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A SUFI INTERPRETATION OF ALISHER NAVOI'S HAYRAT UL-ABROR: HAYRAT, ABROR, AND THE QAHR-LUTF AXIS IN THE CONCEPTUAL ARCHITECTURE OF THE KHAMSA

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ABSTRACT
This article offers a systematic Sufi, Qur'anic-semantic, and poetic interpretation of the concepts of hayrat (mystical bewilderment), abror (the righteous), ahl al-radd/ahl al-qabul (rejection/acceptance), and qahr/lutf (wrath/grace) in Alisher Navoi's Hayrat ul-abror and assesses their value as a conceptual framework for reading the later poems of the Khamsa. The primary text is the sixth volume of Navoi's 2011 collected works. The Revan-808 and Fatih-4056 manuscripts are treated as auxiliary textual controls where relevant, while the study does not claim to establish a critical text. The analysis combines qualitative hermeneutics, comparative-historical contextualization, and Sufi conceptual interpretation. The findings show that hayrat denotes not ordinary surprise but an epistemic-spiritual state linked to ma'rifa, divine self-disclosure, inner vision, and fana; abror likewise occupies a broader Qur'anic and ethical semantic field than a simple equivalent such as "good people." The oppositions ahl al-radd/ahl al-qabul and qahr/lutf support reading the Khamsa as a shared meta-ethical and aesthetic architecture rather than as one linear plot. The argument distinguishes textually demonstrated findings from broader comparative hypotheses that require systematic testing across the remaining four epics.

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Keywords: *Alisher Navoi, Hayrat ul-abror, Khamsa, Sufism, hayrat, abror, wrath and grace, acceptance and rejection, fana.*

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Introduction

In Eastern classical literature, the Khamsa tradition is associated above all with Nizami Ganjavi. Contemporary Nizami scholarship treats the chronology of his five masnavis as a complex and debated matter rather than assigning them a single simplified date range. Drawing on de Blois's reconstruction, Parrello (2012) dates Makhzan al-Asrar to approximately 1166 or slightly later, Layli and Majnun to 1188, the Iskandarnama to approximately 1194, and Haft Paykar to 1197. It is therefore not sufficiently cautious to confine Nizami's Khamsa to an unqualified span such as 1170-1204. More importantly, the five masnavis were subsequently canonized as an integrated literary model under the titles Khamsa or Panj Ganj.

Amir Khusraw Dehlavi is recognized as the first poet to compose a Khamsa as a sustained response to Nizami's model; his quintet was written between 1298 and 1302 (Sharma, 2017). This development consolidated the tradition of tatabbu, allowing later poets not merely to repeat inherited plots but to enter into creative dialogue with earlier models and reinterpret them. Navoi brought this tradition to a new stage

in Chagatai Turkic. Modern scholarship dates Navoi's Khamsa to 1483-1485: Hayrat ul-abror and Farhad and Shirin to 1483, Layli and Majnun and Sab'ai Sayyor to 1484, and Saddi Iskandariy to 1485 (Toutant, 2023).

Navoi himself presents tatabbu not as simple imitation but as a test of creative capacity. A well-known couplet from Hayrat ul-abror expresses the severity of this standard:

Many have longed to attempt a poetic response,
Yet before the cypress and the rose they brought only straw. (Navoiy, 2011, p. 64)

The logic of the couplet suggests that tatabbu is not the copying of a prior text but the ability to produce a response worthy of it aesthetically and spiritually. Toutant (2023) shows that in Sab'ai Sayyor Navoi openly criticizes elements of the Nizami and Amir Khusraw models and restructures both plot and ethical emphasis. This supports reading the first poem of the Khamsa not as a simple repetition of earlier Khamsa practice, but as a programmatic text that articulates Navoi's own creative conception.

In this article, the expression "overall plot of the Khamsa" is used in a precise methodological sense. It does not refer to a single linear sequence of events uniting the five poems. Rather, it denotes a system of meta-ethical, mystical, and literary-aesthetic coordinates that recur across the Khamsa and are reworked in different plots. The central thesis of this study is therefore as follows: Hayrat ul-abror is not a plot map that predetermines every event in the subsequent four poems; instead, it is a conceptual prolegomenon that makes those poems readable through oppositions such as knowledge and ignorance, acceptance and rejection, grace and wrath, love and the lower self, and truth and fame.

