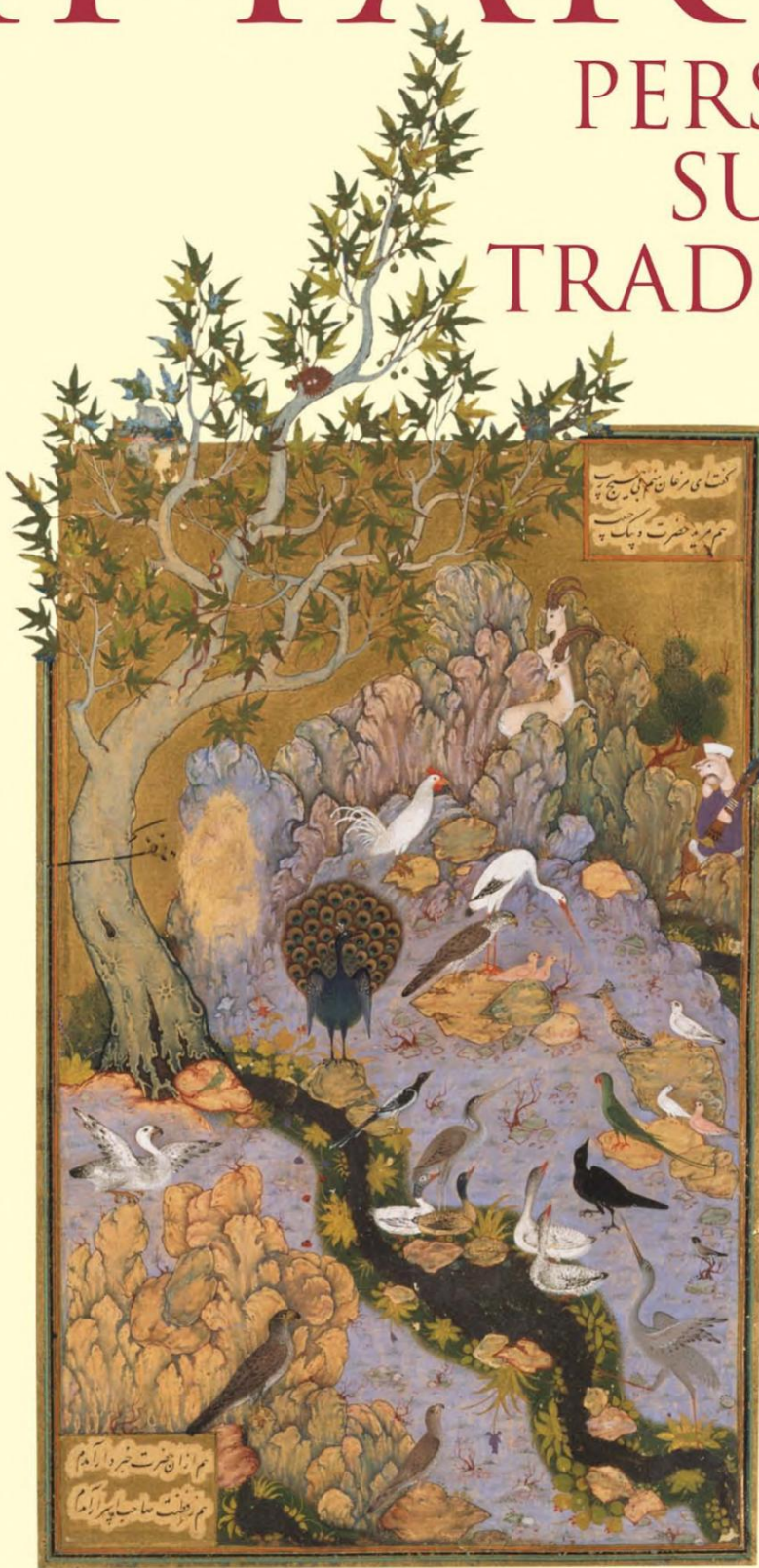


ATTAR

AND THE

PERSIAN SUFİ TRADITION



The Art of Spiritual Flight

Edited by Leonard Lewisohn and Christopher Shackle

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LEONARD LEWISOHN AND CHRISTOPHER SHACKLE

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To the memory of Annemarie Schimmel
(1922–2003)

گل فشانی کرده ام زین بوستان یاد دارم بخواه دوستان
هر یکی خود را در آن نوعی که بود کرد خجسته جلوه و بگذشت زود
لاجرم من نیز همچون مرفغان جلوه دارم مرغ جان بر خفغان

My friends, a shower of roses from that garden
As my memoir upon your heads I've rained down.
Since everyone has made some kind of contribution,
Set forth another revelation and passed on,
So I as well like all the rest have shown
The sleepers how the bird of the soul has flown.

'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, vv. 4491–4493

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List of Abbreviations

- MN 'Aṭṭār Nīshāpūrī, Farīd al-Dīn. *Majmū'a-i Rubā'īyyāt (Mukhtār-nāma)*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Shafī'ī-Kadkanī. 2nd rev. ed., Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996.
- MT 'Aṭṭār Nīshāpūrī, Farīd al-Dīn. *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, ed. Ṣādiq Gawharīn. Tehran, 1342 Sh./1963.
- Dn 'Aṭṭār Nīshāpūrī, Farīd al-Dīn. *Dīwān*, ed. Sa'īd Nafīsī. Tehran, 1961.
- Dt 'Aṭṭār Nīshāpūrī, Farīd al-Dīn. *Dīwān*, ed. T. Tafaḍḍulī. 3rd ed., Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983.
- TA 'Aṭṭār Nīshāpūrī, Farīd al-Dīn. *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, ed. Muḥammad Isti'lāmī. Tehran, 1362 Sh./1993.
- JA Nafīsī, Sa'īd. *Justujū dar aḥwāl wa āthār-i Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār*. Tehran, 1320 Sh./ 1941.
- Meer Ritter, Hellmut. *Das Meer der Seele: Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Farīduddīn 'Aṭṭār*. Leiden, 1955.
- Ocean Ritter, Hellmut. *The Ocean of the Soul: Men, the World and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār*, *Handbook of Oriental Studies*, Section 1, the Near and Middle East, 69. Leiden, 2003, English translation of *Das Meer der Seele*, by John O'Kane.

Editors' Introduction and Acknowledgements

Of my own verse and rhyme I have no shame;
There is but one Aṭṭār each millennium.
Could the mysteries of a myriad universes
By the Sufi idiom and mode of expression
Be put to verse, it's still but scraps and detritus
from the store of Aṭṭār.¹

These verses, penned by Maḥmūd Shabistārī (d. after 1340), one of the greatest Persian Sufi poets of the fourteenth century, bespeak the veneration that the Persian poet Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's mystical poetry still evokes in the Persian-speaking world today. 'Aṭṭār holds a pivotal place in the Persian poetical renaissance of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, being the central figure in the famous trio of Persian Sufi poets beginning with Sanā'ī (d. 1131) and culminating in Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273). He has been justly characterized as 'the principal religious poet during the second half of the 12th century, the generation between Sanā'ī and Rūmī.'² If it were possible to omit and overlook the lyrical poetry of Rūmī from the canon of Persian poetry, another scholar pointed out, 'Aṭṭār's verse would be considered as the most important example of lyrical poetry in the Persian language.'³

Almost nothing of his life is known except that he was a druggist ('Aṭṭār means Perfumer) by profession, who worked in a pharmacy in a local bazaar in Nishapur in northern Iran, and that he died in 1221 or 1229⁴ during a massacre when the Mongols attacked the city. He lived most of his life in Nishapur, which was the administrative capital of Khurasan and one of the most important intellectual centres in the Islamic world, to which students from all over the Middle East and India flocked to study. Practically the only personal detail that we may gather from his own works is that 'Aṭṭār was far more involved in frequenting the company of local ascetics and Sufis than in keeping the society of his peers in the medical profession and the marketplace.⁵ 'From early childhood, seemingly without cause, I was

drawn to this particular group (the Sufis),’ he confesses, ‘and my heart was tossed in waves of affection for them and their books were a constant source of delight for me.’⁶ ‘Aṭṭār had grown up in a literary milieu permeated by the Sufi ascetic and homiletic *ghazals* and *qaṣīdas* of Sanā’ī. When he was in his mid-thirties, the *mathnawī* poetry of the Persian poets from Iraq, such as the *Tuḥfat al-‘Irāqayn* of Khāqānī and the *Makhzan al-asrār* of Niẓāmī, reached Khurāsān. It was probably his reading of these poems that prompted him to begin work on the composition of his major Sufi *mathnawīs*, a task which occupied him for the next thirty to forty years until his death.⁷

‘Aṭṭār composed six important works of poetry and one major prose work. His great prose work comprises the monumental compendium in Persian of biographies of famous Sufis, called *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, or *Memoirs of the Saints*. If his least known poem is the *Book of Mysteries* (*Asrār-nāma*), which strings together a series of unconnected episodic stories, his most famous epic poem is *The Conference of the Birds* (*Manṭiq al-ṭayr*), which is consecrated to the tale of the spiritual quest of thirty birds to find their supreme sovereign, the Sīmurgh. This work was modelled on the *Treatise on the Birds* composed half a century earlier by another Sufi master, Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. 1126), founder of the ‘school of love’ in Sufism. This epic masterpiece (to which four essays in Part II of the present volume are devoted) has also enjoyed several musical and theatrical adaptations in the West, while its stories are common subjects of illustration in Persian miniature painting. ‘Aṭṭār’s *Book of Adversity* (*Muṣibat-nāma*) recounts the Sufi path in other terms, following the voyage of the contemplative wayfarer or ‘Pilgrim of Thought’ (*sālik-i fikrat*) through the mineral, vegetable, animal, human, and angelic realms. Asking questions along the way, he appeals in turn to forty different cosmic or mythical beings for help, until at last he is directed to the Prophet Muḥammad, who gives him the answers he needs to set him on the right road. ‘Aṭṭār’s *Divine Book* (*Ilāhī-nāma*) revolves around the story of a king who asks his six sons what they most desire. They all ask for worldly things, and the king exposes their vanity in a series of anecdotes. The *Book of Selections* (*Mukhtār-nāma*) is a collection of over two thousand quatrains (*rubā‘iyyāt*) arranged in fifty chapters according to various mystical themes, and his *Collected Poems* (*Dīwān*) comprise some ten thousand couplets which are notable for their depiction of visionary landscapes and heart-rending evocations of the agonies and ecstasies of the *via mystica*. These poems are remarkable not only for their thematic unity, with usually just one mystical idea, or a series of related concepts from first verse to last line being elaborated progressively, but also for their hermeticism, esoteric orientation and unconventional religious values. The attribution of the *Book of Khusraw* (*Khusraw-nāma*), a romance of the love between a Byzantine princess and a Persian prince with almost no mystical content to the poet has been refuted on convincing stylistic, linguistic and historical grounds, by Muḥammad Riḍā Shafī‘i-Kadkani.⁸

‘Aṭṭār’s works had such an impact on both the Sufi community and the literate public at large that his fame soared soon after his death. He became rapidly imitated, so that today there are some twenty-three works falsely attributed to ‘Aṭṭār, proven by modern scholars to be spurious or of doubtful authenticity.⁹ If we take merely the works that are unquestionably his, comprising a good forty-five thousand lines, the achievement is monumental.

In the West as well, during the course of the twentieth century, a considerable amount of scholarly research has been devoted to the translation of ‘Aṭṭār’s works¹⁰ and to exposition of his mysticism, the most outstanding contribution to which still remains Hellmut Ritter’s *Das Meer der Seele: Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Farīduddīn ‘Aṭṭār* (Leiden, 1955).¹¹ Ritter analyses his main poems, tracing every idea to its origin and showing its development in Islam. Iranian scholars have likewise produced excellent critical editions of all of ‘Aṭṭār’s major works, as well as many invaluable studies of his thought and poetry.¹²

The most important aspect of ‘Aṭṭār’s thought lies in the fact that all of his works are devoted to Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) and throughout all of his genuine collected works, there does not exist even one single verse without a mystical colouring; in fact, ‘Aṭṭār dedicated his entire literary existence to Sufism.¹³ Despite his evident immersion in Sufism, little is known of ‘Aṭṭār’s contact with contemporary Sufi masters and orders. We know that ‘Aṭṭār was acquainted with the Kubrawī master Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī (d. 1219). While Dawlatshāh’s hagiographical tale that Bahā’ al-Dīn Walad encountered ‘Aṭṭār in Nishapur with his son Jalāl al-Dīn is theoretically possible, there is ‘a small mountain of circumstantial evidence against it’ being at all credible.¹⁴ Concerning his spiritual master or masters in Sufism, all we know for certain is that ‘Aṭṭār was acquainted with a certain Imam Aḥmad Khwārī, a disciple of Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī, who was one of the authorized deputies of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 1221), founder of the Kubrawiyya Sufi Order. Of this fact, ‘Aṭṭār himself informs us.¹⁵ Almost two centuries after ‘Aṭṭār’s death, Ibn Bazzāz (d. 1391) in his *Ṣafwat al-ṣafā’* cites a certain Sufi poet named ‘Shakar’ as his teacher,¹⁶ as well as someone else called Majd al-Dīn Kākulī as having been his master in ‘experiential and speculative mysticism.’¹⁷ Arguments have been advanced,¹⁸ on the basis of a single statement by a fifteenth-century biographer (Faṣīḥ-i Khwāfi, in his *Mujmal-i Faṣīḥī*, completed in 1441–1442) that ‘Aṭṭār’s master in Sufism was in fact Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Nughundarī al-Ṭūsī, the lineage of whose initiatic chain (*silsila*) Khwāfi traced directly back, by five links, to the great Sufi mystic Abū Sa‘īd b. Abī’l-Khayr (d. 1049), the founder of institutional Sufism and the first to codify and record the rules for Sufi novices. However, both Ibn Bazzāz’s and Khwāfi’s claims are completely speculative, being based on sources centuries after the poet’s death that are uncorroborated by any earlier authors. Hence, as Hermann Landolt studiously elaborates in his erudite essay opening our volume, all that can be stated with any certitude about either his Sufi master or his order

is that ‘Aṭṭār was probably well acquainted with the Kubrawī milieu surrounding Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī.

In terms of mystical theology, all of ‘Aṭṭār’s lyrical and much of his epic poetry is pervaded by and subject to the influence of the strange, paradoxical utterances of Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī (d. 875) and the ecstatic sayings of Maṣnū‘ al-Ḥallāj (d. 922), particularly the latter.¹⁹

‘Aṭṭār also followed the opinion of most of the Sufis of his day in stern opposition to rationalistic Aristotelian philosophy. ‘No one is farther away from the Arabian Prophet than the philosopher. Know that philosophy (*falsafa*) is the wont and way of Zoroaster, for philosophy is to turn your back on all religious law (*shar*).’²⁰ These lines from his *Book of Adversity* also inform us that modern Iranian nationalists who wish to find support for the fashionable theory that the Persian Sufi poets were actually secret votaries of a crypto-Zoroastrian cult deriving inspiration from the privileged position of their being ‘Iranians’ consciously manifesting and maintaining the natural superiority of their national genius over everything ‘Islamic’ and ‘Arab’, will find nothing in ‘Aṭṭār’s oeuvre to support such naïve ethnic enthusiasms.²¹ ‘Aṭṭār is first and foremost a Sufi Muslim. ‘The science of religion is jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Qur’ān commentary (*tafsīr*) and Prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*),’ he declares. ‘Whoever studies anything other than these three turns into something vile. So the man of faith (*mard-i dīn*) is either a Sufi (*ṣūfī*), a Qur’ān-reciter (*muqrī*) or a jurist (*faqīh*). If you pursue any other ways than these, I count you a fool.’²²

Although his passionate commitment to Islam reflects his own intense piety, faith and reverence in the classical Islamic ideals, ‘Aṭṭār’s lyrical Sufi vision is radical and provocative, and the virtual antithesis of the contemporary Islamic religious fundamentalist thought. His high-minded exaltation of the suffering of Love-Passion (*dard*) as not only the essence of man, but the essence of God-consciousness, is typified in innumerable classic poetic aphorisms, such as ‘To the religious his religion; to the heretic his heresy. For ‘Aṭṭār’s heart but an ounce of your love-passion suffices.’ Such poetic dicta sketch the contours of the symbolic erotics of a Sufi piety beyond conventionally designated religious boundaries, whether these are theologically labelled as being in a ‘devout Muslim form’ or a ‘heretical Christian form’, both of which are veils, says ‘Aṭṭār, before the *visio dei*.

The present volume is the first in any language to attempt to specifically situate ‘Aṭṭār’s thought and works within the tradition of Persian Sufism which infuses and animates every line of his poetry and his prose. Bringing together for the first time the work of both senior and younger scholars from three continents, the range of the essays included in this collection is itself striking testimony to the stature of ‘Aṭṭār in this tradition. The collection thus offers a uniquely stimulating overview of ‘Aṭṭār and his extraordinarily varied literary creations from a whole

series of different viewpoints, which build on the findings of earlier scholarship to offer many quite novel perspectives. It is divided into four parts, each focusing on different aspects of 'Aṭṭār and his oeuvre.

Part I, 'Prose of the Spirit: 'Aṭṭār and the Persian Sufi Tradition', opens with an essay by Professor Hermann Landolt. Based upon a mastery of modern scholarly debates and a close familiarity with the contemporary Persian sources, his study begins with a statement of the well-known difficulties of firmly assigning 'Aṭṭār to any particular Sufi tradition. Taking a fresh look at the evidence for the affiliations which have been suggested as existing between 'Aṭṭār and leading contemporary figures in Sufism and Ismailism, Prof. Landolt situates 'Aṭṭār in the context of prior and contemporary Sufi and Ismaili tradition. Particular attention is given to his links with Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī, the disciple of the Sufi master Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, and the suggestive similarity of certain passages in 'Aṭṭār's works to the thought of the leading Ismaili philosopher Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī. He suggests that a closer philological study of certain verses in 'Aṭṭār's *Asrār-nāma* indeed reveals the probable influence of Ismaili eschatological doctrine upon the poet.

Husayn Ilahi-Ghomshe's essay, which follows, details 'Aṭṭār's pivotal influence on later Persian mystical poets, in particular Rūmī, Shabistārī and Ḥāfiẓ. Drawing upon his encyclopaedic knowledge of the poetic tradition, he cites numerous examples showing the impact of 'Aṭṭār's language, symbolism, rhetoric, literary devices and mystical theology upon these poets, thus demonstrating the depth and extent of the influence of 'Aṭṭār's particular philosophy and original literary style upon later Persian Sufi poetic tradition. Professor Muhammad Estelami next furnishes us with a succinct overview of the traditional picture of 'Aṭṭār's life as compiled by the pre-modern *tadhkira* writers, while emphasizing that caution is needed in using this material to construct a reliable biography of the poet. His study concludes with a listing of those works which are considered authentic by modern scholarship.

The final two essays in Part I both deal with the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* or *Memoirs of the Saints*, which is 'Aṭṭār's only surviving prose work and the one in which he himself deals most explicitly with the earlier Sufi tradition. Shahram Pazouki emphasizes the character of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* as a work of Sufi hagiography which it would be inappropriate to criticize merely for supposed biographical inaccuracies. Pazouki shows instead how through his compilation of memoirs of so many Sufis, 'Aṭṭār develops a complex and rounded picture of the *awliyā'* from which we can still learn so much if we approach the book in the right way. In the following essay Paul Losensky, who has himself recently produced a complete English translation of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, begins by indicating just how much of 'Aṭṭār's original has been lost in Arberry's well-known English abridgement. Losensky goes on to demonstrate how the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* is quite as carefully shaped as 'Aṭṭār's great poems in the selection and ordering of its seventy-two chapters. His study also shows how this careful rhetorical shaping is equally evident

in the cohesive structural form given to the individual biographies, as exemplified in the chapters dealing with Dāwud Ṭā'ī and 'Abū'l-Ḥusayn Nūrī, which are discussed in detail.

The four chapters included in Part II, 'Flight of the Soul-bird: 'Aṭṭār's Conference of the Birds' are devoted to the best known and best loved of all 'Aṭṭār's poetic masterpieces, the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*. A thematic approach is undertaken by Lucian Stone, whose study focuses upon the concept of *ḥayrat* or 'perplexity', the term which 'Aṭṭār uses to describe the penultimate mystical stage, the sixth of the seven valleys which the birds have to go through on their journey to the supreme King of Fowls, the Sīmurgh. Following a close reading of the poem, Stone shows the significance of the placement of the Valley of Perplexity between the Valley of Oneness (*tawḥīd*) and the Valley of Annihilation and Permanence (*fanā' wa baqā'*) for an understanding of 'Aṭṭār's painfully realized conception of the progressive abandonment of the intellect (*'aql*) as the mystical way is traversed.

The imaginative power of this Sufi poetic masterpiece is next explored in the stimulating chapter by Fatemeh Keshavarz, subtitled 'The Poetic Animating the Spiritual in 'Aṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*'. Taking a theoretical perspective from art history as her starting point, Keshavarz argues that a crucial ingredient in the success of the poem is 'Aṭṭār's mastery of poetically productive metaphors. Drawing upon references which range across the whole of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, she demonstrates how the poem is fundamentally characterized by an inseparable fusion between the spiritual and the poetic, while the reader's understanding of individual passages is repeatedly illuminated by her emphasis on the visual qualities of 'Aṭṭār's metaphors. This theme is developed in a different direction in the following essay by Michael Barry. It looks at a famous illustrated manuscript of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, now in the Metropolitan Museum, which contains masterpieces by the great Bihzād of Herat and by later Safavid artists. Arguing passionately for the need to integrate the study of Islamic figurative painting within the broader context of medieval religious perceptions, Barry shows just how profoundly these pictures are imbued with Sufi imagery. His detailed study of an illustration in the manuscript by the Safavid master Ḥabīballāh draws upon a vast range of reference to Islamic and other texts to show how carefully the meaning of the artist's intentions is contained in the symbolism of the superficially often puzzling details of his composition.

A further dimension of the subsequent legacy of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* is examined in Christopher Shackle's essay, which deals with translations of the poem into other languages. An account of the first versions of 'Aṭṭār into European languages in the early nineteenth century is followed by a fuller description of how Edward Fitzgerald, the translator of 'Umar Khayyām, came to attempt a translation of 'Aṭṭār's poem, and an assessment of the qualities of his radically abbreviated 'Bird Parliament'. The second part of the essay looks at translations in the Islamic world, particularly in India, and discusses in detail a nineteenth-century Panjabi version

of the Tale of Shaykh Ṣaṇʿān by the Sufi poet Muḥammad Bakhsh, explaining how this differs considerably from ʿAṭṭār’s famous narrative in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*.

ʿAṭṭār’s other poetical compositions provide the subject of the six chapters dedicated to ‘The Poetics of Passion: ʿAṭṭār’s Lyric and Epic Poetry’ in Part III. This part opens with a wide-ranging study by Johann Christoph Bürgel, who discusses a subject in which he has long had a particular interest, the forms and functions of repetitive structures in Persian literature. First demonstrating how these literary forms are embedded in the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth, Bürgel goes on to show their significance in many of ʿAṭṭār’s works, including the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, in the Tale of Marḥūma in the *Ilāhī-nāma*, in the *Asrār-nāma* and in the *Dīwān* which contains ʿAṭṭār’s lyrical *ghazals*.

The chapter by Muhammad Isa Waley offers wide-ranging reflections on the basic Sufi doctrines and principles underlying ʿAṭṭār’s poetic persona, which reveal the hidden didactic purposes underlying both the poet’s apparent self-praise and self-criticism. Presenting a plethora of examples from the *Dīwān*, *Asrār-nāma*, *Mukhtār-nāma* and *Ilāhī-nāma*, Waley demonstrates how all of ʿAṭṭār’s poetry is permeated by the theme of *dard*, revealing his compositions as spiritual exercises in the Sufi tradition of the *ars moriendi*. Leili Anvar-Chenderoff approaches a closely related theme in her wonderfully empathetic discussion of the key themes of self and selflessness in ʿAṭṭār’s *ghazals*. Defining the location of the *Dīwān* as situated between the pain of longing and the unbearable fire of union, she explores the defining twin modalities of annihilation by the divine beloved and the self-annihilation of the lover with particular reference to the poet’s paradoxical expression of identity and selflessness in the final verses (*makhlaṣ*) of his *ghazals*. Like others in the volume, this essay addresses the central tension of ʿAṭṭār’s mystical poetry, the use of subjective images to communicate an emotional commotion from speaker to reader which momentarily tears away the veil of selfhood.

The vivid imagery and the extraordinary richness of ʿAṭṭār’s remarkable lyric poetry have not hitherto received from Western scholars the detailed critical attention that they certainly deserve. Just how much lies waiting to be explored is suggested by Leonard Lewisohn’s examination of the esoteric poetics of ʿAṭṭār’s bold ‘religion-of-love’ *kufriyyāt* poetry. His lengthy essay underscores the centrality of ʿAṭṭār’s poetry among cognoscenti of mystical knowledge in medieval Iran, providing an analytical literary study of four major commentaries, by Yaḥyā Bākhārī (d. 736/1335–1336), Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī (d. 735/1334), Ādharī Ṭūsī (d. 866/1461) and an anonymous sixteenth-century Mevlevi shaykh, on a hermetic *ghazal* by ʿAṭṭār belonging to a genre of Persian poetry that he identifies as ‘Sufi-Zoroastrian-symbolist verse’ (*gabriyya*).

Two other chapters in Part III extend the coverage of the volume to the large body of works historically attributed to ʿAṭṭār but which are no longer regarded as authentic by modern scholarship. Eve Feuillebois-Pierunek discusses the

substantial collection of quatrains (*rubāʿī*) attributed to ‘Aṭṭār which are collected in the *Mukhtār-nāma*. As a way of assessing the arguments as to the disputed authenticity of this work, she undertakes an extended systematic analysis of those quatrains with a mystical content, in order to see how their ideas and symbolic expressions correspond with those attested in the fully authentic works. Itself providing an invaluable guide to key features of ‘Aṭṭār’s thought, this thematic analysis leads to the cautious but realistic conclusion that the *Mukhtār-nāma* is perhaps neither a forgery nor a fully authentic work. In contrast, the final chapter by Carl Ernst extends the discussion to extended works like the *Haylāj-nāma* and the *Mazhar al-‘ajāʾib* which have nowadays come to be regarded as completely spurious. Taking as his starting point the paradox of the self-praise contained in some of ‘Aṭṭār’s genuine poetic signatures, which seems to fit so awkwardly with the mystical denial of self, Ernst shows how a consideration of the non-canonical works attributed to ‘Aṭṭār can illuminate the very different understandings of the poet which have characterized his reception at different periods, including the diverse interpretations of leading twentieth-century Western and Iranian critics.

The compilation and publication of this collection of essays on Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār and Sufism stands on the shoulders of a number of institutions and persons. First and foremost, the work is greatly indebted to the indefatigable Farhad Hakimzadeh, Managing Director of the Iran Heritage Foundation, based in London, England. In early 2002 Mr Hakimzadeh approached Dr Farhad Daftary, Head of the Department of Academic Research and Publication (DARP) of The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London with a request for help in convening a conference on the subject of Persian Mysticism and ‘Aṭṭār. Accepting the proposal, Dr Daftary instructed Leonard Lewisohn to design the programme and implement the convening of the conference. At the same time, the Centre of Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMES) at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, kindly consented to host the conference, and later, with funding from the SOAS Research Committee, contributed generously to its organization as well. ‘Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār and the Persian Sufi Tradition’ was duly convened by Christopher Shackle, then Pro-Director of SOAS, and Leonard Lewisohn, at SOAS on 16–17 November, 2002, and attended by some 150 lovers and admirers of ‘Aṭṭār. The conference was the centrepiece of a number of musical, poetic and artistic events in London organized by the Iran Heritage Foundation in October–November 2002 under the rubric of ‘Intimations of Immortality: Mystical Yearnings in Persian Poetry, Music and Art’. While the Iran Heritage Foundation and the Centre of Near and Middle Eastern Studies bore the brunt of the financial and organizational responsibilities of the conference, a number of local London organizations contributed substantially to the cost of organizing it. These include the British Academy and the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, to both of which we are very grateful. We

would also like to warmly acknowledge our gratitude to the IHF and the SOAS Research Policy Committee for their subvention of the costs of copy-editing. Our diligent and long-suffering copy-editor, Judy Kearns, laboured greatly to polish their structure and style and we are greatly indebted for her meticulous efforts. Patricia Salazar's scrupulous attention to and scrutiny of the final manuscript before publication is also gratefully acknowledged. Lastly, we thank The Institute of Ismaili Studies not only for their generous support for the conference, but also for their patronage of the publication of this volume. The editors are immensely grateful to all the organizations and persons who have supported both in word and deed our vision of the present publication which contributes so fundamentally to improving our understanding of 'Aṭṭār and the importance of his mystical and literary heritage.

Transliteration of Persian and Arabic words in this book follows the transliteration table of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Persian words of Arabic origin, such as *Dīwān*, use 'w' instead of 'v' for the Arabic letter wa. The diphthongs are consistently rendered as 'aw' and 'ay'.

In the course of a long and productive career, no scholar of the twentieth century did more to promote understanding of the Persian Sufi tradition in the West than the late Professor Annemarie Schimmel (d. 22 January 2003). She was to have contributed a foreword to this volume, and it was a matter of great regret to us all that she was prevented from doing so by her final illness. This book, which is the poorer for not containing an essay from her ever-evocative pen on a mystical poet who was so important to her, is dedicated to her memory.

LL & CS

Notes

1. Šamad Muwaḥḥid, ed., *Majmū'a-i āthār-i Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistarī* (Tehran, 1365 Sh./1986), p. 69, *Gulshan-i rāz*, vv. 56–57. Tr. L. Lewisohn.
2. Francois de Blois, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey: Poetry c. AD 1100–1225* (London, 1994), vol. 5, part 2, p. 270.
3. Muḥammad Riḍā Shafī'ī-Kadkanī, *Zabūr-i pārsī: nigāhī bi zindagī wa ghazalhā-yi 'Aṭṭār* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999), p. 57.
4. His date of death is still a matter of dispute. Muḥammad Riḍā Shafī'ī-Kadkanī's biographical study of the poet in his *Zabūr-i pārsī* has somewhat revised and updated Furūzānfar's study by offering fresh insight into the local history of his biography, framing it within the 12th-century Persian Sufi tradition in Nishapur, recalculating 'Aṭṭār's birth date and proposing a revised death-date of 1229 (ibid., pp. 66–83) and reappraising his authentic works, thus significantly changing our understanding of the poet's life, works, spiritual milieu and literary background. The essential features of Shafī'ī-Kadkanī's study are discussed in Professor Landolt's essay below.
5. 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb, *Šadā-yi bāl-i sīmurgh: darbāra-i zindagī wa andīsha-i*

‘Aṭṭār (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999), p. 36.

6. ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*’, ed. Muḥammad Isti‘lāmī (Tehran, 1993), p. 8.

7. Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī, *Zabūr-i pārsī*, p. 57.

8. See Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī’s edition of ‘Aṭṭār’s *Mukhtār-nāma*, (2nd rev. ed., Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996), pp. xxxiv–lix.

9. De Blois, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey*, vol. 5, part 2, pp. 297–318. F. De Blois’ study contains the most recent survey and study of the manuscripts of all his major works, along with original insights into their authenticity, and valuable information on his life.

10. ‘Aṭṭār’s *Ilāhī-nāma* has been translated and annotated by John A. Boyle as *The Ilāhī-nāma or Book of God* (Manchester, 1976). The *Muṣibat-nāma* has been translated by Isabelle de Gastines as *Le livre d’épreuve: Musibatnama* (Paris, 1981). A.J. Arberry’s *Muslim Saints and Mystics* (London, 1964) is a selection from *Tadhkirat al-awliyā* rendered into graceful Victorian-style English prose, while the new translation of the entire work by Paul Losensky (forthcoming) is a significant scholarly achievement. An excellent verse rendering of *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* is *The Conference of the Birds*, translated by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (New York, 1984), while a more scholarly translation (with excellent notes) is Peter Avery’s *The Speech of the Birds* (Cambridge, 1998).

11. This monumental work has been translated into English by John O’Kane as *The Ocean of the Soul: Men, the World and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār* (Leiden, 2003), with a 125–page Analytic Index compiled by Bernd Radtke and updated to include contemporary studies on the poet; the German original is also translated into Persian by ‘Abbās Zaryāb-khū‘ī, Mihr-āfāq Bāybardi, *Daryā-yi jān: sayrī dar ārā’ wa aḥwāl-i Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār Nīshāpūrī* (Tehran, 1998). Ritter’s article ‘Aṭṭār: Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm’ in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, 1960–2004), vol. 1, pp. 752–755, contains detailed biographical data, listing the poet’s works, their editions, and important studies. An excellent overview of his life, works and thought is also given in B. Reinert’s article on ‘Aṭṭār, Shaikh Farīd al-Dīn’ in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (London and New York, 1985).

12. Badī‘ al-Zamān Furūzānfar’s *Sharḥ-i aḥwāl wa naqd wa taḥlīl-i athār-i Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār* (Tehran, 1340 Sh./1961), which includes an analysis of three of ‘Aṭṭār’s poems, remains the leading biographical account of the poet. Studies on specific aspects of ‘Aṭṭār’s life and thought include ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb, *Ṣadā-yi bāl-i sīmurgh*, which places ‘Aṭṭār’s life and works in the context of earlier Persian literature. Taqī Pūrnamdāriyān’s *Dīdār bā sīmurgh: haft maqāla dar ‘irfān wa shī‘r wa andīsha-i ‘Aṭṭār* (Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995) is a ground-breaking study of ‘Aṭṭār’s aesthetics, Sufi symbolism and his relationship to Peripatetic philosophy. Riḍā Ashrafzāda’s *Tajallī-yi ramz wa riwāyat dar shī‘r-i ‘Aṭṭār-i Nīshāpūrī* (Tehran, 1373 Sh./1994) provides an original survey of ‘Aṭṭār’s narrative techniques, characters and symbolism, while Pūrān Shajī‘ī’s *Jahānbīnī-yi ‘Aṭṭār* (Tehran, 1994) discusses most of the key themes (of theology, mysticism, ethics, erotic theory) of his world-view. Qādir Fāḍilī’s three-volume encyclopædia of ‘Aṭṭār’s symbolism, imagery, ideas in his major *mathnawīs*: *Farhang-i mawḍū‘ī adab-i Pārsī, mawḍū‘bandī wa naqd wa barrasī*, 1–2: *Manṭiq al-ṭayr wa Pand-nāma*; 3–4: *Asrār-nāma wa Haylāj-nāma*; 5–6: *Muṣibat-nāma wa Mazhar al-‘ajā‘ib* (Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995) is extremely helpful in its thematic organization of the poet’s thought. The critical heritage of ‘Aṭṭār over the past century in Iran now has its own bibliography in ‘Alī Mir Anṣārī’s *Kitābshināsī-yi Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār Nīshāpūrī*,

(Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995), including most of the key articles and studies on his life and thought and editions of 'Aṭṭār's works.

13. Shafī'ī-Kadkanī, *Zabūr-i pārsī*, p. 34; Reinert, 'Aṭṭār', p. 21. Zarrīnkūb (*Ṣadā-yi bāl-i sīmurgh*, p. 34.) likewise underlines the all-important role which Sufism played in 'Aṭṭār's works and speculates that 'Aṭṭār's mind from his late twenties onwards: 'was more preoccupied with Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) than any other thing, and it was the *Qalandarī* method and path of blame (*rāh-i malāmat*) that he preferred over any other.'

14. F. Lewis, *Rumi, Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī* (Oxford, 1999), p. 65. It should be noted that Zarrīnkūb (*Ṣadā-yi bāl-i sīmurgh*, p. 36) quite uncritically accepts this legend as fact.

15. *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, ed. Muḥammad Isti'lāmī, (Tehran, 1993), p. 9. See also Shafī'ī-Kadkanī, *Zabūr-i pārsī*, p. 71, as well as Shafī'ī-Kadkanī's edition of 'Aṭṭār's *Majmū'a-i Rubā'īyyāt* (*Mukhtār-nāma*), (2nd rev. ed., Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996), p. 26, n. 1.

16. *Ṣafwat al-ṣafā'*, ed. Ghulām Riḍā Ṭabāṭabā'ī Majd (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997), pp. 549.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 771.

18. Shafī'ī-Kadkanī, *Zabūr-i pārsī*, pp. 72–79.

19. Taqī Pūrnamdāriyān, *Didār bā sīmurgh*, p. 205; Ashrafzāda *Tajallī*, pp. 239–245.

20. 'Aṭṭār, *Muṣibat-nāma*, ed. Nūrānī-Wiṣāl (Tehran, 1338 Sh./1959), p. 54.

21. There is nothing in 'Aṭṭār's works to support what Louis Massignon (*Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* [new edition, Paris, 1954], pp. 63–68) called 'the *a priori* thesis of Iranian influence' on the origin of Sufism.

22. *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 54.

I

Prose of the Spirit: ‘Aṭṭār and the Persian Sufi Tradition

‘Aṭṭār, Sufism and Ismailism

HERMANN LANDOLT

I. The Poet of the ‘Men of God’

Despite Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s fame as one of the greatest Sufi poets of medieval Persia, very little is known for certain about his life. While his whole literary work leaves no doubt that he was genuinely attached to the classical Sufi tradition and to a profoundly mystical understanding of existence, as was so comprehensively shown by Hellmut Ritter in his magnum opus, *Das Meer der Seele*,¹ many questions remain open with regard to the role he may have played within the Sufi movement of his own time and the broader context in which he lived, that is, Khurasan at the turn of the sixth/twelfth to the seventh/thirteenth centuries, and more specifically the city of Nishapur.

As his pen-name ‘Aṭṭār indicates, and may be gathered from certain allusions in his authentic works,² he was known in his city as an expert pharmacist. However, quite a number of supposedly autobiographical indications that have been taken seriously until recently, including the image of the Sufi pharmacist who was personally attending to a large number of customers in his *dārū-khāna* and also writing there some of his famous *mathnawīs*, are found only in the so-called *Khusraw-nāma*, also known as *Gul u Hurmuz*, and this romance, like so many other works composed under ‘Aṭṭār’s name at a later time, has turned out to be spurious as well. It was convincingly demonstrated by M.R. Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī in 1996, that *Khusraw-nāma* is, in fact, the work of another ‘Aṭṭār, whereas the real *Khusraw-nāma*, the one mentioned by the poet himself in the introduction to the *Mukhtār-nāma*, is none other than the one that came to be known as the *Ilāhī-nāma*.³ By the same token, the unresolved problem of the identity of a certain Khwāja Sa‘d al-Dīn whom the author of the spurious *Khusraw-nāma* appears to extol as his Sufi master,⁴ can now be definitely laid to rest.

As a matter of fact, it is not even certain whether our ‘Aṭṭār belonged to a particular Sufi group, let alone a Sufi order, for he himself never identifies anyone by name as his Sufi master, nor does he ever adduce any *silsila* to show his credentials

as a Sufi. To be sure, the Sufi hagiographic tradition offers a number of names of individuals said to have been his master, but from all of these, only Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī, an influential figure among the direct disciples of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 618/1221), ‘comes within the bounds of possibility’, as Reinert carefully puts it,⁵ and as we shall see later in some detail. On the other hand, ‘Aṭṭār is also considered hagiographically – by Jāmī among others – to have been an Uwaysī, a Sufi initiated ‘spiritually’ by one of the masters of the past, after the figure of Uways al-Qaranī, the legendary forefather of the Sufis who is said to have embraced Islam without ever having met the Prophet in the flesh. This of course implies doubt as to whether ‘Aṭṭār had had any Sufi master at all among his contemporaries. Jāmī has the spirit of Ḥallāj (executed in 309/922) in mind for this role, whereas modern scholars such as Furūzānfar and, with some reservation, Meier, have singled out Abū Sa‘īd b. Abī’l-Khayr (d. 440/1049) in view of evidence found in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Dīwān* that would suggest his own acknowledgement of such a spiritual relationship to the great Sufi, whose fame in Nishapur he certainly kept alive.⁶

Against the notion of an exclusively spiritual relationship with a master of the past, Reinert cautions that ‘Aṭṭār ‘stresses the indispensability of an immediate shaykh’ in certain passages of the *Language of the Birds* (*Manṭiq al-ṭayr*) and the *Book of Adversity* (*Muṣibat-nāma*). It should be noted, however, that the figure of the spiritual guide in these two poetic tales of initiation – the knowledgeable hoopoe in the *Language of the Birds* and the *pīr* who has all the answers for the ‘wayfarer called Thought’ (*sālik-i fikrat*) in the *Book of Adversity* – does not necessarily have to be decoded as meaning any concrete Sufi shaykh. The *pīr* appears to the ‘wayfarer called Thought’ only after the latter’s search for a true master among all the inhabitants of the world, including the Sufis, has ended in sheer desperation.⁷ Moreover, he is clearly marked as the hidden ‘Pole’ (*quṭb*), a figure not of this world yet within the world, and on whose presence the very existence of the world depends:

If you say: there is no master in evidence, just search another thousand times!
For if no *pīr* remained in the world, then neither the earth nor time would remain stable.
The *pīr* exists even now, but he has gone into hiding. Having seen the infamy of humans, he is wearing shabby garments.
How could the world stand firm without the pole (*quṭb*)? It is thanks to the pivot that the mill-stone stays in place!
If the pole of the world were not firmly in the ground, how could the heavens turn?⁸

The notion of the ‘pole’ (*al-quṭb al-mudār ‘alayhi*) is of course well known from classical Sufi sources such as Hujwīrī’s *Kashf al-mahjūb* and generally refers to the

head of an invisible hierarchy of ‘saints’ (*awliyā*). Sufi sources tend to identify the ‘pole’ with this or that concrete Sufi master of particular spiritual gifts. For example, Abū Sa’īd b. Abī’l-Khayr is said to have designated his son and successor Abū Ṭāhir as the *quṭb*.⁹ But ‘Aṭṭār clearly does not have such a concretistic notion of the ‘pole’ in mind. Instead, he appears to be borrowing his description of the *pīr* or *quṭb* from a specific group of Shi’i traditions asserting that the earth would not remain in place without the continued existence of the Imam.¹⁰ In ‘Aṭṭār’s time, such ideas and traditions were cherished particularly in two milieus that are clearly distinct from Sufism proper. On the one hand, we have the *Ishrāqī* philosopher Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī (executed in 587/1191) who established his notion of the ‘divine leader’ (*imām muta’allih*) by referring to a tradition from ‘Alī about the ‘representative of God’ (*khalīfat Allāh*) ‘of whom the earth is never devoid’. According to Suhrawardī, this divine leader may be either manifestly and openly in authority, or he may be hidden, in which case he is the one ‘referred to by the commonality (*al-kāffa*; i.e., the Sufis) as the Pole (*al-quṭb*)’.¹¹ On the other hand, it is of particular interest to note that the notion of the *quṭb* ‘on whom the existence of the world depends’ is also discussed in the Ismaili *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā*, a work written around 596/1199–1200 or a few years later, where it is explicitly identified as an example of the universally existing ‘Man who shows forth God’ and as the Sunni equivalent of the Shi’i (i.e. Ismaili) ‘Lord of the Resurrection’ (*qā’im-i qiyāmat*).¹² Similarly, the standard philosophical account of Nizārī Ismaili doctrine known as *Rawḍa-i taslīm* or *Taṣawwurāt*, which was completed in 640/1242 under the supervision of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī and (at least partly) written by himself, insists in several places on the eternal presence, hidden or manifest depending on the circumstances, of the mysterious ‘Lord of the Resurrection’, and in one place identifies him with the ‘Pole (*quṭb*) of the Earth’.¹³

In this connection it is also worth mentioning that the list of ‘saints’ that received an entry in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā* begins with the Shi’i Imam Ja‘far al-Šādiq and ends with Ḥallāj, so far as the part completed by ‘Aṭṭār himself is concerned.¹⁴ In the entry on Ja‘far al-Šādiq, he manifests a certain degree of sympathy for Twelver Shi’ism while making it clear, at the same time, that he himself is a Sunni. To begin such a book with Ja‘far al-Šādiq, he says, is to have all of the *awliyā* in mind, as ‘those who follow Ja‘far’s *madhhab* follow twelve Imams’, and ‘one is twelve and twelve is one’. Again, a similar assertion is repeatedly made in the *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā* about ‘Alī, with whom all the Imams are said to be identical in essence.¹⁵ For ‘Aṭṭār, it is Ja‘far al-Šādiq who is ‘the absolute guide (*muqtadā-yi muṭlaq*): shaykh for those bound up with God, Imam for those bound up with Muḥammad, model for the mystics (*ahl-i dhawq*), exemplar for the lovers (*ahl-i ‘ishq*), foremost among the worshippers, and eminent among the ascetics.’¹⁶ As is well known, Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) is the last among the Imams common to both Twelver and Ismaili Shi’ism, as well as being recognized by the Sufis as one of their great forebears.

According to Ritter, certain statements in the introduction to the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā* would imply that ‘Aṭṭār himself ‘admits that he does not belong to the Sufis and only acts like them so as to be reckoned among them.’¹⁷ This is perhaps not the most felicitous way to state the problem. ‘Aṭṭār simply tells us there some of the reasons why he composed this ‘*Memoir of the Saints*’: he had studied their sayings from early youth, he says, liked them and wished to preserve them for the spiritual benefit of his readers as well as his own, for he found no better words, after the Qur’ān and *Ḥadīth*, than theirs. So he began writing them down in the hope that, ‘if I am not one of them, then I may at least have made myself similar to them, for “whoever is similar to a people belongs to them” (*ki man tashabbaha bi-qawmin fa-huwa minhum*). As Junayd said: “Treat the pretenders well, for they have true appearance, and kiss their feet, for if they were not of sublime intention, they would have pretended to be something else [than Sufis].”¹⁸ There is a similar statement at the end of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, with the difference that this time, ‘Aṭṭār places himself in the immediate vicinity of, or identifies himself with, a Sufi who had been ‘talking much about the men of God’:

An old master said to a Sufi: How long will you go on talking about the men of God?

He answered: Women are happy to talk about men continuously!

If I am not one of them, I have talked about them.

I am happy because I have told this tale [i.e. the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*]
from the heart.¹⁹

Ritter himself noted the parallel between the two statements in the first place but, for some odd reason, did not seem to notice that this rather speaks against an interpretation to the effect that ‘Aṭṭār ‘did not belong to the Sufis’.²⁰

Of course, as Ritter also points out, it is true that ‘Aṭṭār was keenly aware of the difference between those who are ‘real men’, and those who only ‘talk about’ them; and it is also clear that he considered himself, first and foremost, a great poet. While maintaining in several places that he would prefer not to be judged as a *mere* poet,²¹ he nevertheless defends the intrinsic value of the poetic art against its moralistic critics. In one passage of the *Muṣibat-nāma*, playing on the common letters of the Arabic words for ‘poetry’ (*shi‘r*), ‘divine Throne’ (*‘arsh*) and ‘divine Law’ (*shar‘*), he proudly enumerates the names of some of his famous predecessors, including Sanā’ī, Azraqī, Anwarī, Firdawsī, ‘Unṣurī, Khāqānī and others, and insists, using the poetic device of fantastic aetiology, that all these names are ‘celestial’.²² Indeed he sees himself as nothing less than the ‘Seal of the Poets’ (*khātim al-shu‘arā*), just as Muḥammad was the ‘Seal of the Prophets’.²³ At the same time, he has strong reservations about the customary dependence of the poets on worldly patrons, and claims that his one and only *mamdūh* is, by contrast, ‘wisdom’ itself (*ḥikmat*).²⁴

In this regard, ‘Aṭṭār has in fact one predecessor whom he never mentions, but who is even more famous for the exceptional stance he took against the court-poets: the Ismaili poet Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. after 465/1072–1073). Not unlike the latter, too, he frequently hints at the value and spiritual significance of the poetic word or creative speech (*sukhan*) as such.²⁵ Indeed, the end of the prologue of the *Ilāhī-nāma* suggests that this word, that is, ‘Aṭṭār’s magic word, is, like the creative word ‘Be!’ (*kun*) and the existence-denying word ‘Be Not!’ (*lā takun*), the present form taken by the divine Spirit itself. The Spirit (*jān*, *rūḥ*) is invoked right from the beginning as the vice gerent of God (*nāyib-i dār al-khilāfa*) and holder, in the spiritual realm (*mulk-i rūḥānī*), of the divine creative Imperative or Command (*amr*); an ‘eternal King and Representative of God’ (*tu’ī shāh-u khalīfa jāwidāna*) and Father of six Sons, namely, the sensitive Soul, the Devil of Imagination, the Intellect, Knowledge, Poverty-That-Wants-Nothing, and *Tawḥīd*-That-Wants-All-Oneness. And this enigmatic father figure of the ‘Prologue in Heaven’, as we might call it—not the more human caliph and father of six princes of the actual tale who only resembles him—is then summoned to ‘take the black robe of the caliphate like Adam’ (*siyah-pūsh-i khilāfat shaw chu Ādam*), that is, to come down to earth as Adam, the *khalīfa* of God on Earth, and to accomplish the journey within himself by re-enacting a fantastic history of the prophets until Muḥammad. Only then does ‘the Word’ actually appear, and the tale begins.²⁶

It does not seem to have been noticed that this poetic image of a gnostic anthropos has several traits that resemble essential elements of Ismaili prophetology and Imamology rather closely. Fritz Meier in his most recent essay on ‘Ismailis and Mysticism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries’, to which we shall return later, does not discuss the prologue of the *Ilāhī-nāma* at all, whereas in his classic essay on the theme of this *Geistmensch* in ‘Aṭṭār, he had evoked a possible reminiscence of the ancient Iranian theme of Ahura Mazda, father of six Amesha Spentas and in a sense the seventh out of the six.²⁷ But the Ismaili analogy is certainly much closer to home than pre-Islamic Iran. The seventh Imam or *qā’im*, the ‘Lord of the Resurrection’, is precisely the seventh out of six prophets, from Adam to Muḥammad, and the fulfiller of their mission according to classical Ismaili doctrine. The six sons of the *Geistmensch* in ‘Aṭṭār’s prologue could be decoded, without too much stretch of the imagination, as representing these six prophets as well: the sensitive soul stands for Adam, imagination for Noah, intellect for Abraham, knowledge for Moses, poverty for Jesus, and *tawḥīd* for Muḥammad. Moreover, the Nizārī Ismaili Imam of Alamut, as distinct from the Fatimid caliph-Imam, has something in common with ‘Aṭṭār’s *Geistmensch* insofar as he is identified by his followers as the manifestation (*mazhar*) of the ‘the supreme Word’ (*kalima-i a’lā*) in human form.²⁸

Now of course this does not mean that ‘Aṭṭār actually meant to praise the Ismaili Imam in this prologue, as Nāṣir-i Khusraw undoubtedly would have done. That would be clearly impossible given the rather obvious allusion, by virtue of the

double meaning (*ihām*) of the words *khilāfa* and *siyah-pūsh*, to the 'black robe' of the 'Abbāsid caliphs. But, being the great poet he was, it seems entirely conceivable that he played with basic Ismaili ideas and used them, moreover, to express his support for the Caliph al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (r. 575/1180–622/1225). Before pursuing this line of argument any further, however, it is time for us to take a closer look at 'Aṭṭār himself.

'Aṭṭār in Historical Context

It is now generally accepted, following Furūzānfar's reconstruction of 'Aṭṭār's biography, that he was a native of Nishapur, that he was born around 540/1145–1146, and that he died there when he was already an old man of over seventy years, probably a victim of the Mongol massacre in this city, that is, in Ṣafar 618/April 1221.²⁹ However, the precise dates of 'Aṭṭār's life-span have been a subject of scholarly debate over many years, and it should be noted that a whole series of arguments in favour of a slightly later period, from 553 to 627 or 1158/9 to 1230 (the year of 'Aṭṭār's death as given by most traditional authorities and accepted as such by Nafīsī), has recently been brought up again and elaborated in some detail by Shafī'ī-Kadkanī in his *Zabūr-i Pārsī*. Although these arguments cannot be said to be entirely convincing, as they are of an essentially hypothetical and circumstantial nature,³⁰ they do have the virtue of reminding us, once again, that none of the putative dates in 'Aṭṭār's life is absolutely certain. This applies also to the notorious problem of the internal chronology of his *mathnawīs*. The received view among most Western scholars is that the order in which they are mentioned in the introduction to the *Mukhtār-nāma* implies a chronological order, so that the *Khusraw-nāma* (i.e., as we now know, the *Ilāhī-nāma*) would appear to be the earliest work and the *Asrār-nāma* the second.³¹ Against this, there is the evidence of the poet's allusions to his advanced age in precisely these two *mathnawīs*, as was pointed out by Furūzānfar.³² There is also the admittedly inconclusive evidence of the final verses of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* as found in numerous manuscript copies though not in the oldest, which would suggest a very early date of completion of this work: 570/1175, or 573/1178 or 583/1187.³³

An early date for some of 'Aṭṭār's works is certainly consistent with the fact that he is treated as a poet of the Saljuq period in the only available source that was written during his lifetime, Muḥammad 'Awfī's *Lubāb al-albāb*. However, the problem is that 'Awfī does not mention any of 'Aṭṭār's *mathnawīs*. He refers to him as 'the wayfarer on the path of Truth and the dweller on the prayer carpet of the Path' (*sālik-i jādda-yi ḥaqīqat wa sākin-i sajjāda-yi ṭarīqat*)—in other words: a Sufi—and quotes, apparently from memory (*bar khāṭir būd*), two of his *ghazals* to show both his piety or 'orthodoxy' (*ḥusn-i i'tiqād*) and the high quality of his mystical love-poetry.³⁴ Shafī'ī-Kadkanī explains the absence of any reference to the

four unquestionably authentic *mathnawīs* in ‘Awfī by arguing that none of them was actually written by the time ‘Awfī could have heard about them when he visited Nishapur, that is, around 600/1200. Had they been written before, so the argument goes, then ‘Awfī would at least have mentioned their titles, as is his general custom with *mathnawīs*.³⁵ But one does not quite see why ‘Awfī should not have had an occasion to complete his notes on ‘Aṭṭār by the time he actually completed the *Lubāb*, i.e., by 617/1220–1221.³⁶ Besides, if at least the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* was written well before the end of the sixth/twelfth century, as Furūzānfar believes, then one might as well think of another explanation for its absence in ‘Awfī. He may simply not have recognized its importance, or he may not have deemed it suitable to mention it given his taste for the ‘orthodox’ ‘Aṭṭār and the Avicennian background of this tale’s main theme.³⁷ Its central figure, the Sīmurgh, obviously belongs to the national epic of Iran rather than to the Qur’ān and *Ḥadīth* and could, moreover, have evoked certain reminiscences of the ‘tales of initiation’ of the *Ishrāqī* philosopher Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī, whose execution on charges of heresy in 587/1191 was probably not unknown in the Sufī milieu of Khurasan and Khwarazm with which ‘Awfī was evidently familiar.³⁸

As a matter of fact, ‘Awfī personally met the famous disciple of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī, in Khwarazm sometime before the latter’s execution in 606/1209.³⁹ Unlike the rather withdrawn ‘Aṭṭār, this Baghdādī (from Baghdādak, a village in Khwarazm) was a highly visible personality who seems to have played a dominant role in the organization of the main branch of the then nascent Kubrawī order. ‘Awfī appropriately refers to him, not as ‘the wayfarer on the path of Truth and the dweller on the prayer carpet of the Path’, but as the *shaykh al-shuyūkh-i Ḥaḍrat-i Khwārazm*. Besides, as ‘Awfī also indicates, he was a famous physician, a poet and an influential preacher at the court of the Khwārazmshāh ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad, and his career ended with his execution for reasons that are not altogether clear.⁴⁰ ‘Awfī alludes to this as well by referring to his ‘martyrdom’ (*wa ākhir al-amr bi sa‘ādat-i shahādat rasīd*).

Now there can be little doubt that ‘Aṭṭār himself also had contacts in this particular Sufī milieu. But whether he was a *murīd* of Baghdādī in the strict sense of Sufī affiliation, as is frequently asserted on the authority of Jāmī, is not quite so certain. As is well-known, ‘Aṭṭār himself tells us in the introduction to the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā* that he went one day to visit a certain Imam whose name was Majd al-Dīn Khwārazmī according to the standard text.⁴¹ What he tells us about this person is however no more than this:

I found him weeping. I asked: Are you well? He said: Oh! Those great leaders (*si-pah-sālārān*) who used to live in our community, men who were like the Prophets, for *The learned of my community are like the Prophets of the Sons of Israel!* Then he said: I am weeping because yester-night I prayed: O God, Thine it is to act without

cause. Make of me one of those men, or [at least] one capable of visualizing their presence (*marā az īn qawm yā az nazzāragiyān-i īn qawm gardān*). For I do not have the strength to make any other oath. I am weeping because [the prayer] may have been answered!

This report, it seems to me, makes little sense if the Imam in question was the *shaykh al-shuyūkh-i Ḥaḍrat-i Khwārazm* himself, nor is it self-evident why ‘Aṭṭār should mention his meeting him only to tell us about this lamentation. But the mystery can be solved if we accept, following another of Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī’s sharp observations,⁴² that the correct reading of the name in question is not Majd al-Dīn Khwārazmī, let alone Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad Khwārazmī, but Aḥmad Khwārī, as the Paris manuscript used by Nicholson has it;⁴³ that is, Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. al-Muhadhhab b. Naṣr al-Khuwārī, the disciple for whom Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī wrote his major treatise, *Tuḥfat al-barara*.⁴⁴ In that case, ‘Aṭṭār’s report certainly makes more sense and could, then, indeed imply that he himself was also spiritually attached in some way to the same Baghdādī. At the same time, this would make it possible to venture that ‘Aṭṭār’s reference to Aḥmad Khwārī’s lamentation is in fact a veiled allusion to Baghdādī’s recent execution, which in turn would imply that the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*’ was written in 606/1209 or a little later. Oddly enough, however, Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī himself draws none of these conclusions from his own observation. Instead, he tries to prove the historical accuracy of a Sufi chain of affiliation found only in the fifteenth-century *Mujmal-i Faṣīḥī* of Aḥmad Khwāfī, which makes ‘Aṭṭār a *murīd* of an otherwise unknown Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Nughundarī al-Ṭūsī and would link him up with Abū Sa‘īd b. Abī’l-Khayr via his great grandson Nūr al-Dīn al-Munawwar.⁴⁵ This is presumably to give some historical reality to the kind of special spiritual relationship to Abū Sa‘īd ‘Aṭṭār himself seems to acknowledge in some of his poems, as was mentioned earlier. But of course this chain of affiliation could have been made up by Khwāfī or his sources for exactly the same reason!

‘Aṭṭār’s closeness to Baghdādī and his school might also account for a number of peculiar ideas and expressions common to both, notably the distinction between the ‘journey towards God’ and the ‘journey in God’, to which ‘Aṭṭār clearly alludes at the end of the *Muṣibat-nāma*.⁴⁶ It would also appear that Baghdādī’s influence has something to do with ‘Aṭṭār’s rather frequent expressions of dislike of the philosophers in general, and Avicenna in particular, especially in the *Muṣibat-nāma*. For example, he pointedly asserts there that the ‘Universal Intellect’ (*‘aql-i kull*) has to submit to the ‘Command: “Say [He is God the One]!”’ (*amr-i qul*), and that only the Islamic sciences of *fiqh*, *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* lead to salvation (*najāt*) in the Hereafter (*ḥayāt-i ḥaqq*), not the Cure (*shifā*’; i.e., Avicenna’s philosophy).⁴⁷ Baghdādī himself was certainly no friend of Avicenna;⁴⁸ and his most influential disciple, Najm al-Dīn Rāzī *alias* Dāya (d. 654/1256), although himself heavily

influenced by Neoplatonic views, allowed himself to be carried away with rather violent diatribes against ‘the Philosophers’ (*falsafiyān*) and other ‘unbelievers’ or ‘hypocrites,’ including the ‘Transmigrationists’ (*tanāsukhiyān*) and the Ismailis (*ismā‘īliyyān*).⁴⁹ Both ‘Aṭṭār and Dāya are also among the first to mention the famous ‘Umar Khayyām, but only to criticize him as a philosopher.⁵⁰ Dāya also claimed discipleship from Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234),⁵¹ another famous enemy of ‘Greek philosophy’. This Suhrawardī is well known as the ‘court theologian’ of the Caliph al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh, and the chief ideologue of a re-structured *futuwwa*-network by which the Caliph sought to rally the princes of the Islamic world to his cause.

All this tallies quite well with a suggestion made in 1981 by Julian Baldick in the *Handbook of Oriental Studies*,⁵² namely, that ‘Aṭṭār’s *Ilāhī-nāma* should be seen as a kind of conservative manifesto in favour of this caliph, and against his rival, the Khwārazmshāh, rather than simply as a mystical tale of a timeless ‘King and His Six Sons’. Although Baldick’s polemical argument against Ritter and ‘the orientalist’ is itself objectionable on several counts, notably his claim that the king is not a king but only a caliph, there can be little doubt that ‘Aṭṭār, too, placed himself on the side of this caliph, as was suggested above on the basis of the allusion to the ‘black robe of the caliphate’ in the prologue. But then, al-Nāṣir’s policies of ‘opening up’ towards the Shi‘is in general and the Ismailis of Alamut in particular should also be taken into consideration. As was pointed out by Angelika Hartmann in her monograph on al-Nāṣir, there is no evidence for anti-Ismailism in ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī’s anti-philosophical *Rashf al-naṣā’ih al-īmāniyya wa-Kashf al-faḍā’ih al-yūnāniyya*,⁵³ and in a later study on the same Suhrawardī, she even speaks of his ‘unconscious Ismailism’ (as opposed to the more ‘conscious’ Ismailism of Shahrastānī).⁵⁴ In any case, al-Nāṣir’s policies towards the Ismailis were probably not unrelated to the ‘conversion’ to Sunnism by the Nizārī Ismaili Imam Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥasan III in 607/1210, which was considered a great success for the Caliph and resulted in a formal restoration of the *sharī‘at* at Alamut for a period lasting considerably longer than the eleven years of Ḥasan III’s rule (607–618/1210–1221).⁵⁵ These events obviously happened during ‘Aṭṭār’s lifetime, and the *Ilāhī-nāma* was quite possibly written after 607/1210 if we go by the year of birth 553/1158–1159 as calculated by Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī and the advanced age of the poet as alluded to in the text itself.⁵⁶ Perhaps, then, what I have called ‘Aṭṭār’s ‘playing with Ismaili ideas’ could be seen as part of such an effort, not to antagonize the Ismailis, but rather to ‘convert’ them and bring them back to the fold, as it were. His model in dealing with Shi‘is in general may be seen in the story of Shaykh Rukn al-Dīn Akkāfī (d. 549/1155) and the man who was desperately in love with his Shi‘i wife but outraged by her constant cursing of Abū Bakr: ‘The more you beat her,’ the Shaykh advised, ‘the more she will become stubborn! Tell her the secret kindly: if what they say about Abū Bakr were true, then it would be right to curse him. But these stories are not true in reality, for that

Abū Bakr is an “Abū Makr”, a figure of plots, not the true Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq!’ Sure enough, the wife was convinced in the end.⁵⁷

The question of ‘Aṭṭār’s possible reaction to the Ismaili *da‘wa* of Alamut was most recently taken up by the late Fritz Meier in a highly thought-provoking lecture on ‘Ismā‘īlīs and Mysticism in the 12th and 13th centuries’, which was published posthumously in 2000.⁵⁸ As is to be expected, this is another of Professor Meier’s masterful pieces of erudition and insight. At the same time, it must be said that this essay reduces the main issue to a sort of timeless, psychological cliché: ‘the soul’ confronting ‘the intellect’. ‘Aṭṭār, the poet of the ‘ocean of the soul’, thus comes out ‘in defence of Islamic mysticism’ against the men of the intellect, meaning philosophers and Ismailis alike. To this end, Meier refers rather briefly to the Neoplatonic ‘removal of God into unknown heights’ and the Prime Intellect’s assuming the attributes of the Qur’ānic Allāh in the thought of the Fāṭimid *dā‘ī* Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020), and to Ṭūsī’s *Taṣawwūrāt*, where God, in Meier’s reading, is ‘simply at the top of the intellects as in *falsafa*’.⁵⁹ Certainly the case of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (597–672/1201–1274) would have deserved more attention, and his personal meeting with ‘Aṭṭār—one of the few facts about which we can be fairly certain—is surprisingly not even mentioned.

We know from ‘Abd al-Razzāq Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (d. 723/1323), a student and long-time associate of Ṭūsī’s during the latest period of his eventful career, that he had personally met ‘Aṭṭār in Nishapur, and that he characterized him as an ‘eloquent old man (*shaykh*) who had an excellent way of interpreting and understanding the discourse of the [Sufi] masters (*al-mashāyikh*), the gnostics (*al-‘arīfīn*) and spiritual guides (*al-a‘imma al-sālikīn*).’⁶⁰ Ṭūsī probably made this interesting comment at a later time, when Ibn al-Fuwaṭī could indeed have heard it from him directly, but the meeting with ‘Aṭṭār must have taken place between 612–618/1215–1221 according to Furūzānfar’s reckoning, when Ṭūsī was still a student of philosophy and *fiqh* in Nishapur. A few years later – around the year 624/1227 – he turned to the Ismailis, who protected and treasured him as a ‘guest scholar’ until 654/1256, when the Nizārī Ismaili state had to surrender to the Mongols, apparently on Ṭūsī’s own advice.⁶¹

The meeting between the old ‘Aṭṭār and the young Ṭūsī, it should be noted, is in any case far better attested historically than the rival story of an encounter between the old ‘Aṭṭār and the young Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, also supposed to have taken place in Nishapur at that time, but in reality no more than a ‘myth of succession’, as has most recently been argued by Franklin Lewis.⁶² Contrary to this legend, however, it seems to have received very little attention in ‘Aṭṭār scholarship except for chronological purposes, nor does it appear to have particularly attracted Ṭūsī scholars for that matter. Still it indicates, at the very least, that the old Sufi poet did not disdain discussing serious matters of spiritual guidance with a young student of philosophy who was, moreover, a Shi‘i; and it also shows that the latter evidently recognized his importance and kept him in mind throughout the rather extended Ismaili period of

his life until later, when he had become an established Twelver Shi‘i scholar. Ṭūsī’s comment on ‘Aṭṭār’s ‘excellent way of interpreting and understanding the discourse of the [Sufi] masters, the gnostics and spiritual guides’ might be an allusion to the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā* in the first place. Perhaps he also knew the *Dīwān* and the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* which are mentioned immediately after the quote from Ṭūsī by Ibn al-Fuwaṭī; but this may be an additional comment rather than part of the quote. In any case, Ṭūsī’s personal acquaintance with ‘Aṭṭār and his appreciation for his spirituality may partly explain his interest in Sufism during the latter period of his life, which is manifest in such works as the *Awṣāf al-ashrāf* or his correspondence with Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274).

However, it was not in Sufism but in Ismailism that Ṭūsī found the answer to his spiritual quest during a much earlier period in his life, as he himself clearly indicates in his autobiography known as *Sayr wa sulūk*; and from the way he there describes his own spiritual development, it would appear that a certain dissatisfaction with the exoteric teachings to which he was exposed as a youth made him search for whatever he could find out about Ismailism already at the time of his student days.⁶³ This is very interesting because it would open the possibility to speculate that the conversation between the two unequal men in Nishapur might also have touched upon Ismaili subjects. What makes such a speculation less adventurous than it may at first seem is a similarity between the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, as explained by Ṭūsī in the *Taṣawwurāt*, and an admittedly cryptic passage on the same subject in the *Asrār-nāma*. This will be discussed in the concluding part of this essay below.

Meditations on Death and Resurrection in ‘Aṭṭār: Sīmurgh

The theme of death and resurrection is already present in the *Language of the Birds*. As is well known, the birds in search of the Sīmurgh, their king who lives somewhere at the end of the world, behind the cosmic Mount Qāf, must take a long and painful journey upon themselves. They decide to undertake the journey under the guidance of the knowledgeable hoopoe,⁶⁴ who leads them against much hesitation, despair and resistance on their part through seven valleys, the last among which being the Valley of Spiritual Poverty and Annihilation. Only ‘thirty birds’, *sī murgh* in Persian, make it to the end and are after all allowed to face the Sīmurgh, who turns out to be none other than their own Self. Confused about that mirror-experience, which has shaken their sense of identity, the thirty remain in total perplexity (*ḥayrat*). The Sīmurgh Itself makes it finally clear to them, though without addressing them in ordinary language (*bī zabān*), that It is ‘the real Sīmurgh’ (*sīmurgh-i ḥaqīqī-gawhar*) and that they have to obliterate themselves completely in It in order to ‘find themselves in It again’. As a result, they are virtually dead for ‘hundreds of thousands of timeless ages’, until they are ‘given back to themselves’.

In the recent essay just referred to, Fritz Meier notes that God is nowhere playing an active role in this tale. Acknowledging insights gained from Taqī Pūrnāmdāriyān's important study, *Dīdār bā Sīmurgh*,⁶⁵ he admits that the Sīmurgh does not necessarily represent God but might just as well stand for another ultimate reality behind the human soul, such as a Neoplatonic Intellect. He also points to the textual ambiguity of one particular verse, which can give rise to the question whether it is the Throne (of God, 'arsh), or the Mind (hūsh) that is the 'king in the heart'.⁶⁶ However, he believes that 'Aṭṭār himself felt the ambiguity and wished to correct it subsequently in the *Muṣibat-nāma*, especially in those verses where the soul (jān) as the only means to experience God mystically is placed in stark contrast to the 'intellect' ('aql).⁶⁷ But it remains unclear what all this has got to do with a presumed critique of Ismailism, especially the Ismailism of 'Aṭṭār's time. Meier himself offers no direct evidence to support such an interpretation. He simply ventures that the long waiting period of the birds at the end of the journey, until they are indeed 'resurrected', may be a sign of 'Aṭṭār's indignation about the proclamation of the Resurrection by the Nizārī Ismaili grand master Ḥasan II on 17 Ramaḍān 559/8 August 1164. Similarly, the message of the 'Conversations of the King with his Six Sons', i.e., the main tale of the *Ilāhī-nāma*, which is according to Meier the earliest among 'Aṭṭār's didactic poems, would be none other than to prevent them from such a 'concretistic misunderstanding' of their true spiritual aims. To this effect, Meier also argues at length that 'Aṭṭār could have been aware of those shocking events at Alamut by the time they happened, of course presupposing that he was born in 540/1145–1146.⁶⁸

I see no major problem with assuming that 'Aṭṭār had some knowledge of the events at Alamūt, even if he may have been only a boy of six years when they happened. However, in view of what has been said in the preceding paragraph, I am not so sure that he would have felt quite so unhappy about an Ismaili interpretation of his tale of the 'birds', one that might have been ventured by Ṭūsī, for example. In such an hypothetical Ismaili reading, the Sīmurgh could of course be no one else than the eternal 'Imam of the Resurrection', the mysterious focus in which all significant processes, both historical and spiritual, are said to converge, and the person in whom the faithful have to abolish their own identity (*khwudī-yi khwud*) at the end.⁶⁹ As for the hoopoe, it would doubtless be identified with the *Hujjat*, the vicegerent who is, in fact, the one who plays the role of the Prime Intellect. He is also the knowledgeable one who shows the way to the Imam.⁷⁰

But it should also be noted that 'Aṭṭār's birds are not initiated into any particular doctrine after all. What they experience at the end of their journey is of a rather more fundamental kind than doctrinal issues. It is nothing less than the most radical significance of the Sufi notions of *fana'* and *baqa'*, as 'Aṭṭār himself in fact makes quite explicit.⁷¹ And this, I would suggest, reflects an even more archaic type of initiation than the literary genre of 'tales of initiation' referred to earlier.

Mircea Eliade in his well-known studies on ‘patterns of initiation’⁷² cites innumerable examples of more or less similar initiation myths and rituals from virtually all over the world, all having in common the basic elements of trial, symbolic death and resurrection or renewal, so that one could actually speak of an *archetype*. Of particular interest is the frequent occurrence of a sea monster in such a connection. Eliade refers among other examples to an initiatory significance of the story of Jonah and the Fish, but he also draws our attention to actual initiation rituals that have been observed in various ‘primitive’ cultures, where the neophytes literally have to enter into an artificial monster representing a crocodile or a big fish, by which they are supposed to be ‘swallowed up’. He could also have referred to our ‘Aṭṭār! For our poet too, as if to confirm Eliade’s intuition, in one particular piece of spiritual advice in the *Mantīq al-ṭayr* in effect replaces the Sīmurgh with the Big Fish, and the Seven Valleys separating the birds from their goal with Seven Oceans (or seven oceans of fire and seven oceans of light) to be crossed. A variant of the same piece is also found in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, and in both cases, ‘Aṭṭār ascribes it, more or less arbitrarily it would seem, to the classical Sufi Abū’l-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 295/907). The poetic version may be translated as follows:

A pious man once asked Nūrī: ‘How can we find the way from us to union?’
 He answered: ‘We have to cross oceans both of fire and of light, a long way!
 Once you have traversed these seven oceans,
 A fish will swallow you up instantly.
 It is a fish that pulls in the first and the last in one breath,
 A fish [so big] that neither head nor tail [lit: foot] can be seen;
 In the midst of the Sea of Needlessness is its dwelling place.
 When it pulls in both worlds, like a sea monster,
 It swallows the creatures altogether in one breath.’⁷³

As will be noted, this particular piece of advice on the way of reaching ‘union’ (*wiṣāl* – or ‘gnosis’, *ma‘rifat*, according to the variant in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*) ends with the theme of the end of the world, with ultimate *fanā*, and there is no mention of any renewal or resurrection. In the main tale too, ‘Aṭṭār shows himself quite reluctant in fact to say much about the new life of the birds after they have ‘entered’ the Sīmurgh and totally disappeared in It. He merely indicates the fact that they were indeed ‘given back to themselves’ and emerged after ‘timeless ages’ in the new state of *baqā’-yi ba‘d az fanā*. There is a similar reluctance when it comes to the theme of the ‘journey in God’ in the *Muṣibat-nāma*.⁷⁴ To see what ‘Aṭṭār possibly could have meant, we have to turn to the *Book of Mysteries* (*Asrār-nāma*).

