

Revealing Annemarie Schimmel's Interpretation of the Sufi Texts Through Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutic Analysis

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Abstract

This study presents common problems of Sufi texts' interpretation by orientalists, with a specific emphasis on the Annemarie Schimmel's works. The primary purpose of this study is to uncover biases and limitations that may reside in Schimmel's approach to Sufism and to pave the way for a more reflective and contextual approach in Islamic studies. This work employs a philosophical hermeneutic approach developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer. The primary data source comes from Schimmel's works on Sufism, while secondary data are obtained from academic literature related to hermeneutics, Orientalism, and the study of Sufism. The results of the study show that Schimmel's understanding of Sufi texts is influenced by her prejudices and understandings as an orientalist. Schimmel's "casting fusion" process produces a rich interpretation but is not free from inherent bias. In conclusion, this study has revealed essential dimensions in the hermeneutics of Sufi texts studied by Schimmel and the emphasis on the need for more critical and reflective cross-cultural dialogue to understand the Islamic spiritual tradition more deeply.

Keywords: Sufism, Hermeneutics, Annemarie Schimmel, Orientalism, Islamic Studies.

Introduction

In Islamic studies, the interpretation of Sufi texts has long been the subject of debate and in-depth analysis, mainly when conducted by Western scholars or orientalists. One of the orientalists who significantly contributed to this field was Annemarie Schimmel (1922-2003), a German scholar who dedicated her life to studying Islam, especially Sufism. Schimmel's works, such as "Mystical Dimensions

of Islam" (1975)¹ and "As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam" (1982)², have become an essential reference in studying Sufism in the West. However, like other orientalist interpretations, Schimmel's approach is also not free from criticism and further analysis. Previous research has shown that women have played a significant role in Sufism, although it is often under-recognized in history.³ Annemarie Schimmel highlights that figures such as Rabi'a Basri, Fatimah of Nishapur, and Sha'wana of Persia exemplify key aspects of Sufism, namely unconditional love for God and purity of soul free from fear or worldly rewards. They embody feminine characteristics such as patience and sincerity, which are relevant in a Sufi's spiritual journey.⁴ These studies show that women, with their distinctive qualities, contributed significantly to the core teachings of Sufism, namely the purification of the soul and the attainment of oneness with God.

Hermeneutics in philosophy, established by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), offers an exciting perspective for analyzing the interpretation of Sufi texts by orientalists such as Schimmel. Gadamer, in his monumental work "Truth and Method" (1960), proposed the concepts of "fusion of horizons" and "effective history," which are relevant in this context.⁵ According to Gadamer, every interpretation of a text always involves a dialogue between the text's historical horizon and the interpreter's horizon, which is influenced by their traditions and prejudices (Vorurteil). Hermeneutics, both as a theoretical framework and practical method of analysis, has played a vital role in comprehending and deciphering intricate texts, particularly within the realms of religious and philosophical studies.⁶ Rooted in the tradition of interpreting sacred texts, hermeneutics has developed into a broad philosophical discipline with profound implications for various scientific fields.⁷ Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Hans-Georg Gadamer, widely recognized as the pioneer of contemporary hermeneutics, introduced the notion of the "hermeneutical circle." This concept highlights the interconnectedness between comprehending the individual components of a text and grasping its entirety.⁸ A significant development in hermeneutical theory occurred through the work of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), who extended the application of hermeneutics from sacred texts to a broader understanding of historical and cultural phenomena. Dilthey emphasized the importance of historical context in interpretation and introduced the concept of "Verstehen," or empathetic understanding of the lived experiences of others.⁹ Dilthey's contribution paved the way for the application of hermeneutics in the social sciences and humanities. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) brought a paradigmatic shift in hermeneutics by linking it to fundamental ontology. In his work "Being and Time," Heidegger argued that understanding is not merely a methodology but a basic mode of human existence. Heidegger's concept of "Dasein" emphasizes that the interpreter's existential situation always influences interpretation.¹⁰ Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) made a significant contribution by integrating hermeneutics with phenomenology and structuralism.¹¹ Ricoeur developed a "hermeneutics of suspicion," emphasizing the importance of uncovering hidden meanings behind texts through critical analysis. She also explored the complex relationship between text, action, and narrative identity.¹²

In the panorama of contemporary Islamic studies, the urgency to return to Islam as the primary reference in understanding and interpreting its teachings is increasingly prominent, especially as a critical response to the problematic legacy of Orientalism. Islam, as a religion with a rich intellectual and spiritual tradition, has, over the centuries, developed a complex and sophisticated methodology and epistemology in understanding its sacred texts, its history, and its cultural manifestations.¹³ However, the dominance of the Orientalist paradigm in Islamic studies in the West since the 19th century has resulted in significant distortions and simplifications of the understanding of Islam, both in academic circles and in the broader public perception.¹⁴

Orientalism, as critically expounded by Edward Said in his monumental work "Orientalism," has created a problematic epistemological framework for understanding Islam and Muslim societies. The orientalist approach tends to reduce the complexity of Islamic tradition into essentialist and ahistorical categories, often influenced by cultural biases and colonial political agendas.¹⁵ As a result, narratives about Islam produced through an orientalist lens often fail to capture the nuances, dynamics, and diversity inherent in the living Islamic tradition. Orientalist methodology in Islamic studies has shown fundamental weaknesses in several crucial aspects. First, there is a tendency to treat Islam as a static and monolithic object of study, ignoring the diversity of interpretations and practices that exist among Muslims.¹⁶ Second, more than overreliance on textual sources with adequate understanding of the oral traditions and living practices that shaped understandings of Islam in various cultural contexts.¹⁷ Third, the often ahistorical and decontextualized approach to analyzing Islamic phenomena needs to include the complex socio-historical context in which Islamic ideas and practices developed.¹⁸

