi compilations, sayings, and poetry to practice substitutive writing; symbols are taken as metaphorical representations transferred from the Sufi discursive field to other domains, exploiting the most authentic and symbolically rich Sufi poles for purposes other than transmission. In addition to methodological arbitrariness or “epistemic violence,” practitioners of Sufi clientele-ism engage in adaptive interpretation aligned with a given model of vision to legitimize Sufism, as in modern feminist readings of Islamic Sufism, specifically (Ibn Arabi), who granted a central place to woman within the Islamic and Prophetic perspective, overturning all patriarchal beliefs. She was not a subordinate margin or neglected object, but the tree of the cosmos. Yet modern feminist readings have exploited the Akbarian texts to defend the centrality of woman in existence, claiming it is feminine rather than masculine, and that the first creation is female. One feminist (Nuzha Barada) analyzes one of the Akbarian Fusūs, specifically “The Chapter of Individual Wisdom in a Muhammadan Word,” interpreting it—according to her claim—as centered on feminine love rather than divine love, considering the former a passage to the latter, and the latter manifested essentially in the former. (Nuzha Barada) states: “The love of women represents an extension of the original divine love because through it the secrets of origination are unveiled, allowing the lover, that is, the Muhammadan heir, to attain the rank of cognitive perfection.” Such arbitrary interpretations and controlling explanations have spread, vulgarizing the texts of the great Sufi (Ibn Arabi) regarding woman.

The tendency toward “generalization” (and vulgarization) (la vulgarisation) is one of the traits of the modern mentality and extends to all fields without exception, following the dominance

of the relativist paradigm and the forced leveling between forms of knowledge without distinguishing between worldly (exoteric) knowledge and sacred knowledge. From this perspective, modern explanatory and clientele readings—specifically—treat Sufi knowledge in its epistemic or methodological dimension as if it were like the outward sciences. This trivialization is a feature of reductive simplification, which has extended into the field of sublime knowledge, accompanied by the weakening of the Sufi vision in multiple forms through denial/opposition/inversion—not only in the West but also extending to the East to varying degrees.

Public dissemination presupposes, indeed pre-decides, that everyone is capable of receiving any form of knowledge as something acquired; thus the capacity for perception and understanding is considered equal. This is an explicit denial of the very ranks of understanding and perception, a natural hierarchy that safeguards truth from vulgarization and allows it to appear only to those who rise to it, while it withdraws from those who wish to lower it under the pretext of equality. Hence the Muslim Sufi (René Guénon) rejected “vulgar public dissemination in whatever form, adhering to the strict principled doctrinal stance that refuses any concession,” preferring that the identity of traditional written texts remain without explicit naming, so as to distinguish between the true seeker and traveler of wisdom and the one who approaches it merely for reading in order to practice market Sufi clientele-ism. This is precisely what modern polarizing readings advocating vulgar public dissemination do: “they do nothing but harm the truth; the claim of placing the truth ‘within everyone’s reach’ and facilitating access to it by all without distinction is necessarily a call to insult and distort it.”

To insult anything, it suffices to lower it from its rank; thus bringing lofty truths down to the vulgar public sphere dominated by a superficial exoteric viewpoint means making the path of truth and wisdom easy for all to obtain without patient endurance of the hardships of the path to burn away the husks—contrary to the evangelical wisdom: “seek and knock.” Those who practice propaganda absolve people of the responsibility of seeking and knocking so they may find without effort; there is no baser degradation than this trivialization. If worldly acquired sciences require the cooperation of various capacities and faculties to attain them, how much more so when it concerns what cannot be taught—namely “wisdom,” which transcends all sciences of discursive reason because it is the science of remembrance with the rational heart. Spirituality is an ascending movement, not a descending one; it is approached and sacrifices are made for it according to one’s capacity. “However clear higher-order truths may be, only those qualified to understand them will understand them.”

Moderns strive, without true concern, to generalize what they claim is truth as widely as possible, believing that as the number of recipients increases, those ideas gain greater credibility ensuring their continuity and granting them reality—especially since reality has become the criterion of what is true. This is nothing but further movement toward the dominance of quantity, alongside the reduction of everything qualitative in what is considered truth. Ideas become available and communal not because they are true but because public opinion accepts them. “Fear of ‘people’s opinion’ is, more than anything else, what allows invented custom to impose itself as happens in reality.” Many mistaken concepts about spirituality and Sufism have thus spread beyond a minority of thinkers and invaded the mentality of the masses, becoming intellectual habits. In Arab Islamic societies, for example, merely mentioning the word Sufism immediately evokes asceticism in its mistaken sense. Such misconceptions become entrenched gradually: first as a fashion of the age, then through “collective suggestion” into a settled habit, then a mode of thinking. This, according to (Abd al-Wahid Yahya), means “vulgarization stamps the mentality of its recipients with the mark of ‘pseudo-learning’ (scientism) and reduces their responsibility.” This superficial mentality has extended to traditional doctrines and played a dangerous role in overturning religious and spiritual heritage.