The *Asrār-nāma* is a far less playful work than the other three *mathnawīs*. It has no frame-story, and it is almost entirely devoted to meditations about the theme of death and the mysteries of the Hereafter, ‘*une variation crescendo sur le thème de la*

mort' as Christiane Tortel beautifully summarizes it.⁷⁵ According to Reinert, 'Aṭṭār propounds here, more forcefully than in any other work, 'the gnostic concept of the soul's fall and the duty to free it from worldly and material bonds'. In the same scholar's view, 'the impenetrability of celestial and extramundane secrets (*asrār*)' as pictured in ch. 12, is 'more pertinent to the book's title than the rest'.⁷⁶ But 'Aṭṭār's overall concern in this book appears to be the unity of body and soul rather than their separation in the sense of a gnostic dualism. It presupposes a fundamental unity appearing under different 'faces', depending on the circumstances and the capacity of those who can 'see'.⁷⁷ The title refers not only to celestial secrets, but also to those of the Earth, for example in ch. 9, the purity of the clay from which the body of Adam was made⁷⁸ – an old Iranian and Shi'i theme.⁷⁹

A few verses such as these set the tone from the beginning:

Since I am unaware of my own soul,
How could I know anything of God's Abyss?
He has kept the soul in such a deep mystery that
Never He told the soul's secret to anyone.
Your body is alive through the soul but the soul is hidden,
You live through the soul but you do not know the soul.
The soul has no knowledge of the soul so [as to know] what the soul is,
Nor is the body aware of the body so [as to know] who (sic) the body is.⁸⁰

'Aṭṭār himself gives an answer to these questions in one passage which deserves being translated in full here. It is introduced with a brief allusion to a king who passed in great pomp by a man sitting on the road. The king asked: 'Do you want to be Me?' Whereupon the man answered: 'What I want is *not* to be *me*!' Then 'Aṭṭār reflects:

Once the 'Me' no longer remains in you
Duality is no longer in the way of soul and body.
As soon as your soul and your body become luminous
Your body soon turns into soul, your soul into body.
The body because of its opacity is like the back of the mirror
Whereas the soul, luminous, is [the mirror's] face.
Once the back of the mirror is polished pure
The two become one. No difference between 'pure' (*pāk*) and 'dust' (*khāk*)!
Though some faces will be darkened at The Morrow,⁸¹
Some faces will not be [shining] like the moon,
Yet, once the back of the mirror becomes like the face
It is one, even if it moves in one hundred directions.
No one since the cycle of Adam (*dawr-i Ādam*)⁸² has ever explained
to the world

The symbol of the resurrection of the body (*mithāl-i ḥashr-i tan*)
 in a better way.
 I tell you a subtle point of your resurrection clearly
 Just listen, so I may tell it to you graciously:⁸³
 Your body altogether is right now the spiritual entity (*ma‘nā*)
 It appears⁸⁴ here as body, because this is this world (*dunyā*).
 But when the body opens the soul’s fetters
 Your entire body appears there⁸⁵ as soul.
 It will be the same body, but luminous,
 Unless, if you are in disobedience, it will be a darkened⁸⁶ body.
 The hidden spiritual entity becomes altogether manifest.
 Doubtless this is [the meaning of] ‘The Day when the secrets are tried.’⁸⁷
 Since for Muḥammad, the soul was the body and the body, the soul,
 He went on the celestial Journey (*mi‘rāj*) with *this* and with *that*.
 Should you say: ‘I have seen what the body is – dust,
 How, then, can the humble body be the pure soul?’
 I would answer: ‘Look into the tomb!’
 But you are blind. Who did ever address the blind, saying ‘look!’?
 In your eyes, the tomb is a few bricks and a cleft in the ground
 In the eyes of another one [i.e., the Prophet], it is ‘a Garden and a Pit.’⁸⁸
 He who is capable of seeing the Garden in a handful of dust
 Why should he not see⁸⁹ the body as a pure soul?
 But you, as long as you are [confined] within time and space,
 You will never be able to see the body in its soul-ness.⁹⁰

The significance of this passage had been recognized almost sixty years ago by Fritz Meier.⁹¹ He then saw it as containing a doctrine of ‘transubstantiation’ and noted that it would merit a study by itself; but he apparently never came back to it. More attention was drawn to it in 1960 by Furūzānfar. According to Furūzānfar, our passage together with a number of others from the *Asrār-nāma* shows that ‘Aṭṭār was an original philosophical thinker despite his reservations against the mainstream philosophical tradition. In fact, Furūzānfar suggests, rightly in my view, that in this poetic meditation ‘Aṭṭār anticipates what came to be known much later as Mullā Ṣadrā’s (d. 1050/1640–1641) philosophy of ‘intra-substantial movement’ (*al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya*)⁹² – a philosophy which culminates, as do ‘Aṭṭār’s allusions, in a new interpretation of the doctrine of bodily resurrection (*ma‘ād jismānī*). But Furūzānfar does not elaborate either.

A few words of commentary must suffice here. First of all, it should be noted that ‘Aṭṭār is, again, distancing himself from Avicenna by re-affirming the ‘assembly’ of the body (*ḥashr-i tan*), that is, the resurrection, against a purely intellectual concept of the soul’s ‘return’. But he does not teach us a course in ordinary eschatology either. Quite to the contrary, he is offering a bold *ta’wīl*

of this 'symbol' which he claims to be unprecedented since the 'cycle of Adam (*dawr-i Ādam*) – a rather unusual expression which might, if authentic, by itself reveal some Ismaili influence. His 'subtle point' amounts to saying that the present human body, or what appears as such in the present world, is in reality nothing other than the hidden soul, just as the latter, which appears manifestly in the other world, is in reality nothing other than the same body, 'luminous' or 'darkened', depending on the state or true nature of the soul. Whatever the case may be, this body of the other world is quite obviously already the body needed for the 'assembly', so that there appears to be no need for the dead body to be 'resurrected' at any particular time. What provides for the identity of the present body with the body of the 'assembly' is not its original opaqueness to be arbitrarily reconstituted, but its latent luminosity, or 'soul-ness' (*jānī*) as 'Aṭṭār says in v. 723, although this can be 'seen' only by those freed of 'space and time' – like the resurrected 'birds'. Much the same thing could indeed be said of Mullā Ṣadrā's doctrine of 'bodily return'.⁹³

Perhaps the first few lines of our passage allude to an intermediary state between death and resurrection rather than to the resurrection itself. C. Tortel in her note to v. 707 refers to an unidentified 'Sufi saying' and to an *Ishrāqī* concept involving the 'inversion of the body-spirit relation' in such a state, meaning, more precisely, 'the world though which and in which the spirits become bodies and bodies become spirits' or the *ālam al-mithāl*, Henry Corbin's *mundus imaginalis*, as defined by Mullā Ṣadrā's student, Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680).⁹⁴ This is, in fact, a definition of the ontological status of Ibn 'Arabī's intermediate world of 'separate Imagination' (*khayāl munfaṣil*), which Kāshānī supports by adducing numerous Shi'i *akhbār* about the *Barzakh*. Among these traditions, there is notably one from Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, which is cited by Shaykh Mufīd (d. 413/1022) in the first place and has thereby gained the status of standard Shi'i doctrine: 'The spirits of the true believers and the pure unbelievers will be transferred from their bodies to something like them in form (*nuqilat rūḥuhu min haykalihi ilā mithlihi fī al-ṣūra*), and they will be requited for their deeds until the Day of Resurrection. But when God awakens those in the tombs,' the Imam continues, 'He will reconstitute their [original] bodies, restore their spirits to their bodies, and assemble them for full requital of their deeds.'⁹⁵ The latter point is, of course, the crucial one for any 'traditionalist' understanding of the resurrection, whether Shi'i or Sunni.

On the Sunni side, the classical *Kalām* notion of the soul itself being a kind of 'subtle body' (*jism laṭīf*) should be mentioned here, if only because it is discussed at great length by Hujwīrī in his *Kashf al-maḥjūb* and declared to be the one and only conception acceptable for true Sufis. According to this authority, the soul (*rūḥ*) has to be a 'body' for two reasons: firstly, because it would be in competition with God's eternity (*qidam*) if it were not a body; secondly, because it can be visualized in mystical experience, and whatever is visible, is also corporeal.⁹⁶ In

reality, however, nothing could be further from ‘Aṭṭār than this sort of classical theological materialism. The ‘new’ Sufi theory of the soul propounded by Dāya in his *Mirṣād al-‘ibād* (completed in the second version in 620/1223 in Anatolia) is, perhaps not surprisingly, much closer to his views. Despite his protestations against philosophers, Ismailis and other ‘heretics’, Dāya himself would in fact make another interesting candidate for the theory of ‘unconscious Ismailism among Sunni ‘ulamā’ of the Middle Ages’ referred to earlier, though this cannot be demonstrated within the scope of the present essay. His views on the soul and bodily resurrection may be summarized as follows:

What the Sufis call ‘soul’ (*nafs*), he says, is what the physicians call the ‘animal spirit’ (*rūḥ ḥayawānī*): a ‘fine steam exuding from the heart’. As such it is common to all animals. However, the human soul has an additional quality specific to it, namely, permanence (*baqā*), or, more precisely, two kinds of permanence: one ‘which has always been and ever shall be, being the permanence of God’, the other being the permanence which has a beginning in time. The beginningless permanence was acquired directly from God at the ‘time’ of the moulding of Adam’s clay, whereas the other kind of permanence was ‘installed at the time when the spirit became coupled with the body’. Now, as for the ‘resurrection’ (*ḥashr*), Dāya insists almost exactly like ‘Aṭṭār that it will be the same human body of the present world that will be ‘assembled’, though not with the attributes of this world. He explains this by pointing out that the body, consisting of the four classical elements, is ‘predominantly’ of water and earth in this world, whereas it is ‘predominantly’ of air and fire in the other world; and it is this ‘subtle body’ (*qālab laṭīf*) which is gradually made ‘luminous’ (*nūrānī*) so that it does no longer interfere with the spirit (*rūḥ*). Eventually, then, the human being as a whole ‘returns’ to God, receiving the message ‘From the Living King That dies not, to the living king that dies not’ – an anonymous Arabic phrase which ‘Aṭṭār in the *Ilāhī-nāma* also quotes, though in Persian translation.⁹⁷

As for proper Ismaili thought, it should be recalled, first of all, that the theme of resurrection – both in terms of individual *ba‘th* and in terms of universal *qiyāma* – had been one of its central concerns long before the proclamation of the *qiyāma* at Alamūt. This is quite obvious from the works of Abū Ya‘qūb Sijistānī (fourth/tenth century), who more than anyone else was trying to find a middle way between a totally disembodied ‘return of the soul’ and an arbitrary re-creation of the material body on Resurrection Day, regardless of whether he conceived of this middle way in terms implying *tanāsukh*, or not.⁹⁸ But the inseparability of spiritual and bodily existence in the human form is expressed even more forcefully in the few works relevant to the *qiyāma*-doctrine of the Ismailis of Alamut that have survived. In the *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā* one can read seemingly simple but significant statement like this:

One must know that the corporeal world and the spirit are perfect together, and not separate from each other at all. The Lord of the Resurrection *‘alā dhikrihi al-salām* [i.e., Ḥasan II] has stated: body and soul together are body, and soul and body together are soul. Intelligible and sensed together are intelligible; and sensed and intelligible together are sensed. Relativity (*idāfa*) and truth (*ḥaqīqat*) together are relativity, and truth and relativity together are truth. For instance, if you see the soul with the eye of relativity, it is body [and if you see the body with the eye of truth, it is soul]. If you see the intelligible with the eye of relativity, it is sensed, and if you see the sensed with the eye of truth, it is intelligible. If you see the truth with the eye of relativity, it is also relativity, and if you see relativity with the eye of truth, it is also truth. Indeed the oneness of God, if you see it with the eye of relativity, you will have seen the plurality of the creatures; and it should be understood this way in all opposites.⁹⁹

In Ṭūsī's *Taṣawwūrāt*, the idea of spiritual and bodily resurrection (*ḥashr-i arwāḥ wa ḥashr-i ajsād*) is understood and presented at great length in several places as an individual as well as a universal process of 'submission' (*taslīm*) and transformation from the lowest to the highest, where each lower serves as 'body' for the next higher, respectively, up to the 'resurrectional intellect' (*‘aql-i qiyāmatī-yi ākhiratī*).¹⁰⁰ Of course Ṭūsī does this in a way which reveals his Avicennian background. He insists, for example, on the immortality of the human rational soul, as opposed to the vegetative and the animal souls. However, there is an intermediary between the animal and the human soul: the 'imaginal soul' (*naḥs-i khayālī*); and this 'imaginal soul', once united with the human soul, becomes co-eternal with it and shares in both the felicity and misery of the soul in the Hereafter. More precisely, he says, 'when the soul departs from the body, it retains a kind of imaginal body (*hay'atī az khayāl*)... The identity of the human souls in the Hereafter is determined by this, because in this world, human beings are spiritual beings clothed in corporeal bodies (*rūḥānī'ī ast bi-jismānī bāz-pūshīda*) while in the next they are corporeal beings clothed in spirituality (*jismānī'ī bāshad bi- rūḥānī bāz-pūshīda*).'¹⁰¹

The striking similarity of this passage with vv. 714–715 of the *Asrār-nāma*, though admittedly requiring the slight conjecture in the received text I have proposed, can hardly be a matter of pure accident. One could even say that Ṭūsī's wording, with *bāz-pūshīda* in both cases, in a way confirms that *numāyad* is the correct reading not only in v. 715, but also in v. 714. But of course it does not follow from this that Ṭūsī incorporated a point of doctrine into the *Taṣawwūrāt* he learned from 'Aṭṭār. Rather, we have to assume that both he and 'Aṭṭār drew upon an earlier common source. It is therefore important to note that the very same point of doctrine figures already among the 'answers' given by Shahrastānī's *Ḥunafā'* to the 'Sabian' deniers of bodily resurrection.¹⁰² As was pointed out by Hodgson,¹⁰³ this famous 'Dialogue' in Shahrastānī's *Milal wa'l-niḥal* – or rather, its presumed Nizārī source, perhaps the writings of Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124) – is also quoted in other parts of the

Taṣawwurāt; and Shahrastānī was of course available to ‘Aṭṭār. Perhaps, then, it may indeed be concluded that ‘Aṭṭār himself was, not unlike Shahrastānī, doing a little more than just ‘playing’ with Ismaili ideas after all?

Notes

1. Meier, tr. into English by John O’Kane as *Ocean*. This work remains the fundamental study, though Ritter’s use of terms like ‘pantheism’ should not be weighed on a fine philosophical scale.

2. *Asrār-nāma*, ed. S. Gawharīn (Tehran, 1338 Sh./1959), p. 170 (vv. 2857ff.). Cf. also *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1940), p. 75ff.; ed. F. Rūḥānī, (Tehran, 1339 Sh./1960), p. 61 (ch. 4, 1).

3. MN, intro. pp. 22–59. Additional arguments were brought forward by Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī in *Zabūr-i Pārsī: nigāhi bi zindagī wa ghazalhā-yi ‘Aṭṭār* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999), pp. 96–101, where he tentatively identified the author of the spurious *Khusraw-nāma* with a contemporaneous court-poet of the Khwārazmshāh ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad (596/1200–617/1220).

4. B. Reinert, ‘Aṭṭār, Shaikh Farīd-al-Dīn’, *Elr*, vol. 1, pp. 20–25. See JA, p. 40f., and B. Furūzānfar, *Sharḥ-i aḥwāl... ‘Aṭṭār-i Nishāpūrī*, (2nd ed., Tehran, 1353 Sh./1975), pp. 33–37.

5. Reinert, ‘Aṭṭār’.

6. Fritz Meier, *Abū Sa‘īd-i Abū’l-Ḥayr (357–440/967–1049): Wirklichkeit und Legende*, *Acta Iranica* 11 (Leiden/Tehran, 1976), p. 464.

7. *Muṣibat-nāma*, ed. Nūrānī-Wiṣāl (Tehran, 1338 Sh./1959), pp. 59–62.

8. *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 63.

9. Meier, *Abū Sa‘īd*, p. 448.

10. Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Uṣūl min al-kāfi*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ākhūndī (Tehran, 1388 AH/1968–1969), i, p. 178f. (= *K. al-ḥujja*, bāb 5).

11. *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, ed. H. Corbin in *Opera metaphysica et mystica II* (Tehran/Paris, 1331 Sh./1952), pp. 11–15. For a discussion of the relevant passages, see my ‘Suhrawardī between Philosophy, Sufism and Ismailism: A Re-appraisal’ in *Dāneshnāmeḥ*, I/1 (Winter 2003), p. 18f.

12. *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā*, tr. in Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizārī Ismā‘īlīs against the Islamic World* (The Hague, 1955), pp. 284–289. For the date, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990; paperback ed., 1992), p. 326. One MS gives the year 602/1205–1206 (information kindly provided by Dr J. Badakhchani).

13. Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought. A New Persian Edition and English Translation of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī’s Rawḍa-yi taslīm* by S.J. Badakhchani (London, 2005), para 350 (= Ivanow MS pagination 88).

14. For a good discussion of the authenticity of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’* see Barbara L. Helms, ‘Rābi‘ah as Mystic, Muslim and Woman’ in Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young, ed., *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions* (Albany, NY, 1994), vol. 3, pp. 48–53.

15. *Haft Bāb*, tr. Hodgson, p. 295 f. (the translation on p. 295 is incorrect, as the text of a better MS has: *Wa imāmān khwud hama Mawlānā ‘Alī...and*. (Information kindly provided by Dr S.J. Badakhchani.)

16. *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, ed. R.A. Nicholson (London and Leiden, 1905–1907), Part I, p. 10; ed. M. Isti'lāmī (Tehran, 1346 Sh./1967–1968), p. 12f.
17. *Meer*, pp. 330 and 152; *Ocean*, pp. 342 and 157. The German original sounds slightly less apodictic than the English translation.
18. *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, ed. Nicholson, I, p. 4; ed. Isti'lāmī, p. 7.
19. MT, p. 251 (vv. 4547–4579); ed. M.J. Mashkūr (3rd ed., Tehran/Tabriz, 1347 Sh./1968), p. 292.
20. *Meer*, p. 152; *Ocean*, p. 157. Ritter translated only the first two of the above three verses and followed the reading *zabān* instead of *zanān*, of which the latter seems far better.
21. *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 368; *Asrār-nāma*, p. 23.
22. *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 46. According to Shafī'i-Kadkanī, *Zabūr*, pp. 79–81, this also indicates a late date of the *Muṣibat-nāma* since a poet like Khāqānī (d. 591/1195) could not be presented as a celebrity before the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century.
23. *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 364.
24. *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 47.
25. See Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Forty Poems from the Dīvān*, tr. with intros. by Peter Lamborn Wilson and Gholam-Reza Aavani (Tehran, 1977), p. 20. Most recently, Nāṣir-i Khusraw's concept of *sukhan-i nik* has been analysed by Marina L. Reisner (Moscow State University) at the 5th European Conference of Iranian Studies (October, 2003). A full discussion of 'Aṭṭār's possible borrowings from Nāṣir-i Khusraw is not intended here. It would have to address in particular the vexed question of the authenticity of the poetic *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*.
26. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. H. Ritter, pp. 28–30; ed. F. Rūḥānī, pp. 24–25.
27. F. Meier, 'Der Geistmensch bei dem persischen Dichter 'Aṭṭār', *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 13, 1945 (Zurich, 1946), pp. 283–353. English tr. R. Manheim, 'The Spiritual Man in the Persian Poet 'Aṭṭār' in Joseph Campbell, ed., *Spiritual Disciplines: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, (Princeton, NY, 1985), pp. 267–304.
28. Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Paradise, Taṣawwur* 24, para 330 (Ivanow MS p. 82).
29. See B. Reinert, "'Aṭṭār', with references.
30. For example, assuming that Dawlatshāh meant 553 when the transmitted text actually has 513 as the year of 'Aṭṭār's birth. Cf. Shafī'i-Kadkanī, *Zabūr*, p. 65.
31. F. De Blois, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey* (London, 1994), vol. 5, pp. 273ff. See also B. Reinert, "'Aṭṭār', p. 24.
32. B. Furūzānfār, *Sharḥ*, p. 77.
33. F. De Blois, *Persian Literature*, p. 281.
34. *Lubāb al-albāb*, ed. E.G. Browne and Mīrzā Muḥammad-i Qazwīnī (London/Leiden, 1906, 1903), Part 2, pp. 337–339.
35. Shafī'i-Kadkanī, *Zabūr*, pp. 78–83.
36. See Mīrzā Muḥammad Qazwīnī, intro. to the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, ed. R.A. Nicholson (London/Leiden, 1905), Part 1, pp. 4–5.
37. Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*. Tr. from the French by Willard R. Trask (New York, 1960; originally published as *Avicenne et le récit visionnaire* [Tehran/Paris, 1954]), esp. pp. 193–203.
38. On the Sīmurgh in Suhrawardī's 'Tales of Initiation' see Henry Corbin, *L'Archange empourpré: Quinze traités et récits mystiques* (Paris, 1976), index s.v. *Sīmorgh*. Corbin's original definition of a *récit d'initiation* can be found in his 1949 Eranos lecture, 'Le récit d'initiation

et l'hermétisme en Iran (recherche angéologique)', *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 17 (1949), pp. 121–187. See also my 'Suhrawardī's Tales of Initiation', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 107 (1987), pp. 475–486.

39. This date is according to Dāya. See W. Shpall, 'A Note on Najm al-Dīn al-Rāzī and the *Baḥr al-Ḥaqā'iq*' in *Folia Orientalia*, 22 (1981–1984), p. 72.

40. 'Awfī, *Lubāb*, p. 230. On Baghdādī's execution see also M.A. Riyāḥī, ed., *Mirṣād al-'ibād* (Tehran, 1352 Sh./1973), intro., pp. 46–48; and F. Meier, 'Ein Briefwechsel zwischen Šaraf ud-dīn-i Balḥī und Maḡd ud-dīn-i Baḡdādī' in S.H. Nasr, ed., *Mélanges offerts à Henry Corbin* (Tehran, 1977), pp. 321–366, esp. p. 323f.

41. *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, ed. R.A. Nicholson, Part 1, p. 6, l.21; TA, p. 9 (where the name appears as Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad-i Khwārazmī, as in the Uigur version, for which see now *Farīd ad-Dīn al-'Aṭṭār: Parole di Šūfī. Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, tr. Laura Pirinoli, intro. by Pietro Nutrizio [Milano, 2001], p. 32, n. 1, where this form of the name is mistakenly attributed to the Nicholson edition).

42. Shafī'ī-Kadkanī, *Zabūr*, p. 71.

43. See *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, ed. Nicholson, Part I, p. 19 of the English section. The MS in question is from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century; see C.A. Storey, *Persian Literature* 1, p. 930, with ref. to Blochet, 1, p. 403.

44. The full name of Aḥmad-i Khwāri is given here according to Baghdādī's *Tuḥfat al-barara fī al-masā'il al-'ashara* (sic), MS Berlin No. 3088, fol. 2a, 2–3. In the Tehran MS quoted by Shafī'ī-Kadkanī (and, earlier, by M.A. Riyāḥī, ed., *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, intro., p. 48), the name is only slightly different.

45. Shafī'ī-Kadkanī, *Zabūr*, pp. 72–78. *Mujmal-i Faṣīḥī*, ed. M. Farrukh, part 2 (Mashhad, 1340 Sh./1961–1962), p. 285f. Note that Khwāfī places 'Aṭṭār's death in the year 607/1210–11!

46. *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 363f. See also my study of Isfarāyīnī, *Le Révélateur des Mystères (Kāshif al-Asrār)* (Lagrasse, Verdier, 1986), p. 114, n. 78 (with references).

47. *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 54. See also Meer, p. 81f.; *Ocean*, p. 83f.

48. Amīr Iqbāl Sijistānī, *Chihil Majlis*, ed. N.M. Hiravī (Tehran, 1366 Sh./1987–1988), p.184. See also H. Cordt, *Die Sitzungen des 'Alā' ad-dawla as-Simnānī* (Zurich, 1977), p. 147.

49. Dāya, *Mirṣād*, p. 396 and index s.v. *falāsifa*; editor's intro, pp. 32ff. See also the English tr. by H. Algar, *The Path of God's Bondsmen* (Delmar, NY, 1982), index s.v. philosophers, and my review in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 107 (1987), pp. 803–805.

50. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. Ritter, p. 227; ed. Rūḥānī, p. 215; Meer, p. 82; *Ocean*, p. 84; Dāya, *Mirṣād*, ed. Riyāḥī, p. 31; tr. Algar, p. 54.

51. See Shpall, 'A Note', p. 72.

52. Julian Baldick, 'Persian Šūfī Poetry up to the Fifteenth Century' in G. Morrison, ed., *History of Persian Literature from the Beginning of the Islamic Period to the Present Day, Handbuch der Orientalistik* (Leiden/Cologne, 1981), pp. 113–132.

53. A. Hartmann, *An-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (1180–1225): Politik, Religion, Kultur in der späten 'Abbāsidenzeit* (Berlin/New York, 1975), pp. 250–254 and *passim*. See also her article on Suhrawardī in *Der Islam*, 62/ 1 (1985), pp. 71–97. A 14th-century Persian translation of the *Rashf al-naṣā'ih*, ed. N.M. Hiravī, is available (Tehran, 1365 Sh./1986–1987).

54. A. Hartmann, 'Ismā'īlitische Theologie bei Sunnītischen 'Ulamā' des Mittelalters?' in *Ihr alle aber seid Brüder. Festschrift für A.Th. Khoury zum 60. Geburtstag* (Würzburg/Altenberge, 1990), pp. 190–206.

55. See Daftary, *The Ismā'ilīs*, pp. 405ff. Also C.E. Bosworth, 'The Political and Dynastic History of the Iranian World (AD 1000–1217)' in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 5, (Cambridge, 1968), p. 168f.

56. Furūzānfar, *Sharḥ*, pp. 9, 75, 77. The decisive reference is to the *Ilāhī-nāma*, ch. 17, 6; ed. Ritter, p. 277; ed. Rūḥānī, p. 219.

57. *Muṣibat-nāma*, pp. 38–40.

58. F. Meier, 'Ismailiten und Mystik im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert', ed. from the *Nachlass* by Gudrun Schubert and Bernd Radtke, in *Persica*, 16 (2000), pp. 9–29.

59. Meier, 'Ismailiten', pp. 11, 18, 21–23. Meier refers to W. Ivanow's edition of *The Rawdatu't-Taslim commonly called Tasawwurat by Nasirud-din Tusi* (Leiden, 1950), pp. 121, 123 and 127 (meaning 128?) of Ivanow's manuscript pagination (= paras 488, 491, and 515, respectively, in the new edition by S.J. Badakhchani) to support his interpretation. But the first two passages do not refer to Ismailis at all, since these are descriptions of the doctrines of the 'pure' spirit-worshippers and the star-worshippers (probably = Shahrastānī's 'Sabians'), both of whom are subsequently criticized for their lack of recognition of the supremacy of a *human* intermediary between man and God, i.e., the Imam. As for the third reference, it places the divine Command or Imperative (*ḥayd-i amr*), not God directly, 'at the top' of the Prime Intellect. Meier seems to have been a victim of Ivanow's very approximative translation efforts in this case (cf. Ivanow, English tr., p. 185). In fact, Ṭūsī's endeavour in his Ismaili writings is to show the superiority of Ismaili doctrine even over *falsafa*, precisely because it places the Imam *qua* divine *amr* and 'First Teacher' above the Prime Intellect of the philosophers. For more details see my 'Khvāja Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (597/1201–672/1274), Ismailism, and *Ishrāqī* Philosophy', in N. Pourjavady and Z. Vesel, ed., *Naṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī: Philosophe et Savant du XIIIe Siècle*, (Tehran, 2000), pp. 13–30.

60. *Talkhīṣ Majma' al-ādāb fī mu'jam al-aḳāb*, ed. M. Jawād (Damascus, 1962–1967), part 4, 3, p. 461ff. (nr. 2554).

61. For a thorough overview of Ṭūsī's controversial role as a guest of the Ismā'ilīs, see Daftary, *The Ismā'ilīs*, pp. 408–426.

62. F.D. Lewis, *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teaching and Poetry of Jalāl al-Dīn Rumi* (Oxford, 2000), p. 64ff. See also F. Meier, *Bahā'-i Walad* (Leiden, 1989), p. 41.

63. Naṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Contemplation and Action: The Spiritual Autobiography of a Muslim Scholar*. A New Edition and English Translation of *Sayr wa Sulūk* by S.J. Badakhchani (London/New York, 1998), intro., pp. 1ff.

64. Cf. Qur'ān 27:20ff.

65. *Dīdār bā sīmurgh: haft maqāla dar 'irfān wa shi'r wa andīsha-i 'Aṭṭār* (Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995).

66. MT, p. 63 (v. 1117); ed. Mashkūr, p. 72. See Meier, 'Ismailiten', pp. 16f. and 24ff.

67. Meier, 'Ismailiten', pp. 15–18 and 24–29. The reference is to *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 363. Also see Meier, p. 82ff.; *Ocean*, p. 84f. For a fuller account of relevant passages, see Suhaylā Sārimī, *Muṣṭalahāt-i 'irfānī wa mafāhīm-i bar-jasta dar zabān-i 'Aṭṭār* (Tehran, 1373 Sh./1994), pp. 152–176 (*jān*), p. 237f. (*khīrad*) and pp. 469–481 (*'aql*).

68. Meier, 'Ismailiten', p. 20f.

69. Naṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *The Paradise*, cf. *Tasawwur* 21, para 235, and *Tasawwur* 24, para 350 (= Ivanow MS pag. 60 and 88). According to a later Ismaili commentary upon

Shabistari's *Gulshan-i rāz*, the Sīmurgh is the spirit of the Imam, and Mt Qāf is his body. See H. Corbin, *Trilogie ismaélienne* (Tehran/Paris, 1340 Sh./1961), Persian, p.152; French, pp. [123ff.]

70. For the rank of the Ḥujjat, see esp. *The Paradise, Taṣawwur* 24, paras 330 and 383ff. (= Ivanow MS, pag. 82 and 97f.).

71. MT, p. 237 (vv. 4270–73); ed. Mashkūr, p. 277.

72. Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (New York, 1965); originally published as *Naissances mystiques: Essais sur quelques types d'initiation* (Paris, 1959). Idem., *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (London, 1968), ch. 9 (chapter originally published as 'Mystère et régénération spirituelle dans les religions extra-européennes' in *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, 23, 1954 (Zurich, 1955), pp. 57–98.

73. MT, vv. 4126–4131; ed. Mashkūr, p. 268. Variant in *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, ed. Nicholson, 2, p. 54 (with the preferable reading of manuscript C); TA, p. 473. See also Meer, p. 613f.; *Ocean*, p. 633. The story of the big fish is not found as such in the classical Sufi sources on Nūrī, nor in his own *Maqāmāt al-qulūb*, though he does use the images of the 'ocean' of 'fire' and 'light'; see Paul Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique* (Beirut, 1970), pp. 316–348. For other Sufi traditions involving descriptions of a seven-fold mystic path of initiation see *Le Révélateur*, especially pp. 111–113.

74. *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 363ff. Meer, pp. 633ff.; *Ocean*, pp. 652ff.

75. Tortel, *Le Livre des Secrets présenté et traduit du persan* (Paris, 1985), p. 10.

76. Reinert, 'Aṭṭār', p. 24.

77. *Asrār-nāma*, esp. vv. 743, 748–749, 817.

78. *Asrār-nāma*, vv. 1214–1218. See also *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 13: 2–5.

79. H. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shī'ite Iran*, tr. Nancy Pearson (Princeton, NY, 1977); originally published as *Terre céleste et corps de résurrection: de l'Iran Mazdéen à l'Iran Shī'ite* (Paris, 1960).

80. *Asrār-nāma*, vv. 17–19 and 62.

81. Qur'ān 3:106.

82. The printed edition mentions no variants for this typically Ismaili term. However, MS Basel, Tschudi Collection, now University Library, M V 31 (115b, margin 5) has the neutral *waqt-i Ādam*.

83. Reading *bī mann*, a suggestion kindly made to me by Prof. Jalīl Tajlīl, Tehran.

84. Reading *numāyad*, a very slight conjecture for *na-mānad* of the printed text (v. 714), which is based on the two oldest MSS from Konya but is by no means free from errors. The variants *bi-mānad* as indicated there, or *ānjā* (instead of *īnjā*) *bi-mānad*, as the MS Basel (115b, margin 10) has it, do not make good sense in the context, certainly not what might be called a 'subtle point'!

85. Reading *ānjā* with the variants.

86. Reading *mukaddar*, with MS Basel (115b, 14). The printed *magudhar* is clearly an error.

87. Qur'ān 86:9.

88. Allusion to a *ḥadīth* (cf. Rūmī, ed. Nicholson, *Mathnawī*, 4:3536; ed. Isti'lāmī (Tehran, 1370 Sh./1991–1992), v. 3537.

89. Reading *na-bīnad* with the variants.

90. *Asrār-nāma*, vv. 706–723. Cf. C. Tortel, *Le Livre*, p. 69f.

91. Meier, 'Der Geistmensch', pp. 305f., n. 6 ('The Spiritual Man', pp. 282f.), which also contains a partial translation on the basis of the Basel manuscript.

92. Furūzānfar, *Sharḥ*, p. 42f.

93. For Mullā Ṣadrā's concept of 'bodily resurrection', see especially the final chapter of his *magnum opus*, *Al-Asfār al-arba'a* (Qum, 1379 [1959–1960]), 9, pp. 185–382 and his *Risāla fī'l-ḥashr*, recently translated into French by C. Jambet, *Se rendre immortel suivi du Traité de la résurrection* (Cognac, 2000).

94. Tortel, *Le Livre*, p. 69, n. 1. Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna* (Tehran, n.d.), pp. 70ff.; tr. Corbin, *Spiritual Body*, pp. 176–179.

95. *Kalimāt maknūna*, p. 143; Mufid, *Sharḥ 'aqā'id al-Ṣadūq aw Taṣḥīḥ al-i'tqād* (Tabriz, 1371/1330 [1951–1952]), p. 39. Mufid rejects the pre-existence of the soul, still taught by his master Ṣadūq, but instead insists on a kind of post-mortem transfer of the souls to bodies 'other than those which can be seen rotting in the grave'. Cf. Martin J. McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaykh al-Mufid* (Beirut, 1986), p. 270f. By contrast, his younger contemporary Ibn Sīnā rejects all conceivable kinds of *tanāsukh*, including the idea of an immediate transfer of the soul to a 'subtle body' (*jism laṭīf*), which he attributes to the famous philosopher and astrologer of Ḥarrān, Thābit b. Qurra (d. 288/901); see Avicenna's *ar-Risāla al-Aḍḥawīya fī'l-ma'ād*, ed. Ḥasan 'Āṣī (Beirut, 1404/1984), pp. 118 and 158. Note, however, that Mufid's own concept of the soul as a 'non-composed substance' (*al-jawhar al-basīṭ*; e.g. *Masā'il Sarawīyya* in *Awā'il al-maqālāt*, printed with *Sharḥ*, p. 51) has more in common with Ibn Sīnā's than with the materialist conception shared by most *Mutakallimūn*.

96. Hujwīrī (Jullābī), *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, ed. V.A. Zhukovskii (repr. Tehran, 1336 Sh./1957), pp. 335–341; tr. R.A. Nicholson (Leiden/London, 1911), pp. 260–266.

97. *Mirṣād*, ed. Riyāḥī, pp. 174f. and 405–407; tr. Algar, *The Path*, pp. 191f. and 391–393. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. Ritter, p. 362, 10; ed. Rūḥānī, p. 283, 7812. For a full descriptive analysis of Dāya's doctrine see my 'Stages of God-cognition and the Praise of Folly according to Najm-i Rāzī (d. 1256)', *Sufi*, 47 (Autumn, 2000), pp. 31–43.

98. For a discussion see Corbin's introduction to his edition of Sijistānī's *Kashf al-maḥjūb* (Tehran/Paris, 1327/1949), pp. 5–25, and my introduction to the partial translation in S.H. Nasr, ed., *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, 2 (Oxford, 2001), pp. 71–79. See also W. Madelung, 'Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī and Metempsychosis' in *Iranica Varia: Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater* (Leiden, 1990), pp. 131–143.

99. *Haft bāb*, beginning of ch. 5, tr. Hodgson, *Order*, p. 312, modified here in accordance with the MS used for a forthcoming new edition by Dr S.J. Badakhchani. The phrase in square brackets is, however, supplied from the old text translated by Hodgson.

100. *Paradise*, *Taṣawwūr* 20, 21 and 23.

101. *Paradise*, *Taṣawwūr* 8, paras 54–56 (Ivanow MS pag. 21). See also *Taṣawwūr* 21, paras 242 (Ivanow 61) and 258 (Ivanow 64f.).

102. *Al-Milal wa'l-niḥal*, ed. M.S. Kaylānī (Cairo, 1387/1967), 2, p. 31f. French tr. Guy Monnot in *Shahrastani: Livre des religions et des sectes*, 2, (Leuven, 1993), p. 133f.

103. Hodgson, *Order*, p. 332f. See also Monnot, *Shahrastani* 2, intro., pp. 11ff.; Diane Steigerwald, *La pensée philosophique et théologique de Shahrastānī (m. 548/1153)*, (Québec, 1997), index s.v. ḥanīf(s).

Of Scent and Sweetness: ‘Aṭṭār’s Legacy in Rūmī, Shabistarī and Ḥāfiẓ

HUSAYN ILAHI-GHOMSHEI
translated by Leonard Lewisohn¹

In this mall full of perfume shops, where women try
the fragrant scents, each sort and brand, savouring each ware,
don’t gad about, but go sit down in the stall
of one who sells the luscious sweetness there.

Rūmī²

‘Aṭṭār the poet was as the Spirit;
Sanā’ī the sight of both its eyes.
Our precedent we take
From both those poets:
We walk Sanā’ī’s path,
We tread in ‘Aṭṭār’s steps.

Rūmī³

EXORDIUM

‘Aṭṭār remains the supreme raconteur in the sacred oratory of the Persian Sufi tradition. Like Shahrzād, the famous heroine of the Arabian Nights, he keeps the candle of the lovers’ night-vigil lit with his colourful tales and sweet verses, lest wayfarers on the path of love journeying through the dark night of the world succumb to slumber. First, he ensnares and enchants us by his verse, after which he sets us to work grooming and combing apart the tangled ringlets of the curls of the pre-eternal Beloved – She who is at once all seven levels, or seven cities, or seven valleys, of Love – an Enchantress who possesses all the lore of the divine mysteries, Mistress of Sufi gnosis. The enchantment evoked by the recital of ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry finds its perfect reprise in the opening invocation of Ḥāfiẓ’s famous *ghazal*:

Friends come and let's unbind
 The tangled curls of the Friend.
 The night promises to be sweet –
 With this romance let's make it last.⁴

‘Aṭṭār flourished in a day and age in which the Mongols drenched the earth with the blood of millions of innocent victims throughout the province of Khurasan. Although his blood was also spilled on the earth at their hands, he himself paid the blood-price for his murder, drop by drop, verse by verse, offering us the wondrous spiritual musk of the Mongolian gazelle from his pen:

O ‘Aṭṭār, in every line of your verse
 a fragrance like the musk-gazelle's navel
 which you disperse upon the world
 reveals a myriad mysteries' largesse.
 Your poetry impassions the world's lovers,
 inconstant forever with skittish fervour;
 A whiff of your verse makes redolent
 the whole world with spice and scent.⁵

The same sweet fragrance of love whose celestial odour and heavenly aroma ‘Aṭṭār here implicitly evokes also indues his verse with this same scent of musk:

You've caused a secret Moon to hide
 Inside a little pod of musk –
 Then made the musk itself distraught,
 Caught in shafts of lunar light.⁶

The fragrance of your heavy tress
 Has filled the world with loveliness.
 Alas! You set yourself all at once
 Aside and then vacate your place.
 The fragrance of your musky hair
 Whose scent the breeze bears everywhere
 Has thrown up out a delirious gurgle
 Beneath the restless ocean of the world.⁷

The same fragrance of the mystical musk again is *explicitly* evoked by Rūmī in this verse in which he advises and admonishes us about its most efficacious use:

Don't rub this musk upon your flesh and face –

Anoint the heart with it instead.
 What's that musk? The Name
 Most pure, of Majesty sublime.⁸

‘Aṭṭār is the leader of every spiritual company dedicated to the diffusion and olfaction of this Sufi musk, whose fragrance intoxicated the hearts and minds of those who sat in the circle of love which was later formed by Rūmī, Sa‘dī, Shabistarī, and Jāmī. In the Persian Sufi poetical canon, ‘Aṭṭār remains the chief perfumer and his wild, ever-redolent scent, throbs and stirs the soul throughout Ḥāfiẓ’s verse:

Press your kiss on the lip of the cup;
 And then let drunkards drink up a sip.
 With this gesture of grace and elegance
 Revive the hearts of all your friends.⁹

Although the perfume purveyed by ‘Aṭṭār hails geographically from Persia, when wafted into the West today, it still conveys the same pungent scent, quickening effect and the same celestial fragrance of spiritual musk indued with the perfume of the divine love, which the greatest of the Arab Sufi poets, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, evokes in this couplet:

If the fragrance of this wine were wafted once from the East to the West,
 So those whose sense of smell had died were graced by it,
 A whiff of it would revive and cure all loss of sense.¹⁰

And yet ‘Aṭṭār-the-perfumer was not the first entrepreneur to make a literary sensation in the Sufi perfume market. His verse had many illustrious forebears in the canon of Persian poetry, including the likes of Firdawsī, Sanā’ī, Niẓāmī and even Nāṣir-i Khusraw. Albeit neither Firdawsī nor Nāṣir-i Khusraw were mystics in any normative sense of the word, yet all these poets who preceded him, mystics or not, scented him with the incense of their passionate rhyme and reason so that his every word literally reeks with the musk of their eloquence. From all these perfumers in the Bazaar of Love, hawking the wares of their marvellous diction, ‘Aṭṭār adopted whatever he could, following the scented trail of their sweet verse, setting out large cakes of sugar, diverse varieties of sweetmeats and confectionery on the tablecloth of his epic and lyric poetry to entertain us – his guests. And yet, whatever he took in the way of ideas and expressions from them – which our dear literary critics confidentially announce to be his ‘borrowings and influences’ – did not comprise mere imitative phrases, mimed and rhymed tropes, nor for that matter, smartly coined, clever turns of speech. In this sense, the following verse by Maḥmūd Shabistarī, frankly acknowledging the ‘influence’ of ‘Aṭṭār upon his own

great poem – *The Garden of Mystery* – rings equally true of ‘Aṭṭār’s poetic oeuvre vis-à-vis his illustrious forebears:

My verse is made by hazard and not design;
I’m not a demon who’s tapped an angel’s line.¹¹

The principal capital and main source-spring of inspiration which any poet draws upon is personal experience. ‘Aṭṭār, being a poet on a grand scale, expresses not just experience drawn from the understanding and the senses, but his personal spiritual realization. ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry is thus ‘the fruit of direct certitude’, as Rūmī described his own verse, and ‘not merely a matter of argumentative demonstration or imitation’. After the death of ‘Aṭṭār (d. 618/1221 or 627/1229) one can find very few poets in the Persian language who had not, in one way or another, utterly succumbed to the influence of his style. Among the vast troupe of his followers and imitators, however, three particular poets stand out. These are, in chronological order: Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), Maḥmūd Shabistārī (d. after 1340), and Ḥāfiẓ (d. c.1389).

‘Aṭṭār’s Scent in Rūmī’s Verse

Rūmī’s verse is steeped more deeply in the fragrance of ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry than either of the last-mentioned authors. His *Mathnawī*, which is the natural continuation of the *mathnawīs* of ‘Aṭṭār, represents the high point of all the previous Persian Sufi epics that began with the *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqat* of Sanā’ī, and was then expanded and elaborated upon in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* and other *mathnawīs*. ‘Aṭṭār’s main *mathnawīs* – that is, the *Asrār-nāma*, the *Ilāhī-nāma*, the *Muṣibat-nāma*, and, more important than these, the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* – set down the firm foundations upon which the towering structure of Rūmī’s monumental edifice, the *Mathnawī*, was later erected. To this influence, Rūmī’s verse, cited in the epigraph of this essay, bears ample witness:

‘Aṭṭār the poet was as the Spirit;
Sanā’ī the sight of both its eyes.
Our precedent we take
From both those poets:
We walk Sanā’ī’s path,
We tread in ‘Aṭṭār’s steps.

‘Aṭṭār was ‘the Spirit’, since his words evoked the grand spiritual revival of the Persian Sufi tradition. His verse was like the breath of the Messiah, resurrecting the dead stranded in the veil of passion, quickening them, giving them new life, guiding

them through the seven valleys of love. Sanā'ī represented 'both eyes' of spiritual insight, which contemplated the higher realm of wisdom and gnosis from whose heights the Sage of Ghazna divulged so many of the divine realities.

Rūmī, like 'Aṭṭār, was also an expert raconteur in the assembly of mystical adepts. But besides being a master of the mysteries of intuitive spiritual taste (*dhawq*) and a supreme poet-storyteller, Rūmī had a higher didactic aim in setting forth the *dicta* and *exempla* of the Sufis. By setting the snare and baiting it, he intended to catch us fowls fortunate enough to catch a whiff of the bait – which is nothing less than his deep contemplative experiences, his meditative reflections, his mystical insights and states. The snare which he set was aimed not at entrapment but was directed at our emancipation and realization of a higher consciousness. As such, the elements of ecstasy, intoxication, passion and, in general, mystical awareness, are more strongly evoked and evinced in the work of Rūmī than that of 'Aṭṭār. Rūmī's flights of poetic imagination are far loftier, the eloquence of his poetic expression more refined and sophisticated than that of 'Aṭṭār. 'Aṭṭār always keeps a tight grip on the reins of speech. His particular style of verse is sober: he proceeds methodically, step by step. In this respect, his ability to preserve a story line and hold together the unity of the narrative is simply inimitable. Having finished a story, he rounds it off with a moral, before returning to further disquisition on the Sufi teachings relating to that moral. In contrast, Rūmī appears mounted on a wild colt, gripping the reins of speech more loosely, so that he seems to let the steed of his verse gallop on of its own accord. Often he lets the reins of his discourse – the thread of his story – drop from his hand entirely. Taking flight on the Pegasus of his own transcendent inspiration, he soars into the heavens of higher imagination and understanding, whence he brings back for us – plodding pedestrian wayfarers – strange spiritual insights full of subtle, celestial modes of thought. When from that Empyrean he finally descends to tread alongside us common mortals upon the face of the earth again, he picks up the reins and resumes the thread of his tale.¹²

Setting these differences in literary style and mystical expression between the two poets aside, the *Mathnawī* of Rūmī lies, as was mentioned above, directly in the natural tradition of the *mathnawīs* of 'Aṭṭār. Most of the time, Rūmī's verse appears as the proper culmination of the Sufi epics of 'Aṭṭār. The literary continuity between the two poets becomes more evident when one considers just how many stories and various mystical allegories Rūmī adopted directly from 'Aṭṭār's *Memoirs of the Saints*. Although Rūmī often seems to be more successful in the art of story-telling and in the process of adducing a moral to a tale, the discourse of 'Aṭṭār has its own unique flavour and fragrance. Thus one cannot simply discard the *mathnawīs* of 'Aṭṭār and replace them with the 'spiritual couplets' of Rūmī. In fact, it might even be said that the mystical, detached and spontaneous humour of 'Aṭṭār in respect to the exposition of spiritual truths in certain instances, excels

even the highest flights of Rūmī. The following verses from various *mathnawīs* of ‘Aṭṭār amply prove this:

What man knows
 what’s worth more
 in this deep sea –
 pebbles of sand,
 or coral cornelian.¹³

Not a soul is left alive in all
 the long caravan, just so the crow
 of a crow be kept well fed and full.¹⁴

A hundred thousand infants’ heads
 were lopped off from the neck
 so Moses in the seer’s inward sight
 might just once become adept.¹⁵

Likewise, this sublime invocation, with its inimitable passion and exceptional originality, could never have been uttered by anyone other than ‘Aṭṭār:

Give me an ounce of pain, O you
 Who cure all pain, for left without
 Your pain, my soul will die.
 To heretics let heresy apply,
 And to the faithful – grant them faith;
 But for the heart of ‘Aṭṭār, let
 One ounce of your pain remain.¹⁶

Such inimitable maxims minted in verse occur by no means infrequently in the works of ‘Aṭṭār. His ‘high art’ of storytelling and his theatrical presentation of the frame-story’s key themes and of moral points couched in peerless poetic aphorisms easily enables the reader to rend the veils of spiritual heedlessness. *In this particular aspect*, ‘Aṭṭār excels even Rūmī!

But detecting and exposing the particular *scent* of ‘Aṭṭār’s language within the poetic *dicta* of Rūmī is well beyond the scope of any single essay. Only a full monograph could do such a theme justice. Here, the presence of ‘Aṭṭār in Rūmī’s *Mathnawī* can only be given by way of certain brief indications. A Nishapurian fragrance is sometimes directly imbibed from the verse of our Master of Konya, as in the first book of the *Mathnawī*, where Rūmī inserts this verse of ‘Aṭṭār in the prose caption heading his story to illustrate the topic he wishes to expound, using ‘Aṭṭār as a ‘proof-text’ to make his point:

O soul that's lapsed and bound in ignorance
 You know not what you are, so roll and chafe
 In dust and blood, and fret to death with grief:
 That's but your fate. And yet to heart-adepts
 Sweet are the uses of adversity – though poisonous,
 To them the hemlock tastes sweet and luscious.¹⁷

Rūmī renders a lengthy exposition on this one couplet of 'Aṭṭār's in twelve couplets of his own, two of which are as follows:

Since in you the tyrant Nimrod lurks
 Don't take a step into fire. Become first
 Like Abraham, hid safe within the furnace.
 Don't take a leap in pride and arrogance
 Out in the sea, since you're no sailor nor
 Good swimmer. When men who are inferior
 Get gold in hand, it turns at once to dust
 But perfect men turn earth into gold-dust.¹⁸

How thoroughly Rūmī's verse is steeped in 'Aṭṭār's is obvious to anyone attuned to the diction of the two poets. Although Rūmī rarely mentions 'Aṭṭār by name as he does here, wherever he does it is always with the utmost veneration. While no doubt he considered it redundant to cite the source of his inspiration for each verse in every case or explicitly state that this or that line or image was adapted from his Nishapurian forebear, the earlier poet's all-pervasive influence on him he directly acknowledged in the following oft-cited verse:

'Rūmī' is my name, from
 Whence I'm known as
 The 'Prince of Rum',
 Although from all my verse
 A luscious sweetness pours –
 In rhetoric and *belles lettres*
 To 'Aṭṭār I'm a slave.¹⁹

Numerous instances can be found throughout the *Mathnawī* where Rūmī has adapted tales from 'Aṭṭār's epic poems and re-created them in his own language. Sometimes he keeps the very same moral but retells the parable; other times, he changes the moral to suit his own particular exposition. By way of demonstrating both the similarities and the differences with regard to the two poets' varying narrative styles and modes of mystical interpretation of Sufi stories, the following tale, where Rūmī adopts and re-interprets the tale of the old harpist that was originally

told by 'Aṭṭār in the *Muṣibat-nāma*,²⁰ may be cited. 'Aṭṭār relates that an aged musician had lost all his admirers, fans and generous patrons who had hitherto been willing to support him. Finding no one interested any longer in paying him to strike up a tune, he went to a mosque, where he entreated God: 'O Lord, for Your sake alone do I now pluck my harp. So it is You Who must pay me'. At that very moment it happened that a disciple of the great Sufi saint Abū Sa'īd b. Abī'l-Khayr (357/967–440/1048) sent a charity offering of one hundred dinars to the saint. Although Abū Sa'īd's disciples coveted the money for the expenses of their hospice, with his powers of clairvoyance, the saint ordered that the alms be distributed to the destitute musician who had taken refuge in the mosque.²¹

In Rūmī's narration of this story in the *Mathnawī*, he expounds a number of subtle philosophical and theosophical points not found in 'Aṭṭār's tale. He describes, for instance, the effect of music on the human spirit, soul, and the saints, and even discusses such matters as the manner in which the Day of Judgment will occur. He raises many other issues as well which give his account of the story a deeper philosophical edge than 'Aṭṭār's narration of the tale. Historically, he transposes the story back five centuries earlier, making it refer to the reign of the Caliph 'Umar in the seventh century instead of Abū Sa'īd who flourished four centuries later.

Similarly, Rūmī retells in his *Mathnawī* the tale of Ayāz, the favourite slave of Maḥmūd of Ghazna, that was first recounted in Persian verse by 'Aṭṭār in the *Muṣibat-nāma*.²² He preserves 'Aṭṭār's basic narrative structure but elaborates and ornaments the tale in his own unique, colourful way. As Rūmī relates, legend has it that Sulṭān Maḥmūd put a priceless pearl (or, in 'Aṭṭār's account, a precious ruby goblet) into the hand of his chief vizier and ordered him to smash it to pieces. Instead of immediately obeying the order, the vizier smartly exclaimed, 'What a pity to break such a priceless pearl!' In turn, the sultan presented the same pearl to various other courtiers in his audience chamber. Feigning deference to his will, they all answered him in the same vein, taking their cue from the vizier, and politely protesting the irrationality of the king's direct command. In this fashion, the pearl was bandied about the room and passed from hand to hand amongst the courtiers, but none found the courage within themselves to smash the priceless stone. At last, the precious pearl landed in the palm of the sultan's favourite slave Ayāz, who straightaway picked up a stone and smashed it to pieces. Heaving a collective sigh of regret, everyone in the room turned on him and demanded, 'How could you have been so senseless as to have broken the sultan's priceless, unique gem?' 'Indeed', replied Ayāz, 'I smashed the pearl, but you shattered the precious stone of the king's command – and that is of far dearer, far greater worth.'

In both poets' account of the tale, the sultan is symbolic of God, while Ayāz the slave represents the true lover of God.

Besides the foregoing tale, there is the story of Maḥmūd and Ayāz and the latter's old sheepskin coat, first recounted by 'Aṭṭār in the *Muṣibat-nāma*,²³ which Rūmī

recounts and redesigns in his *Mathnawī*.²⁴ Another important love story was also adopted by Rūmī from ‘Aṭṭār’s *Muṣibat-nāma*.²⁵ It relates to a king who rebuked Majnūn, ‘With all the beautiful women in the world, what are all these tales of your passion for one of our local girls? Why have you raised such a ruckus over a simple girl like Laylā?’ Rūmī retells the story as follows:

Those witless idiots to Majnun said of Laylā:
 ‘In fact, she doesn’t have all that much beauty.
 There’re many girls who vie with her in loveliness,
 All just like moons, and in this town they’re numerous.’
 ‘The form of women,’ Majnun said, ‘is just a cup.
 God gives me wine to drink through her face and shape.
 From Laylā’s shape, God gives you vinegar to taste,
 Lest Love lay hand on you and give your ear a twist.’²⁶

The vast number of other tales, which have all been adopted from ‘Aṭṭār’s *mathnawīs* by Rūmī, unfortunately make too long a list to discuss or even mention here. Aside from Rūmī’s creative borrowing of tales and legends from ‘Aṭṭār, which demonstrates the close relationship between the two poets, Rūmī also paid careful attention to the respective contexts and contents of ‘Aṭṭār’s stories. The similarities between the two poets are actually so great that one could almost say that Rūmī actually had ‘Aṭṭār’s mystical *mathnawīs* and teachings directly before his eyes or indirectly present in his mind when composing his grand Sufi epic.²⁷

Let us briefly consider the impact of ‘Aṭṭār’s *Conference of the Birds* on Rūmī’s *Mathnawī*. If Rūmī did not literally recount the story of the journey of the birds and their trials and tribulations passing through the seven cities of love, one can nonetheless observe the influence and impact of ‘Aṭṭār’s *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* ‘between the lines’ of the *Mathnawī*. Not only ‘between the lines’: there are many instances in the *Mathnawī* where Rūmī alludes directly to ‘Aṭṭār’s avian epic.²⁸ In fact, it may be said that Rūmī followed quite directly in the footsteps of ‘Aṭṭār, making his own way through the seven valleys of love, enumerating the stages one by one. In certain verses Rūmī more or less hints at the vicissitudes that are experienced when traversing the various valleys, utilizing his own individual lexicon and vision, but disregarding ‘Aṭṭār’s formal narrative structure.

Let us just look at Rūmī’s vision of one – the first – of these valleys, that of Spiritual Quest (*ṭalab*). In the following verses, gleaned from various books in the *Mathnawī*, he offers his own view and original approach to this valley:

The quest itself is the best
 Pathfinder of the quest.

Take both your hands:
Apply them to the quest.²⁹

Discomforts of the quest
Will guide a seeker at last
to find his lover's quarter.
So through pain and grief
Mary found her relief
at the palm-tree's base.³⁰

O Lord, you are the source,
the genesis of this quest in us,
Just as freedom from injustice is
but a kind grace of your justice.³¹

Your dry lips issue you this communiqué:
'This fitful fever leads to *aqua vitae*.' ...
This quest is like the rooster's singing at dawn
And thus declaring the arrival of morning.³²

Each of 'Aṭṭār's other valleys, such as 'self-sufficiency' (*istighnā*), 'Divine Unity' (*tawḥīd*), 'bewilderment' (*ḥayrat*), and 'annihilation' (*fanā*), Rūmī describes after his own fashion, although he discards the formal narrative framework of 'Aṭṭār's allegory. In the history of Persian Sufi poetry perhaps the most celebrated verses ever written about Love are the following lines describing the 'Valley of Love' in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*:

Reason is smoke but Love's like fire in this valley:
When Love comes in, reason at once flees away.
In Love's hot passion and melancholic frenzy
Reason is a master without any authority:
Love's work is not made to measure
Of reason born of mother nature.³³

Rūmī directly paraphrases these verses of 'Aṭṭār in the following verses from the *Mathnawī*:

Reason's just a sentinel, but let the Sultan walk by there,
And watch miserable reason crawl beneath the stair.³⁴

When it comes to exegesis of *Eros*
Reason is as good as an ass

That slips in mud. In exegesis
of lovers' rules and on Love's rite.
Eros alone discourses right.³⁵

Rūmī's monumental collection of lyric poetry, the *Dīwān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, is also heavy-laden with the musky fragrance of 'Aṭṭār's inspiration and redolent with resonances of the earlier poet's symbolism, style, similes, imagery and poetic devices. Many of Rūmī's lyrics were consciously composed as exercises in appreciative imitation (*istiqbāl*) of 'Aṭṭār's *ghazals*. To the educated reader it is obvious that Rūmī often had certain verses of 'Aṭṭār in mind when composing his own lyrics. For example, in one of 'Aṭṭār's *ghazals*, in which the word '*ishq*' ('love') is repeated as a rhyme at the end of each verse, the identical pattern of metre and rhythm pattern is utilized in a *ghazal* by Rūmī on the same theme. The initial two verses of 'Aṭṭār's *ghazal* read:

'Aql kujā pay barad shīva-yi sawdā-yi '*ishq* /
bāz nayābī bi-'aql sirr-i mu'ammā-yi '*ishq*
'Aql-i tu chūn qaṭra'īst mānda zi daryā judā /
chand kunad qaṭra'ī fahm zi daryā-yi '*ishq*

How can reason ever get a grip upon
The wont and wit of Love's passion?
By reason you'll never discover
The *trobar clus* of Love's riddle.
Your reason's like a drop of water
Fallen far away from the ocean.
How much does a drop comprehend
Of Love's vast ocean? ³⁶

These lines bear comparison with the following *ghazal* by Rūmī composed in the same metre and rhyme:

Bāz az ān kūh-i Qāf āmad '*anqā*-yi '*ishq* /
bāz bar-āmad zi jān na'ra u hayhā-yi '*ishq*
Fitna nishān-i 'aql būd, raft un bi-yiksū nishast /
har ṭaraf aknūn bibīn fitna-yi darvā-yi '*ishq*

Once again from behind Mount Qāf
The phoenix of love has flown back.
Once again from the spirit's depths
The clamour and cries of love arise.
Uproar and riot were telltale signs

Of Reason, yet these all have fled:
 Cast up now everywhere instead
 You see the riotous *mêlée* of love.³⁷

If we compare the following *ghazal* by ‘Aṭṭār (the first two couplets of which were cited above, p. 28) with a *ghazal* composed in the same rhyme scheme and the same metre by Rūmī the extent of the latter’s emulation of the former is again evident:

Bū-yi zulfat dar jahān afkanda’ī / khwīsh-tan rā bar karān afkanda’ī.
Az nasīm-i zulf-i mushk-afshān-i khwīsh/ ghulghulī andar jahān afkanda’ī.
Vaz kamāl-i nūr-i rū-yi khwīsh-tan / ātashī dar ‘aql u jān afkanda’ī.
Vaz furūgh-i la’l-i rūḥafzā-yi khwīsh / shūrishī dar baḥr u kān afkanda’ī.
Mīnayā’ī dar miyān-i ‘āshiqān / ‘āshiqān rā dar gumān afkanda’ī.
Bar umīd-i waṣl dar ṣaḥrā-yi dil / bīdīlān rā dar fughān afkanda’ī.
Rū-yi chūn mah zi āsitīn pūshīda’ī / khūn-i mā bar āsitān afkanda’ī.

The fragrance of your heavy tress
 Has filled the world with loveliness.
 Alas! You set yourself all at once
 Aside and then vacate your place.
 The fragrance of your musky hair
 Whose scent the breeze bears everywhere
 Has thrown up out a delirious gurgle
 Beneath the restless ocean of the world.
 With fire in the soul your perfect face glows:
 You stoke it first, then fan the bellows
 And brilliance in the mind ignite.
 The gleam of your ruby lips painted bright
 With furious passions fill the sea and land.
 Although among lovers you’re not found,
 You tantalize your lovers with suspense,
 You leave them to tremble in the balance –
 Your lovers then, bereft of heart, are left
 To tread the barren plains of the heart.
 It’s you who rouse in them anguished sobs
 Of grief yet leave them still to cherish hopes
 Of meeting you. Then you withdraw, eclipse
 Yourself, conceal your moonlike countenance
 From them and thus our blood you spill
 Carelessly as we loiter on your doorsill.³⁸

The above seven verses merit comparison (as far as can be understood through the dusky veil of translation) with the following six verses by Rūmī that parallel ‘Aṭṭār’s (*mathnawī ramal*) metre and rhyme scheme exactly. There are a number of particular instances (vv. 30818b, 30819b, and 30825b, highlighted in bold italics in the texts of both poems) where Rūmī uses three hemistiches from ‘Aṭṭār’s *ghazal*, including them (*taḍmīn*), in fact literally duplicating them in his own poem.

- (30816) *Bū-yi mushkī dar jahān afkanda’ī / mushk rā dar lā-makān afkanda’ī.*
 (30817) *Ṣad hazārān ghulghul z’īn bū-yi mushk / dar zamīn u āsimān afkanda’ī.*
 (30818) *Az shu’ā’-i nūr u nār- khwīsh-tan / **ātashī dar ‘aql u jān afkanda’ī.***
 (30819) *Az kamāl-i la’l-i jān-afzā’yi khwīsh / **shūrishī dar baḥr u kān afkanda’ī.***
 (30820) *Tu nahādī qā’ida-yi ‘āshiq-kushī / dar dil-i ‘āshiq kishān afkanda’ī.*
 (30825) *Pur-dilān rā hamchū dil bishkasta’ī / **bīdilān rā dar fughān afkanda’ī.***

You’ve released in the world a musk-like fragrance
 So the void is scented with that musky incense
 And a manifold ripple of musk seems to seethe –
 Its aroma then, cast aloft throughout heaven and earth.
 All this brilliance in the soul and the mind you ignite
 From the shine and the gleam of your fire and light.
 From your lips, just like rubies painted radiant bright,
 You’ve unleashed such furious passions that fill all the lands
 And the seas. It was you who established the ethos
 Of the slaying of lovers, who set in their hearts
 Amour’s pull and the sway of all matters erotic.
 All those stout-in-heart you break just like hearts;
 Those bereft of their heart, you’ve abandoned to sighs and to sobs.³⁹

As can be seen from selected verses of the two *ghazals* cited here, both in regard to formal metrical similarities and stylistic metaphorical resemblances as well as in respect to theosophical topoi, terminology and mystical content, Rūmī’s direct appropriation of ‘Aṭṭār’s imagery for his own uses is evident. The number of *ghazals* written by Rūmī, in which he relies upon and follows ‘Aṭṭār’s inspiration, is by no means small but interests of space preclude any further such comparisons.

However, setting aside the stylistic and aesthetic similarities between the two poets, there are fundamental differences in their poetic sensibilities and philosophic articulation of the Sufi tradition. Firstly, the lyric poetry of Rūmī everywhere exhibits greater maturity and variety of both theme and content, as well as more passion, rapture, ecstasy, and mystical intoxication than the verse of ‘Aṭṭār. Secondly, most of ‘Aṭṭār’s *ghazals* are devoted to the theme of the beloved’s absence and the lover’s separation from him/her, whereas Rūmī’s lyrics are overwhelmingly consecrated to celebrating the lover’s consummation and realization of divine union, having been

inspired by ecstatic states of rapture, intoxication and intimacy with the beloved. For this reason, since in Rūmī's lyrics the burning pangs of separation are much less often expressed,⁴⁰ so much more joy and delight can be intimated from his *ghazals* than from 'Aṭṭār's. And that of course, is one of the secrets underlying Rūmī's greater popularity and fame. Yet, despite Rūmī's obvious pre-eminence in the Persian Sufi poetic tradition, both as a poet and a mystic, 'Aṭṭār's words have their own individual savour and unique style of expression. His *ghazals* in particular, both in sense – content, and in themes – *topoi*, with their extravagant, excessive quality of boasting and audacity, are inimitable and unrivalled in their mastery of the Persian Sufi poetic tradition.⁴¹

'Aṭṭār's Fragrances in Shabistār's *Garden of Mystery*

Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistārī (d. after 740/1340) was another important Persian poet deeply influenced by 'Aṭṭār.⁴² A Sufi poet who belonged to the generation immediately following Rūmī and preceding Ḥāfiz, he was the author of one of the most remarkable and original compositions in the entire history of Persian literature, the *Garden of Mystery* (*Gulshan-i rāz*), a poem notable for its brevity (it is only one thousand lines long) and conciseness of expression combined with extraordinary depth of theological and theosophical insight. It was composed in the same metre as 'Aṭṭār's *Book of Divinity* (*Ilāhī-nāma*, that is, the *mathnawī* metre of the *baḥr-i hazaj*). In the exordium to this work, Shabistārī acknowledges, with utter humility and devastating honesty, 'Aṭṭār's achievement as the true measure of poetic genius, describing his own lowly rank in the canon of Persian Sufi poetry in the following verses:

Of my own verse and rhyme I have no shame;
 There is but one 'Aṭṭār each millennium.
 Could the mysteries of a myriad universes
 by such an idiom and mode of expression
 be put to verse, it's still but scraps and detritus
 from the store of 'Aṭṭār.
 My verse is made by hazard, not by design;
 I'm not a demon who's tapped an angel's line.⁴³

Here the poet explicitly acknowledges his own work to stand on the shoulders of the Sage of Nishapur. Shabistārī admits that his own poetry conveys at best a whiff of the musky fragrance of 'Aṭṭār's inspiration, but this fragrance is purveyed to the reader not by mimesis of the earlier poet in homage to his memory but in travesty to his inspiration, but rather presented to us by having been infused in the poet through *tawarrud*, that is, by the spontaneous, simultaneous inspiration of a single

theme and image into the hearts of two poets sharing like sensibilities. In short, he announces that he shares common theosophical ground with 'Aṭṭār.

The profound impact of 'Aṭṭār's symbolic terminology and metaphysical imagery upon Shabistārī's poem is obvious to anyone acquainted with both their work. Here, interests of space preclude offering any more than a few of the more salient examples to demonstrate this influence. Take, for instance, the following verse from 'Aṭṭār's *Mantiq al-tayr*:

'Arsh-i 'ālam juz ṭilismī bīsh nīst / ū'st u bas, īn jumla ismī bīsh nīst

This universe and the divine Throne
Is all just one magic talisman:
He alone exists: and all the rest
Are mere names which mean naught.⁴⁴

This merits comparison with the theology and imagery of the following two verses in Shabistārī's *Garden of Mystery*, in which the later poet gives the gist of 'Aṭṭār's verse in similar doctrinal terms and with parallel imagery, comparing the Eternal Being with temporal existence:

Qadīm u muḥdath az ham judā nīst / kih az hastī-st baqī dā'imān nīst
Hama ān'ast wa-īn mānand-i 'Anqā'st / juz az Ḥaqq jumla ism bī musammā'st

Eternity *a parte ante* and living beings are not
Two separate things apart,
For nothingness itself in animate Existence
Forever and ceaselessly exists.
Existence is all there is:
All else but God is phoenix-like
– phenomena without Noumena.⁴⁵

In terms of metaphysical imagery, mystical theology, Sufi terminology and poetic imagery, the respective verses are quite similar, suggesting the probable influence of 'Aṭṭār on Shabistārī's expression.

'Aṭṭār's famous *qaṣīda* on *tawḥīd* (carefully imitated, both in metre and meaning, by later Sufi poets including Rūmī and Maghribī) contains the following verse describing the various modalities of divine manifestation and theophany in the world:

Īnjā ḥulūl kufr buvad, ittiḥād ham / k'īn waḥdatī-st līk bi-tikrār āmada

Incarnation here is infidelity;
Unification too is blasphemy.

All is one Unity, whose emanation
Proceeds by way of repetition.⁴⁶

Segments of the wording of this verse and the totality of 'Aṭṭār's meaning were later directly adopted, imitated and then rephrased by Shabistarī in this verse:

Ḥulūl u itiḥād injā maḥāl-ast / kih dar waḥdat du'ī 'ayn-i ḡalāl-ast

Incarnation is here all impossible
And unification inconceivable.
Duality within such Unity
Is utter error, total fallacy.⁴⁷

Yet, the more telling examples of 'Aṭṭārian fragrances wafting through the *Garden of Mystery* appear in the final quarter of the poem where the most sublime flights of Shabistarī's poetic genius are found. In fact, surveying the whole spectrum of Islamic mystical poetry, these three-hundred odd lines (vv. 714ff.) represent the pinnacle of all symbolic poetry in the Persian Sufi tradition. In this final section, Shabistarī rends aside the veil of Sufi symbolic discourse with a directness and clarity unrivalled by any previous writer and unmatched by any subsequent Persian poet. Whereas his precursors in the tradition, such as 'Aṭṭār, Rūmī, Sa'dī and Nizāmī, tried to draw a veil over the more abstruse aspects of the Sufi symbolic lexicon and conceal their esoteric terms and truths in hermetic hints couched in cryptic and paradoxical imagery, Shabistarī devotes all his exquisite poetic diction here to rendering an exposé of the lexicon of Sufi mystical terms. These include the 'Cupbearer' (*sāqī*), the 'Theophanic witness' (*shāhid*), the 'Christian child' (*tarsābacha*), the 'idol' (*but*), the 'cincture' (*zunnār*), 'Christianity' (*tarsā'ī*), and the 'Tavern of Ruin' (*kharābāt*).

The most significant of these terms, in respect to erotic theology at least, is the 'Christian child' (*tarsābacha*). Exegetes both of a secular-fundamentalist and religious-formalist bent who are unable to penetrate behind the veil of mysteries are always disturbed and confounded by this symbol when it appears in Persian literature. They are especially bemused by its apparition in Ḥāfiẓ's – supposedly 'non-mystical' – poetry (see below). Nonetheless, the 'Christian child' is one of the most important symbols in 'Aṭṭār's poetry,⁴⁸ as can be seen, for instance, in the following *ghazal* which is consecrated to this symbol (two verses of which are cited here):

All at once my heart and soul
Have become the prey of the Christian child.
I've been shorn of all my glory and made

The shame of all the world by passion
 Tor her tresses' tip. But anyone who finds
 A token of her suspires, loses heart –
 Such is the way and the wont
 Of that Christian child, of course,
 Which is why I am her lunatic.⁴⁹

This same disturbing Christian girl, who had led Shaykh Ṣan'ān so blessedly astray from his conventional, formalistic faith, enrapturing him by her beauty and initiating him into the higher idolatry of the religion of love, also reappears in this *ghazal* by 'Aṭṭār:

That gypsy Christian girl, of folly so full –
 Idol of the soul – walked from her convent drunk,
 Her bell and wine held in palm, and her hand
 Laid upon her girdle, with holy icon held to her heart,
 Deploring us Muslims, she hawked her wine.
 'For sale! I've wine!' She sang, as if ashamed.
 But when on her tress and her lips and her eyes
 I gazed, all at once on the throne of my heart
 That sovereign moon took up seat, such that she
 Became my heart-lord and suzerain. I fell down,
 Her bounden slave, thrown down before those bright feet.⁵⁰

Shabistārī echoes these verses by 'Aṭṭār when he describes the spiritual ideal and symbolic meaning of this same 'Christian child' in the lexicon of Sufi symbolism as follows:

The Christian child, that 'idol' is but a symbol
 of light that's pure and manifest from the faces
 of idols: iconic forms of her theophany.
 All hearts she welds together, conjunct:
 Sometimes, the lutanist, she sweeps the strings;
 sometimes, the Saki, she purveys the wine.

Shabistārī's description is heightened and further elaborated in its succeeding lines:

What a bard – whose key of grace chimes
 such measure, it sets aflame the coffers
 of a hundred pietists, a myriad pharisees...!
 And what a Saki – whose beaker's brew

bereaves of self and stirs to ecstasy
 two hundred men of over seventy.
 Drunken in a stupor, if she comes at dusk
 to the *khānaqāh*, she shows the Sufi's piety
 to be but cant – all spells and conjury.
 If at dawn, for matins she goes
 into a Mosque, no man therein she leaves
 in sober sense, of self cognizant.⁵¹

We may also see from the following verses how that same 'Christian child' who had roused such passion and anxiety in 'Aṭṭār as a theophany of the divine Beauty, had also visited Shabistārī, rendering him so intoxicated with her beauty that he cast off all his pretence of Faith and tossed away all his love of Infidelity down at her feet, as the following verses by Shabistārī (following those just cited) so eloquently describe:

Like a drunk in masquerade, she goes in the Madrasa –
 the judges and the jurists there, she leaves in dire straits.
 Not just the judges does she befuddle,
 The puritans, from love of her are shorn
 of kith and kin, of house and home.
 One man from her becomes an 'infidel',
 Another – pure and 'faithful'. It's she who fills
 the world with such *mêlée* and misery,
 from her come all these woes and ills.
 The Tavern of Ruin blooms
 with life and health from her lips;
 her visage beams light and lustre
 upon the mosque. Thus, everything for me
 by her seems now easy: because I see
 through her the possibility of liberty
 from this egocentric heresy: my soul-of-infidelity.⁵²

The esoteric symbol of the 'Christian child', who appears as a 'Vintner', 'Barmaid', 'Cupbearer' or 'Bartender' hawking wine to Muslims – a kind of archetypal *puer aeternus* within the Persian poetic imagination personifying the epiphany of God to the heart of the spiritual aspirant – makes its apparition time and time again in Persian Sufi poetry from the time of Sanā'ī down to early modern times. So let us now finally turn to look at some verses by Ḥāfiẓ directly inspired by 'Aṭṭār's tale of Shaykh Ṣan'ān, where a glimpse of this epiphanic figure and a whiff of this Christian maiden's wine may again be caught.

Scent of a Woman: 'Aṭṭār's Christian Maiden in Ḥāfiẓ's *Dīwān*

Her perfumed tray of roses,
The casket of her tiny lips
so redolent with ambergris –
For me her sensual fragrance is
but one whiff of that sweet grace
which is the lovely odour sent
Me by my own 'Aṭṭār's scent.

Ḥāfiẓ⁵³

Although generally recognized as Persia's most eminent lyric poet (*shā'ir-i ghanā'i*), Ḥāfiẓ (d. 792/1389) is also the supreme master of what might be called the 'erotic theosophical lyric' (*ghazal-i 'āshiqāna-yi 'ārifāna*). Even more intensely and more deeply than either Rūmī or Shabistārī, he had succumbed to 'Aṭṭār's dynamic spirituality, had imbibed his melancholic romantic passion, was steeped in his inspired consciousness and had been swept off his feet by the wildly unconventional temperament of the mystical non-conformist or *qalandar* who appears as the supreme Sufi adept throughout all of 'Aṭṭār's works. One could even say that in the entire *Dīwān* of Ḥāfiẓ hardly a single *ghazal* can be found in which the spiritual presence and passionate fervour of 'Aṭṭār cannot be vividly felt.

'Aṭṭār's spiritual presence makes a visible epiphany in Ḥāfiẓ's verse by means of several apparitions of the same 'Christian child' symbol which we witnessed above in the verse of Shabistārī. The child dons a number of different disguises in the *Dīwān* of Ḥāfiẓ, appearing for instance as a Christian boy (*tarsābacha*) in this verse:

A Christian boy who admired wine anyway
Spoke beautifully. He said, 'Toast the man
Or woman in whose face we can see purity and joy.'⁵⁴

In the first three lines of Ḥāfiẓ's most famous erotic *ghazal*, which a number of commentators of a secular orientation insist on interpreting as descriptive of merely human, temporal love, rather than spiritual, divine love, this same Christian child appears as a flirtatious wine-selling maiden with her blouse ripped open, drunk with a cup of wine in hand, seating herself by the poet's bedside one midnight, in these verses:

Her hair was still tangled, her mouth still drunk
And laughing, her shoulders sweaty, the blouse
Torn open, singing love songs, her wine cup full.

