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Theological Aporia and the Cultivation of Desire: Reading Eriugena's *Creatio Ex Nihilo* through an Islamic Theo-Poetics

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Abstract

This comparative theological article expands on John Thiel's article on aporias in theological method. Through an Islamic theo-poetics, it complements the import of hermeneutics in theological method with poetics. In an Islamic theo-poetics, aporias are inverted: they are not impassable walls, but "liminal spaces" through which creative imagination and revelation emerge. Reading Eriugena's *Periphyseon* through two Persian love lyrics by Ḥāfiẓ (and a later commentary) draws out the poetics of the former, a dialogue often described as an exercise in dialectical reasoning. Attention to the poetics of aporetics offers another way to understand the role of aporia in theology: to cultivate (infinite) desire for God. Theology is a theo-poetic reflection on the mystery of our communal *theo(poïe)sis*. Along the way, I indicate how theology construed as poetics—not merely hermeneutics—makes theological aesthetics possible, underscores the role of affective knowledge, and reveals how Eriugena the poet shaped Eriugena the dialectician.

Keywords

Ibn ʿArabī, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *barzakh*, comparative theology, ghazal, Ḥāfiẓ, Periphyseon, poetics, theological aesthetics, *theosis*

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In a recent article, John E. Thiel explores the function of aporias in theological method. An aporia is a logical impasse emerging along the pathway of discursive reasoning.[1] These aporias—logical contradictions, dead ends—are not found merely "at the margins of a meaning-system but within the pathways of its internal logical coherence."[2] According to Thiel, intradisciplinary aporias are especially common within the discipline of theology and can be divided into two types: soluble and insoluble. A constructive insight of his article is that theological aporias are features, not bugs, of the Christian theological traditions. That is, the role aporias play in theological method enhances our appreciation for "the workings of theological creativity and wisdom"[3] in the interpretive process.

Using the doctrine of creation as a paradigmatic example of a soluble aporia, Thiel demonstrates that theological hermeneutics is effectively an exercise in working through aporias.[4] The doctrine of creation—namely, how an immutable God relates to mutable creation within the context of the Christian claim of God's providential disposition toward creation—is "the central Christian aporia"[5] shaping all other aporias, such as christological claims and the tension between nature and grace.[6] Solutions to soluble aporias seek a resolution of contradictions (leaning on one side of the impasse or the other), and Thiel details a few for the doctrine of creation: from Origen and Augustine to John Caputo's process theology and Brian Robinette's recent defense of *creatio ex nihilo*.[7]

Thiel employs two examples for the insoluble aporia: apophatic theology and theodicy. The insoluble aporia is not a site for theological creativity but rather for "the cultivation of wisdom about the need to respect [the] limits [of reason, decision, and moral responsibility]."[8] Judging an aporia insoluble is to let "the paradox be and remain a paradox, and [to find] truth in the aporia standing as such."[9] Apophatic theology leads us to silence, a deepened respect for the limits of theology, a wisdom to know when to cease all God-talk. Theodicy, likewise, pushes theological method to its limits: "theologians have increasingly come to appreciate the wisdom of judging God's relation to evil as an insoluble aporia."[10] I add that, on the other side of this impasse is another one: a strong doctrine of predestination, a noteworthy example of which is Augustine's consistent refrain when reaching the limits of his hermeneutical

1. I am grateful to the anonymous peer reviewers whose critical and constructive feedback significantly improved this article.
2. John E. Thiel, "On Theological Aporias," *Theological Studies* 84, no. 2 (2023): 338, https://doi.org/10.1177/00405639231171049.
3. Thiel, 344.
4. See Thiel, 350.
5. See Thiel, 350.
6. See Thiel, 345.
7. Most recently, see Brian D. Robinette, *The Difference Nothing Makes: Creation, Christ, Contemplation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2023).
8. Thiel, "On Theological Aporias," 352.
9. Thiel, 353.
10. Thiel, 355.

reflection on the predestination of souls in his writings against the so-called Pelagians—silence and a turn to scriptural authority: "Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom 11:33 NRSV, used throughout).[11]

These two types of aporias recall that theology and its method are predominantly conceptualized (implicitly, as in Thiel's article, or explicitly) as hermeneutics and interpretive "negotiations of the aporia."[12] However, Thiel leaves us with concluding remarks that are opportunities for further exploration. First, he notes that the "workings of aporia" should not reduce the practice of theology to aporetics or "serve as a final word on theological method."[13] Later, in a footnote, he acknowledges possible insights into the workings of aporia to be gleaned from exploring comparative theology, which can be written from "within the assumptions of the central Christian aporia," or about "the workings of aporias in other religious traditions."[14]

This article begins where Thiel ends and is an exercise in comparative theology with the Islamic traditions. It zooms in on two textual traditions to illustrate the limits of understanding aporetics through hermeneutics, which stem from viewing theological method generally as hermeneutics. While Thiel does not explicitly view theological method *only* as hermeneutics, this view of theology is an implicit undercurrent of his insightful essay. Complementing it with a view of theology as poetics (which Thiel makes no claims to exclude), especially through an Islamic theo-poetics, will enhance the conclusions and provide alternative understandings of the workings of aporia in theological method. Accordingly, I suggest that, learning from an Islamic theo-poetics, we can reimagine the theological encounter with aporia through *poetics* as much as *hermeneutics*. In this article, I share insights from an Islamic theo-poetics that aids in drawing out the function of poetics not merely in aporetics, but also in theological method. These insights are gleaned from a reading of the ninth-century Irish poet and theologian John Scotus Eriugena's *Periphyseon* (ca. 862–867) with lessons from two Persian love lyrics by Muslim poet Ḥāfiẓ (d. 1389) and a seventeenth-century theological commentary thereon—all of which have an anthropocosmic theology structured through *theophany*.

Eriugena's *Periphyseon* is a dialogue often described as an exercise in dialectical reasoning and rational hermeneutics. I analyze a section dedicated to the central Christian aporia—namely, how an immutable God creates a mutable world within the context of God's providential care toward creation. This exercise in comparative theology will demonstrate how attention to Eriugena's poetics offers another way to understand the role of aporia in theology: to cultivate wonder, bewilderment, awe, and

11. This is Augustine's repeated response to the aporia—namely, why God grants grace and perseverance to some and not others, in his writings concerning the Pelagians. See, e.g., *Answer to the Pelagians IV* of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999).
12. Thiel, "On Theological Aporias," 350.
13. Thiel, 356.
14. Thiel, 356n53

ultimately an (infinite) desire for God. The poetics of theological aporia subsequently underscores the import of theological aesthetics within the discipline of theology. This article, in part, suggests that disproportionate attention to theology as hermeneutics precludes, for example, how Hans Urs von Balthasar attends to Beauty qua transcendental, as "the immediate manifestation of the never-to-be-mastered excess of manifestation contained in everything manifest."[15] Theological aesthetics presumes theology is viewed as poetics as much as hermeneutics; the two complement each other. It is entirely apposite that a dialogical meditation on *creatio ex nihilo* functions to cultivate desire through the poetics of Eriugena's text. Through this central Christian aporia we are able to assert our source in an unrestrictive and unconditioned love of God for us, which in turn instills in us an infinite love for God (and others *in* God). Theology becomes a theo-poetic reflection on the mystery of our communal *theo(poïe)sis*.[16]

Why turn to this Islamic theo-poetics? First, this tradition places the imagination, qua human faculty, above reason and the intellect. It is true that the affective mystical traditions of Christianity have similar resources (e.g., Thomas Gallus), as do the poetic traditions (e.g., John of the Cross), but they are all mostly embedded in an Aristotelian epistemology that places intellect above reason and reason above imagination. With few exceptions, images are discarded for the sake of imageless intellection. The Islamic theo-poetic traditions rejected the Aristotelian subordination of the imagination to reason and intellect. In these traditions (largely informed by Ibn ʿArabī and his later interpreters), the Prophet Muhammad received revelation via his imagination and from the Imaginal World, a Divine Plane of existence that is the source of both creation and revelation (the Qur'an and post-Qur'anic poetry). Consequently, the imagination is superior to the intellect and reason.[17] Second, poetry, metaphor, paradox, ambiguity, and contradiction were valorized in the dominant strands of both Muslim lived religion and Islamic elite discourses.[18] While there are resources in the Christian traditions that did the same, they were often on the peripheries. Third, from the classical to the postclassical Islamic traditions, *ḥayra* (bewilderment) was variably recognized as—at least—an ongoing contested subject of a debate as to its centrality and—at

15. Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*, vol. 1, *The Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 223.
16. Echoing Athanasius's *De incarnationem* 54: "For [God] was made human so that we might be made God [*theopoiēthōmen*]." Athanasius, Contra Gentes *and* De Incarnatione (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 268, 11–12.
17. See Axel Takacs, "Transposing Metaphors and Poetics from Text to World: The Theo-Poetics of Lāhūrī's 'Mystical Commentary' on Ḥāfiẓ's Love Lyrics," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 9, no. 1 (March 2021): 119–26, https://doi.org/10.1163/22105956-bja10008, as well as Axel Takacs, "Beyond the Intellect: Perpetual Expansion and Transformation in the Anthropocosmic Vision of Thomas Gallus and the Akbarian Tradition," *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 55 (2014): 71–107, for an extended discussion of the role of the imagination vis-à-vis the intellect and reason in the Islamic tradition in question.
18. See Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), esp. chap. 5.

most—a formative and ultimate epistemological and spiritual station in encountering God's revelation and in (re)cognizing (experiencing) God; once again, this was not marginal to Islamic traditions but central and constitutive thereof, from elite discourses to lived religion. Fourth, consequently, Islamic theo-poetics elevates bewilderment to the highest mystical station and therefore values poetics that cultivate desire within the context of suffering love.[19] Finally, in this Islamic theo-poetics, aporia are construed not as impassable walls, but as infinite passageways of liminal spaces (*barzakh*) through which creative imagination and revelation emerge.