This critique of orientalist methodology has led to new approaches in Islamic studies that seek to appreciate better and utilize Islamic sources and methodologies. Scholars such as Fazlur Rahman, with his "double movement" approach to interpreting the Qur'an,¹⁹ And Seyyed Hossein Nasr, with his emphasis on Islam's esoteric and philosophical dimensions, have paved the way for a more holistic and authentic understanding of Islam.²⁰ This study takes the bold step of unpacking the problematic impact of Orientalism on interpreting Sufi texts, using the case study of Annemarie Schimmel, a leading figure in the field of Western Sufism. Using Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a framework, the study seeks to uncover the hidden layers of cultural and epistemological bias that have colored orientalists' understanding and presentation of Sufism. It will explore the broader implications of Schimmel's approach for academic and popular discourse on Islam in the West. How might her attempt to 'bridge' Western understandings with Islamic spirituality have inadvertently reinforced the problematic dichotomy between 'East' and 'West'? Has her emphasis on certain aspects of Sufism that resonate with modern Western sensibilities – such as universalism and spiritual individualism – perhaps overlooked or marginalized essential dimensions of the tradition that are less consonant with the expectations of her Western audience?.

Through this critical analysis, the study aims to expose the limitations and potential distortions in Schimmel's work and pave the way for a more reflective and contextual approach to Islamic studies in general. Schimmel's interpretation of Sufi texts, while pioneering in bridging the understanding of Islamic mysticism to Western audiences, is not immune to the limitations inherent in Orientalist perspectives. Her works often reflect a synthesis of profound empathy and rigorous scholarship but remain influenced by cultural biases and methodological constraints. Employing Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, this study critically examines these limitations by highlighting how Schimmel's "fusion of horizons" – the interaction between her interpretive framework and the historical context of Sufi texts – has led to interpretations that, while enriching, may inadvertently distort certain dimensions of Islamic spirituality. This critique underscores the necessity of addressing both the epistemological biases and the cultural prejudices embedded in orientalist methodologies to foster a more nuanced and authentic dialogue in Islamic studies. By unpacking the layers of orientalist bias that may be hidden even in the work of a respected scholar such as Schimmel, the study hopes to foster a greater awareness of the complexities and nuances in understanding Islamic spiritual traditions. Ultimately, the aim is to contribute to a more authentic and equal dialogue between Islamic and Western scholarly traditions, moving beyond the problematic legacy of Orientalism toward a deeper and more respectful cross-cultural understanding. However, there is still a gap in analyzing how epistemological and cultural biases influence the results of

these interpretations, especially in contextualizing Islamic traditions holistically. This article fills this gap by adopting Gadamer's hermeneutic framework to explore the process of fusion of horizons in Schimmel's interpretation.

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics method to analyze the interpretation of Sufi texts by orientalists, focusing on the work of Annemarie Schimmel. The primary data source for this study is Schimmel's works related to Sufism, especially the book "Mystical Dimensions of Islam."²¹ And "As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam."²² Secondary data were obtained from academic literature on Gadamer's hermeneutics, Orientalism, and Sufism studies.²³ Data collection was conducted through an in-depth literature study of these sources. Data analysis follows the principles of Gadamer's hermeneutics, which include: 1) Identification of Schimmel's prejudices and horizons of understanding as an orientalist in viewing Sufi texts; 2) Exploration of the dialectic between Schimmel's horizons and the horizons of the Sufi texts she interprets; 3) Analysis of the process of "horizon fusion" in Schimmel's interpretation; and 4) Critical evaluation of the results of the interpretation by considering the historical and cultural context.²⁴ To ensure the credibility of the research, triangulation of data sources and peer debriefing with experts in Islamic studies, Orientalism, and hermeneutics were conducted.²⁵ The research begins with a thorough reading of Schimmel's works, followed by identifying and categorizing interpretation patterns. Next, these patterns are analyzed using Gadamer's hermeneutic framework to reveal Schimmel's interpretations' assumptions, methods, and implications.²⁶ The final stage involves synthesizing the findings and drawing conclusions about the characteristics and significance of Schimmel's hermeneutical approach in the context of the study of Orientalism and Sufism.

Discussion

Basic Concepts of Hans-Georg Philosophical Hermeneutics from Gadamer

Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics emphasizes dialectical and historical comprehension. Developing hermeneutics as a generic interpretation theory that transcends social science and humanities methodological restrictions.²⁷ He argued that understanding is not merely a method or technique but a fundamental mode of human existence. One of the critical concepts in Gadamer's hermeneutics is "prejudice" (Vorurteil), which he rehabilitated from its negative connotations during the Enlightenment. Gadamer asserted that prejudice is a precondition for understanding, not an obstacle to be eliminated.²⁸ These prejudices form what Gadamer calls the "horizon of understanding" (Horizontverschmelzung), which is the perspective or point of view that the interpreter brings to the process of interpretation. "horizon fusion" (Horizontverschmelzung) is central to Gadamer's hermeneutics, In Gadamer's hermeneutics, "horizon of understanding" refers to the perspectives, prejudices, and experiences that an individual brings to the process of understanding a text or phenomenon. Meanwhile, "horizon fusion" is a dialectical process in which an individual's horizon of understanding interacts and merges with the historical horizon or context of the text, producing a new, deeper understanding. The relationship between the two is integral: the horizon of understanding is the starting point that provides the framework for interpretation, while horizon fusion is the mechanism of transformation that allows for the creation of a dynamic and ever-evolving understanding through a dialogue between the interpreter and the object being understood. This concept describes how the interpreter's horizon of understanding interacts and merges with the horizon of the text or object being

interpreted.²⁹ This fusion is never perfect or final but rather an ongoing process in which understanding evolves and changes.