Her eyes were looking for a drunken brawl, her lips

Ready for jibes. She sat down
Last night at midnight on my bed.

She put her lips close to my ear and said
In a whisper these words: 'What is this?
Aren't you my old lover – Are you asleep?'⁵⁵

In another of Ḥāfiẓ's verses, this Christian child appears again, his or her lips uttering the same 'taunts' and 'jibes' described in second stanza above:

A young wine-seller's boy stepped tauntingly
From the door; 'Wanderer, wake up!
He said, 'The way you walk has the stain of sleep.'⁵⁶

In his mystical commentary on the *Dīwān* of Ḥāfiẓ, written in the early 17th century, Sayf al-Dīn 'Abū'l-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khatamī Lāhūrī gives an interesting interpretation of the first verse of the former *ghazal* (22), explaining it and the entire poem according to the Sufi (and Platonic) doctrine of the ascending hierarchical degrees of love, from form, matter and humanity, up to the transformatory, immaterial and the divine, as follows:

Shaykh Ādharī (may God bless his soul) in his *Jewels of the Mysteries* (*Jawāhir al-asrār*) states that, 'The ecstatic sayings of the masters are the product of the experience of the luminous unveiling or theophanies pertaining to sensory forms (*tajallī-yi šūrī*). This sort of sensory theophany occurs in all phenomenal forms, but its experience varies according to the different ontological levels of the various loci of theophany. Thus, for Moses, it was manifest through the burning bush; for Imam Ja'far Ṣādiq, it was experienced in the form of the spoken word; for Shaykh Ṣan'ān it manifested in the form of a young Christian maiden (*tarsābacha*); for lovers it is experienced through the phenomenal forms of their sweetheart, which likewise should be considered as a theophany pertaining to sensory forms, as is obvious from the tales of (the great pairs of lovers such as) Majnūn and Laylā, Khusraw and Shīrīn, Warqa and Gulshāh, Wīs and Rāmīn, and all the other celebrated pairs. The initiated adept of Shīrāz composed this peerless *ghazal* after this same style, as if to say: "That Transcendent Loved One was luminously unveiled to me in the form of a sweetheart with dishevelled curls, blushing, lips laughing and drunk."⁵⁷

Mystics of the Persian Sufi tradition, as Lāhūrī's commentary reveals, clearly understood the path of Sufi symbolism to wend its way (albeit with a number of interesting erotic bends and twists) straight from the alleyway of Shaykh Ṣan'ān's beloved *tarsābacha* girl, whose immortal romance was narrated in 'Aṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, more or less directly down to her theophany in a *ghazal*

as a drunken maiden at the bedside of Ḥāfiẓ. So it is hardly odd that by far the clearest instance of the apparition of the archetypal symbol of this Christian child in Ḥāfiẓ's *Dīwān* actually relates to 'Aṭṭār's story of Shaykh Ṣan'ān and the Christian maiden.⁵⁸

If we set aside the high romances of Yusūf and Zulaykhā, Farhād and Shīrīn, and the tragic desert affair of Laylā and Majnūn, this story remains no doubt one of the most popular romances in Persian Sufism.⁵⁹ In what remains the most deeply passionate tale of love in all his *mathnawīs*, 'Aṭṭār relates how that same theophany of Divine Beauty – she who is both the 'Idol' and the 'Christian child' – managed to suddenly seduce and convert a respected and venerable spiritual master into a wildly unconventional Sufi who contemplated divine beauty through her female form. Prior to his fateful encounter with this *femme fatale*, he had been known for his pious and ascetic nature, as 'Aṭṭār relates:

For fifty years this shaykh
Kept Mecca's holy place, and for his sake
Four hundred pupils entered learning's way.
He mortified his body night and day,
Knew theory, practice, mysteries of great age,
And fifty times had made the Pilgrimage.⁶⁰

As the story goes, the master, who lived in Mecca near the Ka'ba, one night dreamed that he was prostrating before an idol in a city in Byzantine Anatolia. He interpreted his dream to be a divine portent of a trial that God had sent him. Accordingly, he set out for Anatolia with a group of some one hundred of his most loyal followers. Arriving in a certain town, he saw a lovely Christian girl, symbol of the divine Beauty, standing unveiled on a balcony. Not only did he at once lose his heart to her, but she ravished his exoteric Muslim faith away from him as well. The pious master became a devotee of the higher idolatry of the religion of love, a convert to her 'true infidelity' (*kuf-r-i ḥaqīqī*), a change of heart celebrated in these verses by Maḥmūd Shabistārī:

Be free of shame and name – hypocrisy and notoriety –
Cast off the dervish cloak, tie on the cincture
and like our master, be inimitable in 'infidelity'
if man you be: unto a Man commit your heart entirely.
Give up your heart to the Christian child;
Free yourself of all denial and affirmation.⁶¹

This spiritual doctrine of conversion from 'illusory Islam' (*islām-i majāzī*) to 'real infidelity' (*kuf-r-i ḥaqīqī*) in Sufi literature enunciated here, did not of course

originate with 'Aṭṭār's allegory of Shaykh Ṣan'ān, and can be traced back at least to Ḥallāj (d. 922).⁶² It is worth mentioning in this context that Shabistārī's exhortation here to become a man 'like our master' constitutes a direct allusion to 'Aṭṭār's tale of Shaykh Ṣan'ān, and refers to the verses in which the Shaykh actually casts off his dervish cloak and binds himself (ties on the Christian cincture: *zunnār*) in fidelity to a Christian girl, who appears in the tale as a symbol of the theophany of divine Beauty.⁶³ Lest one wonder at the change of gender – a 'man' in Shabistārī's *Garden of Mystery* switches to a 'maid' in 'Aṭṭār's *Conference of the Birds* – it may be recalled that the metaphysical reality of 'man', and, by extension, the 'lover' and 'beloved' described by both poets transcends the female-male dichotomy. Did not 'Aṭṭār himself claim of Rābī'a in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, that 'she was not a maid but rather a myriad men' and exhort his reader to 'become a *man* like Rābī'a'?⁶⁴

It should be noted that in 'Aṭṭār's account the story of Shaykh Ṣan'ān is recounted by the hoopoe, leader and guide of the troupe of birds, in order to spur them onwards in the mystical quest towards the fabulous Sīmurgh, King of all the birds. As the hoopoe tells the questing fowls in 'Aṭṭār's account, the only provisions wayfarers may take with them on this quest are love and pain:

Love thrives on inextinguishable pain,
Which tears the soul, then knits the thread again.
A mote of love exceeds all bounds; it gives
The vital essence to whatever lives.
... Islam and blasphemy have both been passed
By those who set out on love's path at last;
Love will direct you to Dame Poverty,
And she will show the way to Blasphemy.
When neither Blasphemy nor Faith remain,
The body and the Self have both been slain;
Then the fierce fortitude the Way will ask
Is yours, and you are worthy of our task.⁶⁵

Now this very story is retold and reshaped, both by cryptic hint and direct reference, in line after line of Ḥāfiẓ's *Dīwān*. Ḥāfiẓ explicitly encourages the mystic to follow Shaykh Ṣan'ān's ethics of detachment step by step and emulate his erotic theology. The sweet fragrance of this wonderful romance, replete with refined points of ethics and profound wisdom, continuously wafts through the garden of Ḥāfiẓ's lyricism. In the following verse, which is also the sole instance in his *Dīwān* where Ḥāfiẓ alludes directly to the story of Shaykh Ṣan'ān, he sums up the central moral of 'Aṭṭār's mystical romance, delivering the same homily found in Shabistārī's last-cited verses, to abandon all fear and shame of losing one's fair name:

If you profess yourself a devotee of
 The highway of most noble Love
 Never give a second thought for name
 Or what men say will be 'ill-fame',
 Recall the cap and gown
 Of great Shaykh Ṣan'ān –
 For months in hock, put in
 The wine-seller's shop for pawn.⁶⁶

Aside from this one verse, there are literally thousands of other instances in the *Dīwān* of Ḥāfiẓ where the poet clearly alludes to symbols, tales, ideas or the interpretation of ideas from one or another of 'Aṭṭār's works, and versifies these in his own inimitable and illuminating way. Consider, for example, the following verse:

Pardon me, please, if my rosary
 Bead's string has snapped.
 But my hand lay touching the forearm
 Of a cupbearer with silver legs.⁶⁷

Anyone familiar with 'Aṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* cannot fail to notice that this line harbours another direct reference to the romance of Shaykh Ṣan'ān and his Christian sweetheart. Just like the aged Sufi shaykh, Ḥāfiẓ portrays himself in this verse as head over heels in love with the Christian girl, throwing himself down prostrate before her feet, so that his verse paraphrases the following scenario in the *Conference of the Birds* in which Shaykh Ṣan'ān's disciples formed a circle around him, offering him their counsel and admonition:

'My sheikh', urged one, 'forget this evil sight;
 Rise, cleanse yourself according to our rite.'
 'In blood⁶⁸ I cleanse myself', the sheikh replied;
 'In blood, a hundred times, my life is dyed.'
 Another asked: 'Where is your rosary?'
 He said: 'I fling the beads away from me;
 The Christian's belt is my sole sanctuary!'
 One urged him to repent; he said: 'I do,
 Of all I was, all that belonged thereto.'⁶⁹

The following verse by Ḥāfiẓ also patently functions as a verse-parallel (*naẓīra*) of exactly the same speech (in the second couplet just cited above) uttered by Shaykh Ṣan'ān in 'Aṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*:

I've made ablutions with my tears
 For people of the Path always
 Say this: 'First purify yourself –
 Then gaze upon the one who's pure.'⁷⁰

The following verse from Ḥāfiẓ's *Dīwān* also constitutes the Shirazi poet's creative reinterpretation of the same speech from 'Aṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*:

In Sufi gowns
 and rosary beads
 no drunken joy
 is ever found.
 It is from publicans
 that strength of heart
 to quest for this delight
 solely must be sought.⁷¹

These three verses from different *ghazals* by Ḥāfiẓ are also inspired by the same section cited above from the tale of Shaykh Ṣan'ān:

As I was praying, suddenly
 within my mind appeared your eyebrow's curve;
 A state overcame me;
 the prayer-niche was filled with cries.⁷²

I fear I'll lose all faith
 for your eyebrow's prayer-niche
 robs all mental presence
 from my praying heart.⁷³

Only one who absolves himself in the bitter blood
 of the heart, may perform
 ritual prayers within the crescent-niche
 of her eyebrows.⁷⁴

To be exact, their probable source of inspiration is the following couplet penned by 'Aṭṭār, where a religiose follower of Shaykh Ṣan'ān bade him foreswear his erotic passion and stick instead to the safe path of ritual prayer:

One counselled prayer; he said: 'Where is her face
 That I may pray towards that blessed place?'⁷⁵

But setting this famous romance aside, innumerable other verses in Ḥāfiẓ's *Dīwān* are heavily scented with the fragrance of 'Aṭṭārian inspiration. For example, the opening line of 'Aṭṭār's famous *ghazal*:

Biyā kih qibla-yi mā gūsha-yi kharābāt-ast /
biyār bāda kih 'āshiq ni mard-i ṭāmāt-ast.

Come along! For the way we face in prayer is towards the tavern corner.
 Pass round the wine, for no man's a lover who's caught up in idle chatter.⁷⁶

– constitutes the obvious source of inspiration for this verse of Ḥāfiẓ:

Maqām-i aṣlī-yi mā gūsha-i kharābāt-ast /
khudā-yash khayr dahad har-ki īn 'imārat kard

Before all time, our primordial
 Degree was in the tavern corner:
 God grace with goodness he
 Who raised high this edifice.⁷⁷

Moreover, 'Aṭṭār's reference in the above verse to 'idle chatter' (*ṭāmāt*) – a key Sufi term referring to bombastic, grandiose, often senseless utterances made by Sufis in states of rapture – and his assertion that no man is a lover who engages in such bombastic talk and chatter, is certainly directly replicated by Ḥāfiẓ in this verse:

Mā mard-i zuhd u tawba u ṭāmāt nīstīm /
mā-rā bi jān bāda-i ṣāfī khiṭāb kun

Men we are not
 of ascetic strife,
 of pious contrition,
 or bombastic speech.
 Discourse alone to us
 of cups of wine
 strained pure and fine.⁷⁸

The pluralistic religious vision of Ḥāfiẓ's Persian Sufism, which is expressed in the following famous verse:

Whether we are drunken or sober, each of us is making
 For the street of the Friend. The temple, the synagogue,

The church and the mosque are all houses of love.⁷⁹

– both in respect to imagery and Sufi doctrine is certainly squarely based upon the following verse from ‘Aṭṭār’s *Dīwān*:

Each of us is making for the street of the Friend and yet
Where’s the humble man, drunk in spirit, manifest?⁸⁰

Many other such parallels between ‘Aṭṭār and Ḥāfiẓ, both in respect to poetic imagery and mystical doctrine, might also be adduced here, yet any attempt to trace and track all the various sorts of Nishapurian fragrances wafting through the rosebeds of Shiraz, to record and relate verse by verse the sweetness of ‘Aṭṭār’s lyrical genius in the *ghazals* of Ḥāfiẓ, would itself become a task as prolonged as the proverbial tresses of the beloved, of which Shabistarī complained,

Long are the tales of the Beloved’s tress.
What can be said?
It’s a place of profoundest mysteries.⁸¹

And in recounting the sweet twists and snarls of which, ‘Aṭṭār found himself bemused,

In her musky tresses so many kinks and snarls can be found,
It would take one hundred hands to count each strand.⁸²

And over those curls’ exegesis, Ḥāfiẓ too confessed himself bewildered and at wits end:

The commentary upon the twists and kinks
Of the Beloved’s curls can never be abridged,
– This tale itself is too strung out.⁸³

But since we cannot guzzle down the sea, of necessity we must limit ourselves to a cupful of water: ‘if I cut short my tale – may your life be long’ – as the adage goes.

One point is worth reiterating in conclusion: No Sufi ever quotes the saying of another Sufi unless his purpose be to illustrate his own inner contemplative experience and describe his own mystical states. No doubt, Sufis often have and do still relate one another’s words verbatim, but their intent through such citation is always to represent their own interior revelations and personal spiritual experiences. At the same time, the Sufi sages’ and poets’ independent outlook in respect

to expression of their contemplative visions and spiritual experiences does not at all preclude copious literary borrowing from one another. In the diffusion of the scent and the sweetness of Sufi spirituality and in raising high the standard of mystical poetry, few poets in Persian literary history played such a central role as did ‘Aṭṭār. Indeed, in the firmament of Persian Sufi poetry his verse still remains ‘the star of every wandering bark’ which sails upon the ocean of the Spirit, even if he himself, who knew this truth all too well, confessed himself in these spheres to be but a lost and errant wanderer:

A myriad stars of guidance to the mysteries
 Rove through the heavens of ‘Aṭṭār’s verse
 And yet his lot is like this vagrant
 Firmament, to wander itinerant and headless.⁸⁴

Notes

1. I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Terry Graham and Christopher Shackle’s editorial assistance in drafting earlier versions of this translation. All translations of the poetry in this article are my own unless otherwise indicated.

2. Rūmī, *Kulliyāt-i Shams yā Dīwān-i Kabīr*, ed. Badī‘ al-Zamān Furūzānfar (Tehran, 1355 Sh./1976), vol. 2, p. 22, *ghazal* 563, v. 5961.

3. Citing this famous verse in his *Sharḥ-i aḥwāl wa naqd wa taḥlīl-i āthār-i Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘Aṭṭār-i Nishāpūrī* (2nd ed., Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995), p. 72, Badī‘ al-Zamān Furūzānfar comments that ‘it cannot be found in any of the ten ancient Mss. which formed the basis of my edition of the *Kulliyāt-i Shams*; and is only present in a single Ms. – that published in Lucknow – and in some later manuscripts.’ – tr.

4. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, ed. Parvīz Nātil Khānlārī (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983), p. 494, *ghazal* 239: 1. All references to Ḥāfiẓ below are to Khānlārī’s edition – tr.

5. MT, pp. 246–247 (vv. 4456–4457). It should be noted in this context that the two words used, ‘passion’ (*shūr*) and ‘lovers’ (*ushshāq*), have a meaning besides the literal sense. In the terminology of Persian music, *shūr* designates a musical mode (*dastgāh*), and *ushshāq* denotes a certain melody in that mode.

6. Dt, p. 604, *ghazal* 757: 1.

7. Dt, p. 606, *ghazal* 760: 1–2.

8. Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, vol. 2, p. 267.

9. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, p. 794, *ghazal* 389. This verse, which is excised from Khānlārī’s edition, occurs in variant readings found in two of his earliest manuscripts –tr.

10. Amīr Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadhānī, *Mashārib al-adhwāq: Sharḥ-i Qaṣīda-yi Khamriyya Ibn Fāriḍ Miṣrī dar biyān-i sharāb-i maḥabbat*, ed. M. Khwājāwī (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983), p. 64.

11. Ṣamad Muwaḥḥid, ed., *Majmū‘a-i āthār-i Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistarī*, (Tehran, 1365 Sh./1986), p. 69, *Gulshan-i rāz*, v. 58.

12. One of the best examples of such narrative leaps can be found in the wonderful tale of Ṣadr-i Jahān in the third book (vv. 3686ff.) of the *Mathnawī*. In the middle of his account,

Rūmī abruptly abandons the theme and starts another story relating to – the apparently extraneous subject of – the apparition of the Angel Gabriel to Mary, mother of Jesus, where he presents us with one of the most beautiful and eloquent accounts of the apparition of an angel to a human being in all of world literature. In Western literature one can perhaps find such poetic flights in the novels of Victor Hugo, in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, perhaps – but amongst Rūmī's forebears in Persian literature, such as Sanā'ī, Nizāmī and 'Aṭṭār, one rarely finds similar lyrical flights and poetic leaps from the frame-tale into another, often higher, narrative sphere.

13. MT, p. 12, v. 221.
14. MT, p. 200, v. 3583.
15. MT, p. 200, v. 3587.
16. MT, p. 14, vv. 251–252.
17. Dt, p. 212, *ghazal* 270, v. 9.
18. *Mathnawī*, vol. 1, vv. 1607, 1609.
19. Although this particular verse is absent from Furūzānfar's edition of Rūmī's *Dīwān-i Kabīr*, it has been traditionally ascribed to Rūmī; see, e.g., Nūrānī Wiṣāl's introduction to his edition of *Muṣibat-nāma* (Tehran, 1354 Sh./1975), p. vii. – Tr.
20. *Muṣibat-nāma*, pp. 340–341.
21. For the Old Harpist's tale, see *Mathnawī*, vol. 1, 1913–1950; 2104–2112; 2161–2222; also cf. Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, *Mākhadh-i qaṣaṣ wa tamthīlāt-i Mathnawī* (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983), pp. 20ff. – Tr.
22. *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 297; Furūzānfar, *Mākhadh-i qaṣaṣ... Mathnawī*, pp. 193–194.
23. *Muṣibat-nāma*, pp. 139–140; Furūzānfar, *Mākhadh-i qaṣaṣ... Mathnawī*, pp. 173–174.
24. *Mathnawī*, vol. 5, 1896–1897.
25. *Muṣibat-nāma*, pp. 279–280; Furūzānfar, *Mākhadh-i qaṣaṣ... Mathnawī*, pp. 8–9.
26. *Mathnawī*, vol. 5, 3286–3289.
27. This is especially evident in Rūmī's treatment of Satan or Iblis, which is in many respects almost identical to 'Aṭṭār's approach to the same subject.
28. Cf. *Mathnawī* (vol. 2, 3758): 'The discourse of the princely birds of Khāqānī is mere empty sound. What has become of the discourse of the birds of Solomon?' (*Manṭiq al-ṭayr-i sulaymānī kujāst?*)
29. *Mathnawī*, vol. 3, 979.
30. *Mathnawī*, vol. 2, 98. The verse contains an allusion to the Qur'ānic account (19:23) of Mary's pains during childbirth.
31. *Mathnawī*, vol. 1, 1337.
32. *Mathnawī*, vol. 3, 1441, 1444.
33. MT, p. 187, vv. 3346–3347.
34. *Mathnawī*, vol. 4, 2110.
35. *Mathnawī*, vol. 1, 115.
36. Dt, p. 368, *ghazal* 448, 1–2.
37. Rūmī, *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, ed. Furūzānfar, vol. 3, pp. 133–134, *ghazal* 1311, vv. 13876, 13881.
38. Dt, p. 606, *ghazal* 760 (skipping six lines).
39. Rūmī, *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, vol. 6, p. 173, *ghazal* 2900.
40. This is exactly the same observation attributed to Rūmī by his biographer Shams

al-Dīn Aflākī; see *The Feats of the Knowers of God (Manāqeb al-‘arefīn)*, tr. John O’Kane (Leiden, 2002), vol. 3, 131, pp. 152–153. – Tr.

41. It should also be mentioned that Rūmī paid close attention to ‘Aṭṭār’s *Mukhtār-nāma*, especially in regard to its themes and that he drew heavily from this selection in his own quatrains.

42. For further discussion of ‘Aṭṭār’s influence on Shabistarī, see Šamad Muwaḥḥid, ed., *Majmū‘a-i āthār-i Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistarī*, (Tehran, 1365 Sh./1986), introduction, p. 11; ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb, ‘Sayrī dar *Gulshan-i rāz*’, in his *Naqshī bar āb* (Tehran, 1368 Sh./1989), pp. 256–294 – Tr.

43. *Gulshan-i rāz*, in *Majmū‘a-i āthār-i... Shabistarī*, vv. 56–57. See also my edition of the same work: *Gulshan-i rāz (Bāgh-i dīl)*, ed. H. Ilāhī-Qumsha‘ī (Tehran, 1377 Sh./1998), p. 41, vv. 85–86.

44. MT, p. 8, v. 127.

45. *Gulshan-i rāz*, in *Majmū‘a-i āthār-i... Shabistarī*, p. 96, vv. 702–703.

46. Dt, p. 817.

47. *Gulshan-i rāz*, in *Majmū‘a-i āthār-i... Shabistarī*, p. 85, v. 449.

48. See Leonard Lewisohn’s essay in this volume.

49. Dt, p. 158, *ghazal* 210.

50. Dt, no. 822, pp. 659–660.

51. *Gulshan-i rāz*, in *Majmū‘a-i āthār*, vv. 969–974.

52. *Gulshan-i rāz*, in *Majmū‘a-i āthār*, vv. 975–979.

53. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 52, v. 6.

54. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 119, v. 8. Tr. Robert Bly and Leonard Lewisohn.

55. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 22, vv. 1–3. Tr. Bly and Lewisohn.

56. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 414, v. 2. Tr. Bly and Lewisohn.

57. *Sharḥ-i ‘irfānī ghazalḥā-yi Ḥāfiẓ*, ed. Bahā’ al-Dīn Khurramshāhī et al. (Tehran, 1373 Sh./ 1994), I, p. 426.

58. For further discussion of the influence of ‘Aṭṭār on Ḥāfiẓ, see Bahā’ al-Dīn Khurramshāhī, *Ḥāfiẓ-nāma, Sharḥ-i alfāz, i‘lām, mafāhīm-i kilīdī wa abyāt-i dushvār-i Ḥāfiẓ*, (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), vol. 1, pp. 52–53; and for the specific impact of the Shaykh Ṣan‘ān tale on Ḥāfiẓ, see *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 183–184; 385–387 – Tr.

59. See C. Shackle’s essay in this volume – Tr.

60. MT, vv. 1186–1188; tr. Dick Davis and Afkham Darbandi, *The Conference of the Birds* (Middlesex, 1984), p. 57.

61. *Gulshan-i rāz*, in *Majmū‘a-i āthār*, p. 103, vv. 966–968.

62. For a study of this doctrine, see Leonard Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Teachings and Poetry of Maḥmūd Shabistarī* (Richmond, 1995), ch. 8.

63. MT, vv. 1385–1387. The shaykh’s love is by no means simply a sensual infatuation with her mortal beauty, since the girl is described by ‘Aṭṭār as having been endowed with ‘a spiritual nature; in the Path of Jesus, who is *Spiritus Dei*, she was possessed of myriad sorts of wisdom’ (v. 1208).

64. MT, vv. 580–583.

65. MT, vv. 1174–1175; 1178–1181. Tr. Davis and Darbandi, *Conference*, p. 57.

66. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 79, v. 6.

67. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 202, v. 8.

68. The original Persian reads *khūn-i jigar*, literally meaning 'the liver's blood', but by extension signifies bitterly wept tears that are 'bloody tears torn from the heart', or 'tears of blood drawn out of the gut'.

69. MT, vv. 1269–1274. Tr. Davis and Darbandi, *Conference*, p. 61.

70. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 258, v. 7.

71. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 390, v. 4.

72. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 69, v. 1.

73. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 392, v. 7.

74. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 127, v. 4.

75. MT, v. 1275. Tr. Davis and Darbandi, *Conference*, p. 61.

76. Dt, *ghazal* 46, p. 33.

77. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 127, v. 3.

78. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 388, v. 5.

79. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 78, v. 3. Tr. Bly and Lewisohn.

80. Dt, *ghazal* 30, v. 4. Thus, one may compare Ḥāfiẓ's first hemistich *Hama kas ṭālib-i yārand*, *chi hushyār chi mast...*, with 'Aṭṭār's first hemistich: *Hama kas ṭālib-i yārand u līk...*

81. *Gulshan-i rāz*, in *Majmū'a-i āthār*, p. 98, v. 760.

82. Dt, *ghazal* 226, v. 2, p. 172.

83. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, *ghazal* 41: 5.

84. Dt, *Qaṣīda* 26, p. 820.

Narratology and Realities in the Study of ‘Aṭṭār

MUHAMMAD ESTE‘LAMI

‘Famous but unknown’ is the opening phrase of ‘Aṭṭār’s biography by the late Badī‘ al-Zamān Furūzānfar, the most eminent scholar of the works of ‘Aṭṭār among his generation, and also the most respected by two generations of his students who became scholars of Persian literature in their own right. But why is ‘Aṭṭār unknown? And if unknown, how can he be said to be famous?

‘Aṭṭār is famous because there exist many narratives and legends relating to him, as well as more than a hundred volumes of publications of or about his works. Most narratives however fail to provide reliable information concerning his life, while most of the books published in his name – up to one hundred and twenty titles – are not his works. All that can truly be said to have come from his pen are six volumes of poetry, and his famous biographical work, the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, in prose.

With regard to the lives and times of the poets and writers who are pillars of Persian classical literature, it can even be said that most of the information we have been given derives from writers who are not historians or scholars. Most of the works that are called *tadhkirat* (biographical recollections) were compiled by calligraphers or booksellers, who prepared and sold manuscripts of the literary works of these poets and writers. Those early *tadhkira* compilers had little appreciation of the characteristics of the literary masterpieces or of the cultural significance of their authors, certainly no concern at all for the scholars who have contributed to this volume, who provide us with reliable facts about the life and times of ‘Aṭṭār. From their point of view, a great work of literature could only be authored under the shadow, or with the financial support, of a ruler such as Maḥmūd of Ghazna. Little did they realize that the first version of the *Shāhnāma* was completed by Firdawsī in 384/994 when Maḥmūd was not yet a ruler. Most biographies written by such compilers or booksellers, moreover, incorporated fabricated stories and legends which were unfortunately accepted at face value and recycled by scholars in their introductions to the works of such authors as Firdawsī, ‘Umar Khayyām, ‘Aṭṭār, Rūmī, Sa‘dī, Ḥāfiẓ, etc.

Thus, the life and times of this famous, yet unknown, 'Aṭṭār are obscured by legends and narratives that are as unreliable as any. All that we do know for certain is that 'Aṭṭār was a physician and a pharmacist who had a comfortable life in the city of Nishapur, where he was born and lived until its invasion and subsequent devastating destruction by the Mongols in 618/1221, when he may have died or been killed. More than two hundred years after his death, however, Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, in his biographical work, *Nafaḥāt al-uns*, tells us of how, one day, 'Aṭṭār was very busy with his patients, when a dervish who was begging in front of his pharmacy asked him to give something in the name of God. 'Aṭṭār was so busy that he didn't have the time to pay attention to the beggar's request, at which the latter became angry with him and said: 'Sir! You are too attached to the worldly life. How will you ever pass away?' 'Aṭṭār replied: 'Just as you will!' The beggar thereupon lay down, invoked 'Allah', and died. Suddenly, thereafter 'Aṭṭār allowed his business to be plundered, and became a devotee to Sufism. There is no documentation prior to Jāmī's *Nafaḥāt al-uns* telling us of such an event, but let us see how this tradition came into existence. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī writes in his *Mathnawī*,

Every druggist whose reason became acquainted with God,
Dropped the trays of drugs and perfumes into the river.¹

Jāmī was a poet, not a historian or an archivist. Well acquainted with Rūmī and his works, he would certainly have memorized this striking line, and fabricated a narrative on its basis. Clearly he had no concern for future scholars of 'Aṭṭār discussing his biography eight hundred years after his death, and no concern for the historical authenticity of his narrative. And yet, how many scholars even today when studying the works of 'Aṭṭār, refer to this imagined story and rewrite it as a part of 'Aṭṭār's life?

Let us look at another example constructed out of 'Aṭṭār's comments and concerning his inclination towards the Sufi tradition. In his preface to the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, he states that since his early childhood he had been very interested in Sufis, and their words had always been a refreshing balm for his heart. Yet, nowhere in any of his seven volumes of writing – all of them interesting works of Sufi literature – is there any reference to his having an affiliation with a particular Sufi order or master or *khānaqāh*. Moreover, in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* and in all his poetic works, 'Aṭṭār refers to many Sufis – some of them not even Muslim – who, because of unforeseen events (*wāqī'āt*), became devotees of Sufism. Yet, despite the fact that 'Aṭṭār doesn't mention any *wāqī'a* of his own, Jāmī composes a narrative of 'Aṭṭār's *wāqī'a*, and goes further in identifying the order to which he attached himself – that is, the Kubrāwīs, followers of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, and one of the most active groups of Sufis at that time. Jāmī's source for suggesting such an

affiliation is the brief mention in 'Aṭṭār's preface to his *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* of the name of Imam Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad Khwārazmī, a person who may or may not have been a follower of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā. Neither does 'Aṭṭār refer to Imam Majd al-Dīn Khwārazmī as a Sufi master, or as his own spiritual master, in his preface to the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*. He refers only to a short visit he had paid to Khwārazmī at his residence, a visit which does not imply any spiritual relationship.

Dawlatshāh of Samarqand, a contemporary of Jāmī, refers in his *Tadhkirat al-shu'arā'* to Imam 'Abd al-Raḥmān Akkāf, as 'Aṭṭār's Sufi master. His source is, likewise, the preface of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, but 'Abd al-Raḥmān Akkāf was not a Sufi who might then be able to become a master to others. Both Khwārazmī and Akkāf bore the title of Imam, which meant that they were both religious leaders and jurists, but not that they were Sufi masters.

The main point is that, from early childhood until his death, 'Aṭṭār always had a deep interest in the spiritual elevation of the human being through the teachings of mysticism, a perspective which was always a part of his life. He loved and respected all spiritual or religious pioneers without any fanatical enthusiasm for a special sect, affiliation to a special order, or membership in a special *khānaqāh*. In his first chapter of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* where 'Aṭṭār talks about Imam Ja'far al-Šādiq, he shows respect for Imam Šādiq as a major source of mystical teachings, but not as the founder of the Twelver Imam school of Shi'ism. He also expresses deep respect for the Ahl al-Bayt, the members of the Prophet's house, as well as his particular respect for Imam Šādiq who discussed Islamic mysticism, and thus is a pioneer for all lovers of God. In the same first chapter of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, 'Aṭṭār expresses surprise at those who see a contradiction between the Ahl al-Bayt and Sunni Muslims. From his point of view he makes it clear that there is no contradiction, and that a real Sunni must respect the Prophet, his companions or *Ṣaḥābat*, his four Caliphs, and his descendants. There is much that we can learn about 'Aṭṭār from his *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* without relying on spurious narratives. For one thing, it makes it clear that 'Aṭṭār was a faithful Sunni.

Before the rise of the Safavid dynasty, after all, most Iranian Muslims were Sunnis, although in some cities – such as Kashan, Qum, and the town of Sabzewar – there were also large communities of Shi'is. But in most cities and towns of the province of Khurasan, especially in its major city of Nishapur, the Ḥanafīyya and Shāfi'īyya schools shared between them the majority of the population. 'Aṭṭār's comments about famous Imams and Sufi masters confirm his Sunni affiliation, for he clearly believes in the succession of Abū Bakr al-Šiddīq after the Prophet's death, then the caliphates of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān, and finally of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, whom he also admires as a great mystic, but not as the first successor of the Prophet. The founders of the four Sunni schools are also spoken of with respect by 'Aṭṭār, and three of them – Abū Ḥanīfa Nu'mān b. Thābit, Muḥammad b. Idrīs Shāfi'ī, and Imam Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal – are listed in the *Tadhkirat*

al-awliyā' as '*awliyā'*', and each is introduced in a chapter, but with their names preceded by the title Imam. Abū Ḥanīfa is furthermore referred to in most cases as *Imām-i a'zam*, implying that 'Aṭṭār was a Ḥanafī Muslim.

I am aware of course that in biographical works authored after the rise of the Safavid dynasty and later, 'Aṭṭār, Sa'dī, Ḥāfiẓ and many others were converted to Shi'ism some hundred years after their deaths. If we rely on Shi'i sources of that era, such as the *Majālis al-mu'minīn* of Qāḍī Nūrallāh, we find not only that our Muslim poets, writers and scholars were all Shi'is, but even that Epicurus could have been a Shi'i philosopher. However, the fact of the matter is that most, or at least, many biographies narrated by *tadhkira* writers of the fifth to thirteenth Hijri centuries cannot be considered as reliable sources unless their information is confirmed by the works of the poets and writers themselves.

But having said this, we cannot simply condemn those biographers as liars. It bears repeating that those biographical works were never compiled in order to be used by us as research documents in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Their information was seldom obtained through direct contact with the poet or writer in question, nor were *tadhkira* writers for the most part knowledgeable enough to search for scholarly information or reproduce it in a reliable fashion. But there is another consideration as well, and it is proved by 'Aṭṭār himself.

Let me say frankly that in this most important work of 'Aṭṭār – his *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* – there are also many narratives and legendary stories which are not true. We read in the third chapter that Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was born and grew up in the house of Umm al-Salama, one of the Prophet's wives, and that the Prophet was very kind to him; but we know that this cannot have been true, because he was not born in Basra until a decade after the Prophet's death. Moreover, in the eleventh chapter the story of Ibrāhīm b. Adham's reign as king or governor of Balkh is not supported by historians: this appears to be a fabricated version of the story of Luhrāsp in Persian mythology and in the Persian epic, the *Shāhnāma*. It may also have been partially borrowed from the story of the Buddha. Another example is in chapter fourteen, where 'Aṭṭār says that Abū Yazīd of Bisṭām – or Bāyazīd as he is better known – visited Imam Ṣādiq and was influenced by him: we are well aware that Bāyazīd was not a contemporary of Imam Ṣādiq since he was born forty-five years after the Imam's death.

In many Sufi biographical and didactic works, such legends or narratives may have had educational purposes, for they were quoted as models to be imitated by disciples of the Sufi path. From their point of view, *rawāyāt* were not expected to be true or logical. Dervishes who were affiliated with a Sufi order or a *khānaqāh* were usually not from the elite of society. They were mostly faithful Muslims who might simply believe in what they heard from their master. Therefore, stories and legends told to them about the great mystics such as Bāyazīd, Abū Sa'īd, 'Aṭṭār, Rūmī, Ḥāfiẓ, or others, might not have seemed all that unbelievable. At the same

time, however, many Sufis might have made spiritual progress by listening to these imagined, fabricated or even true stories.

In any study of 'Aṭṭār's life and works, his connection with and influence on the writings of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī must be addressed. There is no doubt that Rūmī was considerably influenced by 'Aṭṭār. This becomes very clear when we read Rūmī's works, especially his *Mathnawī*. But the story of their meeting when Rūmī was twelve or thirteen years old and was leaving Khurasan with his father Bahā al-Dīn Walad is another narrative that cannot be found in any source prior to Jāmī's *Nafahāt al-uns*, and to Dawlatshāh's *Tadhkirat al-shu'arā'*. Rūmī's first biographer, his son Sulṭān Walad, never mentions the encounter; neither does Shams al-Dīn Aflākī, who fabricated many legends in his *Manāqib al-ʿarīfīn* in order to elevate Rūmī's reputation, refer to such a meeting in Nishapur. In those very turbulent years before the expected invasion of the Mongols, 'Aṭṭār was still active, and Rūmī and his father would very likely have had to pass through the city of Nishapur on their way to central Iran, and ultimately to Mecca. But, as I said, there is no evidence that the travellers met 'Aṭṭār, or that the latter predicted to Bahā al-Dīn Walad that his son would 'inflame all enthusiasts of the world!'

Our knowledge of 'Aṭṭār's family is similarly ambiguous and limited. In some sources one finds the story of 'Aṭṭār travelling with his ten children, all young men, when they encounter a band of brigands. The thieves kill nine out of the ten sons before the last one says to his father: 'Oh baba! why don't you say a word? What a merciless father you are!' 'Aṭṭār answers: 'I cannot say a word. This is the Divine will!' Then the thief says: 'If you had said this before, none of them would have been killed.' The main source of this baseless story is a legend related to Ibn-i 'Aṭā which was narrated by 'Aṭṭār himself in Chapter 49 of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, and whether such a thing even actually happened to Ibn-i 'Aṭā is also doubtful. Among the narratives related to 'Aṭṭār, the death of his thirty-two year old son or daughter may be true, for this is suggested in a quatrain by 'Aṭṭār in his *Mukhtār-nāma*, where he calls him or her: 'O my thirty-two year old!' All other information provided by *tadhkira* writers must be similarly tested through the reading of 'Aṭṭār's own works.

As for 'Aṭṭār's literary works, there are only seven books of poetry and prose which are authentically attributed to Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad 'Aṭṭār. However, the number of works printed in his name or listed in the biographical *tadhkirat* ranges from the forty volumes claimed in the *Tadhkirat al-shu'arā'* of Dawlatshāh to more than one hundred and ninety in other works. Most of these did not come from the pen of 'Aṭṭār – perhaps only ten or eleven – of which we possess only six volumes of poetry, and the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* which, as I noted, can reliably be ascribed to him.

Forty years ago when the analytical study of 'Aṭṭār by Professor Furūzānfar, *Sharh-i aḥwāl wa naqd wa taḥlīl-i āthār-i Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad 'Aṭṭār-i*

Nishāpūrī, was published in Tehran, the works of certain attribution included ten titles: seven works of poetry, one in prose (*Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*), plus two missing works, *Jawāhir-nāma* and *Sharḥ al-qalb*, mentioned by 'Aṭṭār himself, but of which no copies exist in any library. The works regarded by Professor Furūzānfar as genuine included the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, *Dīwān-i ghazaliyyāt wa qaṣā'id*, *Ilāhī-nāma*, *Mantiq al-ṭayr* or *Maqāmāt al-ṭuyūr*, *Asrār-nāma*, *Muṣibat-nāma*, *Mukhtār-nāma*, and finally *Khusraw-nāma*, whose attribution to 'Aṭṭār was later denied by Professor Shafī'ī-Kadkanī in the introduction to his edition to *Mukhtār-nāma*, and then in his very scholarly preface(s) to a selection of 'Aṭṭār's *ghazals* entitled *Zabūr-i pārsī*. Shafī'ī-Kadkanī, who was a close student of Professor Furūzānfar and who is now an eminent and well-known scholar of Persian Sufi literature, advances a very cogent argument to which I can do only the briefest justice in this short chapter. In his introduction to 'Aṭṭār's *Mukhtār-nāma*, Shafī'ī shows that the famous *Khusraw-nāma* edited by the late Aḥmad Suhaylī Khwānsārī, belongs to another 'Aṭṭār who lived some decades after Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār of Nishapur. Then, in his preface to *Zabūr-i pārsī*, he reminds us that there were more than ten people in the decades following 'Aṭṭār's life who were druggists and who wrote some humble treatises or poems using the pen name 'Aṭṭār. After this, Shafī'ī-Kadkanī demonstrates quite clearly that *Khusraw-nāma* was the original title given by 'Aṭṭār to his *Ilāhī-nāma*.

So, when you see titles such as *Bīsar-nāma*, *Ushtur-nāma*, *Ḥaydarī-nāma*, *Maẓhar al-'ajā'ib*, and many others attributed to 'Aṭṭār, on sale at the bookstores around the Masjid-i Shāh and the main bazaar of Tehran, I would advise you to be as suspicious of them as you would be of much of the biographical tradition surrounding 'Aṭṭār himself, and to hang on to your money.

Notes

1. Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. R.A. Nicholson (Tehran, 1357 Sh./1978), vol. 2, p. 625.

Sufi Saints and Sainthood in 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*

SHAHRAM PAZOUKI

The *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* is the principal and most comprehensive source on the lives and words of the saints (*awliyā'*) in the collected works of 'Aṭṭār. It is his only work in prose and its attribution to him is not subject to doubt. 'Aṭṭār appears to have finished the work in the later years of his life.

Although the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* is written in a fluent and lovely Persian, its style is poetical. Many have admired the great literary value of the book to such an extent that a specialist such as Muḥammad Qazwīnī says: 'I have not found in Persian any other book besides this with the two qualities of simplicity and sweetness.'¹

There is no doubt about the incomparable literary worth of the book and every Persian reader will recognize this. Here a question arises: is the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* a literary work and is 'Aṭṭār a man of letters? By reading the preface to the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, where 'Aṭṭār lists his reasons and motives for writing the book, we easily find that his main intention was to revive faith in an age when, according to him 'the best men are [in reality] bad and the worst men have forgotten the best', and impostors pretend to be true men of spirituality and true Sufi shaykhs.²

Therefore 'Aṭṭār, like many other great Sufis, intended to restore faith and neglected spiritual states such as repentance (*tawba*), discipleship (*irāda*), companionship (*muṣāḥaba*), reliance on God (*tawakkul*) at a time when the true sciences of religion had been forgotten and confined to jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*kalām*). We are all aware that before 'Aṭṭār such efforts were systematically made in Ghazālī's *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* ('Revivification of the Sciences of Religion') with the difference being that the *Ihyā'* is based on Sufi topics and the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* on the Sufi shaykhs in whose language he develops faith.

The *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* is primarily a Sufi text with its own particular characteristics that contribute to its being a masterpiece of literature. Most importantly,

it should, however, be observed that one cannot penetrate to its depths simply through literary analysis.

The very title of the book, that is the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, reveals to the reader the principal subject of its contents, provided that one is free of some prejudices caused by the modern thought.

Now we come to our main questions: what is a *tadhkira*? And, who are the *awliyā'*?

What is a *Tadhkira*?

To find answers to this we start with the meaning of *tadhkira* or *tadhkirat*. This is derived from the word *dhikr* which means 'remembering and that which causes remembrance', in other words, a memorial. Thus, the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* is a book of remembrance. It is a memorial of the forgotten faith by way of the recollection of the words and acts of seventy-two (or according to some sources ninety-seven) *awliyā'* who lived in the first three centuries of the Hijra. They are famous Sufi shaykhs who wanted to be nameless and without fame. However, from a reading of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* one will not find any biographies, in the strict sense of the term, of any of them at all. 'Aṭṭār does not merely compile facts about the shaykhs; he authors a work that recreates the spiritual world of the *awliyā'*. 'Aṭṭār did not intend to write a biography of the *awliyā'*. He even omits the sources he used for his book and the chain of the documents of the sayings of Sufis.³ This is not only particular to 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, but also characterizes almost all Sufi *tadhkirat*: they are not composed as formal biographies.

In biographical writing emphasis is usually laid on the *bios*, namely, the physical life of any particular person from birth to death. A biography is an account of a person's life and ideas based on such considerations as social, political and psychological factors. This kind of explanation of one's thought and actions is the outcome of a belief in modern historicism and romanticism. In a historicism which is based on historical positivism, things are meaningful only if they can be explained by certain historical facts.⁴ However, how can we judge the sayings and spiritual states and acts of the *awliyā'* while what is happening in their spirits is hidden from us (and is) in their Sufi world? What we see and hear from them is completely external, while the origin of these phenomena arises in their hearts, and is ineffable.

'Aṭṭār himself says that the sayings of the shaykhs of the *ṭarīqat* are: 'from witnessing, not from utterances ... and from Divine knowledge (*'ilm ladunnī*), not from acquired knowledge, from boiling not from toiling.'⁵ So, what can we make of something which is conditional and restricted to time and place and which is considered by 'Aṭṭār to be beyond these constraints? How can such things be evaluated by historical criticism and by referring to historical sources, as is customary? How can 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* be regarded as an historical text? Spiritual

states are not recorded anywhere, and the *awliyā*' themselves conveyed these matters from heart to heart, and they forbade writing about them.

The objections raised by Qazwīnī and other scholars who say that 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*' is full of historical inaccuracies about events and dates are misplaced.⁶ 'Aṭṭār did not pay the slightest attention in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*' to the social and political troubles of his times. This was a period when the Mongols were invading, and all the historical sources, such as the history of Ibn Athīr, are filled with reports of massacres and atrocities. Instead of speaking of the desert physically close to Nishapur, in which so much blood had been spilled, he spoke of the desert within, which the wayfarer needs to cross.

Perhaps it may be said that in some respects the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*' appears to be a hagiography (derived from the Greek *hagios*, holy or sacred), meaning the writing of the lives of the saints. However, the idea is not merely to recount the miracles of certain people or to prove that they had divine powers; rather he is trying to ignite a spark that will enable the reader to sense something of the spiritual states of his subjects.

'Aṭṭār showed no interest in studying the lives of the *awliyā*' in an objective manner because he saw this as an obstacle to becoming intimate with their spiritual states. He enters into a dialogue with them in a meta-historical dimension. He puts himself in the place of those of whom he speaks, carrying his resonance with their hearts (*hamdīlī*)⁷ to the point of identification. In this meta-history, which is the time of the soul, Junayd or Ḥallāj are not only historical figures outside one's soul, but they turn out to be alternative realities within one's own soul with whom 'Aṭṭār travels the way. In this respect, the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*' is similar to what the Sufi exegetes find in the Qur'ān, namely that the persons mentioned have both outward and inward realities. For example, there are the historical figures of Jesus and Moses, as well as the Jesus and Moses of the soul. In this regard Rūmī says:

The Qur'ān is the spiritual states of the prophets,
The fishes of the pure ocean of the Almighty.⁸

It is also similar in method to the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn 'Arabī, except that the subject of the *Fuṣūṣ* is the prophets while the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*' concerns itself with the *awliyā*'.

Who are the *Awliyā*'?

Now we come to the second question. Who are the *awliyā*'? 'Aṭṭār says his book is about the narrations attributed to the Sufi shaykhs, or as 'Aṭṭār himself called them, the *mashāyikh-i ṭarīqat*.⁹ But why does he refer to them as *awliyā*'? Before 'Aṭṭār, there were other books written as memorials of the Sufi shaykhs in which

they were mentioned as *awliyā*'. The oldest such text which has been preserved is the *Kitab al-awliyā*' written by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 894); then there is the *Sīrat al-awliyā*' by Ḥakīm Tirmidhī (d. 10th century), in which he wrote about his own spiritual life, and which is the oldest extant writing that deals explicitly with the topic of *walāyat* in Sufism. The most famous text is the detailed book, the *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*', by Abū Nu'aym Iṣfahānī, (d. 11th century), which is one of the main sources for 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*', so that some of 'Aṭṭār's work is a Persian translation of Iṣfahānī's book. Like him, 'Aṭṭār even begins the section on each *walī* with rhymed prose.¹⁰

The word *awliyā*' is the plural form of *walī* (saint) which is cognate with *walāyat* (sainthood). The original meaning of *walāyat* is the nearness of two things to one another without any distance between them, such as the nearness of the lover to the beloved, or man to God. In Sufi terminology *walāyat* is the spirit and inner meaning of *risālat*, messengerhood. The Prophet faced God with the aspect of his *walāyat*, saying, 'I have states that are with God.' With the aspect of his *risālat* he faced people and propagated the Divine law. *Risālat* is confined to a particular time and place, while *walāyat* is not temporally or geographically confined. *Risālat* is manifest, but *walāyat* is hidden. The spiritual states of the Prophet were hidden from those who had no understanding of them, but his *risālat* was for all people, and hence had to be announced publicly. In other words, *risālat* is the source of *sharī'at*, and *walāyat* is the source of *ṭarīqat*, and both *sharī'at* and *ṭarīqat* mean 'way', or 'path'.

The dimension of *risālat* in Islam is what later appeared in the form of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), while the dimension of *walāyat* took the form of Sufism. According to Hujwīrī,¹¹ *walāyat* is the main principle of Sufism whose 'reality is unanimously affirmed by all the shaykhs, though each of them has expressed it in various ways in accord with their own states.'

Since *walāyat* is a Divine reality, the *walī* had to be appointed by Divine decree. This has nothing to do with the caliphate or political governance. The Prophet appointed 'Alī as the first *walī* after himself by God's command, and the subsequent Imams were likewise appointed in turn by their predecessors. This is why 'Aṭṭār begins the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*' with the remembrance of Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq,¹² and if we consider the last sections of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*' to have also been written by 'Aṭṭār, he finishes the book with the remembrance of the fifth Shi'i Imam, al-Bāqir.¹³

'Aṭṭār calls Imam Ṣādiq 'the heir to the Prophet', 'the exemplar of the shaykhs', 'shaykh of all the Divines', 'Imam of all the Muhammadans', 'the forerunner of the people of spiritual taste', and 'the leader of the people of love'. Then he apologizes for not having mentioned the names of the other Imams, and says, 'They are all the same. When you mention one of them, it is a remembrance of all of them. Have you not seen that the people who have his religion have the religion of the twelve Imams? This means that one is twelve and twelve is one.'¹⁴ He continues: 'Whoever

believes in Muḥammad, peace and blessings of God be with him and with his progeny, and does not believe in his descendants and companions, he does not believe in Muḥammad, peace and blessings be with him.¹⁵ Referring to a verse of poetry from Shāfi‘ī, he says, ‘If friendship with the descendants of the Prophet is rejectionism (*raf*), then tell all the jinns and humans to bear witness to my rejectionism.’¹⁶

‘Aṭṭār considered the friendship and *walāyat* of the *Ahl al-Bayt* as one of the principles of faith. He says, ‘This is the requisite of being “Sunni and orthodox.”’¹⁷ The word ‘Sunni’ here is not in contrast with ‘Shi‘ī’, but has its strict and literal meaning, following the *sunna* of the Prophet. We can find this usage in the poetry of Rūmī and Shāh Ni‘matu’llāh Walī, as well.

This friendship is not merely the simple love that every Muslim naturally has for the descendants of the Prophet. It means the acceptance of the *walāyat* and spiritual guidance of the Imams after the Prophet. This is why almost all the Sufi orders trace their initiatic lineage to the Imams, especially the sixth and eighth Imams, then to ‘Alī, and from him to the Prophet. By doing this they show their spiritual relation and the connection of *walāyat* to the Prophet.

One of the main conditions for *walāyat* is *irādat* (discipleship). In the view of Sufi shaykhs like ‘Aṭṭār, religion is a way to union with the Beloved. The Ascent of the Prophet (*mi‘rāj*) is a model for this wayfaring. Each Sufi should attempt to follow this way in order to become a *walī*. When he mentions Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*, ‘Aṭṭār describes Bāyazīd’s ascent.¹⁸ To travel this way one needs a guide, a hoopoe, in the words of ‘Aṭṭār’s *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, who guides thirty wayfaring birds (*sī murgh*) to the *Simurgh*. Because of this, for every Sufi mentioned in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*, it is stated which of the *awliyā’* were his masters. Usually the story goes that after the beginning of the way, which is the station of awakening (*yaqza*) from the sleep of negligence, the Sufi seeks a guide before whom to repent so that he can travel through the seven cities of love. This repentance is actually practised by giving the hand of discipleship to the *walī* and making *bay‘at*¹⁹ with him, symbolized as being given the dervish mantle (*khirqā*); in other words, it is the acceptance of the *walāyat* of the shaykh.

Sometimes the names of these masters are mentioned explicitly, as in the *irādat* of Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī to Imam Ṣādiq,²⁰ or Ma‘rūf Karkhī to Imam Riḍā.²¹ In other cases, allusion is made to them under titles such as *Khiḍr*, as in the case of the master of Ibrāhīm Adham.²² What is important in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’* is the principle of accepting discipleship with the *awliyā’*. The historical details are not essential. As is narrated from Bāyazīd, ‘Religious duty is companionship with the *mawlā* (the master, i.e., the *walī*) and *sunnat* is abandoning the world.’²³ This is the essence of all the precepts of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*.

‘Aṭṭār himself also had a master. Some people, including Jāmī,²⁴ say that ‘Aṭṭār was the disciple of Shaykh Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī, one of the shaykhs of Shaykh Najm al-Dīn Kubrā. ‘Aṭṭār himself, at the beginning of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*,²⁵

mentions his companionship with Majd al-Dīn. Others say that since there is no explicit documentation on the basis of which certainty could be obtained regarding the name of his master, it should be concluded that he had no master at all.²⁶ However, throughout the works of ‘Aṭṭār, it is insisted that the way must be undertaken with the guidance of a *walī*; so, how could he possibly go without a guide himself? It is not always the case that a Sufi shaykh will explicitly mention the name of his guide in the way that Rūmī mentions Shams. It only becomes necessary for them to mention their guides when they receive permission to guide others.

There is another theory, according to which ‘Aṭṭār was what is called Uwaysī,²⁷ that is, he was guided by the spirituality of the past masters, the most important of whom was Shaykh Abū Sa‘īd b. Abī’l-Khayr, just as Uways is supposed to have been guided by the spirituality of the Prophet. To be Uwaysī – guided by the spirituality of departed masters – does not agree with the principles of Sufism, according to which the way must be undertaken under the guidance of a living *walī*. Sufi orders, such as the Naqshbandiyya, in which there is a lacuna in the chain of authorization, make use of the idea of being guided by the spirituality of past masters in order to fill in the gaps. What is accepted by Sufis and other Muslims is appealing to and benefiting from the spirituality of the prophets and *awliyā’*, and the idea of this is implicit in the practice of offering benedictions, *ṣalawāt*, to the Prophet, in which one asks God to bless the Prophet and his folk as a means of intercession. The relationship between ‘Aṭṭār and Abū Sa‘īd would be better considered as a sort of spiritual homogeneity, as is alluded to in a *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet according to which the spirits were gathered in armies, and those who recognized one another became sympathetic.²⁸ This sympathy among spirits does not imply that one could be guided by another in lieu of a living master.

Variety among the *Awliyā’*

In order to understand the variety which characterizes the aspects of *walāyat*, ‘Aṭṭār mentions different sayings and states attributed to the *awliyā’*. The differences among them are so striking that it may appear difficult to reconcile them. These differences appear from the very beginning of wayfaring and continue throughout it until the end. For example, Ḥallāj considered travelling to be necessary for spiritual wayfaring, and he himself travelled from Tustar in what is today south-western Iran to Khurasan in north-eastern Iran, and from India to China,²⁹ while Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī is reported to have said that seekers should stop their travelling, because what is sought on the spiritual path is not to be found through physical journeying.³⁰ Some shaykhs define Sufism in such a way that it is entirely a matter of personal effort and struggle, while others define it as contentment and submission. These differences are due to the differences in the manner in which the *walī* travels the path. As Rūmī says:

Every prophet and every *walī* has a way,
But since each brings them to God, they are one.³¹

‘Aṭṭār himself refers to these differences in the way as follows: ‘The *awliyā*’ are different. Some of them are people of knowledge. Some are people of action. Some are people of love. Some are people of *tawhīd*. And some are all of the above.’³² In another place, when he mentions Junayd Baghdādī, ‘Aṭṭār says, ‘Most of the shaykhs of Baghdad in his age and after him followed his way in religion. His way is the way of sobriety, contrary to the way of the Ṭayfūriyān, the companions of Bāyazīd.’³³ Accordingly, ‘Aṭṭār considers there to be two main ways for wayfaring: the way of sobriety and the way of intoxication. This does not mean that none who follow the way of sobriety can smell the perfume of intoxication or love. From this love comes knowledge and from the knowledge comes love. ‘Aṭṭār says that Junayd was singular in love, even as he mentions his sobriety.³⁴ He also says that Rābī‘a al-‘Adawiyya was burnt with love, yet was peerless in her action and knowledge.’³⁵

Sometimes, differences are due to the different stages along the way. Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistarī says:

In this way there are *awliyā*’ ahead and behind,
Each giving the address of his own dwelling.³⁶

One says that he never committed a sin in his whole life and has observed all the rules of the *sharī‘a*, while another at an even more exalted stage says that one’s very existence is such a grave sin that no other sin is comparable to it. In another example, Dhū’l-Nūn al-Miṣrī sent someone to Bāyazīd to ask, ‘Do you sleep the entire night while the caravan has gone?’ Bāyazīd replied, ‘Tell him that a perfect man is one who sleeps the entire night, but in the morning arrives at the destination before the caravan.’ When Dhū’l-Nūn heard this, he wept and said, ‘May he be blessed! I have not reached this stage.’³⁷

Despite all these differences, all of the *awliyā*’ face a single direction, all have one orientation, all respond to the Divine vocation. There is a hidden thread that connects all of them: *walāyat*. Because of this, none of them denies or rejects the way of another, despite their apparent differences, as is clear from the story cited above about Dhū’l-Nūn and Bāyazīd in which neither denied the other.

In his *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, ‘Aṭṭār does not show any preference for any particular *walī* above another. He says, ‘My concern is only with their sayings; it is not for me to prefer one to another.’³⁸ Generally speaking, the sort of disputations and refutations that one sees among the *fuqahā*, theologians or philosophers, is not found among the Sufis.

The Language of the *Awliyā'*

Another important feature of *walāyat* as described in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* is that although spiritual discipline is practised by the *awliyā'* with extreme ascetic zeal, none of them believe that by these means one achieves perfection. It is narrated from Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz: 'Whoever supposes that one can reach God by striving has fallen into endless suffering.'³⁹ They believe that the most important provision for the way is Divine grace on the one hand and purity of intention on the other. It is narrated from Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī that he found everything he was looking for in his mother's satisfaction. One night she was ill and asked him for a glass of water. While he went to get it, she fell asleep again. He remained awake until morning with the water for her. God rewarded him with interior unveilings.

The *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* is a book of *walāyat* or *ṭarīqat*. *Sharī'at* and *ṭarīqat*, as has been said, are two aspects of Islam, with the difference that the *ṭarīqat* is the interior or the spirit of the *sharī'at*. Although the *awliyā'* are strict in their observance of the *sharī'at*, they reach a stage beyond this outward aspect of Islam. At this stage the precepts of *sharī'at* and *ṭarīqat* will be different, but not in contradiction. Dhū'l-Nūn says, 'There are things in the *ṭarīqat* that do not agree with what is apparent in the *sharī'at*.' Aṭṭār gives two examples from the Qur'ān: the story of the divine command to Abraham to sacrifice his son, and the killing of the boy by Khidr. In both cases there was a divine order that was apparently against the *sharī'at* and reason, as well; but in reality, the order was not against them, but beyond them. Junayd was asked to sign the sentence for the execution of Ḥallāj, but he refused to do so while wearing the Sufi cloak. After he put on the turban and gown of the scholars of Islamic law, he endorsed it saying, 'Now I judge according to the external, that is, according to the *sharī'at*, that he should be executed. As for the inward reality or *ṭarīqat*, God knows it.'⁴⁰ Aṭṭār explains that whoever has not reached this exalted stage of the *ṭarīqat* must conform completely to the *sharī'at*, otherwise he would become a freethinker and libertine. The same contrast can even be found in the Qur'ān, according to which the right to retribution is the ruling of the *sharī'at*, while the recommendation to forgive and show benevolence (*iḥsān*) is that of *ṭarīqat*.⁴¹ It is at this exalted stage that we find the statement attributed to Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount that one should turn the other cheek.

The language of the *awliyā'*, according to Aṭṭār, is a language of mystery.⁴² The source of this language is the *walāyat* of the *awliyā'*. Since *walāyat* is the spiritual dimension of the *awliyā'*, it refers to the heart. What is seen and heard by the heart cannot be uttered in language, so the *awliyā'* are usually silent, contrary to the prophets, who are commissioned to speak out. Thus, Sufism is based on silence, and if the *awliyā'* in *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* start talking, it is only as a reminder to others. When the *awliyā'* are addressed by God, their tongues are loosened, as was the case of Fuḍayl 'Ayyād. About Junayd, Aṭṭār says that he did not preach. One night

he had a dream of the Prophet ordering him to start talking. He started. Some say that ‘Aṭṭār himself, after performing his Sufi duties and after writing the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*’, stopped speaking, and it is said that he even deliberately destroyed some of the books he had written.⁴³

The *awliyā*’ speak in a mysterious and symbolic language. However, the mysteries are not obscure and the words are not incomprehensible. There is no complicated technical vocabulary in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*’ because those to whom his work is addressed include the illiterate among the people of the heart. They are people like Abū ‘Alī Siyāh Marwī from whom he narrates: ‘I am an illiterate man. I can neither write nor read anything. There should be someone who speaks to me and I hear, or I speak and he hears.’⁴⁴ However, this simple language is itself a mystery. Contrary to puzzles, mysteries do not have solutions. Mysteries are understood through the heart, not by reasoning. This is generally the case with Sufi language. In *fiqh* and *kalām*, on the other hand, the propositions propounded do not have any mysteries or secrets.

The Sufi language is the language of allusion (*ishārat*) rather than that of description (*ibārat*) used by the jurists and dialectical theologians. According to Ḥāfiz, the language of allusion is for those who receive glad tidings (*bishārat*). ‘Aṭṭār says that Junayd was the first to spread the science of allusion. Those who did not understand this language accused him of disbelief (*kufṛ*).⁴⁵ In Junayd’s view, there is a wide chasm between language and mystical experience. He says, ‘It is for about twenty years that I have spoken about the marginalia of this science, but about its mysteries, I have said nothing. Language is forbidden to speak of it.’⁴⁶

One of the characteristics of this holy Sufi language is to speak in paradoxes (*shatḥ*). Such paradoxes are beyond (*para-*) what is commonly understandable (*-doxa*). Because of this, such expressions have always been attacked by those who do not understand them. One of the theologians said to Ibn ‘Aṭā, a disciple of Junayd, ‘Why do you Sufis coin terms that are foreign to the ears of the listeners?’ Ibn ‘Aṭā replied that what was expressed in this language was so dear to them and of such value that they did not want it to be taken up by those who would not understand it and spoken of in ordinary language. The *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*’ is filled with such paradoxical statements from Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī to Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj.

In the world in which the *awliyā*’ live, as described by ‘Aṭṭār, all things are holy, because the *awliyā*’ see the ‘mystery of the light of God’ in everything. This is why, for example, the *awliyā*’ do not spit – because they consider the ground sacred.⁴⁷ Creatures also show their respect to the *awliyā*’. It is narrated that while Bishr – called Ḥāfī, meaning ‘barefoot’ – lived in Baghdad, none of the animals there urinated on the ground, because they knew that he was going around barefoot! When one of the animals finally urinated on the ground, its master wept, understanding that it meant that Bishr had died.⁴⁸ In this world all the creatures are alive and speak with the *awliyā*’ in what ‘Aṭṭār calls a silently expressive language (*zabān-i ḥāl*). For example,

there is a detailed dialogue between Bāyazīd and a dog,⁴⁹ there is a conversation between a deer and Ibrāhīm Adham,⁵⁰ and the crying of the pomegranate tree.

Conclusion

Now that we have become acquainted with the *awliyā'* of 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, we arrive at a concluding question. How can this world of the *awliyā'* with such characteristics as we have mentioned be meaningful for us today? What use is it to us? There is no doubt about the fact that those whom 'Aṭṭār addressed were simple folk, yet they could understand 'Aṭṭār's words because they came from his heart and settled in their hearts. But we live about eight hundred years distant from that world, and the standards of that world are alien to the modern world in which we live. We look towards that past as an object of scientific research, like those who look at exhibits in a museum. To understand that world we should try to put ourselves in the position of those addressed by 'Aṭṭār. He says that his book is for his friends, himself, and those who are the folk of the curtain of the unseen.⁵¹ Therefore, one should join the friends of 'Aṭṭār, those who are his companions in the way. According to Ḥāfiẓ:

Until you have become acquainted, you shall hear no mystery from
behind the curtain,
The ear of the stranger cannot receive the message of Gabriel (*surūsh*).⁵²

To understand this world one should become guests in the house of the *awliyā'*. 'Aṭṭār himself first becomes conversant with all the *awliyā'* he mentions, and then finds a resonance of the heart with them. 'Aṭṭār invites us through his *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* to join him as guests of the *awliyā'* by finding resonance of the heart with him. In this way we will not look at the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* as a literary or historical text that belongs to a dead historical past. In every era the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* serves as a memorial in the hearts of those who follow his way, and it becomes an example of a spirituality that our age has forgotten.

Notes

1. The preface to the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, ed. R.A. Nicholson (London, 1905–1907; Tehran, 1982). See also Muḥammad Taqī Bahār, *Sabk-shināsī* (Tehran, 1941), vol. 2, pp. 205–206.
2. *Tadhkirat*, pp. 8–9.
3. 'Aṭṭār himself mentions this issue. See *Tadhkirat*, p. 5.
4. In his translation of episodes from the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, Arberry concentrates his attention only on the biographical sections of each entry. See *Muslim Saints and Mystics* (London, 1966), p. 16.

5. *Tadhkirat*, p. 5.
6. In Qazwīnī's preface to Nicholson's edition of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*.
7. The expression *hamdilī* is borrowed from Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. R.A. Nicholson (Tehran, 1357 Sh./1978), vol. 1, v. 1207.
8. *Mathnawī*, ed. R.A. Nicholson, vol. 1, v. 1538.
9. *Tadhkirat*, p. 5.
10. Although in the title of his similar work to *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, i.e. *Nafahāt al-uns min ḥaḍarāt al-quds*, ed. Maḥmūd 'Ābidī (Tehran, 1370 Sh./1991), Jāmī does not mention the word *awliyā'*, he starts the book with a chapter on the *walī* and *walāyat*.
11. *Kashf al-mahjūb*, ed. V.A. Zhukovskii (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996), p. 265.
12. *Tadhkirat*, p. 12.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 819.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 202–207.
19. *Bay'at* literally means a transaction or trade in which, according to the Qur'ān, one sells one's soul to God in return for salvation.
20. *Tadhkirat*, p. 161.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 324.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
24. Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, p. 596.
25. *Tadhkirat*, p. 9.
26. Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, *Sharh-i aḥwāl wa naqd wa taḥlīl-i āthār-i Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad 'Aṭṭār-i Nīshāpūrī* (2nd ed., Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995), p. 32.
27. Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, p. 596.
28. See *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 2, p. 147.
29. *Tadhkirat*, pp. 585–586.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 585–586.
31. *Mathnawī*, I: 3086.
32. *Tadhkirat*, pp. 5–6. These differences of way can also be found in other religions. For example, in Hinduism, in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, three ways are mentioned: the way of knowledge (*jñāna-mārga*), the way of action (*karma-mārga*), and the way of love (*bhakti-mārga*), although this division does not correspond exactly to what is found in Sufism.
33. *Tadhkirat*, p. 416.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 416.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
36. *Gulshan-i rāz*, in Ṣamad Muwaḥḥid, ed., *Majmū'a-i āthār-i Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistarī* (Tehran, 1365 Sh./1986), p. 68.
37. *Tadhkirat*, p. 163.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 417.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 461.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 585.

41. Qur'ān 3:134.
42. *Tadhkirat*, p. 5.
43. Zarrīnkūb, *Justujū dar taṣawwuf-i Īrān* (Tehran, 1978), p. 269.
44. *Tadhkirat*, p. 8.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 417.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 421.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
52. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, ed. Parvīz Nātil Khānlari (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983), *Ghazal* 281, v. 6.

Words and Deeds: Message and Structure in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*’

PAUL LOSENSKY

In his introduction to the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, ‘Aṭṭār disavows any pretension to comprehensiveness. If he had collected all the available materials on the lives and sayings of the Sufis and God’s allies, he states, the book ‘would have gotten too long,’ and he appeals to the words of the Prophet Muḥammad to justify ‘taking the path of brevity and abridgement.’¹ Mimicking this practice, A.J. Arberry abridges the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā* itself in his translation, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*.² Arberry’s selected ‘episodes’ consist solely of anecdotal narratives; he omits the sayings of the *awliyā* entirely and replaces ‘Aṭṭār’s introduction to each biography with a scholarly summary of the subject’s life and references to the possible sources and parallels for each story.³ Arberry’s approach to the text has appealed to readers beyond his original English-speaking audience; his translation serves as the basis of a recently published abridgement in Persian, in which the original text of Arberry’s selections is accompanied by Persian translations of his scholarly apparatus.⁴ There is nothing objectionable in Arberry’s approach in principle: the task of the translator and compiler is in part to adjust a source text to the tastes and expectations of a new target audience. The anecdotes do deserve attention in their own right. ‘Aṭṭār is a master storyteller and was able to transform traditional biographical lore into concise and exquisitely crafted tales that retain much of their effect even when excerpted from their original context.

Nevertheless, in adapting the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā* to bring it in line with the narrative-based aesthetics of modern Western (and Westernized) readers, Arberry has sacrificed crucial aspects of the original. By including the stories and leaving out the sayings, as he himself recognizes, he reverses ‘Aṭṭār’s own announced priorities.⁵ Following his opening invocation, ‘Aṭṭār lays out the content and purpose of his work:

Leaving aside the Qur’ān and the traditions of the Prophet, there are no words loftier than those of the masters of the path – God have mercy upon them. Their words

are the outcome of experience and inspiration, not the fruit of memorization and quotation. They come from contemplation, not commentary; from innermost self, not imitation; and from divine knowledge, not acquired learning. They come from ardour, not effort and from the universe of *my Lord instructed me*, not the world of *my father taught me*, for these masters are the heirs of the prophets – the blessings of the Compassionate be upon them all. I saw that a group of my friends took great delight in the words of this folk, and I too had a strong inclination to study their lives and sayings.⁶

‘Aṭṭār alludes only in passing to the narrative lives, instead lavishing his praise specifically on the words of ‘the masters of the path’. From this perspective, the stories are not an end in themselves, but are of value primarily because they help to substantiate and explicate the sayings. Further, by deleting ‘Aṭṭār’s introduction to each biography, Arberry removes an essential structural component of the work, where ‘Aṭṭār typically propounds the major themes that are enunciated by the sayings and illustrated by the stories. As a result, the informing principles and unifying logic of the biographies are lost, and the structure of the work breaks down into a series of discrete and seemingly interchangeable anecdotes.

Put more broadly, Arberry’s translational strategy changes the ‘direction’ of the reading process. His listing of sources and parallels at the beginning of each biography emphasizes the verticality of the text: we are implicitly encouraged to study ‘Aṭṭār’s practice of *inventio*, ‘the discovery of meaning inherent in his material’,⁷ and to dissolve the text into its intertextual relations. Although there is much to be learned from this approach,⁸ ‘Aṭṭār himself does everything that he can to discourage it. He does not, for example, name any of his sources, and he eliminates the chains of transmission (*isnād*) that are typically used to authenticate both sayings and stories. ‘Aṭṭār’s purpose is primarily devotional, not historical, and he concentrates on the horizontal dimension of the text, its rhetorical persuasiveness and structural organization. To analyse the ordering of the component parts of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, its *dispositio*,⁹ we will first look at how the work as a whole gives form to its historical material. We will then examine two biographies more closely to show how apparently discrete anecdotes and aphorisms comment on one another through patterns of repetition, juxtaposition, and variation and constitute a coherent statement on a particular set of mystical and ethical themes.

The Numbers Game

Compared to Sanā’i’s *Ḥaḍīqat al-ḥaḳīqat* or Rūmī’s *Mathnawī-yi ma‘nawī*, perhaps the most striking feature of ‘Aṭṭār’s narrative poems is their use of frame stories, a single narrative running the length of the work that serves to motivate and organize a heterogeneous array of shorter tales, anecdotes, and parables. The greater demand

for verisimilitude in biographical writing is antithetical to such elaborately crafted allegories, and there is no parallel in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* for the avian pilgrimage in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* or the celestial progress of the *sālik* in the *Muṣībat-nāma*. However, an examination of the contents of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* does reveal a shaping of historical material and sources that expresses the same drive for structural cohesion and clarity found in the *mathnawīs*.

It is well established that 'Aṭṭār's original text of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* consists of seventy-two biographies and that the twenty-five additional biographies found in some later manuscripts (and as an appendix in the printed editions) is a supplement added by another hand. The arguments for this conclusion¹⁰ are based primarily on philological evidence, but can be supported on aesthetic and structural grounds as well. The biographies in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* follow a roughly chronological (as opposed to alphabetical or geographical) order, based on the sequence established in Sulamī's *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* and the biographical portion of Hujwīrī's *Kashf al-maḥjūb*. Both the beginning and ending of the work, however, suggest that historical chronology was only one of the factors that entered into 'Aṭṭār's calculations.

Although the semi-legendary Uways Qaranī, a contemporary of the Prophet, is the earliest figure included in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, his biography is slightly postponed, and the first chapter is devoted to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the sixth imam who died in 148/765. This decision is noteworthy. In the general introduction, 'Aṭṭār disclaims any intention of writing about the Prophet's family or companions, and Ja'far's biography should come ninth or tenth in strictly chronological order.¹¹ 'Aṭṭār takes pains to explain his inconsistency:

We had said that if we were to memorialize the prophets, Muḥammad's companions, and his family, it would require a separate book. This book will consist of the biographies of the masters of this clan, who lived after them. But as a blessing, let us begin with Ṣādiq (may God be pleased with him), for he too lived after them. Since among the Prophet's descendants, he said the most about the path and many traditions have come down from him, I shall say a few words about this esteemed man, for they are all as one. When he is remembered, it is the remembrance of them all.¹²

On its face, 'Aṭṭār's self-justification may seem a little weak, but other explanations for the inclusion and placement of Ja'far's biography are not hard to find. From a vertical, intertextual perspective, we note that the major source for the contents and organization of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, Hujwīrī's *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, devotes two chapters to Muḥammad's companions and offspring. 'Aṭṭār epitomizes this structure in a single biography. With this one stroke, moreover, 'Aṭṭār assimilates Muḥammad's genealogy into the Sufi tradition and implies that later Sufis, too, are legitimate heirs of the Prophet.¹³ As the work progresses, Ja'far is further integrated

into the tradition through a series of *intratextual* cross-references. Dāwud Ṭā'ī, for example, whose biography we will discuss in the following section, makes his first appearance as one of Ja'far's interlocutors,¹⁴ and Ja'far will make another appearance as a teacher of Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī.¹⁵ These horizontal cross-references are just one of the ways that 'Aṭṭār links biographies and assures the structural cohesion of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*.

Another is strategic juxtaposition. When 'Aṭṭār initiates the chronological sequence with Uways in the following chapter, the placement of Ja'far's biography takes on further significance. Ja'far and Uways are almost perfect complements: while the former was learned and socially prominent, the latter was an unlettered and obscure camel herder. Although neither ever met Muḥammad face to face, Ja'far partook in the prophetic heritage through genealogical descent, while Uways saw the Prophet with spiritual sight and knew his teachings through divine inspiration. At the very beginning of the work, 'Aṭṭār thus encompasses the full social and epistemological sweep of Sufism: familial descent is set alongside devotional affiliation, and genealogical inheritance is balanced against spiritual attraction. In similar fashion, later in the work, 'Aṭṭār will first assimilate the Islamic legal tradition into Sufism by including biographies of the four founders of the major schools of law and then set these against the story of Dāwud Ṭā'ī, who turned from the law to take up a life of rigorous asceticism.