By characterizing these two traditions in this way, I wish neither to identify Christian theology with reason and logical certainty and the Islamic tradition with the imagination and bewildering uncertainty nor to suggest that these characterizations were normative for the diversity of Christian and Islamic traditions historically or presently. Doing either would be reductive, monolithic, and Orientalist. Rather, in typical comparative theology fashion, I wish to focus on particular texts with particular claims to construct larger conclusions about the workings of aporia in theological method. Additional exercises in comparative theology are necessary to flesh out the differing roles imagination and bewilderment play in the Islamic and Christian traditions. Whether one tradition emphasizes the imagination over reason or bewilderment over logical certainty is a far too universalizing inquiry for comparative theology because it glosses over internal diversities and constructs reductive monoliths. Instead, this article proceeds from both the theological and social fact of the pervasive influence the Islamic theo-poetic traditions in question had on the postclassical, early modern, and contemporary Islamic traditions.[20] It likewise encourages comparative theological explorations between the Christian and Islamic theo-poetic traditions, perhaps recovering this Christian tradition as it pertains to the workings of aporia.

Reading Eriugena through an Islamic theo-poetics provides a third way to understand the workings of aporia and challenges dominant interpretations of the Irishman as an idealist, a mere secular philosopher with Christian garb, and/or a ratiocinative genius for whom the suprarational, the poetic, imaginative, metaphorical, paradoxical, affective, and ultimately the incarnational play no part or are merely ornamental.[21] If we read Eriugena's dialogical meditation on *creatio ex nihilo* through dialectical reasoning and as an exercise in hermeneutics alone, we may very well skip to his conclusion that resolves the aporia to "all things are one in God." The affective reactions are occluded by a simple synthesis. However, reading it as an exercise in poetics—through

19. For the value of confusion, aporia, in the classical Islamic tradition, see the work of Paul Heck, *Skepticism in Classical Islam: Moments of Confusion* (New York: Routledge, 2014), and "*Adab* in the Thought of Ghazālī (d. 505/1111): In the Service of Mystical Insight," in *Ethics and Spirituality in Islam: Sufi Adab*, ed. Francesco Chiabotti (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2016), esp. 305–9.

20. See the scholarship by Oludamini Ogunnaike, Shankar Nair, Khaled El-Rouayheb, and Frank Griffel.

21. See monographs by John J. O'Meara, Dermot Moran, Willemien Otten, Deirdre Carabine, and Hilary Anne-Marie Mooney. All but the last two focus on his idealism or rationalism; none attends to his poetics.

Islamic theo-poetics—we uncover the bewilderment and desire shaping the theological mediation precisely as *the point* of the aporia.

Poetics and Hermeneutics

Poetics is *how* texts mean, while hermeneutics is *what* they mean.[22] Poetics is "the attempt to account for literary effects by describing the conventions and reading operations that make them possible."[23] If hermeneutics attends to *what* meaning is uncovered in the act of interpretation (content), then poetics attends to *how* words come together to *create* an effect on the reader (form). Literary critic Tzvetan Todorov contends that the relationship between "poetics and interpretation is one of complementarity par excellence."[24] *How* and *what* texts mean inform each other rather than remain mutually exclusive. Within the critical hermeneutical process, "interpretation both precedes and follows poetics."[25] Put otherwise, determining *what* texts mean is possible only when working through *how* texts mean. Form and content/meaning remain inseparable. One cannot strive toward the meaning of texts without carefully experiencing their form.

When theological method focuses predominantly on hermeneutics, we miss out on the play of language—poetics—that shapes the human encounter with God and we ignore the affective response therefrom. Understanding aporetics in terms of poetics as much as hermeneutics enables us to attend to the constructive function of aporia not only in theological method but also in our embodied experiences (ethics) of living in this created world.

Attending to poetics does not imply that hermeneutics is inferior or that theology as poetics is the *only* accurate characterization of theology and the workings of aporia. Rather, attention to poetics in theological method is, in a way, a consequence of "Christianity's basic incarnational thrust," which Balthasar argued was often abandoned in the tradition's "gradual unbodying" that it learned from Neoplatonic sources.[26] Related to Balthasar's concern for "authentically incarnational Christian spirituality"[27] is his discussion on the "relationship between the literal and spiritual senses of scripture [as] a christological problem, one soluble only on the basis that the two senses are to each other what the two natures of Christ are to each other."[28] I am suggesting that

22. See chapter 1 of Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction to Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981).
23. Jonathan D. Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 69.
24. Culler, 7.
25. Culler, 7.
26. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*, vol. 2, *Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 110.
27. Balthasar, 111.
28. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 1, *The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A. V. Littledale and Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 20.

the relationship between poetics and hermeneutics in theological method is akin to the relationship between the flesh (poetics) and divinity (hermeneutics) of Christ, and it is no accident that Balthasar links the problem of interpretation to christological claims, an offshoot of the central Christian aporia: "All that is human in Christ is a revelation of God and speaks to us of him. There is nothing whatever in his life, acts, passion and resurrection that is not an expression and manifestation of God in the language of a created being."[29]

The poetics (form) of Christ's life reveals God's saving work (content/meaning) in all its bodily details; that is, the gestalt of God is revealed in Christ Jesus.[30] When we translate it to theological method and extend it to texts of the Catholic tradition beyond Scripture, then attention to poetics in theological method becomes just as necessary as hermeneutics. This attention is enhanced through the Qur'anic and Islamic theo-poetic traditions in which the Words of the Recitation (the meaning of *qur'ān*) are poetic. It draws from patterns of pre-Islamic poetry and employs rhyme, meter, and other poetic aspects to draw the listener into the message being proclaimed. The most common pre-Islamic genre of poetry was the *qaṣīda* (ode, often a panegyric), and while the Qur'an did not replicate its literary form, it certainly sublimated—or sacramentalized—the purpose and meaning of it and employed poetic methods.[31] Space precludes detailing this pre-Islamic genre of poetry and how it was refracted not just in the Qur'an but also in the experience of the Prophet and later poets. Suffice it to say, the Qur'an sacramentalized pre-Islamic poetry and the Prophet sublimated the role of the pre-Islamic poet. Poetry was prophetic and prophecy was poetic.[32] Later traditions then defined the human/divine imagination as the source of prophetic revelation as well as post-Qur'anic poetry. This is the comparative, theo-poetic connection between the Incarnation and Qur'anic revelation that demands we attend to poetics as much as hermeneutics in theological method.

The way poets bring words together triggers an affective response in us. The *meaning* of the poem is constituted by the *affect* it creates in us. Affect theory suggests that affective responses—emotions, psychological states, primal instincts—provide nearly

29. Balthasar, 20–21.

30. Balthasar is explicit about the meaning of the bodily revelation of Christ: "The relativity which belongs to the essence of created life no longer points only momentarily to God, and then becomes powerless to show us the Absolute. On the contrary, in Christ the human is so completely subjected to the divine and made its vessel that it can be made a lasting expression of eternal life. *Each word, movement, look and gesture of the Lord is a revelation of eternal life; but equally so is his suffering, his darkness, his dereliction, his descent into hell*. All this is God making himself known to man." Balthasar, 176 (emphasis added). One may understand from this that the poetics of Christ's life is a revelation of God's gift of eternal life to humanity.

31. See Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 2006), 5–11.

32. See Shahab Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 202, 295–99, as well as scholarship by Devin J. Stewart, Michael Zwettler, Angelika Neuwirth, and William Graham.

unmediated, nondeliberative, and nondiscursive knowledge shaping our embodied experience in/of the world. Poems, especially so-called mystical poems, are replete with aporias; they provide knowledge that is not necessarily irrational or illogical, but certainly suprarational and beyond the logic of normative systems. This is precisely how the Qur'an was originally experienced.[33] Later, the Islamic poetic traditions replicated this Qur'anic experience. For example, Ḥāfiẓ's love lyrics are overflowing with metaphors and images that create an aporetic response in us. This is why, "less than a century after Ḥāfiẓ's death, the well-known Sufi-philosopher" of the School of Ibn ʿArabī and the School of Passionate Love, Nūr al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492), "bestowed upon [Ḥāfiẓ] the honorific, *lisān al-ghayb*, or Tongue of the Unseen; that is, the person whose poetic imagination found its source in the same domain whence the Qur'an descended onto the Prophet."[34] But how the metaphors come together *bears the meaning*; that is, the poems cannot be discursively translated into syllogisms without losing the affective knowledge gained from its initial encounter.[35] His commentator explains these aporias through an Islamic theo-poetics that subverts dominant logics of the rational. Reading Eriugena through this Islamic theo-poetic subversion, we see how even in nonpoetic texts—such as the *Periphyseon*—attention to *how* words collide to elicit an affective response reveals a rich poetics. It likewise underscores how Eriugena *the poet* shaped the corpus of Eriugena *the* dialectic, discursive *theologian*. However, attention to poetics demands a rich theory of metaphor and the imagination, which were central to an Islamic theo-poetics.