Gadamer also emphasizes how tradition and history shape understanding. She argues that we are always in a tradition, and our understanding is always influenced by the "effective history" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) that shapes our prejudices and horizons.³⁰ Thus, absolute objectivity in interpretation is an illusion; every understanding is situational and limited. The "hermeneutical circle" concept also received special attention from Gadamer. She understood comprehension as a dialectical dynamic between part and whole, where part knowledge impacts whole understanding and vice versa.³¹ This process never ends but continues in a spiral of ever-deepening understanding. Gadamer also integrates "application" (*Anwendung*) into knowledge. She claims that comprehending always entails adjusting the text's meaning to the interpreter's circumstances, making interpretation practical.³² This confirms that hermeneutics is not only a theory about understanding but also about how that understanding is applied in concrete life.

Gadamer's critique of the scientific method in the humanities is also essential to his thinking. She argues that the natural science model is unsuitable for understanding the complex and meaningful human experience. Instead, she proposes a dialogical model in which understanding emerges through an open and ongoing exchange between the interpreter and the text.³³ Gadamer's thinking on language is also fundamental to his hermeneutics. Language is a tool for communication and comprehension, according to him. For Gadamer, "Being that can be understood is language." This emphasizes the central role of language in shaping human experience and understanding.

The application of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics to Annemarie Schimmel's interpretation of Sufism reveals complex layers of understanding and potential biases that shaped her scholarly work. Through careful analysis using Gadamer's key concepts of prejudice (*Vorurteil*), horizon fusion (*Horizontverschmelzung*), and effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), we can uncover both the strengths and limitations of Schimmel's interpretative approach.

First, examining Schimmel's horizon of understanding reveals her position as a Western scholar deeply immersed in both European academic traditions and Islamic mystical studies. Her prejudices, in Gadamer's positive sense of pre-understanding, were shaped by her German academic training, her Protestant Christian background, and her extensive engagement with Islamic texts and cultures. This unique positioning created what might be termed a "hybrid horizon" that allowed her to bridge Western and Islamic intellectual traditions, though not without certain interpretative tensions.

The process of horizon fusion in Schimmel's work manifests in several ways. When interpreting Sufi texts, she attempted to merge her Western academic horizon with the historical horizon of Islamic mystical traditions. This is particularly evident in her treatment of key Sufi concepts. For example, in her interpretation of *fana* (annihilation of the self), Schimmel draws parallels with Western mystical traditions while maintaining the distinctive Islamic character of the concept. This fusion, while illuminating for Western readers, sometimes risks oversimplifying complex Islamic concepts to make them more accessible to a Western audience. Gadamer's concept of effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) is particularly relevant when analyzing how Schimmel's interpretations were influenced by the broader historical context of Oriental studies. Despite her genuine appreciation for Islamic spirituality, her work can only partially be separated from the colonial and post-colonial context in which Western Islamic studies developed. The effective history of Orientalist scholarship inevitably influenced her interpretative framework, even as she sought to transcend its limitations. The application of the hermeneutical circle in Schimmel's work reveals how she moved between understanding particular Sufi texts and the broader

context of Islamic mysticism. Her interpretation of individual Sufi poems or treatises was always informed by her understanding of the whole tradition. In contrast, her comprehension of the tradition was continuously refined through detailed textual analysis. This dialectical movement demonstrates the productive nature of the hermeneutical circle, as described by Gadamer. However, critical analysis reveals certain limitations in Schimmel's hermeneutical approach. While she successfully brought Sufi concepts to Western audiences, her interpretations sometimes reflect what Edward Said termed "Orientalist" tendencies - particularly in her romantic and sometimes essentialist portrayal of Islamic mysticism. This reveals the challenge of truly achieving what Gadamer called a "fusion of horizons" when dealing with cross-cultural interpretation.

Furthermore, Schimmel's application of language and translation, crucial elements in Gadamer's hermeneutics, presents both achievements and challenges. While her mastery of multiple Islamic languages allowed for nuanced translations, the very act of rendering Sufi concepts into Western languages and frameworks inevitably involved certain transformations of meaning. This illustrates Gadamer's insight about the fundamental role of language in shaping understanding. The analysis of Schimmel's work through Gadamer's hermeneutical framework also reveals important methodological insights for contemporary Islamic studies. It demonstrates the need for conscious reflection on the interpreter's own historical and cultural situatedness while engaging with Islamic texts. This self-awareness, combined with genuine openness to the otherness of the text, can lead to more nuanced and authentic interpretations.

In conclusion, applying Gadamer's hermeneutics to Schimmel's work reveals both the possibilities and challenges of cross-cultural religious interpretation. While her approach succeeded in many ways in bridging different intellectual traditions, it also demonstrates the persistent influence of cultural and historical prejudices in scholarly interpretation. This analysis suggests the need for the continued development of more reflexive and culturally sensitive approaches to Islamic studies while acknowledging the impossibility of achieving a completely unbiased interpretation.

Annemarie Schimmel's Thoughts on Sufism

Annemarie Schimmel (1922-2003) one of the most prominent orientalists and Islamologists of the 20th century, contributing to Sufism research. Her thoughts on Sufism encompass complex and profound historiographical, conceptual, and phenomenological aspects. In her landmark work "Mystical Dimensions of Islam," Schimmel presents a broad panorama of the history and development of Sufism. She traces the roots of Sufism from the earliest times of Islam, describing how ascetic and meditative practices developed into a complex spiritual system. Schimmel emphasizes that Sufism is not merely a peripheral phenomenon in Islam but is at the heart of Muslim religious experience throughout history.³⁴ Sufism, or *tasawwuf* in Arabic, is an esoteric and spiritual dimension of Islam that has been the subject of extensive study. Etymologically, the origin of the word "sufi" is still debated. Some scholars, such as Al-Qushayri in "Al-Risalah al-Qushayriyya," link it to the Arabic word "*suf*," meaning wool, referring to the simple clothing often worn by early Muslim ascetics.³⁵ Meanwhile, Ibn Khaldun, in his "*Muqaddimah*," put forward the theory that this term comes from the word "safe," which means purity, reflecting the efforts of the Sufis to purify their hearts from everything other than Allah.³⁶

