

Kazuyo Murata, *Beauty in Sufism: The Teachings of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), x+212 pp.

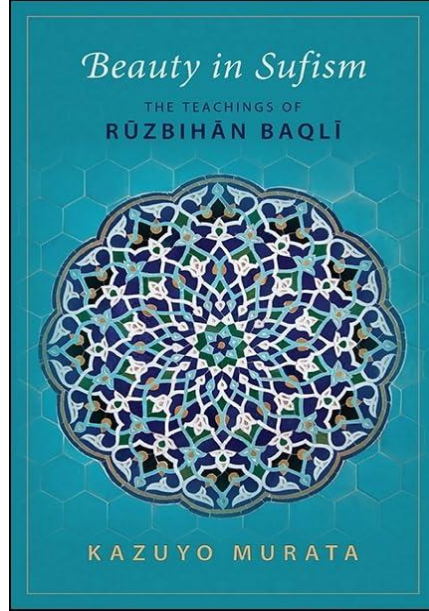
Kazuyo Murata, Beauty in Sufism: The Teachings of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī

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Commencing with a brief exposition on the life and works of Ruzbihān al-Baqlī, Murata's book embarks upon an examination of the concept of beauty as delineated in the Qur'an and hadiths in its inaugural chapter. Subsequently, Murata delves into the multifaceted understanding and application of beauty across various contexts. Employing an analytical framework that encompasses ontological, theological, cosmological, cosmogonic, ethical, and psychological dimensions, Murata elucidates the concept's diverse manifestations. In elucidating ontological beauty, Murata draws upon the insights of prominent figures such as Fārābī (d. 339/950), Ibn al-Sīnā (d. 428/1037), and al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), positing that the beauty of each entity is contingent upon its intrinsic harmony. Thus, the beauty inherent in a horse differs from that found in a human, or in a literary composition versus a musical composition. Transitioning from ontological



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considerations, Murata proceeds to explore theological beauty through the framework of the beautiful names of Allah (*al-asmā al-busnā*), a paradigm consistent with Sufi doctrine which posits the divine names as foundational to the universe's existence.

The assertion that every created entity serves as a reflection of one or more divine names is central to Sufi doctrine. Murata's treatment of this concept, while incorporating Ibn Sīnā's perspective, is critiqued for its omission of the views of certain Sufi scholars, leading to a perceived limitation in the book's scope. Indeed, a more nuanced understanding emerged with the contributions of Ibn al-ʿArabī, wherein the divine names transcended mere descriptors to become fundamental constituents of existence itself. Ibn al-ʿArabī, posits that the divine names and attributes function as a metaphysical bridge, facilitating both epistemological and ontological connections between the unseen realm of Allah and the observable universe. Given the forthcoming discussion on Ruzbihān al-Baqlī's views on beauty, who is often likened to Iran's Ibn al-ʿArabī, it would have been pertinent for Murata to incorporate Ibn al-ʿArabī's perspective at this juncture to enrich the discourse on the subject.

Before delving into the core subject of Ruzbihān al-Baqlī's thoughts on beauty Murata, first addresses the concept of cosmic beauty within the framework of the soul by quoting passages from Plato and the Platonic-inspired Ikhwān al-Ṣafā influenced by him. Drawing upon excerpts from Plato and the Platonic-influenced Ikhwān al-Ṣafā, Murata suggests parallels between Sufi thought and Platonic philosophy. It can be inferred that by exhibiting this kind of approach Murata's points out the following issues: Ruzbihān al-Baqlī, as can be seen at first glance from the names of works such as *Sayr al-arwāḥ*, *Mashrab al-arwāḥ*, explains that the (*sayr wa sulūk*) journey made by the devotee is actually the journey of the soul. It expresses that the inner states (*ahwāl*) experienced in these stations (*makam*) are experienced spiritually. By adopting this perspective in the initial chapter, Murata endeavors to illustrate the resonance between Ruzbihān al-Baqlī's conception of beauty and Platonic ideals, whether directly or indirect.

The first chapter stands as a pivotal component within the book, given its exploration of love (*al-ashq*) as the cornerstone of Ruzbihān al-



Baqlī's sufi doctrine. For al-Baqlī, love and beauty (*al-busn*) are intertwined eternal attributes. Within this chapter, Murata endeavors to explicate various Sufi concepts, including existence and knowledge, through the lenses of ontology, theology, cosmology, cosmogony, and psychology. Hence, Murata's interpreting each of these by taking philosophers and sufis understanding into consideration in general contributes readers to comprehend the other topics better.

In the second chapter, Murata delves into Ruzbihān al-Baqlī's work, *Masrab al-arwāḥ*, to explore the concepts of beauty and grace (*jamāl*), the pleasant (*al-mustabsān*), and the unpleasant (*al-mustaqbāb*) as interpreted by the scholar. While *Masrab al-Arwāḥ* is acknowledged as a primary source for understanding Ruzbihān al-Baqlī's thoughts, a discussion of *'Abbar al-Āshiqīn* would have provided additional insight given the nature of the topic. However, the primary focus remains on the subject matter rather than introductory details.