Literature Review and Research Gap

The Sufi layers of Hayrat ul-abror have been studied from several perspectives in Uzbek Navoi scholarship. Muhiddinov (2022, p. 51) links the heart's experience of hayrat to fana and mystical perfection; his later article likewise analyzes the three "hayrat" chapters through the Sufi symbolism of the heart (Muhiddinov, 2023). G'afforova (2024) examines the ideological and artistic function of the poem's hymns of praise and emphasizes the compositional importance of hamd, na't, and munajat. Imomnazarov (2022, p. 144) regards the elevation of the heart's bewilderment to an artistic center in Navoi as an important innovation in classical literary thought. Komilov's (2009) synthetic study of Sufism in Uzbek scholarship also provides a theoretical basis for interpreting Sufi categories in their terminological and historical contexts.

In international Navoi studies, the poet's relationship to Persian models and his restructuring of those models has become increasingly important. Using Sab'ai Sayyor as a case study, Toutant (2023) demonstrates that Navoi reshaped the Nizami and Amir Khusraw plot in accordance with ethical-political and Naqshbandi Sufi criteria. This work provides an important methodological basis for explaining the internal coherence of the Khamsa not only through formal tatabbu, but also through the author's sustained ethical and mystical choices.

Nevertheless, existing studies often treat separately the term hayrat, the Qur'anic semantics of abror, the ahl al-radd/ahl al-qabul and qahr/lutf oppositions in the "Bismillah" chapter, the ethics of authorship in the prologue, and the conceptual criteria that may connect the later poems. The contribution of the present article does not lie in an absolute priority claim such as "for the first time," but in integrating these elements into a single conceptual model and explicitly distinguishing conclusions directly supported by the text from hypotheses that require further comparative research.

Research Questions

1. What Sufi-epistemological meaning does the term hayrat acquire in Hayrat ul-abror, and how is this meaning internally related to the poem's three chapters devoted to hayrat?

2. What semantic layers does the term abror combine from Qur'anic and lexical perspectives, and what do these layers imply for interpreting the title of the poem in a modern language?

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3. To what extent can the oppositions ahl al-radd/ahl al-qabul and qahr/lutf be justified as a conceptual axis extending from Hayrat ul-abror to the later poems of the Khamsa?

Materials and Methods

The primary text for this study is Hayrat ul-abror as published in the sixth volume of Alisher Navoi's ten-volume Complete Works (Navoiy, 2011). Where necessary, the Revan-808 manuscript in the Topkapı Palace Library and the Fatih-4056 manuscript in the Süleymaniye Library, both in Türkiye, were consulted. Because this article does not aim to establish a critical text or provide a complete apparatus of manuscript variants, the manuscripts are used as auxiliary controls; a stemmatic description of their variants remains a separate textual-critical task.

The conceptual sources include Qur'anic verses, Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf's Tafsiri Hilol, Usmonxon Temurxon Samarqandiy's Tafsiri Irfon, Süleyman Uludağ's dictionary of Sufi terminology, and Aziziddin Nasafi's The Book of the Perfect Human. The frequency and forms of abror in the Qur'an were checked against the Quranic Arabic Corpus. Hadith material was not included in the analytical corpus because the article's central argument relies on the Qur'an, tafsir, Sufi terminological sources, and the literary text.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, the semantic and mystical fields of the terms hayrat and abror in the poem's title were identified. Second, the prologue's "Bismillah," hamd, munajat, na'‘t, and praise of predecessors were read as internally connected conceptual layers. Third, the applicability of these concepts to the later poems of the Khamsa was evaluated not as a rigid classification of characters but as a model for comparative reading. Methodologically, the study combines qualitative hermeneutic analysis, comparative-historical contextualization, and religious-Sufi semantic analysis.

Quotations are cited by page number using the APA 7 author-date system. Qur'anic passages are identified primarily by surah and verse number; when an interpretive rendering is drawn from an Uzbek tafsir, the relevant tafsir source is also cited. Unless otherwise indicated, the English translations of Navoi's Chagatai passages in this article are the author's own and aim to remain close to the semantic structure of the cited edition.