Islamic Theo-poetics

> Metaphor not only shatters the previous structures of our language, but also the previous structures of what we call reality.
> —Paul Ricœur[36]

Al-majāz qanṭara al-ḥaqīqa, "metaphor is a bridge to Reality," is the single most important Arabic literary axiom appropriated by the Islamic poetic tradition.[37] This axiom gives meaning to how poetic metaphor elides with the cosmological theophanies (*tajallīyāt Allāh*) via the imagination and the Imaginal World (*ʿālam al-khayāl* or *al-mithāl*). A seminal Arabic text defines *majāz*, with respect to Qur'anic exegesis, as

33. This is the thrust of Michael Sells's argument in *Approaching the Qur'an*, in which he underscores the affective responses entailed in the poetics of the (earlier) Meccan surahs.
34. Takacs, "Transposing Metaphors," 108.
35. Compare Salim Kemal, *The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroës: The Aristotelian Reception* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), with Abū Dīb, *Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Poetic Imagery* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1979), esp. 79ff.
36. Ricœur, "Creativity in Language," in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur: An Anthology of His Word*, ed. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 132.
37. See Wolfhart Heinrichs, "Contacts between Scriptural Hermeneutics and Literary Theory in Islam: The Case of Majaz," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 7 (January 1, 1991): 253–84.

"everything that goes *beyond* the strictly logical application of language."[38] Reality, as it were, is beyond the logical. Shahab Ahmed, in *What Is Islam?*, adduces copious texts from the Islamic tradition to demonstrate that contradiction was the modus operandi and modus vivendi of being Islamic. This contradiction was discursively expressed in terms of metaphor and paradox because of the semantic capaciousness these techniques possessed to manifest coherent contradiction.[39] According to Ahmed, metaphor and paradox were central ways Muslims made meaning, found value, discovered t/Truth in the world.[40]

Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī and his seventeenth-century commentator, Abū al-Ḥasan Khatamī Lāhūrī, were both shaped by the theo-poetics of the School of Ibn ʿArabī and the *madhhab-i ʿishq* (School of Passionate Love). Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240), in analyzing a portion of a famous *ḥadīth* that reads, "Worship God *as though* [*ka-inna*] you saw Him," states that the letter *kāf* found in the Arabic phrase for "as though" represents the power of the imagination. A poem in his *Futūḥāt* suggests as much:

> Between the next world and this world adheres vision.
>
> The degrees of liminal spaces possess enclosures [*suwar* = Qur'anic chapters].
>
> . . .
>
> Were it not for the imagination, today we would be nonexistent [in nothingness].
>
> . . .
>
> Its authority is "As though/*ka-inna* [you saw Him]," if you understand it.
>
> *Revelation has come through it*, and *understanding* and *consideration*
>
> Among the particles is the "like" (*kāf*) of the attributes.
>
> You are not separated from the [one set of] forms but that you reach [another set of] forms.[41]

The final couplet refers to the infinite process of interpretation—or rather, one's remaining forever within poetics—involved in deciphering the various signs of God from one set of forms to another; the beginning of the poem suggests that this whole world is nothing but *barzakh*, liminal spaces that are Qur'anic chapters, or *suwar*, and the final three lines relate this to the imagination. The imagination is the *barzakh*, the liminal space; the whole world is nothing but an imagination (as he avers elsewhere:

38. Wolfhart Heinrichs, *The Hand of the Northwind: Opinions on Metaphor and the Early Meaning of* Istiʾāra *in Arabic Poetics* (Wiesbaden: Deutsche Morgenländische Ges.; Steiner [in Komm.], 1977), 30–31 (citing Ibn Qutayba [d. 889]).
39. Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 389.
40. See Ahmed, 393.
41. Ibn ʿArabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. Osman Yahya, vol. 1 of 4 (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 1:304.6, 12–14 (vol:page.lines).

"Existence [*wujūd*], all of it, is an imagination within an imagination").[42] Indeed, creation is a *barzakh* between "the known and the unknown, the nonexistent and the existent, the denied and the affirmed . . . and nothing but the Imagination [*al-khayāl*]."[43] These contradictions elicit aporias. Yet, in this Islamic theo-poetics—and here is a source of comparative theological insights—the contradictions are not walls *a-póros* (without passage) but liminal spaces through which the creative (*poïesis*) imagination emerges. Creation brings together nonexistence and the Real—we live within aporetic-*barzakhī* reality. For Ibn ʿArabī and his later interpreters, this world *is and is not God* (*huwa/lā-huwa*, He/not-He, a refrain of his) and perpetually re-created (*tajdīd al-khalq*) via theophany.[44] Revelation, understanding, and consideration come through *ka-inna*, through *being-as*, which is metaphor, imagination, and the *barzakh*. We are deep within Islamic poetics, the theo-poetics of this world, within which aporias constitute the poetic passages of reality.

Ḥāfiẓ created ghazals, Persian renditions of the *nasīb* and, to a lesser extent, *raḥīl* sections of the Arabic pre-Islamic and later Islamic *qaṣīda*. They poetically express the lament of being separated from the beloved and the vicissitudes of searching for the lost beloved. But in Islamic ghazals, the human beloved is simultaneously *the* Beloved, God. The embodied experience with a human beloved was the manifestation of divine love. The first sample:

1 I smelled the scent of affection, and looked out for the flash of union. [Arabic]

Come! for by your scent I am dying, O gentle breeze from the north.

2 Urging forward with your singsong the camels of the beloved: halt and descend! [Arabic]

For in yearning for beauty, patience is not beautiful to me.

3 Better to neglect the story of the night of separation,

[and] praise the dawn of union for lifting the veil.

. . .

5 Come! For the rose-scattering veil of the seven partitions of the eye

we have drawn with ornamentation from imagination's workshop.

42. Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad (Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 2015), 138 (chap. on Joseph); for English, see *The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. R. W. J. Austin (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 125.

43. Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:304.20–22.

44. Readers may wish to compare this with Ricœur's theory of metaphor: "'It was and it was not'. . . contains *in nuce* all that can be said about metaphorical truth," which "preserves the 'is not' within the 'is.'" Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 265, 294. For Ricœur, metaphorical truth is "being-as," which best represents the tensional dynamic of reality; see Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 303, 362, and 370.

6 Except for the image of your mouth, nothing else is within my constricted heart.
May no one be like me, in search of the impossible image.
7 We are afflicted by the affair of the beloved,
for no one is truly afflicted with the beloved herself.
8 I have become a captive, losing heart and life because of the tress's tip.
Made desperate, madly-in-love, and drunk from that cheek and freckle.
9 Ḥāfiẓ the stranger was killed by passionate love for you, however,
pass by our grave, because our blood is lawful to you.[45]

This ghazal, replete with metaphorical images and literary techniques, displays Ḥāfiẓ's poetics.[46] The overarching theme of this love lyric is that of the *(im)possible* union with the beloved after separation. The various poetic techniques he employs keep the interpreter in a perpetual state of "disruption-in-continuity,"[47] an aporetic state in which the reader-auditor remains in constant desire for more of the lyrical playfulness on display. The union is obtained, however, through the imagination. The "flash of union" is an allusion to "the essential theophany which . . . [is called] the flashing theophany by the glimpse of which the essential theophany manifests to the wayfarer like a dazzling flash and then vanishes."[48] The beloved is witnessed only via the imagination but through the physical eye. The tension between the beloved's majesty and transcendence, on the one side, and mercy and immanence, on the other, is poetically expressed in terms of the imagination. The coincidence of apophasis and kataphasis increases desire, the fuel that ignites the imagination.

The fifth and sixth couplets are the poetic pivot because they embody the fleeting moment of communion with the Beloved: aporia occurs—God and creature come together. The words and phrases convey a superabundance of meaning; not only are key words ambiguous but together they produce even more complexity.[49] At the moment of communion with the beloved, the imagination explodes with perplexing and equivocal poetics. This is because the *dhāt*, essence (of God, of *al-ḥāqq*, the Real), is the hidden, unmanifest Divine Ipseity. Searching for the "essential theophany" through the lover's own effort is futile. Reading these two couplets through

45. Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ Khvāja Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad*, ed. Parvīz Nātil Khānlarī (Tehran: Khvārazmī, 1983), 610, also found in the commentary I employ, Abū al-Ḥasan Khatamī Lāhūrī, *Sharḥ-i ʿirfānī-i ghazalhā-yi Ḥāfiẓ*, 4 vols., ed. Bahā' al-Dīn Khurramshāhī et al. (Tehran: Nashr-i Qaṭrah, 1995), 3:2,089. For an English rendition: *The Collected Lyrics of Háfiz of Shíráz*, trans. Peter Avery (Cambridge: Archetype, 2007), 369.
46. For an extended discussion, see Takacs, "Transposing Metaphors," 128–31.
47. Takacs, 131.
48. Lāhūrī, *Sharḥ-i ʿirfānī-i ghazalhā-yi Ḥāfiẓ*, 3:2,090.
49. I explain the deep ambiguity found in the poetics of these two couplets in Takacs, "Transposing Metaphors," 133–35.

Lāhūrī's commentary, however, Ḥāfiẓ claims that *his* imagination, inspired by the Imaginal World whence the Beloved emerges, enables the perpetual perception of the Beloved—the object of desire. It is through the imagination that Ḥāfiẓ is able both to perceive and to welcome the Beloved and to enable others to do the same. In the fifth couplet, Ḥāfiẓ's imagination effects communion with the Beloved *and* transforms the lament of the first four verses into the bewilderment and augmented desire of the final four. That the fifth couplet is so rich with ambiguity and meaning is no accident. There is no dialectical or hermeneutical resolution of the contradiction, but rather the creature dwells within aporetic spaces.

In the sixth couplet, the impossible image is a constitutive part of the couplet's poetic construction: through the imagination, the image of the beloved's mouth is within the lover's heart—an impossibility. But the imagination permits the impossible, as Ibn ʿArabī suggests:

> [A] power of the creation of the World of Imagination is that the coincidence of opposites manifests therein, because sense perception and the intellect are unable to make opposites coincide, whereas the imagination is able [to do so]. . . . The imaginal faculty and the World of Imagination . . . is the nearest to indicating the Real. . . . Hence nothing has truly attained unto the [Divine] Form except the imagination.[50]

In the commentary, imagination permits the impossible, the coincidence of opposites, the coming together of the Divine Essence (hidden) and this world (manifest) in the form of the embodied (*majāzī*) beloved.[51] In the words of Ricœur, the "semantic shock" of metaphor "abolishes the logical distance of distinct semantic fields,"[52] or for Lāhūrī's case, distinct ontological fields (God and creation) that are nondually related via theophany. In other words, the imagination—not the intellect—constructively encounters aporias, and these aporias constitute creation.

