

## Hermeneutic Analysis of Ibn Arabi’s Theory of “Continuous Revelation” and Its Comparison with Roland Barthes’ Theory of “Open-Closed Texts”

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### ABSTRACT

Hermeneutic analysis (Hermeneutics) of texts is a new branch of Islamic studies that seeks to discover the messages, signs and hidden meanings of revelation and Quranic verses. The mystical views of Mohy al-Din Ibn Arabi, one of the greatest mystics of the Islamic world, are mostly based on the meta-textual hermeneutics assigned to him and interpretations far from the appearance of Quranic verses. Hermeneutical views of Ibn Arabi of revelation and Quranic verses can be assayed and studied in his works including Futuhat Al Makkyyah, Fusus Al Hikam as well as the Quranic exegeses which are attributed to him. In present essay, we first study Ibn Arabi’s general perspective of “Revelation” and then continue to discuss the hermeneutic analysis of his theory of “Continuous Revelation” and finally we compare Ibn Arabi’s theory with Roland Barthes’ theory of “Open-Closed Texts”. The results of the present study show that the manifestation and emergence of the mystical theory of “Continuous Revelation” is of a literary and artistic nature and despite certain differences, one can find considerable similarities and compatibilities with the theory of “Closed-Open Texts”. To put it otherwise, this essay explains the considerable similarity of Ibn Arabi’s mystical theory of “continuous revelation” and Roland Barthes’ “closed-open texts” from the point of view of the emergence and infusion of hermeneutical meanings in/ into the reader’s mind and demonstrates that regardless of the mystical nature of the theory of “continuous revelation” its objective appearance and emergence has taken form based on the literary and artistic dimensions.

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## **Intruduction**

Hermeneutics has its origin in Greek «Hermeneuein» in the sense of opening and interpretation which itself is a derivative of Hermes who is deemed in Greek myths to be the inventor of writing system and language (Palmer, 2011, 19). Hermeneutics is one of the new branches of textual studies that struggles to methodize the interpretation of all human meaningful actions and effects as well as their appearances particularly when they are emerging in the form of text. Hermeneutics deals with the process of understanding of a work and it studies the mechanisms of acquisition of meaning from different phenomena including the speech, behavior, written texts and artistic works in order to present a way for better understanding of the phenomena. To put it in a nutshell, hermeneutics to find an answer to the question that if there is a method and solution by means of which the readers of a text or the viewers of an artwork can acquire the fixed and determinate meaning of that work or text or every audience's understanding belongs to him and is different from that of others?

The historical roots of hermeneutic debates can be traced back to the post-medieval era and the destruction of the domination of Catholic Christianity.

*Schleiermacher* and *Wilhelm Dilthey* were the first thinkers to establish the basic principles of hermeneutics in the nineteenth century. They believed that there are a final meaning and an ultimate understanding of the work which is exactly meant by the author and the interpreter is obliged to reach that "ultimate meaning" through knowing the work, examination of the intra-textual signs and correction of the interpretation method. This idea is presented as the theory of "Determinacy of the Author's Intention" and grounds the basis of traditional hermeneutic thinking (Palmer, 2011, 19).

Schleimacher's philosophical hermeneutics was text-oriented. Dilthey acknowledges Schleimacher's insight that what is fundamentally intelligible is text. From this perspective, hermeneutical understanding is the understanding of the text in its historical context, and results from considering history as the source of all mind-made realities (Weinsheimer, 2010, 21).

The chief problem of the traditional hermeneutics in the eyes of the critics was that the discovery of the author's intention is not possible due to temporal and spatial distance. Accordingly, in later eras, modern hermeneutic theory took form and such thinkers as *Derrida*, *Gadamer* and *Roland Barthes* used the idea of relativity of meaning to challenge the theory of determinacy of meaning of the texts in a fundamental fashion. "New theories in hermeneutic consider the meaning to be dependent upon the reader and reading and do not attribute a considerable importance to the writer or narrator of the text" (Weinsheimer, 2010, 180). *Gadamer*, influenced by *Heidegger*, argues that understanding is a historical matter and as such is always connected to the present. For him, it is naive to speak of the "objective validity of interpretations," because to do so would be to take for granted the possibility of understanding from a position outside history (Palmer, 2011, 55).

On this basis, in modern theories and literary theories, hermeneutics acquired a broader meaning and a wider scope, and was applied to any type of interpretation in the context of human knowledge, experiences, and perceptions.

can be said, the major application of the hermeneutic discussions is in the interpretation of the biblical and mythical texts. In recent years, hermeneutics has entered the Islamic and Quranic studies and some comparative researches have been conducted regarding the Sufi hermeneutical exegeses of Quran and hermeneutical discussions.