'Aṭṭār manipulates chronological order more subtly at the end of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*. Composed in the first quarter of the seventh/thirteenth century, the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* looks back at the lives it recounts from a distance of almost three centuries, and 'Aṭṭār was free to define the limits of the work as he saw fit. His decision to end with the martyrdom of Ḥallāj in 309/922 is so artistically satisfying that it is seldom questioned, but it is perhaps not as obvious as it seems. None of 'Aṭṭār's possible models gives Ḥallāj this pride of place. If 'Aṭṭār's goal were simply to define the end of the 'classical' period of Sufism, Shiblī's death in 334/946 would appear a far more appropriate date. Shiblī, after all, is mentioned far more frequently in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* than Ḥallāj, but because he died after Ḥallāj, he is denied his own independent biography. From a purely historical point of view, Shiblī is the last of the 'formative' figures to live before the period of consolidation represented by Sulamī, Qushayrī, and Abū Nu'aym. Historical precision, however, is not 'Aṭṭār's foremost concern. Ḥallāj's tragic fate, his gruesome execution, and the post mortem miracles give the conclusion of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* a resounding power that goes well beyond questions of proper periodization.

Besides dates, there is one other number that indicates the care that 'Aṭṭār took in shaping the overall structure of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*. There is nothing in the historical material or in earlier biographical compendia¹⁶ to dictate that 'Aṭṭār include exactly seventy-two chapters. But the proliferation of three- and four-page biographies toward the end of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* suggests that

it was important for ‘Aṭṭār to reach this number. Aḥmad Mahdawī Dāmghānī has suggested that seventy-two does not have a precise quantitative meaning in medieval Islamic sources. It is, rather, a number that is used to indicate a general abundance and multiplicity.¹⁷ This lack of specificity, however, only enhances its symbolic potential. Seventy-two appears most notably in a well-known *Ḥadīth*: ‘The Jews were split into seventy-one or -two sects; and the Christians were split into seventy-one or -two sects; and my community will be split into seventy-three sects.’¹⁸ This *Ḥadīth* may do no more than give the number an appealing sacral nimbus. But it seems likely that ‘Aṭṭār had a more precise message in mind. Each of his biographical subjects constitutes, as it were, a sect of one, while together they represent the full range of Islamic spirituality. Perhaps we can extend this idea even further: ‘Aṭṭār may imply that each true believer, in turn, has a uniquely valid path to the divine. This is an idea that he presents explicitly in some of his poetry. But whether we give the number seventy-two a specific allusive meaning or merely note its generally symbolic quality, it is another sign of ‘Aṭṭār’s concern for the structural coherence of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*.

From Timidity to Piety

This attention to significant form is also evident when we examine the biographies themselves. Each biography is composed of three basic components. First comes an introduction – prefaced by a series of rhymed, laudatory epithets – that briefly describes the subject’s beliefs and accomplishments and lists teachers and associates. This is typically followed by a set of brief stories, most of which are preceded by the phrase *naql ast* (‘it is related’). Sayings and aphorisms, marked by the simple verb *guft* (‘he said’), are generally grouped together after the stories. We can further single out two recurrent types of stories: stories of repentance come immediately after the introduction, and stories of death follow the sayings at the end of the biography. A basic five-part sequence – introduction, repentance, stories, sayings, and death – thus organizes even the longest biographies, such as those of Bāyazīd and Junayd. Variations are, of course, possible. For example, the sayings may be divided into two or more groups or their position shifted slightly; in shorter biographies, stories of repentance and death may be absent, and the narrative content may be reduced to no more than a couple of brief anecdotes. In spite of the priority often given to the stories in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*, it is the introduction and sayings that are essential components of every chapter, and their role in synthesizing and giving meaning to the narratives deserves careful study.

As Julie Scott Meisami has observed, ‘both classical and medieval rhetoric paid considerable attention to the beginning of a work and to its importance in establishing the sense of the whole’, and she points out that ‘a single meaningful word’ in the opening verse of a poem can often signal the major theme of the entire work.¹⁹ The

crucial role of the introduction is especially evident in 'Aṭṭār's biography of Dāwud Ṭā'ī (d. 165/781–782). The key word appears in the first sentence of the biography: 'He was one of the elders of this clan and a chief of the folk, and he was the utmost perfection in *wara'*.'²⁰ Dictionaries translate *wara'* somewhat vaguely as 'piety' or 'godliness'; its more precise ethical sense is, as Michael Cooperson defines it, 'proper conduct in a variety of everyday situations'²¹ and it is perhaps best rendered in English as 'moral vigilance' or 'scrupulousness'. Outside of the ethical realm, however, *wara'* has a broader application as a character trait, and its semantic range extends to include caution, reticence, timidity and shyness.²²

'Aṭṭār's biography of Dāwud unfolds as an extended gloss on *wara'* in all its senses. An encounter with a funeral cortège brings him face to face with his own mortality and makes his 'heart turn cold to the world'. The first advice that he receives from his teacher, Abū Ḥanīfa, is to 'shun society'.²³ Though he continues with his legal studies for another year, he maintains total silence and perfect reticence. His repentance is complete when he secludes himself entirely from the world. In the anecdotes, his withdrawal from human society becomes progressively more insistent and extreme. In one episode, Dāwud explains his refusal to live with others, to marry, or even to comb his beard, on the grounds that these acts will distract him from his moral vigilance. Later, his wariness before all potential sources of corruption impairs even his capacity to perform the fundamental duties of the faith:

It is related that Dāwud was seen running to prayer. 'What's the hurry?' they asked.

'There is an army at the city gates, and it is waiting for me,' Dāwud said.

'What army?'

'The dead from the graveyard.'

When Dāwud completed his prayers, he would hurry off as though he were fleeing from someone until he reached home. He had a great aversion to attending prayers because of his terror of people, so the Real most High absolved him of that hardship.

Timidity here verges on paranoia, and Dāwud's awareness of mortality takes him beyond the pale of society and ritual practice. In the end, he gives up attending prayers altogether or making even the slightest motion that would bring any relief or pleasure to his *nafs*, the bodily or egoistic self. When he explains his behaviour to his mother, he makes a startling revelation:

When I saw the conditions and indecencies in Baghdad, I prayed for the Real most High to take the power of movement away from me, so I would be excused from being present in the congregation and having to see them. For sixteen years now, I have not had the power to move and have not told you.²⁴

As both a moral principle and personality trait, *wara'* reaches its extreme expression in an eremitic paralysis, as the stories explore the ultimate limits of a term first broached in the introduction as the major theme of Dāwud's biography.

These stories are introduced by the formula *naql ast*, and Dāwud's utterances are set within a narrative framework. As we move into the section of Dāwud's sayings and aphorisms, the narrative is reduced first to dialogic minimum ('Someone asked, and Dāwud said') and then to the simple citation verb *guft* ('he said'). The basic theme, however, remains the same. The aphorisms begin with Dāwud's advice to Abū Rabī'-i Wāṣitī: 'Fast from this world and break the fast on your death and flee from people as they flee from a ferocious lion.' Dietary purity is here paired with an anxious and almost panic-stricken reclusiveness. In the following counsel (*waṣīyat*), the semantic scope of *wara'* begins with verbal reticence and ends in religious vigilance:

Someone else asked him for counsel. He said, 'Hold your tongue.'

'Say more.'

'Live alone, away from people, and if you can, sever your heart from them.'

'Say more.'

'Among the things of this world, you should be content with being secure in the faith, just as worldly people are content with being secure in the world.'²⁵

Another of Dāwud's sayings takes us back to the looming sense of mortality that grounds *wara'* as both principle and behaviour: 'Someone else asked him for counsel. He said, "The dead are waiting for you."²⁶

The meanings of *wara'* are elaborated not only in Dāwud's actions and teachings, but also in a key image that run throughout the biography. In an early anecdote, we are told that Dāwud had 'a large mansion with many rooms'. As one room falls into disrepair, Dāwud moves to another until only the porch remains standing, and the porch too collapses on the night he dies.²⁷ Architecture is a common symbol of earthly comfort, social status, and in this context, the moral corruption that they harbour. Dāwud's indifference to the progressive dilapidation of the house becomes a metaphor for his larger contempt for the world and society. The connection is made explicit in the anecdote that immediately follows the section containing Dāwud's sayings:

It is related that Fuḍayl met Dāwud two times in his entire life and took pride in them. Once, Fuḍayl had ducked under a roof that was caving in. He said, 'Get up – this roof is caving in. It's about to collapse.' Dāwud said, 'As long as I've been sitting on this porch, I haven't noticed the roof. *They detest meddlesome glances as much as they detest meddlesome words.*' The second time was when Fuḍayl said, 'Give me a piece of advice.' Dāwud said, 'Flee from people.'²⁸

Narrative, image, and aphorism are powerfully combined in a single episode, and the impact is further enhanced by the cross-reference to Fuḍayl, perhaps the archetypal representative of asceticism and social liminality in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*. Characteristically, Fuḍayl takes shelter in a ruin, but finds it too unstable even for his liking. As Dāwud drives him away with a pre-emptive and accusatory curtness, he outdoes Fuḍayl in his own spiritual speciality. This encounter takes its place in the meaningful structure of both Dāwud's biography and the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* as a whole.

Since 'Aṭṭār has carefully foreshadowed the role that Dāwud's mansion will play in his death, he is able to execute a series of subtle variations on architectural imagery in the final three episodes of the biography. In the first, the rundown house becomes not simply a peripheral consequence of his indifference to the things of this world, but a perfect metonymy for his mortal, bodily self. As he refused to repair his house, he refuses to comfort his body in its final moments:

A great person said, 'When he was ill, he was sleeping on the porch of that rundown house. It was extremely hot, and he had placed a brick under his head. He was in his death throes and was reciting the Qur'ān. I said, "Do you want me to carry you out to this open field?"

'He said, "I am ashamed to ask for anything for the sake of the self. The self has never had any hold on me. It is more proper this way." He died that very night.'

Although the last part of his mansion collapses, architecture continues to figure in his biography after his death. Though his dwelling slowly fell into ruin during his lifetime, the wall built to protect his grave continues to stand strong after he is gone:

Dāwud had left final instructions: 'Bury me behind a wall, so that no one can pass in front of my face.' They did as he asked, and even today, his grave is like this.

Architecture, once a symbol of the imminent decay and inherent corruption of all mortal, created things, now stands for the firmness of Dāwud's moral rectitude in the face of society's 'meddlesome glances.' And it is another type of building that comes to represent Dāwud's final liberation from his earthly coils:

On the night that death came to him, a voice came from heaven: 'O people of the earth! Dāwud Ṭā'ī has reached the Real, and the Real most High is pleased with him.'

Later, he was seen in a dream flying through the air and saying, 'This hour, I have been released from prison.' The dreamer came to tell Dāwud – he had died.²⁹

Mansion and prison stand at opposite ends of the architectural spectrum, but through Dāwud's single-minded pursuit of moral rectitude, the two become one and are left behind together.

Paradoxically, the dilapidation of Dāwud's house represents the solidity of 'Aṭṭār's literary structure. 'Aṭṭār collected the materials for the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* from a wide variety of sources, and the use of citation phrases such as *naql ast* and *guft* creates the impression that stories and sayings are independent, detachable units. This impression, however, is belied by the clear organization and careful composition of 'Aṭṭār's verbal portraits of these 'sects of one'. In the case of Dāwud, the basic theme of his biography is stated in 'a single meaningful word' in the introduction. The full implications of *wara'* are deployed in action, word, and image. The clarity of 'Aṭṭār's structure joins together apparent contradictions – frenzied flight leading to total paralysis, collapsing house re-erected in a permanent wall – in a thorough exposition of a single concept that extends from timorous reclusiveness to uncompromising moral vigilance.

Against this background of stern self-denial, god-fearing isolation and uncompromising scrupulousness, Dāwud's one moment of spiritual delight stands out in brilliant contrast:

Once a dervish said, 'I went to see Dāwud. I found him smiling. I thought this strange. I said, "Abū Sulaymān, where does this happiness come from?" He said, "This morning I was given a wine that they call the wine of intimacy. Today I celebrated the end of the fast and took up joy."³⁰

That this exception should so thoroughly prove the rule of Dāwud's character is testimony to 'Aṭṭār's skill in organizing his account. Not surprisingly, this episode occupies the structurally prominent position at the transition between stories and sayings.

Rapture and Altruism

At the other end of the spiritual gamut from Dāwud Ṭā'ī stands Abū al-Ḥusayn Nūrī (d. 295/907–908). While Dāwud tasted 'the wine of intimacy' but once, Nūrī drank repeatedly from this cup. Dāwud exemplifies the ascetic hermitism of *wara'*, whereas Nūrī represents the self-sacrifice and altruism of *ithār*. 'Aṭṭār incorporates a quotation from Nūrī in the introduction to his biography that addresses this very point: 'Keeping company with dervishes is an obligatory duty, and seclusion is not approved.'³¹ However, since Dāwud and Nūrī are such opposites, it seems appropriate to start our analysis of Nūrī's biography not from a meaningful word at the beginning but from one at another crucial structural position, the end. A single sentence follows the story of Nūrī's death:

Junayd (God have mercy on him) said, 'After Nūrī died, no one spoke about the real nature of sincerity, for he was the truly righteous man of the time.'³²

Effective endings not only epitomize and sum up what has come before, but also shift the reader's perspective a little, encouraging a final interpretative engagement with and rethinking of the text. Although biological decease provides 'Aṭṭār with a natural closure, he seldom fails to develop its wider rhetorical potential, as we saw in the architectural imagery at the conclusion of Dāwud's biography. Giving Junayd the last word operates in a similar fashion here: his role as a supporting character has evolved throughout Nūrī's biography and is given one final twist.

Junayd's epitaph, moreover, brings to the fore a theme that has unobtrusively shaped the entire account. Nūrī's actions and statements have been dominated by the ideas of *īthār*, altruism, and *wajd*, rapture; the notion of *ṣidq*, sincerity or honesty, has appeared only in passing. Reading backwards, however, we can see that it is an issue that has been implicit from the start. To judge the validity of more extravagant forms of behaviour, such as extreme self-sacrifice or mystical transport, we need to determine to what extent public actions and claims correspond to inward states: does altruistic behaviour really indicate a lack of self-interest, or is it driven by other, ulterior motives? Is rapture inspired by the divine, or is it mere attention grabbing or perhaps a symptom of an unbalanced mental state? Using a variety of techniques, 'Aṭṭār subtly broaches this problematic in the first pages of Nūrī's biography. As the account proceeds, Junayd, as the publicly reputable face of Sufism, acts as a crucial judge and foil of Nūrī's conduct. Finally, Nūrī's own words and sayings summarize, substantiate, and justify his actions. The issue of Nūrī's sincerity – the union of deed, word, and ideal – illustrates the structural cohesion, rhetorical persuasiveness, and consummate artistry achieved by the best biographies in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*.

As we might expect, the opening sentences present the central themes of Nūrī's biography. The opening rhymed epithets, *majdhūb-i waḥdat* and *maslūb-i 'izzat*, 'enraptured by unity' and 'seized by majesty', use Arabic passive participles to indicate the ecstatic possession by the divine characteristic of Nūrī. Altruism or preferring others to oneself (*īthār*) is explicitly announced as the distinguishing principle of his doctrine. But it is a sequence of apparently indiscriminate, laudatory attributes that first points to 'Aṭṭār's concern with coordinating outer expression and inner reality: 'He possessed a venerable austerity and pleasing conduct, lofty epigrams and marvellous enigmas, true vision and honest clairvoyance, perfect love and endless yearning.'³³ The adjective *ṣādiq*, 'honest, sincere', provides a verbal hint of the logic of this series: we move from public behaviour and expression to spiritual insight and passion. A similar logic informs the miracles that 'Aṭṭār relates to explain Abū al-Ḥusayn's honorific:

He is called Nūrī, or the Luminous, because light would come from his mouth when he preached on dark nights, illuminating the room. They also called him Nūrī because the light of his clairvoyance informed him of hidden secrets. It is also said

that he had a meditation cell in the desert where he would worship all night long. People would go there to watch. At night, they would see a light shining and rising up from his meditation cell. Abū Muḥammad Maghāzilī said, 'I never saw anyone with Nūrī's devotion.'³⁴

In the first and last of these three explanations, the miraculous light verifies the inner validity of Nūrī's words, whether they are addressed to the people or to God. Projected outward, this sincerity enables him to judge the inner states of others through the prodigious power of clairvoyance (*firāsāt*). Junayd's final epitaph thus reveals an organizing principle operative from the beginning.

The need to balance and coordinate inner and outer is also apparent in the ordering of episodes. The account of Nūrī's conversion begins with a short incident told by a detached, third-person narrator. For twenty years, Nūrī allows his household to think that he has eaten at work and his co-workers, that he has eaten at home; in this way, he keeps his daily fasting hidden from all, without anyone being 'aware of his spiritual states'. 'Aṭṭār then begins a new episode by combining the introductory formulas for stories and sayings: 'It is related that Nūrī said...'. What follows is an extended, first-person account of his spiritual awakening. Nūrī himself recounts his dialogue with his body and his egoistic self; he first denies himself all physical gratification, but fails to attain his goal: 'I had heard that the hearts of this clan were extremely sensitive and knew the secrets of everything they saw or heard. I could not see this within myself.'³⁵ He then begins to deny himself any psychological gratification, whether through asceticism, ritual, social intercourse, or seclusion, and in the end, finds the jewel or pearl of enlightenment in dissatisfaction itself. By moving from objective narration to subjective confession, the juxtaposition of these two complementary episodes aligns outward action with inward spiritual development.

However, no sooner is sincerity established than it is called into question. Following his spiritual opening, Nūrī takes a break from his self-examination and somewhat naively seeks a material sign of his conversion. He goes to the Tigris, refusing to leave until he catches a fish. When Nūrī shares his revelation with Junayd, the Sufi master quickly demolishes the neophyte's pretensions: 'If you had landed a snake, that would have been your miracle, but since you were still involved, it was a deception, not a miracle. A miracle is something in which you are not involved.'³⁶ The rejection of this humble, homespun 'miracle' complicates the very concept of sincerity: if sincerity is defined by a perfect correspondence of outward appearance with inward state, what value can it have when the ultimate goal is to efface the inward state? Junayd points toward an advanced and ever-elusive form of sincerity, in which outward appearance manifests not inward consciousness, but the cosmic presence of the divine.

Junayd will make several more appearances before his concluding eulogy. While Junayd's presence helps to situate Nūrī in the larger context of the

Tadhkirat al-awliyā' through cross-reference, he also serves as a crucial structural element *within* Nūrī's biography as a supporting character. Immediately after the story of Nūrī's conversion, Junayd appears in a non-speaking role in the story that most dramatically exemplifies Nūrī's altruism. The ascetic preacher Ghulām Khalīl accuses Nūrī, Junayd and three other Sufis of heresy, and they are sentenced to death by the caliph. Standing before the executioner, Nūrī rushes before the others and joyously asks to be first to meet the sword. This act of self-sacrifice forces the caliph to reconsider the case, and Nūrī is given the final speech in the trial. His words show that he has understood the full implications of Junayd's criticism:

The Mighty and Glorious Lord has people who stand entirely through Him, who move and rest entirely through Him, who live through Him, and who abide through the contemplation of Him. If they stop contemplating the Real for even one moment, their souls fly from them. They sleep through Him, they eat through Him, they take through Him, they walk through Him, they see through Him, they hear through Him, they exist through Him.³⁷

Ascetic practice and private contemplation lead to public action and pronouncement under Junayd's experienced eye.

Junayd next appears in two consecutive anecdotes. He still acts as Nūrī's mentor, but Nūrī is now well advanced along the path and can serve as an object lesson for Junayd's other students. The setting for both anecdotes clearly indicates Nūrī's new status: it is not Nūrī who seeks out Junayd, but Junayd who comes to visit Nūrī, an unmistakeable sign of deference and respect. In the first anecdote, Junayd finds Nūrī in a state of despair and spiritual exhaustion: 'For thirty years, when He has appeared, I have been lost, and when I have appeared, He has been absent.' Junayd first turns to his followers and holds up Nūrī as a model of those who are 'tested, bewildered, and left helpless' by God and then reassures Nūrī that his frustration is proof of the authenticity of his experience: 'Thus it must be. If He comes alive in you, if He appears in you, you do not exist.' Junayd identifies true spiritual communion as a loss of awareness. In the following anecdote, the diagnosis of inner experience is juxtaposed with an assessment of public behaviour. Junayd and his followers are informed that Nūrī has been spinning on a brick for several days, shouting out the name of God; although he has not eaten or slept, he continues to observe the times and practices of daily prayer. Junayd's followers conclude that Nūrī's ritual observances are proof that he is not self-annihilated, but merely showing off. Junayd again offers Nūrī as an exemplum to his students: far from being a sham, Nūrī's behaviour indicates that even in rapture he is protected by God from violating His ordinances. In private, however, Junayd visits Nūrī and offers a more advanced teaching: 'Abu'l-Ḥusayn, if you know that shouting will do you any good

with Him, then let me start shouting too. But if you know that acceptance is better, then resign yourself, so your heart will be at ease.’³⁸ While Junayd does not question the authenticity of Nūrī’s rapture, he does imply that Nūrī’s self continues to intrude. The very mention of God’s name suggests that Nūrī continues to objectify God in language and to resist a full merger with the divine. Throughout the first part of the biography, Junayd plays a consistent role as Nūrī’s advisor and mentor, leading him from his initial naivety to the ultimate stages of self-transcendence. He provides a reliable witness to the validity of Nūrī’s spirituality and the sincerity of its expression.

We can contrast Junayd’s role here with the part he plays in the final biography of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*, that of Ḥallāj. Junayd’s actions in the events leading up to the execution of Ḥallāj are disturbingly similar to those of Pontius Pilate in the passion of Christ; although he does not initiate or encourage the persecution, his tacit approval is essential to the final dénouement. ‘Aṭṭār, however, takes pains to establish a different role and character for Junayd in Nūrī’s biography. In one episode, Nūrī questions the validity and value of public preaching as an unwarranted interference between God and the individual believer. Junayd is the object of Nūrī’s critique in the *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, but in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*, it is Shiblī. The *Kashf al-maḥjūb* was in all probability ‘Aṭṭār’s source,³⁹ and his decision to substitute Shiblī for Junayd demonstrates ‘Aṭṭār’s concern for preserving the integrity of Junayd’s character. But ‘Aṭṭār has another reason for leaving Junayd’s authority intact at this point. It heightens the impact when the roles of student and teacher are finally reversed in the penultimate episode of the narrative portion of the biography:

It is related that Nūrī fell ill. Junayd came to visit him on his sickbed and brought flowers and fruit. After a while, Junayd fell ill. Nūrī and his followers came to visit him on his sickbed. Nūrī said to his friends, ‘Each one of you take something of Junayd’s illness, so he will recover.’

‘We have taken it’, they said.

Junayd immediately got up. ‘From this time forward’, Nūrī said to Junayd, ‘when you visit someone on his sickbed, do it like this. Don’t bring flowers and fruit.’⁴⁰

In the end, Nūrī emerges as a fully matured ally of God, able to offer instruction even to his mentor. His instruction, moreover, deals with precisely the area of Sufi conduct that was first identified as his pre-eminent virtue – altruism. Far from undermining Junayd’s authority, this final role reversal demonstrates how effective his teaching has been and further enhances the authority of his final epitaph. Key themes are thus developed not only within the individual anecdotes, but through their interrelationships and juxtapositions over the course of the biography.

This complex rhetorical structure culminates in the final major component of the biography – Nūrī's sayings. Each of the fifteen aphorisms resonates with one or more of the stories and consolidates the meaning of the narrative in concise, general statements. Following the 'path of brevity', a few examples will suffice. As in Dāwud's biography, the first couple of sayings are introduced with the formula *naql ast*, but the narrative is reduced to a dialogic minimum, effecting a smooth transition between sections:

It is related that Nūrī was asked, 'How is the path to gnosis?'

He said, 'There are seven seas of fire and light. When you have crossed those seven seas, then you will become a morsel, so you can swallow the first and the last in a single bite.'⁴¹

The substantive variants between the printed editions of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* show that this paradoxical utterance has been a bane for copyists and editors alike.⁴² But the mention of the word *nūr*, light, takes us back to the opening, anecdotal explanations of Nūrī's honorific and suggests that this saying contains the informing principle of his spiritual path. The idea of consumption unites the mixed metaphors of fire and ingestion. Enlightenment is synonymous with a burning away of the self; cooked and absorbed by the divine, the seeker is nourished and empowered. The magnanimity of altruism and the ecstasy of rapture are both made possible by an annihilation of self and self-interest, and Nūrī's very name takes its place in a conceptual as well as biographical context.

Rapture is treated more explicitly in two consecutive utterances. The surprising phrase 'treating' or 'curing rapture' (*mu'ājalat-i wajd*) in the first recalls Junayd's private advice to Nūrī. Even more keenly than his mentor, Nūrī feels the danger inherent in the immediate apperception of the divine, its potential to destroy as well as revitalize. The flame in the second echoes the imagery of light and fire in the opening aphorism, highlights the threatening aspect of Nūrī's name, and explains just why rapture is such a difficult condition to treat:

They asked about rapture. Nūrī said, 'By the Lord Who prohibits the tongue from describing His reality and the description of Whose essence renders the eloquence of the cultured mute, the matter of rapture is the greatest of undertakings, and no torment is more painful than treating rapture.'

He said, 'Rapture is a tongue of flame that the innermost self cannot contain and it emerges from yearning, so the limbs of the body move, whether with joy or sorrow.'⁴³

These utterances look not just backwards, but also forward to the well-known story of Nūrī's death, which follows the sayings and immediately precedes Junayd's final

epitaph. Nūrī falls into a rapturous trance and stumbles into a freshly cut cane-field where his body is pierced by the cane stubble until he bleeds to death. His demise is made all the more poignant by the clarity with which he expresses the peril that attends the ecstatic loss of self driven by sorrow as well as joy.

Let us close with two sayings that deal with matters of conduct and, by implication, the ethics of altruism with which Nūrī is so closely identified:

He said, 'Sufism is neither knowledge nor custom. Rather, it is character.' In other words, if it were a custom, it could be acquired through striving. If it were knowledge, it could be gained through learning. Indeed, it is character, for *They are moulded by the character of God*. Emerging in the character of the Lord is not acquired by custom or knowledge.

He said, 'Sufism is freedom, gallantry, abandoning formality, and munificence.'⁴⁴

The second aphorism takes a form common among Sufi *aqwāl*, the definition of terms. The virtues listed here are an extended gloss on *īthār* – a disregard for conventional social status and niceties that allows one to place the needs of others before one's own – and reasserts the equation between Sufism and altruism established at the start of the chapter. In the first, 'Aṭṭār violates his normal practice and includes a short commentary. This commentary is largely derived from Ḥujwīrī's *Kashf al-maḥjūb*,⁴⁵ but 'Aṭṭār's addition of the Arabic *ḥadīth takhallaqū bi-akhlāq Allāh* indicates that he was not copying blindly. Nūrī's utterance again gives precedence to ethics and character (*akhlāq*) and to social conduct in the hierarchy of Sufi values. The commentary goes further and links this outward behaviour with the innate core of the personality. The sincerity of Nūrī's actions is again established, and this sincerity is grounded in God-given character.

Although Dāwud Ṭā'ī and Abū al-Ḥusayn Nūrī represent opposite poles of religious experience, the literary world of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* is ample enough to contain them both. This is, in part, due to a literary form that approaches each of the allies of God as an integral and coherent sect of one. Through a variety of techniques, 'Aṭṭār gives shape and meaning to a dispersed body of formerly discrete stories and sayings. The introduction to each biography sets key themes that are elaborated in a clear five-part structure through carefully constructed patterns of repetition, juxtaposition, and variation. As Michael Cooperson observes in the context of Arabic biographical writing, 'these relationships set up a necessarily interpretative and critical chain of associations in the reader's mind.'⁴⁶ To privilege one component of the biographies over another, as Arberry's translation does, is inevitably to distort this structure and to limit the engagement with the text that 'Aṭṭār does so much to cultivate. Indeed, so cohesive are 'Aṭṭār's literary portraits that the distinction between stories and sayings on which Arberry's reading is

predicated ultimately collapses. In both the biographies we have considered, 'Aṭṭār begins the section of utterances with episodes that merge narrative with pure dialogic exchange. From this transitional point, we can see how the stories give experiential expression to the sayings, while the sayings provide the stories with conceptual depth. The stories speak, and the words become forms of action. It is precisely this attention to structural coherence and literary persuasiveness that distinguishes the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* as the work of a poet's pen and makes it a masterpiece of Islamic biographical literature.

Notes

1. TA, p. 5. This and other translations in the article are the author's.
2. Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya'* ('Memorial of the Saints') by Farid al-Din Attar, tr. A.J. Arberry (Chicago, 1966).
3. In his introduction, Arberry writes, 'In making the present selection, attention has been concentrated on the biographical sections of each entry, leaving aside the much-prized dicta perhaps for future treatment' (*Muslim Saints*, p. 16). Arberry, in fact, never took up the task of treating the sayings.
4. Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *Guzīda'hā-yī az Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, collected by A.J. Arberry and tr. Farīdūn Badrā'i (Tehran, 1377 Sh./1998). It is worth comparing this version to an earlier college-level abridgement by the most recent editor of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, Muḥammad Isti'lāmī's *Guzīda-i Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* (3rd ed., Tehran, 1370 Sh./1991), in which 'Aṭṭār's introductions and a selection of each saint's sayings are included with a selection of stories.
5. *Muslim Saints*, p. 14.
6. TA, p. 5. Here, as elsewhere, phrases in italics are in Arabic in the original.
7. Julie Scott Meisami, *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Poetry: Orient Pearls* (London, 2003), p. 23.
8. I have examined 'Aṭṭār's use of his sources in an essay entitled 'The Creative Compiler: The Art of Rewriting in 'Aṭṭār's *Tazkirat al-awliyā'*', which will appear in a forthcoming *festschrift* in honour of Professor Heshmat Moayyad.
9. See Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, p. 55.
10. These arguments are well summarized in Isti'lāmī's introduction to TA, pp. xxv–xxvii.
11. Ḥabīb 'Ajāmī (d. 130/747–748), ch. 6, and Ibrāhīm Adham (d. 161/777–778), ch. 11.
12. TA, p. 12.
13. On heirship to the Prophet as a guiding principle in Islamic biographical literature, see Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mūn* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 13–16.
14. TA, p. 14.
15. TA, pp. 161–162.
16. Sulamī's *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* contains 105 biographies, and ch. 11 of the *Kashf al-maḥjūb* (roughly equivalent to the period covered in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*) includes 64 biographies.
17. Aḥmad Mahdawī Dāmghānī, 'Naẓarī bi-'adad-i 73 dar ḥadīth-i "tafriqa"', in *Ḥāṣil-i*

awqāt: majmūʿaʿi az maqālāt, ed. Sayyid ʿAlī Muḥammad Sajjādī (Tehran, 1381 Sh./2002), pp. 615–622.

18. Abū Dāwud al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwud*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyi al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ([s.l.]: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya, 1970), vol. 4, pp. 197–198 (no. 4596).

19. Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, pp. 60–61.

20. TA, p. 263.

21. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, p. 109.

22. See Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowen (Wiesbaden, 1974), s.v., ʿw-r-ʿ.

23. TA, p. 263.

24. TA, pp. 265–266.

25. TA, pp. 266–267.

26. TA, p. 267.

27. TA, p. 265.

28. TA, p. 267.

29. TA, p. 269.

30. TA, p. 266.

31. TA, p. 464.

32. TA, p. 474. Contrast this statement to Junayd’s vaguely laudatory epitaph on Nūrī quoted by Annemarie Schimmel: ‘Half of Sufism is gone’, in ʿAbūʾl-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī: ‘Qibla of the Lights’ in Leonard Lewisohn, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism: I. Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi (700–1300)* (Oxford, 1999), p. 64.

33. TA, p. 464.

34. TA, pp. 464–465.

35. TA, p. 465.

36. TA, p. 466.

37. TA, p. 467.

38. TA, pp. 468–469.

39. See ʿAlī ibn ʿUthmān Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, ed. V.A. Zhukovskii (Leningrad, 1926; Tehran, 1376 Sh/1997), p. 165, and *The Kashf al-maḥjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Ṣūfism*, tr. Reynold A. Nicholson (Leiden, 1911; Karachi, 1990), p. 131. ʿAṭṭār, as Professor Schimmel might say, ‘elaborates romantically’ on Hujwīrī’s text (see ʿAbūʾl Ḥusayn al-Nūrī, p. 60). ʿAṭṭār transforms the short first-person account in the *Kashf* into a third-person narrative with a dramatic dialogue between the protagonists. However, certain verbal parallels leave no question of ʿAṭṭār’s source. For example, in the *Kashf*, Nūrī says, ‘*man mar-īshān-rā naṣīhat kardam, bi-sang-am rāndand*’; in the *Tadhkirat*, the language is slightly ‘modernized’ to read, ‘*man naṣīhat kardam, marā bi-sang rāndand*.’

40. TA, p. 472. The omission of this crucial anecdote from Arberry’s translation indicates how his ‘molecular’ approach to the text can violate the artistic cohesion and impact of even the narrative portions of the biographies.

41. TA, p. 473.

42. The final clauses of the aphorism in Istiʿlāmī’s edition read, ‘*ān gah luqmaʿi gardī chunān kih awwalīn wa ākhirīn bi-yak luqma furū barī*. In Nicholson’s edition (based on later manuscripts), additions are made to clarify both sense and syntax: *āngāh luqmaʿi gardī dar ḥalq-i ū chunān kih awwalīn wa ākhirīn-rā bi-yak luqma furū burd*; see Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār,

Tadhkirat al-awliyā', ed. Reynold A. Nicholson, 2 vols. (London, 1905–1907; Tehran, [1982] 2:54).

43. TA, p. 473.

44. TA, pp. 473–474.

45. Hujwirī, *Kashf*, p. 47; Nicholson tr., p. 42.

46. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, p. 192.

II

Flight of the Soul-bird: 'Aṭṭār's Conference of the Birds

Blessed Perplexity: The Topos of *Ḥayrat* in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*

LUCIAN STONE

If we find fullness of joy in the thought that God is, we must find the same fullness in the knowledge that we ourselves are not, for it is the same thought. And this knowledge is extended to our sensibility only through suffering and death.

Simone Weil¹

This chapter is, in a sense, a reading of the last rites for the faculty of reason or intellect (*‘aql*), the final vestige of the egoic self on the mystic’s quest. Its procession towards annihilation sets the foundation upon which Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār places the capstone to his magnum opus, the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*. This occurs at the point along the Way when, after crossing the first four of the seven valleys, of seeking (*ṭalab*) love (*‘ishq*), intuitive knowledge or gnosis (*ma‘rifat*) and detachment (*istighnā*), and upon experiencing union with the divine (*tawḥīd*), the mystic encounters the state of pained, yet blessed, perplexity (*ḥayrat*)² – a topsy-turvy experience of the world in which the wayfarer’s logic (*manṭiq*)³ is befuddled and finally cast aside – allowing for poverty (*faqr*), annihilation (*fanā*) and subsistence in God (*baqā*) to succeed.

With respect to the preceding terse synopsis of the developmental stages along the mystic’s Path according to ‘Aṭṭār, particular attention may here be drawn to the peculiar ordering of the final three stations – *tawḥīd*, *ḥayrat*, and then *faqr u fanā*’ (which includes the final state, *baqā*). Traditionally understood, the ultimate aim of the mystic is *tawḥīd* (union with the divine),⁴ but ‘Aṭṭār situates this stage as his fifth, followed by two further stations. I believe this begs the question: why is *tawḥīd* not the final stage; or, rather, what is specifically entailed in both *ḥayrat* and *faqr u fanā*’ that they reach *beyond* the experience of union? Or, in other words, why does the seeker of Truth, according to ‘Aṭṭār, traverse *tawḥīd* and encounter the succeeding stages of *ḥayrat*– which, as we will see, is in essence enduring pain and suffering – and finally *faqr u fanā*’?

The following analysis is intended to illustrate that *ḥayrat* is a fundamental key to the puzzle of what is perhaps the most eminent mystery of the Way – the simultaneity of *fanā*’ and *baqā*’.⁵ In fact, as we shall see, the experience of *tawḥīd* and the subsequent turmoil in the station of *ḥayrat* is precisely that of reason’s waning struggle with the metaphysical conundrum of the experience of both Oneness and multiplicity along with the instinctive self-preservation of the intellect.⁶

Before proceeding to contextualization and textual analysis, it may finally be noted that this study also reflects ‘Aṭṭār’s own personal spiritual plight. In her illuminating *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Annemarie Schimmel said of ‘Aṭṭār that he, ‘[m]ore than any other mystical poet of Iran – can be called “the voice of pain”, the voice of longing and of searching.’⁷ The search continues *after* the experience of union (*tawḥīd*) only if the egoic self through the troublesome faculty of reason (*‘aql*) exerts itself toward a rational understanding of the divine Mystery. This aptly describes ‘Aṭṭār’s own continued agony, as he himself freely admits.

In the attempt to explicate the essentially inexplicable I will employ a method of contextualization with the hope that at the very least it will provoke the evocative powers of ‘Aṭṭār’s allegory. In employing this method, textual analyses of the final three valleys will be presented in successive order, highlighting their essential qualities and pertinent themes. Following these individual exegeses, the positioning of *ḥayrat* between the valleys of *tawḥīd* and *faqr u fanā*’ will be examined in hopes of coming to a deeper understanding of the major features of *ḥayrat* itself. Finally, an attempt, supported with textual evidence, will be made to synthesize these findings and to examine their relation to ‘Aṭṭār’s overall intent with the text – the refutation of the presumptuous and erroneous attempt to rationalize God – and to his own spiritual condition, one of constant anguish.

The Valley of *Tawḥīd*⁸

The movement into the fifth stage along the Way, *tawḥīd*, is unprovoked. What I mean by this is that it is not a state that is achieved through striving. Rather, it is given to the wayfarer, a gift from the divine. This gift is endowed due to the adherent’s absolute openness to the divine,⁹ while resisting any other form of bequest not of divine origin:

An old woman went to Abū ‘Alī and said,
 ‘Take this draft for gold from me.’
 The sheikh replied, ‘I have vowed to take
 Nothing from anyone but God.’¹⁰

In this case, the exemplar, Abū ‘Alī, refuses the generosity of the old woman, insisting instead that he will accept nothing from anyone but God Himself. It

is through the grace of God then, that the wayfarer is lifted, one might say, into *tawḥīd*. 'In the end a day will come when that sun / will cast off its veil and claim everyone.'¹¹ Therefore, it is through divine will, not any selfishly-driven motive, that the mystic is granted admission to the divine presence and the experience of divine union. One does not find God, according to 'Aṭṭār, one prepares oneself to be found by God.¹²

The self must not be posited or put forward in any fashion. Any assertion of individual will, the slightest hint of the presence of egoic consciousness, and the traveller along the Way is excluded from the experience of *tawḥīd*:

To be more than the king or less than him,
Is, in either way, confronting him.
Who am I to dare such a thing
And make myself manifest before him?¹³

As the above verses declare, if the mystic has direction, a unique perspective from which to (re-)orient him/herself toward or away from the divine, then he or she no longer remains in the station of *tawḥīd*. To make this more explicit, the mere fact of having a space¹⁴ other than absolute fusion with the divine, thereby admitting duality/multiplicity (as opposed to Oneness or singularity), is a result of a manifest self/ego; thus, the self serves as a veil to *tawḥīd*.

Though this may appear straightforward enough in theory, several looming perplexities abound. The most substantial of these are, of course, the metaphysical implications of such a claim. Here we refer to the perennial paradox of the One and the Many.

If you see many in number or just a few,
They are but one on this path, only one.
Because there are always many ones in one,
That one in the ones is the perfect one.
That is not the unique one if it comes
From the one which multiplies before you.
Since that is outside the unique, and this the multitude,
Stop being fixated on the eternity that precedes or that which follows time.¹⁵

To say the least, 'Aṭṭār's poetic language does little to clarify this dilemma – as he openly admits.

Till when, O 'Aṭṭār, this figurative language?
Return to the mysteries of oneness!
When the wayfaring man reaches this station
The station itself rises from the road.

It will get lost because he will be found;
 It will grow mute because he will be heard.
 The fragment transforms into the whole, then neither fragment nor whole,
 Not spirit nor limb, but a form will be its attribute.
 All four will emerge from each of the four
 And one hundred thousand will exceed one hundred thousand.
 In the higher school of this strange mystery
 You will find a hundred thousand intellects ('*aql*) parch-lipped.
 What is the intellect ('*aql*) here? Left at the door, a helpless child, born deaf!
 Whenever an atom of this mystery has shone on someone's head,
 He has turned his head from both worlds.
 Since this person is not as much as even a hair,
 Why should he not turn his head from the world like a hair?
 Though this person is not the whole, he too is a person;
 Even if he is and also is not, this person is a person!¹⁶

This lengthy passage is provided here for several reasons. Firstly, it self-referentially proclaims the profound difficulty 'Aṭṭār himself faced in verbalizing this divine mystery, the constant frustration of all mystics alike. Despite being an eloquent wordsmith working in the robust medium of the Persian language, all 'Aṭṭār could muster to describe this mystery¹⁷ was yet another broad generalization insufficiently characterizing the paradox: 'He is – in him, from him, with him.'¹⁸ In frustration he asserts emphatically that this mystery is impenetrable by reason ('*aql*), whose handmaiden is language.¹⁹

Finally, before moving on to the valley of *ḥayrat*, let me make note of a qualitative difference between the experience of *tawḥīd* and that of *ḥayrat*. 'Aṭṭār says of the experience of Union, 'Slavery disappeared, freedom did not prevail; / even a particle of sorrow or joy did not remain in the heart.'²⁰ The experience is stoic. That is, *neither* sorrow nor joy overcome the adherent. This is in stark contrast to the torment the mystic encounters in the next phase.

The Valley of *Ḥayrat*²¹

'Aṭṭār's introductory description of the valley of *ḥayrat* is striking to say the least. After having experienced the grace of God in divine union (*tawḥīd*), the seeker enters the stage of *ḥayrat* in which 'sorrow and pain will be your permanent preoccupation'.²²

The perennial metaphysical paradox of the One and the Many lurks in the background. Having experienced union with the divine or Oneness (*tawḥīd*) and subsequently moving out of that stage, the mystic is thrust back into the phenomenal world of multiplicity. In his 'memory' lurks the certainty of his experience of

Oneness, while before him lies the multiplicity of things. Furthermore, the reason that he has emerged from the valley of unity is due to the reassertion of the self; that is the egoic consciousness has returned, severing the wayfarer from the divine once again. Hand in hand with the return of the self is that dreaded faculty of reason (*'aql*), whose troublesome nature is to vainly attempt to sift through and, ultimately, to solve this eternal metaphysical paradox. To this end, 'Aṭṭār makes jest. This rationally-perceived paradox is not, in fact, a paradox at all. Rather the irony appears in a circular fashion in the very attempt to reason one's way through it, to claim to have captured it within the feeble mind like some obtainable dogma. In the mutual perception of both the One and the Many, the entire horizon of phenomenal experience is turned on its head: 'The man in this [valley] will be a frozen fire / or ice, burning hard with pain.'²³ All previously 'known' logical distinctions and categories are thrown into chaos and absolute confusion swells within the wayfarer. The proverbial philosopher's nightmare holds true: the square-circle! Such confusion results in helpless agitation.

For brevity's sake, I will concentrate on a single parable 'Aṭṭār utilizes to make his point, the story of the princess who falls in love with a slave-boy.²⁴ The allegory shares common features with the plethora of other such tales throughout the text and in the Sufi poetic genre as a whole; that is, it begins with a flowery description of a princess and her magnificent attributes of beauty and pomp. For example: 'The Holy Ghost was permanently perplexed / by those ruby lips, the sustenance of the soul.'²⁵ This princess then encountered a slave-boy whose handsomeness matched her own beauty. Upon a single glance, 'Her heart was lost to anguish; / her reason (*'aql*) lost its veil of righteousness.'²⁶

Given the austere circumstance of being a princess, beyond the worth of a slave-boy, she feigned imperviousness to his beauty and kept her secret to herself. Eventually, however, she told her secret in confidence to her ten maidens, who in turn devised a plan to bring the slave-boy before her presence. During the night, one maiden went to him and drugged his wine so that: 'Day to night that silver-chested slave / was drunk and oblivious to both worlds.'²⁷ Enraptured in this induced state, the youth then, upon being brought to the princess, symbolically represents the station of *tawḥīd*, union. 'Those idols were drunk with ecstatic music, / reason (*'aql*) had bid farewell to the soul (*jān*), the soul (*jān*) to the body.'²⁸ No sense of self (*'aql* or *jān*) was left intact – only a singular cohesion.

The slave-boy underwent pure experience. That is, 'Aṭṭār writes:

He was left dazed (*khīra*), bereft of reason (*'aql*) or soul (*jān*),
 Belonging truly neither to this world nor that.
 His chest was filled with love, his tongue was mute,
 His soul was revived by the taste of intimacy.
 His eyes were transfixed on the mistress of his heart,

His ears hearkened to the song of the pipes.
His sense of smell was drunk with the scent of ambergris
And his mouth had found the liquid fire.²⁹

All of his senses were awash with the divine, as his taste, his sight, his hearing, his smell, and his sense of touch were enveloped by the immediate experience of the princess (i.e. God). This experience could only be perpetrated because of the dousing of the faculty of reason and loss of individual identity – in this allegorical scenario, due to his drugged state. Pure experience of the Beloved as Beloved!

Yet, the perplexing nature of this experience still perseveres. In other words, does not perception require a perceiver? And so, suggests 'Aṭṭār, 'And that slave remained drunk like this before his sweetheart / remaining with eyes wide awake, not with his self, but rather bereft of self (*bā khwud, na, bī khwud*).³⁰ We see in this instance, I surmise, the wavering or flickering of the self (*khwud*) – to this issue we will return shortly.

Upon passing out from extreme intoxication, the slave-boy awoke from this dream-like state back home and tried to gather himself.

After that, when the silver-chested slave
Had gained some awareness of himself,
He was distraught in a frenzy, not knowing what had taken place.
But what use was wailing when it had happened so?³¹

Regaining full cognition of his selfhood, the slave-boy is left bewildered. He is questioned by others about his perplexity, for which he lacks a clear explanation. He is not even certain if it was he who experienced the presence of the Beloved or not: 'Have I seen all that or another? / I heard nothing when I heard everything! / I did not see though I saw it all!'³² Reason (*'aql*) is essentially impotent in its capacity to capture this state, especially within the boundaries of language. At best, the slave-boy can make general allusions to the experience:

In the whole world no state (*ḥāl*) can be stranger than this,
A state neither hidden nor manifest. ...
Not for a moment does it fade from the soul,
Nor can I find the slightest trace of it.³³

The slave-boy admits his own wretched state: 'Because I don't know if I have seen her or not, / I'm losing my mind somewhere in between.'³⁴

It is important at this juncture to point out that, despite the sustained anguish the mystic withstands in this station along the Path, it is also here that he experiences a unique sense of ecstasy. This is born from the fact that *ḥayrat* only comes about

after having been blessed, by the grace of God, with the privileged experience of *tawḥīd*. It is reason's fluctuating back and forth between these two worlds, Oneness and Multiplicity, that instigates the agonizing nature of *ḥayrat*. Moreover, the crux of the entire situation is, for 'Aṭṭār, the preservation of that very thing which reason deems worthy or, rather, necessary to preserve, namely itself! In its refusal to fully embrace divine Union via self-annihilation, but instead, in its repositioning itself in order that it maintain its perspective, it is condemned to be at a nonplus. What is brought into question then is the intellect or ego itself and what are its intrinsic self-veiling effects.

The Valley of *Faqr u Fanā*³⁵

The seventh and final station on the Way is most elusive of description and analysis. Before proceeding, 'Aṭṭār himself ponders: 'How could speech be allowed in this place?'³⁶ The incapacity to even speak directly of this station is indicative of this essential quality, one that can only be explained as '...the exact equivalent of oblivion; / it is lameness, deafness and unconsciousness.'³⁷ In other words, when the battle between reason ('*aql*') and itself is complete, it serves as both executioner and executed. Less poetically put, let us say that reason is obliterated in such a way that it no longer re-manifests itself in an attempt to rationally grasp and hold onto the ineffable divine Secret. 'It [*fanā*'] goes beyond reason's ('*aql*') imagination!'³⁸ Reason is externally directed, whereas the movement in *fanā*' is oriented inwardly. The final valley is beyond reason or reasoning. To move into it, and thus past *ḥayrat* once and for all, is to surrender the intellect *in toto*.³⁹

What are you doing? Come out like a man!

Burn reason ('*aql*') to the ground and become like a madman (*dīwāna*)!⁴⁰

This movement is counterintuitive to the self as self. Indeed, it is what reason determines to be madness and what the Sufis challenge one to become (*dīwāna shaw*!).⁴¹ It is madness precisely because, after undergoing *tawḥīd* and the consequent struggle within the state of *ḥayrat*, unity is revisited in its deepest and unending sense.

I was a drop, lost in the ocean of mystery,

And now I cannot find that drop again.

Though getting lost is not within everyone's power,

I was lost in annihilation (*fanā*'), as were many others.⁴²

Whereas after having been infused with the divine in the fifth valley of *tawḥīd*, the mystic re-emerged to labour in the perpetual perplexity of *ḥayrat* and, in the

last phase, the drop is lost in the ocean of mystery and does not rediscover itself as a drop again. Therefore, the flame of agony is doused in the ocean along with selfhood as such.

Nevertheless, this still does not solve the riddle of *baqā'*, and for the purposes of explicating this fundamental state in 'Aṭṭār's mystical path, one must turn to the allegory of the birds as it plays out with the famous encounter of the thirty birds (*sī murgh*) with their King, the Sīmurgh.

Having conquered their fears and objections, adhering to the Hoopoe's refutation of their rational excuses (*manṭiq*), intently listening to Solomon's messenger's description of the Way, and finally traversing the travails of the valleys themselves, the thirty birds remain intact and arrive at the Court of Majesty.

Thirty bodies, wingless and featherless, feeble and ill,
Heart broken, souls lost, bodies unwell,
Beheld a majesty undefinable and indescribable,
Beyond the comprehension of reason ('*aql*) or gnosis (*ma'rifat*).⁴³

Getting to this point entailed detachment from both worlds, from body (*tan*) and soul (*jān*) as well as from the spectre of reason. Even *ma'rifat*, intuitive knowledge or gnosis, has been left behind. In the midst of the intermediary world, the Court of Majesty is revealed:

Then from the rays reflected from the face of the world's Sīmurgh
They saw the face of 'Thirty-birds' from the world.
They realized that these thirty birds were that Sīmurgh!⁴⁴
All were lost in bewilderment (*taḥayyur*)!
And once again, in another way, they were blessedly perplexed (*ḥayrān*).
They saw themselves wholly as the Sīmurgh
For the Sīmurgh had always been those *sī murgh*.⁴⁵

Confounded by the riddle of the One and the Many, the birds undergo transformation:

All were drowned in bewilderment (*taḥayyur*),
Bereft of thought (*bī-tafakkur*), incapable of thought!
Because they knew nothing about this state of nothingness,
Without any words they inquired from that majesty
About the secret of this mighty mystery
And for a solution to this we-ness and you-ness.
Without words came the answer from that majesty,
A mirror like the sun is this majesty:
Whoever beholds it sees itself in it;

A body with a soul will see a body with a soul...
 Whatever you knew, once you saw it, was not true;
 Whatever you had heard or said, also proved to be untrue.
 All these valleys which you have traversed,
 All the manliness that you have displayed,
 All you have passed through are but acts and deeds of we-ness;
 In the vale of the divine essence, you have slumbered in your (own) attributes.
 Because you thirty birds have remained blessedly perplexed (*ḥayrān*),
 Left with lost hearts and souls and patience,
 We are far more qualified to be *the* Sīmurgh
 For we truly are the quintessential *sī murgh*!⁴⁶

We see then, from the pen of ‘Aṭṭār, the most direct reference to the claim of the present essay. That is, ‘Because you thirty birds have remained blessedly perplexed (*ḥayrān*) ... we are far more qualified to be *the* Sīmurgh.’ Therefore, as long as the thirty birds continue to hold a place from which to ‘appropriate’ the divine Secret, their voice is not univocal with the Thirty Birds. This space from which orientation is grounded begins and ends with the intellect. As long as it persists, the thirty birds remain thirty individuated birds, anguished and suffering unlike the uniquely divine Sīmurgh. In the same breath, however, because they have reached the state of blessed perplexity, they are nearest to *the* Sīmurgh. Nevertheless the self is, in the end restored, though it is not on account of the individual asserting itself, but rather by a further act of grace from God equal to that previously experienced in *tawḥīd*.

After that, by grace restored those mortal birds
 To themselves, but with no further mortality.
 When all were restored to themselves without selves,
 They came upon permanence (*baqāʾ*) after annihilation (*fanāʾ*).
 Recent or ancient, there can never be
 Any talk of that annihilation (*fanāʾ*), nor that permanence (*baqāʾ*).
 Just as that day is far, far from our sights,
 Its description is far from being explained or described.
 Thus our masters have only attempted to explain
 This state of permanence after annihilation through allegories.⁴⁷

At the risk of being a fool myself, I will not heed ‘Aṭṭār’s warning but will here attempt a slight discursive explanation of the distinction between the graceful act of *tawḥīd* and those of *fanāʾ* and *baqāʾ*. The union bestowed upon the mystic in the station of *tawḥīd*, somehow, could be eradicated by re-exerting the self, consequently breaking the union. The return to self is, then, self-instigated or self-determined. After *fanāʾ* on the other hand, the self is restored in the form of *baqāʾ* (subsistence or permanence) solely by the blessing of God.

Perhaps most troubling and frustrating for those of us enslaved by the faculty of reason and determined to come to rational terms with this conundrum of reconciling *fanā'* and *baqā'* is the fact that the Secret *has* been delivered to the wayfarer. However, as 'Aṭṭār informs us, it is conferred upon the mystic like the princess's kisses upon the lips of the slave-boy, while intoxicated – that is, in the stations of *fanā'* and/or *tawhīd*.

Then, amidst this annihilation (*fanā'*), he has been told
 A hundred secrets, yet told in his own absence!
 After that, he has been given absolute permanence (*baqā'*).
 The pits of degradation have become for him the heights of elevation!⁴⁸

If this is not maddening enough, then *baqā'*, eternal subsistence, is given as a benevolent gift from the divine. In sum, the self is subdued⁴⁹ in order that *tawhīd* can be bestowed upon the mystic, at which time, in the absence of self-consciousness, the divine mysteries are revealed; then, upon re-emergence of self-consciousness, reason is smitten with aching perplexity as a result of its own self-awareness and the scent of the Secrets of Oneness 'known' by it. In the midst of this philosophical to and fro with itself, the intellect is finally shed; *fanā'*, once and for all supersedes selfhood, or so we are led to believe. But still further the ultimate gift is bestowed in the form of *baqā'* where the self is restored, illuminated and transformed by the experience.

First he casts you in disgrace on the road,
 Then, suddenly, he raises you in glory.
 Become obliterated that life may come to you.
 Until you live, how can life be yours?⁵⁰

Now let us turn briefly to the autobiographical nature of *ḥayrat* with respect to 'Aṭṭār which I alluded to at the beginning of this study. In the concluding portion of his opus, 'Aṭṭār grants us access to his own spiritual condition, asking his readers, 'Read my poems with compassion / that you may believe one of my one hundred pains.'⁵¹ This begs the question, what is the root or source of his suffering?

In directly addressing his audience, 'Aṭṭār takes note of the character of his audience; in other words, he is well aware of the predisposed perspective from which a reader of his work will be approaching it. 'Those infatuated with appearance, drown in my words. / Those who believe in essence are the true men of my mysteries.'⁵² As a result, he is astutely aware of how his poetic mystical expression will be regarded in their eyes and of what use, if any, it can/will be to them. As the quoted passage proclaims, his audience is one that is consumed with the external world of appearances (*ẓāhir*), not the internal, esoteric, dimensions of religion

(*bāṭin*). Or, to put it another way, the ‘sages’ are not necessarily the ones who have pierced the pearls of Mystery.

With regard to his own spiritual development and the efficacy of his own words therein, ‘Aṭṭār is humble and unwaveringly honest. He says,

I don’t claim superiority over anyone because of this;
I just keep myself busy with religion...
All this is just a tale of futility!
The work of true men is devoid of I-ness.
If the heart becomes preoccupied with this futility
What will its utility be once words have worn themselves out?⁵³

Thus, ‘Aṭṭār’s own comportment, as well as that of his assumed audience, embodies futility. He and they are all preoccupied with external forms and reality; instead, ‘Aṭṭār insists, they should turn inward and make the climb to the summit, to Mount Qāf – that is, they must strip away the layers of selfhood in preparation for divine grace. As a consequence, he recants:

With his dying breath that sage of faith [Sanā’ī] said,
‘If I only knew long before this
How far more honourable is listening to speaking,
When would I have wasted my life with words?’⁵⁴
If words were as fine as gold,
Still they would be inferior to unuttered words!
Doing it is the lot of true men!
Alas, my fate was just *talking* about it.⁵⁵

Therefore, the act of speaking – which is wedded to the faculty of reason – about God, or even about the Way to God is in fact a diversion away from Him. In lieu of actively perceiving, defining, and prescribing Him and/or the Way leading to His presence, we should busy ourselves with preparation for *receiving* God. We should not beg, borrow, or – most certainly – attempt to steal the gift from God. The mystic’s *modus operandi* is non-involvement; in other words, it is to allow for God to show Himself contrary to rationalist metaphysics which errs in attempting to show (or ‘prove’) God.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Ḥayrat is reason’s (*‘aql*) last fluttering of its burning wings, like the second moth in the renowned parable⁵⁷ that has physically experienced the flame – in fact he has been scorched by it – yet has fled in order to exist, in order to gain perspective,

and in order to share his experience with the others. But for ‘Aṭṭār it is audacious that one should dare to attempt to shed light upon the Light which is the only true source of illumination. The exemplar subsists (*baqā*) only after annihilation (*fanā*), which requires complete renunciation of the self, burnt in the fire! ‘How can a moth reject the flame / when he gains his presence (*ḥuḍūr*) only in the flame?’⁵⁸

The inspiration for the allegory of the birds and the title of the piece is well known; this is in reference to the Qur’ānic description of King Solomon who had the gift of the ‘speech of the birds.’⁵⁹ But, as has already been mentioned, the word *manṭiq* is also the technical philosophical term of the rational philosophers and theologians. In particular, ‘Aṭṭār had in mind those thinkers who utilized their Greek philosophical predecessors. In several direct instances throughout the text, but namely at the very end, ‘Aṭṭār attacks the Greek-inspired rationalistic approach to God.

When will you realize the glory of the spiritual ones
In the philosophy of the Greeks?
Until you’re separated from that philosophy
How can you become a true man in the wisdom of faith?
Whoever speaks of that philosophy (*ḥikmat*) in the path of love,
Is not in the book of faith aware of love.⁶⁰

And a few verses later, he adds:

If that philosophy (*ḥikmat*) could enlighten a heart
Why would the Discriminator [‘Umar] burn it all up?
If the candle of faith burned Greek philosophy (*ḥikmat*),
Know you cannot light the candle of the heart with it.
The wisdom of Yathrib suffices, O man of faith,
Bury Greece in your fervour of faith.⁶¹

The latter citation not only illustrates how much he deplores the rational-philosophical approach, but in essence declares it a distraction from Islam itself; a virtual charge of polytheism or idolatry (*shirk*). Ironically, this mimics the very same accusations that the mystics were often accused of, and sometimes tragically executed for, as in the case of ‘Aṭṭār’s spiritual forerunner, Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj.⁶²

Interestingly, ‘Aṭṭār then turns this blade upon himself, exclaiming, ‘Composing poems is proof of sterility! / To see one’s self is stupidity (*jāhilīst*)!’⁶³ In this statement ‘Aṭṭār condemns himself as well as the philosophers, the theologians, and the jurists. He believes that even the mere fact of having a position, a place from which to write or express your *own* view of the divine, is idiotic, in itself a form of idolatry.

And so, 'Aṭṭār's own state is one of Ḥayrat:

If from sugar I have no share but my name,
It is still better than having poison in one's mouth.⁶⁴
My whole poetry (*dīwān*) is sheer madness (*dīwānagīst*):
Reason (*'aql*) is alien to these verses.⁶⁵

All of his poetic composition is an expression of this pained state; if he himself had achieved *fanā'* and subsequently *baqā'* he would have remained silent. Instead he is driven to write, driven by his unquenchable desire to grasp the divine with the intellect, which end he knows is futile.

I am now neither an unbeliever (*kāfir*) nor a Muslim,
But one lost in blessed perplexity (*ḥayrān*), somewhere between the two.⁶⁶

Notes

1. Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, tr. Arthur Wills (Lincoln, NE, 1997), p. 84.
2. Often *ḥayrat* is translated as 'bewilderment', 'astonishment', 'amazement', or 'dumb-founded stupor' as in Leonard Lewisohn's lucid exegesis of Shabistarī's thought, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Maḥmūd Shabistarī* (Richmond, 1995), p. 243. This, I might add, is one of only a few texts to directly address the present theme at any length and in depth. I have chosen '(blessed) perplexity' as I think it more accurately captures the essence of the term as it is used in 'Aṭṭār's work – connoting the blessed grace of a gift from the divine and the ensuing turmoil in reconciling it with previous and concurrent lived experience. 'Aṭṭār's use of words cognate with *ḥayrat* and carrying the same connotation is indicated where appropriate within parentheses, e.g. (*taḥayyur*, *ḥayrān*).
3. *Manṭiq*, translated in general as 'speech', 'conference', or even 'parliament', has a more pointed meaning, 'logic'. In medieval Islamic philosophy it is the Arabic word used synonymously for the Greek *logos* as carried over from the classical Greek philosophical works. This is particularly pertinent in this context given that 'Aṭṭār explicitly opposes the rationalistic philosophers, the Mu'tazilites who attempted to reason their way to God, or worse still, to allow reason to trump the transcendent authority that is God's alone. For 'Aṭṭār, reason is ultimately impotent in attaining the true wisdom of God, which can only be received as a gift from God through direct experience of Him.
4. This can rightly be attributed to mystics working within many traditions including, of course, Islam. The root of this claim, particularly within the Islamic tradition, is readily witnessed not only through the mystical lens, but from the central theological grounding of the faith as a whole. In fact, it can be and has been argued that *tawḥīd* is the unifying principle around which all other facets of the tradition can be understood, especially the mystical interpretations. See Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (St Paul, MN, 1994) in which the centrifugal force of *tawḥīd* is thoroughly expounded.
5. 'There can be no greater than the "perplexity" caused by the sight of "drowning" and

“burning” with Life and Knowledge, that is, simultaneous self-annihilation and self-subsistence.’ Al-Qāshānī, quoted in Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley, CA, 1983), p. 72.

6. Ibid., p. 68: ‘The right attitude which combines in itself *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* is, in short, to see the One and the Many and the Many and the One, or rather to see the Many as the One and the One as the Many. The realization of this kind of *coincidentia oppositorum* is called by Ibn ‘Arabī “perplexity” (*hayra*). As such, this is a metaphysical perplexity because here man is impeded by the very nature of what he sees in the world from definitely deciding as whether Being is One or Many.’

7. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997), p. 305.

8. I assume a general familiarity with the text or at the very least with the allegory. For a brief reminder along with insightful commentary, see James Winston Morris, ‘The Basic Structure of ‘Aṭṭār’s *Conference of the Birds*: An Introduction’, *Sufi: A Journal of Sufism*, 7 (1990), pp. 10–13.

9. Recall that in the Valley of Detachment, one can correctly be described as being ‘self-sufficient’; i.e., in being detached from worldly (earthly) affairs, one is only susceptible to being affected by Divine acts. It is also worth noting for present purposes that in this stage, the mystic is already beyond the carnal-self (*nafs*).

10. MT, 3707–3708. All translations are my own.

11. MT, 3717.

12. A fruitful comparison can be found in the mystical writings of Simone Weil, notably *Gravity and Grace*, especially pp. 78–86 on ‘Decreation’; and *Waiting for God*, tr. Emma Craufurd (New York, 1973).

13. MT, 3777–3778.

14. Implying time as well, outside of which only God is situated.

15. MT, 3696–3699.

16. MT, 3731–3740.

17. Cf. Morris, p. 10: ‘The central – indeed the unique – subject of ‘Aṭṭār’s poem is the intimate relation of God and the human soul, a relation that he describes most often in terms of the mystery or “secret” of divine love.’

18. MT, 3714. Cf. Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, pp. 70–71: ‘This “perplexity” necessarily assumes the form of a circular movement. “The man in ‘perplexity’ draws a circle,” as Ibn ‘Arabī says. This is necessarily so, because the “walking” of such a man reflects the very circle of the Divine self-manifestation. The Absolute itself draws a circle in the sense that it starts from the primordial state of Unity, “descends” to the plane of concrete beings and diversifies itself in myriads of things and events, and finally “ascends” back into the original non-differentiation. The man in “perplexity” draws the same circle, for he “walks with God, from God, to God, his onward movement being identical with the movement of God Himself.” ‘This circular movement, Ibn ‘Arabī observes, turns round a pivot (*quṭb*) or centre (*markaz*), which is God. And since the man is merely going round and round the centre, his distance from God remains exactly the same whether he happens to be in the state of Unity or in that of Multiplicity. Whether, in other words, he is looking at the Absolute in its primordial Unity or as it is diversified in an infinite number of concrete things, he stands, at the same distance from the Absolute *per se*.’

19. Cf. Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, p. 81: ‘Philosophical interpretation is after all an

afterthought applied to the naked content of mystical intuition. The naked content itself cannot be conveyed by philosophical language. Nor is there any linguistic means by which to convey immediately the content of mystical intuition. If, in spite of this basic fact, one forces oneself to express and describe it, one has to have recourse to a metaphorical or analogical language.'

20. MT, 3750.

21. The paradoxical nature of *ḥayrat* itself complicates any precise explication of this phenomenal experience, especially a rational or philosophical one for that matter. Little has been written on this subject to the best of my knowledge, no doubt due to its very nature. I have already cited Leonard Lewisohn's work above, which dedicates an entire chapter (ch. 7, The Thought of the Heart) to this subject. Also I have made reference to Izutsu's illuminating contribution. Two other works deserve mention here as well. First Carl W. Ernst's book on *shāḥiyyāt* (ecstatic expressions), *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany, NJ, 1985). Secondly the comparative study on the theme of *apophasis* (unsaying) authored by Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago, 1994). Both of these texts prove to be extremely helpful in broaching this topic. For similar insights in contemporary phenomenology where religious experience is again being taken seriously, cf. *ḥayrat*. See Jean-Luc Marion, 'Evidence and Bedazzlement', ch. 3 in *Prolegomena to Charity*, tr. Stephen Lewis (New York, 2002), pp. 53–70; and Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. by Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA, 2002), esp. p. 199ff.

22. MT, 3801.

23. MT, 3805.

24. MT, 3814–3892.

25. MT, 3821.

26. MT, 3829.

27. MT, 3849.

28. MT, 3856.

29. MT, 3859–3862.

30. MT, 3869.

31. MT, 3873–3874.

32. MT, 3882–3883.

33. MT, 3887, 3889.

34. MT, 3893.

35. *Faqr u fanā'* ('poverty' and 'annihilation') are elusive of precise definition. Limited understanding of these terms can be attained through exposition – they are known truly through experience. Nonetheless, Avery provides a lengthy and useful endnote in his translation, in which he utilizes Hujwīrī's commentary on Sufi technical language. See Avery, *The Speech of the Birds*, pp. 531–532, n. 408.

36. MT, 3942.

37. MT, 3943.

38. MT, 3957.

39. Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity*, p. 246 where he translates a selection from Lāhijī, '...at the degree of annihilation in God, all knowledge, reason, apprehension, discernment and other (human) qualities are obliterated.'

40. MT, 4113, emphasis added.

41. An apposite comparison to Søren Kierkegaard's description of Abraham can be made here: '... Abraham was the greatest of all, great by that power whose strength is powerlessness, great by that wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by that hope whose form is madness, great by the love that is hatred to oneself.' *Fear and Trembling*, tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ, 1983), pp. 16–17. As is the case with 'Aṭṭār, here Kierkegaard champions those virtues which can be summed up best by the term selflessness. That is, a reversal of the normative, positive features of human character should be employed. A de-emphasis of, or turning away from, the self is what makes Abraham great in Kierkegaard's religious-philosophical perspective. It is particularly interesting to note his esteem for the fool as the wise. We have seen this trend already in 'Aṭṭār's critique of 'aql (reason or intellect).

42. MT, 4123–4124.

43. MT, 4154–4155.

44. Cf. Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, p. 84: 'Thus the truth itself is quite simple: in whatever form God appears in the mirror, it is always as a particular phenomenal form of God, and in this sense every image (i.e., every object worshipped as a god) is ultimately no other than God Himself. This simple fact, however, is beyond the reach of Reason. Reason is utterly powerless in a matter of this nature, and the reasoning which is the activity of Reason is unable to grasp the real meaning of this phenomena.'

45. MT, 4235–4238.

46. MT, 4243–4247, 4253–4258.

47. MT, 4271–4275.

48. MT, 4285–4286.

49. Withdrawn or 'decreated' as expounded in the works of Simone Weil cited above.

50. MT, 4290–4291.

51. MT, 4468.

52. MT, 4475, 4502, 4504–4505.

53. MT, 4502, 4504–4505.

54. Yet another open chiding of the characters of the birds, who provided their well-thought and self-justifying 'speech' or 'logic' (*manṭiq*).

55. MT, 4508–4511.

56. Cf. Marion, 'Evidence and Bedazzlement', p. 10: 'The method does not so much provoke the apparition of what manifests itself as it clears away the obstacles that encircle it and would hide it. The reduction does nothing; it lets manifestation manifest *itself*; it takes the initiative (of considering seriously what is lived by consciousness) only in order to offer it to what manifests *itself*.'

57. A version of this allegory appears in MT, 3987–4004.

58. MT, 4189; *ḥuḍūr* is the opposite of *ghaybat* (absence).

59. Qur'ān 27:16.

60. MT, 4531–4533.

61. MT, 4537–4539.

62. On the life and thought of Ḥallāj, see the exhaustive research of Louis Massignon, *La passion de Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr Ḥallāj, martyr mystique de l'Islam exécuté à Bagdad le 26 mars 922; étude d'histoire religieuse (nouvelle édition)* (Paris, 1975). The character of Ḥallāj plays, perhaps, the most significant and telling role in 'Aṭṭār's work as far as historical personas are concerned. Particular famous episodes of Ḥallāj's life are positioned strategically in *Manṭiq*

al-ṭayr. For example, at the completion of the thirty birds' voyage, the first story we encounter centres around the martyred, smouldering remains of Ḥallāj. Immediately following this recapitulation of the tale, we are given a commentary on the states of *fanā'* and *baqā'* (MT, 4259–4266). Thus, Ḥallāj's historical life serves as a symbolic exemplar for 'Aṭṭār.

63. MT, 4559. This particular passage poses the often encountered difficulty in translating Persian verse – multiple layers of meaning. *Jāhilīst* is correctly translated as 'stupidity' or 'ignorance'. It could be the case as well that 'Aṭṭār meant it as an allusion to the 'State of Ignorance' (*jāhiliyya*) of pre-Islamic times.

64. A play on his own name, 'Aṭṭār derived from the root ' – *t* – *r* (perfume), literally meaning apothecary.

65. MT, 4550–4551.

66. MT, 4624.

Flight of the Birds: The Poetic Animating the Spiritual in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*

FATEMEH KESHAVERZ

In ‘Aṭṭār’s *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, a group of birds come together to seek their legendary king, the Sīmurgh or phoenix. The arduous journey, made possible through the leadership of the hoopoe, has joyous as well as demoralizing moments. The thirty birds, literally *sī murgh*, who make it to the abode of the Sīmurgh, find themselves immersed in an indescribable presence.¹ The presence does not celebrate the birds’ arrival, nor does it clarify the enigma of its own seeming indifference to their hardship. When finally the messenger of its glory² cares to ask the name of the defeated journeyers,³ the ensuing exchange is not encouraging. Rather, the insignificant horde⁴ are told to return to where they came from. If anything, the encounter serves to deepen the perplexity that had fuelled the quest in the first place. Somewhere in between enduring the fatal blow of their rejection, and remembering the hardship of the journey, which has given them a new vision of reality, the birds grow strong enough to see their own smallness. That transforming moment of pure modesty⁵ renders their insignificance worthy of companionship to the king. They have finally arrived. In the light emanating from proximity to the presence⁶ everything is infused with a luminous new life.⁷ In that collision of light and life, the thirty birds see what appears to be the king they sought one instant, and in the next a reflection of their own image.

The *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* is not the first literary work in which the quest for the truth has been chronicled. It is, however, one of the most celebrated examples. What is in this particular poetic articulation of struggle and perplexity that has immortalized the work? How do we understand the tremendous success of the allegorical journey that culminates in the birth of the most celebrated pun in classical Persian literature: between Sīmurgh and *sī murgh*? The pun itself, despite its clever construction, can only embody a small measure of the complexity and timelessness of the message that the text conveys. ‘Aṭṭār himself cautions against

investing too much into the cleverness of the pun by subverting it immediately after it has been created:

Chūn shumā sī murgh injā āmadīd
Sī dar īn ā'ina paydā āmadīd
Gar chil u panjāh murgh ā'id bāz
Parda-i az khwīsh bugshā'id bāz

You came as thirty birds and therefore saw
 These selfsame thirty birds, not less or more;
 If you had come as forty or fifty – here
 An answering forty, fifty, would appear.⁸

Like many literary masterpieces, the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* has a few illustrious prototypes including the *Risālat al-ṭayr* of Abū 'Alī Sīnā (d.1037), a treatise with the same name by Muḥammad Ghazālī (d.1111), the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* of Khāqānī (d.1158), as well as less known models that are likely to have played a role in its creation.⁹ 'Aṭṭār, therefore, is not to be credited for absolute originality in constructing the saga of the journeying birds. He is, however, responsible for infusing the tale with new life. It is not the novelty of the subject matter, but rather 'Aṭṭār's fresh and dynamic retelling of it that has earned the work a special place in a wide and dazzling range of Sufi homiletic tales.

'Aṭṭār himself occupies an equally special place among Sufi authors. As a writer, he is exceptionally prolific and adventurous even if we rule out many of the sixty-six titles attributed to him by traditional scholarship.¹⁰ Between the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, a hagiography in prose, the poetically told tale of the birds, and the lyric *ghazals* and *rubā'īs*, he covers a remarkable variety of subject matters and generic forms. Furthermore, 'Aṭṭār has commanded respect, even on a popular level, for reasons at times extraneous to his prolific writing career. He is reputed among other things to have possessed medical and pharmaceutical knowledge, to have refused to write panegyric verse, and to have influenced the writings of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī.

In a study of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, *Muṣibat-nāma*, and *Asrār-nāma*, the contemporary Iranian critic Taqī Pūrnamdāriyān attributes 'Aṭṭār's success with readers to the accessibility of his style, and to his genuine warmth and humility. As far as the textual merits of these works are concerned, he points rightly to the brevity of the stories, the diversity of the characters, and the attention of the author to the feelings of each protagonist. Pūrnamdāriyān's study focuses on the flow of 'Aṭṭār's anecdotes along clear and simple narrative lines that seem to be replicated, with little variation, in the above three works. As a result, he overlooks the intricacy and abundance of the details that are woven around the basic narrative structures or the specific poetic purposes they serve. One of Pūrnamdāriyān's notable contributions,

however, is to draw attention to the fact that 'Aṭṭār enjoyed his own stories. In other words, he did not create them to serve a homiletic end alone but rather to be enjoyed and read, repeatedly, and for pure entertainment.¹¹

Besides general remarks of the nature made in the above study, little is said about the literary merits of the journey of the birds in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, the poetic crystallization of yearning for the truth. Nor would any one explanation suffice to shed light on the effectiveness and endurance of this work. As with many other Persian mystical writings, the success of the work, in this case the poetic force that animates the flight of the birds, is the result of many interrelated characteristics. Not the least of these is the sustained interplay of literary patterns that reward the reader throughout his textual/spiritual journey which takes place alongside the journey of the birds. These details deserve much attention. No doubt, a composition as multifaceted as the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* challenges scholars of each generation in a different way with regard to goals and methods of investigation. Much remains to be done, for instance, in exploration of the paradigm shifts that the tale must have inspired in the mystical vision of the time, not just through Rūmī but also through many other fine minds. Similarly, steps can be added to Ritter's monumental efforts to clarify questions of biography, authenticity, and textual transmission, to name but a few.