The next lyric adds to an Islamic theo-poetics, for *seeing* the Face of God in the embodied images of creation is a function of the imagination:

1 In the Magi's wine tavern the Light of God I see.

  See what a marvel this is! What a Light and whence I see!

2 Who is the dreg-drinker of this wine tavern, O Lord, in which

  the *qibla* of need and the *miḥrāb* of petitioning I see?

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50. Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 4:325.3–8. See also William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 115–16.
51. *Majāzī* in Arabic and Persian is typically translated as "metaphorical." However, in the theo-poetic tradition in question, it is best to translate it as—quite paradoxically—embodied, or "phenomenally embodied." This world is the metaphor and therefore the *majāzī* beloved is the embodied beloved—a human beloved that manifests the Divine Beloved. See Matthew Miller, "Embodying the Sufi Beloved: (Homo)eroticism, Embodiment, and the Construction of Desire in the Hagiographic Tradition of 'Erâqi," *Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures* 21, no. 1 (2018): 1–27, as well as Takacs, "Transposing Metaphors."
52. Paul Ricœur, *From Text to Action* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 172–73.

3 Don't act cute and flirty with me, O leader of the Ḥājj, for you
see the House, but the Master of the House I see.
4 I want to open the musk-bag of the idol's tresses.
Long is [this] thought—[from it] surely error I see.
5 Burning heart, flowing tears, sighing at dawn, lamenting at night:
all this because of your graceful gaze I see.
6 The position of being in passionate love, of libertinage, of contemplative gazing:
all from the cultivation of your grace I see.
7 A single drop in the ocean causes more or less no disparity,
for this problem without when and why I see.
8 The path of my [rational-formations] is cut off at every instant by a figure of Your Face.
To whom should I tell what things in this veil I see?
. . .
10 Friends! Don't reproach Ḥāfiẓ for his amorous glancing,
because him among your lovers I see.[53]

The imagination functions in the antepenultimate couplet as receptive to the figure of God's Face, from which the intellect is veiled. Only the imagination experiences creation as aporias. The imagination is explicitly connected to the dreg-drinker—human person—who, according to the commentary, is the *barzakh* able to obtain from the outward (*ẓāhir*) meaning of the inward (*bāṭin*) and from the inward meaning of the outward.[54] "Face" refers to the formal theophany or the "experiential theophany" (i.e., the manifestation of God's essence through all things we experience in creation) and the *figure* of "Your Face" connotes "the figures and forms of the loci-of-manifestation in whose forms the formal and luminescent theophanies manifest upon the wayfarer" (i.e., the manifestation of God *in particular embodied forms of creation*). In other words, the embodied experience of creation in all its particularity is a manifestation of God's Face. The experience of embodied "luminescent theophanies" subverts our intellect and reason and "throws [the wayfarer] into ambiguity [*ishtibāh*], for she is unable to differentiate between the loci-of-manifestation and the Manifesting One." Shifting to the first person, Lāhūrī concludes: the theophanies "cut off the path" of my rational "formation and thinking (*taṣawwur u tafakkur*)" and "throws me into the abyss of ambiguity . . . [for] *I am unable to explain the modality* [lit., "howness"] [of these forms and figures] out of fear of *tashbīh* (immanence) and *ittiḥād* (unity)."[55]

53. Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ Khvāja Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad*, 714, though following version in Lāhūrī, *Sharḥ-i ʿirfānī-i ghazalhā-yi Ḥāfiẓ*, 3:2,308. For English rendition, Avery, *Collected Lyrics*, 429.
54. Lāhūrī, 3:2.310–11.
55. Lāhūrī, 3:2.314, emphasis added.

The poetics (aporetics) of the text is reflected in the poetics (aporetics) of the God-creature relationship. The aporia that brings together God with creation is poetics and attempting to rationally interpret *how* (the modality) God relates to creation leads to a resolution of the aporia on the side of radical immanence and unity of God in/with the world (pantheism, monism). Judged unacceptable, Lāhūrī urges us to suspend rational deliberation. His commentary is effectively a gloss of "Whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God" (Qur'an 2:115). The embodied form of God meets the wayfarer at the intersection of her imagination and sensory perception. But this embodied theophany is *literally everything in creation that she experiences.* Unprepared, she is confused by the ambiguity of the theophanies and incapable of discursively or logically resolving *how* God both is and is not the forms of the world, lest she commit *tashbīh*, equating God with creation in a simple unity (*ittiḥād*). The connection between this ambiguity and the radical immanence of God is etymologically revealed by the shared Arabic roots of ***ish**ti**bāh*** and ***tashbīh***. *Logically* explaining the modality reduces God to the world (monism); evoking the modality poetically with the imagination keeps the relation in tension. The commentary ends with a fear of emulating the (in)famous Sufis of old, Manṣur al-Ḥallāj ("I am the Real!") and Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī ("There is nothing in my garment but God; Praised be me, how magnificent my affair!")[56] in which the Creator-creature distinction vanishes.

These lyrics and commentary demonstrate how the poetics of the text valorizes aporetics—paradox, contradiction, ambiguity—and how hermeneutical or dialectical resolution is not the goal. *How* words come together elicits an affective response of bewilderment. But this poetic bewilderment, which enhances desire for the Beloved, is valued over knowledge obtained through discursive or deliberative reasoning in this theo-poetic tradition: "The state of final bewilderment [*ḥayra*] . . . is desired by the greatest [realized ones] and *they do not surpass it*. Rather, they ascend in it forever and ever in this world, in the liminal space (*barzakh*), and in the hereafter. . . . And so in their contemplation of the Real they enter the trackless desert and their bewilderment is from the Real, through the Real, and in the Real."[57] Aporias construed as infinite passageways of bewilderment in Islamic theo-poetics provide comparative theological insight into the "workings of aporia" in Christian theological traditions.

The centrality of bewilderment or confusion (*ḥayra*) in this Islamic tradition of theo-poetics is not an isolated or marginal case within the classical and postclassical Islamic traditions. Paul Heck, Michael Sells, and most recently, Gregory Vandamme have all demonstrated the centrality of *ḥayra* in the classical and postclassical Islamic intellectual traditions. In the early period, "confusion [*ḥayra*] . . . had a precise sense in the scholastic theology of the ninth century . . . where it indicates a breakdown of

56. Lāhūrī, 3:2.314.

57. According to the Jāmī (d. 1492), a major commentator of Ibn ʿArabī's texts. Nur al-Dīn Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Naqd Al-nuṣūṣ Fī Sharḥ Naqsh Al-fuṣūṣ*, ed. Jalāl Al-Dīn Āshtiyānī and William Chittick (Tihrān: Muʾassasah-ʾi Muṭālaʿāt Va Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, Vā'b Astah Bih Vizārat-i Farhang Va Āmuzish-i ʿĀlī, 1991), 280 (my translation, emphasis added).

discursive reasoning."[58] This term was received and transformed into a spiritual state by the early piety movement and later Sufi tradition in order to "undermine the arrogant pretensions of scholastic theologians to be able to define the reality of God in words (scholastic terminology)."[59] For this tradition, a surer path to God is through bewilderment rather than discursive reasoning. It was then reintegrated back into the theological traditions by Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), who extends the role of *ḥayra* in his arguments with the philosophers. Bewilderment leads to the knowledge of the inability to know God's reality (related to "learned ignorance"): "Ghazālī . . . is not claiming that scholars can know nothing at all about God by the scholastic method, but he is countering the claim of philosophers to have surer knowledge of God's reality through logical reasoning than prophets have through revelation."[60] Furthermore, within the Islamic theo-poetic tradition, prophetic revelation is intimately related to poetry and encountered through poetics more than rational hermeneutics.

Ibn ʿArabī and his later interpreters then take this tradition and deploy it across the Islamic intellectual traditions.[61] According to Ibn ʿArabī, "revelation is precisely the means by which human beings can approach the perplexing perfection brought by *ḥayra*. It is through the perplexing encounter with the Qurʾan that human beings are able to face the limits of their own perspective and to encounter the Divine perspective on reality."[62] The relationship between revelation and *ḥayra*, I add, lends support to the centrality of *poetics* in the Islamic theological traditions and the comparative theological exploration of the workings of aporia. Finally, *ḥayra* itself is described as a *barzakh* "that draws the limit between Divine and Human levels in being, and at the same time marks the distinction between reason and senses, reason and imagination, or love and fear."[63]

It is this tradition of *ḥayra* that shaped major strands of postclassical Islamic thought and theo-poetics. Ḥāfiẓ and his interpreter are not marginal figures but rather receive, refract, and develop this tradition in ways that constitute "modes and mechanisms of self-expression in the largest part of the Islamic world for half-a-millennium."[64] Next, I apply this Islamic theo-poetics to a text that is often described as eminently dialectical and rational. In doing so, we encounter not only the import of affective knowledge in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, but how the aporia are not surmounted like walls but navigated like infinite passageways, or as Eriugena puts it, like the Gulf "of Syrtes . . . hidden straits of the Divine Ocean."[65] Attention to the poetics of aporetics offers

58. Heck, "*Adab* in the Thought of Ghazālī," 305.
59. Heck, 305.
60. Heck, 307.
61. See Gregory Vandamme, "'*Ḥayra*': La perplexité chez Ibn ʿArabī. Épistémologie, métaphysique, herméneutique coranique" (PhD diss., UC Louvain, 2023).
62. Gregory Vandamme, "The 'Veil of Glory': Perplexity (*Ḥayra*) and Revelation in the Qurʾānic Hermeneutics of Ibn ʿArabī," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Islamic Thought*, ed. S. Camilleri and S. Varlik (New York: Springer, 2022), 82.
63. Vandamme, 82.
64. Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 32.
65. Eriugena describes the complexities of Book IV, which begins in the middle of a hexaemeron that continues into Book V, with the metaphor of a sailing ship: Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, ed. Édouard A. Jeauneau, CCCM 161–65 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1996), 4:5.75–78 (hereafter cited as *PP*).

another way to understand the purpose of aporia in theology and the limits of conceptualizing theological method as hermeneutics alone. Theological aporia cultivates our desire for God. However, unpacking the poetics of Eriugena's dialogue demands a close reading of his text. While others have noted Eriugena's poetics, none have given examples through his language that cultivates desire through aporia.[66] I urge readers to read aloud some of the passages analyzed below, which sound as perplexing in English as the original Latin. As a spoken dialogue—even if fictitious—this serves to underscore poetics.