As the noblest figure in the history of theoretical mysticism in Islamic World, *Ibn Arabi* in addition to having a hermeneutical perspective in understanding the Quranic notions that has its root in his belonging to the historical current of Sufism, believed in the mystical idea of "Continuous Revelation" and explained its details and meaning throughout his works. "Just as the revelation of the Book to the hearts of the prophets is from God, the revelation of the understanding of this Book to the hearts of some believers is also from God" (*Ibn Arabi, 1986, Vol.1, 279*). As to *Ibn Arabi's* Quranic hermeneutical exegeses, numerous studies have been conducted but according to our review, no serious and independent study has been done yet concerning the hermeneutical analysis of the "continuous revelation". The core idea of the present study includes two parts. The first part is focused on the introduction and analysis of the theory of "continuous revelation" based on hermeneutic perspective while the second part compares the latter theory with *Roland Barthes'* "Closed-Open Texts" theory from the point of view of the hermeneutical functions. Through this study, we seek to answer the following basic questions:

1. From what principles does the mystical theory of "continuous revelation" originate and what are its functions?
2. How can a connection be made between hermeneutic science and hermeneutic signs with *Ibn Arabi's* continuous revelation?
3. What are the commonalities and differences between *Roland Barthes'* literary theory of "open-closed texts" and *Ibn Arabi's* mystical theory of "continuous revelation"?

## 1. Background

In such works as "*Muhy al-Din Ibn Arabi* the Distinguished Figure of Islamic Mysticism", "*Ibn Arabi* Heir to the Prophets", "Three Muslim Sages" as well as other works on *Ibn Arabi*, short parts have been devoted to the explanation of *Ibn Arabi's* hermeneutical perspective of Quran, but no precise and independent discussion is offered of the issues of hermeneutics and its methods in *Ibn Arabi's* thought or "continuous revelation" and its features. In the peer-reviewed article entitled "*Ibn Arabi* on Quran and Method of Quranic Exegesis" despite precise outline

of *Ibn Arabi*'s exegetical method and even a short allusion to some aspects of continuous revelation, the hermeneutical functions of this theory have been passed in silence.

Generally speaking, most of the articles reviewed related to the keywords "Quran", "Revelation" and "Ibn Arabi", including "*Ibn Arabi* in Prophetic Revelation" and "Ibn Arabi on Revelation" do not have any basic content in explaining the theory. Continuous Revelation "and analysis of its literary and artistic aspects

The article "Comparative study of Ibn Arabi's mystical interpretation with contemporary hermeneutical issues" also divides hermeneutics into three types: classical, romantic and philosophical, and considers the Qur'anic interpretations of mystics outside this division.

Given the aforementioned points, it seems that no independent study has been conducted so far concerning the comparative study of the theory of continuous revelation and hermeneutical discussions as well as other literary and artistic theories including *Barthes*' theory of closed-open texts.

## **2. Ibn Arabi on Revelation and Quranic Verses**

Ibn Arabi's (560-637A.H.) thoughts have been influential in many branches of Islamic sciences and knowledge. The nature of revelation and themes of Quranic verses are among the issues that are frequently discussed in Ibn Arabi's intellectual system.

According to *Ibn Arabi*, there are two types of revelation: The first type is the general revelation and its characteristic is that it extends into all creatures in the world and does not exclusively belong to man or angels ([Ibn Arabi, 1986, Vol.2, 78](#)).

But the second type of revelation is special and exclusively belongs to man. This revelation, according to Ibn Arabi, is itself of two subsets: first, the revelation related to man in the domain of Sharia that belongs to the prophets and ordinary people have no share in it while the second type is the special revelation, i.e. cordial inspiration, of which the Chosen Saints of Allah have a share ([Dadju, 2012, 140](#)). This type of revelation is ongoing and is not specific to official prophets ([Mojtaheed Shabestari, 2005, 143](#)). Based on this definition, special revelation that is specifically for the saints can be classified among the spiritual openings, inspirations and cordial enlightenments of the mystics.

### **2-1. Quranic Exegeses of Ibn Arabi**

Interpretation can be lexically understood as the discovery of intention and meaning of a complicated word; but hermeneutics refers to tracing a word back to its origin or acquisition of the hidden and possible senses of the speech ([Purnamdarian, 2017, 125](#)). Any interpretation is limited and therefore temporary because the meaning of any work is beyond measure ([Weinsheimer, 2010, 18](#)).

The historical current of "Sufism along with the Ismailis and esotericists who were after the innermost essence of Quran have struggled to penetrate into the surface of the words and by clearing the surface meanings aside to understand the truth of the divine words" (Shafei Kadkani, 2013, 142).

It is interesting to note that in the historical course of the Sufi exegesis the scale of the use of hermeneutic exegesis and transcending the surface of the words and meanings of Quranic verses by the exegetes is totally dependent on their literary and artistic language. Upon the beginning of Seventh Century and following the emergence of Ibn Arabi and his followers, the language of Sufism has expanded further and become more complicated and new experiences have taken form in the domain of Quranic hermeneutics and exegesis. "Sufi experience in understanding Quranic notions comes to end with *Muhy al-Din* and his school and later efforts are nothing but the repetition, exposition and manipulation of his mystical terms" (Shafei Kadkani, 2013, 149).