In the present essay, I will approach the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* from a largely visual angle and borrow words from a distinguished art historian to describe the methodological vantage point I have chosen for my glance at 'Aṭṭār's master painting.¹² In his fascinating study *What Painting Is*, James Elkins wrote:

What is painting? Is it the framed object, with its entourage of historical meanings, the gossip about its painter, and the ledgers, letters, files, reports, reviews, and books it inspired? Or is painting a verb, a name for what happens when paint moves across a blank surface?¹³

Though Elkins concludes rightly that neither of the above definitions is complete without the other, he devotes his own work to examining the fine details that the act of painting uncovers on every inch of the canvas. Thus he invites his readers to assume the standpoint of a spectator and to look in every finished painting for signs that say something about the movements of the painter's body, his or her thoughts, feelings, moods and 'other wordless experiences', as Elkins calls them. He closes the discussion with the following observation:

That is why painting is a fine art: not merely because it gives us trees and faces and lovely things to see, but because paint is a finely tuned antenna, reacting to every unnoticed movement of the painter's hand, fixing the faintest shadow of a thought in color and texture.¹⁴

It would not be fair to reduce Elkins's study to a close-up on the movement of the painter's body while engaging in the act of painting. More to the point is Elkins's attempt to steer us away from the notion of painting as a luxurious object, toward seeing it as an event that unfolds on the canvas. The unfolding, he wishes us to understand, will continue as long as we continue to engage the work as a creative *act* of self-expression. Seeking faint shadows of thought fixed in colour and texture by the small movements of the painter's hand is Elkins's methodology for recovering the creative performance embedded in colours and textures of the 'framed object'.

Colour and texture will be among the things that occupy our thoughts in the present study. While taking into account the outer lines of the tale that encompasses the journey of the birds, and by implication those of ours, I will bring into sharper focus the poetic details. These details are the colours that give each bird its distinctive shape and personality. From this perspective, in their clamour, objections, enthusiasm, beauty, and other diverse characteristics, the birds are the journeyers and, at the same time, the colourful canvas on which 'Aṭṭār paints his vision of the landscape they traversed. With the pains and pleasures that animated their individual journeys to the Sīmurgh, they are the poetic Space in which our poet operates. The result is an intertextually rich tapestry that interweaves hundreds of colourful threads from the treasury of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, to that of classical and popular literature. I will argue that, quite apart from his undeniable mystical insights, sincerity, and storytelling skills, 'Aṭṭār's success in keeping his truth-seeking birds airborne is due to his mastery of the poetic productivity of metaphors. By this, I do not just mean the originality of what the major figures in the tale represent allegorically. Rather, I refer to the overt or tacit manners in which the metaphors operate as multidimensional scripts through their individual shape, colour, and texture. We shall now look at the ways in which 'Aṭṭār engages our many emotional and motivational cognitive sensibilities through the dazzling variety of these images.

Thinking in Metaphorical Images: a Brief Cognitive Exploration

Cognitive psychologists have dealt in length with our brain's ability to generate mental images during the cognitive process.¹⁵ These images result from brain states similar to those that arise during perception, but in the absence of appropriate immediate sensory input. This much is commonly known. We are all familiar with the state often described as 'seeing with the mind's eye'. I will, here, try to better understand what I suggest to be a two-tiered poetic visualization on the part of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*. The first is 'Aṭṭār's use of colourful and complex images to let us concretize the elusive journey of the soul and literally 'see it with the mind's eye'. The second, and the less readily visible, is to infuse these concrete images with an ever-changing life. We are thus taught, through following the transformation of the

imagined, to move beyond the 'concretely' known and expand the horizons of a perception that learns to evolve. This is an evolution with no end, an evolution which begins in the text and which expands with the capacity of the individual reader defined by personal and historical conditions. In the unique manner in which poetry proposes world-altering projects while leaving the details to the agency of the reader, the birds' journey becomes the delightful introduction to the book we each have to write for ourselves. In simpler terms, journeying with the birds entails re-imagining and re-imagining the tale of our own journey and the opportunity to alter the course of the journey that is life. The *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* is, therefore, not an account of coming face-to-face with the polished mirror of the self and staring at the truth that the birds did not know was there. It is the metaphorical exploration, and discovery, of the ways in which we can breath life into the Sīmurgh of the personal truth we have pieced together. Put differently, the journey to Mount Qāf is not to uncover an existing treasure but, rather, to locate the treasure house of 'becoming' where the Sīmurgh of a recreated self may be, step-by-step, 'imagined' into reality.

Imaging Emergent Worlds

Much of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*'s success is due to Aṭṭār's tremendous poetic precision in imaging the emergent world of the birds. Through poetic complexity and precision, events of the journey, verbal echoes of 'being' as 'becoming', have captivated and transformed generation after generation of readers. On the one hand, resonating with the reader's personal longing to make the journey, the poetic energy fuels the flight of the birds within. As animated epitomes of a free and adventurous quest, they generate in us a compelling urge to seek. On the other hand, the birds are the reader's personal space in their exact shape and the heights to which they are permitted to fly. The result is an emergent world of unlimited possibilities. What is it in metaphorical images that helps the individual discover or create the opportunity? There are extensive debates on whether the verbal and the imaginal material are processed by two different representational systems in our minds. Some argue that the information processed by our brain in early stages of cognition has an abstract nature, which is neither visual nor verbal. The majority agrees that imagery and verbal thought depend upon at least partially distinct processes. To dispense with the technical jargon, thinking in images is different from thinking in words.¹⁶ Thinking in images engages parts of our being that respond to visual input, creating in the process the space needed for emergent worlds. It is easy to respond to the complexity, brevity, vividness and charm of pictorial logic. Metaphorical images are even more engaging because they can be manipulated into sequential as well as visuo-spatial units that keep the attention more focused and for a longer time. The next question is how to choose the right images.

Choosing the Metaphor

The broader the range of the metaphors, and the more intricate their designs, the more captivating is our need to unravel them. In this sense, a gradually unfolding cluster of interrelated images by drawing us into a long and gradual process of learning can be more effective than a single striking image. A combination of the two will be even more effective. 'Aṭṭār demonstrates intuitive awareness of our sensitivity to the intriguing nature of complex images. He achieves a balance between attending to the larger allegorical tale that encompasses the journey of the birds and the intricacies of smaller units that he carefully pieces together. These constituent elements of the larger metaphor consist of minute images cut to precision and arranged into smaller units capable of functioning on their own and as elements of the wider poetic landscape.

Choosing birds as the main journeyers, 'Aṭṭār fulfils from the outset a significant condition for the success of the metaphor, namely the 'typicality effect'. The higher the typicality of an instance, the stronger its connection with the target it aims to achieve. Activation of a high typicality effect inhibits the impact of the less typical instances that might intrude and hinder the speed or diminish the vividness of the imagination. If you call someone a turtle, the typical slowness is likely to become the category priming which inhibits all other features of the animal from coming to mind.¹⁷ The birds provide 'Aṭṭār with an astonishing array of typical conditions ranging from captivity in a cage to soaring up high. They can be as rare and mysterious as a heron, or as ordinary as a duck. Physically speaking, there are no limits to the colours, shapes and sizes in which they can be portrayed, or to the variety of the tunes they can sing. Once the various religious, literary, and popular shades of information are added to the canvas, the colourful birds afford our poet a tremendous range of poetic imageability. Just think how much resonance the hoopoe would lose if Solomon and the Queen of Sheba were removed from the picture.¹⁸ On the one hand soaring up high in myths and legends, the birds are on the other hand the most earthly and accessible of animals to engage the popular imagination. If few people have ever seen a real hoopoe, there are few who have not come across a raven or a partridge. Each fulfil the purpose for which they have been employed. The rarity of the hoopoe evokes the same typicality effect as the prevalence of the raven.

At the same time, the birds meet successfully the condition of asymmetry that arises from the typicality effect and is equally needed for the speed and clarity of the metaphorical imaging. Asymmetry facilitates the comprehension of a metaphor by inhibiting the activation of certain brain networks through assuring that the metaphor works only in one direction. Putting it simply, children are flowers, but flowers are not children. Similarly, people living to guard their worldly gains are owls imprisoned in the ruin of their belongings, but innocent owls are not miserly people watching over their jealously guarded wealth.

Making Full Use of Metaphors

The more thoroughly metaphors are used, the more effective they are. Widening the focus from single metaphors to larger allegorical constructions reveals 'Aṭṭār's awareness of this point. He makes persistent and precise attempts to make use of the interactive nature of single images in their emerging environment. To utilize the poetic possibilities within such complex constructions, 'Aṭṭār creates the variety of colour and texture necessary to give expression to what Elkins termed 'wordless experiences'. He demonstrates that the success of a metaphor is not only in its suitability, originality, and proper application but also in being permitted to grow fully in its created poetic habitat. Let us look at a concept such as the unattainability of love, a trait common to lyric poetry, which exemplifies Elkins's wordless experience. To portray the misfortune of the lover consumed by the sorrow and jealousy of unattainable love, 'Aṭṭār employs a bird well enough known to excite the imagination and exotic enough to be exaggerated. He places a heron, *būtīmār*, on the seashore:

*Bar lab-i daryā nishīnam dardmand / dāyimān andūhgīn u mustmand
Zi ārizū-yi āb dil pur-khūn kunam / chūn darīgh āyad najūsham chūn kunam?
Chūn nayam man ahl-i daryā ay 'ajab / bar lab-i daryā bimīram khushk-lab
Garchi daryā mī-zanad ṣad-gūnā jūsh / man nayāram kard azū yak qaṭra nūsh
Gar zi daryā kam shavad yak qaṭra āb / zi ātash-i ghayrat dilam gardad kabāb.*

I wait in sorrow there, there mourn and sigh
My love is for the ocean, but since I
A bird – must be excluded from the deep
I haunt the solitary shore and weep.
My beak is dry – not one drop can I drink –
But if the level of the sea should sink
By one drop, jealous rage would seize my heart.¹⁹

Mistaking himself for a seabird, the heron continues to long for the sea and misses the opportunity to seek the true alchemy suited to bring him happiness, namely the company of the Sīmurgh. In the hoopoe's response to the heron, this simple tale of futile self-mortification is transformed into a fully fledged metaphor. The bitter and salty waters of the unpredictable sea hint at the bitterness of a love condemned to remain unfulfilled. Sharks guard the surface and hordes of shipwrecked seafarers fall into the vortex, losing their lives. To make certain that the frustration and fear of suffocation have been conveyed vividly, 'Aṭṭār summons divers to the dark sea depths. Even they survive the perilous waters at a great cost, learning to hold their breath. How grave are the consequences of not realizing which shade of love is suited to one's nature:

Hudhudash guft ay zi daryā bī-khabar / hast daryā pur nahang u jānivar
Gāh talkh ast āb ū rā gāh shūr / gāh ārāmast ūrā gāh zūr
Munqalib chīz ast u nāpayanda ham / gāh shawand gāh bāz-āyanda ham
Bas buzurgān-rā kih kashtī kard khurd / bas kih dar girdāb-i ū uftād u murd
Harki chūn ghawwāš rāh dārad dar-ū / az gham-i jān dam nigah darād dar-ū.

The hoopoe answered him: 'You do not know
 The nature of this sea you love: below
 Its surface linger sharks; tempests appear,
 Then sudden calms – its course is never clear,
 But turbid, varying, in constant stress;
 Its water's taste is salty bitterness.
 How many noble ships has it destroyed,
 Their crews sucked under in the whirlpool's void:
 The diver plunges and in fear of death
 Must struggle to conserve his scanty breath.²⁰

Rise up and Play the Song of Gnosis! (*khīz u mūsīqār zan dar ma'rifat*)

The process of metaphorical image making, which begins with every bird and expands into longer allegorical constructions, continues to surface in single word units as it expands simultaneously to reverberate through the entire poem. 'Aṭṭār loves anaphora and alliteration which lead to musical intricacies at the sonic surface of short word constructions as well as full verses. Thus the hoopoe is described as *hudhud-i hādī-shuda*, 'the hoopoe turned guide', and the parrot as *ṭūṭī-yi ṭūbā-nishīn*, 'the parrot settled on the *ṭūbā* tree'. There is a temptation to assume that he inherited such conventional patterns wholesale from the existing tradition and replicated them without much deliberation. A more effective approach is to examine individual instances closely in an attempt to understand them as clear and deliberate poetic choices he made every time he used such devices. Let me give an example.

In the opening verses of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, the poet salutes the finch and encourages the bird to rise up and play the 'song of gnosis'. The greeting words themselves become a musical echo, a rhythmic metaphor, if you like, of the anticipated melody. Note the melodic anticipation of *mūsīqār*, 'music' in the preceding words *mūsīcha*, 'finch', and *Mūsā-ṣifat*, 'Moses-like'. It is neither a hypnotic pursuit of tradition nor a linguistic accident, that the verse performs, with sounds, the concept that it conveys semantically:

Khah khah ay mūsīcha-i Mūsā'-ṣifat
Khīz u mūsīqār zan dar ma'rifat .

And you are welcome finch! Maker of prophetic tunes
Rise up now and play your song of gnosis.²¹

Such carefully constructed repeating structures may be recovered from almost anywhere in the text. The opening passages contain many examples. As the birds arrive on the scene to be introduced to us, they are greeted alternately with *marḥabā* and *khah khah*. Similarly, the birds' excuses follow predictable patterns, as does hoopoe's storytelling. Again, while in places this structural orderliness may seem as mere conformity to conventional patterns, in many instances there is a distinct poetic logic to the manner in which images come together to form a cluster 'performing' the message that they deliver. What 'Aṭṭār does here may be described as a variation on the poetic strategy that Michael Sells describes as 'the distinctive semantic event within the language of unsaying' or the 'meaning event'.²² A fascinating example of the meaning event in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* occurs in a section devoted to praise and glorification of the divine just before the arrival of the birds. In this passage, we read:

Jān nihān dar jism u tu dar jān nihān
Ay nihān andar nihān ay jān-i jān .

The soul is hidden in the body and you are hidden in the soul
O hidden within the hidden! O soul of the soul!²³

On the sonic surface, the word *jān*, 'the soul', echoes repeatedly the word *niḥān*, 'the hidden', to underlie their natural affinity. At the conceptual level, the verse generates a cluster of ideas that revolve around acts of hiding and guarding, or evoke concepts such as inner qualities, depth, treasure, and the like. This cluster ends with the hemistich *ay darūn-i jān burūn-i jān tu-ī*, 'O you within the soul, you are outside my soul as well'.²⁴ With these words, a reversal of the vantage point opens before us the opposite perspective on the divine manifestation. The new perspective emphasizes not the interpenetrating quality of the divine, but rather its tendency to reveal or uncover itself. Again, 'Aṭṭār finds it insufficient to simply inform his readers of the new perspective. He wants them to poetically perceive, to experience through language if you like, the change in the landscape resulting from access to the new vantage point. In the verses immediately following, the divine self-revelation is poetically articulated in images of the sun rising radiant and giddy, and the moon melting in love to spread its silvery magic on the surface of a bewildered earth. Against this glowing backdrop, captive mountains and restless seas join the other natural elements to unfold the earth's bounty and beauty.²⁵ Carefully designed patterns such as this, almost reminiscent of miniature paintings, remain a characteristic feature of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*. Like waves appearing on the

surface of the sea, they surface, present their visual logic and gradually fade into the next concentric circles forming around a new conceptual nucleus. One interesting example is the cluster woven around the *nūr-i Muḥammadī*, 'the prophetic light', which spreads across the 'sea of mysteries' and awakens it to give birth to the seven spheres. Muḥammad's call to Islam is therefore meant to embrace the entire universe. The infusion of the creation with the prophetic light is more than a simple poetic metaphor. It is a tale with its moments of suspense seeking resolution in the anticipated prophetic intercession on behalf of the sinners on the Day of Judgment.²⁶ With the advent of intercession, the circle is completed. It is time, now, for the theme to begin to fade into the background forming a bridge for the ensuing transition to the next conceptual cluster.

Where do the Crows Land? Issues of Variety and Transition

Once an extended frame tale – such as the *Mantiq al-ṭayr* – houses a large variety of metaphorical constructions, their functions must be harmonized through an effective rhythm of cohabitation and exchange to allow the larger symphony to play smoothly and meaningfully. Here, I term this overall persuasive harmony 'poetic precision'. 'Aṭṭār's awareness of the significance of 'poetic precision' in the performance of these metaphorical clusters is reflected in many features of the work. One such feature is the rhythmic or musical gravity providing the centrifugal pull that keeps many clusters in orbit around a central notion. Another is the narrative thread that holds these clusters, strung together with an episodic logic, connected to the broader storyline. Finally, 'Aṭṭār is keenly aware of the need for smooth transitions protecting the wholeness of each pattern against an abrupt intrusion by the ones that follow. Let us examine an example of the last feature. During our visit to the Valley of Detachment (*wādī-yi istighnā*) we witness wintry tempests blowing fiercely and scouring the land. From the seven seas and the eight paradises we move down to earth where ants, elephants and ravens match the heavenly variety with their earthly show. We are getting ready for the arrival on earth of angels and prophetic figures, while the ravens are still within visual range. 'Aṭṭār, here, provides a fascinating poetic solution. He dubs the angels *ṣad hazārān sabz-pūsh*,²⁷ literally 'hundreds of thousands of figures clad in green'. Less visual terms, or different colours, could have been used to describe the angels. Entering the angels as figures in green on the distant horizon, however, he provides the appropriate transition for the exiting ravens: green trees. As the ravens fly naturally in the direction of the tree-like images in the distance, the newly arrived figures fill the field of vision.

While 'Aṭṭār remains attentive to details in every inch of the canvas, he remains aware of the message that the broader compositional patterns would give the reader. The greetings to the individual birds, for example, are interspersed with allusions to

events or virtues associated with the different prophets. The falcon, a bird worthy of royal attention, is thus greeted in the name of Muḥammad, and the nightingale is associated, equally justifiably, with the vocalist prophet David. Through such associations, 'Aṭṭār confers recognizability on the birds, none of whom have as yet taken any action. In anticipation of their prophetic nature, the readers are given a foretaste of the role they are to play in the unfolding journey. The primary function of the allusions is, however, to place our birds in the broader context of the human quest for self-discovery and salvation. What we are about to read, in other words, is not an obscure travel account, but an echo of the cosmic mission of the prophets that keeps humanity on the right track.

To keep the universal rhythm of worship ringing through the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, 'Aṭṭār uses different poetic techniques. One is a random personification of the constituent elements of the universe as they live their longing for the divine in their daily actions. Thus the fly has its hands on its head calling on the lord of creation, while the sun and the moon prostrate themselves in their cyclic settings. The firmament is a bird flying in the hope of building a nest on the divine threshold, and the agitated sea in her indigo outfit mourns separation from the heavenly beloved.²⁸ The tremendous variety of the metaphors and the flexibility with which 'Aṭṭār assigns them their function, requires certain balancing measures to ensure consistency for smooth communication. As we have already seen, the images do not work in isolation. The above example of providing the crows with landing spots on green-clad angels posing as trees, is a small example of the interrelation of the images and 'Aṭṭār's intimate awareness of the interconnected nature of poetic logic. We shall take a brief look at instances in which this interconnection is imaged in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*.

Imaging the Interconnected Nature of Poetic Logic

The contractual nature of the poet/reader relationship allows every author to stretch the parameters of reality, at least to some degree, beyond our everyday standards. Thus the readers of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* will not ask themselves why the birds speak, how our poet came to know about the journey, where Mount Qāf is, and the like. However, the poet's licence to enjoy the confidence of the reader is not unlimited. His composition must be ruled by some consistently applied interconnected poetic logic to sustain the validity of the contract with the reader, although it is important not be stifled or overwhelmed by this logic. 'Aṭṭār shows little hesitation in bending rules of consistency, when possible, in favour of innovative storytelling. The dog representing the 'the animal soul' (*nafs*), controlling the king, who compares himself to a wayfarer,²⁹ puts on royal satin and gold in a subsequent story, which highlights the function of divine attributes in humanity. In its new role, the dog is still distracted from the king by the earthly desire to sniff bones. But this time, its

fate inspires hope. For while we see in this dog our own tendency to be distracted, we also see the hope for union with the divine. Why shouldn't we find our way, if the dog could recover his memory of the palace by discovering the jewels and heading back to the royal abode?³⁰ 'Aṭṭār compensates for diversification of such metaphorical roles assigned to certain images through enforcing others in single repetitive functions. Most notably, when the resonance of a metaphor is to be enhanced, it resurfaces to perform identical or similar tasks.

An example of this balancing act is the repeated rising of the metaphorical sun (*āftāb*), in the story of the Shaykh Ṣan'ān and his love for the Christian girl. The selection of the image is a subtle poetic move in itself. In addition to portraying the girl's radiant complexion, and giving a foretaste of her bright destiny, the image unlocks the treasure house of popular religious memory with its accounts of the ascent of Christ into the fourth heaven, the sphere that the crucified prophet co-inhabited with the sun. Throughout the story the rays of the sun function as luminous threads, not only highlighting the significant moments, but keeping them connected as well. When she first unveils her radiant face, the Christian girl drowns the sun in envy³¹ just as she sets fire to the Shaykh's being.³² This much is conventional to the description of love's gripping power and blazing fire. The image resurfaces somewhat unconventionally, soon after the Shaykh has turned into an 'anxious shadow'. What would he not give to climb up to the window of the beloved's house, as the sun does?³³

Later still we realize that the sun represents the Shaykh, not just in his desire to overcome the physical distance with the beloved, but in that the true wayfarers are as 'singular' (*fard*) in their pursuit of the truth as the sun is in its celestial journey.³⁴ The sun of singularity rises yet again, in the dream of a disciple, in the perfumed morning air that reveals mysteries to the heart radiating from Muḥammad's glowing countenance.³⁵ During this dream scene, the sun stays in view longer and its poetic mission diversifies to perform a specific prophetic role in the story. Luminous rays of the sun appear in the Christian girl's dream of sewing it, almost, to the dream of the disciple and guiding the girl in her pursuit of the Shaykh. The event leads to her complete transformation.³⁶ Her subsequent waking up is a true awakening, symbolized in the poem with the rise of a second sun. If, in the beginning of the story, her radiant face was the first sun, now her illumined heart adds the second. With the intensity of the encounter between the girl and the Shaykh, she dies while at the peak of her strength and beauty, as do many exalted heroes and heroines. Once again, our metaphorical sun makes a fleeting appearance before it slips under the clouds to signal, not her end, but her departure from view.³⁷ What has happened here is that while the narrative line has given us events from the Shaykh's story to piece the larger picture together, the sun has compared and connected poetically the many luminous moments of yearning, struggle, joy and union. Through this reappearing meta-sign, we have come to appreciate the interconnected nature of

various events in the story and the various levels of human experience. 'Aṭṭār is aware that such capsulated poetic signs can deliver messages that would otherwise require pages of explanation.³⁸

This is a good time to look at the mystical function and significance of the central poetic meta-sign in the story, the Sīmurgh. According to the narrative, the Sīmurgh is the end to the journey of the birds and, by extension, that of the reader, in search of truth. How does this most present and least visible character in the story fit into the poetic logic, and perform the gravity of the task it has been assigned? Before we proceed further, a general observation will be beneficial. Questions concerning the Sīmurgh's poetic performance in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, or the metaphor of the sun which we just concluded, are intimately connected to a broader (and older) discussion. Namely, why does the mystical search for the truth depend, to the extent that it does, on poetic activity? What does the poetic energy contribute to the mysterious journey?³⁹ The question may easily be posed in reverse: where would classical Persian poetry be in its evolutionary journey without the spiritual fuel that has kept the engine rolling? In either configuration the question will lead to answers as diverse as the generic postures which Persian Sufi poetry has adopted over the centuries. In many of its postures, the poetry has fulfilled the multiple functions of documenting the journey, serving as an empowering tool for the journeyer, as well as entertaining a broad and uninitiated body of readers at the same time. Even a rudimentary list of poets will include innumerable Sufis who encoded their experiences into poetry and sought the poetry of others to nourish as well as direct their inner yearnings. It is no longer possible to divide the creative impulse of these Sufi poets into poetic and/or mystical. There is no justification for assuming that these poets wrote poetry, despite their mystical devotion, rather than as a constituent element of the experience that was part and parcel of the artistic creativity. Indeed one of the most effective ways to explore the nature of the interaction is to look closely at the function of meta-signs such as the Sīmurgh in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*.

Moulding the Sīmurgh of One's Personal Truth: Transmutations of the Meta-sign

We are already familiar, to some extent, with the constitution and functions of the birds. It is hard to miss the skill and the passion with which 'Aṭṭār translates his own yearning into the poetic energy that keeps them airborne. The complexity of the work is one of its many facets rendering it indispensable to generations of seekers. The others include 'Aṭṭār's sincerity and devotion to the path, the moving simplicity of his style, as well as the practical nature of the guidance provided by this timeless spiritual travel guide. Each of these elements deserves a separate in-depth study. However, maintaining a literary vantage point, and heeding Elkins's challenge of

attention to action embedded in detail, we shall continue to approach 'Aṭṭār's master-painting by highlighting events that unfold on every inch of the canvas.

What is the metaphorical construction of the Sīmurgh as the poetic site of becoming? Just as every stage in the present study is a testimony to the profound interconnection between 'Aṭṭār's Sufi convictions and his poetry, shedding light on the Sīmurgh's evolving presence will further unravel the dynamics of the happy union between the mystical and the poetic in his work. Far from being a borrowed garment, an unsuitable medium, or a reluctantly created handicraft, poetic articulation, with its potent nature, has been a most effective tool for shaping of emergent realities. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* where poetic potency results in the successful construction of transformable capsulated meta-signs or, as we have called them, metaphors. It is time to look at the evolution of the master meta-sign, the site of the emergence of the 'indescribable presence', the Sīmurgh itself.

The Sīmurgh of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, as we shall see, is not created to simply be the pun that embodies the thirty triumphant birds linguistically. It is created to give the readers the poetic space in which to come to terms with the transmuting nature of the personal truth that they, as seekers, must perceive, envision, even construct. Notions of a 'personal' or 'constructed' truth evoke an apparently relative and evolving nature, which must be understood as rooted, not in the constitution of the truth, but rather in the capacity of the envisioning seeker. In other words, while the ocean is boundless the individual jugs will only be filled according to their own size and shape. In simple terms, the Sīmurgh is the jug that is the ocean. It is enigmatic beyond description (*bī-waṣf u ṣifat*). It lives, but not in an ordinary nest, rather on Mount Qāf beyond historical space. It is the king that all the birds seek and, yet, none other than their own reflection. It leads the journeyers to his abode, the great gift of knowledge and clarity, which is none other than deepening their bewilderment. It is everywhere, but it will refuse to be portrayed or defined.

What could this metaphor do for the reader, how can it become a tool for spiritual growth? The short answer comes close to what the great German mystic Meister Eckhart observed: the transcendent truth manifests itself in most common ways to most common people.⁴⁰ On the one hand, the Sīmurgh is just a simple bird that embodies other birds in the story. On the other, it has the quality of being unconditioned by relativity, and thus the disontological ability to transmute into a higher level of existence the moment it is supposed to have been captured, grasped, named or in any way divested of its transcendence. In this linguistic process of slipping away, opens the referential space, which the informed reader/journeyer appropriates to infuse with his/her personal encounter with the truth.

The longer answer entails a look at the process of cognitive construction and reconstruction of the 'truth' in the space provided by the Sīmurgh. Cognition has many dimensions built upon individual, social, and historical processes. In any

one of its dimensions, however, it is bound intrinsically with the evolution of the self in perpetual interaction with the world in which it exists. Therefore, the truth, which despite its universality can only be grasped in the form of individualistic perception, manifests itself only in the interaction between the seeker and the world. In the absence of an expansive inner space inaccessible to the limitations of legal finality, this interaction will remain confined to narrowness of habitual practice and convention. 'Aṭṭār's Sīmurgh is therefore indispensable as the poetic site of struggle for discovery and reconstruction of the notions of the self and of the truth beyond the limits of convention.

Transmutations of the Sīmurgh are not in essence dissimilar to the poetic processes, which we observed earlier as animating the flight of each bird and that of the work as a whole. This, in part, results from the fact that although the Sīmurgh's expansive nature baffles the human intellect, it must remain somewhere on the fringes of the reader's perceptive grasp or the work will not benefit the ordinary wayfarer. The jug brings us something of the ocean, each bird replicates on a smaller scale the Sīmurgh's transmuting quality. In a similar, and meditated, manner the borders between the birds and the human readers frequently collapse to expand the transmutation beyond the precincts of the aviary. As the hoopoe unravels for the birds the enigma of their origins in the shadow of the Sīmurgh, for instance, we find ourselves talking about the *mard-i mustaghraq*, 'the person immersed [in truth]'.⁴¹ At the same time, the Sīmurgh is none other than its shadow. In the same way that the fair-faced king has his subjects gaze at his reflection in the mirror instead of his face, the shadow of the *sīmurgh* is one transmutation of the truth that the birds (and we) are able to gaze at without hurting our eyes:

Āyina farmūd ḥālī pādishāh
Kāndar āyina tawān kardan nigāh
Rūy-rā az āyina mī-tāftī
Harkas az rūyash nishānī yāftī.

The King commanded mirrors to be placed
 About the palace walls, and when he faced
 Their polished surfaces his image shone
 With mitigated splendour to the throng.⁴²

As the image of the king reflected the truth's magnificence, so too does the multitude of forms that sprang from the Sīmurgh's shade.⁴³ Furthermore, the proximity to the truth has a transforming quality. The elixir of cohabitation with those who have uncovered the shadow of the Sīmurgh results in the replication of the 'Sīmurghian' transmutation in these ordinary individuals. The poor fisherboy who encounters King Mas'ūd and the old woodcutter who has King Maḥmūd carry

his wood are transformed as a result of their proximity to these kings.⁴⁴ These examples are more than anecdotes documenting personal struggles for growth. They are glances into the dynamic, humorous, and informal nature of the relationship between the Sacred which is illusive and changing, and a wide range of seekers. The seekers themselves range from the most pious and learned to sinners, idol-worshippers, kings, and even spiders. The simpleton who requests a robe and gets a tattered one patched in 'a hundred places' teases the almighty:

*Mard-i majnūn guft ay dānā-yi rāz
Zhanda-ī bardūkhtī zān rūz bāz
Dar khazānat jāmahā jumla bisūkht
Kīn hama zhanda hamī-bāyast dūkht
Şad hazārān zhanda bar-ham dūkhtī
Īn chunīn darzī zi kih āmūkhtī.*

'You spent ten days with patches and old threads.
Stitching this cloak,' the madman said: 'I'll bet
You spoiled a treasury of clothes to get
So many bits together – won't you tell
Your servant where you learned to sew so well?'⁴⁵

Such brief metaphorical exchanges condense large chunks of information into compact constructions that represent the subset of cognitive and perceptual features salient to the broader concept they signify. Hence the rubric 'capsulated meta-sign'.

For the present discussion, however, the significant feature of metaphors is not so much in their shortness or density as in the manner in which they trigger the individual's 'long-term memory' in order to 'unfold their [the metaphors'] long-term script'.⁴⁶ The long-term memory is the repository for an incrementally collected and processed body of knowledge that is activated every instant to shape and reshape our perception of the self and the world in relation to which the self perceives itself. The long term, or extended, script of a metaphor consists of the images, ideas, and events that it selects to trigger from the reader's reservoir of long term memory. The building blocks of this extended script are, therefore, none other than the reader's cultural and personal experiences. Looking at an example may help clarify the personal nature of the construction that results from the unfolding triggered by a metaphor. Let us take the hoopoe, the leading bird in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*. As a 'capsulated meta-sign' unfolding its extended script in the long-term memory of a Muslim reader familiar with the scripture, the hoopoe would evoke the full Qur'ānic account of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba with all its rich details. To a lay person, more familiar with legends surrounding the evolution of the

bird in popular Muslim culture, the hoopoe would be Abu'l-Akhbar, Abū 'Abbād, Abū'l-Rabī', Abū Rawḥ and a host of other popular figures. To a contemporary urban reader, the bird might unfold the memory of a bird-watching adventure or a visit to an aviary as part of a trip to the zoo. To yet another bird enthusiast living in a medieval Muslim urban environment, the hoopoe might have unfolded a script entailing the bird's legendary eyesight and other characteristics listed in the pseudo-scientific compendia of wondrous animals such as the *'Ajā'ib al-makhḷūqāt wa gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt*.⁴⁷ The metaphorical significance of the bird is further enhanced in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* through the grand reception with which 'Aṭṭār marks the arrival of the hoopoe in the story. In this passage, the hoopoe is described as a 'discerning', 'righteous', and 'intelligent' guide who carries the crown of truth on the head.⁴⁸ In a way, the script unfolding the metaphoric hoopoe makes a viable bridge connecting popular colourful legends with the learned elitist culture which is permeated with the Qur'ānic wisdom.

The hoopoe's noble personality and exceptional qualifications to lead the birds, which are at first seemingly exaggerated, make perfect sense as the journey of the birds unfolds its own extended script as a capsulated meta-sign representing the bigger journey, that of the reader. Generation after generation of such birds will look to their own hoopoe, 'Aṭṭār himself, and his words of guidance preserved in the text, which bridges not just the elitist and the popular culture, but the past, the present and the future. Indeed, it has to embody something of eternity and speak with a timeless voice to make sense to generations of journeyers in perpetual pursuit of the truth. These do not just vary in race, gender, education, and other social markers, but in the personalized perceptions of the truth they are each able to construct for themselves.

Like the hoopoe, our poet has conversed with the learned elite immersed in Qur'ānic wisdom and wrapped the gift of his learning in simple stories we may comprehend. Aided with lyrical potency and visual density of capsulated meta-signs, unfolding into expansive personal scripts, our poet has translated the timelessness of the truth into a poetic persistence defying the ravages of time. The text itself performs on many levels its ultimate purpose of initiating the reader into the search for the treasures within. Simple and persistent metaphors like that of the sun which was discussed earlier are interwoven into the narrative structure of allegorical episodes to ensure the wholeness of extended tales. Individual stories fit in the larger frame tale of the journey of the birds, mirroring the ways in which the tale itself fits in the larger frame tale that is our life journey. In these treasure boxes fitting neatly into one another, the journeying birds of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* find the textual space in which to interact with the hoopoe and to piece together the ultimate goal of their expedition. Yet texts are limited in numerous ways. They are finalized on the page, subjected to the conventions of language, and caught between silences that mark their beginnings and ends. These textual limits have

to be overcome through poetic transmutations, in this case most notably that of the Sīmurgh, in order for the work to succeed. Through this poetic shape shifting, the journeyer/reader is prepared for an eventful life journey during which he or she must patiently construct a truth that is changing, illusive, and not conditioned by the states of being, i.e. disontological. The truth is none other than a perpetual Sīmurgh of becoming.

Meta-signs as Strategies for Theory Formation

We have so far focused on the significance of metaphors, and our master metaphor the Sīmurgh, as tools for communication. It would be appropriate to focus these concluding remarks on a whole new dimension, which would point to exciting avenues for future research in this area. In his valuable study, Qāsimzāda treats capsulated meta-signs as more than tools for transmission of messages. Metaphors, he reminds us, are often a strategy for theory formation and paradigm shifts that are vital for construction of knowledge. They achieve this goal through a number of interconnected processes. They avoid unnecessary details, lead the processing system in the direction which they wish to take, and regulate tonicity to achieve the desired shift in frame.⁴⁹ A poem that makes effective use of metaphorical structures is a powerful agent for this type of shift. It is for this reason that Qāsimzāda describes the world created 'through poetry' as 'mostly a meta-frame world'. In other words, the world created through poetry is neither static nor a replica of the objective one. Rather, it is an 'emergent and emerging' world. The emergent nature of the poetic world is, in part, rooted in the tension that metaphors deliberately create. The tension itself results from the fact that a metaphor appears to be contextually anomalous, that is, if it is interpreted literally it will fail to fit the context. Encyclopaedias are goldmines, but goldmines are not encyclopaedias. The more original the metaphor, the stronger is the tension. The process does not end here. The mark of a good metaphor is that it motivates the listener/reader to eliminate the tension by searching for the salient features of the literal meaning of the metaphor which are not incompatible with the context. This cognitive move to eliminate tension is fuelled by the originality of the metaphor and so essential to the process that a metaphor may be called 'a tension-resolvable contextual anomaly'.⁵⁰ Hence the force animating the perpetual search for new cognitive meta frames or the 'poetically emergent worlds', as the author calls them.

Obviously, this conceptual debate on the function of metaphors as expressed in these specific terms, was not of concern to 'Aṭṭār and his contemporaries. Indeed, too much attention to the function of language is likely to have been shunned as a hindrance to spiritual progress. But there is little doubt that he understood, valued, and deliberately utilized, the tension-inducing perplexity that fuelled the search for the emergent truth. The theme surfaces regularly in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*:

*Pīshvāyānī kih rah-bīn āmadand
 Gāh u bī-gāh az pay-i īn āmadand
 Jān-i khwud-rā 'ayn-i ḥayrat yāftand
 Ham-rah-i jān 'ajz u ḥasrat yāftand.*

Leaders far-sighted, able to see the road ahead
 Appeared from time to time to lead the way
 They found themselves animated with bewilderment
 With helpless longing their soul companion on the road.⁵¹

Whatever his theoretical position, or our understanding of that position, 'Aṭṭār made perfect use of the poetic productivity resulting from such tension rooted in bewilderment.⁵² A notable example of this appears in the story of the slave drugged and taken to the royal palace, where love is lavished on him by the fair-faced princess. The meta-world he has visited has been so overwhelming that the slave finds no words to describe it. But that is for the better, because we have shared in a state of awareness what he has been drugged to be able to experience and forget. We have the privilege to have observed not just the perplexity but the splendour of the mystery that sustains the search.⁵³

The greatest of the tension-inducing perplexities which are to be resolved, only to lead to the emergence of more puzzling experiences, is the nature of the Sīmurgh itself. In its endless mutations, which take place in proportion to the capacity of journeyers, our bird becomes a succession of emergent meta-frames in which we imagine our evolving truth. When the birds first arrive at the abode of the Sīmurgh, they are overpowered with its glory and then rejected. Here, through the allegorical visualization of the tale of Yūsuf, and the letter his brothers wrote to sell him, we are reminded that the birds have to face their actions. As their shortcomings overwhelm them, the light of the Sīmurgh shines to purify their actions and carry them to the next stage. Their immersion in the radiance of the truth enables them to see their own reflection in the Sīmurgh. This is only the beginning of the perplexity, an arrival at a new level of bewilderment. Indeed, the birds are never able to determine whether they sight the Sīmurgh in themselves or in a place external to their own being.

How much of this enigmatic and splendid exchange could be captured without being uttered in language? How much of it could be uttered without the aid of poetic tools? My answer is 'very little'. The hoopoe has to lyricize to elicit from our lethargic existence with poetic urgency the enthusiasm to brave the road. The Sīmurgh has to be born in a poetic environment so that we tame with poetic logic our 'rational' resistance to the instability of a personal truth in the shape of an evolving bird. Under 'normal' circumstances, we would demand carefully delineated definitions. In the realm of poetic utterance where the indescribable

presence and language at times overlap, it is easy to refrain from putting the finishing touches to the *Simurgh*. Having been rescued from the *Qāf* of anonymity, the *Simurgh* – who has always existed distant from our daily preoccupations – is now ours, to come to life and grow in the realm of human speech. Years after ‘Aṭṭār, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī articulated the transforming quality of uttering things in language with precision:

Speech is like the sun. It is the source of life and warmth for all human beings. The sun is always present, and everyone is alive and warmed by it. However, because the sun cannot be seen all the time, people are not [constantly] aware that their warmth and life is because of it. When articulated through language, be it to express gratitude or to complain, be it for a good or an evil purpose, the sun is brought to mind. Similarly, the rays of the sun that shines in the sky ceaselessly are not visible, until they fall upon a wall.⁵⁴

Freed from time and space, and uttered in poetic language, the emergent world appears every instance in a new light. The bewilderment remains with the birds to change only in colour and intensity, during and after the encounter with the *Simurgh*. The progression of bewilderment knows no limit, but there are no new frontiers to explore except through knocking on the door that opens into more bewilderment:

Rīsmān-i ‘aql-rā sar gum shudast
Khāna-yi pindār-rā dar gum shudast.

The rope of rationality I held to is lost
 The door that opened to the house of thought has vanished.⁵⁵

And thus, the *Simurgh* is remade perpetually.

Notes

1. MT, 4155: *ḥaḍratī dīdand bī-waṣf u ṣīfat.*
2. MT, 4164: *chāvush-i ‘izzat.*
3. MT, 4167: *bī-ḥāṣilān.*
4. MT, 4178: *mushtī ḥaqīr.*
5. MT, 4230: *ḥayā-yi maḥḍ.*
6. MT, 4234: *āftāb-i qurbat.*
7. Ibid.: *jumla-rā az partaw-i ān jān bitāft.*
8. MT, 4248–4249. I have in this chapter used the eminently readable English translation of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis, published as *The Conference of the Birds* (New York, 1986). I am aware that the rendered verses do not always correspond in number to the original. I have at times truncated the line where the Persian text ends; see

Darbandi and Davis, p. 219.

9. Cf. Gawharīn, MT, p. xvii, who also cites as a possible prototype the *bāb Ḥamāmat al-muṭawwaqa* in the *Kalīla wa Dimna*.

10. Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, tr. P. van Popta-Hope (Dordrecht, 1968), p. 238.

11. For biographical information on ‘Aṭṭār, see *Ibid.*, pp. 237–240. For the study by Taqī Pūrnamdāriyān, see ‘Nigāhī bih-dāstān-pardāzī-yi ‘Aṭṭār’ in *An Anthology of Iranian Studies*, ed. Mohammad Shoaee (Tehran, 1999), pp. 2, 4.

12. In shaping the conceptual framework for this essay, I have benefited tremendously from the insights of Dr Ḥabīb Qāsimzāda of Tehran University. Dr Qāsimzāda has published extensively in Persian and English on thought, speech and the role of metaphors in cognition. Furthermore, he has made the seminal studies of cognitive psychologists such as L.S. Vigotsky and A.R. Luria available to Persian readership through superb translations. In this study, I have made use of two of his essays in particular ‘Some Reflections on Metaphoric Processing: a move toward a meta-sign formulation’ *New Ideas in Psychology* 17 (1999), pp. 41–54, and ‘Vigotsky’s Mediational Psychology: New Conceptualization of Culture, Signification, and Metaphor’ *Language Sciences*, 27 (2005), pp. 281–300.,

13. James Elkins, *What Painting Is: How to Think about Oil Painting, Using the Language of Alchemy* (New York and London, 2000), p. 192.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 193. Elkins’s study, which goes far beyond issues discussed here, is a fascinating glimpse into the diverse functions of the medium of paint in the act of painting.

15. Pioneering studies in this area were published by Luria and Vigotsky. Two better known titles are *Language and Cognition* (New York, 1982) by the former, and *Thought and Language* (rev. ed., Cambridge, MA, 1986) by the latter. For a simple list of significant topics in human visual learning, see the proceedings of the 25th conference of the International Visual Literacy Association published in 1994, *Visual Literacy in the Digital Age: Selected Readings from the 25th Annual Conference*, ed. Darrell G. Beauchamp, Robert A. Braden, and Judy Clark Baca (Blacksburg, VA, 1994). For a more in-depth study see Wayne Reeves, *Cognition and Complexity: The Cognitive Science of Managing Complexity* (Lanham, MD, c.1996). Reeves examines the complexity of the cognitive process with particular attention to metaphors used in critical thinking. Another fascinating study of mental imagery and self expression with yet more literary emphasis is the collection of essays edited by Joanne M. Braxton and centred around the poetry of Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings: A Casebook* (New York, 1999). The central place of metaphors in learning as well as healing is the subject of numerous studies. George Burns, for example, looks at metaphors used in therapy, in *101 Healing Stories: Using Metaphors in Therapy* (New York, c.2001). Qāsimzāda, whose work we shall revisit in more detail, applies these insights to Persian poetry in *Isti‘āra wa shinākht* (Tehran, 2000).

16. Qāsimzāda ‘Some Reflections’, p. 46.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

18. Gawharīn, MT, p. 296.

19. MT, 979–983; tr. Darbandi and Davis, p. 47.

20. MT, 987–991; tr. Darbandi and Davis, p. 47.

21. MT, 622.

22. Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago / London, 1994), p. 9.

23. MT, 138.
24. MT, 146.
25. MT, 146–159.
26. MT, 312.
27. MT, 3584.
28. MT, 77, 89, 93, 1000.
29. MT, 2001.
30. MT, 2266.
31. MT, 1209–1210.
32. MT, 1224.
33. MT, 1330.
34. MT, 1407.
35. MT, 1502.
36. MT, 1538–1545.
37. MT, 1586.

38. A meta-sign is a compound configuration of a series of signs enhancing the utility of each. Constituent elements of a meta-sign may be an arbitrary sequence or the result of careful construction. Through their density and/or visual impact, meta-signs stand out and function as an aid to memory. Studies in cognition and language often refer to meta-signs as ‘capsulated’ (enclosed in a capsule or in a box) because they contain much within themselves. Their formation is explained through a process termed *synoptic equivalences* between signs, see Roy Harris, ‘Writing and Proto-writing: from Sign to Meta-sign’ in George Wolf, ed., *New Departures in Linguistics* (New York, London, 1992), pp. 180–192.

39. Interestingly, Dick Davis, who (together with Afkham Darbandi) has provided us with the most lyrical English translation of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, argues that the rhetoric of classical Persian panegyric court poetry was borrowed by the Sufi poets though it was unsuited to the task. As a result the rhetoric of ‘authority and service between a prince and his subject’ affected the tone of all poetry in general. How could numerous artistic masterpieces be created in the ‘wrong’ kind of medium is a question (among many) that the work does not deal with. See *Borrowed Ware: Medieval Persian Epigrams*, tr. Dick Davis (Washington, DC, 1997), p. 12. The present essay, although limited in scope, testifies to the felicitous union between the mystical and the poetic in medieval Persian poetry.

40. Robert Ellwood, *Mysticism and Religion* (New York and London, 1999), pp. 117–119.

41. MT, 1087.

42. MT, 1112–1113; tr. Darbandi and Davis, p. 54.

43. MT, 1118.

44. MT, 1723.

45. MT, 1797–1799; tr. Darbandi and Davis, p. 86.

46. Qāsimzāda, ‘Some Reflections’, p. 53.

47. Cf. Gawharīn, p. 296, s.v. ‘*hudhud*’, on reflections of the hoopoe in Persian popular culture.

48. MT, 688–689.

49. In a medical context, tonicity refers to elastic tension in organic life, as in muscles, as the quality that facilitates response to stimuli. In the present context, the concept evokes the lively, almost organic, manner in which an effective metaphor engages the human cognitive

processes requiring elasticity and rapid response from the reader's imagination.

50. Qāsimzāda, 'Some reflections', pp. 43, 53. Much of the value of Qāsimzāda's contribution comes from his personal attention to poetry, a quality rarely present in psychological studies.

51. MT, vv. 19–20, as well as vv. 38, 41, 43, and 47, among many others, that revive the theme.

52. The issue debated here is not 'Aṭṭār's aptitude for conceptualization, which I hope the present essay amply documents. It is, rather, to explain the seemingly unlikely affinity between the latest findings in cognitive psychology and the concerns of a pre-modern Sufi poet and thinker.

53. MT, 3814–3893. [On which, see also Lucian Stone's essay above – eds.]

54. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Fīhi mā fīh*, ed. Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar (Tehran, 1358 Sh./1979), p. 196. The translation is mine. Cf. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Signs of the Unseen: The Discourses of Jalaluddin Rumi*, tr. W.M. Thackston (Vermont, 1994), p. 206. Dr Qāsimzāda prefaces the 3rd edition of his Persian translation of Vigotsky's *Thought and Language* with a more extended version of this quote from *Fīhi mā fīh* in which Rūmī explores the interplay of thought and language; see L.S. Vigotsky, *Andīsha wa zabān*, tr. H. Qāsimzāda (Tehran, 1380 Sh./2001).

55. MT, 3904.

Illustrating 'Aṭṭār: A Pictorial Meditation by Master Ḥabībballāh of Mashhad in the Tradition of Master Bihzād of Herat¹

MICHAEL BARRY

A Royal Manuscript of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*

In 1609, Shāh 'Abbās presented his royal family shrine in Ardabil with the most beautiful illustrated manuscript in existence of 'Aṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, medieval Persian literature's own 'Parliament of Fowles'. This venerable volume donated by the Safavid king was then already more than a hundred years old, for it had been copied and bound for presentation to the Timurid ruler of Herat, the refined and fastidious sultan Ḥusayn Mīrzā Bayqarā, in the year 1487.²

The years 1487–1488 were, in fact, just those in which artists in Herat like Mīrak and Bihzād were painting their celebrated masterpieces for yet another royal manuscript, the great copy of Sa'dī's *Būstān* now preserved in the Cairo National Library. These years indeed mark something like a creative zenith in Islamic art. The well-known Cairo *Būstān* is recognized as a watershed in the history of Persianate painting, since it contains the only absolutely authentic signatures by Bihzād. The pictures in the Cairo *Būstān* have thus allowed all subsequent efforts to identify works by the master. But the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* manuscript, now in New York's Metropolitan Museum (Fletcher Fund 63.210), easily ranks with this Cairo *Būstān* as another supreme expression of medieval Persianate pictorial art. For the New York *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* includes one painting probably by Mīrak, and three almost certainly by Bihzād, and, in addition, script by the greatest calligrapher of the late Timurid age, Sulṭān 'Alī Mashhadī. Shāh 'Abbās could be proud to own, and to donate, such a prestigious volume.

Four pages had been left blank, however, to receive further paintings. These were duly commissioned by Shāh 'Abbās, to complete the volume for proper donation to the shrine in Ardabil in 1609. One of these later artists has been identified as Ḥabībballāh of Mashhad, who signed his own picture of 'The hoopoe addressing

the assembled birds' (Plate 1). The other three Isfahan paintings, while anonymous, show unmistakable signs of the influence of such later sixteenth-century Safavid masters as Ṣādiqī Beg and Riḍā-yi 'Abbāsī.

Taken together, then, the illustrations to 'Aṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* now in New York span two of the most glorious moments in Persianate painting, the late fifteenth century in Herat, and the early seventeenth in Isfahan.³ But these illustrations to 'Aṭṭār's mystical poem must obviously have meant something far more than pure adornment, however aesthetically magnificent in themselves, and thus ostentatiously worthy of a king's treasury and royal donation. For boldly written across the surface of every one of these paintings, wherever space allowed, in the period when this book was donated to the shrine, appears the Arabic word *waqf*, indicating a pious endowment. This book and all its pictures made up a holy offering, hence the illustrations were necessarily regarded as a form of worship in their own way, too.

At the very least, these figurative paintings constitute visual meditations on 'Aṭṭār's devotional poetry, designed for contemplation by the ruler to whom the manuscript was first addressed, then donated by another ruler to the library of a shrine for the benefit of pious readers in all times to come. Such remarks on the sheer devotional purpose of paintings like this, in a mystical book copied for a devout-minded prince like Sulṭān Ḥusayn Mīrzā Bayqarā of Herat, and which was then ultimately dedicated in public ceremony by another equally devout-minded prince, Shāh 'Abbās of Isfahan, to one of the very holiest shrines in the entire realm, would be merely taken for granted – indeed they would appear painfully banal – regarding any other cultural tradition in world history. But they seem to fly in the face of what often passes for conventional wisdom today, regarding the true place of figurative art in traditional Islamic civilization.

Painting Sanctified: the Tradition of Master Bihzād

Persian manuscript illustrations – even those which once formed part of traditional readers' experience of sacred poets like 'Aṭṭār – are now most usually considered by many scholars as a sort of marginal but tolerated aberration, a delightful but decidedly minor quirk indulged in by a handful of artists protected by a few eccentric princely patrons, a suspicious activity that ran counter to the prevailing mood of what is supposed to have been an otherwise rigidly iconophobic culture. Hence the study of Islamic figurative painting has usually been restricted to the field of art history, and to a sometimes rather narrow concern with stylistics, however sensitive and perceptive: that is, not truly included in any comprehensive survey of medieval Islamic religious perceptions as such.

We completely disagree with such a restrictive view and approach. The paintings which appear in countless books of devotional Persian poetry copied for numerous

royal patrons from Turkey to India in the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, we believe, can now be seen to be as fully steeped in Sufi symbolism as the verses they illustrate, and, really, may only be properly deciphered in light of the standard Sufi or more generally religious imagery of their own age: much like the pictorial allegories of any other traditional religious civilization.

The following observations are based on conclusions to which we were logically drawn in our work on Bihzād's pictorial symbolism, mainly based on fresh examination of his illuminations for the 1487–1488 *Būstān* manuscript now in Cairo, and for the 1494 *Khamṣa* manuscript of Niẓāmī now in the British Library.⁴ Master Bihzād of Herat (1465–1535), we found, became regarded, over the following two centuries, as the spiritual master, indeed patron saint, to a long line of figurative artists working not only in Herat itself but also in Tabriz and later in Qazwin and Isfahan, and farther east in Bukhara, Kabul, Lahore and Agra; his name was held with equal respect in Istanbul.

The *historical* fact of the matter is that, while some modern schools of Islam might wince at this, figurative illustrations to Sufi poems were approved and endorsed by the ruling circles and highest religious authorities of Timurid and Uzbek Central Asia, Turkoman and Safavid Iran, Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India.

The allegorical code underlying Persianate painting seems to have disintegrated after the fall of the Safavid dynasty in early eighteenth-century Iran, though it lingered in India well into the nineteenth. The hieroglyphical key to our Rosetta stone for Persian painting, as it were, lay in our recent discovery of verses by the famed Sufi poet Jāmī himself, the grandmaster of the Naqshbandī order and leading religious authority in the late fifteenth-century Timurid kingdom of Herat, found discreetly inscribed in a famous picture by Bihzād. In fact, inclusion of these verses in Bihzād's painting made these lines of Jāmī's poetry relate directly to *Bihzād himself*.

That Bihzād might have had in mind Jāmī's own poem of *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā* when he, Bihzād, illustrated Sa'dī's version of the story for Sulṭān Ḥusayn, has often been suspected.⁵ But as it happens, Jāmī's own verses actually *do* lurk in the architectural framework of Bihzād's great painting of 'Yūsuf and Zulaykhā', in the 1487–1488 *Būstān* (Plate 3).

Bihzād quotes, as might have been expected, verses from Jāmī's poem on the same subject, which was finished in Herat almost exactly at the same time as Bihzād's own painting, that is, in the year 1487. But Bihzād could hardly have cited these words without Jāmī's *explicit* permission. For Jāmī was the spiritual adviser to the Timurid court, and this copy of Sa'dī's *Būstān*, again illustrated by Bihzād and also perhaps Mirak, with calligraphy by Sulṭān 'Alī Mashhadī and abstract illuminations by Yārī, was an expensively produced official manuscript destined for the royal library – just as was the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*.

The verses by Jāmī included in the ‘tilework’ of Bihzād’s painting are these:

Şafā-yi şaffahāyash şubḥ-i iqbāl
Faḍā-yi khānahāyash ganj-i āmāl
Agar nazẓārāgī ānjā gudhashtī
Zi ḥasrat dar dahānash āb gashtī
Dar-ū juz ‘āshiq u ma’shūq kas nay
Gazand-i shaḥna u āsīb-i ‘asas nay.

The pure sheen of its slabs is a dawn of joy!
 The space of its halls is a treasure of hope!
 Should a glance but thereupon glide,
 Envy’s water from his own mouth should flow!
 Therein, save the Lover and Beloved: none!
 Sting or harm from patrol or nightwatch: none!⁶

The subtle hiding in this way of Jāmī’s verses in a painting by Bihzād, which ostensibly illuminate Sa’dī’s verses, is a classic instance of the *dual illustration* so characteristic of fifteenth- to seventeenth-century Persianate art (and numerous examples may be adduced): the artist comments upon one poet, by visually alluding to another.

In the case of Bihzād’s *Būstān*, Jāmī did more than merely approve, and praise, Bihzād’s art – and Bihzād’s marvellous depiction of the Lady Zulaykhā’s palace – by allowing his own verses to be quoted by the painter in this way. The context from which Jāmī’s verses are drawn, in fact relates to the poet’s account of the fabled wizard-artist who built the Lady’s Castle in Jāmī’s own version of the story. Now, the reproduction of these verses in Bihzād’s painting implies that Jāmī identifies Bihzād – who painted this particular castle – with the artist in Jāmī’s story: high praise indeed for one of the Herati kingdom’s greatest living painters.

But Jāmī’s verses are fraught with more meaning still, and deliver a far more important message. In the poem, Jāmī’s words describe an artist endowed with the same miraculous power as that vouchsafed by God, according to the Qur’ān, unto the child Jesus, believed in Islamic tradition to have moulded little birds of clay, to have blown upon them, and so to have given them life. In the words of the Qur’ān: *Wa idh takhluqu min al-ṭīni ka-hay’ati’l-ṭayri bi-idhnī fa-tanfukhu fihā fa-takūnu ṭayran bi-idhnī*; ‘And so! Thou didst fashion from clay even like unto the figures of birds, by My willing, and thou didst blow thereupon, and they became birds, by My willing!’⁷

In Jāmī’s description of his story’s artist, this becomes:

Ba-taṣwīr ānchi bar kilcash gudhashtī

Zi rashḥ-i ān rawānī zinda gashtī
Bih-sang ar šūrat-i murghī kashīdī
Sabuk sang-i girān az jā parīdī.

Whatever his stylus upon an icon drew,
 Through the ink of the thing, its very soul took life!
 Upon a stone should he draw a bird's figure,
 Weightless! Aloft should fly the heavy stone!⁸

That later Persianate tradition understood these verses by Jāmī to allude not only to the Qur'ānic miracle of Jesus, but to Bihzād's mastery as well, and to Bihzād's magical endowment with the same Christ-like power, is clearly proven by the scribe Mīr Sayyid Aḥmad's reworking of Jāmī's same poetic conceit in the years 1564–65, in explicit praise of Bihzād, in the preface to an album of pictures now preserved in Istanbul:⁹

Būd šūrat-i murgh-i ū dīl-padhīr
Chū murgh-i Masīhā rūḥ-gīr

So pleasing to heart his icon's bird
 That it might catch breath,
 – the spirit, *rūḥ* –
 Like Jesus' own bird!

Qāḍī Aḥmad of Qum filched these verses on Bihzād and made them famous in his own, far better known chronicle of calligraphers and painters, completed in 1596.¹⁰

Jāmī's clear mystical reference to the quickening breath of Jesus, *rūḥ*, the 'spirit', and his equally limpid implication that Bihzād *the figurative painter* was blessed *in turn* with such a life-giving 'breath of Jesus' (*nafas-i Masīhī*) point to the major role played by Jāmī himself in not only endorsing, but, indeed, in *sanctifying* figurative art in late fifteenth-century Herat. Such sanctification of figurative art boldly courted a religious paradox, of course, masquerading as blasphemy, the better to shock disciples into profounder spiritual awareness: akin to similar Sufi paradoxes (*shaṭḥ*) found in the age's poetry with their apparently blasphemous praise of 'wine', 'taverns', 'Magi' and the like.

Jāmī's language, at any rate, inspired the scribe who wrote Shāh Ismā'īl's edict of 1522 proclaiming Bihzād as guild-master of all artists of the book in the Safavid realm. The complex text of this edict is fraught with expressions such as *mazhar-i nawādir-i šuwar*, meaning that Bihzād was to be regarded as 'the manifestation of the rarities of forms': as if the Heratī painter mirrored the divine archetypes in his meditation and upon his own heart, like the shaykh of a Sufi order. Šādiqī Beg,

master of the Safavid Empire's guild of painters in the later sixteenth century, and standing, as it were, in a direct line of succession to Bihzād as shaykh of this same order, uses the distinctly Sufi expression of *himmat*, 'spiritual zeal', to describe his own mystical striving in Bihzād's path:

*Tamannā-yi dilam īn būd paywast
Kih gīrad himmat-i Bihzādī-am dast.*

My heart's yearning so endured
That it might seize me with Bihzāadian spiritual zeal.¹¹

In Jāmī's writings, the most complicated paradox of all – indeed, the central and hardest paradox of all Sufi symbolism – concerns 'idols', however. In orthodox Islam, the believer is, of course, supposed to spurn 'idols' – that is, figurative images – in order to uphold God's invisible Transcendence. But the mystic knows that God is not only Transcendent. God is also Immanent, and lies revealed in the mirror of all created things. Hence God may after all indeed be revealed through the idol, the icon, the figurative image (*ṣanam*, *ṣūrat*, *taṣwīr*): but only unto the true mystic with spiritual eyes to see the Divine both as the hidden One, and as the manifest Many, that is, as the Transcendent and as the Immanent. Thus the very term 'idol' distracts those spiritually still immature, but mirrors the Godhead in the inspired meditation of the initiate. Therefore contemplation of the 'idol', the figurative image, the icon, the mirrored manifestation in visual form of the Godhead, becomes a necessary degree in the path of initiation, which needs must lead through the Immanent and the visible, unto the Transcendent and the hidden. This ultimately neo-Platonic mystical concept lies at the heart of Jāmī's countless spiritual word-plays on 'images', which of course drew upon the Sufi speculation of earlier masters like Ibn 'Arabī and, indeed, 'Aṭṭār himself.¹²

Nearly three centuries before Jāmī, 'Aṭṭār's whole *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* itself 'paradoxically' plays upon the iconic image of the great bird Sīmurgh, as the visible manifestation of the Divine. In allusion to the well-known attraction of examples of Chinese art for Persian painters (already apparent even in 'Aṭṭār's pre-Mongol period), the poet of the 'Language of the Birds' thus subtly hints at every aspect and mystical implication of the Sīmurgh's iconic manifestation. The Great Bird appears as a ray of Immanent creation's visible and dawnlike 'oriental' (hence 'Chinese') Light, shooting forth from the unfathomable, unknowable primordial Darkness of the invisibly Transcendent:

*Ibtidā-yi kār-i sīmurgh ay 'ajab
Jalwagar bugdhasht bar chīn nīm-i shab
Dar miyān-i chīn futād az vay parī*

Lājaram pur-shūr shud har kishwarī
 Har kasī naqshī az ān par bar girift
 Har kih dīd ān naqsh-kārī dar girift
 Ān par aknūn dar nigāristān-i chīn ast
 ‘Uṭlubū’l-‘ilm wa-law bi’l-Ṣīn’ az īn ast
 Gar nagashtī naqsh-i par-i ū ‘iyān
 Īn hama ghūghā nabūdī dar jahān.

At the outset of the Simurgh’s feat, oh its very wonder!
 She splendidly appeared in China, in the midst of night,
 And in the midst of China flew down from Her such a plume
 Whence every land needs fell into a broil
 And every wight devised his icon from yon plume
 And every wight who saw it took to painting his own pictures.
 Now yon plume is kept in China’s painting-hall:
 Whence holy word: ‘Seek all ye wisdom an it lay even in China’.
 If yon icon of Her plume had never been revealed,
 This world would never thus have cried in turmoil.¹³

For our detailed argumentation on the link between Bihzād and Jāmī, and, beyond Jāmī, to the mystical tradition and imagery of Ibn ‘Arabī, ‘Aṭṭār and Nizāmī, along with our general elucidation of the allegorical code of Bihzād’s pictures, we must refer readers to our book, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*. But the November 2002 London symposium on ‘Aṭṭār and the Persian Sufi Tradition¹⁴ drew welcome and most necessary attention to the New York *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* pictures, and survey of these pictures yielded further rich clues to cracking the whole symbolic code of later medieval Persianate art.

‘Aṭṭār, of course, was one of the twelfth-century narrative poets who most deeply influenced Jāmī’s own religious vision – and, hence, Bihzād’s. Meanwhile Bihzād’s illustrations for ‘Aṭṭār’s *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* remain among those very few works which we may undoubtedly ascribe to the master: works which, in turn, so poignantly influenced the early seventeenth-century painters, like Master Ḥabīballāh, commissioned to finish the book’s whole illustrative scheme for Shāh ‘Abbās.

Just like every great Persian poem, every great Persianate painting constitutes, however, an *entire cosmology* in itself. Thus elucidation of any one *single* picture by Bihzād, by Mīrak, by Shāh Muẓaffar, by Maḥmūd-i Mudhahhib, by Shaykhzāda, by Sulṭān Muḥammad, by Mīr Muṣawwir, by Mīr Sayyid ‘Alī, by ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, by Ṣādiqī Beg, by Riḍā-yi ‘Abbāsī or by Master Ḥabīballāh, in light of the text or poetic conceit which it illuminates or to which it alludes, can, and usually must, require as many pages of commentary as any single *ghazal* by Ḥāfiẓ, canto by Dante, or panel by Jan Van Eyck. We may here, therefore, only briefly scan the iconographic code of one outstanding picture in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*: the early seventeenth-century

painting by Master Ḥabīballāh, who sought to convey the general symbolism of ‘Aṭṭār’s poem, by drawing upon a set of visual allegories first worked out on paper, it seems, by Master Bihzād, and in any case, associated with Bihzād’s artistic legacy.

Master Ḥabīballāh’s Illustration: ‘The Hoopoe Addresses the Assembled Birds’

Ernst Grube in 1967 was thinking mainly of stylistics when he wrote of the impact of the four late fifteenth-century paintings in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* on the early seventeenth-century artists commissioned to finish the manuscript. But even here, as in Persian poetry, far more than at first meets the eye always lies beneath the surface of Persian icons. Grube writes:

The paintings added at the command of Shāh ‘Abbās are of exquisite quality and baffling style. Baffling because, except for one, they have very little to do with the style current in Isfahān around 1600 ... They are so strongly reminiscent of Herāt painting of the later fifteenth century that it seems strange, if not at first inexplicable, that they should have been painted in Isfahān in the first decade of the seventeenth century.¹⁵

It is rather remarks like this which seem ‘baffling’. Just to take Master Ḥabīballāh’s own early seventeenth-century painting for the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, and in reference to its discernible fifteenth-century prototypes, we can try to recover from Professor Grube’s acknowledged ‘bafflement’, in order to make some sense of the picture. To begin with, we might stress that there seems nothing at all ‘inexplicable’ about a later Safavid artist elaborating on the themes and style offered by what were then the most highly admired Timurid and early Safavid models, most notably those works ascribed to Bihzād himself.¹⁶

Ḥabīballāh’s painting (Plate 1), added for the 1609 presentation, is an illustration to the opening of the narrative, where the assembled birds first listen to the discourse of the hoopoe, Solomon’s fabled messenger to the Queen of Sheba. While this picture is only the second illustration in the manuscript’s paginated sequence, it is the first and only painting to address the subject of the poem as a whole.

In Islamic lore, as is well known, the hoopoe was regarded as a trusted minister to the great monarch of Scripture. ‘Solomon’ himself, in Islamic tradition, symbolizes the rule of Intellect: for ‘Solomon’ chained the ‘demons’ – figurations of the lower passions to be held sternly in check by the guiding mind – and forced them to do his bidding. ‘Aṭṭār’s verses, with all their sonorous alliterations and *double-entendres*, clearly allude to this. In the poet’s words:

Marḥabā ay hudhud-i hādī shuda
Dar ḥaqīqat payk-i har wādī shuda

*Ay ba sar-ḥadd-i Sabā sayr-i tu khwush
 Bā Sulaymān Manṭiq al-ṭayr-i tu khwush
 Ṣāhib-i sirr-i Sulaymān āmadī
 Az tafākhur tājwar zān āmadī
 Dīw-rā dar band u zindān bāz dār
 Tā Sulaymān-rā tu bāshī rāz-dār
 Dīw-rā waqtī kih dar zindān kunī
 Bā Sulaymān qaṣd-i shādrawān kunī.*

Greetings, O you hoopoe, so you've turned our guidance now!
 In truth, you've turned a messenger through every valley now!
 O happy your own journey to Sheba's farthest reaches
 And happy, with King Solomon, your Parliament of Fowles!
 For you do come as lord of Solomon's own secrets,
 You come in glory crowned.
 Then bind again the fiend in his own chains and gaol
 And turn again as keeper unto Solomon's own secrets.
 For when you have locked fast the very demon in his gaol,
 With Solomon you fly: to his pavilion, to his soul-rejoicing goal!¹⁷

The verses encapsulated in Ḥabīballāh's painting, however, are these, the first utterances addressed by the hoopoe unto the birds – words which, in themselves, were intended by the poet to echo the opening verses of the second *sūra* of the Qur'ān: *Dhālika'l-kitabu lā rayba fīhi, hudan li'l-muttaqīna alladhīna yu'minūna bi'l-ghayb*, 'This is the Book in which there is no doubt, a guide to the devout and who believe in the unseen.'¹⁸ Compare 'Aṭṭār's verses:

*Guft ay murghān man-am bī hīch rayb
 Ham barīd-i ḥaḍrat u ham payk-i ghayb
 Ham zi har ḥaḍrat khabar-dār āmadam
 Ham zi fiṭrat ṣāhib-asrār āmadam.*

Said he: Oh you birds! I am he, without a doubt,
 At once a courier from the Presence, and a messenger from the Unseen.
 At once I come with tidings from the Presence,
 At once I come by nature Adept in the Mysteries.¹⁹

Among the seventeenth-century added illustrations, Grube thought this 'the painting farthest from the Isfahan style' and 'the finest and most beautiful of the group. At first glance it could easily be taken for a Timurid work' were it not for 'a man with a gun – a gun of a type not developed before the late sixteenth century.'²⁰ The painting is signed by Ḥabīballāh of Mashhad. Grube correctly notes that this

master also drew a young guardsman or hunter bearing a very similar matchlock, in an isolated picture now preserved in the Staatliche Museen in Berlin. Grube remarks that 'the barrel of the gun is painted onto the margin of the page, proof that the painting was added to the manuscript when the pages were remounted'. True enough, technically: but what is this same odd gun actually doing, allegorically, in this particular picture? And what do all the picture's other details signify? For what is really so 'Timurid' in feeling, in Ḥabīballāh's illustration, lies not only in the careful finish of its gem-like colouring. Rich pigmentation, it is true, characterized the earlier style of fifteenth-century Herat and even of sixteenth-century Tabriz: whereas the dominant mood in seventeenth-century Isfahan, as we know, tended rather to stress calligraphic drawing, which was left therefore deliberately visible under lighter washes of paint, or even with no colouring at all.

But what Ḥabīballāh did, in addition to laying his pigments on paper very thickly in the Timurid and early Safavid manner, was carefully to adapt a typical Timurid *scheme of composition* with the following *three allegorical motifs*, which pervade his pictorial vision: (a) *An inclined plane-tree*, which dominates the whole painting; (b) *A running brook* whose source is seen to spring from this tree's roots; (c) *Tormented rocks* in which lurk the hidden faces of grotesque *demons*. The stylistic origin and allegorical meaning of these three basic iconic elements in Persianate painting may, we believe, be elucidated as follows in the three succeeding sections.

A. The inclined plane-tree

This motif goes back at the very least to Bihzād's illustrations for the famous *Khamṣa* of Nizāmī presented to Herat's sultan in 1494, and now preserved in the British Library (Or. 6810). Bihzād seems actually to have invented, or at any rate made popular, the vision of the towering plane-tree that rises above the entire picture, slightly bent or leaning towards one side, and spreading its multicoloured foliage like a canopy over the main character or characters in a given illustration.

Ḥabīballāh's design, here, represents exactly the same sort of plane-tree (*chinār*), to be seen, for example, in the 1494 Herat *Khamṣa*, in Bihzād's two great pictures of 'The saintly Bishr searches for the body of the blasphemous Malikhā who drowned in the Well of Being' (Plate 4), where the plane-tree leans both over the Well and over the saintly Bishr, and even scatters a few leaves in homage at Bishr's feet; and of 'Alexander Kneeling before the Holy Man to Obtain his Blessing in order to Capture the Castle of Derbent' (Plate 5), where an identical plane-tree bows over the saint sitting at the mouth of his cave, and likewise scatters a few leaves at the saint's feet.

A third painting in the 1494 Herat *Khamṣa* shows exactly the same plane-tree rising, this time, over 'Majnūn when he First Sees his Beloved Laylī in School' (Plate 6). This third painting may be by Bihzād's pupil Qāsim-i 'Alī, whose carefully

written name appears between two columns of script, although it was ascribed to Bihzād in the seventeenth century by the Mughal Emperor Jahāngīr, who once owned this manuscript and whose somewhat ungainly scrawling of Bihzād's name appears in the lower margin. At any rate, even if actually by Qāsim-i 'Alī, the style of this third painting – with its overshadowing *chinār* – remains so close to that of Bihzād, that even so shrewd a connoisseur as Emperor Jahāngīr could no longer tell the difference. In terms of artistic influence, we may therefore accept all three depictions of the inclined plane-tree, in the 1494 *Khamṣa*, as 'Bihzadian'.

While this particular manuscript, that is, the 1494 Herat *Khamṣa* manuscript, found its way to India and formed part of the collections of the Mughal Emperors where its pictures profoundly influenced the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mughal school of painting, models closely similar to its designs also left their clearly visible stamp upon the paintings of the early sixteenth-century Safavid school in Tabriz, where Bihzād was appointed guildmaster by Shāh Ismā'il in 1522.

Thus, in their own illustrations to Niẓāmī's great *Khamṣa*, both in the manuscript copied in Tabriz for Shāh Ṭahmāsp in 1539–1543 (British Library Or. 2265), and as an addition to a 1493 Herat manuscript of the poet (British Library Add. 25900) again completed for Shāh Ṭahmāsp in about the same years, the Safavid artists Sulṭān Muḥammad and Mīr Muṣawwir both reproduced the model of Bihzād's great tree.

In Sulṭān Muḥammad's fairy-tale depiction of 'Shāh Khusraw sees Princess Shīrīn Bathing' (Plate 7), the *chinār* spreads its branches majestically above the Princess discovered seated within the fount, beneath the tree's roots. Mīr Muṣawwir follows Bihzād's iconographical scheme even more closely, in his own rendition of 'Alexander Kneeling before the Holy Man to Obtain his Blessing in order to Capture the Castle of Derbent' (Plate 8). Indeed, Mīr Muṣawwir adheres even more narrowly than Sulṭān Muḥammad to Bihzād's prototype, by showing his plane-tree's foliage tinged in autumnal, *motley colours*, itself no accidental detail. Thus Ḥabīballāh essentially pursues Safavid tradition, in repeating the motif of Bihzād's plane-tree in his own illustration, in turn, to the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*.

Bihzād's plane-tree was no mere whimsical adornment, however. Bihzād's *chinār* – hence also Ḥabīballāh's – represents the Tree of Life: bowing down, in homage, before the manifestation of the Divine. Bihzād's iconography mostly mirrors – as refracted through the teachings of his contemporary Jāmī – the imagery of the eminent early thirteenth-century Sufi master Ibn 'Arabī, who left his native Spain to teach in the Near East, and whose thought came entirely to dominate mystical speculation throughout the Persianate cultural sphere from Anatolia to India. As is well known, the thirteenth-century poetry of Rūmī is steeped in Ibn 'Arabī's vision. But the theomonic perception associated with Ibn 'Arabī's thought is already well discernible in the writings of such twelfth-century masters of Persian prose and poetry as 'Ayn al-Quḍāt, Sanā'ī, Niẓāmī and of course 'Aṭṭār.