The author provides necessary foundational information to understand the beauty mentioned by Ruzbihān al-Baqlī under the title "Discourse on Beauty" and discusses how beauty is addressed in the Qur'an and hadiths. She highlights Ruzbihān al-Baqlī's interpretation of the hadith "Surely Allah is beautiful, and He loves beauty," where inner states such as love are equated with inner beauty (*al-jamāl al-bātm*), while outward states like confidence in God (*al-tawakkul*) and humility (*al-tawādu'*) are associated with outer beauty (*al-jamāl al-zābir*). Murata notes that Ruzbihān al-Baqlī uses the terms *al-busn* and *al-jamāl* interchangeably, albeit suggesting a nuanced difference. While *al-busn* is portrayed as softer and more inviting, evoking hope and pleasure, *al-jamāl* is characterized by "fear and recognition of majesty," imparting a sense of intimidation.

Ruzbihān al-Baqlī's analysis of beauty as opposed to ugliness (*al-qubb*) is inherently ontological. Murata, after to understand the groundwork on al-Baqlī's terminology and ontology of beauty, suggests that readers are primed to delve into discussions on God, the universe, and the beauty inherent in humanity in subsequent chapters. Murata ultimately offers a comparative analysis of the concepts of *mustahsan* and *mustaqbah*, critiquing them based on Ruzbihān al-Baqlī's ideas.



The author touches upon an important assertion regarding Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, as mentioned in some other sources as well. Murata then states that Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's work was influenced by Deylemī's work on the topics of love and beauty, and there are some similarities between the two. Murata endeavors to elucidate this claim through al-Baqlī's work, *'Abbar al- 'Āshiqīn*. For instance, she highlights al-Baqlī's assertions regarding the concept of *mustahsan* in this work, drawing parallels with Deylemī's words in his work, *Ātfū'l-elfū'l-me'lūf'ale'l-lâmi'l-ma'tûf*. A notable example from Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's *'Abbar al- 'Āshiqīn* illustrates this connection: "The beautiful light of everyone and everything is created from the eternal beautiful light of Allah. As you get closer to that light, the shadow of beauty increases." This sentiment resonates with Deylemī's assertion: "Everything that is beautiful derives its beauty from the universal beauty. The closer you get to it, the more beautiful it becomes." Through such comparisons, similarities emerge, notably in the shared notion that beauty diminishes as one moves away from its source, as evidenced by the expression "It decreases as you move away" echoed in both works.

In the third chapter, Murata focuses the broad topic of beauty, previously discussed from ontological, theological, cosmological, and psychological perspectives by philosophers and Sufis, into specific themes analyzed through the lens of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's views. This focused approach underscores Murata's commitment to exploring the subject through the perspective of a singular individual, signaling her dedication to thoroughly investigating al-Baqlī's insights. Additionally, touches upon to the symbolic, metaphorical and figurative language used by Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's her works by opening titles, Murata and prefers the works she mainly uses according to the subjects. For example, her use of *Masālik al-tawhīd* regarding the dogmatic theology of beauty, it can be said that the author's use of a good method lies behind such a difficult attempt. Throughout, the key terms of *al-ḥusn* and *al-jamāl* remain central, anchoring discussions around these fundamental concepts.

In the fourth chapter, titled "Anthropology and Cosmology of Beauty," Murata elucidates the distinctions between beauty in the universe and in humans, who interact with both God and the cosmos. Beginning with guiding introductory statements and questions aimed at facilitating



comprehension, Murata's analysis is structured around probing inquiries such as: "If Allah is beautiful, and therefore His creations are also beautiful, then what is the role of beauty in the creation of the world? What is the role of humans in the face of beauty? What makes things beautiful?" (p. 75)

Within this framework, Murata contends that human beings, embodying the essence of the universe within themselves, uniquely reflect both the beautiful (*jamāl*) and majestic (*jalāl*) attributes encompassed within the divine attributes of Allah. Unlike other entities in the universe that reflect only one of Allah's attributes, humans exhibit the dual manifestation of both beauty and majesty, displaying traits ranging from goodness to anger. Drawing upon the *al-Kanz al-makhfi* hadith, Murata delves into why human beauty is characterized by the term *al-husn*, attributing it to Allah's love for the attributes of beauty that encompass both *al-jamāl* and *al-jalāl*. For Murata, beauty encapsulates the entirety of divine attributes, including both aspects of beauty and majesty, making it the most fitting term to describe human beauty as a reflection of the divine names (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*).

In the fifth chapter, Murata introduces a new theme titled "Prophetology of Beauty," asserting that human beauty surpasses cosmic beauty. She posits that while various forms of beauty exist among individuals, the beauty of prophets holds a supreme status. Murata supports this assertion by referencing Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's statement: "A servant who has been purified from creaturely qualities mirrors Allah's beauty and perfection in the world, such as Adam, Joseph, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. They serve as the original sources of Allah's beauty, through whom His eternal beauty is revealed in the world. This inheritance of beauty extends to its possessors in both this world and the hereafter." Murata further delves into an analysis of the beauty attributed to these five prophets, delineating their respective roles and significance within Ruzbihān's discourse on beauty. For instance, she highlights Adam as the symbol of universal human beauty, underscoring his pivotal role as the first human and prophet in Ruzbihān's beauty discourse.

Regarding Western scholarship on Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's, Louis Massignon provides extensive insights into al-Baqlī's life and works, while W. Carl Ernst explores his Sufi experiences and philosophical thoughts in



various works. Paul Ballanfat focuses on al-Baqlī's philosophical ideas, such as "Nûr-i Muhammedî" and "Ruh", whereas Kazuyo Murata concentrates on a singular subject, offering a comprehensive understanding of Baklî's views on beauty. Murata's work presents a structured analysis of the concept of beauty within Rûzbihân al-Baqlî's framework, accompanied by chapter summaries that underscore its significance and the necessity of its translation into multiple languages.