Muhy al-Din quotes his master Sheikh *Abu Madin* to have said: "The true follower is the one who finds in Quran what he wants" (Ibn Arabi, 1986, Vol.2, 93) The belief in the existence of such a vast field of understanding of the Quran has led *Ibn Arabi* to strip most of the texts and sayings he cites of any simple content and all understanding, and to discover meanings and points in them that no one else can understand. In other words, he can deduce whatever he wants from the Quran and the Hadith (Khwarazmi, 1985, Vol.1, 53).

Symbolic and hermeneutic method of Ibn Arabi in exposition of Quranic verses is mostly used towards the endorsement and exposition of the theory of unity of existence and it has nothing to do with the prevalent exegetical methods in Science of Sharia.

Ibn Arabi's hermeneutic method contrary to the dominant early exegeses has firstly been form based on "Unity of Existence" and secondly, there are countless words away from the surface of the words and without any historical and traditional documentation. The major sources of the scholars in examination of Ibn Arabi's Quranic hermeneutics are "*Fusus Al Hikam*" and "*Futuh at Makkyah*" as well as the so called "*Tafsir Al Quran Al Karim*". Of course, according to the majority of the scholars, although the latter Commentary of Quran is authored based on *Ibn Arabi*'s mystical system and intellectual system using the innovative terms of Muhy al-Din, it does not belong to Ibn Arabi himself rather it is authored by Kamal Al Din Abd Al Razzaq Kashani (Shafei Kadkani, 2013, 163).

## 2-2. Theory of Continuous Revelation

Continuous Revelation implies that the revelation of the meanings of Quran contrary to its words does not come to its end with the termination of prophecy rather spiritual and esoteric truths always descend into the hearts of the believers by means of the words of *Quran*. Different indications exist among the great masters of Sufism in this regard, e.g. Sohrewardi recommends

the readers: “*Read the Quran in a way as if it is revealed for you*” (Sohrawardi, 1994, Vol 4, 139).

This sentence suggests that Quran is a mirror on which everyone finds a specific meaning proportionate to his/her own status. In other words, everyone sees his/her own “self” on this mirror. Such a take of Quranic verses can realize when one sees Quranic verses as symbols. In other words, Quranic verses have numerous esoteric meanings in addition to their surface meanings which become manifested to the enlightened souls according to their epistemic status and spiritual-mystical initiation. Then, one can claim that symbolic taking of Quranic verses is in one sense the necessary background for the theory of continuous revelation (Purnamdarian, 2017, 121).

Ibn Arabi shares the same view with Sheikh Eshraq. Ibn Arabi endorses the dynamic relationship and extra-temporal nearness of the hearts of believers and the verses of Holy Quran and states: “Quran was revealed to the heart of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and it will continue to be revealed to the hearts of the believers until the Doomsday. It is this continuous revelation of the Quran that keeps the revelation fresh and living” (Erol Kilic, 2015, 178).

It is needless to say that revelation of Quran in these words of Ibn Arabi does not refer to the surface wording of the verses rather as it was already mentioned, it is concerned with the esoteric meanings, limit and the opening of the divine word. Ibn Arabi considers reaching to the truth of revelation to be a type of intuition and believes that the revelation of true meanings onto the hearts of the believers is not possible from the behind of the curtain of surface words of Quran without “intuition” (Kamarei, 2012, 124). Among the great Sufis, apart from Ibn Arabi, some others also consider it possible for the mystic to reach the truth of revelation, as Shams Tabrizi says: “Some are the scribes of revelation and some are the places of revelation. Strive to be both; to be both the place and the scribe of your own revelation” (Shams Tabrizi, 1998, 83/2).

As to a servant who has given his heart to the Lord and recites the Quran, *Ibn Arabi* in *Futuhāt Makkiyyah* states: “He deserves to give his ears to me and only lets my words to reach his heart so that I can expose my own words to him and express their meaning to him as I recite the verses for him and let him to hear them ... Then, he gets the knowledge from Me not from his own thoughts and reflections” (Ibn Arabi, 1986, Vol.2, 239).

According to Ibn Arabi, freshness and dynamicity of revelation require diversity of its meanings. The question is, how does this diversity occur in unique and fixed words?

According to Ibn Arabi, people do not share the same temperament and even a unique level of perception. On the other hand, holy scriptures have been revealed from God for all people; then, in descension of Quran, these differences have been taken into account and the truths are

expressed in a way that everyone gets availed of them proportionate to his/her own spiritual status. In *Futuhat*, Ibn Arabi refers to this point as follows:

The man who knows Quran qua Quran is of a unique eye staring at the Transcendent Unity of *Allah* and the one who knows it as a whole, Quran will be his protector and he will observe its back, womb, limit and beginning. The Holy Prophet said that every verse has a backside, womb, limit and beginning, but the first person does not believe in this, because his taste is different (Ibn Arabi, 1986, Vol.3, 94).