The Poetics of Creation in the *Periphyseon*

> [The] philosopher relies on this capacity of poetry to enlarge, to increase, to augment the capacity of meaning of our language.
> —Paul Ricœur[67]

Eriugena was a poet no less than a theologian for whom the writing of poetry was not merely "a 'leisure-activity' in the life of a busy philosopher/theologian and teacher."[68] Rather, and especially for Eriugena, "poetry and philosophy are highly compatible entities."[69] Eriugena connects poetry to theology in his commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy* when he contends that "theology, *as it were a poetess*, conforms holy scripture to formed images" for the sake of uplifting and returning us—enfleshed humans—back to God.[70] However, most scholars have focused

66. See, e.g., Richard Kearney, "My Way to Theopoetics through Eriugena," *Literature and Theology* 33, no. 4 (September 2019): 233–40, https://doi.org/10.1093/litthe/frz019, and Valentin Gerlier, "Nature Conversing: John Scotus Eriugena's Contemplative Ontological Poetics," *Medieval Mystical Theology* 30, no. 2 (2021): 69–84, https://doi.org/10.1080/20465726.2021.1997184. Michael Sells, in *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, attends to Eriugena's use of language but does not frame it through a discussion of poetics.

67. Paul Ricœur, "Poetry and Possibility," in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. Mario Valdés (Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 440.

68. Michael W. Herren, ed. and trans., *Carmina* (Dublin: School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1993), 11.

69. Herren, 42.

70. Eriugena, *Iohannis Scoti Eriugenae Expositiones in Ierarchiam Coelestem*, ed. J. Barbet, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 31 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1975), 24, emphasis added. In a thoroughly contradictory mistranslation, Eriugena renders *atechnōs* (without artistry or skill) as "with intense artistry." "Indeed, with intense artistry [*valde artificialiter* = *atechnōs*], theology employs sacred, constructed [*factitiis* = *poiētikais*] formations in [revealing] formless meanings [*non figuratis intellectibus* = *aschēmatistōn noun*] . . . unveiling our mind, providing a return that is proper and connatural to it, [and] forming holy scriptures to uplift [us] to [God]." *Expositiones*, 23; for original Greek, see *Corpus Dionysiacum*, ed. Beate Regina Suchla, Günter Heil, and Adolf Martin Ritter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990), 2:10 (137B). René Roques has demonstrated that this is no accident of a misreading or of a materially deficient manuscript; Eriugena intentionally—and audaciously, even *poetically*—corrects Dionysius's negative adverb and translated it into a superlative with the opposite meaning. See René Roques, "'*Valde artificialiter*': Le sens d'un contresens," *Annuaire de l'école pratique des Hautes Études* 77 (1969–1970): 31–72.

primarily on Eriugena's prose treatises to the exclusion of his poems or have analyzed them in isolation from his poetry. Exceptions of import include the works of Peter Dronke, Filippo Colnago, and Catherine Kavanagh.[71] Dronke has noted how poetry and theology are interwoven in Eriugena's corpus, such that works that are explicitly theological betray a poetic sensitivity. According to Dronke, this is the case for Eriugena's *Homilia in Prologum Evangelii secundum Iohannem*. Colnago has demonstrated how theological themes are embedded within and expressed by his poems, which are "theology in verse," such that Eriugena's poems contribute "to a new and mature deepening of this poetry-theology union."[72] Finally, Kavanagh has noted the liturgical character of the poems that reveal central aspects of his theology: "the transcendence of God 'beyond being,' the recapitulation of humanity in the Person of Christ and the ultimate divinization of human nature thanks to Christ's action at Easter."[73] This coheres with Colnago's conclusion that "quantitatively, the subject of the Incarnation and the *inhumanatio*/*theosis* is par excellence the main theme of Eriugena's poems."[74] I will return to the interrelationship among Creation, Incarnation, and Redemption/theosis qua Eriugena's primary poetic themes at the end of the proceeding analysis, which suggests that poetics is of import not merely in explicit poetry, but also in discursive, prosaic treatises. Eriugena the poet and Eriugena the theologian come together in this exercise in comparative theology and provide analogical support for the comparison itself. Just as the theo-poetics of Ḥāfiẓ's poems are theologically unfolded in the later prose commentary, likewise is the theo-poetics of Eriugena's poems unfolded in his own dialectical text of theology, the *Periphyseon*.

Eriugena opens the *Periphyseon* with a paradox, an aporetic statement: "The first and highest division of all things that are able to be perceived by the mind or that surpass its thought are into those things that are and those things that are not."[75] *How* something that is nonexistent and therefore incomprehensible to the human mind falls within the ambit of a division conceived by the human mind is a paradox that pervades both the text of the *Periphyseon* and *Natura* itself. This twofold division is quickly rendered fourfold:

> Nature that [1] creates and is not created [God the *principium* of all things "that are and that are not"]; [2] is created and creates [the primordial causes]; [3] is created and does not create [phenomenal creation]; [4] neither creates nor is created [God as *finis* of all things].[76]

71. Filippo Colnago, *Poesia and teologia in Giovanni Scoto l'Eriugena* (Rome: Herder Editrice e Libreria, 2009); Peter Dronke, "*Theologia veluti quaedam poetria*. Quelques observations sur la fonction des images poétiques chez Jean Scot," in *Jean Scot Erigène et l'histoire de la philosophie, Laon 7–12 Juillet 1975*, ed. René Roques (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1977), 243–52; and Catherine Kavanagh, "Maximus Embellished? The Poetry of Johannes Scottus Eriugena," in *The Beauty of God's Presence in the Fathers of the Church, the Proceedings of the Eighth International Patristic Conference, Maynooth, 2012*, ed. Janet Elaine Rutherford (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), 218–32.
72. Colnago, 258.
73. Kavanagh, "Maximus Embellished?," 219.
74. Colnago, *Poesia and teologia*, 269.
75. *PP*, 1:3.2–4 (441A)
76. *PP*, 1:3–4.20–22 (441B). For my reference to "phenomenal creation," see *PP*, 1:4.38 (442B).

Eriugena intended to apportion a single volume for each division, but the "prolixity of [the fourth] volume" demanded a fifth.[77] Loquaciousness alone does not prevent this goal but also, I argue, his poetics. *How* he discusses each division belies any discursive, linear presentation of *Natura*. Books II–IV each contain multiple "recapitulations" of other divisions, to which Eriugena often refers in the Greek, *anakephalaiōseis*. The interpenetrative, co-constitutive relationship among the divisions force the dialogue to dwell on all four divisions throughout the volumes. In Book II, Eriugena prepares the reader for precisely this. The procession recapitulates the return, which recapitulates the procession, because "the procession of creatures and the return of the same occur simultaneously to the reason that is investigating them."[78] *Exitus* and *reditus* are happening *at the same time*, eliciting what another author calls "contemplative ontological poetics."[79]

The circular poetics of *Natura* follows a logical argument by which Eriugena executes a dialogical reduction of the four into one by way of *ratio*. The teacher asks, "For nothing other than [God] is truly called Essential, since all things which are from Him are nothing other than—insofar as they are [*in quantum sunt*]—the participation in Him who by Himself alone subsists through Himself. Would you deny that the Creator and creation are one?"[80] To which the student replies, "Not easily would I deny this. For it seems to be ridiculous to resist this recapitulation."[81] The response to an astonishing aporia is nonchalant—Eriugena ostensibly glosses over the central Christian aporia. However, the teacher was careful in his choice of words (poetics) throughout: *in quantum sunt* renders creation nonetheless dependent *somehow* on the Creator. While the procession and return are simultaneous "to *ratio*" investigating them, "insofar *as*" (*in quantum*) resonates with the Islamic theo-poetic *ka-inna* (as though). An Islamic theo-poetics compels us to seek revelation, consideration, and understanding from the liminal space of this "insofar *as*" enabling a productive turn to the creative imagination. *Ratio* alone produces monism, pantheism, or even radical apophaticism, whereas the imagination and attention to poetics maintain the tension of the aporia.

Indeed, the Irishman was accused of pantheism by many of his later interpreters, a reason for which the *Periphyseon* was frequently proscribed by ecclesiastical authorities.[82] As will be noted, a focus on hermeneutics seeks to resolve the aporia through *ratio*. Reading theophany, or "God-appearance," the cosmological principle that forms the basis for Eriugena's theological anthropology and Christology, through *ratio* or hermeneutics *alone* leads us to two contradictory conclusions: either God is everything (pantheism) or we are prevented from the eschatological, unmediated vision of

77. *PP*, 4:167.5164–69 (860B).
78. *PP*, 2:8.59–65 (529A).
79. Gerlier, "Nature Conversing."
80. *PP*, 2:7.109–14 (528B).
81. *PP*, 2:7.115–16 (528B).
82. For a more detailed report of various condemnations, see Maïeul Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Érigène, sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée* (Bruxelles: Culture et Civilisation, 1969), 248n2, and Deirdre Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 23.