Results and Discussion

The Programmatic Role of Hayrat ul-Abror within the Khamsa

As the opening poem of the Khamsa, Hayrat ul-abror differs generically from the subsequent epics: rather than an uninterrupted romantic or historical plot, it relies on a complex composition of maqalat, exemplary tales, hamd, munajat, na'‘t, and philosophical-mystical reflection. This feature means that its function cannot be reduced to that of merely being "the first poem." It formulates in advance Navoi's criteria concerning the human person, divine grace, love, reason, authorship, justice, and perfection, thereby providing a normative vocabulary for reading the later epic narratives.

For this reason, calling Hayrat ul-abror "the key to the treasury of the Khamsa" is productive as a poetic metaphor, but as a scholarly thesis its meaning must be specified. In the present article, "key" does not mean that the poem pre-encodes the plots of the next four works; rather, it means that Hayrat ul-abror supplies a conceptual vocabulary for naming ethical and mystical oppositions that recur within them.

The Sufi Meaning of Hayrat: From Tajalli to Fana

Uludağ (1995, p. 231) explains Sufi hayrat as a spiritual state in which ordinary rational comprehension becomes insufficient as a result of a tajalli (divine self-disclosure) or an inward visitation received by the heart of the spiritual wayfarer, and he associates its meaning with contemplation of divine manifestation. This definition corresponds to the logic of Navoi's title and the three chapters on hayrat: bewilderment is not mere surprise at an unexpected event, but the point at which deepening knowledge brings cognition to a new threshold.

In the prose explanation associated with the title, the heart's arrival at hayrat is represented as a four-stage movement: liberation from the "night of nonbeing" and entry into the "dawn of existence";

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contemplation of the variegated realm of the angels; recognition that created beings glorify the Real, causing the "flowers of hayrat" to bloom; and, finally, an altered state of consciousness under the force of that disclosure (Navoiy, 2011, p. 64). This sequence may be read as ontological awakening → unveiling/contemplation → cognitive recognition → ecstatic self-loss.

The opposition between the "night of nonbeing" and the "dawn of existence" figures the heart's transition from biological existence to an existence illuminated by ma'rifa. Here, "life" is not defined by physical survival but by the light of knowledge. The image of the angelic realm likewise signifies the ascent of perception from the outward world to an inward order. Nasafiy (2021, pp. 128-129) distinguishes the realms of mulk, malakut, and jabarut as ontological levels; Navoi's "spring garden of the angelic realm" is semantically consonant with this Sufi cosmology.

Navoi alludes directly to Qur'an 87:1, reproducing the divine command in Arabic:

سَبِّحِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى

The phrase is transliterated as "Sabbih isma rabbika al-a'la" and means "Glorify the name of your Lord, the Most High" (Qur'an 87:1; Samarqandiy, 2019, p. 568). Navoi thus connects the source of hayrat to the recognition that creation itself glorifies the Real. Hayrat therefore arises not from the strangeness of an object but from basira, the inner vision that begins to perceive the divine signification of existence.

At dawn the robe of morning flashed with golden thread;
No thread remained of night's dark curtain.
Across the arch of heaven the pen of fate inscribed
The verses "By the sun" and "By the morning brightness." (Navoiy, 2011, p. 64)

The contrast between dawn and night represents the inward passage from knowledge to ignorance and back into illumination. The allusions to "By the sun" and "By the morning brightness" intensify the semantics of sunlight and radiance, creating a Qur'anic intertext for the opening of the heart through the "light of guidance." This allows the Sufi interpretation to be grounded not in external symbolism but in the Qur'anic and poetic relations within Navoi's own text.