Therefore, just as God has different Names, Attributes and Dimensions and to every individual, one or few Divine Names are manifested, Holy Quran and the Scripture as a manifestation of the Divinity will have different revelation in proportionate to the levels and degrees of understanding of people. According to Ibn Arabi, people are divided into four groups in view of their understanding of Quran: thinkers, scholars, men of reason and men of understanding. Each class of people understands different aspects of Quranic verses proportionate to their own existential level (Kakaei, 2014, 512).

Although Ibn Arabi takes the meanings fathomed from Quran to be dependent upon the level of perception and understanding of the audience, he denies the influence of personal struggle of the audience for instillation of those meanings and this is why he prefers the term "indication" over "Ta'vil" [hermeneutical exegesis] in the sense of arbitrary effort of the theologians and the men of reason for understanding the meanings of Quran:

The People of Allah refer to what they offer in explanation of the Book of Allah as indication and not anything else. This is merely out of what they have been taught by the Lord and the ordinary scholars do not know anything of it, because the indication is just intended for the one who indicates not for the one to whom the indication is made (Ibn Arabi, 1986, Vol.1, 281).

In Ibn Arabi's intellectual system, the indicator (the one who indicates) is God who conveys the meaning of a verse into the heart of the audience proportionate to his spiritual and intellectual capacity. To expose the meaning of his words, Ibn Arabi quotes an interesting story of the history of Islam; in the course of Hudaybyyah peace process where the Holy Prophet and Muslims were encountered with a tough situation, the pagans would send someone called "*Suhail*" to the Prophet for negotiation. When the Messenger of Allah heard the name of the mission, he would say: "The work is easy now!" Finally, as the Prophet had predicted, the work became easier and the conflict was resolved (Kakaei, 2014, 515).

In this story, the arrival of a person called *Suhail* is a subtle indication of the facilitation of the affairs and tackling of the problems in near future. Although this reality is discovered by the prophet, the indicator is the Lord who has already informed the Prophet's heart of this fact.

As to Quranic indications, Ibn Arabi does also have similar conception and believes that God conveys the esoteric meanings of the Quranic verses into the believers' hearts proportionate to their spiritual and intellectual capacity. The important and interesting point to which we will return in upcoming sections is implicit reference of Ibn Arabi to the close relationship of the spiritual states of the audience and the hidden meaning of the verses that create difference and diversity in understanding the meanings of the verses. The other point is the subtle role of words in the formation of the hermeneutical meanings. Like other mystical thinkers, Muhy Al Din contends that Ta'vil implies understanding the innermost nature of the Quran but these esoteric meanings are acquired through the surface of the Holy Quran; because meaning is not basically perceptible without the determination of the words for man (Haji Rabei, 2015, 135). As the name "Suhail" is the key to understanding the easing of a complicated situation by the Prophet, the Quranic words are not also separate from their esoteric meaning and one cannot deny the significance of word and surface of the verses in the unconcealment of the esoteric meanings in the hearts of the audience of the Holy Quran.

Given the aforementioned points, Ibn Arabi claims that in Quranic exegeses, he is firmly keeping with the superficial meanings of the verses and observes the consistency between the hermeneutical and superficial meanings of the words. This is why he does not agree with the interpretations offered by the theologians and philosophers concerning the hermeneutical meaning of the supplication of the inanimate objects. He believes that the mistake of the theologians and philosophers lies in the fact that they fail to intuit the supplication of the inanimate objects and struggle to understand the word "supplication" in hermeneutical way so that they can understand true meaning of the verse.

### 3. Quran and "Close-Open Texts" Theory

The new literary theorists including *Roland Barthes* divide text into two types: *Readerly* (Closed) Texts and *Writerly* (Open) Texts. Closed text is a text the creator of which seeks to convey the meaning to the reader in a direct way. In fact, closed text is of single meaning and its understanding depends on understanding the single meanings intended by the creator of the text in the time of its creation. This type of texts usually does not motivate the mental imaginations of the reader and resist against the interpretability and multiple meanings. By contrast, open text has ambiguity and equivocalness and the nature of the text is in a form as if the meaning is dancing and creates multiple meanings. In this type of texts, it is the reader who takes part in the process of creation of the text and contributes to the formation of its meaning (Barthes, 2016, 52-56; Allen, 2015, 85). In this case,

Everyone has their own interpretation and understanding of the text. In this way, the text is constantly reproduced and born. Derrida considers this to be the secret of the survival of the text (Weinsheimer, 2010, 204).

Generally speaking, "open texts are reader-centered and their interpretation is to be undertaken by the reader. In these texts the reader should be taken as the central element who interprets the text within the horizon of his own mind" (Newton, 1988, 54). In examining and interpreting such works, a complete and absolute meaning is never achieved (Weinsheimer, 2010, 18).