In Bihzād's day, the chief expounder and commentator of Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics was Jāmī himself, who as both theologian and poet was respected and even revered as far as Istanbul and the Muslim communities in China, and who sought to reconcile the Spanish-Arab master's teachings with the allegorical message implied in the twelfth to fourteenth-century Persian verses of Jāmī's own four major sources of poetic inspiration: that is, the writings of 'Aṭṭār, Nizāmī, Sa'dī, and Amīr Khusraw, who are, as it happens, the same four poets illustrated by Bihzād.

Bihzād, one argues, chose his autumnal *chinār* to make visible the concept of Ibn 'Arabī's *Tree of Life* (itself a very old Near Eastern image), whose purport was thus summarized for Persian-language readers as early as the second half of the thirteenth century by the Central Asian divine, 'Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī: *Bi-nazdīk-i ahl-i waḥdat, tamām-i mawjūdāt yak dirakht ast*; 'So far as the Folk of Unity are concerned, all things which exist make up a single Tree.'²¹

In Ibn 'Arabī's seminal work, the *Shajarat al-kawn* or 'The Tree of Being', all manifest existence is compared to a single, cosmic tree.²² This tree is forked, and its twin sets of ramifications signify the twin divine aspects of Mercy and Wrath. Every leaf bears the stamp of one of the Divine Names, that is, one particular physical manifestation of the cosmic whole. The tree's bark represents external visible reality, which is all that the Devil can see of this tree, just as the Devil may only perceive those branches and leaves that signify the Divine Wrath. The mystic, however, perceives *both* sides of the tree, and also the wooden pulp, and finally its all-pervading sap. This sap vivifies all Being, and corresponds to the Source of Life.

Ibn 'Arabī writes that when the Perfect Man first appeared in this universe – that is, the mystic who encompassed all reality in his meditation and whose ultimate manifestation as both saint *and* lawgiver was Muḥammad the Prophet (but saints, as distinct from Prophets, do continue to dwell within our world and to mirror the entire cosmos in their minds) – then:

Wa'htazzat ṭarab-an shajaratu-l-akwāni
Wa taḥarraka mā fihā min al-alwāni wa'l-'iḍāni

And the Tree of all Beings trembled with joy,
 And all its colours and twigs quivered thereby.²³

Before the manifestation of the Prophet-Saint, Ibn 'Arabī continues, the Tree showed obeisance, and 'bowed thither in inclination': *fa-māla ilayhā muta'aṭṭifan*. Ibn 'Arabī's Tree and Saint make up the opposite poles of visible existence. The Tree corresponds to the universe in all its manifold, diffuse diversity, in macrocosm. The Saint concentrates the visible universe in the sharp clear compass of his meditating

heart, in microcosm. This is why the Tree bows before the superior holiness of the Saint. For the Saint, as the Divine made manifest in microcosm, displays God’s *tajallī* or epiphany upon his (or her) countenance. Odd branches of Ibn ‘Arabī’s flourishing Tree do not receive the divine sap, however. They are twisted and dry, sprout no leaves, and correspond to damned souls, disciples of the devil. This motif of the damned soul as a withered tree is also pre-Islamic, as in Matthew (3:10): ‘and now also is the axe laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.’ Jesus curses, blasts and causes to wither the barren fig-tree. The damned in the second round of the seventh circle of Dante’s Hell stand as sterile trunks with twigs to be snapped off in pain – a whole terrifying thicket of them:

Non fronda verde, ma di color fosco;
Non rami schietti, ma nodosi e’nvolti;
Non pomi v’eran, ma stecchi con tosto.²⁴

Standard commentaries of Dante usually point to the poet’s sources for such imagery in Virgil and Ovid, but after Miguel Asín Palacios first traced distinct Spanish-Arabic influences in the *Divina Commedia* in 1919, Enrico Cerulli in 1949 found and published the thirteenth-century Latin and Old French translations of a lost Spanish-Arabic account of the Prophet’s other-worldly journey, with a very similar account to Dante’s of an infernal forest of damned souls on either bank of the many rivers of Hell with ‘seventy thousand ignited trees’:

Ex utraque parte super ripas supradictorum
fluminum septuaginta arborum ignearum.²⁵

To quote in turn from Arthur Jeffery’s translation of Ibn ‘Arabī:

From the shoots of this tree comes every one who takes the way to the left and deviates, desiring error. So when the winds of sending are sent with this message, ‘And we sent thee not save as a mercy to mankind’ (XXI, 107), those for whom good was preordained by Us will be on the watch for it, and incline affectionately towards it, but such as have been afflicted with spiritual dullness or sinfully refuse to accept it, will be blown away by the violent winds of Power, and after having been green foliage will become dry and withered, the face of their prosperity all in frowns, since the hope of their cultivator has become a desponding and a despair.²⁶

Rūmī turned this metaphor into narrative poetry in the eleventh tale of Book II of the *Mathnawī*, where the Devil himself appears before a caliph to explain that he, the Devil, is God’s own wood-cutter in the grove of God’s world, bearing the axe in

order to chop down all those damned souls that are like unto withered trees, so as to free from their arid entanglements the precious musk-substance of the universe:

Har kujā bīnam dirakht-i talkh u khushk
Miburam tā wā rahad az pushk mushk

Wherever I see a tree bitter and dry,
 I chop it, to free from its filth what is musk.²⁷

Bihzād's flourishing Trees of Life – but also his withered bushes – correspond in very close detail to Ibn 'Arabī's conceit of the *Shajarat al-kawn* in either aspect: luminous and merciful, but also dark and wrathful. By bestowing autumnal tints upon his depiction of the Tree in glory, Bihzād even allows himself sensitively to render the motley, trembling foliage evoked by Ibn 'Arabī's *wa taḥarraka mā fihā min al-alwān*, 'all its colours ... quivered thereby', the better to render the multihued splendour of the visible universe.

In the 1494 *Khamisa*, Bihzād's Motley Tree devoutly leans, exactly as Ibn 'Arabī writes, 'in loving inclination' (*fa-māla ilayhā muta'aṭṭifan*) over the *tajallī* or saintly manifestation of Bishr in the desert, or of Alexander's holy man sitting before his cave.

Again in the 1494 *Khamisa*, the picture, by Bihzād's disciple Qāsim-i 'Alī, of 'Majnūn first sees Laylī in school', refines the theme. Here the Motley Tree shelters and bows down in homage to Majnūn, because this young man is a perfect poet-saint, who has just fully recognized the manifestation of the Godhead, and is about to dip pen in ink to compose due praises to the Lady Belovèd. It is the Lady Laylī, however, who sits framed as the *tajallī*, or feminine manifestation, of the Divine, within a prayer-arch or *miḥrāb*. The painter illustrates the exact moment when the Lady Belovèd has first lifted Her Veil to display Her Countenance unto her devout Lover, as Niẓāmī's verse reads beneath:

Burqa' zi jamāl-i khwīsh bar dāsht

She has uplifted the Veil from her own Beauty.

The Arabic inscription, added by the painter over the lintel of Laylī's niche, is Qur'ānic and makes the allegorical point as limpid as any medieval allegory can bear: *Wa huwa qā'imun yuṣallī fi'l-miḥrāb*; 'Upright is he – who towards the prayer-niche doth pray'.²⁸

Mīr Muṣawwir's Tree is also motley, in his own version of Bihzād's earlier 'Alexander and the Saint', which the Safavid artist added in the 1540s to complete the 1493 Herat *Khamisa*.

In Sulṭān Muḥammad's adaptation of the motif of the Cosmic Tree for the 1539–1543 *Khamṣa*, however, the leaves are not motley, but instead are verdant. Yet this depiction also corresponds very exactly to Ibn 'Arabī's mention of the Tree's 'green foliage' (*naḍāratuhu*). Sulṭān Muḥammad's Tree spreads in homage over the Lady Shīrīn, who is again here God's *tajallī* as a female manifestation: before whom Shāh Khusraw, the royal lover, bites his finger in awe.

Ḥabīballāh, now, for the 1609 *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, borrows a leaf, as it were, from Sulṭān Muḥammad's vision, and renders his Tree, too, as verdant. But Ḥabīballāh also draws his Plane-Tree as performing a very deep bow, much like Bihzād's in obeisance to 'Bishr'. Ḥabīballāh's own Tree performs obeisance before the obvious saintly *tajallī* in this particular illustration to the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*; the holy manifestation, in this case, is *Solomon's crowned hoopoe*, perched upon its rock: tiny but commanding full authority, as chosen Messenger of the Divine. But Ibn 'Arabī's withered branches and Rūmī's bitter-dry stumps, as if Sufi mirrors to Dante's Wood of the Damned, are hardly absent, either, from Bihzād's visionary landscapes: and they reappear in Ḥabīballāh's picture.

Bihzād's desert hills, as it happens, are pocked throughout with tormented, twisted stumps. The Iranian critic Abolala Soudavar has perceptively noted that such sterile thickets are a 'hallmark' of Bihzād's manner:

His landscapes are always barren and deserted; trees are depicted with crooked branches and no leaves. For example, a distinctive crooked branch with a sharp angle, almost a signature motif, recurred throughout Behzād's career.²⁹

Indeed such crooked branches are a 'hallmark' of Bihzād's vision, and a highly allegorical one, too: they correspond to Ibn 'Arabī's dry branches of despair.

While Bihzād's flourishing Tree bows in prayer over the Saint, his sterile stumps on their hillocks and rocks are deprived of sap, and twist their claw-like branches in pain, because they are the damned souls in the 'desert' of this lower world, spirits who are denied contemplation and understanding of the Divine as made manifest in the *tajallī*.

Ḥabīballāh, in the Bihzadian tradition, duly scatters such twisted, arid clumps across his own desert landscape. They may not be so sharply drawn as Bihzād's tortured thickets, but then Ḥabīballāh is a talented artistic follower, not a major innovator like the Master of Herat. Yet these dry bushes, too, are souls devoid of spiritual initiation and vivifying sap, who fail to recognize the hoopoe's saintly Message.

Bihzād's own illustrations painted in 1487 for the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* manuscript show remarkable creative variations on the theme of the Cosmic Tree, in both Divine aspects of God's Mercy (*luṭf*) and Wrath (*qahr*).

Bihzād's painting on fol. 44 of the New York *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* (Plate 9) purports to

depict 'Aṭṭār's story of the pretentious cleric who was too proud of his long beard, fell into a river and was drowned, because he was dragged below by the weight of his sagging facial ornament as heavy as a sack, while an anxious bystander could only question and watch.

Only the top half of Bihzād's picture corresponds exactly to the poem, however. The lower half is made up of Bihzād's visual and very sardonic comment, which draws upon the work of yet another poet – in this case Rūmī – to illuminate a point made by the author, that is, 'Aṭṭār, who is directly illustrated. In this new example of dual illustration, Bihzād's woodcutters, as in tale 11 of Book II of the *Mathnawī*,³⁰ are chopping down dry trees – souls that are as damned as the cleric in the river – to burn in Hellfire, while the Devil himself, with dark countenance and bulging eyes, watches over the work of his servants. The pious bystander above – like the book's reader or viewer – must draw his own conclusions from the vain cleric's fate, for he stands exactly between two trees: one vigorous and green, the other sterile and warped.

Bihzād took an even further flight from the ostensible text of the poem in his illustration, on fol. 35, to 'Aṭṭār's short account of a Sufi consoling a young man seen following in tears his father's funeral procession (Plate 10). In Bihzād's painting, only the lower portion of the picture now corresponds exactly to the text. Instead, the wall of the cemetery as it were separates this lower world, where mourners weep over their dead, from the higher world beyond as imagined by Bihzād, where the virtuous dead are resurrected.

Bihzād hints at this by depicting, not just any graveyard, but Herat's own holy shrine of Gāzurgāh, which shelters the tomb of the eleventh-century Sufi theologian and poet, Khwāja 'Abdu'llāh Anṣārī, the city's patron saint. To this day, a bending yew-tree overshadows the saint's tomb. Bihzād renders this tree as a *chinār*, bowing over the grave in homage to Anṣārī's saintly *tajallī*. But this Tree, shown leafless, apparently dead and in winter, also manifests signs of Resurrection, of the spring to come. The source of eternal Life flows from its roots. Soul-birds, freed from this lower world at last, build their nests upon its topmost boughs. Indeed, upon one of the Tree's branches hangs an empty bird-cage. This is a common Sufi image of the human body which entraps the soul in this lower or material world, but which then releases the soul, like a bird, at the moment of death, as in this well-known verse by Sa'dī (quoted by Bihzād's contemporary the chronicler Dawlatshāh to commemorate the death of the Timurid prince 'Alā' al-Dawla ibn Bāysunqur):

Sa'dī tan-i tu chūn qafas u rūḥ hamchu murgh
Rūḥ az qafas shikasta u murghash parīda gīr.

Sa'dī, your body is like a cage, your spirit like a bird:

Lets say your spirit has broken its cage and its bird flown away!³¹

Bihzād’s visual hints and comments in no way contradict, but instead further emphasize ‘Aṭṭār’s spiritual message.

B. The running brook

This motif is directly linked to the image of the Cosmic Tree, as in Bihzād’s painting mentioned just above. It wells up again in Ḥabīballāh’s picture. The brook may be seen bubbling up from a spring at the very root of the Tree. It flows down through the desert, yielding a twin strip of welcome verdure in the surrounding desolation. For this is the holy flowing Water of Life, Ibn ‘Arabī’s *mā’ jārī*: the vivifying sap and fount of immortality, well known in Islamic lore as the source in which the saintly al-Khaḍīr or ‘Khidr’ once bathed, the ‘Evergreen’ Prophet or Ever-living One who symbolizes both enduring verdure, and the eternal soul.

Bihzād deliberately associates Tree and Source. In the three paintings of the 1494 Herat *Khamṣa* considered here, the Source of Life springs as a brook from beneath the Tree in ‘Alexander and the Saint’; the Tree overshadows the Fount of Being in ‘Bishr and Malīkhā’; and the Tree rises directly above the mosque’s Ablution Well in ‘Majnūn and Laylī’.

In his addition to the 1493 Herat *Khamṣa*, Mīr Muṣawwir copied Bihzād’s Tree and Source arrangement in Tabriz in the 1540s in his own ‘Alexander and the Saint’, with downward flowing brook. In the 1539–1543 Tabriz *Khamṣa* (Plate 8), Sulṭān Muḥammad in turn shows Princess Shīrīn, as a divine manifestation or *tajallī*, bathing in the Source springing from below the Cosmic Tree. Ḥabīballāh most closely follows the manner of composition of Tree and Brook visible in Bihzād’s ‘Alexander and the Saint’.

While they certainly imitate each others’ visual models, the painters most decidedly observe the intention of the poets. In his ‘Bishr and Malīkhā’ illustration for the 1494 *Khamṣa*, Bihzād thus renders Nizāmī’s description, in the ‘Tale of the Green Pavilion’, of the Cosmic Tree rising in the desert and miraculously sheltering a great jar of water, which turns out to be no less than the magic Well of Being itself:

Dar biyābān-i garm u bī-ābī
Maghz-ishān tāfta zi bī-khwābī
Mīdawīdand bā nafīr u khurūsh
Tā rasīdand az ān zamīn ba-jūsh
Ba-darakhtī siṭabr u ‘ālī-shākh
Sabz u pākīza u buland u farākh
Sabza dar zīr-i ū chū sabz-i ḥarīr
Dīda az dīdanash nashāt-padhīr
Āgānīda khumī-yi sufāl dar ū
Ābī al-Ḥaqq khwush u zulāl dar ū.

In a waterless, burning desert,
 Their brains a-boil from lack of sleep
 They ran with many a hue and cry
 Until from that broiling land they reached
 A Tree majestic, high its branches,
 Green and pure and tall and wide:
 All green beneath it, green as silk,
 Eyes rejoiced at the very sight!
 And there an earthen jar well-filled
 With Water – God! – so sweet and clean!³²

Bihzād underlines Nizāmī's purport by sternly depicting the difference between the Cosmic Tree, with its flourishing boughs, and the withered stumps shrivelling in the desert. The latter, as damned souls, enjoy no spiritual access to the Fount of Life; they are like the blasphemous Malikhā who could only sink therein, and drown.

Rūmī makes the same allegorical point in his tale of the Devil and the Caliph, where the Devil thus addresses the blighted trees which he, Satan, is about to hew down mercilessly:

Jādhib-i āb-i ḥayātī gashta-ī
Andar āb-i zindagī āghāshta-ī
Tukhm-i tu bad būda-ast u aṣl-i tu
Ba darakht-i khwush na-būda waṣl-i tu.

Would you seep into Life's Water
 And be steeped in Live Water?
 But your seed is all bad, and so is your root!
 To the Good Tree you have not been grafted!³³

C. The tormented rocks

Ḥabīballāh completes the cosmographical scheme in his picture with his tormented rocks, so twisted as to reveal *caricatural masks* on closer inspection. This bizarre touch is not Ḥabīballāh's own, however. *Faces in rocks are an iconographic convention.*

The hidden, grotesque faces to be descried lurking in stone formations in Persianate paintings from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries have often been noticed by amused scholars. They have never been satisfactorily explained. In the only systematic study ever undertaken of this curious feature in late medieval Persianate art, Bernard O'Kane accurately enough pointed out that Muslim artists delighted in adapting the queer rock formations which they saw in Chinese models, mostly painted on ceramics. But O'Kane confesses complete puzzlement regarding

the reason *why* these grotesque shapes appear in so many late medieval Islamic manuscript illuminations: 'As far as I have been able to ascertain, Persian literature is silent on this phenomenon'. O'Kane even wondered whether the only purpose to these caricatures was merely 'a sense of fun'.³⁴

Certainly the artists indulged with gusto in devising these contorted masks. But in point of fact, Persian or more generally Islamic literature is *not at all* 'silent on this phenomenon': quite the opposite, the texts not only very clearly point to one single and constantly repeated image – they fairly scream it. That contemporary scholars should so utterly overlook the obvious allusion only painfully drives home how completely the logical connection between medieval Persian painting and medieval Islamic letters and thought generally has been snapped, ever since the eighteenth-century disintegration of the Safavid kingdom.

Persian painters, especially in the age of Mongol dominion in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, without a doubt borrowed Chinese forms for their own purposes. Yet they shaped their stones to look like demons, not only because stones can take on very contorted shapes in Taoist or Mahāyāna Buddhist pictures, but because one of the Arabic names for the Devil is, precisely, *Ṣakhr*, the 'Rock'.

The metaphysical identity of *Ṣakhr* as the 'Rock-Devil' became a central object of meditation in medieval Islamic speculation, on account of this enigmatic Qur'ānic verse: *Wa-laqaḍ fatannā Sulaymāna wa-alqaynā 'alā kursiyyihi jasadān thumma anāba*; 'We allowed Solomon to be seduced by temptation, and we cast a body upon his seat. Then he repented.'³⁵

Qur'ānic commentators explained this verse in terms of a tradition – it is of rabbinical origin – according to which God once caused King Solomon, for his sins, to lose his ring of power. Solomon's ring was stolen by a demon known as Asmodeus in Judaeo-Christian lore, and as *Ṣakhr*, the 'Rock' or 'Stony One', in Islamic lore. As a result, Solomon was cast down from his throne, and his place was taken for forty days by this demon *Ṣakhr*, who impersonated the fallen monarch, ruled as a tyrant, and spread mischief and black magic throughout the land. Finally Solomon recovered his ring, and punished the demon *Ṣakhr*, by locking him forever in a prison of *stone* (*ṣakhra*), punningly befitting the demon's own name *Ṣakhr*.

The story of the demon locked in stone in the midst of the desert figures prominently in medieval Islamic folktales. It appears thus in an old story which came to be included in the *Thousand and One Nights*, 'The Tale of the City of Brass' (in Richard Burton's translation):

Then they came upon a pillar of black stone like a furnace-chimney wherein was one sunken up to his armpits. He had two great wings and four arms, two of them like the arms of the sons of Adam and two others as they were lions' paws, with claws of iron, and he was black and tall and frightful of aspect, with hair like horses' tails

and eyes like blazing coals, slit upright in his face. Moreover, he had in the middle of his forehead a third eye, as it were that of a lynx, from which flew sparks of fire, and he cried out saying, 'Glory to my Lord, who hath adjudged unto me this grievous torment and sore punishment until the Day of Doom!'³⁶

Andras Hamori in 1974 was the first critic of the *Nights* to recognize the crucial connection of this image to the Qur'ān and its glosses: 'It is an important clue for understanding the entire tale that the demon in the rock is a close variation on *Ṣakhr* in the legend of the ring, and that his story is an unmistakable allusion to the demonic impersonation of Solomon'.³⁷

Hamori's intuition, as it happens, may be fully borne out by explanatory interpolations in one early nineteenth-century Egyptian manuscript of the tale recently brought to light, and whose traditional scribe immediately saw – and glossed – the intended reference:

Then [Solomon] sent his [submissive] demons in search of the genie *Ṣakhr* [sic], and they seized him, and brought him before Solomon, who ordered them to dig a rift for him between two rocks [*Ṣakhratayn*], and to load him with chains, and to wedge him between these two rocks [*Ṣakhratayn*], and to shut them both upon him solidly.³⁸

Most probably through Spain and perhaps also Sicily, versions of the tale of the demon in stone proved so popular that they passed from Islamic into medieval European folklore. *Ṣakhr* in a Christian context reappears as the Demon-under-a-Stone within the Valley Perilous – also known as the 'Vale of Covetousness' or *covetise del avoir* – a Vale which itself, in medieval European literatures, appears as an allegory for this lower world, and was also regarded as one of the entrances to Hell. The Demon-in-Stone in the Valley Perilous or Vale of Covetousness thus grimaces in the twelfth-century French *Roman d'Alexandre*, and leers in Sir John Mandeville's fourteenth-century tall tales, both in their Middle French and Middle English versions:

... et en my lyeu de celle valle souz une roche y ad la teste et le visage dun diable molt terrible a veer: et ny piert forsque la teste iusques as espauls / ... in myddes of the vale under a roche es shewed openly the heued [head] and the visage of a devill, right hidous and dredefull to see; and ther is na thing sene theroff bot the heed [head] fra the schulders upwards.³⁹

Qur'ānic commentators were keen, also, to coax moral meaning and allegorical import from this famous story. On one level, 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī's thirteenth-century Arabic gloss on the Holy Writ argued that

... the satan who sat thereupon [sovereignty's throne] and took its ring away, represents the elemental earthly nature, ruler over the lower sea of matter, called *Ṣakhr*, 'the Rock', on account of its inclination towards lowest things and clinging thereto, even as a stone on account of heaviness.⁴⁰

At deeper levels, commentators stressed the moral aspect: the 'demon' represents a corruption of man's will, 'Solomon' the human guiding intellect. If the 'demon' overthrows 'Solomon', then this means that an evil passion has overpowered a human being's intelligence. Guiding 'intellect' must therefore subdue the passions, and force them to obey the dictates of properly guided will, even as 'Solomon', by virtue of his sovereign ring, bound the demons in restraining chains, compelled them to serve, and shut the worst of them in an eternal prison of 'rock'. Yet even so staid and devout a religious commentator as 'Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī could indulge in a little iconographic fun, in referring to dog-like and pig-like demons, when phrasing the allegory this way in his thirteenth-century Persian:

The task of God's vicar is such as to reduce the faculties to servitude and obedience, and to assign to each its proper task, so that none should labour but by his command. And God's vicar is 'Solomon'. And all this befits 'Solomon'.

Oh you dervish! Angel and Devil are a single force. So long as such a force be not subject and obedient to 'Solomon', then its name is 'Devil', and 'Solomon' must keep it in bonds. Yet should this force become subject and obedient unto 'Solomon', then its name is 'Angel', and unto 'Solomon' shall it ply its task: some such forces to build, others to dive.

Thus it is 'Solomon's' task to modify the faculties, but not to annihilate them, for such would not be possible. That which disobeys, he renders obedient; the impertinent he renders courteous; that which is blind, he causes to see; that which is deaf, to hear; and what is dead, he quickens.

Thus Intellect, which is God's vicar, is at once an 'Adam', a 'Solomon' and a 'Jesus'. But if the reverse should befall, and 'Solomon' become enslaved and subjugated by such as these, then 'Solomon' shall be captive unto the Hog and Swine, and bondman unto the Demon and Satan. Every day will he need pass in their service, to hand them what they wish, and himself remain lowly, weak, helpless in the paws of the Demon. And the Demon over him shall wax powerful and rule. And the Demon shall sit upon the Throne!⁴¹

Hamori stressed this allegorical aspect in connection with the *Nights* tale, through a pointed quotation of a verse from 'Aṭṭār himself in the *Ilāhī-nāma* (v. 87):⁴²

*Az ān bar mulk-i khwīshat nīst farmān.
Kih dīw-at ast bar jā-yi Sulaymān.*

Thereby you have no rule over your own realm,
For with you, your own Demon holds Solomon's seat.

In the poet's first greeting to the hoopoe quoted above, 'Aṭṭār stresses the *Ṣakhr* allegory. The very first spiritual point made by the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* is that it behoves every soul to behave as a triumphant 'Solomon', to fetter the demons of the lower senses, and to lock fast the demon-prince into his gaol of 'rock' as the very first necessary step of spiritual initiation before the soul's long, bird-like flight towards the Divine Principle.

Indeed the *Ṣakhr* tale is so key to medieval Islamic mystical psychology that Sufi-minded poets could hardly fail to embroider upon the theme. The most pungent, and grotesquely comic expression, of medieval Islamic demonology in all medieval Persian literature, is Nizāmī's Tale of the Turquoise Pavilion. The poet obviously had great fun describing shaggy naked demons with flaming eyelids, boar-tusks, cow-horns, elephant-trunks, filling the desert with their howls, dancing to tambourines, gulping down flagons of wine and clicking castanets of human bones. Since Nizāmī was the most abundantly illustrated of all Persian poets for presentation of manuscripts of his stories to kings, even Bihzād – despite a cool exterior manner masking restrained and internalized intellectual tension (the very mark of a 'classical' artistic temperament) – at least once gave visual form to Nizāmī's demon-story. In a small 1493 manuscript of the *Khamṣa* now in London, Bihzād shows Nizāmī's unfortunate sinner riding upon a seven-headed dragon, helter-skelter, through a desert of howling, pig-headed and elephant-headed fiends (Plate 11).

Even the most superficial glance at another group of famous demon-pictures, produced in late fifteenth-century Turkoman Tabriz and ascribed to one 'Master Muḥammad of the Black Stylus' (*Ustād Muḥammad-i Siyāh-Qalam*), reveals the same iconography as Bihzād's deceptively calm-looking illustration. Every detail in the 'Siyāh-Qalam' demon-pictures may be found to correspond to a verse in Nizāmī's tale, and to an iconographic trait in Bihzād's rendition – although, to be sure, in the Tabriz depictions, by contrast with Bihzād's 'classicism', the devils are treated in a bold, tormented expressionist manner, much influenced by the many Taoist and Mahāyāna Buddhist Chinese demon-paintings then still preserved, ever since the days of thirteenth-century Mongol rule, in the Tabriz Royal Library. And just as medieval Christian European renditions of the devil mostly derive, with an obvious anti-'pagan' note of scorn, from Graeco-Roman depictions of the god Pan and the goat-legged and goat-horned satyrs, so the Persianate portrayals of Iblīs and his minions are mainly and just as recognizably ferocious caricatures of naked and bangled Hindu deities – also seen in the Mahāyāna scrolls – but here and now turned into monsters: such as Ganesh, with his characteristic elephant head, and Vishnu in his incarnation as a boar, or rather seen as a human body with the head of a tusked boar.

Yet probably more nonsense has been written about the 'Siyāh-Qalam' paintings, now preserved in the Topkapı collections in Istanbul, than regarding any other group of pictures in all Islamic art. The figures in these Istanbul pictures have been described as masked Mongol shamans, or as portraits of wandering Russian merchants, or whatnot. In fact their iconography is so *Islamic* that the 'Siyāh-Qalam' demons are more often than not shown wearing chains, that is, *fettered as Solomon's slaves*, and even seen bearing aloft palanquins with courtly-looking royal characters – drawn in the classical fifteenth-century Persianate manner – which obviously represent Solomon, the Queen of Sheba and their ministers (Plate 12). As for the 'Siyāh-Qalam' bearded characters shown trudging beside their donkeys and wearing heavy caftans and fur hats, these are not Russian merchants (though a few Muscovite traders did visit Persia from the fifteenth century onwards), but dervishes, shown clad exactly in this way (caftans and fur hats) in numerous fifteenth-century illustrations to well-known Persian poems (including illuminations for Niẓāmī's tales), and painted in a far more 'classical' manner.

The mystery inherent in the 'Siyāh-Qalam' paintings, and also in Bihzād's own illustration to the Tale of the Turquoise Pavilion, is that the *demonic element* in late medieval Persianate painting is deliberately handled by the artists in a grotesque, caricatural and expressionist manner, in sharp and absolutely voluntary contrast to the courtly stylization properly adopted to depict angels, fairy-folk, princes, ladies beloved, knightly heroes, and the like. Precisely the same sort of stylistic contrast may be observed between the 'demonic' and the 'saintly' or 'courtly' in European Gothic art, down to and including Hieronymus Bosch and even as late as Pieter Breughel the Elder.

What is most interesting about the Şakhr motif in Persianate painting of the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, even in the most coolly cerebral and academic examples of the high Herat style, including pictures by Bihzād, is that the 'grotesque' or 'demonic' approach most often takes discrete refuge in the rocks of the landscape, while princely protagonists, in the foreground, are drawn according to the 'classical' or courtly style. This is because the 'grotesque' is appropriate to drawing demons, not princes. Thus the demons are locked into stones, in endless visual punning upon the very meaning of *şakhr*.

Thus the expressionist 'grotesque' style, associated with the Tabriz late fifteenth-century Turkoman 'Siyāh-Qalam' school, endures – in variations on the demonic figure of Şakhr – in the rock formations that surround the landscapes of what at first glance look like the most classically restrained examples of fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth-century Persianate painting. The 'Siyāh-Qalam' school itself delighted in painting demons in rocks, as in the tremendous Topkapı picture of classically drawn angels battling dragons that swarm over stones whose shadows and highlights turn into smirking demons. In early sixteenth-century Safavid Tabriz, the painter Sulṭān Muḥammad especially enjoyed perpetuating the 'Siyāh-Qalam'

conceits in his own illustrations of demons – inside or outside of rocks – for Shāh Ṭahmāsp's great copies of the *Shāhnāma* and the *Khamṣa*.⁴³

Certainly the viewer was expected to derive as much delight in deciphering bizarrely rendered and even very amusing demon heads in the rocks in Persianate painting, as the reader of Persian poetry was in discovering some of Niẓāmī's more hilarious descriptions of hooting dog-headed devils, or she-vampires with pig-snouts. But what the demons-in-stone represented allegorically was a deeply serious religious matter. They point to the permanent 'Solomonic' triumph of the saintly or courtly protagonist who is the ostensible subject of a given picture.

Thus, in countless illustrations to Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* or Niẓāmī's *Khamṣa*, princely lovers (in mystical contemplation of one another) sit enthroned, or ride swan-necked horses through fairy-landscapes, while leering devils huddle all around them *gaoled in stone*, because these fiends, symbols of the lower passions, are thus shown properly subdued by the minds of the picture's saintly protagonists.

This is why the viewers of these paintings were required to take some care in discovering each picture's hidden demons, just as pious readers of Niẓāmī's or 'Aṭṭār's poetry were expected to detect, and so to quell, the unruly but equally hidden passions that might unsettle their own souls. Persianate painting's semi-hidden devils-in-stone represent, as it were, *permanent attributes* of the victorious spiritual hero or heroes depicted in the foreground: just as, in European Gothic and Renaissance art, a slain dragon, a chained demon, a serpent lurking in a cup, or a submissive hog, are the abiding and conventional fixtures to so many representations of Saint George, Saint Bartholomew, Saint John the Divine or Saint Anthony the Hermit.

In Ḥabīballāh's painting, these demons-locked-in-stone, which are closely modelled on the grotesque designs seen in Bihzād's own landscapes, are thus visual allusions to the hoopoe's 'Solomonic' spiritual victory over the forces of evil. Small twisted dry twigs, as damned souls, likewise writhe in torment upon Ḥabīballāh's devil-rocks. The demon-faces lurking in Ḥabīballāh's rocks are therefore all variations of Ṣakhr. Ḥabīballāh depicts many of these devil-masks with squinting eyes, or with no eyes at all, because *spiritual blindness* is one of the traditional attributes of the Devil in Islamic lore.

In Bihzād's desert landscape for the 'Bishr and Malikhā' illustration (Plate 4), the great leaning rock, in the background, is a huge face in itself; the 'cave' is a gaping maw, screaming in pain; indeed one stony paw masks the face where the eyes should be. This is because this 'stone-demon' cannot see the Divine that is supposed to be Immanent in Bihzād's picture, as made manifest in the Tree, in the Well, and upon the countenance of the saintly Bishr. Ṣakhr's damnation in stone is Bihzād's own shadow-comment upon the desert's damned souls trapped within their withered stumps, and upon Malikhā's spiritual doom at the bottom of the Well.

In Islamic folklore, Dajjāl the Antichrist is described as One-Eyed, precisely because this demonic character cannot perceive God's dual aspect of Immanence

and Transcendence. The Devil sees only God's Transcendence, and Wrath, and so maintains God's distance from all created things. Created manifestations thus harden into 'things' devoid of divine Immanence in the Devil's unbalanced, 'one-eyed' vision. Maḥmūd Shabistarī's fourteenth-century *Gulshan-i rāz* spins out dozens of verses to describe the various allegorical ophthalmic 'defects' of different sorts of heretics, blasphemers and unbelievers. Even in popular Sufi imagery, as in the tales of the *Thousand and One Nights*, the three Qalandar princes are likewise described by the fourteenth-century Egyptian storyteller as suffering blindness in one eye, because they have sinned as unwitting disciples of the Devil. In the *Thousand and One Nights* story of the 'City of Brass', the name of the Devil-locked-in-stone is appropriately given as *Dāhish ibn al-a'mash*, the 'Bewildered One, son of the Bleary-Eyed'.

To return again from popular to more erudite Sufism, in Ibn 'Arabī's *Shajarat al-kawn* this bleary-eyed Devil is called Iblīs – as in the Qur'ān. Historically, this Qur'ānic name for the Devil was of course an Arabization of the Greek *diabolos*, the 'slanderer': but Ibn 'Arabī (like Hallāj before him) believed that the appellation was more pertinently derived from the Arabic root *l-b-s*, to 'veil' or 'cloak'. For unto the Devil, God 'cloaks' Himself. Thus the Devil cannot distinguish the Divine Immanence, because the Devil is spiritually one-eyed, bleary-eyed or sightless, and so 'cloaked-over'.

According to Ibn 'Arabī's treatise, the Devil for forty thousand years attempted to decipher the Arabic letters making up the divine word *kun* – 'Be!', the first seed of creation. Yet for all his contemplation, Iblīs could not, therein, see a 'symbol' (*mithāl*), the transparent envelope of an inner reality, but only an 'image' (*timthāl*): and the Arabic word can mean a statue, an idol, something so opaque that only its outer shell might be discerned. This is Iblīs's familiar predicament. God has veiled Himself unto him (*l-b-s*), physical reality he apprehends as something other than God, and so the world's physical appearance hardens into a thick screen preventing him from seeing God's Immanence within it.

The sanctified soul, on the other hand, perceives the Divine Immanence within all created things, with all the spiritual clarity of an 'Adam' or a 'Solomon' or a 'Jesus'. Yet the sanctified soul must stand on constant guard, lest the demon lurking within the soul should cloud and so 'mask' the soul's own clear vision of the Divine. This is why the Devil looms as threateningly in Ḥabīballāh's painting as he does in Ibn 'Arabī's treatise or in 'Aṭṭār's poetry, with the hoopoe's 'Solomonic' insistence:

Then bind again the fiend in his own chains and gaol
And turn again as keeper unto Solomon's own secrets.
For when you have locked fast the very demon in his gaol,
With Solomon you fly: to his pavilion, to his soul-rejoicing goal!

Conclusion

The above elucidation of all the symbolism should by now have made tolerably clear the allegorical purpose of Ḥabīballāh's 'Hunter with gun'. The Devil's presence pervades Ḥabīballāh's painting. As a Serpent, he stealthily creeps up the Tree of Life to catch unwary birds nesting upon the branches. This Serpent is as clearly visible in Ḥabīballāh's painting, as in Bihzād's depiction of the shrine at Gāzurgāh, with identical snake climbing up the Tree.

But Ḥabīballāh's Hunter, just as the Serpent, likewise represents the Devil: stalking these birds which represent human souls. In a famous story from the animal fables of *Kalīla wa Dimna*, as these fables were further elaborated and allegorized by the fifteenth-century Timurid polymath Ḥusayn Wā'iz-i Kāshifī in the Persian-language *Anwār-i suhaylī* ('Lights of Canopus'), the Diabolic Hunter scatters seed, dangerously attracts unwary birds, and so finally casts his net over them. But one guiding bird exhorts all its fellows to lift the net together, thus saves them all, and leads them off in flight.⁴⁴

Again in illustration of one famous poem – the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* – by means of pertinent visual comment borrowed from yet another celebrated literary work, the *Kalīla wa Dimna* (or its later version the *Anwār-i suhaylī*), the painter Ḥabīballāh, as it were, updates the fable, and makes it vivid and immediate to his early seventeenth-century Persian viewers, by providing his Devil-Hunter, instead of a net, with a *gun*: of the sort then furnished to the Safavid rulers by Portuguese and later by English traders in the Gulf (Plate 1).

In the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* itself, 'Aṭṭār obliquely refers to the same familiar fable from the *Kalīla wa Dimna*, or rather evokes it in general terms, in another paradoxical little spiritual parable: uttered by the hoopoe unto the assembled birds. According to the tale told by 'Aṭṭār's hoopoe, a dervish once rebuked even the saintly Khidr, on account of Khidr's own concern with the immortality of his personal or individual soul. Rather, says the dervish, the soul should seek complete extinction in the Godhead – like the poem's birds, under the guidance of the hoopoe, in search of the Sīmurgh: who is none other than their own individualities at last transcended and merged into the Divine Unity.

For preoccupation with the self is the subtlest of all the Devil's psychological traps, laid out for the soul-birds who might flock down to nibble Satan's deceptive seeds in this lower world. 'Aṭṭār's dervish says to Khidr in the hoopoe's fable, with its implied warning:

Bihtar ān bāshad kih chūn murghān zi dām
Dūr mībāshīm az ham wa'l-salām.

Better let it be, like all those birds out of their trap,
 We should fly far from one another: and so salaam to you! ⁴⁵

But the painter Ḥabīballāh, like the poet ‘Aṭṭār whom he thus so carefully illustrates, does depict the soul’s final triumph over the Devil. For the painter’s baffled Hunter, amongst his blinded devil-rocks, bites his finger in bewilderment, awed by the hoopoe’s discourse unto the birds: for the hoopoe’s ‘Solomonic’ discourse remains a mystical message from the Divine, that is forever unfathomable unto the Devil-Hunter’s defective meditation. Nor may the Devil-Hunter perceive the Divine Immanence as made manifest in and through this hoopoe. This is why the picture’s hoopoe so significantly turns its back upon the Devil-Hunter: for the hoopoe, in ‘Aṭṭār’s poem as in Ḥabīballāh’s painting, is here itself the divine manifestation, the *tajallī*.

Master Ḥabīballāh’s pictorial drama thus comes into sharp clear focus, as a very complete visual rendition of ‘Aṭṭār’s entire cosmology. Ḥabīballāh’s Tree of Life springs from the Fount of Life, and bows in homage before ‘Aṭṭār’s hoopoe, that is, before the divine Solomonic messenger who manifests the Godhead and leads the soul-birds up to salvation, high, high beyond the blinded demons shut up in their rocks, and beyond the souls of the damned who remain tormented in their prisons of dry stumps, and even far beyond the twisting Serpent or the threatening gun of the Satanic Hunter – that the chosen soul-birds might soar, and merge at last into the Godhead.

Notes

1. This study is dedicated to the late Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, who was both my master Cary Welch’s dearest friend and my own dear patron in the field of Afghan relief, at once an outstanding humanitarian worker and a peerless prince of the arts, and so the living proof that both may thrive – within a single ‘Heart-of-Faith’: in living, loving memory.

2. This date was first accurately deciphered by Souren Melikian. See Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, ‘Khawāje Mīrak Naqqāsh’, in *Journal asiatique*, 276 (1988), p. 104. ‘The Parliament of Fowles’ alludes here, of course, to the title of Chaucer’s poem.

3. See *The Language of the Birds* (New York, 1967), Marie G. Lukens, ‘The Fifteenth-Century Miniatures’, and Ernst J. Grube, ‘The Seventeenth-Century Miniatures’. Grube carefully discusses Master Ḥabīballāh’s style, but Grube’s egregious failure to read even a translation of the poetry which the paintings illustrate, results in one particular howler, see pp. 346–347. The painting on fol. 4 (Plate 2) does not depict the ‘Martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist’ (!), but one of ‘Aṭṭār’s stories in the preludes to the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*. The parable is an allegory of divine mercy, which tells of the kind young woman who thoughtfully gave a piece of bread to the man about to be executed by her own husband; the swordsman spared his victim, since the latter had now ‘shared bread’ with him. The pertinent verses are clearly framed within the picture.

4. Michael Barry, with introduction by Stuart Cary Welch (Paris and New York, Autumn 2004); in English, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam and the Riddle of Bihzād of Herat*, and in French, *L’art figuratif en Islam médiéval et l’énigme de Behzād de Hérat (1465–1535)*.

5. See notably Thomas Lentz and Glenn Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian*

Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century (Washington, DC; Los Angeles, 1989), p. 292. Only Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom in *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250–1800* (New Haven and London, 1994), p. 63, have duly noted that Bihzād includes four hemistiches from Jāmi's own poem 'around the *īwān* in the centre of the painting'.

6. Jāmi, *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā*, in 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmi, *Haft Awrang*, ed. Jābulqā Dād 'Alishāh et al. (Tehran, 1999), vol. 2, vv. 2241, 2257, 2362.

7. Qur'ān 5:113. Although later rejected from the orthodox Christian canon, this tradition is found in the so-called Gospel of the Pseudo-Matthew and also in the Gospel of the Pseudo-Thomas, whose Greek texts, as they read now, are believed to date from the third or fourth century AD.

8. Jāmi, *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā*, vv. 2238–2239.

9. See here Wheeler M. Thackston, 'Preface to the Amīr Ghayb Album', in *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters* (Leiden, 2001), p. 27.

10. *Gulistān-i hunar*, ed. A. Suhaylī Khwānsārī (Tehran, 1352/1973), p. 134; English trans. by V. Minorsky, *Calligraphers and Painters: A Treatise by Qāḍi Aḥmad, Son of Mir Munshi* (Washington, DC, 1959), p. 180. On Qāḍi Aḥmad's close dependence, for his facts about Bihzād, on the earlier writer Pīr Būdāq of Qazwin, see notably A. Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts* (New York, 1992), p. 123, n. 47. The fact that Qāḍi Aḥmad is mainly a derivative writer actually further underscores his cultural importance as a faithful transmitter of received tradition.

11. Šādiqī Beg Afshār, *Qānūn al-ṣuwar*, Persian text (after the edition of M.T. Dānish-Pazhūh, collated with that of A.Y. Kaziev, Baku, 1963) in Y. Porter, *Peinture et arts du livre, essai sur la littérature technique indo-persane* (Paris/Tehran, 1992), p. 198, v. 11; the edict of 1522 appointing Bihzād as guildmaster is bound in a collection of model epistles and edicts, all dated 27 Jumādā I, 928 (= AD 24 April 1522) and entitled the *Nāma-i nāmī* or 'Book of Renown', put together by the scribe and eminent chronicler Khwāndamīr and now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France; the edict's text with translation was first published by M. Qazwīnī and L. Bouvat, 'Deux documents inédits relatifs à Behzād', in *Revue du monde musulman* 26 (1914); other translations include Porter, *Peinture et arts du livre*, pp. 139–140; E. Bahārī, *Bihzād, Master of Persian Painting* (London, 1996), pp. 184–186; Thackston, 'Preface', pp. 41–42. While most scholars ascribe the edict's authorship to Khwāndamīr himself, M.T. Dānish-Pazhūh believes its language was borrowed by Khwāndamīr from a text composed by the scribe Amīr Šadrūddīn Sulṭān-Ibrāhīm Amīnī, also known to have prefaced an album of Bihzād's drawings, see David J. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image, the writing of art history in sixteenth-century Iran* (Leiden, 2001), p. 24, for references. Ascribing the edict's draft to the scribes Khwāndamīr or Amīnī is really a minor point, much like the issue of deciding the authentic 'date' of 1522, since it makes no discernible difference regarding the edict's cultural and symbolic importance as such. Another crucial Sufi concept, which appears throughout the sixteenth-century Persian literature on painters, is the insistence on the symbolic equivalence of the Two Pens, that is, the calligrapher's stylus and the artist's brush; see here especially Ch. Adle's study of this notion, 'Recherche sur le module et le tracé correcteur/régulateur dans la miniature orientale', *Art et société dans le monde iranien* (Paris, 1982).

12. On the concept of the 'idol' (*but*) in 'Aṭṭār's poetry, see the essay by Leonard Lewisohn below – eds.

13. MT, vv. 736–740. As the late Professor Henry Corbin has so often had to remind us,

medieval and modern Persian *Simurgh* derives – through middle Persian *Sēnmurgh* – from Avestic *Saena Meregha*, grammatically a *feminine* form. The manifestation of the Godhead may be just as easily female as male in Persian mystical poetry, as Shabistari's celebrated fourteenth-century Sufi manual, 'Mystery's Rosebower' or *Gulshan-i rāz*, so endlessly stresses: indeed, to overlook these two possible aspects of the Divine is to lose the whole symbolic point of such female figurations of the Beloved as Shīrīn or Laylī, whether in Nizāmī's verse, or in later poetic adaptations, songs, or paintings.

14. See the introduction to this volume – eds.
15. Grube, 'The Seventeenth-Century Miniatures', pp. 339 and 342.
16. See here Sheila R. Canby, *The Rebellious Reformer, the Drawings and Paintings of Rizā-yi 'Abbāsī* (London, 1996), especially chapter 8, 'Drawings after Works by Bihzād', p. 129 ff.
17. MT, 616–621.
18. Qur'ān 2:2–3.
19. MT, 690–691. This manuscript reads *ham az haḍrat*.
20. Grube, 'The Seventeenth-Century Miniatures', p. 344.
21. 'Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī, *Kitāb-i insān-i kāmīl*, M. Molé, ed. (Paris/Tehran, 1962), p. 430 ff.
22. Ibn 'Arabī, *Shajarat al-kawn*, Cairo ed., 1941, p. 5; there is an English translation by Arthur Jeffery in *Studia Islamica*, 10, pp. 43–77; 11, pp. 113–160.
23. *Shajarat al-kawn*, Arabic text, p. 5.
24. *Inferno*, Canto 13, vv. 4–6; in John D. Sinclair's translation (New York, 1961): 'No green leaves, but of dusky hue; no smooth boughs, but knotted and warped; no fruits were there, but poisonous thorns.'
25. Enrico Cerulli, *Il 'Libro della Scala' e la questione delle fonti della Divina Commedia* (Vatican, 1949), 'Liber Scalae Machometi', ch. 71; see more generally Miguel Asín Palacios, *La Escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia* (Madrid and Granada, 1919), new ed. 1943.
26. A. Jeffery, tr., in *Studia Islamica*, 10, p. 76.
27. *Mathnawī-yi ma'nawī*, ed. R.A. Nicholson (Tehran, 1984), 2, v. 2692.
28. Qur'ān 3:39.
29. Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts*, p. 97 (see n. 8), with accompanying illustrations.
30. *Mathnawī*, 2, vv. 2691–2699.
31. This verse appears in *Kulliyāt-i Sa'dī*, ed. Muḥammad 'Alī Furūghī (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1984), p. 865, with a different first hemistich: *Sa'dī tu nīz az'īn qafas-i tangnā-yi dahr*.
32. Waḥīd Dastgirdī, ed., *Kulliyāt-i Ḥakīm Nizāmī Ganjawī*, (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999), vol. 1, *Haft paykar*, p. 513, Tale 28, vv. 94–98.
33. *Mathnawī*, vol. 2: 2697–2698.
34. B. O'Kane, *Studies in Persian Art and Architecture* (collected articles), (Cairo, 1995), ch. 4, p. 227.
35. Qur'ān 38:34.
36. Richard F. Burton, *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainment* ('Benares', 1885) vol. 6, p. 96.
37. A. Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton, 1974), p. 150.
38. 'Rheinhardt' manuscript of the *Thousand and One Nights* (Egypt, AH 1247/AD 1831), Strasbourg University Library, 4 vols., vol. I, fol. 488 r°: *thumma ba'atha 'afārīta fī ṭalbi Ṣakhri*

l-jinni fa-akhadhūhu wa-ātū ilā Sulaymāna bihi wa amara an yanqura lahu ṣakhratayna wa an yasfida fi'l-ḥadīdi wa ja'alahu bayna ṣ-ṣakhratayna wa aṭbaqahumā 'alayhi wa aḥkamahumā. I am indebted to Pr. Aboubakr Chraïbi for procuring for me a photocopy of this manuscript, the subject of his dissertation, *'Etude d'un manuscrit inédit des Mille et Une Nuits: entre le folklore international et les traditions narratives arabes'* (Paris, 1993). The oldest of the very many Arabic-language versions of the Tale of the City of Brass goes back to the ninth century AD, and the story circulated widely in Islamic Spain (indeed three versions are extant in *aljamiado*, the Castilian dialect of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spanish Moriscos).

39. *The Buke of John Maundevill*, parallel Middle French and Middle English texts edited by George Warner (Westminster, 1889), ch. 31.

40. 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (Pseudo-Ibn 'Arabī), *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 1968), vol. 2, p. 356: *wa-sh-Shayṭānu -lladhī jā' ahā fa-akhadha minhā l-khāṭim, huwa ṭ-ṭabī'iyatu l-'unṣuriyyatu l-arḍiyya, ṣāhibu baḥri l-hayūlā s-sufliyya, sumiyya Ṣakhr-an li-maylihi ilā s-sufli, wa mulāzimatihī ka-l-ḥijri li-th-thiql.*

41. Nasafī, *Kitāb-i insān-i kāmīl*, p. 150 ff.

42. Hamori, *The Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* p. 158. Hamori borrows the quotation from Hellmut Ritter's classic study of 'Aṭṭār, *Meer*, p. 625.

43. For the distinction between the 'expressionist' temperament of fifteenth-century Turkoman Tabriz painting, and the 'classical' mood of fifteenth-century Timurid Herat painting, and recognition of the synthesis of both trends in the painting of early sixteenth-century Safavid Tabriz, I am indebted to the connoisseur who has really been the master of so many of us in the field of Persianate art, Stuart Cary Welch of Harvard. Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts*, pursues about as far as it can go, with great sensitivity, Welch's profound connoisseurly and stylistic approach to Persianate painting.

44. In Wā'iz-i Kāshifī's version (*Anwār-i Suhaylī*, Tehran ed., 1983, ch. 1, p. 41), a bird imprudently leaves its heavenly nest and is at once beset by all the travails of this falsely alluring lower world: *Dām: Shayṭān ast; Dunyā: dāna-i adhahathā-yi nafs; / Murgh-i dil-rā ḥirṣ-i dāneh zūd dar dām afkunad.* 'The Snare: is Satan; and this World: our lower soul's delight in yonder seeds; / Such greed for grain shall swiftly cast this Bird, which is our heart, into yon snare!'

45. MT, v. 820.

Representations of ‘Aṭṭār in the West and in the East: Translations of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* and the Tale of Shaykh Ṣan‘ān

CHRISTOPHER SHACKLE

An extraordinarily rich variety of poems has been composed in the narrative genre of the Persian *mathnawī* with its infinitely extendable chain of rhyming couplets which are themselves largely self-contained in formal structure. Within the genre, ‘Aṭṭār’s twelfth-century masterwork, the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, has a special place both loved and honoured as an outstanding exemplar of the Sufi teaching poem. To its composition, ‘Aṭṭār brought a combination of very special gifts not only of spiritual insight but also of great literary skill. These qualities include the simplicity and beauty of direct poetic expression which is so characteristic of his *Dīwān*, the knowledge of history and legend and the narrative art which fill his prose masterpiece, the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*, and the power to combine all these in highly coherent longer works to which his other authentic poems offer equal testimony.

The *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* and the Tale of Shaykh Ṣan‘ān

Within the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*,¹ a place of special importance is occupied by the Tale of Shaykh Ṣan‘ān who became infatuated with a beautiful Christian girl. Occurring at a crucial point in the larger narrative, it is carefully elaborated at exceptional length, being at 409 verses much the longest of all the stories and amounting to nearly one-tenth of the whole, and thus offering translators a temptingly self-contained challenge. As will be remembered, this story comes about a quarter of the way through the poem at the point when the birds are all wobbling about undertaking the terrifying journey to the Sīmurgh. Like so many of ‘Aṭṭār’s stories it is very cunningly linked into the larger narrative, being in a sense a very extended exemplification of the teaching which the hoopoe has given to the birds a few verses earlier:

*Har ki-rā dar 'ishq muḥkam shud qadam
Dar gudhasht az kufr u az islām ham.*

Islam and blasphemy have both been passed
By those who set out on love's path at last²

The Tale of Shaykh Ṣan'ān³ begins with a picture of the pious Shaykh whose honoured existence at Mecca surrounded by his numerous followers is disrupted by a dream in which he sees himself as an idolater in Rūm until, in pursuit of the dream, he is driven to Rūm where he falls hopelessly in love with a beautiful Christian girl to the dismay of his disciples.

A more elaborate passage follows in which the Shaykh spends the night lamenting the force of his love, before the disciples gather round for each in turn to offer him sensible advice which he rejects. Night turns to day and for a month he lies before the girl's door until at last she deigns to taunt him and, in response to his ardent profession of love, lays down the four conditions for his acceptance: abandoning Islam, bowing down to images, burning the Qur'ān and drinking wine. 'Aṭṭār handles this key passage with that characteristic skill which sets all his translators so hard a task, as he blends a variety of registers within a remarkably economical compass:

*Dukhtarash guft ay kharaf az rūzigār
Sāz-i kāfūr u kafan kun sharm dār
Chūn damat sard-ast damsāzī makun
Pīr gashtī qaṣd-i dilbāzī makun
Īn zamān 'azm-i kafan kardan turā
Bihtaram āyad kih 'azm-i man turā
Kay tawānī pādishāhī yāfitan
Chūn ba-sīrī nān nakhwāhī yāfitan
Shaykh guftash gar bugū'ī ṣad hazār
Man nadāram juz gham-i 'ishq-i tū kār
'Āshiqī-rā chi jawān chi pīr mard
'Ishq bar har dil kih zad ta'thīr kard
Guft dukhtar gar tu hastī mard-i kār
Chār kārāt kard bāyad ikhtiyār
Sajdiḥ kun pīsh-i but u Qur'ān bisūz
Khamr nūsh u dīda-rā īmān badūz.*

She laughed: 'You shameless fool, take my advice –
Prepare yourself for death and paradise!
Forget flirtatious games, your breath is cold;
Stop chasing love, remember you are old.
It is a shroud you need, not me! How could

You hope for wealth when you must beg for food?
 He answered her: 'Say what you will, but I
 In love's unhappy torments live and die;
 To love, both young and old are one – his dart
 Strikes with unequalled strength in every heart.'
 The girl replied: 'There are four things you must
 Perform to show that you deserve my trust:
 Burn the Koran, drink wine, seal up Faith's eye,
 Bow down to images.'⁴

Şan'an agrees to take wine, and becomes still more ardent when drunk. She tells him he must now abandon Islam, and the Christians take him to a monastery. She then demands the further condition that he should become her swineherd for a year, leading to a brief excursus on the inner swine present in the psyche of every seeker.

The disciples are in despair and he tells them to return to Mecca rather than sharing his fate. As they skulk back, they are met by the Shaykh's leading disciple, who had not been able to go on the journey to Rūm, and who now upbraids them for their feebleness. He leads them back, and on the way his prayers are answered by a vision of the Prophet who graciously grants his request that the Shaykh be freed from his obsession. When the disciples arrive they find the Shaykh has cast aside his Christian dress and is filled with remorse for his actions. They comfort him with the news of the Prophet's intercession on his behalf. The Shaykh resumes his faith and they return to Mecca.

The girl then has a dream of her own in which she is told to match her erstwhile love's devotion and herself follow him to Mecca. She desperately runs after him. The Shaykh realizes what is happening and takes his disciples back to find her. In an abject state she confesses how ashamed she is of her conduct. The Shaykh admits her to Islam to the rejoicing of the disciples. But unable to bear the pain of absence she dies, a drop returned to the great sea of Truth.

Briefly glossed by the hoopoe, the great climax of the Şan'an story fills the birds with the desire to set out on their journey. But with his customary art 'Aṭṭār delays their departure, first by the election of the hoopoe as their leader, then by their further fears of the journey which he allays with the Tale of Shaykh Bāyazīd and the Stars, then by the long succession of the objections of individual birds which are allayed in turn by the hoopoe with further stories in support of each rebuttal, then again by the description of the Seven Valleys, before the eventual rapid description of their actual journey to the Sīmurgh, their initial rejection and final discovery of him, until the poem closes with the wonderful Tale of the King who Ordered the Death of his Beloved, second only to the Tale of Shaykh Şan'an in length and complexity.

Representations of ‘Aṭṭār in Nineteenth-century Europe

It took quite a while for the significance of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* to become apparent to Western audiences, not only as a major work in its own right in absolute terms, but even for its outstanding position amongst the other works of ‘Aṭṭār. It is in fact wholly characteristic of the sheer uncertainty of the larger translation process that the first work of ‘Aṭṭār to command substantial Western attention was not one of those masterpieces honoured and studied by modern scholarship but rather the humble *Pand-nāma*, now regarded as an apocryphal addition to the corpus.

The simple style and the uplifting content of the *Pand-nāma* had long made it a popular item on the syllabus of elementary Persian texts in both Turkey and India, where it fulfilled the sort of function occupied for centuries in the Latin schools of Europe by such short sets of moralistic apothegms as the *Dicta Catonis*, which has an equally doubtful attribution to the sage of ancient Rome. So it seems appropriate enough that the first Western appearance of the *Pand-nāma* appears to have been in Latin, in the short extracts presented in von Stuermer’s bilingual anthology, published as *Anthologia Persica* in Vienna in 1775.⁵

In other European countries too, it was the *Pand-nāma* which first began to make ‘Aṭṭār’s name familiar. In Britain an elegant little edition of the Persian text was published in 1809 by the Reverend J.H. Hindley of Manchester College. From his introduction, addressed to the Chairman, the Deputy-Chairman and the Honourable the Court of Directors of the East India Company, no hint of ‘Aṭṭār’s status emerges. It is simply the practical value of the text in helping the colonial administrator get inside the Muslim mind-set that is stressed:

The series of little moral poems now first presented to the public, have, for ages past, been the delight and instruction of a very considerable part of the civilized globe. From the ease of the versification, the elegant simplicity of the phraseology, the purity of the style, and the system of dignified morality inculcated, the *Pendeh-i-At-tar*, if not studiously adapted to the laws, manners and climate of a widely extended empire, has uniformly been the first book which an august and jealous polity has placed in the hands of youth, and reserved for the amusement and reflection of maturer age, throughout the whole *Mohammedan* dominions.⁶

A decade later, a much more influential version of the *Pand-nāma* was published in Paris in 1819 by Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1833), the leading French orientalist of the day.⁷ Besides a Persian text with rubrics printed in red, this has a French translation to which are appended as extended footnotes a whole selection of Persian texts with French versions. Reflecting Silvestre de Sacy’s own wide reading over a long career, these include a range of the standard authors, including Sa’dī, Ḥāfiẓ, Rūmī, Jāmī and the *Anwār-i suhaylī*. They also include a fair number of extracts from the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*: the Tale of Jesus and the Jug, the Tale of the Gravedigger, and the

Tale of Maḥmūd at Somnath, besides a long citation from the passage on the Seven Valleys. This was not quite the first serious presentation of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* in a Western language, since it had just been preceded by the extracts with German translation published in his bilingual anthology of 1818 by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall,⁸ but the wide distribution of Silvestre de Sacy's more accessible book was to mean that it was the most influential such summary introduction.

A generation later, this work was to be taken forward by Silvestre de Sacy's student and most distinguished successor at the École des Langues Orientales Vivantes, Garcin de Tassy (1794–1878). Unlike his teacher, Garcin de Tassy's specialization was not in Persian but in Urdu, and he held the title of Professor of Hindustani for most of a long career, during which he published prolifically on Urdu literary topics as well as on the Urdu language, besides a varied selection of other Indian subjects.⁹ While his widely ranging publications also included a number of translations of standard Persian texts, it is unclear why he came to focus particularly on the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, unless it was due to earlier encouragement by his teacher. Given Garcin de Tassy's academic specialization, one might reasonably speak of another manifestation of the Indian connection in the introduction of 'Aṭṭār to the West, even if, as an armchair scholar of the old school, his fieldwork was done in France rather than in India.

This was the first time a professional scholar from a Western university, albeit not one who was working in the area of his primary expertise, had seriously devoted major attention to the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, and the fruits of his industry were made available in a methodical series of publications. In 1856 he published a French prose translation of the Tale of Shaykh Ṣan'ān as a journal article designed to arouse interest in the larger scale works he was envisaging.¹⁰ The same year also saw the independent publication of his introduction to the poem, entitled *La poésie philosophique et religieuse chez les Persans d'après le Mantic uttair*.¹¹ In 1857 he published an edition of the complete Persian text,¹² and this was followed in 1863 by a full translation of the entire poem into French prose, accompanied by some explanatory footnotes.¹³

Although ostensibly certainly marking an impressive academic achievement, this set of publications is very much a typical product of the European orientalist scholarship of its time, in being methodically rather than sensitively assembled. The limited manuscript base of the edition and the fact that Garcin de Tassy was not primarily a Persian scholar have caused subsequent critics to point out technical deficiencies in both his text and his translation.¹⁴ The latter is certainly a work of devoted industry rather than of industrious devotion. Like all attempts to recast the endstopped balance of the rhymed hemistichs of the *mathnawī* into paragraphed Western prose, it suffers from the peculiarly deadening effect of continual short sentences, often broken into two by commas or semicolons, and ending in full stops, as in his rendering of the Christian girl's mocking speech to Ṣan'ān:

Ô vieux radoteur! lui répondit la jeune chrétienne, n'as-tu pas honte d'employer du camphre et de préparer ton linceul? Rougis de confusion. Puisque ton souffle est froid, ne cherche pas l'intimité avec moi. Tu es devenu *pîr*; ne fais pas le projet de jouer ton cœur. Occupe-toi actuellement de ton linceul; cela vaudra mieux que de t'occuper de moi. Dans l'âge avancé que tu as atteint, borne-toi à la vie animale. Tu ne peux inspirer de l'amour; va-t'en donc. Comment pourrais-tu obtenir la royauté, lorsque tu ne peux trouver du pain pour te rassasier?¹⁵

So it is true that the content is all there, but like most full prose versions of poetic texts, it soon becomes quite difficult to read as a straight book rather than as a useful crib to the original. And much the same may be said of perhaps the most influential of Garcin de Tassy's three main publications on the *Mantiq al-ṭayr*, his introductory essay on *La poésie philosophique et religieuse* which had been through four editions by 1864. Betraying some of the impatience of the age, as when the firmly Catholic Garcin de Tassy quickly dismisses the 'exaggeration' of 'Aṭṭār's praise of the Prophet, this is a determinedly unspeculative study. It largely sticks to being a systematization of the poem, whose enticingly winding course is firmly reduced to a summary of the 'plot', neatly broken down into *mantiq* followed by *maqāmāt*. Once again, as with the earlier European approaches to the *Pand-nāma* as a preliminary instrument of colonial governance, there is the sense that the poem is being so to speak gutted for what it can yield as a systematic guide to Persian Sufism.

Fitzgerald's Version of the *Mantiq al-ṭayr*

For a more interesting if less worthy contemporary European treatment of the *Mantiq al-ṭayr* we may turn to that of Edward Fitzgerald (1809–1883), supremely famous as the translator of 'Umar Khayyām, but less well known as the translator also of 'Aṭṭār's poem. Fitzgerald enjoyed all the advantages as well as suffering some of the disadvantages of materially comfortable circumstances. Freed from the necessity of ever having to earn his own living, he was able to indulge his literary and intellectual interests without having to subject them to the discipline of any rigorous academic training.¹⁶ In short, there could hardly be a sharper archetypal contrast than that between Garcin de Tassy as the systematic French professional scholar and Fitzgerald as the casual English amateur man of letters, and this contrast is fully reflected in the versions of the *Mantiq al-ṭayr* which they were working on at the same time in the late 1850s.

We know a good deal about the genesis of Fitzgerald's project thanks to the preservation amongst his extensive correspondence¹⁷ of a series of letters to his younger friend Edward Cowell, who excited Fitzgerald's interest in 'Umar Khayyām,¹⁸ and who was later to have a successful academic career as Professor of Sanskrit at Cambridge. Coming to the serious study of Persian in the early 1850s¹⁹ after he had

been working on English versions of the Spanish plays of Calderón, Fitzgerald's first major project was an abridged translation of Jāmī's *Salāmān wa Absāl* into blank verse, which he first published privately in 1856.²⁰

The first mention of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* comes in a letter written to Cowell on 31 August 1854 in which he refers to a citation in Silvestre de Sacy's edition of the *Pand-nāma*.²¹ By the beginning of 1857, with *Salāmān and Absāl* published and his interest in 'Umar Khayyām excited by Cowell's gift of a copy of the *Rubā'iyyāt* in the previous year, Fitzgerald has also come to pay attention to the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*. In his first letter to Cowell since the latter's departure for India, Fitzgerald writes on 22 January 1857 that he has been reading it from a manuscript and first reveals his intention to produce a version of the poem:

...with the help of G. de Tassy [I] have nearly made out about two-thirds of it. For it has greatly interested me, though I confess it is always an old Story. The Germans make a Fuss about the Súfi Doctrine, but, as far as I understand, it is not very abstruse Pantheism, and always the same. One becomes as wearied of the *manī* and *dū'ī* in their Philosophy as of the *bulbul* etc. in their Songs. Attār's Doctrine seems to me only Jámī and Jeláledín (of whom I have poked out a little from the MS. you bought for me) but his Mantic has, like Salámán, the advantage of having a Story to hang all upon; and some of his illustrative Stories are very agreeable: better than any of the others I have seen. He has not so much Fancy or Imagination as Jámī, nor I dare say, so much depth as Jeláledín, but his touch is lighter. I mean to make a Poetic Abstract of the Mantic, I think; neither De Tassy nor Von Hammer gives these Stories which are by far the best part, though there are so many childish and silly ones.²²

In the next month Fitzgerald refers in a long letter to Cowell written in February 1857 to now lost previous communications on 'Aṭṭār's poem, also to the correspondence (since lost) which he has started with Garcin de Tassy. Commenting on the latter's introductory essay Fitzgerald says that his

Analysis of the "Mantic" is *Capital*, as I ought to say who should scarce have got on with the MS. without that Assistance. There is very little of *Frenchism* in it; only now and then *murghān* translated "*Chers Oiseaux* etc."²³

Hearing that Garcin de Tassy is preparing both his edition and a full translation, Fitzgerald returns to his plan of a partial translation. By March 1857, he is able to report to Cowell, whom he is greatly missing in his absence in India, that he has made substantial progress with his translation, although he has no great confidence in the result:

Meanwhile also I keep putting into shape some of that Mantic which however would never do to publish. For this reason; that anything like a literal Translation would be,

I think, unreadable; and what I have done for amusement is not only so unliteral, but I doubt *unoriental*, in its form and expression, as would destroy the value of the Original without replacing it with anything worth reading of my own. It has amused me however to reduce the Mass into something of an Artistic Shape. There are lots of Passages which – how should I like to talk them over with you! Shall we ever meet again? I think not; or not in such plight, both of us, as will make Meeting what it used to be.²⁴

In a typical change of focus, possibly to be connected with the strains associated with the brief marriage he so disastrously contracted late in 1856,²⁵ Fitzgerald reports in a letter to Cowell of 7 May 1857 that his attention has turned to Aeschylus:

So I have put away the Mantic. When I die, what a farrago of such things will be found! Enough of such matter.²⁶

Thereafter he makes only passing references to ‘Aṭṭār and to the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*. A letter of 8 December 1857 reports that he resumed his work:

I have left with Borrow the Copy of the Mantic De Tassy gave me; so some days ago I bought another Copy of Norgate. For you must know I had again taken up my rough Sketch of a Translation, which, such as it is, might easily be finisht. But it is in truth no Translation: but only the *Paraphrase of a Syllabus* of the Poem: quite unlike the original in Style too: but it would give, I think, a fair proportionate Account of the Scheme of the Poem. If ever I finish it, I will send it to you.²⁷

A year later, he writes on 2 November 1858:

No. I have not read the Jámí Díwán; partly because I find my Eyes are none the better, and partly because I have now no one to “prick the sides of my Intent”; not even “Vaulting Ambition” now. I have got the Seven Castles [i.e. Hâtifi’s *Haft Manẓar*] in my Box here and old Johnson’s Dictionary; and these I shall strike a little Fire out of by and bye: Jámí also in time perhaps. I have nearly finisht a metrical Paraphrase and Epitome of the Mantic: but you would scarce like it, and who else would? It amuses me to give a “Bird’s Eye” View of the Bird Poem in some sixteen hundred lines. I do not think one could do it as Salámán is done. As to Omar, I hear and see nothing of it in Fraser yet: and so I suppose they don’t want it.²⁸

The theme is resumed the next year, in a letter of 27 April 1859 written in very low spirits following the death of his dearly beloved friend William Browne:

I sent you poor old Omar who has *his* kind of Consolation for all these Things. I doubt you will regret you ever introduced him to me. And yet you would have me

print the original, with many worse things than I have translated. The Bird Epic might be finisht at once: but "cui bono?" No one cares for such things: and there are doubtless so many better things to care about. I hardly know why I print any of these things, which nobody buys; and I scarce now see the few I give them to. But when one has done one's best, and is sure that the best is better than so many will take pains to do, though far from the best that *might be done*, one likes to make an end of the matter by Print. I suppose very few People have ever taken such Pains in Translation as I have: though certainly not to be literal. But at all Cost, a Thing must *live*: with a transfusion of one's own worse Life if one can't retain the Original's better. Better a live Sparrow than a stuffed Eagle. I shall be very well pleased to see the new MS. of Omar, I shall *one day* (if I live) print the "Birds," and a strange experiment on old Calderon's two great Plays; and then shut up Shop in the Poetic Line.²⁹

Much later, he is stimulated by receiving Garcin de Tassy's French translation to report to Cowell from Lowestoft in December 1867:

Here, at Lowestoft, in this same row of houses, two doors off, I was writing out the Translation I made in the Winter of 1859. I have scarce looked at Original or Translation since. But I was struck by this; that eight years had made little or no alteration in my idea of the matter: it seemed to me that I really had brought in nearly all worth remembering, and had really condensed the whole into a much compacter Image than the original. This is what I think I can do, with such discursive things: such as all the Oriental things I have seen are.³⁰

In a farewell to his manuscript from the same address, he writes on 29 December 1874:

I have left the Persian Books to be forwarded to you at Cambridge. You know I have no Eyes for that Character: it is all I can do to read European Type with any Comfort. ... I think the Arrangement of the Story is good: the long seven Valleys well reduced to *Three*: and the incidental Stories properly – or, at any rate, purposely, excluded as the Action hastens to Conclusion. But the Diction is quite foreign to the Oriental: and not very good as English Verse. However, as I say, you may like to have it: and, if not, it won't take up much room in your Lumber room.³¹

Although Fitzgerald had earlier made half-hearted efforts to solicit Cowell's assistance in getting the poem published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, it was in the event to remain unpublished during his lifetime. It consequently first appeared in the first edition of his *Letters and Literary Remains*, published by his literary executor Aldis Wright in 1889.³²

Both Fitzgerald himself and his 'Bird-Parliament' leave so much to be criticized that if so inclined one might hardly know where to begin with its many eccentricities.

The success of the *Rubáiyát* largely depended after all upon its suggestion of an alternative value system, not on any direct opposition to Christianity.³³ And such thinking may have coloured Fitzgerald's omission not only of any reference to the Tale of Shaykh Šan'ān from his letters to Cowell, but also of its text from his translation, where it is true it could only have been included in very abbreviated form without seriously upsetting the balance of the contents which he did include.

On a larger scale, the extreme abbreviation of content and radical editing of structure are perhaps the most obvious of the consequences of his having chosen not to follow the usual strategies adopted by translators of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* – either to try to translate the whole, or to summarize consistently, or indeed to select only one of the more major portions like the Tale of Shaykh Šan'ān for partial treatment. As his letters so vividly show, however, Fitzgerald's *modus operandi* as a translator rather recalled his habit of buying pictures of doubtful attribution to old masters, then capriciously adjusting their dimensions by cutting bits out, or by himself retouching them here and there.³⁴ Here he is quite as vulnerable to criticism as he has become for his airy reshaping of 'Umar Khayyām, which has recently come under such puritanical attack by postcolonialist critics.³⁵ If anything, indeed, Fitzgerald shows himself to be less able fully to engage with 'Aṭṭār than with Khayyām, where there was considerable justification for the *majāzī* position he adopted against Cowell's view of 'Umar as a straightforwardly Sufi poet.³⁶ But the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* is a Sufi creation through and through, and Fitzgerald's justification of his radical shortening of the *maqāmāt* by rather sloppy reference to Tholuck is a case of nineteenth-century orientalism at its self-justifying worst.³⁷

Nevertheless, since the divine gifts are unequally shared amongst human beings, even a translator not very sympathetic to Sufism as such may, if sufficiently gifted, be able successfully to convey something of the literary quality of Persian Sufi poetry.³⁸ As a purely literary text, indeed, the best bits of Fitzgerald's version are peculiarly attractive. He was good at heroic couplets, and the 'Bird-Parliament' reads far better than his turgid translation of *Salāmān wa Absāl* into sub-Milonic blank verse. It is the stories of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, of course, which he brings best to life, and one example may give some indication of this. When he was still excited by his first discovery of the contents of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, Fitzgerald had written to Cowell in February 1857 about a story which he clearly found particularly appealing:

Of course you know the pretty story of Báyazid going out of the noisy City into the still Moonlight of the Fields – and, wondering to see no one there to admire the Moon and Stars with him, a *hātifi* [sic] whispers to Him, "The King's House is not open to Beggars, who are rather driven from the Doors; when the Light flashes from my Harem it scares away the lazy vagrants on the Road, and Thousands come for One that is admitted."³⁹

This story, which comes at the crucial narrative turn following the telling of the Tale of Shaykh Ṣan'ān and the election of the hoopoe, appears in the version Fitzgerald worked up in 1859 in a style fully reminiscent of the translator of the *Rubáiyāt* at his best:

One Night from out the swarming City Gate
 Stept holy Bajazyd, to meditate
 Alone amid the breathing Fields that lay
 In solitary Silence leagues away,
 Beneath a Moon and Stars as bright as Day.
 And the Saint wondering such a Temple were,
 And so lit up, and scarce one worshipper,
 A voice from Heav'n amid the stillness said;
 "The Royal Road is not for all to tread,
 Nor is the Royal Palace for the Rout,
 Who, even if they reach it, are shut out.
 The Blaze that from my Harím window breaks
 With fright the Rabble of the Roadside takes;
 And ev'n of those that at my Portal din,
 Thousands may knock for one that enters in."⁴⁰

It is passages such as these which show that there is at least something of the 'live Sparrow' about Fitzgerald's 'Bird's Eye View of the Bird Parliament', and enough will have been gathered from the uniquely revealing quotations from Fitzgerald's letters to show both how he was his own keenest critic and how his is a deliberately shaped version, in his words 'a Paraphrase of a Syllabus of the Poem'.