Islamic history has changed the meaning of Sufism. One of the most influential Sufists, Al-Ghazali (d. 1111), defined Sufism as heart purification and moral and spiritual improvement. Al-Ghazali stated in "Ihya 'Ulum al-Din" that Sufism seeks *ma'rifah* (intuitive knowledge of God) and qurb. In this concept, Sufism emphasizes inward development and character improvement through practical and ethical

means. The Andalusian Sufi and philosopher "Shaykh al-Akbar" (The Greatest Teacher) Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) offers a philosophical approach. Ibn 'Arabi defines Sufism as the accomplishment of *wahdat al-wujud* (the oneness of being), which regards all existence as expressions of one Divine Reality, in "Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyyah." Although contentious, this notion shaped Sufi philosophy. Meanwhile, Imam al-Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 910), who is considered the "*Shaykh al-Ta'ifah*" (Master of the [Sufi] Group), emphasized the practical and ethical aspects of Sufism. She defined Sufism as "*al-fana' fi Allah wa al-baqa' bi Allah*" (the annihilation of the self in Allah and the continuation of life through Allah), a concept that emphasized the importance of transcending the ego and merging with the Divine will.³⁷ Al-Junaid's definition reflects the focus on direct spiritual experience that is characteristic of many Sufi traditions. From a more contemporary perspective, scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr define Sufism as the "inner dimension of Islam" that aims to realize tawhid (the oneness of God) doctrinally and in direct spiritual experience. Nasr emphasizes that Sufism is not something separate from Islam but rather its spiritual heart that gives vitality to the entire tradition.³⁸

Schimmel understands Sufism as the "mystical dimension of Islam" encompassing various aspects of Muslim spiritual life. She explores key concepts such as Ego annihilation and God's eternity are *fana* and *baqa*, as well as the various *maqamat* (spiritual stations) and *ahwal* (spiritual states) that Sufis pass through on their journey to God.³⁹ Schimmel's phenomenological approach allows him to describe the mystical experience of the Sufis with great empathy and depth. One of Schimmel's significant contributions is his analysis of the role of love in Sufism. In his work "As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam," she explores how the concept of divine love (*sahabah*) is central to Sufi thought and practice. Schimmel shows how Sufi poets such as Rumi, Hafiz, and Ibn 'Arabi use the metaphor of human love to express their spiritual longing for God.⁴⁰

Schimmel also paid particular attention to the aesthetic aspects of Sufism. She emphasized the importance of art, especially calligraphy and poetry, as expressions of mystical experience. In "Calligraphy and Islamic Culture," she describes how Islamic calligraphy became a means of contemplation and spiritual expression for Sufis.⁴¹ Another aspect that Schimmel pays attention to is the practical dimensions of Sufism in the daily lives of Muslims. In "Mystical Dimensions of Islam," he discusses the role of the *Erekat* (Sufi orders) in shaping Muslim societies' social and spiritual life. Schimmel describes how practices such as *dhikr*, the same (spiritual concerts), and the celebration of the *mawlid* became an integral part of popular religious expression.

Schimmel also made essential contributions to understanding the relationship between Sufism and Sharia. She argued that, although often considered opposites, Sufism and Sharia complement each other in the Islamic tradition. In "Mystical Dimensions of Islam," she showed how great Sufis such as al-Ghazali attempted to reconcile Islam's esoteric and exoteric dimensions. Schimmel's thinking on Sufism also included gender aspects. In his work "My Soul is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam," she explored the role of women in the Sufi tradition, highlighting figures such as Rabi'a al-Adawiyya and analyzing the concept of the divine feminine in Sufi thought.⁴² However, Ernst argues that Schimmel's empathy and appreciation for the Sufi tradition allow him to understand and describe mystical experiences with a depth rarely achieved by other scholars. Schimmel also pays attention to the relationship between Sufism and politics. In "Islam: An Introduction," she discusses how Sufi orders have often played a significant role in socio-political movements in the Muslim world, including in the resistance to colonialism.⁴³

Hermeneutical Analysis in "Mystical Dimensions of Islam"

Schimmel describes Sufism's growth and core in *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* chronologically and thematically. She starts with the Qur'an and Hadith origins of Sufism, then discusses its historical growth, significant people, essential principles, and expressions in Islamic art and culture. Schimmel emphasizes language and symbolism in Islamic mysticism. She studies metaphor, allegory, and symbol in Sufi poetry and other spiritual texts. His hermeneutic method helps readers grasp how language expresses spiritual experiences that are hard to put into words. Schimmel's treatment of Sufi mystical love is crucial to the book. Love for God ranges from *mahabbah* (love) to *'ishq* (passionate love). Schimmel shows how this concept of love is central to many Sufi teachings and how it finds expression in Sufi poetry and literature. Schimmel also pays special attention to the role of women in Sufism. She brings to light the stories of Sufi women often overlooked in mainstream Islamic history, such as Rabi'a al-Adawiyah. Using his hermeneutical approach, Schimmel reveals how these women significantly contributed to the development of Islamic spirituality. In the book's opening section, Schimmel discusses the roots of Sufism in the Qur'an and the Hadith. He writes: "Sufism, like other aspects of Islam, is rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Sufis have always referred to verses in the Qur'an that speak of God's closeness to humans, such as Surah Qaf [50:16]: 'We are closer to him than his jugular vein.'" Schimmel shows how verses such as these are fundamental to the Sufi understanding of the intimate relationship between humans and God. He also describes how the practices of the Prophet Muhammad, such as meditation in the Cave of Hira and his ascetic life, became models for early Sufis.