Here the Muslim Sufi (René Guénon) distinguishes between two categories, both of which have trivialized the field of spiritual heritage through public dissemination. The first does not deliberately trivialize but seeks to explain and simplify gnostic concepts for those unfamiliar with them, relying on reading Sufi writings through discursive logic without practicing spiritual contemplation, assuming they are like worldly sciences suitable for public dissemination. They fall into reductive simplification, for “even within the limits of their understanding, the necessities of propaganda inevitably lead them to adapt to the mentality of those they address, which can only be achieved by diminishing the dimensions of truth.” Instead of elevating to the truth, it is lowered to suit the mentality of the masses, including so-called intellectuals and specialists, disrupting proper order. Moreover, presenting ideas for the sake of generalization contradicts the traditional mode of transmission.

First, because it does not observe the conditions of proper transmission reserved for the spiritually qualified elite. Second, although many of this group sincerely aim to make traditional gnostic knowledge accessible to all with transparency and independence from bias, they have vulgarized it more than preserved its sublimity, practicing public dissemination without direct engagement in a historical or spontaneous spiritual lineage. Their affiliation is academic in the modern sense, not inward participation (unity of subject and object), but outward affiliation (separation of subject and object). The first transmits from within; the second from without.

Whoever remains at the outward level attains only the outward; whoever enters the inward stands upon lofty truths and some of their secrets open before him. Traditional transmission aims not at displaying ideas for all, but at safeguarding the trust of spiritual heritage entrusted by Truth to the chosen elite inheritors of wisdom, successors of prophets and messengers, charged by divine care or delegation. Thus traditional transmission is qualitative and superhumanly guided, whereas public dissemination is quantitative.

The second reading is more dangerous: it approaches spiritual heritage through academic specialization with the deliberate aim of trivializing it through inversion, seeking material gains and privileges. They practice emotional duplicity—alignment or opposition depending on their clientele. Governed by a capitalist mentality, they turn the traditional field—like all modern civilization described by (Martin Lings) as a market—into a marketplace ruled by supply and demand, including “spirituality.” Agents of modern deviation push it to the lowest depths to delay or prevent the second birth of spirituality, which withdraws further as heedlessness invades the worldly sphere and empties it of sacred blessing. These people “are not truly concerned with esoteric doctrines and teachings, but seeing the favor they enjoy in wide circles, they exploit this ‘fashion,’ turning them into a real commercial project, publishing indiscriminately whatever seems to suit the tastes of a type of ‘customer.’”

The judgments of advocates of vulgar public dissemination of spiritual or Sufi thought are widely accepted in public discourse and academia, taken as self-evident truths. They exploit the aversion generated toward spiritual heritage so that false concepts become entrenched mental habits without critical examination. Living in a worldly environment dominated by heedlessness, this majority embodies the dominance of quantity and becomes pliable material for vulgar disseminators. Another category targeted are false affiliates of spirituality lacking proper traditional guidance, drawn by prestige and claims of cosmic authority—“charlatans falsely affiliated with esoteric knowledge who deliberately deceive the public by presenting their invented innovations under titles of authentic doctrines they completely ignore, thus increasing confusion.” Disseminators exploit their ignorance, sometimes feigning support for “spirituality” as a seductive tactic.

The spread of falsifications has made people unable to distinguish true esoteric scholars from pretenders; all spiritual guides are accused, their methods demonized. Some describe disciples as passive “lifeless bodies,” while others reduce all esoteric doctrines to politicized ideologies. Psychological therapy is confused with spiritual training, and the former is favored while the latter declines due to weakened connection to traditional chains and the decline of qualified elites amid the proliferation of promoters of ego-centered self-development. These too represent

traditional inversion, directing individuals downward rather than elevating them to higher stations of true knowledge.

The spread of oversimplified ideas has led people to conflate vulgar dissemination with independent presentation unconcerned with pleasing the public. Such works are judged as charlatanism practicing false spiritualization to spread claims. Trust has eroded, especially among the uneducated masses, whose minds are pliable for manipulative suggestion. In today's cyber knowledge society, superficial pseudo-intellectualism and fragmented information have facilitated commerce in spiritual gnosticism, whether hostile or falsely promotional. Many teachings are advertised in cyberspace under cultural exchange; even well-intentioned but ignorant individuals contribute to trivialization.

Conclusion:

Gnostic symbolism is a form of inward allusion not intended for its own sake but to safeguard wisdom from vulgar public dissemination and preserve the transcendence of sublime truth. Thus the Sufis' resort to symbolism is not arrogance but a possible means of transmitting what belongs to the traditional spiritual field. It is methodological, not an end in itself. Outside this role it has no legitimacy. It is merely a preparatory means placing the traveler on the path; its role ceases once the highest station of union is reached. Therefore generalized vulgar dissemination is only possible by lowering lofty truths to an inferior level accessible to common understanding. Instead of elevating to the truth, it is brought down to suit the mentality of the public—whether academically educated or not.

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