According to the theory of open texts, a literary or artistic work is a text that does not say anything in a decisive and determinate way and at the same time can say everything (Barthes, 2016, 58; Allen, 2015, 97). This definition is like a sentence that *Ein al Qudhat* has written in one of his works on poetry and its meanings: "O' Cavalier! Take these poems as mirrors! You'll finally know that the mirror does not have any face in it. But whoever looks into it, he would see his own face on it!" From this perspective, *Ein al Qudhat* just like *Roland Barthes* believes that one can impose any tolerable meaning to the text and the understanding of what the teller intended to say does not matter that much" (Shafei Kadkani, 2013, 199).

Key literary works usually have some aspects of the open text in themselves and thanks to this interpretability and reader-based readings they survive in the course of time. In different research works, dimensions and methods of making texts equivocal in Persian literature including the poems of Hafez and Sa'di are studied and analyzed. It is needless to say that *Hafez* is of a special place in this area as his wider use of equivocalness in his *Divan* has made his poems the frequent reference of the ordinary people for fortune telling. The use of equivocal words, application of metaphors, formation of multiple meanings using different types of "ya", suspension of meaning in reference of the pronouns are among the most important scientific methods used by *Hafez* in giving multiple meanings to his odes (Azizi Habil, 2019, 16).

As to the comparison of the "closed-open texts" theory with Quranic verses, there are different ideas; some exegetes referring to certain verses of Quran argue that the meanings of Quran do not need any further interpretation. Such as

*"Here is a plain statement to men" (3: 138), "Verily this Qur'an doth guide to that which is most right (or stable)" (17: 9), "And We have indeed made the Qur'an easy to understand and remember: then is there any that will receive admonition?" (54: 17),*

These scholars believe that the quality of public guidance in Quran requires it to have a simple, plain and clear language with a single fixed meaning (Shoar, 1990, 6). On the other hand, the majority of exegetes refer to some verses including the verse (3: 7) "*It is He who has sent down to you the Book. Parts of it are definitive verses, which are the mother of the Book, while others are metaphorical.*" and accept interpretation and exegesis of Quranic verses and consider it possible following the linguistic, historical and jurisprudential rules (Agah, 1996, 198). Anyway, it is clear that if not all verses at least a considerable part of Quranic verses are of multiple meanings and one cannot easily infer single and fixed meanings from them. Having

multiple meanings is one of the aspects of open texts and therefore, application of the quality of open text to some Quranic verses seems to be a defensible action.

Providing all reasons and evidence of equivocalness and open text semantic multiplicity in Quranic verses is beyond the scope of the current essay, but the numerous exegetical works in the history of Islam and deep differences between their content can be clear evidence of the veracity of this claim. As an objective and contemporary example, one can refer to some exegeses of the modern age in which Quranic verses are interpreted relying on the findings of empirical sciences. In "Creation of Man", Dr. Yadollah Sahabi seeks to interpret the verses of human creation or the fatherless birth of Jesus Christ based on the latest findings of empirical sciences and biology in a completely scientific manner (Sahabi, 1967, 154). What makes such an alternative interpretation possible is the quality of equivocalness and multiple meanings as well as symbolic language in the text of the verses related to human creation otherwise on the verses with fixed and clear meanings no such approach is usually adopted. Since the verses related to the devotional actions, injunctions, compensations, and legislative issues are expressing rules and law, they often have one single meaning and one cannot consider them to be open texts. By contrast, the verses related to the history of prophets, human creation, states of the doomsday and monotheistic knowledge are normally associated with interpretability and can be classified as open texts.

The key point in finding the meaning in open texts is the significance and role of the reader in understanding the texts. Intellectual, scientific and spiritual background of the audience, the sight-angle or dominant vision of the reader, temporal and spatial requirements of the encounter with the text and even the unconscious of the audience influences the meaning inferred from the texts. Review of the important exegeses which have been written in the course of the history of Islam suggests that this issue is also the case with the Quranic verses. Sufi exegetes have interpreted the Quranic verses based on their own intellectual principles including the attention to monotheism and inattention to the world and otherworld. Philosophers have inferred the philosophical rules and principles from divine verses while the empirical scientists claim to have discovered gravity, earth rotation around the sun and etc. from Quranic verses. All these hermeneutic exegeses have become possible under the shadow of the reading of different readers and of course the multiple equivocal words and phrases as well as the literary and artistic dimensions of the Divine Word in some Quranic verses. For example, in the verses related to the adulterous people of Lot, after the heralding of the descension of punishment at dawn, the verse ends with an interrogative phrase addressed by the angels of punishment:

They said, 'O Lot, we are messengers of your Lord. They will never get at you. Set out with your family in a watch of the night; and none of you shall turn round, except your wife; indeed, she will be struck by what strikes them. Indeed, their tryst is the dawn. Is not the dawn [already] nearby? (11: 81)

#### 4. Comparative Study of Theory of "Continuous Revelation" and "Open Texts" Theory

The necessary requirement for comparison of two ideas, works or theories is that both of them to belong to the same scientific and epistemic areas and at the same time to be emerge in two different cultural and linguistic fields. As much as the comparison of *Fusus Al Hikam* and *Masnavi* as two distinguished mystic works is logical and acceptable, comparison of a mystical theory with a literary theory seems to be illogical. "Continuous Revelation" is a mystical idea and theory in the domain of *Ibn Arabi's* ideas while *Roland Barthes'* theory of "open-closed texts" is a literary and artistic theory. Then, how can we compare two mystical and literary theories in a logical way?