God (radical apophaticism). Otherwise put, either we are *always* seeing God, or we will *never* see God. A focus on poetics and imagination (learning from an Islamic theo-poetics), while maintaining Eriugena's distinctions or divisions of nature, keeps accusations of pantheistic monism at bay, even as they frequently swell within the poetics of the text. The purpose of focusing on poetics is not to exclude hermeneutics but to balance the conclusions that emerge when we view theology merely as hermeneutics.

This dispassionate portion of the dialogue is an example of dialectical reasoning's resolution of an aporia. The teacher and student step-by-step reduce the four into two and then the two into one—a synthesis. It is so reasonable that the student acquiesces calmly to the logical conclusions. Nevertheless, this dispassionate dialogue is distinguished from the perturbing dialogue that follows in the rest of Book II and into Book III. As *ratio*'s conclusions unfold in the dialogue, the student is left occasionally in stupefaction at the implications of reason's explications. It is in these aporetic moments that dialectical truth concedes to paradox and contradiction. The law of noncontradiction struggles to maintain control of the dialogue and yields to poetic imagination. The theological dialogue ceases to be an exercise in hermeneutics alone and becomes just as much an exercise in poetics.

The poetics of the text is evident in Eriugena's exposition of the central Christian aporia. In the first one hundred pages of Book III, Eriugena removes a series of binaries, each time revealing an aporia that elicits affective responses. The discussion begins with the nature of *nihil*, the nothing from which God made all things. Once the teacher explains that God, too, is nothing,[83] the student is befuddled to understand how at once God is nothing and God creates out of nothing. The first affective shock of the aporia: "I feel myself . . . enclosed from every which way by the dark clouds of my thoughts. . . . I am repelled, with the sharpness of my mind struck down [*perculsus*] by the excessive obscurity of the most subtle reasons that elude me, or more correctly by [their] excessive brightness."[84] On the one hand, all things are eternal in their primordial causes in the Word,[85] on the other hand, they are made out of nothing; all things are eternal and made. "However, in what *way* [*quemadmodum*] these things that are opposed, as it were [*veluti*], to one another, harmonize into a single bond of understanding—i.e., *how* [quomodo] *all things are simultaneously eternal and made*—seems . . . to be worthy of a most diligent search by reason."[86] The search is for *how* this is the case; they are seeking a theo-poetics of *Natura*, which perplexes the student not on account of the deficiency of his rational faculty, but because of "excessive brightness."

The bewildering dialogue continues with the assertions that "the eternal universe of the whole creation is *in* the Word of God"[87] as the Cause of all things. The teacher glosses Acts 17:28 with Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius and then suggests, it "is

83. See *PP*, 3:24.644–49 (634BC).
84. *PP*, 3:25.662–68 (635A).
85. *PP*, 3:25.687–88 (635C).
86. *PP*, 3:29.805–8 (638BC), emphasis added.
87. *PP*, 3:31.866–67 (639C), emphasis added.

openly given to understand that all things are not only eternal *in* the Word of God, *but really are the Word of God*."[88] Here, we have an additional step taken, from *is in* to simply *is*. This foreshadows the conclusions to be obtained nearly sixty-five pages later: the division of *Natura* is really a division of *Divina Natura*. But *how* are things both eternal and made? This remains unclear and so the teacher continues to remove dualities: "Whatsoever is substantially in God the Word necessarily is eternal, *since nothing but the Word Itself is*."[89] The teacher contends that the Divine Word is both simple and united as well as manifold and permeated in all things.[90] The tensive concept of reality is felt even within the Word Itself. The poetics of the text holds the reader in a tension throughout: simple and manifold, united and permeated. The Word alone is, yet the Word is diffused through all things. In other words, creation is nothing but the Word's permeation, diffusion, effusion, since the Word's "permeation is the substantiation of all things."[91]

Eriugena is quick to indicate that there were not preexistent things into which the Word diffused. Rather, the effusion of the Word is equated with all things, and the *subsistence* of all things is the participation in the Word. The teacher struggles to demonstrate *how* all things are eternal and made for another four pages in the Latin edition, passages analyzed by Michael Sells in his *Mystical Languages*. Sells speaks of the paradox of the Word's "self-containment" and how prepositions "in" and "into" intensify the paradox of simultaneous immanence and transcendence.[92] Eriugena, glossing Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius, concludes that "all things whatsoever that are truly understood *to be, are* nothing else but the Manifold Power of Creative *Wisdom* [Word], *which subsists in all things*."[93] The poetics of this passage is palpable, something I call a "double within-ness" of the Word/creation: all things are the power of the Word which subsists in all things. But Eriugena's poetics continues:

> Therefore, all-things-that-are are . . . at once both eternal and made, given that in them is made Wisdom Itself, Which makes them; and the Cause, in which and through which they are both eternal and made, in them is eternal and made.[94]

The poetics of this passage quite nearly fails to maintain subject-object distinction and temporal order as it performs a "double within-ness." Wisdom makes all things *in which Wisdom is made*; all things are eternal and made in the Cause *which is eternal and made in them. Wisdom subsists in all things which subsist in Wisdom*. The perplexing poetics of this passage is an aporia. *How* these words coincide produces semantic shocks that struggle against dualistic (and monistic) logic. This is evident in the student's reaction:

88. *PP*, 3:34.915–17 (641A), emphasis added.
89. *PP*, 3:35.957–60 (642A), emphasis added.
90. See *PP*, 3:36.984–92 (642C).
91. *PP*, 3:36.991–92 (642C)
92. See chapter 2 of Sells, *Mystical Languages*, 34–62 (esp. 48–53).
93. *PP*, 3:41.1137–39 (646A), emphasis added.
94. *PP*, 3:41.1161–64 (646C).

> I am greatly bewildered and, stupefied . . . dead, perplexed. For I am allured [*attrahor*] by these arguments, since they are likely to be true and corroborated by the testimonies of the Holy Fathers and Holy Scripture. However, again and again I am drawn back [*retrahor*] in hesitation and immediately thereafter I slide into the thickest darkness of my thoughts. For the sharpness of my mind is unable to consider and thoroughly penetrate into the profundity of these present questions.[95]

The student cannot comprehend the aporia with a rational hermeneutics. An Islamic theo-poetics aids us here: *ḥayra*, being thrown into ambiguity, fearful of radical immanence (monism, pantheism)—all this is an affective response to the poetics of the central Christian aporia. Theology here is effecting this aporia through poetics, granting affective knowledge that is distinct from discursive or rational knowledge. The *experience* of the central Christian aporia of creation is part of the Christian experience and lends insight into how we are to relate to God in our embodied selves—with wonder, bewilderment, astonishment. This is why theological aesthetics presumes theology as poetics. Aporetics demands poetics, which in turn cultivates the desire that fuels our theo(poïe)sis. Indeed, throughout the dialogue it seems only *ratio* creates impasses, whereas affective poetics views contradictions as passageways for creativity (*poïesis*). These affective responses resonate with Eriugena's poetry in which are found a veritable "theology of the cross."[96] Eriugena does not dwell explicitly on the glory of the Cross and the salvific work of Christ's bloody passion in the *Periphyseon*. However, his poems are replete with these images.[97] In the poems, "a true and proper 'theology of the Cross'—and, likewise, 'theology of the Crucified'—takes shape . . . when the poet speaks of *lignum crucis* as the central moment of salvation history that brings the Son from the assumption of human flesh to the sacrifice of His life (with an abundance of details about His pierced and bloody body), culminating in the consequent divinization (theosis) of humanity."[98] There is a connection, therefore, between the student's suffering wonder and confusion at the aporias he encounters and the ultimate, eschatological theo(poïe)sis of humanity through Christ's bloody passion. Indeed, this connection is underscored through an Islamic theo-poetics, which connects passionate love, a love that suffers, with the infinite desire for God it cultivates.

Eriugena ends this first removal of dualities with another confounding statement: "No creature susceptible to the senses or intellect [is] found, of which [creature] it

95. *PP*, 3:42.1165–71 (646CD).
96. See Colnago, *Poesia and teologia*, 274–78, as well as Kavanagh.
97. For example, the first poem in Herrren's *Carmina*, 58–61, in which "Christ [is] bathed [*perfusum*] in blood" (lines 8–9), "the wood of the cross embraces the four corners of the globe" (lines 19–20), we are told to "behold the pierced palms, shoulders, and feet" of Christ (line 23), and Christ's "blood makes gods of us mortals" (line 28). Likewise, the second poem (*Carmina*, 64–67), which is effectively a hymn to the glory of the "Cross of Salvation" (line 2) that "shines beyond [*supra*] Seraphim and Cherubim" and which is worshipped by "all that is, is not, and is more than [*super*]" (lines 7–8).
98. Colnago, *Poesia and teologia*, 275.

[cannot] truly be said: It always was, is, and will be, and it always was not, is not, and will not be."[99] All things always were, are, and will be, and always were not, are not, and will not be *in the Word*. According to an Islamic theo-poetics of creation, this world is "God/not-God," carrying us beyond to God: "Metaphor is a bridge to Reality." With the student's appetite for poetics whet, he desires more. The student understands *what* the teacher is teaching, but he still does not see *how* it accords with reason that "made things are eternal and eternal things are made,"[100] especially since the Word in which they are made and eternal is Itself coeternal with the Father. "Accordingly, it will seem that there is no difference between the eternity of the universe in the Word and its creation, if eternity is creation and creation is eternity."[101] The student desires *how* all things are eternal and simultaneously made in the Word. This desire launches the dialogue into one of the most moving, profound, and penetrative discussions concerning the depths—or rather the liminal spaces—of the Divine Nature, the Word, the Divine *Nihil*, and the theophanic nature of the universe.