This world is a garden in bloom,
Indeed, a world concealed within a flower.
It cannot have sprung into being by itself,
Unless there is a Gardener who made it so. (Navoiy, 2011, p. 69)

The comparison of the world to a garden and of the Creator to a "Gardener" gives poetic form to an ontological argument. Yet Navoi does not make hayrat an end in itself. An angelic voice urges the spiritual wayfarer to move from "fruitless bewilderment" toward seeing the secrets of Reality with the eye of basira:

What use is bewilderment without benefit?
What profit does this bewilderment bring you?
Partake of the secret of Reality,
And look with the eye of inner vision.
When these words, like pearls, reached his ear,
His eyes opened with the light of guidance. (Navoiy, 2011, p. 69)

This passage prevents Navoi's hayrat from being interpreted as irrational paralysis. Hayrat is a dynamic state that moves toward basira and guidance. In the second hayrat, bewilderment intensifies as ma'rifat Allah (knowledge of God) deepens; in the third, hardship and ecstatic self-loss strengthen the movement toward fana. Muhiddinov (2022, p. 51; 2023) interprets the image of the heart as "master" and its relation to fana through this internal evolution. Thus, the sequence hayrat → basira/guidance → fana constitutes the poem's mystical anthropology.

The traditional comparison according to which the journey of the heart in Nizami's Makhzan al-Asrar is structured through "retreats," whereas Amir Khusraw's Matla' al-Anwar organizes it through

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"conversations," is useful for demonstrating the structural emphasis placed on hayrat by Navoi. An absolute claim that this occurs "for the first time in the history of Khamsa writing," however, would require caution in the absence of a broad manuscript and comparative corpus. This study therefore locates Navoi's innovation not in a formula of absolute priority, but in the exceptionally central and systematic role assigned to hayrat through the title, three dedicated chapters, and the logic of fana. Imomnazarov (2022, p. 144) likewise regards the elevation of the heart's bewilderment to this degree of artistic centrality as a significant innovation.

The Qur'anic and Lexical Semantics of Abror

The second component of the title, أَبْرَارٌ (*abrār*), identifies the ethical subject of the poem's interpretation. In the original philological discussion, أَبْرَارٌ (*abrār*) is identified as the plural form of بَرٌّ (*barr*). Baranov (2006) records within lexical items derived from the b-r-r root such semantic shades as goodness, piety, obedience, righteousness, kindness to parents, charity, and beneficence. Replacing *abror* simply with "good people" therefore narrows its semantic field.

According to the Quranic Arabic Corpus (n.d.), the specific form al-abrār/abrār occurs six times in the Qur'an: 3:193, 3:198, 76:5, 82:13, 83:18, and 83:22. For example, Qur'an 3:198 emphasizes the excellence of the reward reserved with God for the abror; 82:13 states that the abror are in bliss; and 83:18 and 83:22 connect them with their record of deeds and eschatological felicity. Tafsiri Hilol likewise interprets this category as a conjunction of faith, righteous action, beautiful character, and charity (Muhammad Yusuf, 2008a, p. 126; 2008b, pp. 405, 414).

On this evidence, translating the title Hayrat ul-abror simply as "The Amazement of Good People" is limited in two respects. First, hayrat denotes a mystical state broader than ordinary psychological surprise; second, abror gathers together ethical, confessional, and eschatological qualities. A philological rendering should therefore preserve the term, for example "The Bewilderment of the Abror," or provide an explanatory translation such as "the mystical bewilderment of the righteous and God-conscious." This is not proposed as a definitive equivalent, but as a translation principle designed to preserve the semantic density of the original term.

The "Bismillah" Chapter: Ahl al-Radd/Ahl al-Qabul and the Qahr/Lutf Opposition

The poem's opening with an exposition of "Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim" is not incidental compositional ornament. Navoi figures the letters and words of the formula as "peerless pearls" and the thread that connects them as the "vein of life":

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful—
He strung several peerless pearls upon a thread.
Each pearl surpassed the jewel of life;
In worth, it exceeded both worlds.
Its thread itself was the bond of the world—
Nay, not the world's bond, but the vein of life. (Navoiy, 2011, p. 6)

In this chapter, the human response to the divine formula is expressed through the categories ahl al-qabul and ahl al-radd, while their conditions are associated with lutf and qahr. The opposition condenses the poem's ethical theology: acceptance signifies openness to divine grace; rejection signifies closure through denial or the lower self; lutf forms a semantic field of mercy and guidance, whereas qahr approaches deprivation and punishment.