To answer this question, one needs to elucidate the relation between "mysticism", "language" and "art". Although the true meaning of mysticism and its spiritual experiences is something intrinsic and epistemic for the mystics, yet for those who have not have such spiritual experiences and only through the veil of the phrases and terms and linguistic experiences have approached the understanding of such intangible experiences will be different. According to Professor *Shafei Kadkani*, mysticism is nothing but artistic and aesthetic vision of theology and religion and therefore, "genuine mysticism is not to be realized unless in an artistic and aesthetic language" (*Shafei Kadkani, 2013, 39*). This definition is not in conflict with the theological and historical aspects of mystical streams; rather it implies that the representation of the mystical experiences of such mystics as *Ibn Arabi* is nothing for us but their linguistic effects. To put it otherwise, regardless of the truth of *Ibn Arabi's* experiences and theories, the place where it becomes manifested and objectified is the linguistic and artistic dimensions of the remaining texts.

Regardless of the general coincidence of mysticism, language and art, *Ibn Arabi's* theory of continuous revelation is concerned with *Quran* and finally it deals with the hermeneutical exegeses and intuition of the believers of the divine verses. No matter what is the truth of instillation of esoteric meaning of *Quran* in the hearts of the believers, its result and manifestation will be revealed in the form of hermeneutical interpretation of the meaning of the Quranic verses. This domain is completely consistent with the artistic and linguistic dimensions of *Quran*. Then, one can say that the nature and essence of *Ibn Arabi's* theory of "Continuous Revelation" despite its mystical and spiritual nature, its result and manifestation occur in the domain of language and this is why it can be studied and compared with other artistic and linguistics theories in the domain of textual studies in a logical and defendable way.

##### 4-1. Characteristic of Hermeneutical Meanings in the Presented Theories

Having said these, although *Ibn Arabi* considers the Divine Will to be the main agent of the process of continuous revelation, he still believes that the appearance of the words and the level of spiritual perception of the audience in understanding of the hermeneutical meanings of the verses are completely influential. In the historical story of Prophet, he has used to explain the

meaning of hermeneutics or Quranic allusion, many interesting side points are revealed. The arrival of a person called “*Suhail*” and Prophet’s indication of the facilitation of exegesis firstly underlines the significance of word in the veracity of hermeneutics; secondly, it demonstrates that the context of realization of hermeneutics is the conditions and states of the audience. If the name of the missionary was *Qassem* instead of *Suhail*, could the Prophet declare the arrival of that person as an indication of the ease of affairs in future?! If the conditions were not difficult and there was no worry whatsoever on the possible war with the pagans and the Prophet was not mentally impressed by these, what justification would be there for indication of the name *Suhail* and expression of such a wishful exegesis?!

In addition to this historical example, if we consider Ibn Arabi’s Quranic exegeses to be an instance of the extensions of “Continuous Revelation” and analyze them, we will reach the same designed framework. Ibn Arabi offers a different exegesis of the verse “*therefore put off your shoes; surely you are in the sacred valley, Tuwa*” addressing Moses. The majority of the exegetes believe that when Moses is ordered to put off his shoes, this is because of the sacredness of the valley he has entered and necessity of the bareness of his feet is the observation of the etiquettes of submission before the Lord. This superficial meaning is completely in line with the public culture of the Muslims and the verbal aspects of the verse. Although later the Sufi exegetes added certain hermeneutical expositions to this view including the interpretation of “shoes” as a symbol of the world and the otherworld. They have suggested that whoever wants to reach the intended destination of the Soul, s/he needs to deliver himself from the bondages of the world and even the otherworld and be completely free from all attachments (Khwarazmi, 1985, Vol.2, 18). Ibn Arabi in a different exegesis as compared to the ideas suggested by the earlier exegetes has argued:

He knew that he has worn the shoes of fear and hope and these two carry him just like a vehicle... when Moses reached the circle of intimacy and union in the Sacred Valley, he is told: put off your shoes. Because fear and hope are just for those who still continue to be engaged with initiation, not for the people who have already reached the destination and are the companion of the Beloved (Ibn Arabi, 1998, vol. 3, 76-77).