The teacher rebukes the student because *how* this is the case is veiled from all intellects. Even the angels "veil with their wings both their faces and their feet, i.e., fearing to gaze at the profundity of the Divine Power."[102] The teacher adds, "Nevertheless, [the angels] do not cease to fly, turning on high. For they always seek, insofar as they are able, lifted up by Divine Grace and the subtlety of their nature, those things that are beyond themselves by their desire unto infinity."[103] The subject calls for silence, and yet the student and teacher desire more unto infinity. Theology as poetics explains this infinite search for God in a way that complements conceptualizing theology as hermeneutics. Theology as poetics and thus as a cultivation of desire is supported by an Islamic theo-poetics. Ḥāfiẓ contributed to an Islamic poetic tradition that was astonishingly normative, and commentaries abound from this tradition, which makes God's essence equivalent to *ʿishq*, passionate love. The poetry and the commentaries are not offering a static hermeneutics, but a poetics intended to cultivate the desire for, and passionate love of, God (and, in parallel traditions, the Prophet Muhammad) through the embodied forms of creation. Aporias are intended to entice us, drawing us in to (*atrahor*) and backing us away from (*retrahor*) God, perpetually augmenting desire.

The dialogue proceeds to seek after the mystery of the divine will, *how* God *willed* that all things are both made and eternal, enticing them through poetics:

> Nothing is more hidden than [the divine will], nothing is more present than it, difficult as to where it is, more difficult as to where it is not, the ineffable light always present to all intellectual eyes, and known by no intellect as to what it is, diffused through all things unto infinity, and made all in all things and nothing in nothing.[104]

99. *PP*, 3:67.1925–35 (665CD).
100. *PP*, 3:70.2016–17 (667D).
101. *PP*, 3:70, 2017–19 (667D). Eriugena's poetic treatment of the aporia of time and eternity in these sections is configured by Augustine's ruminations on the topic in Book XI of *Confessions*.
102. *PP*, 3:70.2024–27 (668A).
103. *PP*, 3:70.⟨14 ⟩104–6 (668A).
104. *PP*, 3:71.2040–44 (668C).

The poetics is patent, which makes this passage superbly aporetic. The first removal of duality attempted to resolve an aporia: all things are *eternal in the Word* and *made in their effects*. But poetics demands more. So, the aporia above emerges in the text. Eriugena attempts another resolution:

> All visible and invisible things . . . and . . . whatsoever the universe of all creation contains, [are] eternal and simultaneously made in the Only-Begotten Word of God; their eternity does not precede in them their being made, and their being made does not precede their eternity.[105]

Now, all things are eternal and simultaneously made in the Word. Another duality is removed, for even created effects are eternal in the Word.

The Aristotelian logic that shaped Eriugena maintains the law of noncontradiction, but his conclusions continue to violate it. When pressed for the *mode* (how?) of the creation of all things in the Word of God, the teacher, once again, refers to the authority of Holy Scripture: "Who alone possesses immortality and dwells in inaccessible light" (1 Tm 6:16). The *modus* or way that all things are both eternal and made is inaccessible to *ratio* and, like Augustine, Eriugena quotes scripture (a poetic response). Throughout the last several pages, the dialogue is navigating further within the liminal spaces of the Word of God: (1) All things are eternal and made; then clarified, (2) eternal in the Word, made in this phenomenal world; and finally, (3) both eternal and made *in* the Word. They are now entering the incomprehensible mystery of the Word as they are enraptured by aporetic creation. The Word "is made all things in all things."[106] And, as if to textualize the interpenetration of creation and the Word, the teacher declares, "How or by what reason is the Word of God made in all things that are made in Him [*dei verbum in omnibus quae in eo facta sunt fit*] flees the sharpness of mind."[107] Temporal and causal priority elude the mind through the poetics of this passage; the subject chases the object chasing the subject within the liminal spaces of aporia. How is the Word made in all things made in the Word? The theo-poetics of creation confounds the interlocutors. This sentence keeps the reader within poetics (how words mean), because what it means (hermeneutics) flees the intellect, for which it remains logically impassable-impossible.

This is an astounding textual performance of theology as poetics—desire increases infinitely in what has been called "the divine 'whirlings' that constitute Natura's creative expression," which "remain forever beyond any totalizing grasp."[108] Once again illuminated by an Islamic theo-poetics, in the ghazals the commentator reminds us that the essence (*dhāt*) of God is inaccessible, and yet the essential theophany and the Face of God—theophanies of God experienced in our bodies—are what instill desire for God. Despite his own warnings not to seek how all things are made and eternal in the Word according to the divine will—the poetics of the central Christian aporia—the

105. *PP*, 3:72.2046–51 (669A).
106. *PP*, 3:75.2149–50 (671C).
107. *PP*, 3:75.2150–52 (671C).
108. Gerlier, "Nature Conversing," 75.

teacher forges along and encourages the student. The pair are, as it were, performing divinization in their risky, ascetical search for wisdom, to draw from Kavanagh's analysis of Eriugena's poetry.[109] The teacher asks the student whether the Word of God saw all things that were made in Him,[110] to which the student replies in the affirmative by quoting Maximus the Confessor on the Divine Volitions (*voluntates*/Gr. *thelēmata*).[111] God sees the things that are made as He sees His Divine Volitions. But the teacher catches the student in another potential duality: the things that are made are the Divine Volitions, but is God's vision of the Divine Volitions "different from the made things that He sees as Divine Volitions?"[112] The student is "hemmed in from every which way,"[113] since he is forced to choose between two options that appear equally preposterous and illogical—an aporia:

> Either that the Will of God be separated from God and added to creation, such that God and His Will are two different things, i.e., that God is the maker and His Will made. Or, if right reason forbids [me] to say this, necessarily I will admit that *God, His Volitions, and all that He has made are one and the same*. And without delay, by the compelling power of reasoning, it will be concluded: God therefore makes Himself, if His Volitions are not external to Himself, and He does not see His Volitions one way and what He makes in another way, but rather sees what He has made as His Volitions. And if it is thus, who will doubt of the eternity of all things that are made in God, when they are not only made and eternal, but also understood to be God?[114]

"If right reason forbids me"—indeed!—but he traverses the aporia-*barzakh* path and says it nonetheless. Creation becomes the Will of God; each of us is gratuitously willed by God *ex nihilo*. The teacher applauds the student's conclusions, happily proclaiming that "no more labor is necessary in order to suggest the eternity of all things that were made in the Word of God."[115] The student strikes back, rather humorously—"I think you're mocking me!"[116]—and demands further discussion. The teacher acquiesces and several conclusions are granted in dialogue.[117] Then, it follows:

> And if His Will is His Vision and His Vision is His Will, then all that He wills is made without any interval. And if all that He wills to be made and sees to be made, and if what God wills and sees is not outside of Himself but rather in Himself, and nothing is in Him that is

109. See Kavanagh, "Maximus Embellished?," 228–29.
110. See *PP*, 3:76.2184–85 (672C).
111. *PP*, 3:77.2209–17 (673B); citing Maximus Confessor, *Ambigua ad Iohannem* 7: for Greek-English, see Maximus Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 108–9 (1085B).
112. *PP*, 3:78.2225–26 (673C).
113. *PP*, 3:78.2228 (673C).
114. *PP*, 3:78.2240–52 (674AB).
115. *PP*, 3:79.2255–56 (674B).
116. *PP*, 3:79.2257 (674B).
117. See *PP*, 3:79–80 (674C–675B).

> not Himself, then it follows that all that God sees and wills is understood to be coeternal with Him, if His Will and Vision and Essence are One.[118]

To this the student responds, "You now compel us to admit that all things whatsoever that are . . . eternal and made are God!"[119] The subtle poetics put forth by the teacher elicits an affective response: he is *compelled*! The teacher congratulates him, for he sees that what the student has said he also has understood—namely, that outside the Divine Nature there is *nothing*, and that "It contains all that It has created and creates, nevertheless such that It, being Superessential, is different from that which It creates in Itself."[120] Eriugena is cautious here, replicating in his own words the central Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and the "radical, qualitative difference" between God and creation "that in fact allows us to affirm divine transcendence precisely *as* God's unfathomable nearness."[121] While the specter of pantheism looms in Eriugena's poetics, he remains a radical proponent of *creatio ex nihilo* that maintains the difference between God and creation as "originally and eternally *in* God."[122]

The poetics of these passages likewise points to metaphorical truth, the *as though* from which revelation and understanding emerge according to an Islamic theo-poetics. God *is different* from the things that He has created *within Himself*. All creation is a liminal space (*barzakh*) bringing together existence and nonexistence (*huwa/lā-huwa*, God/not-God) in a series of infinite aporias that serve to cultivate desire. Aporias in an Islamic theo-poetics are not impassable walls but rather the passage through which creation emerges. The Islamic tradition enhances Christian understandings of aporetics in ways different from, but complementary to, how the Christian tradition has predominantly construed them. This allows a novel understanding of Eriugena's dialogue: teacher and student are not climbing or removing walls, they are navigating the liminal spaces of aporias, "hemmed in" but forging along the "hidden straits of the Divine Ocean."