Dividing every character in the Khamsa into two rigid groups would, however, be methodologically reductive. Epic characters often undergo development, error, repentance, conflicting motivations, and multilayered political functions. Accordingly, this article treats ahl al-radd/ahl al-qabul and qahr/lutf not as prosopographical labels but as interpretive axes for evaluating a character's ethical choice in a particular situation.

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This approach provides a more persuasive account of the Khamsa's internal unity. Across the later poems, oppositions such as love and self-interest, fidelity and betrayal, justice and oppression, knowledge and the lower self, grace and deprivation are repeatedly reworked in different plots. Toutant (2023) shows that in Sab'ai Sayyor Navoi raises an ethical objection to the inherited image of Bahram and reshapes the narrative according to Naqshbandi ethical and political criteria. This evidence supports the productivity of the normative categories articulated in Hayrat ul-abror for reading the later epics, but it does not prove a rigid binary classification of all their characters.

Divine Artistry, Reason, and Love in the Hamd and Munajat

The prologue to Hayrat ul-abror contains religious-poetic sections including an exposition of "Bismillah," a hamd, four munajats, and five na'ts. These sections are not merely detachable "introductory ornament" preceding the maqalat; they establish criteria for knowledge and authorship. G'afforova (2024) likewise emphasizes the role of the hamd chapters in the poem's ideological and artistic system. Navoi seeks to demonstrate divine power not through abstract praise alone but through images of the cosmos, light, reason, and the human body.

In the hamd chapter, the human brain is figured as a "narrow chamber," and reason as a lamp burning within it:

He made the brain a narrow chamber,
And lit within that chamber the lamp of reason. (Navoiy, 2011, p. 10)

The image of reason as a "lamp" associates it with divine favor and guidance. Navoi therefore does not reject reason; rather, he presents it as a necessary but not ultimate instrument of knowledge. Love, by contrast, may carry the human being beyond ordinary rational order toward a higher mode of experience:

When the wind of love blew fierce and swift,
It shattered the frail hut of reason into pieces. (Navoiy, 2011, p. 11)

This opposition creates a natural theoretical background for reading the poetics of love in Layli and Majnun. Yet the entire poetic mechanism of the later epic cannot be deduced from two couplets in Hayrat ul-abror. A more defensible conclusion is that the first poem provides a terminological and axiological basis for the relationship between love and reason; the manner in which that relationship is modified in Layli and Majnun requires a separate comparative analysis.

The four munajats likewise strengthen conceptual continuity through themes such as creation and the place of the human being; God as the sole object of worship; grace and intercession; generosity and forgiveness. On one level these themes elaborate the qahr/lutf axis, and on another they reveal human weakness and dependence on divine mercy. In this respect, the prologue provides a theological foundation for the moral anthropology of the Khamsa.

The Ethics of Authorship: Truth, Concealment, and the Renunciation of Fame

The praise of predecessors and of Jami in the poem's prologue also reveals Navoi's literary-aesthetic program. The following couplet on Jami presents writing not as a means of producing fame, but as a veil that conceals the writer's true inward state while guiding the seeker toward meaning:

He made a veil to conceal his inward state,
And filled the page with lines in order to hide it. (Navoiy, 2011, p. 43)

Here, the semantics of concealment in satr and kitman express the distance between the author's inward state and the outward text. If literature becomes an instrument for acquiring fame or rank, its spiritual status declines; if it is oriented toward expressing truth, however, the word acquires transformative force:

A subtle word can melt stone like water
If it takes its savor from the fire of truth.
If it is far from the jewel of truth,
Better that the thread of words remain unspoken. (Navoiy, 2011, pp. 44-45)

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This principle shows Hayrat ul-abror not merely as a collection of moral counsels but as a programmatic reflection on the epistemic and ethical conditions of literary creation. Artistic skill detached from "truth" is insufficient; the value of form is tied to meaning and spiritual responsibility. At this point the methodological function of Hayrat ul-abror becomes clearer: it establishes criteria not only for how to live, but also for how to write, how to read, and how to relate to literary inheritance.