Station, there is no way but keeping its companionship. Here Ibn Arabi has interpreted the shoes of Moses as meaning "fear and hope" that are the requirement of Wayfaring in the Path of Allah and until the arrival at the Ultimate

Ibn Arabi continues to offer another hermeneutical exegesis of this Quranic order which is completely new and different from the earlier meanings.

In Prophetic tradition, we have read that the shoes of Moses were made of the skin of dead donkey. Thus, one should say that these shoes have three

characteristics: first, the appearance of the skin as a token of necessity of keeping the path without getting stuck in superficial affairs! Secondly, stupidity and ignorance which are symbolized by the donkey and thirdly, the dead donkey is itself denotes the impurity though it implies ignorance too ([Ibn Arabi, 1998, vol. 2, 77-78](#)).

In this part, based on the prophetic tradition of which he is informed, opens a new horizon of meanings for this Quranic injunction that seems to be completely away from the superficial meanings of the verse. If these hermeneutical exegeses of Doctor Maximus are to be regarded among the extensions of Continuous Revelation, it seems that the general principles of "significance of word and appearance of the text in validity of the exegesis" and "dependency of the exegesis upon the audience's states" will continue to be the case. In interpretation of shoes in terms of fear and hope, the pair-ness of shoes is in line with the duality of fear and hope. On the other hand, the role of shoes in walking is in harmony with the role of fear and hope in wayfaring through spiritual initiation. Then, harmony with the superficial and verbal meaning is observed in the interpretation. By the same token, instillation of this exegesis in Ibn Arabi's heart is completely in harmony with his personal and internal states. For firstly, Ibn Arabi is a mystic and wayfarer and from this very perspective, he is completely familiar with the notions of fear and hope and wayfaring towards Allah; secondly, insistence on the notion of duality as well as the conundrum of integrity of this meaning with the notion of unity and union are reflected in the works of *Ibn Arabi*. According to Ibn Arabi,

This dualism of Divine Names and Attributes is manifested in human existence; the appearance and the essence of Truth are both reflected in the form of body and soul; His oppression and compassion are revealed in the form of fear and hope; and Divine anger and satisfaction have brought about majesty and intimacy in man ([Khwarazmi, 1985, Vol.1, 150](#))

In the second interpretation which apparently seems to be far off the mark again the hermeneutical meaning is in harmony with the superficial meaning. In this exegesis, allocation of the shoes to Moses and the order of their removal and putting aside are in harmony with the superficial meaning and on the other hand, three meanings hidden in "dead donkey's skin" which are heeded by Ibn Arabi do also have their origin in the hermeneutic knowledge of the exegete of the content of prophetic tradition. To put it otherwise, if *Ibn Arabi* was not informed of such a tradition, he would have not been able to provide such an exegesis. As Muhy al-Din himself has noted, reading this tradition of the characteristics of the shoes of Moses has enabled him to understand these hermeneutical meanings. Then, in this hermeneutic interpretation the knowledge and mental background of the audience or internal states of the exegete have been influential in the form and meaning of the exegesis.

To conclude the points acquired via the above statement and the foundations of the definitions suggested in previous sections, one can summarize the basic axes in the theory of Continuous Revelation as follows:

- A. The main role in realization of continuous revelation is not played the audience's effort and struggle rather it is undertaken by the Divine Will.
- B. The meanings instilled in the hearts of the believers are in proportionate with the level of perception, spiritual conditions and their internal purification.
- C. The instilled meanings and exegeses are not in conflict with the appearance of the text and words of Holy Quran.
- D. The offered exegeses are not necessarily unique and fixed and even they have the possibility of replication for one audience.

After mining these four axes concerning the hermeneutical meanings of Continuous Revelation, we need to analyze the most important aspects of *Roland Barthes'* theory of "closed-open texts". The scope of influence of *Roland Barthes'* theory in the history of literary criticism and hermeneutic discussion is extensive and even later, another version of this theory became known as the theory of "*La mort de l'auteur*" which in turn gave rise to other literary theories. Despite the extensive scope of this debate, what is relevant to the subject-matter of the present research is the quality of equivocalness and interpretability of the open texts to which we referred earlier in this essay.

The lack of clarity of meanings in open texts paves the path for the reader's interpretation; therefore, part of the Quranic verses which do not have unique and decisive meaning and instill dimensions of equivocalness in the audience's mind including the equivocalness of the words, suggestion of abstract notions, ambiguity in speaker's understanding, diversity and dispersion of themes, melody and so on and so forth, lie in the domain of open texts theory. According to Barthes, "language is not clear-crystal in open texts so that it can convey one single decisive meaning, the signifier does not determine the signified rather the signifier itself has extensive freedoms for meaning creation. Interpretations are built in this way and one should not confuse it with truth" (Barthes, 2016, 48).