Schimmel lists five key Sufist periods in his history. "Muslim asceticism flourished in the 8th and 9th centuries CE. Hasan al-Basri and Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah are important early Sufists. Fear of God and rejection of the material world characterize this period." Schimmel next recounts how Sufism evolved from asceticism into a comprehensive spiritual doctrine over centuries. She emphasizes the rise of Sufi orders and their significance in propagating Islamic mystical doctrines. Schimmel's examination of Sufi mystical love is fascinating. She wrote: "Sufism emphasizes God-love. Sufis have a vast vocabulary of describing love from *mahabbah* to *'ishq*. A prominent 8th-century Sufi woman, Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah, said, 'O Lord, if I worship You because I fear hell, burn me in it.' If I worship You for paradise, keep me away. But if I adore You exclusively for Your sake, show me Your eternal beauty." Schimmel examines how Sufi poets like Rumi and Hafiz convey love. She illustrates how the soul-God relationship is modeled after love.

In analyzing various schools and figures in Sufism, Schimmel applies comparative hermeneutics. She compares and contrasts 'Sunni' Sufism with more esoteric schools such as those developed by Ibn 'Arabi. This approach allows the reader to understand the diversity and complexity of the Sufi tradition. Schimmel also uses dialogical hermeneutics to discuss the relationship between Sufism and Islamic orthodoxy. She shows that Sufism is fundamentally rooted in the Islamic tradition despite frequent tensions. This approach helps the reader understand the complex dynamics between Islam's esoteric and exoteric dimensions. In discussing the influence of Sufism on Islamic art, architecture, and music, Schimmel employs cultural hermeneutics. She shows how mystical ideas have shaped Islamic aesthetics, from calligraphy to mosque architecture. This approach allows the reader to see how spirituality deeply integrates into Islamic material culture. Schimmel also uses contextual hermeneutics to discuss the contemporary development of Sufism and its relevance in the modern world. She analyzes how Sufi teachings have adapted to the challenges of modernity, showing that Sufism is not just a historical phenomenon but a living tradition that continues to be relevant.

Interpretation of Sufi Texts in "As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam"

"As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam" is another essential work by Annemarie Schimmel that focuses on an in-depth exploration of mystical poetry in the Islamic tradition. This book, published in 1982, comprehensively analyzes how Sufi poets use language and imagery to express their spiritual experiences that are often difficult to express in ordinary words. Schimmel begins her book by outlining the roots of Islamic mystical poetry in the Qur'an and the Hadith. She shows how the Qur'anic verses, full of metaphor and symbolism, inspired Sufi poets. For example, verses describing the beauty of Paradise or the closeness of God to man often served as starting points for poets to explore deeper spiritual themes. In the following chapters, Schimmel analyzes the chronological development of Islamic mystical poetry from the early Islamic period to the modern era. She shows how mystical poetry developed from simple forms of *zuhd* (asceticism) in the 8th and 9th centuries to more complex expressions of divine love in the following centuries. Schimmel pays special attention to the development of the ghazal, a form of lyric poetry that became the primary means by which Sufi poets expressed their love for God. One of the essential aspects that Schimmel discusses is the use of the language of human love as a metaphor for the relationship between the soul and God. She analyzes how poets such as Rumi, Hafiz, and Ibn al-Farid use images such as lovers and wine to describe their spiritual experiences. Schimmel shows that the use of erotic language in Sufi poetry is not intended as a glorification of worldly love but rather as a way of expressing the soul's longing for God that is difficult to express in other ways. The book also deeply examines the symbols and motifs that appear frequently in Islamic mystical poetry. Schimmel explores the meaning behind images such as the rose, the nightingale, the mirror, and light, all of which have special significance in the Sufi tradition. She shows how these symbols serve as poetic decorations and tools for conveying profound spiritual teachings. Schimmel pays special attention to the works of Persian poets such as Attar, Rumi, and Hafiz. She analyzes how these poets developed sophisticated poetic language to express their mystical experiences. For example, in his discussion of Rumi, Schimmel shows how this great poet used a variety of poetic forms, from the ghazal to *Malawi* (long narrative poem), to explore different aspects of the spiritual journey.

Schimmel's analysis of mystical poetry and Sufi ideas is crucial to the work. Sufi poets used poetry to communicate complicated theological concepts like *fana* (ego annihilation) and *baqa* (God continuance). Poetry became a means of sharing Sufi ideas and expressing personal experiences. Schimmel analyzes Sufi ceremonies and mystical poetry. She describes how several Sufi orders used poetry in *sama'* (listening to spiritual music) sessions and dhikr. This examination indicates that mystical poetry was both literary and spiritual. Schimmel analyzes Islamic mystical poetry in Turkey, India, and the Arab East in the book's concluding chapters. She shows how mystical poetry adapted to local languages and cultures, blending Islamic mysticism with local customs. Schimmel also examines how Islamic mystical poetry influenced non-Muslim literature. He illustrates how Rumi and Hafiz impacted Goethe and Emerson. Islamic mystical poetry has bridged East and West, as shown in this essay. Schimmel emphasizes Islamic mystical poetry's depth and ambiguity. He explains how Sufi poetry can be viewed literally and esoterically. This technique illuminates this lyrical tradition's complexity and depth.