In more general terms, this unpublished version by a well-off gentleman amateur also provides a helpful counterpoint to the set of significant themes which emerge from our preceding survey of more professional early translations of 'Aṭṭār into Western languages. This indicated how some of the works of a completely strange figure gradually began to be integrated into the European cultural system, and how this process involved grappling with greater or less success with the formidable issues raised by the many unfamiliarities of language, poetic expression and religious and spiritual content. It has also indicated how the translators and their public were a part of that wider encounter of the West with the East when the search for understandings of Islam was hardly to be separated from the rapid extension of colonialism. This was the immediate historical context for the kind of orientalist scholarship practised by, for example, Garcin de Tassy, for whose brand of 'stuffed Eagle' the publishing market found a ready outlet.

Early Eastern Versions of ‘Aṭṭār

All this is, of course, very different from the historic situation in the East, where Persian was for many centuries culturally dominant over so much of the non-Arab Islamic world. Since throughout this world the educational system instilled into the educated elites a first-hand familiarity with Persian, there was rather little call for actual translations of Persian poetry into other languages, since the process of vital cultural transfer worked rather through the familiar process of creative imitation (*jawāb-gū’ī*, *naẓīra-gū’ī*).⁴¹

When looking at the process of translation within the wider world of pre-modern Persian culture, there is an instructive contrast to be noted between India and Turkey, the two main regions in which Persian was not the native language of most of the population. ‘Aṭṭār’s works continued to be studied and highly valued in the original Persian in both areas, as may be seen from the numerous manuscripts from the Ottoman and Mughal courts and from lesser centres of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*⁴² and other poetical works, including the apocryphal *Pand-nāma*,⁴³ as well as the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*. But when it comes to translations, a rather different story emerges.

In Anatolia, Aḥmed Gülşehrī produced in 717/1317 a translation into Turkish verse of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, also called the *Gülşen-nāme*. At 4338 verses this is about the same length as the original, which it follows in metre and to which it appears to be quite faithful in style, although in places divergent in content.⁴⁴ It has naturally attracted favourable attention from twentieth-century Turkish literary historians anxious to reclaim for their pre-Ottoman literary past this expressly nativist version,⁴⁵ as has the now lost thirteenth-century Turkish version of the Tale of Shaykh Ṣan‘ān referred to by Gülşehrī as ‘The Tale of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Razzāq’ (*Dāstān-i Şeyh Abdürrezāk*).⁴⁶

Other Turkish versions also include a particularly suggestive treatment of the Ṣan‘ān story, preserved in a British Library manuscript, the *Qiṣṣa-yi Shaykh ‘Abd al-Razzāq* composed in 991/1583 by one Ḍiyā’ī Chelebī, a native of Mostar in the Sanjak of Hersek.⁴⁷ Though its contents apparently remain uninvestigated, this poem is said to have been composed from a prose source. Written in Hercegovina, right on the borders of the Muslim and Christian worlds and just by one of the great pig-breeding areas of south-eastern Europe, it might be seen as a rather remarkable illustration of the literalizing effect of translation, in this case taking a mythically conceived story close to its physical source. Also in the western part of the Islamic world, there are several versions of the Ṣan‘ān story in Kurdish, beginning with the classic poem by Faqīh Ṭayrān (c.1590–1640).⁴⁸

A number of other full and partial Turkish versions of the poem are recorded from subsequent centuries, from both the western and the eastern Turkish lands. By far the most famous of these is the *Lisān al-ṭayr* (*Lisānū’ṭ-ṭayr*) composed

under the pen-name Fani by the great eastern Turki poet ‘All Shir Nawa’i in 1498, again in the same metre as the original, but executed with all the confidence of adaptation demanded by Nawa’i’s ambitious programme of reproducing the Persian literary heritage in Chaghatay, with himself as the master Turki poet.⁴⁹ As would be expected from such an author, this is a very confidently extended version of the poem which feels itself free to elaborate upon the original, taking for instance over 500 verses to tell the San’an story, and which claims for itself a fresh poetic inspiration:

*Cun Lisanu’t-tayr agaz eyledim
Turfa kuslar birle pervaz eyledim.*

Once I began the Lisanu’t-tayr
How wonderfully I flew with the birds!⁵⁰

By the time another Timurid dynasty established itself in India, Persian had long enjoyed an exceptional status as the prime cultural language of Indo-Muslim civilization, in which it was largely unchallenged as the language of administration and of literature. The great variety of the indigenous languages of the subcontinent, not to speak of the very partial success of the process of conversion in most regions of this area of the *dar al-islam*, here created rather special conditions, with their own implications for the process of translation. Unlike in Turkey or Herat, there appears to have been absolutely no attempt in this period to translate ‘Attar, or indeed any other Persian poet, into local languages. As is well known, the translation process which was encouraged at the Mughal court actually worked the other way, through the official sponsorship of translations of Sanskrit and other Indian literature into Persian.

So it was not in the imperial centres of north India, but in the southern courts of the Muslim Deccan that the writing of poetry in the early form of Urdu known as Dakani began to be actively encouraged from the sixteenth century onwards. This period saw a particular cultivation of the *mathnawi* including, besides many original narratives, both those official productions based on the exploits of local rulers and others treating Indian romantic themes, as well as a wide variety of translations from Persian sources, like the *mathnawi* composed in Dakani by the poet Ghawwasi on the Arabian Nights story of *Sayf al-muluk wa Badr al-jamal*.⁵¹

This tradition of the Dakani Urdu *mathnawi* survived the Mughal conquest of the Deccan kingdoms in the mid-seventeenth century. One of the later poets was Wajih al-Din Wajidi, a native of Kurnool, south of Golkunda (the modern Hyderabad), of whom all that is known must be gleaned from the sparse details which emerge from his poems, including three in *mathnawi* form. The first of these, composed in 1115/1703 is entitled *Tuhfa-i ‘ashiqan*, and is an extended version of

the *Khusraw-nāma* historically attributed to ‘Aṭṭār.⁵² Composed in the same metre as the original, the unusual choice of subject suggests that ‘Aṭṭār must have had a particular appeal for Wajdī.

Whatever the case, this appeal was manifested in Wajdī’s second and most celebrated *mathnawī*. This is his version of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, which with characteristically deliberate Indianization he entitled *Panchhī-bāchā* or ‘Bird-Word’, and which he completed in 1131/1719, as proudly recorded by its chronogram *yo khāṣā kitāb* ‘this special book’.⁵³ Comprising some 3650 verses in the same metre as the original, this follows ‘Aṭṭār’s poem quite closely. In his brief epilogue at the end of the poem, which is the place where *mathnawī* translators get briefly to speak in their own voice, the poet states only modest aims for his version:

Because this poem was in Persian, though,
Few ordinary folk could understand
And those who can read Persian, still
Can’t understand the harder words.⁵⁴

Like most such undemandingly faithful translations from one language into another, its distinctive features are better described through glossed parallel quotations of original and translation. Attention may briefly be drawn here to some features of Wajdī’s treatment of the Tale of Shaykh Ṣan‘ān, where the passage quoted earlier from ‘Aṭṭār appears considerably extended from eight verses to fourteen as:

Ba’d az ān hans-kar kahī o mast nār
Ay burhe behosh ay pīrī-gudhār
Sar huā hay jyon terā kāfūr sā
Fikr kar jā tūn kafan kāfūr kā
Gar terā dam sard jyon kāfūr hay
‘Ishq ki garmī son tūn ma’dhūr hay
Tūn so apnī qūt kā muḥtāj hay
Gar tujhe roṭī mile to rāj hay
Khān tun mere vaṣl kī shāhī kon pāy
Mayn kahān hor tūn kahān ay wāy wāy
Shaykh ne bole nako yo bāt kar
Ho rahā hūn mayn so tujh gal kā bhanwar
‘Āshiqī kon kyā būrḥā kyā naw-jawān
Kyā gadā kyā bādshāh kyā kāmran
‘Ishq kā jis dil mane howe gudhar
Kar dikhātā hay apas kā whān athar
Pas kahī dhan gar tujhe merī hay chār
Tūn musalmānī son apnī hāth jhār

Nhīn jo ko'ī hamrang apne yār kā
Rāzdān nīn 'ishq ke asrār kā
Shaykh bole je kahe tūn so karūn
Mar kahe to turt isī sā'at marūn
Mayn so tere kahe mane hūn ay nigār
Khwāh merā jīw banchā le khwāh mār
Ba'd az ān bolī ke ay mard-i tamām
Mard gar hay tūn to kar e chār kām
Sijda kar but kon jalā Qur'ān kon
Pī sharāb awr chhor de imān kon.

After that the proud woman said: 'O heedless old man, to whom age has come, since your head is white as camphor, think about your shroud and camphor. Since your breath is cold as camphor, you are incapable of the heat of love. You are in want of your daily bread, if you get a loaf that's your sovereignty. How can you attain the kingship of union with me? Look where you are, and look where I am!'

The Shaykh said: 'Don't talk like this. I have never strayed from you. For being a lover what if one is old or young, a beggar or a king or well-to-do? When love passes into a heart it shows its effect there.'

Then the girl said: 'If you desire me, wash your hands of your Muslim-ness. No one who is not the same as his beloved can become privy to the secrets of love.'

The Shaykh said: 'I'll do whatever you say. If you tell me to die, I'll die right away that very moment. I am at your command, my darling, whether you save me or kill me.'

After that she said: 'You perfect man, if you're truly a man then do these four things – bow down to the idol, burn the Qur'an, drink wine and abandon faith.'⁵⁵

While the deliberately light Persianization of Wajdī's version might be compared in style and inspiration to the earlier Turkish versions of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, his Dakani language rapidly became obsolete with the shift of the centre of Urdu literary activity to northern India during the eighteenth century.

In the following century, the rapid spread of lithographic printing in India from the 1830s onwards was of course also one of the most remarkable cultural transformations of the period, marking one of the earliest and most substantial extensions within a major part of the Islamic world of the operations of print capitalism. One of the key players in this process was the Lucknow publishing firm of Nawal Kishor, which produced what was probably the first printed Persian *Kulliyāt* of 'Aṭṭār in 1872. Besides this edition of the poetry and of the Persian text of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, the period also saw the production of a number of Urdu versions of 'Aṭṭār's most popular works, as Persian came to be replaced by Urdu as the primary language of literacy for Indian Muslims. These versions are not of the great *mathnawī* poems which are rightly so highly regarded today, but of

the ever popular *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, including, besides several prose renderings, at least one into Urdu verse,⁵⁶ and the comfortingly straightforward *Pand-nāma*, which was recast in metrical Urdu by that assiduous litterateur from Bengal, 'Abd al-Ghaffūr Nassākh.⁵⁷

Miyān Muḥammad's Version of the Tale of Shaykh Ṣun'ān

All this brings us to the brink of the twentieth century. But before we bring the story down to that more recent period, much may be learnt from stepping back to look at a particularly interesting Indian poem of the mid-nineteenth century, written not in Urdu, but in Panjabi. Largely oral in character, the earlier Muslim literature in Panjabi, although quite heavily Sufi in orientation,⁵⁸ contains few direct or indirect references to 'Aṭṭār. This general rule does, however, have one notable exception, in the passing citations by the early eighteenth-century Qādirī poet Bullhe Shāh of the sufferings of the hero of 'Aṭṭār's famous story. Locally re-vocalized as Shaykh Ṣun'ān,⁵⁹ he appears along with other Sufi martyrs as a victim to the divinely instigated power of love. Sometimes he is depicted as being ensnared by the Christian's girdle:

You put the saw to Zakariyā's head
 You made Ṣābir worm-infested
 You put the girdle round Ṣun'ān
 And had another flayed.⁶⁰

Elsewhere the reference is to his humiliation as a swineherd:

You set Ṣun'ān to herd the pigs
 You had Shams stripped of all his skin
 You set Maṣṣūr upon the gibbet
 Now Your hands are stretched to me.⁶¹

It is something of this directness which informs the poem we are now about to examine, the *Qiṣṣa Shaykh Ṣun'ān*, composed in Panjabi verse by Miyān Muḥammad Bakhsh in 1273–1274/1857.⁶² Although this was the same year that Garcin de Tassy and Fitzgerald were both in their different ways engaged with 'Aṭṭār's poem, Miyān Muḥammad's could hardly be more different from theirs in spiritual intent and stylistic orientation. It is certainly a remarkable coincidence that, although none of them refer to the fact, this was not only the year of the last great resistance of the old order to British colonial rule in India, but also the one which was so significant both for the pioneering Western activity already described above and for the completion of perhaps the last notable Islamic reworking of

'Aṭṭār's tale, a quite radical reshaping which reveals a good deal about the possibilities of translation in the pre-modern Muslim world.

A member of a minor Qādirī dynasty whose ancestral shrine is at Khari in the Mirpur area of Kashmir now situated in Pakistan, Miyān Muḥammad was himself a Sufi with a passionate devotion to the *Pīr-i Dastgīr*, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir Gīlānī. The firmness of his spiritual conviction and of his absolute commitment to an anti-reformist religious position could hardly be more unlike Fitzgerald's cautiousness in these matters, although in Miyān Muḥammad's renunciation both of marriage and of the formal duties that might have been expected from one in his family position, a certainly biographical similarity to his contemporary might be detected.⁶³ While equally detached from the economics of the publishing industry, he was certainly the more prolific writer. He compiled an extensive hagiographic account of his immediate dynasty in Persian prose and was the author of numerous narrative poems composed in Panjabi, of which by far the most famous is his Sufi-ized telling of the adventure-filled Arabian Nights romance of *Sayf al-mulūk wa Badī' al-jamāl*, a long poem of over 9,000 verses completed in 1864, which has long been honoured as the national epic of his part of the world.⁶⁴ Although he refrains from drawing the explicit comparison himself, therefore, Miyān Muḥammad's large and ambitiously varied oeuvre does suggest a certain parallel with 'Aṭṭār's huge achievements in Persian some seven centuries earlier.

Miyān Muḥammad's poetic apprenticeship began with a number of shorter poems. The *Qiṣṣa Shaykh Ṣun'ān* was immediately preceded by his *Sohnī Mahīnwāl*, an explicitly Sufi treatment of one of the great Panjabi romantic legends,⁶⁵ and the *Tuḥfa Mirān*, a hagiographic offering to Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir containing a succession of stories of his miracles adapted into popular Panjabi verse from Arabic and Persian sources. And it was immediately followed by his *Nayrang-i 'ishq*, a translation of a once very popular Persian *mathnawī* which was originally written in the Panjab in the seventeenth century, and which I have described elsewhere.⁶⁶

Knowledge of Miyān Muḥammad's life is largely dependent on the hagiographic accounts later produced by his disciples, so it is impossible to supply the kind of biographical detail so luckily available for Fitzgerald. But we do have the literary evidence, and rather as Fitzgerald's 'Bird-Parliament' bears the impress of the versions of Jāmī and Khayyām on which he was working at the same time, so too is Miyān Muḥammad's *Qiṣṣa Shaykh Ṣun'ān* related in different ways to all three of the other poems he was working on at this time, since it combines elements of local romance, of hagiography and of translation. At 564 verses, it is markedly longer than 'Aṭṭār's treatment in 409 lines, and although written in rhyming couplets, these do not follow the original metre (as Miyān Muḥammad did in his version of the *Nayrang-i 'ishq*) but are in the Panjabi metre *baint khurd* containing two hemistichs of at least fourteen syllables each, themselves longer than 'Aṭṭār's eleven-syllable *ramal*.

In the epilogue to his poem, Miyān Muḥammad recognizes the likelihood of achieving only a small audience while proclaiming his confidence in the style he has chosen to adopt:

What's hard escapes the folk, who like their verses clear
 The learned do not read these Indian compositions.
 So who will grasp and read the message which I write,
 Empowered by the Lord, in verses filled with art?⁶⁷

His confident delight in the use of his poetic art is amply demonstrated in the heavy word plays, alliterations and assonances which are the delight of Panjabi poetry and with which Miyān Muḥammad freely decorates his more affecting passages, as in:

Wāng Zulaykhā jhallī ho'ī sang parim dī jhallī
Jhākī andar baythī jhāge jāgī pīr awallī.

Made mad, she like Zulaykha suffers passion's point
 She waits while watching him to feel frightful pain.⁶⁸

Not only the style but the whole approach is very different from 'Aṭṭār's, and so too are the courses of the narrative very divergent. The foundation of the reworking emerges in the introduction, when the praise of the Prophet leads quickly to a description of the *Mi'rāj* and to the Qādirī foundation myth which tells of the spirit of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir offering his neck for the Prophet to tread upon in mounting Burāq, and being granted the authority to lay his foot on the necks of all the saints. This is confirmed by another story of his being rewarded by God with the same authority as a reward for standing on one foot for twelve years out of respect for the divine omnipresence. The main narrative then starts by citing the authority of Jāmī in his *Nafahāt al-uns* for the account of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir preaching in the mosque in Baghdad and being given the command to tread on all saints' necks (*hādhā qadamī ...*),⁶⁹ in a third reiteration of the granting of this power.

His claims are resisted only by Shaykh Ṣun'ān, who had been made proud by his fifty years' service at the Ka'ba, his fifty Pilgrimages and his hundred books, but who fatally lacks love. For his disobedience Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir sentences him to herd pigs, and to take them on his shoulders. Ṣun'ān leaves with his two disciples, one called only Maḥmūd, while the other is none other than Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Muḥammad, whom we here refer to as 'Farīd al-Dīn' in distinction from the poet 'Aṭṭār. This tradition that Ṣun'ān was the *pīr* of 'Aṭṭār, which typologically resembles the identification of the 'disciple who loved Him most' with St John, seems to have been widespread at least in South Asia.⁷⁰

On the way Shaykh Ṣun'ān comes to a Christian city, sees the beautiful girl and falls in love with her. Her beauty is described, then the night of his sufferings. As in 'Aṭṭār, he lies for a month in the street at her door. Eventually she is moved to love for him by his devotion. In a switch to the well-known themes of the Panjabi romance, involving the conflict between individual love and tribal honour, her father finds out. To safeguard the family's reputation, he tells Ṣun'ān he must abandon Islam, and become a herder of pigs and give the young ones piggybacks for a year, before he will finally be admitted as their son-in-law at a ceremony where wine and pork kebabs will be served. Overcome like Maṣṣūr, Sarmad, and Majnūn by the power of love, Ṣun'ān agrees and for a year he herds pigs. His disciples are appalled, but Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir's sentence is not to be set aside. Finally the wedding preparations are put in hand, but Farīd al-Dīn successfully begs the divine court for mercy. Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir sprinkles the water of his ablutions over Ṣun'ān, who comes to himself. Accompanied by Farīd al-Dīn, he goes to Baghdad and begs the Shaykh's forgiveness. This section of the poem ends with fulsome praise of the great saint and his merciful power.

Another version of the story is then presented. This begins with Ṣun'ān's departure from Baghdad for Mecca with his four hundred disciples – 'Aṭṭār's numbers are carefully kept – after refusing to acknowledge Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir. On the way he sees the girl, who is here described as a daughter of Kalāls, a low caste of wine-sellers, and who is compared to the great heroines of Panjabi romantic legend. He falls in love with her, and then in an extended passage more similar to the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* than Miyān Muḥammad's first version, she rejects him by saying he is too old, then requiring the four conditions of him. This is one of the few passages permitting direct comparison as a translation of 'Aṭṭār. Miyān Muḥammad keeps to the same number of verses as 'Aṭṭār, although his are longer, and he manages to capture a good deal of the original, including the rhetorically compressed concluding statement of the four tasks:

Larkī kahndī jhallā hoyon terā waqat wihānān
Ho kāfūr ga'ī kastūrī chāhiye kafan sawānān
Buddhā nahīn muḥabbat lā'iq eh kam hayn jawānān
Karo tayārī gor safar dī bharyā hor zamānān
Buddhā tūn qabar de dande chal kī 'ishq kamāsen
Ik roṭī thīn 'ārī bandā shāhī kyonkar pāsen
Ākhan shaykh kahīn say gallān jhallān birhyon tīrān
'Ishq jawānān pīrān de dil kardā hay tāthīrān
Larkī kahyā is kārī vich jekar hayn tūn pakkā
Kāfir ho hath dho islāmon chhor Madīna Makka
Shaykh kahyā jo ākho karsān kamm nahīn eh kachchā
Sang piyā hamrang ho'e bin 'ishq na hondā sachchā

*Mayn be-dām ghulām tusādā karsān jo farmānwen
 Zulfon ḥalqa kann mere wich je ik wāren pānwen
 Kahndī je tūn ‘āshiq merā kar eh chāre kārīn
 Qur’ān sar karīn but sijda madh pī imān hārīn.⁷¹*

The girl said: ‘You’ve gone crazy, your time is over. You’ve turned to camphor, your musk is gone, you should prepare your shroud. An old man isn’t fit for love, it’s a business for the young. Get ready for the journey to the grave, your time is up and you’re old, so go along the path to the grave, what love can you perform, a poor fellow without even a crust of bread, how will you find kingship?’

The Shaykh said: ‘Say as much as you like. I will suffer the arrows of love. Love has its effect on the hearts of both young and old.’

The girl said: ‘If you are firm in this business become an infidel, wash your hands of Islam and abandon Medina and Mecca.’

The Shaykh said: ‘I’ll do as you say, this is no trifling business. Love is not true unless one becomes the same as one’s beloved. I am your slave purchased for nothing, I will do as you command if you once put a lock of your hair as the earring that marks my slavery.’

She said: ‘If you are my lover perform these four deeds – burn the Qur’ān, worship idols, drink wine, and abandon faith.’

Şun‘ān first agrees to drink the wine, but is led further down the path of unbelief. But she still rejects him on the grounds that he has no money for her bride-price, and tells him he must earn it by herding pigs for a year, to which he agrees. Miyān Muḥammad then reproduces the gist of ‘Aṭṭār’s excursus on the inner pigs in all of us, before comparing Şun‘ān’s humiliation in the cause of love in the style of Bullhe Shāh to the experience of the heroes of Panjabi legend and the martyrs of Islam like Maṣṣūr and Shams.

The disciples despair at the sight of him having to pick up the piglets, and decide that Maḥmūd should stay with him while Farīd al-Dīn goes to Baghdad, where he succeeds in secretly taking over the cleaning by night of the latrines attached to Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir’s court. The regular sweepers complain of this invasion of their prerogative. In another topos from the local poetry, the freezing winter night is vividly described with highly charged word-plays:

*Kar kar karke bijlī karke darke sher bhī darke
 Sī murghān thar kanbī laggī sardī kolon tharke.*

The lightning cracked and crackled, even tigers shrank and quivered
 The birds were seized by tremors, and from the cold they shivered.⁷²

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir asks him about himself, and Farīd al-Dīn cites the examples

of divine mercy shown to the prophets, before asking him to save his Shaykh. The great saint is moved to mercy, and at that very moment Şun'ân returns to Islam, professing his devotion to Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir.

This second version of the story is then provided with three alternative endings, ascribed to different narrative traditions. In the first, Şun'ân's reconversion and his rejection of the girl provoke her into a passionate confession of love. When he tells her that her religion revolts him, she becomes a Muslim along with her entire tribe, so that both find their heart's desire, in a wondrous tribute to the power of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir. In the briefly related second ending, Şun'ân is irritated by her importunate pursuit and so he tells her to disappear. This she does, with her devotion posthumously allowing her to become the object of a cult among women.

Only with Miyân Muḥammad's third conclusion do we return more closely to the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*. After Şun'ân's departure for Mecca, the girl has a dream in which Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir tells her to convert properly for his sake as Şun'ân has improperly for hers:

Liyā majāz terā hun tūn bhī lay ḥaqīqat usdī
Tere kân sharī'at chhadyus pakar ṭarīqat usdī.

He took up your illusion, take up now his truth
 For you he left the Law, take hold now of his Way.⁷³

On awakening she is utterly alienated from her familiar surroundings in the style of the heroines of Panjabi romance, and she sets out after him. A voice (*hātif*) tells Şun'ân that she is now a Muslim and he hurries back to find her. They weep together, she asks for instruction and dies.

So the greater length of Miyân Muḥammad's *Qiṣṣa Shaykh Şun'ân* is not used so much to tell the story over an ampler compass, as to tell it very differently in two different versions of which the second is provided with three different endings. This, in other words, is as much an Indianized version of Jāmī, the great figure of the tradition to whom more than one explicit reference is made,⁷⁴ as it is a representation of the Tale of Shaykh Şun'ân from the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*. In spite of the resemblances to its ultimate narrative model, the poem itself is never referred to, while on the other hand its author is incorporated into the story. Above all, the focus of the story has been quite radically shifted from a situation in which the main character is the victim of his unrealized inner contradictions before being brought to fuller awareness through the power of suffering inflicted by love, to a setting in which what happens to him is the largely mechanical product of a holy man's awesome authority. His followers no longer turn for assistance to the Prophet but to Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir. And the same figure dictates the final salvation of the girl too, at least in the ending closest to the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*.

In conclusion, then, Miyān Muḥammad's *Qiṣṣa* has, like most 'strong' translations,⁷⁵ plenty to tell about itself and its author, as well as about the context and the tradition to which it and he belong, as notably about Miyān Muḥammad's self-conception in relation to 'Aṭṭār, and to Jāmī, or his depiction of such matters as the inter-relationship of different religions, quite as much an issue for nineteenth-century Indian Muslims as it had been for the Muslims of earlier centuries living on the frontier with Christianity. It also has much to reveal about the operations of 'medieval translation' in the Muslim world.

Conclusion: Twentieth-century Versions in the East and the West

It is uncertain if Miyān Muḥammad's *Qiṣṣa Shaykh Ṣun'ān* was printed before the 1970s, when it was reissued by the Awqaf Ministry of Azad Kashmir as part of an official tribute to the region's greatest local saint. But Wajhī's Urdu *Panchhī-bāchā* re-emerged earlier in the twentieth century when it was printed in Bombay around 1900.⁷⁶ This is a revised version whose language is considerably adapted by the replacement of most of its archaic Dakani features by the Persianizing norms characteristic of the later Urdu poetic standard, as signalled by its retitling as *Panchhī-nāma*.⁷⁷ This stylistic alteration seems to have been carried out more with an eye to the expectations of the contemporary Indian market than with any special reference to 'Aṭṭār's original, and the modernized version of the old *Panchhī-bāchā* may be seen as an economical contribution to the general process of translation into modern Urdu alluded to above as a characteristic development of Indian Muslim culture in the nineteenth century. The steady warmth of the market for religious texts applies equally to great works of spiritual instruction like the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, and other instances of such recycling will be noted below.

Perhaps the most striking feature of twentieth-century translations of the text is the way in which they illustrate the progressive assimilation of the East to the West. At least where published translations are concerned, Western styles of understanding and approach come to be increasingly prominent as opposed to the more vital internal reworkings of tradition seen in some of the poetic versions discussed in the preceding sections. So, with the recession of a widespread knowledge of Persian and the increasing prominence of English in the education system of early twentieth-century India, a number of basic cribs of 'Aṭṭār into literal English were produced. The British Library holdings from the period include a version of the *Pand-nāma* indicating the remarkable endurance of this text as a syllabus stand-by,⁷⁸ and a literal verse-by-verse prose English translation of the first part of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, whose abrupt ending a quarter of the way through the poem is equally characteristic of the Procrustean style appropriate to set texts.⁷⁹ From the later nineteenth century onwards, this colonial textbook style had been fully transferred from English into Urdu, as exemplified in a version of

the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* published in the 1930s. Although suggesting older allegiances in its title as the *Lisān al-ghayb, sharḥ-i Manṭiq al-ṭayr*,⁸⁰ this is very much a Western-style production, being a verse-by-verse rendering into Urdu prose of the still standard Nawal Kishor Persian text, some of whose errors are corrected, and with a preface which owes much to modern orientalist scholarship, including the edition by Nicholson and Qazwīnī of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*.

If the main market in colonial India appears to have been for textbooks, it seems that in the West, particularly after the weakening of Western self-confidence by the psychic trauma of the Great War, the demand was rather for spirituality, particularly when the spiritual message came in conveniently potted form. One early example of this trend is the English version of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* by the prominent Parsi Sir Rustom Pestonji Masani. Printed in Mangalore and published by Oxford University Press in 1924, its production literally bridged India and the West. One-third of Masani's little book is taken up with a general introduction to Persian mysticism which is at pains to point to its supposed links with Zoroastrianism. His abbreviated version of the poem is divided into four parts, respectively called The Parliament of the Birds (ending with a quite full retelling of the Šan'ān story), On to the City of God, Through the Seven Valleys, and Reception at the Royal Court. So this is a version quite unlike Fitzgerald's. Even if the poetry hardly appears, the skeleton of the poem is in place, with a strong emphasis on the teaching underlined by the citation of parallels in quite lengthy footnotes.

Similar to Masani's in format and general intent is the version published in the *Wisdom of the East* series by Margaret Smith.⁸¹ This very much reflects the style and approach of her other works, and their convergence with those of Evelyn Underhill. The introduction again occupies a third of the book, and includes a summary of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* with a female hoopoe and a description of the Seven Valleys. The selections from the poem are shorter in total than those given by Masani, and there is no room for Shaykh Šan'ān. Mostly written in a prose whose archaisms, including biblical 'thee's and 'thou's, cover 'Aṭṭār's studiously clear style with a patina of reverence, these also somewhat awkwardly include the two short passages translated in a different style by Browne in his *Literary History*, of which the first is in Fitzgeraldian heroic couplets.

After the Second World War, these short English versions were joined by a third, the rather fuller translation by Stanley Nott first published in 1954.⁸² Unlike Masani's and Smith's, this was not done from the Persian original but is a filleted version of Garcin de Tassy's old French prose translation, so that the result may be useful but is hardly beautiful. Apart from the flattening effect of a summarized translation of a translation, Nott's version in places reflects his own alignment with the teachings of the Gurdjieff-Ouspensky school in its choice of technical terms.⁸³

As suggested earlier, however, in a world in which the dissemination of the spiritual is ever more intimately associated with the market forces of world capitalism,

there is a continual demand for new versions and a continual opportunity for the recycling of old ones. Garcin de Tassy's old translation served as the basis for a Swedish version in the 1920s,⁸⁴ while in its original form, though without his introduction or his notes, it has been reissued as a French paperback.⁸⁵ In English too, alongside the Darbandi-Davis translation and Avery's more recent verse-by-verse rendering into very literal prose,⁸⁶ Nott's simpler reach-me-down prose re-rendering remains in print in American reissues.⁸⁷ At the same time, the power of the spirit to batten upon the opportunities created by lapsed copyrights is exemplified in the recent reissue of Masani's version under a new title and with a new introduction by Andrew Harvey,⁸⁸ seeming to be very much aimed at the hungry neo-Sufi market which is such an important part of the modern Mind-Body-Spirit phenomenon.

Nor is this only a European phenomenon. In the Islamic world, some modern versions of the *Mantiq al-ṭayr* have been done from the Persian, like Gölpınarlı's translation into modern Turkish,⁸⁹ while others reflect earlier eastern versions, like the modern Uzbek prose version supplied to accompany Nawā'ī's *Lisānū't-ṭayr*.⁹⁰ But the style of the European versions predominates, even perhaps their direct example, in such instances as a rendering into Arabic prose published in 1979,⁹¹ or a 1983 Indonesian prose version which is expressly stated to be done from Nott's, and is consequently at three removes from the Persian.⁹²

No doubt a systematic survey of modern translations into other languages would produce similar further evidence. If not chastening, it is certainly interesting to think that, in spite of the great achievements of modern Iranian scholarship, just how many more seekers around the world have in recent decades been dependent for their knowledge of the *Mantiq al-ṭayr* on versions derived from Garcin de Tassy than those who are able to encounter 'Aṭṭār in the original Persian. It is true that one world has in our lifetimes come into being, one in which the East is assimilated into the West through styles of translation and scholarship, quite as much as the West has been opened to the message of the East. Intuitively we may like to sense that translation proceeds in a steady upwards movement towards ever greater fidelity, but a closer examination shows that the process is much more complex, somewhat like a circling lantern glimpsed going round and round, with sometimes eccentric sudden flashes from the 'strongest' translators, and often casting as much light on the circumstances in which each translation is produced as upon the supreme original, which is by definition itself ultimately untranslatable.

Notes

1. References to the Persian text (as MT) are to the verses of the standard edition, *Mantiq al-ṭayr*, ed. S.S. Gawharīn (4th ed., Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995).

2. MT, v. 1178 as translated in *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham Darbandi

and Dick Davis (Harmondsworth, 1984), p. 57. This most successful of modern English translations, a somewhat compressed version done into heroic couplets, is cited without comment, since this already lengthy paper is concerned rather with earlier and less familiar renderings.

3. R. Ashrafzade, *Hikayat-i Shaykh-i San'ān* (Tehran, 1373 Sh./1994) provides an excellent overview. I am grateful to Leonard Lewisohn for drawing my attention to this and other Persian studies.

4. MT, w. 1336-1343, tr. Darbandi and Davis, p. 64.

5. *Anthologia Persica seu Selecta e Diversis Persis Auctoribus Exempla*, ed. I. von Stuermer (Vienna, 1775).

6. *Pendeh-i-Attar: The Counsels of Attar*, ed. J.H. Hindley (London, 1809), p. 5.

7. *Pend-nameh; ou, Le livre des conseils de Ferid-eddi Attar*, ed. and tr. A.I. Silvestre de Sacy (Paris, 1819).

28. Ibid., pp. 322–323.
29. Ibid., pp. 334–335.
30. Ibid., 3, p. 74.
31. Ibid., p. 540.
32. References below are to the text of the ‘Bird Parliament’ printed in *The Variorum and Definitive Edition of the Poetical and Prose Writings of Edward Fitzgerald*, ed. George Benthham (1902, repr. New York, 1967), vol. 6, pp. 137–200.
33. Cf. Martin, *With Friends Possessed*, pp. 221–222.
34. Cf. Ibid., p. 124.
35. Cf. Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley, CA, 1992); and Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, ed., *Post-colonial Translation* (London and New York, 1999), pp. 6, 38.
36. Cf. Martin, *With Friends Possessed*, pp. 203–205.
37. Cf. Fitzgerald’s note in the ‘Bird Parliament’, p. 189: ‘Other great Sufi Doctors distinguished “The Road” of Self-perfection into other Stages, some more, some less in Number than Attar: but Tholuck tells us Three was the usual Scale of Gradation: and, one must admit, quite enough. (Vulgo tres solent majoris minorisve Perfectionis gradus Muhammedani numerare &c. Ssufi vel pariter tres vel quatuor Gradus posuere ... Sæpius ut solet prolixè de Lege, Itinere, Veritate, Attarus cornicatur ... nec tamen significant memorabile quidquam nisi quod perpetuo asserat hos Gradus se invicem quasi in Nuce continere ... Tholuck’s Ssufismus, Berol. 1821. p. 325 &c.).
38. For an illuminating discussion of the theoretical and practical issues involved, cf. Leonard Lewisohn, ‘Ta’ammulātī dar uṣūl-i nazarī wa rawish-i tarjuma-i ash‘ār-i ṣūfiyāna-i fārsī’, *Mutarjīm: Iranian Journal of Translation*, 10 (2001), pp. 21–47.
39. Fitzgerald, *Letters*, 2, p. 255.
40. ‘Bird Parliament’, p. 143, MT, 1619–1629, cf. Darbandi and Davis, p. 77.
41. Cf. Paul E. Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid-Mughal Ghazal* (Costa Mesa, 1998); also Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, ed., *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa* (Leiden, 1996), vol. 2, pp. 1–47.
42. For the Turkish MSS of the *Manṭiq al-tayr*, cf. H. Ritter, ‘Philologika XIV’, *Oriens*, 11 (1958), pp. 36–60.
43. For the Turkish MSS of the *Pand-nāma*, cf. H. Ritter, ‘Philologika XVI’, *Oriens*, 13 (1961), pp. 195–238.
44. A facsimile text with introduction is provided in *Mantıku’t-tayr, tıpkıbasım*, ed. Ağâh Sırrı Levend (Ankara, 1957).
45. Cf. Amil Çelebioğlu, *Türk Mesnevî Edebiyatı 15 yy. Kadar* (Istanbul, 1999), pp. 48–49; Claude Cahen, *The Formation of Turkey* (Harlow, 2001), p. 266.
46. Cf. Çelebioğlu, pp. 39–40, following M.F. Köprülü, *Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi* (2nd ed., Istanbul, 1980), p. 253.
47. See the description of MS Or. 3291 in Charles Rieu, *Catalogue of the Turkish Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1888), p. 185.
48. The Kurdish versions are surveyed in T. Fayḍizādā, *Darbāra-i dāstān-i ‘arīfāna-i Shaykh Ṣana‘ān: gustardigī-yi dāmīna-i nufudh-i ān dar adabiyāt-i jahān ba-vizha dar adabiyāt-i fārsī, turkī wa kurdī (dar hama lahajāt)* (Tabriz, 1365 Sh./1986). A romanized

text of the poem by Faqīh Ṭayrān ('The Jurist of the Birds') composed in 313 quatrains is available with English introduction as Feqê Teyran, *Şêx Sen'ân*, ed. M.B. Rudenko, transcribed and ed. M. Yetkin (Stockholm, 1986).

49. It would be inappropriate to say much more here than to regret the absence of an English version of the classic comparative study by E.E. Bertel's, 'Nevâi 'Aṭṭār', in *Mir-Ali-Shir*, ed. V.V. Bartold (Leningrad, 1928), pp. 24–82, and to refer to the abridged text of the *Lisānū't-ṭayr* in romanized transliteration in *Ali Şir Nevaî, IV cilt*, ed. Ağah Sırrı Levend (Ankara, 1968). For a modern edition with complete romanized text, see Aziz Merhan, ed., *Die 'Vogelgesprache' Gülşehrî's und die Anfänge der türkischen Literature* (Göttingen, 2003).

50. *Lisānū't-ṭayr*, p. 183.

51. Cf. D.J. Matthews, 'Humour in Early Urdu Narrative: The *Masnavīs* of Ghavvāsī', in *The Indian Narrative: Perspectives and Patterns*, ed. Christopher Shackle and Rupert Snell (Wiesbaden, 1992), pp. 227–240.

52. Jamil Jālibī, *Tārīkh-i adab-i urdū I* (Lahore, 1975), pp. 445–446.

53. References are to the British Library manuscript of the *Panchhī-bāchā*, MS Isl. 2375, dated 1206/1791; see further Naşīr al-Dīn Hāshimī, *Yūrap men dakhānī makhṭūṭat* (Hyderabad, 1932), pp. 365–369.

54. *Panchhī-bāchā*, fol. 123a.

55. *Ibid.*, ff. 30b–31a.

56. Cf. J.F. Blumhardt, *A Supplementary Catalogue of Hindustani Books in the Library of British Museum* (London, 1909), pp. 114–115.

57. *Chashma-i fayḍ*, trans. 'Abd al-Ghaffūr Nassākh (Calcutta, 1862).

58. Cf. C. Shackle, 'Persian Poetry and Qādirī Sufism in Later Mughal India', in Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism* (Oxford, 1999), vol. 3, pp. 435–463.

59. And so spelt here, to distinguish from 'Aṭṭār's version, where the basis of Gawharīn's *Shaykh-i Şam'ān* (MT, 1185, as followed by e.g. Darbandi and Davis) is rightly criticized by Ashrafzāda, *Hikāyat*, p. 16.

60. *Kulliyāt-i Bullhe Shāh*, ed. Faqīr M. Faqīr (Lahore, 1960), *kāfī* 30, p. 51.

61. *Ibid.*, *kāfī* 92, p. 198.

62. References (with verse numbers added) are to the modern edition, *Shaykh Şun'ān ma'-i Chittī Hīr Rānjhā*, ed. Maḥbūb 'Alī (Muzaffarabad, n.d.).

63. In fact, since Nawā'ī was also unmarried, it is noteworthy that all three of the most creative versions of 'Aṭṭār considered in this paper were produced by celibate authors, if Fitzgerald's attempt at matrimony is discounted.

64. *Sayf al-mulūk ma'-i sawānīh-umrī-yi ḥaḍrat muşannif*, ed. Maḥbūb 'Alī (Muzaffarabad, 1994); also *Safar al-īshq: Sayf al-Mulūk*, ed. M. Sharīf Şabir (Lahore, 2002). For a fuller characterization of this poem and a description of its numerous literary antecedents in the Indian subcontinent, see C. Shackle, 'The Story of Sayf al-Mulūk in South Asia', forthcoming in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

65. Cf. C. Shackle, 'Beyond Turk and Hindu: Crossing the Boundaries in Indo-Muslim Romance', in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce Lawrence (Gainesville, FL, 2000), pp. 55–73, especially pp. 66–68.

66. Cf. Shackle, 'Persian Poetry and Qādirī Sufism', pp. 461–463.

88. Conference of the Birds, A Seeker's Journey to God (Boston and York Beach, 2001).
89. Mantiku'l-tayr, tr. Abdalbaki Golpinarli (Istanbul, 1944-1945).
90. Lisonut tayr, Nasriy Bayoni Bilan (Tashkent, 1991).
91. Mantiq al-tayr li-Farid al-Din Attar al-Naysaburi, ed. and tr. Badi Muhammad Jum'a (Beirut, 1980).
92. Musyawarah burung, tr. Hartojo Andangdjaja (Jakarta, 1983).

III

The Poetics of Passion: ‘Aṭṭār’s Lyric and Epic Poetry

Some Remarks on Forms and Functions of Repetitive Structures in the Epic Poetry of ‘Aṭṭār

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Repetition is rooted in human experience. Day and night, sleeping and waking, the seasons of the year, the rites of passage through life: birth, adolescence, maturity and death – all these cycles of shorter or longer duration form the structure of human life. As long as we are alive we cannot escape these repetitive structures. The natural environment, too, is full of repetitive phenomena, such as the waves of a lake or a sea, etc. So it is not surprising that repetition should form one of the oldest structures in the works in the plastic arts such as ceramics or carpet-making, or in the sacred visual and oral performances of religious rites and ceremonies, as in prayers, liturgies and so on. Nor should we forget music, which, both at the folkloric and the highest artistic levels, is unthinkable without repetitive elements. It has been said that these repetitive structures have or may have an archaic layer of magical origin as is still apparent in the inscriptions of amulets, magical formulations, etc.¹ However it may be, it is a fact that the cosmic order rests on constantly repeating movements. It is these cosmic and natural structures that encourage order and avert chaos, creating in man a certain degree of confidence in the laws of nature. Such magical influences as well as this element of order, this hope and confidence, are all reflected in the use of repetitive structures in the fine arts.

Repetitive Structures in the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth

Our current topic invites us to look just at literary forms. But, before talking of repetitive structures in the work of ‘Aṭṭār, let us cast a brief glance at the use of repetition found in the sacred texts of Islam, because it is from there that this otherwise profane structure gathers its particular sacred power. Both the Qur’ān and ḥadīth literature demonstrate a rich variety of repetitive structures. The Qur’ān as a whole with its 114 *sūras*, each of which – with the exception of the ninth – begin with the formula *bismillāhi l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm*, as well as rhymed prose (*saj’*), is subject to

such structures. Its text is pervaded by the mention of God's beautiful names (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*), which verbalize the Divine Presence. But apart from that, there are many other forms of repetitive structures to be found in the holy book. One major manifestation is the refrain-like repetition of formulas, the most conspicuous example of which is offered in the fifty-fifth *sūra* entitled *al-Raḥmān*, where the phrase *fa-bi'ayyi ālā'i rabbikuma tukadhdhibān* ('Which of your Lord's bounties will you deny?') is repeated thirty-seven times in a text of just seventy-eight verses. Ibn Rashīq, a medieval Arabic authority on rhetoric and poetics, pointed to this phenomenon in his *al-'Umda* as a fine example for the figure of *takrār*, meaning 'repetition'. Other forms of repetition in the Qur'ān include the repetition of a motif, notably in the structure of short tripartite parables or tales about prophets. A fascinating example is the threefold appearance of the shirt at decisive narrative junctures in the tale of Joseph in the twelfth *sūra*. The function of such repetitions is to underscore an idea, to intensify a certain motif, or to charge the text with sacred power. In fairy tales this kind of repetition may lead to a deadlock in the story, which is then gradually resolved in the final part of the tale.²

These particular functions are illustrated in two *ḥadīth*, describing two metaphysical events in the life of Muḥammad, both of which are used by 'Aṭṭār as models for two of his long narrative poems. These are the *ḥadīth al-shafā'a* or 'Report on the Intercession' and the *ḥadīth al-mi'rāj* or 'Report about the Ascension'. These two reports, even though transmitted in various forms, have a common trait in their amplified versions which consists of a bipartite structure with an ascending movement in the first part, leading to a certain critical culmination point, or even a deadlock, a descending movement in the second part, leading to the gradual solution.

Let us first look at the *ḥadīth al-shafā'a*, and its importance for 'Aṭṭār. The report tells us that, on the Day of the Last Judgement, man will ask various prophets to intercede for him with God. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus will be addressed; but their responses will be negative. Each of them will answer to the effect that he is not capable of interceding on man's behalf because of this or that sin (with the exception of Jesus, who is without sin also according to Muslim belief). On each occasion man will be sent on to another prophet, and finally, it will be Jesus who will advise man to ask Muḥammad, who will then intercede for him.

In the version of this *ḥadīth* cited by al-Bukhārī in the *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, the report has a second part, in which Muḥammad describes his dialogue with God. In response to each successive intercession, God orders him, first of all, to remove from hell those in whose hearts there is as much belief as a grain of barley; then, those in whose hearts there is as much belief as a mustard seed; and finally, after the last intercession, those in whose heart there is the tiniest grain of a mustard seed of belief.³ Here we encounter the repetitive structure of a sacred Islamic text showing its typical intensification, each successive degree surpassing the preceding one.

‘Attar has made use of the hadith al-shafa‘a in his *Musibat-nama*, or ‘Book of Adversity’, or rather, this particular hadith inspired him to create a much more extensive repetitive structure. In this epic poem, the mystic’s soul or thought is presented as a pilgrim (*salik-i fikrat*) traversing the cosmos with its astral spheres, and then the metaphysical cosmos of the Islamic tradition.

Accompanied and instructed by a spiritual teacher, he passes through forty stations corresponding to the forty days of a mystical retreat (*chilla*). On his way, he encounters and converses with various cosmic beings, physical and mythical, to whom he puts various questions: the Archangels, the Bearers of the celestial Throne, the Throne itself, the Footstool (*kursi*), the Table of Destiny, the Writing Reed (*qalam*), Paradise and Hell, Heaven, Sun and Moon, the Four Elements (Fire, Wind, Water, Earth), the Mountain, the Ocean, the three Kingdoms of Nature (Minerals, Plants, Animals, with special sections for birds and wild animals), Satan, the Spirits, Man, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, Muhammad, the Senses, Imagination, Reason, the Heart and the Soul.

On each occasion, the pilgrim starts with a *captatio benevolentiae*, enumerating the merits of the being or the person addressed, then he formulates his wish and receives a negative response; each addressee explains its/his incapacity to help with its/his own difficulties.

As in the hadith which serves as a model, it is only through the encounter with Muhammad that things change. The deadlock gives way as the impasse opens: Instead of giving a confused answer, the Prophet refers the pilgrim back to his own interior being. It is there, in his own soul that he will finally find what he has been searching for.⁴ The repetitive structure of this narrative reflects the lived repetition of outer or inner experiences, whether during the so-called *dhikr*, the meditation of Sufi groups where certain formulas are repeated possibly several hundred times, or during the forty days’ retreat, which in a way is an extended *dhikr*. However, the fasting that is normally practised during a *chilla* may produce quite extraordinary psychic states, in fact, forms of ecstasy, with experiences that one is tempted to call para-psychological.⁵

The second report about the ascension of Muhammad, functions as a substructure to the best of ‘Attar’s epic poems, the *Mantiq al-tayr*, ‘The Language of the Birds’, or as this Qur’anic expression is now usually translated, ‘The Conference of the Birds’.⁶ Let us first recall that in the Islamic tradition, two types of spiritual journey are known. The first is an ascension or vertical voyage through the spheres of the Ptolemaic cosmos, the prototype of which is the *mi’raj* of the Prophet. The second is, as it were, a horizontal voyage, based upon an interior or metaphysical geography.

In the case of the *Mantiq al-tayr*, ‘Attar drew his inspiration from two narrative sources to do with an allegorical voyage of birds. One is the ‘Tale of the Birds’ by Ibn Sina, the other a somewhat similar work by Muhammad Ghazali, translated

from Arabic into Persian by his brother Aḥmad Ghazālī.⁷ As has been pointed out by Henry Corbin, these two treatises have little in common, except for a repetitive element.⁸ In Avicenna's tale, the birds, having liberated themselves from the fetters of the hunters, fly over eight summits standing for the eight astral spheres. These mountains appear as valleys in 'Aṭṭār's poem, however, losing their reference to the cosmos and now symbolizing inner states or stages of the soul. According to 'Aṭṭār's explanation, these mystical valleys signify the stages of seeking, desire, recognition, independence, unity, stupor, and 'dénouement'.⁹ From Ghazālī, 'Aṭṭār has taken over three major topics: 1) the birds' decision to choose a king (in Ghazālī's report, this is the 'Anqā, the Arabic counterpart of the Sīmurgh, the mythical bird in the *Shāhnāma*; 2) the description of the adversities suffered by the birds during their search for the Sīmurgh; and 3) the first reception at the royal court of the 'Anqā, which is more a refusal than an acceptance. 'You have laboured in vain. We are the king no matter whether you agree or disagree, whether you arrive or leave!' This first, rather frosty answer, which the birds receive from the 'Anqā, is soon followed by a graceful reception. In 'Aṭṭār's epic, the herald of her Majesty, the Sīmurgh, says to the birds:

The herald said: 'This king for whom you grieve
Governs in glory you cannot conceive –
A hundred thousand armies are to Him
An ant that clammers up His threshold's rim,
And what are you? Grief is your fate – go back;
Retrace your steps along the pilgrims' track.'¹⁰

So this is the impasse encountered by the birds at the end of a long voyage accompanied by phenomena resembling each other and thus forming repetitive structures, such as the seven valleys. Yet the impasse is soon followed by a consoling *dénouement*.

In 'Aṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, the seven valleys do not constitute the only repetitive structure. There are others, such as the brief addresses of the hoopoe directed to the main birds – the hoopoe having been chosen as guide because it is mentioned in the Qur'ān as the eloquent bird in the service of Solomon – then the excuses of a large number of birds preferring to stay where they are, fearing the vicissitudes of the journey, each one receiving an answer from the hoopoe. These various repetitive structures are like an overture to the ultimate repetitive structure, that of the seven valleys, first described by the hoopoe, and then traversed by an ever-shrinking number of birds, the journey symbolizing the vertical *mi'rāj* of the Prophet as well as the individual soul's horizontal progress.

In these two epics, we have thus a basic repetitive structure of a similar function, engendering the narrative progress. We would therefore like to call this structure

'dynamic' or 'progressive'. In other epics of our author, the basic plot is also provided by repetitive structures, but their function is not progressive, but just additive, which we see, for instance, in the *Ilāhī-nāma* ('Book of the Divine'), where a king gives advice to his six sons,¹¹ or in the *Ushtur-nāma* ('Book of the Camel') where a puppeteer shows one puppet after the other and, its role completed, throws it back into the chest from which he had fetched it.¹²

Given the fact that some large scale repetitive structures in the work of 'Aṭṭār are clearly inspired by a sacred text model, one wonders if this is also the case in some much simpler cases. Such as, for example, a short legend, in which Moses successively encounters three persons at Mount Sinai. They ask him to convey a message of theirs to God. He does so and receives their respective answers. But here again, there is a little deadlock followed by dénouement: Moses refuses to reveal the impertinent message of the madman, the gist of which is, 'I (the madman) decided to abandon you (God)...!' God, however, insists on hearing this message, and when Moses discloses it, God shows His generosity by responding to the madman: 'Impatient one! You talk of abandoning the Creator; know that He will never abandon you – no matter whether you turn away from Him or not!' At any rate, the tripartite structure, with an element being repeated three times in the exposition of the narrative, and then again in the second part leading to the dénouement, is reminiscent of the so-called theodicy legend in the Qur'ān.¹³

The Tale of Marḥūma

In other cases of repetitive structures one would look in vain for models either in the Qur'ān or in the *ḥadīth*. A famous example is the story of Shaykh Ṣan'ān or Ṣam'ān in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* where the story of an old Sufi master who falls in love with a beautiful Christian girl is told as the case-history of an illness growing more and more severe to the point of complete madness, or in mystical terms, the complete annihilation of the lover's self. The Sufi Shaykh ends up by becoming a Christian, only to finally win over the girl by his love, making her convert to Islam and accepting him as her lover.¹⁴ This, then, is a fine example for a repetitive structure leading to a complete deadlock, from which only an unexpected turn, enacted by divine grace, can save the protagonist.

Another illustrative example is again a famous tale, this time from the *Ilāhī-nāma*, one of the longest ever told by 'Aṭṭār: it is the story of a woman as beautiful as she is pious, as courageous as she is faithful. The story occurs also in one version of the *Thousand and One Nights*, as well as in the Turkish version of the *Ṭūṭī-nāma*. The heroine's name is Marjūma or Marḥūma.¹⁵ Neglecting the other versions, I will give a summary of the 'Aṭṭār version and say a few words concerning the role of repetition in this long narrative.

Marḥūma is a married woman. One day, her husband departs to make the pilgrimage, leaving his wife under the protection of his brother. This latter falls in love with her, trying to seduce her *à tous prix*. When she refuses, he accuses her, with the help of four bought witnesses, of having committed adultery which, by the way, is a very common motif in the narrative literature of the Islamic world.¹⁶ She is convicted and, having been stoned, she remains lying in the dust of the steppe, drowning in her own blood. A Bedouin finds her, takes her into his tent, falls in love with her, but renounces his passion when she tells him that she is married. Yet, the Bedouin has a black slave, who starts accosting her and when she refuses him, takes revenge by killing the Bedouin's baby in its cradle and hiding the blood-stained knife under the woman's pillow. She protests her innocence and even though the Bedouin trusts her, she has to leave the house, because the Bedouin's wife insists on her departure. Travelling on the road, she beholds a gallows and a young man in the process of being hanged, because of a fiscal debt of 300 dirhems. She ransoms him with the 300 dirhems the Bedouin had given her for her journey. But shortly after, the adolescent falls in love with her, starts to molest her and continues to harass her in spite of her reproaches.

When they arrive at the coast of a sea, where a boat is ready to depart, he sells her to one of the merchants pretending she is his slave, whom he wants to get rid of because of her insubordination. The merchant purchases her, neglecting her protestations that she is a free woman. On board the ship, first the merchant, then the whole crew start desiring her. And when they decide to assault her and assuage their lust or, in other words, to commit a collective rape, she implores God for help. Immediately, a fire rises from the waves, falls upon the crew and burns them to ashes. A wind then drives the boat to the coast, where the woman, who has put on male dress, is received by the king and wins his favour. When the king feels his death approaching, he appoints the young guest as his successor. A deputation conveys to her the fact of her nomination and she answers, 'If I'm going to become a king, I'll need a queen. Bring me a hundred girls with their mothers, so that I may choose from among them.' Once these women have been assembled, she discloses to them her true sex, appoints a king and then installs herself in her oratory. Very soon, her renown as a saintly woman spreads across the country. Arriving back from his pilgrimage, her husband learns from his brother the false report about his wife's adultery, stoning and death. He is desolate. Yet he finds his brother in a bad state of health, paralysed and unable to move either his hands or feet. Shortly after, the man learns about that saintly woman and her healing power and he decides to take his brother to her. On their way they pass by the house of the Bedouin, where the black slave is also paralysed, so they take him with them. Finally they come to the village where the villainous young man lives. He, too, is paralysed, and they take him along as well.

When the group arrive at the oratory, the saintly woman recognizes her husband, puts on her veil and receives the four men. Having listened to the request of her

husband, she responds, 'Your brother has committed a great sin. If he does not admit it, he will stay palsied.' After much hesitation, the brother confesses his crime and is healed. The same process of repentance, confession and healing repeats itself with the two other sinners. Finally, the woman sends away the three healed ones, remaining alone with her husband. Now, she unveils her face before him, whereupon the man utters a scream and falls into a swoon. When he comes back to his senses, the woman asks him to tell his adventures and he says, 'I had a wife whom you resemble exactly. If only she weren't dead...' At this point she discloses to him her identity and tells him all the adventures she has passed through during his absence. Then she appoints him king of the town, with the faithful Bedouin as his vizier.

In this story, the repetition has a double function: on the one hand, it serves to illustrate the power of beauty and eros, and, no less, to unmask the banal and somewhat ridiculous mechanism of male desire, which is always the same when aroused by female beauty, in good and bad men alike; and on the other hand, it highlights the constancy, the moral strength and perseverance of the faithful woman.

Typically enough, the repetitive structure of this tale, reaching several almost complete deadlocks, always opens into new and unexpected vistas (comparable to the Tale of the Hunchback in the *Thousand and One Nights*) and finally turns back to the beginning. The repetitive structure itself is repeated, albeit in an abridged form, in the second half of the story – the way we know it from the theodicy legend in *sūra* 18 – where one segment after the other of the first part is taken up in the second. In the Qur'ānic text, the incomprehensible acts, wrought by Khidr, 'God's friend', in the first part, are explained in the second; in the Marḥūma story, the crimes committed in the first part are forgiven through the confession of the perpetrators in the second.

Repetitive Structures in 'Aṭṭār's Longer Poems

One has to be aware of the fact that repetition in literature, as in music, even though it is not quite devoid of a spatial dimension, is mainly based on temporal structures, with one event following the other. In contradistinction to this, the repetition in painting, decoration and calligraphy is purely spatial. It may however occur that such a spatial structure, consisting in the repetition of a visual motif on a surface, is described in a literary text, or illustrates such a text. A fine example is the pictorial stratagem used by Zulaykhā in order to arouse Yūsuf's desire for her. This story is mentioned in the *Muṣibat-nāma*. 'She ordered a chamber to be erected and its walls to be covered with pictures of her face. So all four walls as well as the ceiling showed just the face of Zulaykhā! Furthermore she had a carpet woven to the size of that room on which, again, her face was the only design.'¹⁷ Jāmī in his epic poem on this Biblico-Qur'ānic couple is even more outspoken: according to him,

the motif, repeated all over the walls of the room, showed not just Zulaykhā's face, but Zulaykhā and Yūsuf in the act of embracing.¹⁸ In a very convincing manner, this scene exemplifies a fundamental function of repetition, that of amassing an almost magical energy.¹⁹

So far we have been dealing with repetitive patterns structuring a whole narrative unit. However, there are also some other, less comprehensive, more limited forms of repetition,²⁰ emerging like a whirlpool in a river or sea. Let me briefly mention two such phenomena.

One is the anaphora, which, typically enough, tends to appear in hymnic passages written in praise of God or the Prophet Muḥammad.²¹ Some fine examples are to be found in the introductory chapters of the *Ilāhī-nāma*. Thus, for example, 'Aṭṭār starts a sequel of nineteen lines with the exclamatory particle, *zahi*, 'how great!'/ 'how wonderful!', to enumerate Divine qualities. The first two lines run as follows:

How great is His rank, before which (everything) from Fish to Moon
is like a hair in its blackness!
How great is His power, which is so free from want that so many
(human) intelligences and souls are a mere plaything before Him!²²

And again, he uses this same anaphora in the hymnic praise of Muḥammad in the *Asrār-nāma*:

O what rank, what power, what might!
O what a lord, what a truth-speaker, what a chancellor!
O king-like ruler of the world of dust!
O emperor of the kingdom of the spheres!
O you for whom the highest throne is but a mere threshold!
O you for whom the seven skies are just one of His houses!²³

The same stratagem is also used several times in a profane love story in the *Ilāhī-nāma* – albeit one with a mystical dimension – linked with the name of the medieval Persian poetess Rābi'a, daughter of Ka'b. At the beginning there is a passage with a repetitive structure forming part of the description of the young lady's father, a prince. Twelve lines all begin with the preposition, *zi*, 'through':

Through his insight, sun and moon possess light and splendour,
Through his generosity the people of virtue/art
enjoy fame and food.
Through his justice mouse and wolf live together,
Wolves live now in peace with each other.
Through fear of him the waters of the seas are boiling
And yet as silent as fire is in stone...²⁴

At the end of this long and heartbreaking story, after some shorter repetitive structures, the complaints of the male hero culminate in another one of some eight lines, each beginning with *az īn*, 'with this...':

With these tears that are coming upon my face, I will wash all unwashed faces!
 With this blood, if ever I find release from here²⁵
 I will drown all lovers in rose-like red.
 With this fire, that I am burning with,
 I will show the seven hells how to burn...²⁶

That all these structures are power structures is evident from the few lines we have translated.

The other phenomenon consists in the repetition of one and the same word not at the beginning or at the end, but somewhere in the middle of a number of subsequent verses. This may happen in certain short stories that lend themselves to this practice, which I called 'cluster structure' in my writings on Niẓāmī, who is fond of this kind of repetition. A good example of this phenomenon in the works of 'Aṭṭār are two amusing little narratives about problems connected with having a big beard (*rīsh*). The first is about a dervish who is so enamoured of his beard that he is deprived of receiving the divine grace. But when God lets him know his error, and he tears out his beard, Gabriel appears and tells him he is still, and even more than before, preoccupied with his beard instead of being devoted exclusively to God.

The second story is about a fool who is drowning because of his huge beard.²⁷ But when a spectator warns him to take off his bag (*tūbara*), he snaps: 'this is not my bag, but my beard.'²⁸ Both stories are somewhat funny, notwithstanding their serious message. Over the course of twenty-eight lines, the word *rīsh* appears no less than twenty-six times, often twice in one line. Thus, the heaviness, the cumbersome dimension of the beard is, as it were, implanted inside the verbal structure.²⁹ It should not go unnoticed however, that the sense of the repeated word does not change; 'Aṭṭār does not even make use of the other two meanings of *rīsh*, 'wound(ed)' and 'feather', along the lines of phonetically similar words such as *rīsha*, 'root', etc. Even though his texts are not completely devoid of such rhetoric figures as *tajnīs* and *ihām*, he uses them to a much lesser degree than does, for instance, Niẓāmī.

Another very impressive example is a sequence of forty-two verses (that I have translated and annotated in the Afterword below) in the introduction of the *Asrār-nāma*, where, in his praise of the prophet Muḥammad, 'Aṭṭār repeats the words *angusht*, 'finger', *angisht*, 'charcoal' and *angushtar*, 'signet-ring', arguing for instance, that he does not need Solomon's ring by which he ruled the demons, because the whole universe is under his finger's sway. This repetitive structure thus again serves the expression of power.

Repetitive Structures in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Dīwān*

Before coming to my conclusions, I would like to make some brief observations about the role of repetition in ‘Aṭṭār’s lyrics. When one looks through the more than 800 *ghazals* of his *Dīwān*, it soon becomes evident that he does not use any conspicuous repetitive structures exceeding those typical of the genre, that is, monorhyme and *radīf*. These again are only rarely exploited to build up power, even though the power of love is the dominant subject of the whole *Dīwān*. Reiteration does exist, for instance, in the word *zulf*, ‘a lock of hair’ that appears in many *ghazals*, sometimes even in several successive lines, but these repetitions do not resemble those discussed above, since there are hardly any structures used or intended to build up power. This becomes particularly clear when one looks at the *radīfs* used by ‘Aṭṭār. Those words charged with power that hallmark Rūmī’s *Dīwān* are almost completely absent from ‘Aṭṭār’s.³⁰ The six *ghazals* with ‘*ishq*, ‘love’ as their *radīf* form a notable exception. Another exception is the *ghazal* with the *radīf* of *āftāb*, ‘sun’, where this metaphor, frequent in ‘Aṭṭār’s lyrical poetry, is in fact used to build up power.

O you, – the sun’s face is (yellow) as gold from envy for your fair face.
Never has the sun grown a jewel like your lip.
When the parrot of your cheek’s down opens its wings,
The sun with its hundreds of wings disappears in the shadow of that wing.
If the sun were not an atom of your face,
It would never be as illuminated as your face.³¹

But these verses are no more powerful than the many statements about the sun in ‘normal’ *ghazals*, for instance, the initial verse of a *ghazal* without any *radīf*, which runs thus:

O you, the sun is (just) a verse (*āya*) from the leaf of your face,
Compared with your ruby cup (your lips) the Kawthar (pool
in Paradise) is (just) a (plain) tale.³²

Substantive *radīfs* have thus not attracted ‘Aṭṭār in the way they attracted other Persian poets. The reason may be that they are particularly difficult to handle, requiring a degree of refined artistry that was not normally favoured by our poet, who prefers a certain simplicity in his style. His evocation of the might and power of love is expressed spontaneously, whether that be in poems without any *radīf*, or in poems with simple *radīfs*, such as ‘again’ (*bāz*) or ‘it is’ (*ast*). Power – the power of love, of the Friend – is omnipresent in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Dīwān*, but here it is not so much built up with the help of repetitive structures as it is emphasized by means of metaphors and hyperboles. The underlying principle is the same that I have described

of love and of the pain of love, as he expressed it in the moving lines and surprising self-address at the end of his *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, where he mixes self-praise with contrition in a way reminiscent of Nizāmī's poem on the King of Kings.³⁷ Since perhaps even to look at repetitive structures in his work in the way we have attempted here may be a distraction from the central spiritual message of his verse, I will leave the last word on the form and function of repetition in 'Aṭṭār's verse to the poet himself:

Through you the world is filled to the horizons with scent;³⁸
 Through you the lovers of the world are impassioned.
 Your poetry gave the lovers their capital;
 It gave them an ornament for ever.
 Do not, O man, look at my book
 From the angle of poetics and logic.³⁹
 Look in my copy-book from the angle of pain,
 So that you will believe me (at least) one out of a hundred pains.
 The polo-ball of bliss is borne off
 By those who look at it from the angle of pain.
 Whoever did not perceive the scent of this kind of speech,
 Has not gained so much as one hair of love.
 The adherents of form are drowned in my words;
 The adherents of inner sense are the folk of my secrets.
 My poetry has a strange particularity:
 It bestows ever more gain!
 If it is possible for you to read much of it,
 No doubt it will please more every time you read it.⁴⁰

Afterword

'Aṭṭār's use of repetitive structures, which has been discussed above, is vividly illustrated in the following section from the *Asrār-nāma*.⁴¹ The translation below presents a sequence of forty-two verses, each of which contains three words closely connected semantically or phonetically, with some verses containing two such words together. Thus, the word *angusht* (finger) is related by assonance to *angisht* (charcoal), occurring three times. Enlarged by a suffix, *angusht* appears as *angushtar(i)* (signet-ring), occurring nine times, and once in *angushtwāna* (knuckle-duster).

In this passage, the archangel Gabriel addresses the Prophet Muḥammad with many, often obscure, references to his biography, most of which I have tried to elucidate in notes.⁴²

According to the exegete⁴³ who is trustworthy,

even though, according to some people, he is not:
 When he [Muḥammad] turned the signet-ring,
 Gabriel appeared to instruct him:⁴⁴
 O Lord, let your heart be detached from the ring!
 For no dealing with rings can give (your affair) any lustre.
 The spheric sky (already) has a ring-like hump because of you,
 why should you trouble it with your ring!
 Your heart is in the fingers of the Merciful!⁴⁵
 Don't look for a ring the way Solomon did.
 For, no matter whether your ring be engraved with a name
 or made of gold, which incidentally, is illicit:⁴⁶
 You should turn in your fingers a rosary,
 for this is what pious men (*mardān*) have in their hands.
 Since the moon was a knuckle-duster (*angushtwāna*, lit. thumbstall)
 for your fingers,
 with your finger you poked out the eye of your day and age.⁴⁷
 Upon each finger you have more than a hundred crafts,
 why do you fetter your heart with a ring?
 It is befitting that you should bind your fingers with a cord,
 in order to be reminded of pain!⁴⁸
 You will not be able to endure the Almighty's rebuke
 if ever without us, you wash in water your fingers!⁴⁹
 Don't turn away from us even by the tip of a hair,
 don't neglect even as much as a hair of your fingers!
 If your fingers are right at work,
 take them off from the bloody cotton!⁵⁰
 Reckon your own work with your fingers,
 so that you may easily confront the Last Judgement.
 I turn my finger upon this point,
 since, apart from you, nobody can approach me.
 That is why I wag my finger at you:
 since you are the pupil and I am the teacher.
 Did not you, equipped with all tranquillity (*ba-ṣad rawḥ*)⁵¹ through
 Qur'ānic knowledge,
 put your finger before us upon the heavenly table (*lawḥ*)?!⁵²
 By dint of the Meccan war over the hailstone-like finger-tips,
 you won your kingdom by the finger.⁵³
 No pen has ever been in your fingers,⁵⁴
 and yet the people of the pen owe you all their glory.
 Through your glory, reason and soul are perplexed;
 the intellect put its finger upon its mouth in amazement.⁵⁵
 The two worlds, totally depending on you (*tufayl-i tu*),

on the day of resurrection, will be confronted with one finger.⁵⁶
 You are without shadow,⁵⁷ and before you the sun
 like a child (*tiflī*) is sucking in longing its finger.
 The sun pitched its tent on the spheric sky
 in order to take a pinch of salt with you with its finger.
 Since you bear the fountain of Khiḍr in your palm,
 bring forth a fountain from under each finger!⁵⁸
 From the earthen plains, step up on the divine Throne,
 since the distance from your departure to the Throne is just a finger.
 Should Gabriel advance by just a finger,
 his wings would burn like charcoal (*angisht*).⁵⁹
 Because of your light, the saints (in Heaven) spread their wings
 and mutually point at you with their fingers.
 No apostle equals you in his mission.
 The fingers of the hand are not all equal.
 Not that one will enjoy *ḥalwā*
 who has the longest fingers.
 Go and put your finger on the pulse of the truthful one,⁶⁰
 for he has a heart full of the light of truth.
 Tell 'Umar to rise up in righteous rage
 and poke a finger into Satan's eye!⁶¹
 Tell 'Uthmān to become powerful through the Qur'ān,
 leafing through it with his fingers.
 Tell 'Alī to abandon, for the sake of leadership,
 being ringleader during the ritual prayer.
 Go and combat the idol-worshippers,
 make their world (as narrow) as the circle of a ring.
 If you are asked to perform a miracle,
 point with your finger at the moon.⁶²
 Render religion glorious by your truthfulness,
 wipe out the moon in the sky with your finger (or: a piece of charcoal).
 Your rival bites his finger out of rage,⁶³
 while you cut the moon asunder with your finger.
 If he abstains from your religion, even by a finger-tip,
 string him up with a few strands of hemp robe!
 From this herd of cattle unfit for your time
 draw back the fingers (of your hand) [as] from the poisoned goat.⁶⁴
 If even as much as one counts on the fingers of them (your foes)
 enter your land, nobody then will protect your religion.
 Recite the Qur'ān, don't become silent, O friend,
 even if the unbeliever puts his fingers into his ears.
 When Bilāl puts his fingers at his ears,

he reduces all other speech to silence.⁶⁵
 If they throw a heavy stone at your lips,⁶⁶
 go, put your finger upon your lips, be silent!

Notes

1. Cf. A. Riegl, *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie* (Vienna, 1927), and my *The Feather of Simurgh: The ‘Licit Magic’ of the Arts in Medieval Islam* (New York, 1988).
2. Cf. my article ‘Repetitive Structures in Early Arabic Prose’ in F. Malti-Douglas ed., *Critical Pilgrimages: Studies in the Arabic Literary Tradition*, Literature East & West 25 (Austin, TX, 1989), pp. 49–64.
3. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. M. al-Nawāwī, M. Abū’l-Faḍl, Ibrāhīm M. Khafājī, (Cairo, 1376/1957), vol. 9, p. 118.
4. Cf. Faridoddin ‘Aṭṭār, *Le livre de l’épreuve (Muṣibat-nāma)*, tr. Isabelle de Gastines (Paris, 1981).
5. Cf. my article ‘Die Erfahrung von Mächtigkeit in der islamischen Mystik’, in Ch. Scharfetter and Ch. Räscher, ed., *Welten des Bewusstseins*, Bd. 9. Religion Mystik – Schamanismus (Berlin, 1998), pp. 79–105.
6. MT; *The Conference of the Birds*, tr. by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (New York, 1984).
7. French translation of the versions of Avicenna and al-Ghazālī, in H. Corbin, *Avicenne et le récit visionnaire*, 1: Étude sur le cycle des récits avicenniens (Tehran and Paris, 1954), pp. 217–222, 226–227.
8. ‘Il semble qu’entre le Récit d’Avicenne et celui de Ghazālī, il n’y ait de commun que Le symbole de l’Oiseau et le thème du pèlerinage des Oiseaux vers le Roi.’ (It would appear that between the recitation of Avicenna and that of al-Ghazālī, there is nothing in common except for the Symbol of the Bird and the theme of pilgrimage towards the King.) Corbin, *Avicenne*, p. 227.
9. Ibid., p. 228.
10. Tr. Darbandi and Davis, p. 216; MT, vv. 4175–4178. The Persian text reads:

Guft ān chāwūsh k̄ay sargashtigān
Hamchu gul dar khūn-i dil āghashtigān
Gar shumā bāshīd wagar na dar jahān
Ū-st muṭlaq pādishāh-i jāwidān
Ṣad hazārān ‘ālam-i pur az sipāh
Hast mūrī bar dar-i īn pādishāh
Az shumā ākhīr chi khīzad juz zaḥīr
Bāz pas gardīd ay mushtī ḥaqīr.

11. *Ilāhī-nāma*, F. Rūḥānī, ed. (Tehran, n.d.); *The Ilāhī-nāma or Book of God of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār* tr. J.A. Boyle (Manchester, 1976); summary in *Meer*, pp. 4–8.
12. *Ushtur-nāma*, ed. Mahdī Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1339 Sh./1961; repr., Tehran, 1979); brief summary in *Meer*, p. 42.

13. Cf. my 'Repetitive Structures' (as in n.2), p. 53f.
14. MT, vv. 1185–1593 pp. 67–88; English tr. by Darbandi and Davis, pp. 57–75. [See also the essay by Christopher Shackle above – eds.]
15. *Ilāhī-nāma*, pp. 31–47; summary in *Meer*, pp. 353–356.
16. Cf. S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (3rd ed., Bloomington, 1975).
17. *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 94.
18. *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā*, in Mudarris-i Gilānī, ed., *Haft Awrang* (Tehran, n.d.) p. 673; for a miniature representing the scene, see R. Hillenbrand, *Imperial Images in Persian Painting* (Edinburgh, 1977), no. 175.
19. For repetition in mystical liturgies see my 'Die Erfahrung von Mächtigkeit in der islamischen Mystik' (see n. 5).
20. For the role of repetitive structures in the Persian *ghazal*, such as the *radīf* (refrain) or the anaphora, cf. my *The Feather of Simurgh*, pp. 80f., and my article 'Speech is a Ship and Meaning the Sea: Some Formal Aspects of the Ghazal Poetry of Rumi', in Amin Banani, et al., *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: the Heritage of Rumi* (New York and Cambridge, 1996), pp. 44–69.
21. Masterful use of anaphora is made by Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī in his romance *Wīs u Rāmīn*; cf. *The Feather of Simurgh*, p. 82.
22. *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 1:

Zahī rutbat kih az mah tā bi-māhī
Buwad pīshash chu mū'ī az siyāhī
Zahī 'izzat kih chandān bī-niyāzī-st
Kih chandīn 'aql-u-jān ānjā bi-bāzī-st...