The most important axes of *Roland Barthes'* open texts theory that in one sense are relevant to the interpretability aspect of Quranic verses can be outlined as follows:

- A. Open text does not necessarily have a true and unique meaning; rather one can attribute a set of possible meanings to it.
- B. In interpretation of open text, although words and the general structure of text are the basis of interpretability, loyalty to the surface of the text is necessary in interpretation.
- C. Open text is reader-centered and the experiences, spirit and character of the audience play the main role in finding hermeneutical meaning.

D. In interpretation of open texts, finding the author's intention does not matter. But anyway, some rules govern it according to which, some interpretations are valid while others are invalid.

## Conclusion

In a general attitude, this study shows that the theory of "Continuous Revelation" has similarities and differences with/from Roland Barthes' open-closed texts theory in view of the hermeneutical functions. The most important difference of continuous revelation as compared to Roland Barthes' theory lies in the main role of divine will in realization and instillation of hermeneutic interpretation in the hearts of the believers. Acceptance or refusal of acceptance of the role of divine will in instillation of meanings in the mind of the audience of Holy Quran though is important from a dogmatic perspective, the results acquired in current study seem to suggest that there is no considerable difference in the quality of emergence and appearance of hermeneutical meanings.

Roland Barthes in his theory of "open-closed text" When explaining the conditions of interpretation of texts does not rely on no trans-physical factor and The whole process of text interpretation is taken to be influenced by the author, text and the reader, although the position of the author is only accepted up to the stage of creation of text and the main burden of interpretation is laid on the shoulder of the text and reader (Newton, 1988, 123). Therefore, the most important difference of continuous revelation with the theory of open-closed texts lies in *Ibn Arabi's* belief in agency of the Lord in instillation of hermeneutical meanings in the hearts of believers and the addressees of Divine Word.

The most important common characteristic of the two theories has also been interpreted to be the acceptance of the influence of the states of audience. *Ibn Arabi* considers the acquired meanings through Continuous Revelation to be in proportionate to the level of perception and spiritual purity of the audience. As it has been mentioned in the examples, *Ibn Arabi's* Quranic exegeses are completely in harmony with the framework of his ideas, character, knowledge and mystical beliefs. The serious impact of the audience's states on hermeneutical meanings is directly highlighted in the theory of open texts. Of course, the title "states of audience" is expressed in different forms in various literary and artistic theories. For example, what *Ibn Arabi* names as "Internal Purity" and he considers it to be influential in Divine Instillation is referred to in modern hermeneutics as mental background, the unconscious, sensations, degree of perception and internal state. Therefore, one can claim that in *Ibn Arabi's* theory of Continuous Revelation just like other theories related to the interpretation of texts, the influence of the audience's states on the interpreted meanings is accepted.

The other common feature is the importance of superficial meanings and words in reaching the hermeneutical meanings. According to Muhy al-Din, the key to hermeneutical meanings of

Quran is the superficial words and meanings of Quranic verses. Ibn Arabi insists that Quran's interpretation should never be acquired via the denial of superficial meaning or inattention to the words of the verses. Hermeneutical or esoteric meanings are in fact the background or existential truth of the superficial words of Quran the knowledge of which is accessible only to the People of Allah or mystics through faith, submission to the Truth and mystical intuition. The condition of veracity of such mystical interpretations is also being not in contradiction with the appearance of Quran and deep knowledge of the interpreter of the science of roots of the words as well as the principles and rules of language (Kakaei, 2014, 530). But *Roland Barthes* in the course of hermeneutical interpretation does not attach a considerable significance to the text's surface and considers the mentality of the reader to be more important than the text itself. Of course, *Barthes* highlights the point that it is this essential and general feature of the text that provides the ground for the interpretability, and He believes there is no necessity for the harmony of hermeneutical meanings with the superficial meanings and the words of the text.

The other feature of the continuous revelation theory is the possibility of diversity in instilled meanings in the hearts of the believers. This diversity can be concerned with the number of different audiences and also with the changing spiritual states and levels in particular audiences; as previously mentioned. *Ibn Arabi* considers continuous revelation to be a dynamic event through in the context of which various meanings are constantly revealed to the hearts of believers and mystics. Diversity of hermeneutical meanings is completely recognized in Roland Barthes' theory. Roland Barthes' theory is basically a reader-centered theory and contrary to Ibn Arabi's continuous revelation theory, it does not attach any significance to the discovery of the author's intention. Then, with the diversity of readers and their changing internal states, hermeneutical meanings will be naturally diverse.

The above-mentioned points show that the emergence and manifestation of Ibn Arabi's mystical theory of "Continuous Revelation" is of a Linguistic-mystical nature and there is a considerable similarity and overlap between it and Roland Barthes' theory of "open-closed texts" in terms of instillation of hermeneutical meanings in the reader's mentality. In other words, Ibn Arabi's theory of Continuous Revelation, though at surface seems to be a mystical theory, is influenced by hermeneutical aspects of Quranic verses. It seems that this theory It illuminates the different layers of the meanings of the Holy Quran from a different perspective.

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