Implications of Schimmel's Interpretation in the Study of Orientalism

The implications of Schimmel's interpretation are evident in how she treats Islam's primary sources. Unlike classical orientalists, who often relied on translations and secondary interpretations, Schimmel emphasized the importance of mastering Arabic, Persian, and Turkish to understand Islamic texts directly.⁴⁴ This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the complexity of Islamic thought and avoids the simplifications that are often the subject of criticism of Orientalism. Schimmel also pays special

attention to Islam's aesthetic and literary aspects, a dimension often neglected in previous Orientalist studies.⁴⁵ Schimmel's contribution to changing the Western perception of Islam cannot be overstated. Through his extensive works on Sufism and Islamic mysticism, she opened up new insights into the spiritual dimension of this religion that is often misunderstood in the West. Schimmel showed that Islam has a rich and profound mystical tradition, which is comparable to the mystical tradition of the West. This approach helps bridge the gap in understanding between East and West, challenging the orientalist narrative that tends to see Islam as a rigid and monolithic religion. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak further problematizes the researcher's position in cross-cultural studies. She warns that even the best intentions to "give voice" to the marginalized can maintain existing power structures. This shows that the dilemma between empathy and objectivity is not only a methodological issue but also an ethical and political one.⁴⁶ More contemporary approaches, such as those proposed by Johnson, attempt to address this dilemma by adopting what she calls "immanent critique." This approach seeks to understand the practices and thinking of research subjects within their normative framework while retaining a critical position.⁴⁷ This is an attempt to balance empathy and criticism despite the limitations and challenges of this approach.

However, Schimmel's interpretation is not without its critics. This criticism highlights the dilemma scholars face in bridging the cultural divide: balancing empathy with scholarly objectivity. Nevertheless, even Schimmel's critics acknowledge his outstanding contribution to enriching Western understanding of Islam.

Criticism and Challenges to Schimmel's Hermeneutic

One of the main aspects of Schimmel's hermeneutics is an emphasis on a phenomenological and empathetic approach to understanding the Muslim religious experience. Another criticism of Schimmel's hermeneutics comes from the perspective of postcolonial studies. Some scholars argue that although Schimmel attempted to understand Islam from the "inside", his approach still bears the imprint of classical Orientalism. Fitzpatrick and Walker in "Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God" highlight that although Schimmel contributed significantly to introducing Islamic spirituality to Western readers, his approach sometimes tended to be romantic and uncritical.⁴⁸ Schimmel's approach to Islamic studies, particularly Sufism, demonstrates what might be termed "sympathetic Orientalism." While she developed an intimate understanding of Islamic mysticism and devoted her academic life to presenting it sensitively to Western audiences, certain orientalist paradigms remained embedded in her interpretative framework. This manifests in several key aspects of her work.

First, there is a persistent tendency toward romanticization in Schimmel's portrayal of Islamic mysticism. While her deep appreciation for Sufi spirituality is evident, she often presents it through an idealized lens that emphasizes its exotic and ethereal aspects. This romanticism, though different from the hostile Orientalism criticized by Edward Said, still reflects a Western gaze that can distort the lived reality of Islamic spiritual traditions. Her treatment of Sufi poetry, for instance, sometimes overemphasizes its aesthetic and universal aspects at the expense of its specific theological and cultural contexts.

Second, Schimmel's methodological approach, despite its sophistication, occasionally reflects what might be termed "academic Orientalism." Her work, while groundbreaking in many ways, still operates within the established Western academic paradigm of Islamic studies. This manifests in her categorization of Islamic phenomena, her selection of sources, and her analytical frameworks, which

sometimes impose Western academic categories on Islamic concepts that might resist such categorization.

The tension between insider and outsider perspectives in Schimmel's work is particularly revealing. While she achieved remarkable insight into Islamic spirituality, her position as a Western scholar inevitably influenced her interpretation. This dual positioning - as both sympathetic interpreter and Western academic - created what might be called a "hermeneutical double consciousness." She simultaneously wrote as someone deeply immersed in Islamic tradition and as a Western scholar addressing a Western audience, creating subtle distortions in her presentation of Islamic concepts. Moreover, Schimmel's treatment of Islamic mysticism sometimes exhibits what can be termed "universalizing tendencies" characteristic of classical Orientalism. While her comparative approach yielded valuable insights, it occasionally led to oversimplified parallels between Islamic and Western mystical traditions. This universalization, while making Islamic concepts more accessible to Western readers, risks obscuring the distinctive Islamic character of Sufi thought and practice.

The language and terminology used in Schimmel's work also reveal residual Orientalist influences. Despite her mastery of multiple Islamic languages, her translations and explanations sometimes reflect Western conceptual frameworks that may not fully capture the nuances of Islamic spiritual terminology. This linguistic dimension highlights the persistent challenge of translating not just words but entire conceptual frameworks across cultural boundaries.

Another challenge to Schimmel's hermeneutics comes from feminist and gender studies scholars. Leila Ahmed, in "Women and Gender in Islam," critiques the tendency of orientalist studies, including Schimmel's, to ignore often or marginalize the role of women in Islamic history and spirituality.⁴⁹ Although Schimmel has written about female figures in Sufism, such as Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, critics argue that her analysis fails to take into account the broader dynamics of gender and power in Muslim societies. Methodological criticism of Schimmel's hermeneutics has also come from scholars who advocate a more interdisciplinary and critical approach. Omid Safi, in "Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism," emphasizes the importance of integrating socio-political and ethical analyses in the study of contemporary Islam.⁵⁰ Safi argues that an approach that focuses too much on the spiritual and textual aspects of Islam can ignore the complex realities of contemporary Muslim life. Another challenge comes from the perspective of comparative religious studies. In "The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies," Robert Orsi criticizes the phenomenological approach to religious studies, prioritizing subjective experience and ignoring the material and historical context. This criticism can be applied to Schimmel's hermeneutics, which often emphasizes the experiential dimension of Islamic spirituality.⁵¹

Critique of Orientalist Prejudice and Perspective

Orientalism is a complex and controversial academic field that has significantly changed its aims, methodologies, and public perception since its inception. Originally, Orientalism referred to Western scholars' study of Eastern cultures, languages, and societies. Over time, however, the term became fraught with complex political and ideological implications. Orientalism's roots can be traced back to the European Renaissance, when increased contact with the Eastern world sparked intellectual curiosity about non-Western cultures and languages.⁵² In the 18th and 19th centuries, the study of Orientalism flourished in line with European colonial expansion. During this period, the primary mission of Orientalism was often associated with an imperial agenda, aiming to understand, classify, and ultimately control colonized societies.⁵³ In his work "Islam and the West," Bernard Lewis argues that early Orientalism had a more neutral aim, namely to expand knowledge of non-Western cultures and languages.⁵⁴ However,

she acknowledges that the study became closely tied to colonial interests over time. Scholars such as William Jones and Silvestre de Sacy, while making significant contributions to linguistic and philological knowledge, also shaped Western perceptions of the "Orient" that were often stereotypical and reductive.

