Poetics of Coherence: Notional, Real, and Necessary Connections in Poems of Two Lines
(University of Pennsylvania, October 8 and 9, 1997)

I October 8, 1997

I am separate from you 
in appearance, not in reality. 
Our distance is 
like the distance between 
the two lines of a she’r. (Sā‘ib, d. 1669)

I'm away from you 
in appearance, yet close 
in reality: we're like 
two lines of a she’r. (Mīr Husain Shauqi, fl. 17th cent.)

"Poems two lines long" 
why it became necessary to develop the concept of coherence. 
(Mīr on the Dakani poets: they lack coherence.)
Incoherent (nā marbūt) perhaps the most telling indictment against a poet. 
End stopped lines make task more difficult.

(1) End-stopped lines: complete statements, incomplete utterance

My friend, what unique honours 
there are in wandering (1)
Thorns get to my feet in supplication 
and pray for me to be seated (2) (Saudā, d. 1780)

(2) End-stopped lines, complete statements, complete utterance

Out of neglectfulness, I didn’t 
realise the worth of those 
who are now gone (1)
And when those gatherings 
became a dream, my eyes opened (2) (Mīr, d. 1810)

The world is a house 
of mirrors, if one 
has the eyes to see (1) 
faces can be seen in the walls (2) (Mīr, d. 1810)
(3) End-stopped lines, complete statements, parallel utterances

Heart’s luxury:

to be wounded by desire (1)

Delectation for the heart-wound:

to be immersed in salt (2) (Ghâlib, d. 1869)

She, with a dagger to my heart (1)

I, rapt admiring

the lightness of her hand (2) (Soz, d. 1794)

(4) Incomplete statements need to be completed

You are friendly with everyone (1)

What can I say? I don’t like it (2) (Mîr Hasan, d. 1786)

Your friendliness with everyone

oh what can I say? (1)

I had to sever relations

with the whole world (2) (Saudâ)

(5) Complete utterances need to be

5.1 supplemented

I got acquainted with the

cruelty of the rose, and also

with the bulbul’s fidelity (1)

Instead of the bulbul, one finds

just a handful of feathers

in the garden (2) (Mîr)

5.2 complemented

The heart is not

a city that can be repopulated (1)

You’ll repent, you hear?

laying this place to waste (2) (Mîr)

5.3 provided a parallel for

Wherever could there be

an enemy so attractive? (1)

Love is one’s enemy, and

also one’s objective (2) (Mîr)
(6) Statements/propositions need to be

6.1 proved through "poetic proofs" or "poetic universals"
(Poetic proof)
Who did ever support
anyone in their dark hour? (1)
Even one’s shadow goes away
when it is dark. (2) (Nāsīkh d. 1838)

(Proof: "poetic" and also "universal")
True seeing is possible only by
keeping the eyes shut (1)
The bubble can’t see a thing
when it opens its eye (2) (Mīr)

6.2 responded to
Desire for the flame did to me
whatever a flame couldn’t have (1)
Oh how some burnt in pain
on account of a fireless heart (2) (Ghālib)

I, and open my mouth
to declare my love? Let
my tongue be burnt (1)
Ask the sorrow that you gave me
for it is my true confidante (2) (Sōz)

What a load of trouble
are the tresses on the beloved’s waist (1)
Well, after all, who rears and keeps
dangerous beasts should in for trouble (2) (Nāsīkh)

6.3 improved upon
Wine does not flow down my throat
when you’re not here (1)
A sword of fine water
playing upon a dry neck (2) (Saudā)

It’s spring and I
am defenceless without the
wineglass and beloved to shield me (1)
The morning breeze
pierces the heart like an arrow (2) (Saudā)
(7) If statement/utterance in a line is weaker or thinner than in the other one, there is lack of coherence then too.
   7.1 weak proof or utterance
   7.2 poor progression
   7.3 insufficient response
   7.4 bad parallel

(8) Connections can be made stronger or better by munāsibat (consonance). Munāsibat means using words which strengthen or support or uphold the meaning of a key phrase or image in the poem. These are real connections.

   Going away from this confined world
   is exactly like (1)
   A prisoner being led to his execution (2) (Mir)

   9.1 I lived my life all ways, somehow ...
   But to live again, after death
   is doomsday dire (2) (Abrū, d. 1733)

9. Abrū's line above is an example of natural connection. In such cases, one uses a word or phrase having two or meanings, and one of the meanings seems relevant to another statement in the poem. Such connections are not real, but add piquancy and unit to the poem.

   9.2 I knew nothing
   but thorn on coming
   into this world ...
   only this little piece of land
   was under my sway (Mir)
October 9, 1997

A Ghazal by Ghâlib (composed before 1816)

1. Not a particle of dust
   is without use in the garden (1)
   Even the narrow dirt path
   is the fiery fuse that burns
   the scar on the poppy’s heart (2)

2. Who can bear the burden
   of the afflictions of knowledge
   without wine? (1)
   The level-limiting line
   on the wine-glass was drawn
   by ambition’s lack. (2)

3. The rose
   laughing at the bulbul’s business: (1)
   The thing called Love
   is mental derangement (2)

4. The intoxication of poem-thought
   is nothing new for me (1)
   An ancient smoker of opium
   from the smoky lamp (2)

5. A hundred times I got free
   from the bondage of love (1)
   But what could I do?
   It is my heart itself which is
   the enemy of peace and quiet (2)

6. Without the heart’s blood
   the power of sight is dust in the eye (1)
   This wine-house is devastated
   looking and searching for wine (2)

7. You, a garden in bloom,
   the whole property of the
   heart’s joy (1)
   Spring-clouds:
   a cask full house of wine,
   for whose brain? (2)