The Conceptual Architecture of the Khamsa: A Synthesis Model

The foregoing analysis does not license an automatic interpretation of the four later poems through a single formula. It does, however, make it possible to construct a testable conceptual model for their comparative reading. The model's principal axes are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

A Conceptual Reading Model Derived from Hayrat ul-Abror

Conceptual axis	Basis in Hayrat ul-abror	Question to test in the later Khamsa
Hayrat → basira → fana	The three hayrat chapters; deepening ma'rifa and guidance	How is a character's inner transformation constructed as a process of knowing, loving, or passing beyond the lower self?
Qahr ↔ lutf	The two poles of divine relation in the "Bismillah," hamd, and munajat	How are grace, trial, deprivation, and salvation connected to ethical causes within the plot?
Rejection ↔ acceptance	Faith and the response to the divine formula	How is a character's choice represented as openness to truth or closure through the lower self?
Reason ↔ love	The images of the lamp of reason and the wind of love	In what poetic forms is the tension between rational norm and the experience of love reworked?
Truth ↔ fame/lower self	The praise of Jami and the authorial ethics of the "fire of truth"	How does inward truth, rather than outward success, determine the value of poet, ruler, or lover?

Note. The table is not a rigid classification of characters; it organizes comparative questions that must be tested against specific textual evidence in the later poems.

The advantage of this model is that it does not force the unity of the Khamsa into a single plot. Instead, it allows comparison of recurring value problems across poems of different genres and narrative structures. Navoi's respectful but critical reassessment of his predecessors' plots and his modification of particular ethical motives (Toutant, 2023) justify the search for precisely this kind of conceptual continuity.

At the same time, Farhad, Shirin, Majnun, Layli, Iskandar, and other characters should not automatically be classified as ahl al-qabul, nor should Khusraw, Shiruyah, Ibn Salam, Bahram, Darius, and Mallu automatically be classified as ahl al-radd. Such a classification is an interesting hypothesis, but it cannot become a final conclusion without sufficient textual evidence from each later poem, attention to narrative dynamics, and analysis of character development. Complex and changing figures such as Bahram are especially liable to lose their pedagogical and evolutionary logic when reduced to a single ethical label.

Limitations

First, this article is not a critical textual study describing all variants of the Revan-808 and Fatih-4056 manuscripts. Consultation of these manuscripts is limited to controlling the primary text; a full apparatus of variants requires a separate specialized study.

Second, the four later poems of the Khamsa were not fully coded and statistically or systematically classified in this article according to qahr/lutf or rejection/acceptance for every character and episode. The

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conclusion that Hayrat ul-abror serves as a conceptual key to the Khamsa is therefore an interpretive conclusion grounded in the programmatic categories of the opening poem and existing comparative scholarship, not a final demonstration covering the entire epic corpus.

Third, no absolute priority claim is made concerning the precise extent to which hayrat was used in the Khamsa tradition before Navoi. Such a conclusion would require terminological and conceptual comparison across a complete electronic or manuscript corpus of Nizami, Amir Khusraw, and other Khamsa poets.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that the title and compositional structure of Hayrat ul-abror condense Navoi's mystical-aesthetic program. Hayrat is not ordinary amazement; it is a state in which, under the influence of tajalli and ma'rifa, the heart passes beyond the limits of ordinary cognition, opens toward basira and guidance, and moves toward fana. The three chapters on hayrat deepen this process stage by stage.

From Qur'anic and lexical perspectives, abror is a category broader than "good people." It unites a semantic field encompassing God-consciousness, righteous action, integrity, generosity, justice, and eschatological felicity. An unannotated translation of the title as "The Amazement of Good People" therefore loses part of its mystical and ethical content; a form that preserves the term—such as "The Bewilderment of the Abror"—is philologically more cautious.

The ahl al-radd/ahl al-qabul and qahr/lutf oppositions in the "Bismillah" chapter form an important ethical-theological axis of Hayrat ul-abror. When this axis is applied to characters in the later epics, however, it is more methodologically sound to use it as an interpretive criterion for examining choice, transformation, and spiritual condition within the narrative than as a rigid two-group classification.

The hamd, munajat, and praise of Jami establish criteria concerning reason, love, truth, and authorship. Hayrat ul-abror may therefore be interpreted not as the linear plot of the Khamsa, but as a conceptual and meta-ethical prolegomenon for reading the subsequent poems.

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