The critique of Orientalism peaked with the publication of Edward Said's "Orientalism" in 1978.⁵⁵ Said argued that Orientalism was not merely a neutral academic study but was a discourse that created and maintained power relations between the "West" and the "Orient." According to Said, Orientalism served to define Western identity through the construction of an exotic and inferior Oriental "Other." Said's critique has fueled ongoing debates about the goals and methodologies of area studies and the relationship between knowledge and power. Talal Asad, in "Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter," extends this critique by showing how the colonial context has shaped anthropology as a discipline closely associated with Orientalism.⁵⁶ Asad argues that the mission of early anthropology cannot be separated from the broader colonial project of understanding and governing colonized societies.

One of the main criticisms that has emerged is the tendency of Orientalism to reduce the complexity and diversity of the Islamic world to oversimplify stereotypes. Hallaq argues in his work "Reforming Modernity: Ethics and the New Human in the Philosophy of Abdurrahman Taha" that Orientalism often fails to understand Islamic thought's nuances and internal dynamics, especially in the context of modernity.⁵⁷ Recent research by Mossad in "Islam in Liberalism" reveals how Orientalism has contributed to the construction of 'Islam' as the antithesis of Western liberal values.⁵⁸ Massad points out that the category of 'Islam' used in orientalist discourse is often a projection of the West's anxieties and aspirations rather than an accurate representation of Muslim realities. This results in a distorted understanding of Islam and Muslim societies, which in turn influences international policy and relations. One of the problematic aspects of Orientalism highlighted by recent scholarship is its tendency to treat Islam as a monolithic and static entity. In "What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic," Sahab critiques this essentialist approach and stresses the importance of understanding Islam as a dynamic and diverse discursive tradition.⁵⁹ Anjum argues that Orientalism often fails to capture the fluidity and internal contestation of Islamic thought and practice, resulting in an inadequate analysis of contemporary developments in the Muslim world. Another critique of Orientalism comes from a decolonial perspective.⁶⁰ Mignolo and Walsh, in "On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis," show how Orientalism has been an integral part of colonial knowledge structures that perpetuate Western hegemony.⁶¹ They argue that Orientalism not only produces problematic representations of Islam and the Orient but also contributes to the marginalization of non-Western epistemologies and knowledge systems. This raises serious questions about the validity and ethics of Orientalist approaches to Islamic studies.

Analysis of the orientalist tendencies in Annemarie Schimmel's work is evident in her approach, which, although empathetic to the Islamic mystical tradition, still shows epistemological and methodological biases associated with the Western scholarly tradition. Schimmel's approach, as analyzed through the framework of Gadamer's hermeneutics, reveals how prejudices originating from a Western scholarly background influence her interpretation of Sufi texts. In her attempt to bridge the understanding between Islamic spirituality and Western audiences, she tends to emphasize the universalism and aesthetic aspects of Islamic mysticism. However, this often obscures the theological complexity and cultural context inherent in the Islamic tradition itself.

For example, the use of metaphors of love in Sufi poetry, as raised in her work *As Through a Veil*, displays the beauty and depth of mystical experience but sometimes gets caught up in universal generalizations that are more in line with Western sensibilities than the specific nuances of Islam. Furthermore, although Schimmel has mastered many Islamic languages, the process of translating Sufi

concepts into the framework of Western language and thought results in a transformation of meaning that only partially reflects the essence of Islam.

Critical Valuation of Schimmel's Methodology in the Study of Sufism

Annemarie Schimmel, with her extensive contributions to the study of Sufism, has played a significant role in shaping the Western understanding of the spiritual dimension of Islam. However, her methodology in the study of Sufism has also been the subject of various criticisms and critical evaluations. An assessment of these criticisms is important for understanding the strengths and limitations of Schimmel's approach, as well as its implications for the study of contemporary Sufism while emphasizing the importance of a thorough understanding of the historical and intellectual context in analyzing Sufi texts.⁶² Alam shows that Sufi texts often have complex layers of meaning that can only be understood through careful contextual analysis. This is a development of Schimmel's approach, which, while paying attention to historical context, sometimes tends to emphasize the phenomenological and personal experience aspects of Sufism. Julia Day Howell, in "Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam," further challenges the traditional-modern dichotomy that often appears in the study of Sufism.⁶³

Comparative and global perspectives have also been the focus of criticism of traditional methodologies in studying Sufism. Jamal Malik and John Hinnells, in "Sufism East and West," present a comparative analysis of Sufism in various cultural contexts.⁶⁴ They show how Sufism has undergone transformation and adaptation in cross-cultural exchange. This approach broadens the geographical and cultural scope of the study of Sufism beyond the more focused approach to the Arab and Persian worlds often found in Schimmel's work. Criticism of the tendency to see Sufism as a homogeneous and harmonious tradition also appears in recent works. Ovamir Anjum explores the controversies and polemics surrounding Sufism throughout Islamic history.⁶⁵ Shows that Sufism has always been a subject of debate and contestation in Islamic thought, an aspect perhaps under-emphasized in a more appreciative approach such as Schimmel's. The gender dimension in the study of Sufism has also been the focus of criticism and development. Mònica Domínguez Díaz, in "Women in Sufism," examines the role of women in contemporary Sufism, providing a stronger gender perspective.