The student thinks aloud, "I used to maintain that the fullness of the whole universe was limited to . . . God and creation. But now . . . it seems my faith is wavering, weakened by the foregoing arguments."[123] Faith in what? Surely not God, but in a particular *ratio*, a logic that precludes the impossible—the "right reason" that was forbidding him to say what he said nonetheless. The poetics of the dialogue on *creatio ex nihilo* undermines the logical rule of noncontradiction. The teacher lends a helping hand: remember "that outside of God there is *nothing* . . . therefore, move . . . around that which you believe to be *within* God."[124]

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118. *PP*, 3:80.2299–2304 (675AB).
119. *PP*, 3:80.2305–6 (675B).
120. *PP*, 3:81.2322–25 (675CD).
121. Robinette, *Difference Nothing Makes*, 7.
122. Robinette, 74, emphasis in original.
123. *PP*, 3:81.2330–33 (676A).
124. *PP*, 3:81.2334, 2337–38 (676A), emphasis added.

Student: "I perceive within God nothing but Himself and creation created by Himself."

Teacher: "Therefore you see *in God* what *is not God*."

Student: "I see [that], nevertheless it is created from God."

Teacher: ". . . Did God see all things that [God] made before they were made?"

Student: "[Yes.]"

Teacher: "Thus [God] saw the things that He willed to make; and [God] saw nothing other than the things He made; and the things that [God] made He has seen before He made them."[125]

The final statement demonstrates the poetics of the *Periphyseon*. It collapses temporal distinctions, and the words come together in such a way to produce a conclusion that remains aporetic: God sees what He will make while seeing what He has made, which He has seen before He made them. Only such a strain on discourse can manifest the poetics of *Natura*, for the poetics of the text mirrors the poetics of the world. The poetics of the *Periphyseon* attends to *how* words come together in his dialogue to reveal how *ratio* is subverted and desire for God increased. Dialectical reasoning yields to aporetic truth and affective knowledge.

The student, bewildered and frightened—suffering—exclaims, "I see myself surrounded from every which way, and that there remains no way of escape."[126] The student's passion finds meaning in the theology of the Cross, without which the aporia remains impassable and the student remains trapped. In Eriugena's poems, "Christ suffers as the means of opening the way to *theosis* for humanity" and through "his Incarnation, death, and Resurrection, Christ . . . opened for all flesh the possibility of following the same path—by suffering (that is, ascesis) humanity participates in the Passion of Christ in order to participate in his Resurrection and Divinity."[127] The student suffers, and the aporia qua *barzakh* is narrowing. Bewildered, suffering, but in passionate love of God, the student is once again cornered and forced to remove the final duality—namely, that between God and creation—a path made possible by the incarnation and passion of Jesus Christ. His exclamation segues directly into a disquisition that folds creation into God. The full passage contains a steady stream of bewildering aporias, negations, and coincidences of opposites that disrupt *ratio*:

> God is all things everywhere, and the Whole in the whole, and the Maker and the made, and the Seer and the seen, and time and space, and the essence, substance, and accident of everything and . . . all that truly is and is not, Superessential in essence, Supersubstantial in substance, the Creator *beyond* every creation, and Created *within* every creature, and subsisting below every creature, beginning to be from Himself, and moving Himself through

125. *PP*, 3:81–82.2339–48 (676AB), emphasis added.
126. *PP*, 3:82.2358–59 (676B).
127. Kavanagh, "Maximus Embellished?," 226–27 (emphasis added).

> Himself, and the movement toward Himself, and resting in Himself, multiplied unto infinity through the genera and species in Himself, though not abandoning the simplicity of His nature, but recalling the infinity of His multiplication in Himself. For in Him all things are one.[128]

At this juncture, the dialogue elaborates *how* God and creation are related through theophany: creation is *subsisting in* God, Who is created *in* creation through the Divine Word. The dialogue concludes with the student rhetorically asking, "How would the Word suffer to be made in Himself what was not [already] consubstantial with Him?"[129] In other words, *how* could "the Word be made flesh" unless there was not already a consubstantial relationship between creation and the Word? The passages discussing the central Christian aporia conclude with another aporia: the Incarnation. The poetics of creation whirl into the poetics of the Incarnation, the source of our theo(poïe)sis.

Certainly, theology as hermeneutics and the use of *ratio*—however defined—remain necessary features of fruitful theological method. However, poetics—an Islamic theo-poetics—sheds light on the workings of aporia within the context of the central Christian aporia. This is all the more evident when Eriugena's poems are read together with the above sections of the *Periphyseon*. The poetics of creation seamlessly becomes the poetics of the Incarnation. Both Colnago and Kavanagh have noted how the theological themes of Creation, Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection not only pervade Eriugena's poems but are also mutually inextricable one from the other. In his dialectical treatise, the Incarnation—"all that is human in Christ . . . his life, acts, passion and resurrection . . . [as] . . . an expression and manifestation of God in the language of a created being"[130]—permit humanity's theo(poïe)sis and convert the student's aporias from impassable walls to infinite passageways (*barzakh*). This is the import of poetics in theological method: it grounds the discipline even deeper within the Incarnation and underscores theological aesthetics as a necessary feature of faith seeking understanding.

Conclusion

Learning from an Islamic theo-poetics, Eriugena is *navigating* aporias qua *barzakh* to increase desire for God infinitely—just as the passionate love lyrics of Ḥāfiẓ are describing an infinite love for *the* Beloved, God, who is revelation-in-concealment in creation. Theology as poetics therefore reads Eriugena's negotiations of aporias not as resolutions but as textual performances that mirror the Incarnational poetics of the world.

The poetics of theological aporia gesture toward the work of theological aesthetics. Islamic theo-poetics and its concomitant experiences of *ḥayra* and passionate (suffering) love conceptualize theology as poetics and thus underscore the import of theological aesthetics. "Metaphor is a bridge to reality"—this world *as* the

128. *PP*, 3:82–83.2362–2413 (676B–677D), emphasis added.
129. *PP*, 3:86.2497–98 (679CD).
130. Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 1:20–21.

metaphor—suggests that our embodied experiences guide us beyond (*meta*) to the Beloved. But like beautiful, complex poetry, you cannot abandon the form of the metaphor, the poetic images, to access pure meaning; you cannot resolve poetry, its metaphors and images, into syllogisms or discursive thought without losing the meaning embedded—embodied—in the poem. Form and meaning cannot be separated. "Suffering has meaning" as an abstract aphorism is meaningless without the concrete form of the Cross, as Balthasar would remind us. Similarly for our embodied experiences of the Beloved, of God in this world: we cannot abandon our flesh for some pure, disembodied, intellectual knowledge of God. Furthermore, the *kāf* of *ka-inna* (as though) effects in us revelation and understanding of God. However, this knowledge of God is understood not by the intellect or by *ratio*—fetters that bind us according to an Islamic theo-poetics—but by the faculty of the imagination and the experience of *ḥayra*.[131] The imagination is (1) *how* God creates (*poïesis*) the world and (2) *how* Muhammad receives revelation; therefore, (3) poets access and participate in the creative and revelatory imagination, which can comprehend *coincidentiae oppositorum*. The imagination encompasses and creatively navigates aporia; it can perform the impossible. Finally, passionate love is the engine driving an Islamic theo-poetics; human wayfarers ever seek the Face of God, *the* Beloved in creation. Everything in creation is a theophany, a divine self-disclosure in which God's manifestation-in-concealment is encountered, and as such experiencing creation cultivates desire infinitely. Since there is always more of God to experience, more divine love to give and receive, we perpetually live in poetics, for Beauty is "the immediate manifestation of the never-to-be-mastered excess of manifestation contained in everything manifest"[132]—excess, but within creation.

Theology as poetics is required of theological aesthetics because being is revealed only in a perceptible form, and this form is the gestalt of God, who is Christ—especially Christ Crucified, "who is folly" to Paul's Greeks who sought a certain *ratio*. The form is the Beauty of God, which delights and entices us toward the vertical depths of the infinite Glory of God. We are "enraptured by . . . these depths" and "transported to them," but we never "leave the (horizontal) form behind us" because "the appearance of the form, as revelation of the depths, is an indissoluble union of two things."[133] Aporias thus cultivate desire, a passionate love grounded in the Cross that effects a certain praxis. Theological aesthetics is the fruit of viewing theology as poetics as much as hermeneutics, enabling us to encounter the play of God's revelation-in-concealment, to experience a God who is *semper maior—Allāhu akbar!*—even in His nearness (for no form exhausts God's Glory).

In a theology focusing on hermeneutics, some aporias resolve themselves, others lead to silence. But in a theology complemented with poetics, aporias are inverted: not walls, but liminal spaces (*barzakh*) through which emerges desire for God and for the

131. See Takacs, "Transposing Metaphors," 79–83.

132. Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, 1:223

133. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, trans. E. Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 115–16.

other who is a manifestation of God. Textual poetics shapes our embodied poetics; *through* aporias-*barzakhs* we are to create (*poïesis*)—incarnate—new modes of being, new passageways, in the world, subverting our socially dominant logics (social imaginaries) that are restrictive rather than liberating. Beyond theological method, we must perpetually ask ourselves: how are the logics of this world (e.g., carceral logic, neoliberal logic, white supremacist logic, ableist logic, etc.) restricting our imagination for the (im)possible, and how do we live to subvert them and create something new? In this comparative theological exercise, our worldly logics construct walls, and aporias are the passageways through them. But these passageways follow the suffering of the student: they lead us to suffer confusion and bewilderment. Because of original sin, one consequence of which is social/structural sin, this poetic thinking, being, and living never fashions a totalizing resolution, lest we accidentally conform ourselves to the logical side of sin and sinful structures (Balthasar's "Promethean" ideologies). Rather, by inverting aporias into liminal spaces or passageways, the "workings of aporias" compel a perpetual subversion of restrictive logics and the *poïesis*/creation of liberating, theo-poetic communion with others in God—our theo(poïe)sis is our passageway (*barzakh*) to God.

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