In academic discourse regarding criticism of Annemarie Schimmel's work, the position taken is oriented toward a reflective synthesis that acknowledges her contribution to introducing Sufism to Western audiences while accepting certain criticisms that highlight her methodological bias. One criticism that is considered valid is Schimmel's tendency to romanticize Sufism, where her aesthetic interpretation often emphasizes the universality of Islamic mysticism. This approach, although effective in attracting the attention of non-Muslims, has the potential to ignore the historical, theological, and contextual dimensions that are essential to the Islamic tradition itself.

As an illustration, the use of metaphors of love in Sufi poetry emphasized by Schimmel, as seen in *As Through a Veil*, shows an attempt to make this tradition relevant within a global framework of thought. However, this interpretation is often trapped in universal generalizations that obscure the uniqueness of Sufistic understanding that developed in the context of Islamic culture and theology. This criticism is relevant because it shows the potential for reduction in the delivery of complex aspects of Sufism. Nevertheless, Schimmel's phenomenological approach to understanding mystical experience is still recognized as one of the important contributions to the study of Sufism. In this framework, criticisms that reject the empathic method are considered less relevant, considering that empathy is an important

instrument in building deep cross-cultural understanding. Thus, although Schimmel's works are not entirely free from the epistemological biases inherent in the orientalist framework, his approach provides a significant foothold for connecting the Islamic tradition to a Western academic audience.

Conclusion

This study identifies a number of prejudices that color Annemarie Schimmel's work in understanding Sufi texts. As an orientalist trained in the Western academic tradition, Schimmel brings certain epistemological prejudices that are manifested in her tendency to romanticize Islamic mysticism and emphasize its universality. These prejudices, which originate from a Western framework of thought, encourage Schimmel to align Sufi elements with Western sensibilities, especially in the aesthetics of poetry and the symbolism of love in Sufism. Although it expands the accessibility of Sufism to non-Muslim audiences, this risks reducing the richness of the theological and historical context of the Islamic tradition itself. In the discussion section, Gadamerian hermeneutics is used to reveal how these prejudices play a role in Schimmel's interpretation. Gadamer's concept of fusion of horizons explains that Schimmel's understanding cannot be separated from the dialogue between the historical horizon of Sufi texts and the horizon of understanding formed by her cultural and academic background. The distortions that emerge, such as the simplification of Sufi concepts to be more in line with Western sensibilities, are evidence of the limitations of her approach. However, it is important to acknowledge that Gadamer's hermeneutics also opens up a space for appreciation of Schimmel's efforts in bridging two different intellectual traditions, although the results are not entirely free from bias. The apparent contradiction in Schimmel's assessment actually reflects the complex nature of her academic approach. The author of this article realizes that appreciation of Schimmel's contribution should not exclude criticism of her methodological limitations and biases. In other words, appreciation of Schimmel's efforts in introducing Sufism to Western audiences does not mean ignoring the distortions that arise from the orientalist prejudices that shape her understanding. Therefore, criticism and appreciation of Schimmel's work should not be seen as opposition but rather as part of a comprehensive critical reflection.

In conclusion, this article reaffirms that Annemarie Schimmel's understanding of Sufism is the result of a hermeneutic process influenced by the prejudices and horizons of understanding formed by her Orientalist background. Through the application of Gadamer's hermeneutics, this study not only reveals the existing epistemological biases and distortions but also emphasizes the importance of critical reflection on research methods in Islamic studies. Thus, this analysis paves the way for a more self-aware and contextual approach to cross-cultural dialogue and the study of Islamic mystical traditions.

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mysticism continue to inspire scholars worldwide. We hope this work can contribute, however small, to the ongoing dialogue between the intellectual traditions of the East and the West. Gadamer's hermeneutical approach offers an interpretive framework that not only highlights the epistemological biases in Annemarie Schimmel's work but also opens up opportunities for a more reflective cross-cultural dialog. As the author, I argue that while Schimmel's work successfully introduces Islamic mysticism to a Western audience, there is a potential neglect of the deeper theological and historical dimensions of the Islamic tradition. This analysis shows that Gadamer's fusion of horizons, which involves the interaction between the historical horizon of the text and the interpretive horizon of the researcher, can help us understand how Schimmel's cultural and academic biases shape her interpretations. In my view, the use of this framework allows us not only to criticize any orientalist bias that may exist but also appreciate Schimmel's efforts in bridging two different intellectual traditions.

A novel contribution of this study is that it emphasizes the urgency of deep epistemological reflection in contemporary Islamic studies. As a writer who examines the relationship between Sufi texts and hermeneutical methodologies, I see that Gadamer's hermeneutics not only helps identify biases in interpretation but also provides a methodology that allows for more contextualized reinterpretations. For example, in my analysis, the concept of love in Sufi poetry as discussed by Schimmel runs the risk of reduction when interpreted in terms of universality more in line with Western sensibilities. This is where Gadamer's hermeneutics can be an important tool to re-explore these texts in an authentic Islamic context without losing their spiritual depth.

The implications of this analysis are not only academic but also practical. In my view, the application of Gadamer's hermeneutics can be used to overcome the dichotomy between the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of Islam that is often debated in orientalist studies. For example, in building a fuller understanding of Sufism, it is important to consider how this tradition lives on in Muslim social practices, a dimension that is sometimes overlooked in Western studies. This research, thus, emphasizes the need for an approach that not only appreciates the complexity of the Islamic tradition but also involves critical reflection on the researcher's own epistemological position.

As the author, I am also of the view that this work can be an important foothold for a more equitable cross-cultural dialogue. A critique of orientalist bias should not only lead to a rejection but also to the establishment of a more inclusive methodology. By applying Gadamer's hermeneutics, this study contributes to the development of a more reflective and contextual approach in Islamic studies, bridging the two intellectual horizons without compromising the uniqueness of the Islamic tradition.

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