23. *Asrār-nāma*, ed. S. Gawharīn, vv. 243–249. Except for the last two lines, both hemistiches begin with *zahī*.
24. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. H. Ritter (Tehran, 1359 Sh./1980), p. 330, vv. 5–7.
25. The hero has been thrown into a pit.
26. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. Ritter, p. 351, vv. 14, 15, 16.
27. Illustrations to this story are discussed by Michael Barry in his essay in this volume – eds.
28. MT, vv. 2974–87; tr. by Darbandi and Davis, pp. 152–153.
29. It should be noted that Nizāmī's clusters are much more refined, in that the meaning of the repeated word often changes from line to line.
30. Cf. my 'Speech is a Ship', pp. 44–69.
31. Dt, *ghazal* 11, vv. 1–2.
32. Ibid., *ghazal* 775, v. 1.
33. *Allmacht und Mächtigkeit. Religion und Welt im Islam* (Munich, 1991), esp. pp. 30ff.
34. *Dīwān-i 'Aṭṭār*, *ghazal* 776, v. 10; the Persian text reads: '*Aṭṭār agar bi-kullī az khud khalāṣ yābad / yak juzw-i jānash āyad nuh charkh-i lājvardī*.'
35. Qur'ān 2: 67–71, the name-giving passage of this *sūra*.
36. For further detail, see my 'Repetitive Structures.'
37. Cf. my 'L'autoportrait de Nizāmī dans sa qasida Roi des Rois', in *La signification du bas moyen age dans l'histoire et la culture du monde musulman*. Actes du 8me Congrès de

l'Union Européenne des Arabisants et islamisants (Aix-en-Provence, 1978), pp. 45–51.

38. *ʿIṭr* – allusion to his name 'Aṭṭār. [See also the essay by Husayn Ilahi-Ghomshei above – eds.]

39. *Shi'r u kubrā -Kubrā* is the major term of a syllogism, and thus here *pars pro toto* for logic; therefore I have translated *shi'r* as 'poetics' rather than 'poetry'.

40. MT, vv. 4457, 4459, 4468–4469, 4473, 4475, 4478–4479.

41. *Asrār-nāma*, ed. S.S. Gawharīn (Tehran, 1338 Sh./ 1959), pp.14– 16; vv. 199–241.

42. For the elucidation of these verses, I used the notes by Gawharin (G), which, however, do not always illuminate all the obscurities of the text. I am indebted and deeply grateful to my friend and colleague Dr Leonard Lewisohn, who kindly suggested solutions and correct translations for a number of difficult verses.

43. *Mufasssir*: I cannot tell who 'Aṭṭār is referring to here.

44. When Muḥammad decided to send letters to the rulers and kings of neighbouring empires inviting them to accept Islam, he was told that they would not be accepted if they were not sealed. So he ordered a signet-ring to be made of gold. He was followed in this by his disciples, until the archangel Gabriel appeared and informed him that to wear and use golden vessels and signet-rings was forbidden for his community. So he replaced his golden ring by a silver ring. (*Asrār-nāma*, G's note, p. 223).

45. Allusion to the *ḥadīth*: "The hearts of men are all between two fingers of the Merciful like one heart, which He turns where he wills." *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 8, 51. (G)

46. See n. 44 above.

47. That is, escaped/overwhelmed it, apparently a reference to the miraculous capacity of *ṭayy al-zamān wa'l-makān* = the folding up of time and space, attributed to mystical saints in Islamic hagiographies: cf. R. Gramlich, *Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes. Theologien und Erscheinungsformen des Heiligenwunders*. Freiburger Islamstudien 11 (Wiesbaden 1987), p. 287 ff. L. Lewisohn thinks the whole verse refers to Muḥammad's miracle of splitting the moon (cf. below, n. 62)

48. To bind a cord on one's finger was a means to remind oneself of things (G).

49. As L. Lewisohn suggests, this is a reference to the ablution before ritual prayers.

50. Perhaps a reference to birth and delivery, i.e. an admonishment to leave childhood behind. It might, however, also be a reference to a particular incident in the life of Muḥammad.

51. This reading is suggested by the rhyme and adopted by G. Still, *rūḥ* = spirit would seem to be the more appropriate reading: 'Equipped with a hundred spirits.'

52. A reference to the pre-existence of Muḥammad.

53. Probably an allusion to the Qur'ān's mention of the non-believers, who, 'When they meet you they say: "We believe", but when they go privily, they bite at you their fingers, enraged. Say: "Die of your rage; God knows the thoughts in the breasts"' (3:119, tr., A.J. Arberry). The Arabic *barad al-anāmīl*, "the hail-stones of finger-tips" seems to be a quotation from an old Arabic poem, even though *barad* is normally used as a metaphor for teeth, not for fingers.

54. A reference to the illiteracy of Muḥammad.

55. A reference to the well-known gesture of astonishment.

56. This probably refers to Muḥammad's intercession on the Day of Judgment (L. Lewisohn).

57. In later hagiography, Muḥammad was said to cast no shadow (G. 225).

58. According to some hagiographic sources, Muḥammad's fingers shone with light (G. 225). This miracle was, however, usually attributed to Rābi'a al-'Adawīya.

59. According to Persian *mi'rāj* accounts, the archangel who led Muḥammad during his heavenly ascension was not allowed to follow him beyond the *sidrat al-muntahā* up to the highest point, cf. T. Nünlist, *Himmelfahrt und Heiligkeit im Islam*. Studia Religiosa Helvetica, 6 (Bern, Berlin, etc., 2002), p. 360ff. Gabriel is reported to have said: 'If I come closer by a finger's breadth, I shall burn.' (G. 225).

60. Referring to Abū Bakr, known as *al-Ṣiddīq* (the truthful one), given this sobriquet because he was the first to believe Muḥammad when the latter related his ascension (G. 226f.).

61. According to G. this is an allusion to the *ḥadīth*: 'There is nobody whom his devil did not overcome except 'Umar who overcame his devil.'

62. Allusion to the 'splitting of the moon' (*shaqq al-qamar*), mentioned in *sūra* 54:1, which was often interpreted as a miracle wrought by the Prophet.

63. Cf. note 53.

64. Muḥammad was brought a roasted goat, which was poisoned, but he refused to eat from it. When his disciples asked him the reason of his refusal he answered: 'the roasted goat said to me: "My meat has been poisoned."' (G. 230). The herd of cattle must then refer to those people who brought him the goat.

65. Bilāl, the first *mu'adhdhin*, recited the *idhān* with his fingers at (behind) his ears.

66. Allusion to an incident during the battle of Uḥud: The apostle 'was hit with a stone so that he fell on his side and one of his teeth was smashed, his face scored, and his lip injured.' Ibn Hishām, *The Life of Muhammad*, a Translation of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, tr. A. Guillaume (London, 1966), p. 380; cf. my 'The Idea of Non-violence in the Epic Poetry of Nizāmī', *Edebiyat*, 9 (1998), pp. 61–84, esp. pp. 66f.

Didactic Style and Self-Criticism in Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār

MUHAMMAD ISA WALEY

Introduction

This chapter examines some elements in the didactic style and message of the sage of Nishapur, including the self-criticism characteristic of this author and its place in his work. By examining selected passages, we can find clues for the task of disengaging the real from the apparent ‘Aṭṭār. It is not so much a matter of deciding which works are authentic, more of seeing how the poetical modes and moments of the undisputedly ‘Aṭṭārian works relate to one another; and hence, how they can best be interpreted, and which of the author’s paradoxical or apparently contradictory statements can be taken at face value and which cannot.

‘Aṭṭār’s Didactic Style and Aims in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā* (‘Memoirs of the Saints’)

We begin with a passage that announces in clear prose the author’s view of the spiritual needs of the people of Khurasan in his times, and also his mission to celebrate the *Awliyā*, the beloved ones of God (often translated as ‘saints’), and their spiritual states and sayings, the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*.¹ In his introduction, *Āghāz-i kitāb*, ‘Aṭṭār enumerates the motives that impelled him to compile such a work. Towards the end, he declares:

Another reason was that this [the sayings of the *Awliyā*] is the best of all discourses in several ways. Firstly, it renders the world cold in a man’s heart; second, it gives a man a reminder of the Hereafter; third, it makes the love of God appear in a man’s heart; fourth, when a man hears this kind of talk he may begin to make his travelling provisions for the journey to the Infinite’ (or, ‘for the journey without end’).²

Let us examine just what ‘Aṭṭār is saying. Earlier in the preface he describes the impact that tales of the saints had had upon him since his youth. Now he makes four statements, all consonant with the belief that there is no more beneficial or necessary knowledge or admonition than that concerned with putting an overwhelming concern with the Hereafter in the place of the potentially fatal attachment to this transitory world that appears natural to the unenlightened soul. The author does not give any place here to any explicit concern with inducing people to admire and adopt the ethical virtues, unlike Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, and other writers who are in a sense apologists – at least, from the viewpoint of the *malāmatiyya*, or seekers of blame, the strain of Sufism to which ‘Aṭṭār belongs in some respects. Intrinsically, of course, these ethical concerns are contained here under the rubric of ‘making the love of God manifest in a man’s heart’ and ‘beginning to make travelling provisions for the journey that has no end’. This passage, then, amounts to a brief and candid exposition of four didactic motives – enumerated in the previous paragraph – to which we shall return later. The text continues:

That being so, the compilation of such sayings was an obligation [for me]. One may say that there is no better book in Creation than this, for their words [those of the saints] are commentaries upon the Qur’ān and Traditions (*Akhbār*), which are the best words of all. It can also be said that this is a book that makes men (*mard*) of the effeminate (*mukhannathān*); men into lions of men (*shīr-i mard*); lions of men into unique men (*fard*); and unique men into embodiments of passion (*‘ayn-i dard*). How, indeed, could one not become an embodiment of passion? For anyone who reads this book as it should be read will become aware as to what was the longing in those men’s souls, that such deeds and words of such a character emerged from their hearts.

In this passage, I have translated the word *dard* as ‘passion’. The literal meaning is ‘pain’, but in this context it seems preferable to use a word suggestive of transformative suffering and longing. Lest its use be misinterpreted, ‘passion’ here connotes something far more profound than a simple excess of emotion. Moreover, the suffering and longing in question are not to be sought for their own sake, but are the driving force behind these men’s spiritual progression. Now, the foregoing passage contains three assertions that cast further light on ‘Aṭṭār’s didacticism.

Firstly, he claims superiority for the *dicta* of the saints over the classical commentaries on both the Qur’ān and the *hadīth*, the corpus of Prophetic Tradition (whose ultimate supremacy are nonetheless proclaimed earlier on in the preface). While some of the greatest Qur’ān commentators (*mufasssirūn*), and scholars and exegetes of Prophetic Tradition (*muḥaddithūn*), hailed from Khurasan, so also did many of the ecstatic Sufis. And in accordance with his assertion of the primacy of

the words of God's Friends, 'Aṭṭār claims that 'one may say that there is no better book in [all] Creation' than the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*'.

Secondly, this passage shows that the transformative power of the discourse of the saints, even as mediated in written form, is for 'Aṭṭār axiomatic. How indeed, he asks rhetorically, could one not become an embodiment of passion after reading the book attentively and grasping the inner states from which their words and deeds arose? In our time it requires an effort of the imagination to appreciate fully the impact that the word, read or spoken, could exercise on people in medieval times, when there were scholars and saints who possessed prestige and influence analogous in some ways to that now enjoyed by certain show business personalities and sportsmen. At any rate, this emphasis on the words of the saints rather than those of the 'schoolmen' situates Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār firmly in the camp of the people of *ishārat*, or spiritual symbolism and esoteric allusion, rather than of the 'ulamā', or mainstream scholars of religion.

Thirdly, our writer evokes a spiritual progression in degrees of manhood. It should be noted that the use of the word *mard* here indicates spiritual accomplishment and does not exclude women, who certainly play significant roles in religious life as depicted by 'Aṭṭār. Highest are the *fard* and the 'ayn-i *dard*. A *fard* is an 'individual' distinguished by apparently unique attainment or spiritual character. This Sufi term also perhaps evokes another: *mutafarriḍ*, someone devoted to a single goal – realization of Divine Unity at the most elevated level. But highest of all, according to the sage of Nishapur, is the 'ayn-i *dard* or embodiment of longing, of passion readily endured for the sake of God.³

Who is he? He is, it would appear, a person whose every word and deed evince an inner pain and passion (*dard*): if this is sorrow, it is heartfelt grief at being separated from the Divine Beloved; if it is a longing, it is a longing for the Vision of God. But if he be of the highest spiritual rank, the most 'manly' and lion-hearted of spiritual men, the 'ayn-i *dard* is one whose passion has brought him to an exceptional state. One who is the embodiment of passion can no longer be 'somebody' in himself. He has already died before his physical death, in accordance with the maxim *mūtū qabla an tamūtū*, meaning 'Die before you die'. The Sufi terms *al-fanā' bi-Llāh* and *al-baqā' bi-Llāh*, passing away through God and living on through God, will be sufficiently familiar to most readers of this book not to require more elucidation.⁴ Such, then, is the apex of humanity according to Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār.

Remembering that inducing the reader to prepare for 'the journey to the Infinite' is one of the explicit aims of *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, we shall return later to the subject of death and its meaning, and the lessons presented on this subject in other works of 'Aṭṭār.

The Changing Landscape: Light and Darkness on the Path

Another key theme in 'Aṭṭār is that the conditions of earthly life take every thinking human being, the worldly and the spiritual alike, through an ever-changing interior landscape. In his poem *Ilāhī-nāma*, he tells a tale about a pious and powerful king who found himself in need of some means to cope with this aspect of the human condition.

'One day, strange to say', he told [his court sages]:
 'A state of distress keeps coming over me.
 A desire most strange has arisen in my heart,
 though I know not from what cause it arose.
 Make me a pure ring of such a kind
 that whenever I feel very sorrowful,
 by looking at it I become glad-hearted
 and free from the clutches of sorrow, that Turk.'
 The sages asked him to give them some time.
 Those great wise men then sat down together.
 They pondered and meditated at length,
 spending blood, sweat and tears on the task at hand.
 Finally they agreed on a firm decision –
 resolved a single design for the ring.
 'Make haste to inscribe this motto upon it:
 "This too shall soon enough pass away".'⁵

In those whose primary concern is with worldly well-being, joy and sorrow are apt to prevail alternately according to circumstances. For those in love with God, spiritual 'contraction' and 'expansion' (*qabḍ* and *baṣṭ* in Arabic and Persian) alternate like night and day, according to the degree to which they perceive themselves to be close to or far from their Beloved. As a man of passionate longing, 'Aṭṭār shows vividly how the state of a person's heart is manifested in their words. Those alternations colour his perceptions of his reception by his audience; his own view of his poetry; and many other things. From the viewpoint of 'contraction' and of the ego, physical death is the most fearsome of prospects and food for the most morbid reflection; from the viewpoint of 'expansion' and of the spirit, the prospect of death is to be embraced as bringing liberation from the confines of the mortal body and of this transient and ultimately doomed world with all its limitations. 'Aṭṭārian self-criticism and self-praise, to be discussed later, may also be connected with the alternation of *qabḍ* and *baṣṭ*.

Didactic Aims in the Diwan and the Mukhtar-nama Undoubtedly

'Attar saw himself as a poet with a mission, with urgent messages to convey. The picture we gain from the written sources is of a man with both an apothecary's shop and a circle of spiritual followers of some kind - although not, apparently, as a recognized and authorized Sufi murshid or as a scholar in the other religious sciences. If this picture is factually correct, it is perhaps not so surprising that ' Attar sometimes felt that there was no one who really understood what he wanted to convey. In one qasida he complains thus:

If I spoke in ways that chime with every poet's
mind,
No doubt I would have less to say to ordinary men.

My heart holds the secret of the Universe, yet
people's unworthiness leaves me speechless.
If there were any worthiness in you, I would tell it
to you.

How long will you say, 'Don't leave your heart's
secret unsaid - tell it'?
Won't you tell me: if I should tell it, then to whom?

There are smart people who can bring me answers
from their saddle-packs,
If I speak figuratively of asses in their presence.

But where is he who could hear mysteries from me
and understand them?
To such a one I would tell some new mystery each
moment.

Where is there one who can raise his mind's feet
above Illusion,
So I might speak to him of things far loftier than
God's Throne?

Where is there one who will take due warning from
this hellish realm,
So I might give him an admonitory commentary in a
hundred ways?

Where is there one who will not make himself judge
of all he sees,
That I might recite to his heart the formula of the
Changeless World?

experienced annihilation (*fanā*) and is thus completely dead, in the positive sense of dying to self. Part of the problem is, perhaps, that such adepts no longer need to listen to poets in order to 'take due warning from this hellish realm'. Notable is the lament of the lack of any listener 'who will not make himself judge of all he sees': someone humble enough to admit the limitations of their own knowledge and perspective, as distinct from 'smart people who can bring me answers from their saddle-packs'.

Lyric poems, as we know, are crystallizations of particular 'states' (*aḥwāl*) and 'moments' (*awqāt*). One may surmise that 'Aṭṭār did in fact find a worthy audience at times, the above *ghazal* representing a less harmonious moment. All the same, it seems that recognition on a wide scale, far beyond the poet's homeland, was a long time coming. By then he had left this world and embarked on his 'journey to the Infinite'. One is reminded of the story of Firdawsi's long-awaited recompense finally arriving through one gate of his native city just as his funeral procession left by another gate. As we shall see, 'Aṭṭār does allude poignantly to the treatment of the master bard of Tūs in his *Ilāhī-nāma*.

Here, by contrast, is an example of 'Aṭṭār's didactic lyricism in positive mode:

*Love's Happening*⁷

Love's happening leaves no mark that can be seen:
it's tough – the door's locked and there is no key!

As long as you're 'you', you can't be a real Lover:
you have to sell yourself, and purchase Love.

You'll not track down one speck of what you seek
till you vanish like a speck from what 'you' are.

You need something to happen, in order to hear;
you must have a stomach (*hawṣila*) in order to taste.

Love can't be perfect until you see True Beauty.
To hear the real truth, you must listen correctly.

If you're a lover, act; if you've nothing, bear that:
this superficiality won't make the Beloved appear.

Be burned, and then maybe you will catch fire –
once His fire's struck, He's picked out the ones who are burnt.

Look for passion, feel pain. That which I had sought
appeared, and right then life came to an end.

The King of Love pitched his tent outside my heart,
the Beloved broke right in, and Reason was silenced.

All I had, wet or dry, He burnt up in a trice.
Unveiling His Face, He tore down my veil.

Heedless heart, don't sleep. Get up! The One we love
is resting in those Lovers' breasts before us.

Now 'Aṭṭār's heart's the songbird of Passion's bower;
his love for the Friend brings new flowers each moment.⁸

Now, this *ghazal* clearly comprises two parts. In the first, the poet argues that it is our notion of self-identity that constitutes the greatest obstacle to spiritual realization:

As long as you're 'you', you can't be a real Lover –
you have to sell yourself, and purchase Love.

You'll not track down one speck of what you seek
till you vanish like a speck from what 'you' are.

Furthermore, he says, spiritual progress also necessitates being prepared to change radically and the stomach (that is, the desire, capacity, courage and endurance) to experience hunger for the new:

You need something to happen in order to hear;
you must have a stomach (*hawṣila*) in order to taste.

The transition between the first and second parts comes with this couplet:

Dard nigar ranj bīn kānchi hamī justa am
Rāst kih bunamūd rūy 'umr ba-pāyān rasīd

Look for passion, feel pain. That which I had sought
appeared, and right then life came to an end.

We are back with the theme of *dard*, of longing and passion. Quite abruptly, within the first *miṣrā'* (hemistich), the poet moves from exhortation to recounting

his own experience in this area. In the second part of the *ghazal*, 'Aṭṭār narrates a spiritual experience of his own, his conquest by the Sultan of Love. At the conclusion of the poem, he celebrates his role as the *bulbul* bird, poet-laureate of the bower of love's passion (*dard*). In other words, he celebrates his transition from *shīr-i mard* to '*ayn-i dard*. This, 'Aṭṭār implies, is what made him the poet that he is. Once more, the basic message is that love and suffering themselves can transform people into new beings. The same point is made in another brief *ghazal*:

The Feast of Love

You who are the heart and soul of my life,
it is suffering for You that brings me joy.

My eyes have made wine, my heart a kebab.
Will You not come to this feast of mine?

Both worlds I have abandoned, because
You are both this world and the Next to me.

In verse on this subject, O 'Aṭṭār,
I am without rival in this age.⁹

'Aṭṭār's Self-criticism

In analysing a passage from the preface to the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, we found that for 'Aṭṭār the highest spiritual rank is that of the man who represents '*ayn-i dard* (passion or pain personified). At this point, it seems appropriate to consider in what other ways this preoccupation with passion as the touchstone of supreme spiritual attainment is reflected in the style and content of 'Aṭṭār's didactic *mathnawīs*. Now, the literature of Sufism is replete with injunctions to avoid excessive attachments to worldly concerns and, on a deeper level, to the habits of the ego (*nafs*). The seeker is instructed to develop, through constant practice, the positive traits of sincere and continual repentance from bad actions and the defects of the heart that underlie them; and humble recognition of his total dependence upon the mercy and generosity of God. Without the willingness to acknowledge his own failings, the spiritual seeker can accomplish nothing. Self-criticism, accordingly, has an important place in Sufism; and indeed one does not have to search far to find Sufi writers' expressions of pain and sorrow on account of their own defects. Furthermore, they are disposed to attribute the remoteness from the Divine Beloved that they experience to precisely those defects of character and the incompleteness of their sincerity.

Expressions of self-reproach appear repeatedly in the writings of 'Aṭṭār, who indeed is often regarded as one of the *malāmatīs* or followers of the Path of Blame, who go out of their way to avoid seeking a good reputation. The first example comes, once again, from the preface of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*. Besides characterizing himself as a confused man in search of the guidance to be gained by studying and emulating the saints, he recounts with approval that Jamāl al-Mawṣilī, having secured a burial-place close to the tomb of the Blessed Prophet, compared himself to the dog of the Companions of the Cave in the Qur'ānic narrative (found in *Sūra* 18, *al-Kahf*), and requested that a verse from it be inscribed on his tomb. 'Aṭṭār reckons himself as a dog who can nonetheless claim to be the friend of God's Friends.¹⁰ In the *Dīwān*, 'Aṭṭār goes further, comparing his own ego to a dog with the purely negative aspects of canine nature. One of many *ghazals* devoted largely to self-criticism is the following:

Such was Life

Most of my life was spent in such a state
that I was hidden from my own sight.

Sometimes I was busy communing with God,
sometimes I went running off to the tavern.

Now I'd gain immensely, thanks to my Spirit;
now lose completely because of my body.

To tell the truth, though, in no sense
was I truly in either one or the other.

What can I do? For they wanted it so:
be it good or evil, that is how I was.

Although I know everything under the sun,
I still looked for one atom of direct vision.

No, both knowledge and vision went astray;
I was out of my mind and my heart was on fire.

True, I was light-hearted about myself;
yet I weighed too heavy on my own heart.

The Sea of the Soul seemed a strange thing to me:
I was drowned in confusion about this world.

I have held forth on every subject, and yet
my heart remained blind, my tongue twisted up.

Not knowing the one essential thing,
I was no more than ideas and opinions.

I really knew nothing, and all my life through
have been waiting for one to whom all things are known.

Since omniscience cannot be struck with an arrow
I am bound to be bowed down with grief, like a bow.

So many tears he has wept, and for so long;
Farīd, lost and helpless, is drowning in blood.¹¹

Bewilderment (*ḥayrat* or *taḥayyur*), another key theme in ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry and the subject of the ninth section of his *Mukhtār-nāma*,¹² is proclaimed so loudly in the above passage as to seem almost a boast. Is this in ‘Aṭṭār’s view the inevitable lot of the man who has become ‘*ayn-i dard*, sorrow itself? Again, he speaks of having waited all his life for the man of perfect knowledge. Is this his greatest sorrow – the unfulfilled hope of a perfect guide? One cannot be sure, and yet his self-praise in other passages does not suggest that he felt himself to have failed to attain a sufficient degree of enlightenment. In any case, of all the reproaches he levels at himself, none that the present writer has so far found suggests that ‘Aṭṭār saw himself as anyone’s negligent or disobedient disciple. No less plangent, though, is the tone of the following *ghazal*:

Human Weakness

I make a pledge – but then I break it again.
That is all I can manage, so what can I do?

When it comes to having enemies I am a man.
When it comes to self-regard I am a woman.

In the Holy Law’s way I am ten-score times helpless.
In human nature’s way I’ve a thousand tricks.

For the lower soul’s sake, in a hundred ways,
I am put to trial at the hands of Fate.¹³

Self-criticism in the *Mukhtār-nāma* Quatrains

The most concentrated dosage, as it were, of 'Aṭṭārian self-criticism is to be found in the collection of quatrains entitled *Mukhtār-nāma*. The twelfth section in the book is devoted exclusively to quatrains (*rubā'īyyāt*) bemoaning the faults of the writer's *nafs* or lower soul (*bāb-i dawāzdahum: dar shikāyat az nafs-i khwud*). On the face of it, this is a goldmine of material for the subject under discussion; but caution is needed here. According to some scholars, such as the late 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb,¹⁴ it is very likely that not all of the *Mukhtār-nāma* poems are by 'Aṭṭār himself since they do not all feature in the earliest manuscripts. Many are very vehemently worded. On the other hand, whether authentic or not they arguably do not differ markedly in content from some passages in the author's *Dīwān*, such as the one just quoted. Here are four examples.

The soul-dog plays with my heart every moment.
It stirs up trouble with my heart's burning.
Each night I tie it fast with a thousand tricks.
When day comes it starts its crooked ways again.

I've an ego that grows each moment.
I said, 'I will train it, so it will get better.'
However much I thin it down by my efforts,
From one untrue word it becomes plump again.

My heart, which I see tied neither to faith nor worldly things,
I see sitting around with the filthy lower soul.
My hair has turned milk-white, yet in each hair's root I see
A hundred lions and leopards lying in ambush.

You who are entirely laid low by your soul,
Your essence is slain by egohood's filth.
If you spend several lifetimes burning in fire,
Still egohood's stench will arise from your ashes.¹⁵

Self-criticism in this vein – of which the *Mukhtār-nāma* contains several dozen more examples in the twelfth section, to say nothing of other sections – might appear to be evidence of a morbid personality. On the other hand, one must remember that the poet does not fail elsewhere to praise himself; and, as already mentioned, that he believed that he had messages for which he found no worthy audience in his milieu.

But part of his message being that one can get nowhere without utter humility, it is not surprising that this son of the homeland of the *Malāmatiyya*, who welcome

the censure of others for their own spiritual benefit, should practise self-criticism in all his writings as an example for emulation. I hope in what follows to demonstrate the central importance of this practice in 'Aṭṭār's methodology.

'Aṭṭār's Treatment of Death and the World

This may be an appropriate point at which to touch on a question which, although tangential to the main theme of this study, is linked to it and is of great importance. How is one to characterize 'Aṭṭār's views on the world and on death? He appears to have been haunted by death, to judge by the frequency with which this subject occurs in some of his poetry. Is he, then, morbid or just realistic? Was he really haunted by death, or is its imminence a topos exploited with especial frequency, owing perhaps to the author's own personality and the catastrophic times in which he lived? It is instructive to compare the views of 'Aṭṭār and Rūmī, although only one example can be given here. 'Aṭṭār's strictures on the world's base and transitory nature reach their apex in the *Asrār-nāma*, as in the following passage:

This land of fairy-tales would be delightful
were it not for the dying we are doomed to.

What makes this court of trials so very mournful
is that it will not let us stay together.

Life would be sweet – and yet how could it be so? –
if hateful Death did not follow behind it.

If pleasure comes, it will not be without pain;
nor existence without fear of non-existence.

Perversely you may seek pleasure from this world,
but pleasure cannot last for any time in this world.

Its wine seems sweet, but understand: it's fire!
Know that all the world's sweetness will turn sour.

The world's rose-water and musk are tears and blood.
To seek delight in tears and blood is madness.¹⁶

The idea that worldly life would be sweet but for the prospect of death is confronted head-on by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī in the *Mathnawī*, although there is no evidence that his intention was to aim a rebuttal at his revered predecessor. The passage in question reads as follows, beginning with the episode heading:

A reply to the simpleton who said, 'This world would be delightful were it not for death, and worldly wealth would be delightful if it did not come to an end,' and other absurdities of the kind.

That man would say, 'This world would be delightful,
if only death's foot were not planted in it.'

Said another, 'If there were no death at all
the world would be worthless and entangled –

A stack piled up within an empty field,
abandoned and neglected and unthreshed.

You've imagined as life what is really death;
sown your seed in salty, barren soil.

Truly, false reason views things inside-out:
It sees life as death, you weak-minded man.'

God, show us all things as they really are
in this abode where illusion is rife.

No dead person grieves on his death's account:
What he mourns is that he has too little stored up.

Yet, he's fallen from a pit out into the open
amidst fortune, pleasure and relaxation.

From this abode of mourning, this narrow vale
He's been transported to the great outdoors –

'A Seat of Truth,' not a palace of falsehood;
Choice wine, not being drunk with buttermilk.

The Seat of Truth, with God now his Companion:
He's escaped this water, the fire-temple's earth.

If you've not led the illuminative life,
There's a moment or two left: die like a man!¹⁷

Here Rūmī argues that what appears to be death is in reality life, it being understood that the real life is that of the Hereafter, so that abiding in this world forever would by no means be the best thing for us. His concluding message, however, is

the same as 'Aṭṭār's: to find true life, you must die to yourself. And Rūmī would certainly have understood, as we should, that in the last quotation the predecessor whom he so revered and praised is voicing a line of argument in order to rebut it. Having seen as much as he had of life's vicissitudes, the sage of Nishapur could scarcely have contended that life on earth would be delightful in every way were it not for the prospect of death.

This same message is found in 'Aṭṭār's warnings about the imminence of death and the possibility of the redeeming moment until the end comes. The illustrative quotation here is from a lengthy *qaṣīda* in which the poet anticipates his own death as a moment of desolation, depicting the loneliness and regrets that attend many a passing. Once again, as in the *Asrār-nāma*'s abundant gloomy references to death, there seems to be an intention of reminding the listener to prepare for the everlasting journey. The poem begins:

Dear friends, when death's hour looms over me,
I'll stumble and fall, my liver bleeding.

What's more, my going won't be like my arrival:
I have no hopes that anyone will come to my side.

At least come to my graveside for a short while,
And ask my dust for some sign or news of me.¹⁸

The *ghazal* continues in the same vein for thirty couplets, ten of which begin with the lamentation *Dardā wa darīghā*, 'What sorrow, what a pity!' Then with the final *bayt* comes a sudden, relieving glimpse of hope and enlightenment. 'Aṭṭār produces another piece of chiaroscuro or interplay of darkness and light, a favourite rhetorical device of his:

Yet if God sends a single glance of grace my heart's way,
By God, I won't glance once at this world or the Next.

Where is the light to come from? An answer given in the opening exordium of the *Ilāhī-nāma* is that the very Transcendent Immensity and Purity of the Divinity as compared even with human sinfulness are so tremendous that the minutest particle of Divine Mercy will purify and illumine all creation.

There is another viewpoint as to where the light will come from, as 'Aṭṭār explains in the *Asrār-nāma*, the *mathnawī* in which he concentrates most on the subject of death and the need to prepare for it. The exposition begins with a cautionary tale, tinged with humour, about worldliness:

I have heard that there was once a master of his trade
 Who would call back donkeys that had gone astray.
 He had done this work for sixty, seventy years.
 After seventy-one he entered death's agonies.
 When 'Azrā'il came for a private session with him,
 He thought [the Angel] had come about a lost donkey.
 He jumped up – there was a window before him –
 And he stuck his head right out of the window.
 He opened his mouth: 'You friends who are around!
 If anyone sees a dying donkey, send it here!'

Then comes the admonition:

Dear friend, anyone who deals only with asses
 will live, perish, and rise again as an ass.
 O pure living one, die alive like Jesus,
 lest you die like an ass upon this dustball.
 In your soul and your body you have two sicknesses;
 keep yourself far away from both of them.
 Death will release you from bodily sickness;
 but death will bring you sickness of soul.
 Go, get far away from both forms of sickness –
 or turn into a whirlpool of so many sicknesses!
 You are ill, and your illness is greed for this world.
 Our [inward] illness lies in store Hereafter.
 Unless you have rid yourself of it in this world
 you will remain far from eternal perfection.
 Once you begin dying in this world, know for sure
 that you've been reborn into the Hereafter.
 Succumbing to death in this world's your dying
 into the Next World; in fact, it is your birth.
 Know for sure that once you start dying in this world
 you've reached the point of birth into the Next World.
 Friend, when you die here you are born into There.
 I have peeled the truth down to the core with these words.
 ... If you bring a single speck of light with you,
 that light will produce a sun for you there.
 If one particle of light come along with you,
 thanks to its high value you will learn mysteries.
 And after that, your light will increase
 and then the door will open wider for you.
 The little that you have will turn into much;
 your infant will grow into a wise adult.

Once that light grows abundant by itself,
 all that becomes a compensation for your soul.
 When sands on earth accumulate, do they not
 stick to each other and become a mountain?
 ...But if you have died without gaining any light
 you will be cloaked in a hundred thousand veils.
 You'll be left like an onion, skins layer on layer;
 you'll burn because you have no core, my friend.
 Having no core will make you burn so badly
 that you will know no night or day without burning.
 If you've a core (or brain) behind your heart's veil,
 you have a heart that works, and a fine destiny.¹⁹

The above passage has been cited at length partly in order to provide one substantial example of Aṭṭār's expository style. He explains that the divinely bestowed light that 'will grow abundant by itself' comes to the dead by virtue of the travelling-provisions that they gathered in this lower world, if they were wise. Despite all our faults, and the parlousness of the general human condition, if we work hard enough before death we shall be ready. But we need to assemble our travelling provisions, a point raised already in the author's introduction as one of the potential benefits of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*.

Self-criticism and Self-praise in the Epilogue of the *Ilāhī-nāma* ('The Book of the Divine')

Perhaps the single richest source for 'Aṭṭār's self-criticism and self-exhortation is the Epilogue (*Pāyān-i kitāb*) to his *Ilāhī-nāma*. The first story in this section concerns Uways al-Qaranī, a saint of Yemen who lived in the Prophet's time but never met him:

That man with a pure soul asked this of Uways:
 'There is a certain man who, as people say,
 some thirty years ago dug himself a grave
 and in it hung a winding-sheet for himself.
 He sits there in that grave constantly,
 and never ceases weeping for one moment.
 He does not rest by day or sleep at night;
 he weeps so many tears that his eyes are dried out.
 His fears and dread are so severe – never
 in history has any man been so fearful.
 O pure guide, have you ever seen this man?'
 Uways replied, 'Lead me to where that man is.'

When he reached that place, he saw the man thus.
 He was half dead from fear of the sabre of Death;
 thin as a toothpick from moaning and groaning,
 the full moon of his face become a crescent;
 blood pouring from both his eyes like a torrent;
 his heart full of fire, his tongue like a flame;
 with his grave ready dug, his shroud before him,
 he sat there like one who'd already perished.
 Uways said to him: 'You who have learned no secrets,
 thanks to this grave and shroud you are far from God.
 You're worshipping an illusion you created:
 a grave and a shroud – that is all that you worship.
 A grave and a shroud – these have obsessed you;
 for thirty years they have deprived you of God.
 Thirty years grave and shroud have been your idols,
 like highwaymen blocking your way towards God.'
 When that devoted dervish saw the disaster
 that had befallen him, his soul departed.
 Having been blind to the secret of reality,
 he uttered one cry and fell into the grave.
 Like a bird he flew from the snare of existence;
 he died and was delivered from idol-worship.
 For such a man, whose austerity was boundless,
 grave and shroud were veils that blocked his vision.

At this point 'Aṭṭār turns to address a lesson from this story to himself:

The first thing that has veiled you consists of poetry –
 On this idol's account you're still far from God.
 Many idols of various kinds I have broken;
 now I worship the idol of my poetry.
 Bonds made of wood I've severed by the thousand;
 now I'm bound by love for something golden.
 If I can leave those bonds behind, then I'll fly;
 if not, I'll die upside-down in the same bonds.
 Since I'm distracted from God by an idol,
 how can I become one who shares God's secrets?
 The disaster that has descended upon my neck –
 I know for sure that it too came from myself.
 Had 'Aṭṭār recited to himself one time
 all the words that he's been reciting to you,
 in rank he'd have surpassed the seventh heaven,
 rising beyond the troops of holy angels.

thousands of fountains were cast up onto its shores.
 Since my poetry's ocean manifested
 running fountains on every shore each moment,
 one of those fountains is the sun so lofty,
 which scatters its light lavishly on this world.²⁰

Farid al-Dīn (meaning, 'the Unique One of the Faith') 'Attar does not content himself with the claim that his poetry would make the masters of the past die of envy, and that the sun itself would have no light without it. He continues:

On Resurrection Day the sun will be dark;
 but my verses are going to shine forever,
 to be recited every day in Heaven,
 to melodies of love, by enchanting houris.
 Because my poetry is all pure Unity,
 what would be wrong if you sang it in Heaven?
 The door to the Divine Treasury I have opened,
 and have named this poem *Ilahi-nama*.
 The great ones who dwell in the seven heavens
 will read the *Ilahi-nama* of 'Attar.
 Because of this book's glory I have kingship;
 for the *Ilahi-nama* comes from Divine favour.
 He sends me a new life at every moment,
 a banquet from the Unseen every instant.²¹

Boasting is common practice among classical Persian poets, including great mystics; but the passage just quoted is barely surpassable. It is almost matched, however, in a passage over fifty couplets long near the end of *Mantiq al-tayr* and headed *Fi wasf halih* (Description of his own state). There, 'Attar claims that he has set the seal on the art of poetry; and again in the Epilogue (khatima) to the *Musibatnama* the same claim is made.²² More restrained, perhaps, is the author's accolade to the healing properties of his own verse in the preface to *Mukhtar-nama*: 'The discourse of 'Attar, which is in reality a sovereign remedy, must not be compared with the discourse of others.'²³ The question of boasting by Sufis is an interesting one. Here it must suffice to recall that a dispensation (*rukhsa*) allowing boasting with the intention of proclaiming divine bounty one has received is mentioned by no less an authority than Abu'l-Najib al-Suhrawardi (d. 563/1168), author of the renowned treatise *Adab al-muridin* (Rules for disciples).²⁴ Boasting may be permissible while one is in a state of spiritual ecstasy or engaged in a contest of boasting (*mufakhara*) with an adversary. Still, the question remains as to how one is to reconcile such self-praise with the self-criticism expressed with equal vehemence in other passages, without concluding that the poet is either hypocritical or plain crazy.

We must not overlook the paradoxical fact that for a *malāmatī*, whose spiritual way involves courting opprobrium, self-praise is one of the best means to achieve that very object. What kind of a Sufi is it, after all, who contaminates his allegedly spiritual poetry with extravagant encomia to himself? One who is too intoxicated with devotion to the Beloved to care what others think – and whose praise is at least in part for spiritual poetry itself as being one of the highest human activities. For while ‘Aṭṭār occasionally looks to inculcate love of the virtues, one of his major didactic purposes is to imbue the audience with the sense of the supremacy of the way of Divine Love and all that leads to it.

To return to the Epilogue of *Ilāhī-nāma*: ‘Aṭṭār next proclaims that although he sits in isolation and obscurity he is like a king because of his complete contentment. Now, if the self-accusation of idolatry that follows the story of Uways and the man in the grave were intended to be taken at face value, the poet might reasonably have been expected to excise most – if not all – of the passage just quoted, rather than leave it in the poem as apparent evidence of flagrant hypocrisy. If, on the other hand, the boasting were to be taken at face value, all the admonitions about humility in *Ilāhī-nāma* (and in other works of ‘Aṭṭār, for that matter) would lose credibility.

What is one to make of this dilemma? May it not be that ‘Aṭṭār is striving – in self-praise and self-accusation alike – to bring to life as vividly as possible his, and every human being’s, relationship with God and the magnitude of what is at stake? In so doing, perhaps, the poet seeks to enlist the help of the reader’s spiritual imagination, employing a rhetorical device greatly favoured in Persian verse: *mubālagha*, or exaggeration. After all, great poetry does seem to confer some kind of immortality; moreover, great poetry whose theme is *tawhīd*, the spiritual science of Unity, is arguably fit to be praised and chanted by saints and maidens in Heaven. Finally, to be fair to ‘Aṭṭār, his boastful interlude ends with a candid recognition that his achievements are due entirely to divine grace and favour, dependent as they are upon ‘a new life at every moment / a banquet from the Unseen every instant’. Let us examine whether the remainder of the Epilogue to the *Ilāhī-nāma* supplies any further evidence regarding ‘Aṭṭār’s views on his work and his worth. Do his self-admonition and self-criticism continue in the same vein? If so, does the exaggeration continue, or does the author opt instead for a happy rhetorical medium? In the interests of brevity, the anecdotes and ‘Aṭṭār’s comments will be summarized, with a few lines quoted here and there to help convey something of the tenor of the poet’s messages.

First, the passage quoted from the very beginning of the Epilogue ends with the claim that since the author receives his provision from the Unseen he has no need to trouble himself with pleasing ordinary men and with the world and its cares:

‘Aṭṭār is not the only Persian poet to accuse himself of preferring talk to action, though his expressions are particularly vehement. One is reminded, for example, of the many *ghazals* in Rūmī’s *Dīwān-i kabīr* with closing lines that enjoin silence.²⁹ ‘Aṭṭār next introduces the tale of Uways and the ascetic in the grave, discussed above; this is followed by a further exhortation to himself to keep silent.

The fourth anecdote in the Epilogue to the *Ilāhī-nāma* recounts in two lines a sage’s words of admonition to the dying Alexander of Macedon; he enquires, rather belatedly, why the world-conqueror had sought pleasure in the world despite being doomed some day to lie beneath it. Here again ‘Aṭṭār expatiates on his own fears and failings. He is, he insists, suspended between faith and unbelief, even his tenets of faith being doubtful:

Why should my heart recoil so from death?
I am nothing and my heart’s attached to nothing.
My whole life has passed in pursuit of fables;
Who would want to embark on a second lifetime?
As my ways were awry, I am empty-handed.
From confusion my soul’s foot is trapped in the mud.
Like Moses’ people I am wandering the desert,
From Transcendence arriving at anthropomorphism.
God does not call me, nor am I banished;
I am left between unbelief and true faith.
Now I sit in the corner of bewilderment,
My hand like a column supporting my face.
If you want to see a world full of sorrow,
Then sit down close to my heart for a while.³⁰

The poet proceeds to elaborate on his burden of griefs, and after alluding to his mention of the state of holy men he begs any reader (or listener) who are ‘men of heart’ to pray for him. He warns them against making light of his sorrow:

If you are in mourning because of this,
it is fitting that you should also lament.
But you’re so busy preening yourself that when
you hear laments you think it’s just a game.
Lamentation is fitting for noble minds;
to lament is all the unfortunate can do.
If you’re a lover who has lost his love,
then you have no choice but to lament.
You are trying to trace what cannot be traced,
and have had not a moment’s respite from the search.

How strange this is! You, who have lost nothing –
what are you seeking, and for how much longer?³¹

This transition from haranguing himself to addressing the audience suggests a didactic intention behind the self-criticism that precedes it. The *malāmatī* ideal that he embraces with such conviction will not allow the poet to address strictures to his readers that he is not prepared to apply with equal or greater force to himself. Hence the need to balance self-deprecation with encouragement to his audience; and as 'Aṭṭār's intention appears to be to build up to a final climax in the Epilogue to his great poem, there are passages in which the expression of both becomes extreme.

In the several episodes of the Epilogue that follow, the main emphasis is on the Divine Mercy which will ultimately manifest itself to the patient and humble believer, however long the preceding worldly tribulations. The apparent darkness of many 'Aṭṭārian passages must not mislead one into underestimating this strand of the poet's didactic message: the power of God's love and mercy. In the present chapter, considerations of space preclude more detailed study of this theme and we must limit ourselves to a summary of some episodes, omitting others.

In a powerful passage concerning the Devil, we are reminded that the root cause of his being cursed was his egotistical pride. Yet even Iblīs, damned as he is, dares, in 'Aṭṭār's characterization, to hope for some form of redemption. Part of the underlying message here is that we must never allow the extent of our sins to make us lose hope or cease to work for our own salvation. The trials of the Prophets Job (Ayyūb) and Zacharias (Zakariyyā) are cited to illustrate how God tests different people in different ways. We are then reminded, in a story about the Prophet Muḥammad and a pigeon, that God's concern for sinners is a hundred times greater than the care of a mother bird for its young. A Bedouin came to the Prophet and said that he would become a Muslim if he could tell him what he had in the hem of his garment. The Prophet said: 'You have a pigeon with two young pigeons in its bosom.' The man converted immediately. When he asked the Prophet to tell him who had informed him, the Prophet answered that it was God. Those who were present marvelled at the pigeon's motherly concern for its young. 'Why do you wonder at that?' asked the Prophet. 'I swear by God that He is a hundred times more loving to every sinner than this mother pigeon who has shown you what tenderness is.' Shaykh Abū Sa'īd of Mayhana, seen radiant in a dream after his passing, tells the dreaming Bū Sahl that one true act of devotion may cancel out a hundred sins. 'Aṭṭār also tells how 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, one of the Companions of the Prophet, made up his mind to sell a slave-girl just as her first white hairs appeared. Though he changed his mind, she continued to weep at her master's intended injustice, and told him that she no longer minded if he did sell her anyway. At this point the Archangel Gabriel himself intervenes, arriving to inform the Prophet that so faithful a servant deserves to be set free rather than sold. Following the path of self-criticism once again, 'Aṭṭār

pleads to God to deliver him from himself, to accept him despite all his faults, and not to 'sell him' or reject him as a worthless servant. This conforms to the Islamic doctrine that only through Divine Mercy can we be saved from ourselves, for the Prophet Muḥammad himself told his Companions that none of them would be saved by their actions alone, and that the same applied even to him.³²

Finale

In the course of this study, it has been observed that Farid al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār provides a clear manifesto of his didactic intentions in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*: to inculcate disdain for this world; humble awareness of one's own faults; earnestness in preparing for death; and the passionate love of God for which all else must be sacrificed. These are the main preoccupations to which he calls his readers. As with Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, his follower and admirer, the essence of 'Aṭṭār's message is the primacy of spiritual love. Divine compassion will bring the faithful a light that will compensate for everything. Distinctive features of 'Aṭṭār's contribution include the vehemence of his denigration of the lower world and the lower soul: his disdain for the former with its faithlessness and mediocrity, and his disgust at the antics and the stubbornness of the latter. His excoriating self-criticism, however, is balanced by candid recognition of his own genius. As a guide and teacher the sage of Nishapur is admittedly less mild – and his thought less readily accessible to the generality of modern readers or listeners – than the saint of Konya whose message and style seem so pre-eminently suited to the needs of our time.

And yet it is arguable that no poet has depicted in more vivid and compelling words and images the momentousness and the 'thrills and spills', the *Sturm und Drang*, of the mystical Path which is for its exponents both the true human vocation and the ultimate adventure. Not only does 'Aṭṭār show us alternating tableaux of darkness and light, dread and hope, sorrow and joy, annihilation and immortality: one could almost say that he throws us into them, such is the power of his engagement, vision, and poetic talent. (In his lyric poetry, he shares with us his moments of despondency and exultation.) In this way he fulfils an important didactic purpose: that of helping to prepare the spiritually engaged reader for the reality of 'the journey to the Infinite'. Like it or not, we are already embarked upon this journey simply by virtue of having been created human beings, with the power to choose good or evil and so with a Judgement awaiting us. The tale of the donkey-hunter is a warning to wake up before it is too late.

In the final episode of the *Ilāhī-nāma*, 'Aṭṭār describes how an immense and unexpected reward came the way of Bishr-i Ḥāfi of Marw, whose repentance led him to Sufism and to spiritual eminence.³³ As a worldly man living through hard times in Baghdad, Bishr was walking through the city one night in a drunken state when he came upon a piece of paper on which the name of God was written. With

unaccustomed reverence he picked it up, took it home and put perfume on it. These words of admonitory self-criticism from 'Aṭṭār may fittingly conclude this study of an eloquent advocate of enlightenment through total self-effacement.

That night, as dawn broke, he had a dream
in which he was addressed by a Voice Unseen:
'O you who picked My Name up from the dust
and reverently cleaned it and perfumed it,
We have made you a seeker of the truth;
we have both purified you and perfumed you.'
O Lord, for so long this sweet-singing 'Aṭṭār
has perfumed Your Name with the scent of poetry.
Though he may sing sweetly, what does that count for?
Your Name has been perfumed for all eternity.
Yet by Your grace make him dust at Your doorway.
Through Your own Name, make his name celebrated.
Except through Your grace he can expect nothing:
he has not produced one hair's breadth of devotion.³⁴

Notes

1. The same passage is tellingly discussed in Alessandro Bausani, 'Considerazioni sulla *Tadhkiratu l'awliyā*' di 'Aṭṭār', in *Colloquio italo-iraniano sul poeta mistico Farīduddīn 'Aṭṭār* (Rome, 1978), pp. 71–88.
2. *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, ed. R.A. Nicholson (London and Leiden, 1905), vol. 1, p. 16.
3. On this theme see further *Ocean*, esp. pp. 139–140, 246–255.
4. For a brief explanation of these terms see F. Rahman's article in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, vol. I, p. 951.
5. *Ilāhi-nāma*, ed. F. Rūḥānī, pp. 200–201; cf. J.A. Boyle, tr., *The Book of God*, pp. 234–235. All translations in the present study are by the writer.
6. Dt, pp. 834–835; *qaṣīda* 30.
7. The titles given to the *ghazals* translated in this study are purely the invention of the translator. Classical Persian poets did not as a rule give titles to their lyric poems, except occasionally for generic ones such as *Sāqī-nāma* (Ode to the Cupbearer) or *Tarjī'-band* (Stanzaic Poem).
8. Dt, no. 384, pp. 304–305.
9. Dt, p. 544; *ghazal* no. 682.
10. *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, ed. Nicholson, p. 17.
11. Dt, p. 386; no. 481.
12. *Bāb-i nuhum: Dar maqām-i ḥayrat wa sargashtagī*, in *Mukhtār-nāma*, ed. Shafī'i-Kadkanī, pp. 128–133. [On the theme of bewilderment in 'Aṭṭār, see also the essay by Lucian Stone in this volume – eds.]
13. Dt, p. 472; *ghazal* no. 586.

14. 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb, *Ṣadā-yi bāl-i Sīmurgh: dar bāra-i zindagī wa andīsha-i 'Aṭṭār* (3rd ed., Tehran, 1380/2001–2002), pp. 59–60. [On the *Mukhtār-nāma*, see the essay in this volume by Eve Feuillebois-Pierunek – eds.]
15. *Mukhtār-nāma: majmū'a-i rubā'iyyāt*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Shafī'i-Kadkanī (rev. 2nd ed., Tehran, 1375/1996), pp. 145–146; quatrains 548–549, 552, and 557.
16. *Asrār-nāma*, ed. Sayyid Ṣādiq Gawharīn (Tehran, 1338/1959), p. 124, vv. 2038–2044.
17. *Mathnawī*, ed. R.A. Nicholson (London, 1933), v. 1760–1772.
18. Dt, pp. 814–817; *qaṣīda* no. 25.
19. *Asrār-nāma*, ed. Gawharīn, vv. 1168–1199.
20. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. Rūḥānī, p. 285 ff; tr. Boyle, *The Book of God*, p. 334 ff.
21. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. Rūḥānī, pp. 285–286; cf. tr. Boyle, *The Book of God*, pp. 334–335.
22. *Muṣībat-nāma*, ed. Nūrānī Wiṣāl (rev. 3rd ed., Tehran, 1364/1985–1986) pp. 364–366.
23. *Mukhtār-nāma*, ed. Shafī'i Kadkanī, pp. 71–72.
24. Abū'l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī, *A Sufi Rule for Novices: Kitāb Ādāb al-Murīdīn*, tr. M. Milson (Cambridge, 1975), p. 81. The passage is quoted and commented on in C.W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany, NY, 1985), p. 39.
25. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. Rūḥānī, p. 286; cf. tr. Boyle, *The Book of God*, p. 335.
26. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. Rūḥānī, pp. 286–287; cf. tr. Boyle, *The Book of God*, pp. 335–336.
27. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. Rūḥānī; cf. tr. Boyle, *The Book of God*, p. 336.
28. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. Rūḥānī; cf. tr. Boyle, *The Book of God*, p. 337.
29. See, for example (with reference also to Ḥāfiẓ), Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford, 2000), p. 329.
30. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. Rūḥānī, pp. 290–291; cf. tr. Boyle, *The Book of God*, p. 340.
31. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. Rūḥānī, pp. 291–292; cf. tr. Boyle, *The Book of God*, p. 341.
32. There are eleven *ḥadīth* to this effect in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Cairo, 1290/1873), vol. 2, p. 347; cf. tr. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ṣādiqī, vol. 4 (Lahore, 1976), pp. 1472–1474.
33. *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, ed. Nicholson, vol. 1, pp. 105–112.
34. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. Rūḥānī, p. 302; cf. tr. Boyle, p. 353.

‘Without Us, from Us We’re Safe’: Self and Selflessness in the *Dīwān* of ‘Aṭṭār

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As an opening to the question of selflessness in the *Dīwān*¹ of ‘Aṭṭār, one can quote a *ḥikāyat*² taken from his *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*³ or *Memoirs of the Saints*. In this poetic prose work, as in all the other works by ‘Aṭṭār, we discover that the question of selflessness is the axis of the wayfarer’s spiritual quest and of the poet’s preoccupations because the question of love is the beating heart of the whole process of spiritual perfection.³ This story is told by Ibrāhīm Adham in chapter 11.⁴ At a certain point, he sees in the desert seventy men who have been slain. Only one of them survives long enough to tell him what happened: they were a group of Sufis on their way to Mecca, having made the vow to concentrate on nothing but God. In the desert, they encountered Khidr and they took this as a divine sign, rejoicing at the sight of the immortal prophet and greeting him. Then God blamed them for having been traitors to their vow, liars and false pretenders to love, for having let their thought deviate and focus on someone other than the only real Beloved. And of course God told them that He would slay them for this sin and He would not forgive them until He had shed their blood. And that is what He has actually done to them. The dying Sufi warns Adham with these words: ‘Do not go too far away from Him for you will feel the pangs of separation, and do not come too close for you will fall victim to suffering’.⁵

This is exactly where the *Dīwān* stands: between the pain of longing and the unbearable fire of union. When the lover comes too close to the Beloved in his words and images, he is shunned by his/her cruelty and when he feels separated, he longs for proximity. And this is directly connected to the question of selflessness for, in fact, we may distinguish two modalities of annihilation in the *Dīwān*: the one is performed by the Beloved who appears as a cruel bloodthirsty persona, and the other is the self-annihilation performed by the lover himself when he tries to rid himself of himself in order to ‘purify’ the place for the lover to enter. It is through the interaction between these two modalities that we are led to understand the

necessary relationship between love and selflessness. This theme has been largely expounded by Aḥmad Ghazālī in his *Sawāniḥ*⁶ and has shaped the whole tradition of Persian mystical *ghazal* poetry. Indeed, the classical paradoxes of finding 'being in non-being' or the 'self in selflessness' make sense only in relation to the theme of love, the all-encompassing love that saves the quest for selflessness from becoming mere nihilism.

The terrible sufferings undergone by the lover and described in the *Dīwān* are to be interpreted in this perspective. This is no useless suffering; all suffering aims at annihilating the self in order to give rise to the reality of the loving soul. For 'Aṭṭār, suffering is necessary for the awakening of the real self. So, if the Beloved so often seems cruel and pitiless, it is a pedagogical device. That is why He (God) says, in a strange poem where He speaks in the first person:

If your heart is not cloyed with Me
 Even for a moment, do not ever be without Me.
 Whirl in the fire of the heart, headless
 Like a beheaded bird, for the love of Me.
 Every day, let your eyes wet with their blood
 Acres of earth, for the love of Me.
 Weep and weep again as weep the clouds in springtime;
 Let your blood transmute dust into mud, for the love of Me
 For each suffering is a key that opens
 A hundred treasures kept by magic, through Me.
 And 'Aṭṭār, how is he in this station?
 He is mad with love and wise for the love of Me!⁷

Thus, suffering is perceived as an absolute necessity for those who wish to join the Beloved, to reach that 'treasure' to which the famous *ḥadīth*: 'I was a hidden treasure and I wished to be known' alludes. In Persian, the close relationship between suffering and treasure is enhanced by the assonance between *ranj* and *ganj* and has become a classical topos. Whereas in court poetry, the cruelty of the Beloved is a mere coquetry, a kind of whimsical pose, here cruelty is a supreme tenderness for it shows the way: if the lover has not had his head severed, that is, if he does not renounce both life and reason, he can never attain to the bliss of union. We find here the classical metaphors of the lover's sufferings: fire,⁸ beheading, tears of blood drunk by the earth. All such images create an expressionist atmosphere in this particular poem and more generally in the *Dīwān*. It should be noted that all these dramatic events happen on the level of the inner self and that the fire in question burns the lover from inside and, consequently, both dissolves and transmutes the wayfarer from within. This means that the cruel Beloved is an interior presence and what he does to the lover is intended to make him aware of the reality of this

presence in him by renouncing the unreality of what appears as his self. The interaction of metaphors in this *ghazal* shows that the suffering imposed by the beloved on the lover is a necessary corollary to the inner transmutation which constitutes the experience of love: all this is done 'for the love of Me'. And this alchemic transmutation is present throughout the poem, for water is transmuted into blood, dust into bloody mud, the wet into the dry, suffering into treasure and, finally, madness into wisdom. The dissolution of the element earth into blood represents the process through which the body and the self must dissolve into the reality of spiritual love. But the attachments to the flesh, to its desires and passions, are so intense, and the density of matter is such that to tear away from them cannot but be difficult and painful. This is why love is a suffering which is both a destroyer of the self and a saviour from the self. And this is why the Beloved appears as a tender murderer:

What can I do? My sly Beloved, my love is here!
A dagger in his hand, he has come to the bazaar:
His dagger is thirsty for my heart's blood
And so he comes to me, bloodthirsty, sanguinary!⁹

And then after a few lines in the same style:

He is the lover and love and the Beloved.
Who are you then, if He is all that is?
When I look well, I see that from his part
'Aṭṭār has received nothing but nothingness!¹⁰

Here again, 'Aṭṭār conjures up an expressionist scenery that culminates in self-annihilation and nothingness (*fanā*). If the Beloved wants to shed the blood of the lover, it is because He wants to empty him of his seemingly vital substance and to help him embrace selflessness or, rather, realize that there is no self at all for there is no other reality than 'He'. 'Lover', 'love' and 'beloved' are only different aspects of one and the same reality. In reality, nothing exists but 'Him', although paradoxically He has created the whole creation. Yet the whole creation has no ontological reality by itself. And it is the task of mystical lyric poetry to give a form to love, lover and the beloved and, by so doing, at the same time to point to their unreality.

We may argue that if mystical poets have widely used the *ghazal* form, it is precisely because this was *the* form of love poetry par excellence: the invocations to the Beloved, the dialogue between lover and Beloved, and the images of cruel beauty and endless longing were the classical clichés of love poetry which the Sufis used to express their spiritual states.¹¹ Within this framework though, the sensual images point to something other than themselves and they are denied any real being, exactly as the words are both celebrated as expressions of the Beloved and

and denied any reality compared to the reality of love. And this process is quite visible in ‘Attar’s ghazals not simply due to the fact that they are not yet too elaborate from a lyrical point of view, but also because there is a didactic perspective even at the heart of his lyric expression. By ‘didactic’ I do not mean necessarily that he is giving lessons to the reader but, rather, that by composing the poem he is trying to make things clear to himself. In fact, the essential quest for understanding the nature of the self which is so brilliantly dramatized in the mathnawis is put into successive intimate nutshells in the ghazals, very often couched in the form of questions:

Since You are all, what then is the world?
 And if I am naught, why then all this wailing?
 You are all and you are everything
 What then is that which is other than you? What?
 Since it is certain that there is none but you
 Why then the reverberation of so many
 uncertainties?
 Since no mistaker can be found anywhere
 Why then so many mistakes everywhere?
 Since non-being is all there is in this world
 Why then so much shift and motion in it?
 Being in truth devoid of existence
 How is it that we go through endless pain and
 sorrow?
 It is not life that animates me, it is love
 Why then should I be afflicted so by life?
 Since in you, the soul has died,
 Renouncing its ‘self’, it is now of itself unaware.
 How can poor ‘Attar hint at this mystery
 Other than with hollow words? ¹²

The whole poem is an ontological question. That is why it is built on the verb ‘to be’ (*budan*), not only in the rhyme (*chist*) where it is associated with the interrogative *chi*, ‘what’, but in the rest of the poem, whether as a full form or as an enclitic, in the first, second and third persons. The Sufi term *fana*, ‘annihilation’, ‘non-being’ is used twice: *fana’-i mahz* (total or absolute nothingness) and *fana’ shud* (lit. ‘became non-being’, here ‘died’). In the first case, it is the reality of the word as being which is denied, and in the other, the process of ‘dying to the self’ leads to a salutary ignorance. This is because questioning one’s own reality and the reality of the world should lead to the perception of the illusory character of things and, more importantly, of oneself. But the originality of ‘Attar here is that he does not take being in general as his starting point but the all-encompassing being of ‘you’, whom we may suppose is the Beloved because of the allusion to love (*ishq*) in the seventh verse. He starts at a very high spiritual station, with the certitude that nothing other than the Beloved exists and then he comes back to the realm of

common reality. But it should be noted that the signs of the empty reality of the world are all rather negative: 'wailing', 'uncertainty', 'mistakes', 'shift and motion', 'pain and sorrow', 'affliction', 'hollow words'. This creates an impression of ontological instability and suffering and thus the didactic goal is attained: through a comparison between the two categories of being, the real one and the illusory one, the 'living soul' (*jān*) or 'life' becomes convinced of the necessity to 'die to itself', to renounce the self. Thus another reading of the poem becomes possible: in the rhyme *chīst?* ('what is...?'); we may read a rhetorical question to which the only possible answer is, 'it is nothing, indeed'. So, the hustle and bustle of being on the surface of the world should not mislead the wayfarer into believing in any kind of existence other than that of love, including even his own existence. He should not confuse 'tiny signs' with the reality of Being, form with truth, words with meaning. In fact, the phrase *guft-i miyān tuhi* in the final verse means literally 'words hollow in their centre', words which are only a form, pointing to something other than themselves. With this last line, 'Aṭṭār denies to himself any kind of poetic selfhood while, at the same time, by quoting his pen-name, he asserts his identity, putting the paradox of being and non-being into a final nutshell.

In many another final verse, the *makhlaṣ* in which Arberry very justly saw a 'clasp-theme',¹³ we find this double vision of the poet's individual identity hovering between being and non-being and epitomizing the difficulty of experiencing the paradox of selflessness. For the difficulty is that when you make use of language to speak about selflessness, you have to use personal pronouns to have a subject for the verbs. When the poet says 'I am not', he denies his existence by asserting it. On the other hand, the use of the pen-name in the last line of the poem is a poetic convention and we may argue that, like all the other stylistic devices used by the Sufi poets, this feature was spiritualized and took on a parabolic meaning. After 'Aṭṭār, Rūmī even renounced his pen-name to replace it with the name of his Beloved, Shams, thus dissolving his personal identity.¹⁴ In the case of 'Aṭṭār, the Beloved has no name and the poems of the *Dīwān* invariably end with the names 'Aṭṭār or Farīd or Farīd al-Dīn. But it should be noted that the classical use of the pen-name induces a change of pronoun: in the last line, 'Aṭṭār is no longer 'I' but 'he' (sometimes 'you'), and this imposes a change of perspective: we no longer look from the inside but from the outside, that is, we return to form or at least to the consciousness that the poem is a form, an assertion of being, although it tries to expound the reality of non-being. That is why the poet frequently warns the reader not to fall victim to the power of poetic suggestion and cautions against the illusion of thinking that one has reached the realm of selflessness or union with the Beloved through mere words alone. Thus, in another *makhlaṣ* we read,

'Aṭṭār may have performed miracles with words,
But beware of putting your faith in the miracle of the words!¹⁵

The poetic miracle lies not only in the beauty of form and images but also in the faculty of evoking the impossible paradox of being in non-being. Yet, the emotional response of the poet to his own inspiration, or that of the reader to what he receives, should not induce them to mistake form for meaning. In this perspective, the distance created by the *makhlaṣ* allows the poet to come back from the realm of spiritual perceptions to the reality of language. At the same time, the *makhlaṣ* is from an etymological point of view not only the 'line of liberation', a kind of anticlimax, but also the expression of something 'quintessential'. The 'I' of the ego dissolves away but the name endures like an emblem of the process of love:

Since love caused 'Aṭṭār to lose all sign of being,
Dissolved though he is, he shall soon find form.¹⁶

When every sign, every form, every expression of the self has been dissolved, it does not mean that all identity is lost: it means that the real identity has been found at last. And this true identity is symbolized by the *laqab* ('nickname') which is always meaningful. Here, the movement of the poem becomes a mirror of the poetic persona's progress on the path of dissolution, for this last line echoes the first line of the same poem:

I said I would pay the price of life to buy the pain of loving you,
And you sold me a whole world.¹⁷

'To give the price of life', or 'relinquish the soul' – that is, to die – is of course one of the main metaphors of self-annihilation and refers to the famous prophetic saying: 'Die before you die' upon which 'Aṭṭār and many other Sufis have meditated over and over again. It does not only mean that one should kill the carnal soul but, more generally, following 'Aṭṭār's expression, that one should 'die to oneself' (*az khwud fanā' shudan*); one should renounce the idea of being something, or of having any kind of personal desire in relation to the Beloved. Dying, bleeding and burning are the recurrent metaphors of self-dissolution which point to a physical reality: that you need an empty place to make room for the constant presence of the Beloved. But then a strange alchemical process takes place which transmutes time, space, reality and, most of all, the nature of the self into something so vast that it cannot be encompassed by human means. Thus, in this *ghazal*, once he has drunk from the *Sāqī's* wine-cup, 'Aṭṭār says,

Once I passed away out of the old stale life
I came to meet the Beloved, life of all lives.
Delivered from the tyrant Pharaoh of being

Like Moses, I kept returning to the place of encounter.
 When I found myself above the two worlds
 And saw myself in that station,
 A sun arose from my being
 And within me rose higher than the heavens!
 'O Thou, the knower of all mysteries', I said,
 'Tell me when will it be that I come close to that Essence?'
 'You proud and ignorant fool', the answer came,
 'Can ever anyone get there? Never, alas never!'
 Particles of the universe are all drunk with love
 Suspended between negation and affirmation
 In a place where the sun casts its rays.
 Particles are neither existent nor in-existent
 What do you say, O 'Aṭṭār, in the end?
 Who could understand these mysteries and these allusions?¹⁸

This is one of the rare moments when the poet speaks of a kind of fulfilment in love. Usually, he dwells on pain and longing, and does not describe the state of union, that moment when the emptied self finally receives the object of its desire. Here, transmuting and reviving the selfless self, the sun rises in the inner landscape of the soul and from there invades the whole world. But the arrogant boast of the ecstatic soul is checked by the answer to his wish: 'you proud, ignorant fool!' The exhilaration of fusion may produce the illusion that proximity to the Essence is possible. But, whatever is created belongs to an ontological state between being and non-being, which is incompatible with proximity to God. There is a radical ontological difference between what is created, and the uncreated Essence. Only love which incarnates the presence of the Uncreated within the created can connect these two separate states. Paradoxically enough, it is what is created that has no real being and if 'Aṭṭār insists so much on the importance of putting aside any feeling of being, it is precisely because he believes that being is nothing but an illusion. What is commonly known as being was in fact begotten by nothingness:

Forego being, and embrace nothingness,
 For nothingness is nothingness only in name.
 Be certain that it is nothingness
 That gives rise to ordered existence.¹⁹

So 'ordered existence' – what we commonly call 'being', whether material or psychological – is only the result of the productiveness of nothingness, that is, of the state of things before creation. And it is in this perspective that 'Aṭṭār's appeal for a radical ontological conversion should be understood. It is its productive potential that makes nothingness more real than any reality.

Another aspect is the question of mortality. For 'Aṭṭār, whenever a being is created out of non-being, it takes on a form and thus becomes mortal. It is a classical philosophical conception that whatever has a beginning must also have an end; so whatever is created is doomed to disappear. Only the Uncreated has no end because it had no beginning.

Since the two worlds are begotten by nothingness
 How could anyone find a being, lost and wandering to boot?
 Since the two worlds are nothing but a single sun
 How could anyone find even an atom in a hidden shadow?
 Since all who lived have died and all who live will die,
 Who among the living could find the water of life?
 Tell me Farīd, who on earth or in the heavens
 Could find in this *Dīwān* a single particle of being?²⁰

A few remarks on this passage are necessary. First of all, 'Aṭṭār is again posing rhetorical questions here, the answer to which is clearly: 'there is no way or nobody'. The first hemistich (*miṣra'*) of each verse gives a general philosophical statement which invalidates the common conception given in the second *miṣra'*. It is commonly believed that being can be found in the world, lost and wandering though it is. It is also commonly believed that there are atoms in the world. But with the change of perspective suggested in the first part of these lines, these common conceptions become absurd. The poet even goes so far as to deny that the water of life can be found in the realm of being, apparently contradicting a longstanding Sufi tradition and belief. What he means of course is that the mortal self, the self-asserting self, can never reach the water of life which stands as the symbol of the highest initiation. By questioning so radically such conventional perceptions and certitudes, 'Aṭṭār suggests that he is looking at things from the standpoint of nothingness and, consequently, that he has achieved selflessness himself, as is witnessed in the boast of the last line.

But this *makhlaṣ* is also an indication of the whole Sufi poetic tradition to which 'Aṭṭār has himself largely contributed as a founding father. Indeed, he has initiated a kind of poetry that, contrary to court poetry, is not supposed to feed the pride of the poet or serve any earthly master, but which is entirely turned towards a spiritual goal. It is not the place where the self asserts itself as an artist but a process through which the ego withdraws and the real empty self is revealed. Only then does the poem become a mirror in which the Beloved can be reflected. It has to be added that from a theological point of view, 'Aṭṭār apparently believed ²¹ in the uncreated nature of the Qur'ān and therefore (according to what has just been said above concerning the created and the uncreated) that there was not a 'single particle of being' in it. Thus, in an oblique way, there is a suggestion that the status

of the Diwan is similar to that of the Qur'an.²² This idea reminds us of Hallaj, who stated that the saint should become God's word once he has lost his own identity: 'You should become the discourse that shows the reality of love, then you shall be the language, that expresses anything.'²³ There are many instances of Hallajian resonances in the Diwan of 'Attar even when Hallaj is not mentioned by name. Though very important, this theme cannot be developed here but it should be emphasized that these resonances deal precisely with the theme of selflessness and with the alchemical transformations of the self during the process of annihilation. These transmutations are to be grasped in the form of language and they change the very nature of language from an expression of selfhood to the fragrance of nothingness imbued with the divine presence.

Although 'Attar very often denies to poetry the power of approaching anywhere near the Beloved's beauty or saying anything of the process of self-annihilation, that he had a very high opinion of his own poetry is witnessed by the set of metaphors he uses to characterize it, such as: sugar, water, ocean, fire, jewels, pearls. He would say for example,

Because of Him, inspired to speak ' Attar's mind has
turned into an ocean of attributes
O for a pearl-shedding ocean to praise beauty!²⁴

Here again, there is a direct relationship between words and attributes, but then these words are not uttered by the poet's ego - they come to him and fill his mind with something that is beyond him - which is exactly what Hallaj calls 'becoming the language of God'. And this language, upon which 'Attar has laid such emphasis in the *Tadhkirat al-awliya*,²⁵ mirrors the process of self-annihilation which leads to spiritual fulfilment:

If 'Attar could totally get rid of his own self
A fraction of his living existence would be equal to
the nine azure firmaments.²⁶

If self-praise is natural to the court poet and if the

I am indeed 'Aṭṭār, but only in name
Without the perfume of the Beloved's locks, an 'aṭṭār / 'Aṭṭār I'll never be.²⁷

Here again, the *makhlaṣ* is directly connected to the question of identity but in a paradoxical way: it is self evident that 'Aṭṭār is a name because, as a literary device the pen-name refers directly to the poetic identity of the 'I'. At the same time, the phrase 'only in name' underlines the idea of selflessness, the idea that all personal identity has faded away. The only trace that remains is a name and a fragrance suggested by the pun on the pen-name: an 'aṭṭār is both an apothecary and a merchant of perfumes ('itr).²⁸ At the same time, we see here the close relationship between the perfume of the Beloved and the fragrance of poetry presented as the art of making perfumes, of making perceptible an evanescent presence within the heart of matter. And there is more to this than meets the eye. Throughout the *Dīwān*, the only solace for the unattainability of the Beloved is sometimes the perception of his/her fragrance. It is a delight and a promise, it gives a taste of union, fleeting though it may be. And the frequent comparisons of poetry with perfume suggest that in fact words have here the same function in the world of language as the Beloved's scent in the world of the soul; for these are indeed spiritual perceptions. Like Joseph's shirt that was a solace to Jacob,²⁹ a promise and at the same time a source of even deeper yearning, 'Aṭṭār believed that inspired words remind the soul of the Beloved, and point to his essential absence as long as the self is on the way. As Schimmel justly remarks:

Words are the scent of the muskdeer, which leads finally to the source of the fragrance; or they are like the scent of Yusuf's shirt, which brought his father glad tidings from his faraway son and cured his eyes, which were blind from weeping. Through the image of fragrance mystical poetry gives some news of the everlasting Beloved even to those who have never seen him, and who never realized that His Beauty is hidden behind cypress and rose, behind the dark cloud and the jasmine bush.³⁰

Like the metaphor itself, fragrance dwells somewhere between being and non-being; it is the presence of an absence with a powerful alchemic power. As it is said in another *makhlaṣ*:

He who scented but one musk-like breath of Ṭūbā
Would become an 'Aṭṭār for all eternity.³¹

Or in another *ghazal*,

I thought that my sealed up sigh
Has filled the world with the fragrance of Tartarian musk.³²

But ‘Aṭṭār never gets totally carried away; he is quite aware that those moments of grace, where the poetic self imbibes and is given a taste of what it is to set the self aside and let the Beloved speak through that self transmuted by its own effacement, are only moments of grace. It is a long journey yet to the ultimate selflessness that he seeks:

When ‘Aṭṭār speaks, his firewood is as good as aloe wood
But when it comes to practice, it's nothing but dead wood.³³

But either way, whether as aloes or dead wood, he is doomed to burn and to disappear; but in the former, something remains of him and his annihilation leaves a pervasive perfume, whereas in the latter, he is only worthy of pure extinction.

At the end of a poem in which the Essence is opposed to the attributes, insofar as in the process of speaking, no enumeration of the attributes can ever express or attain the Essence, ‘Aṭṭār says,

I myself am the obstacle on my way
How long will I go on being ‘Aṭṭār and practise ‘aṭṭārī?³⁴

Of course, these self-denials are part of the process and vocabulary of self-annihilation but they serve to emphasize two major characteristics of ‘Aṭṭār's lyrical poetry: first, they reflect a process which never ends, even in the great *mathnawīs*, because they tell the story of the journey from self to selflessness and from thence to the ocean of the attributes, an ocean without end and beyond time. In *fanā* ('non-being') one should always see *baqā* ('eternal survival in God') even if it is seldom described because it is beyond description. The second characteristic is that ‘Aṭṭār's lyric expression is never far from his didactic preoccupations. The problem of audience must be raised here even if there can be no definite answer to the question of *who* ‘Aṭṭār is talking to in the *ghazals*. Who is he urging to renounce the self? Who is he really criticizing when he gets impatient with the denseness of the wayfarer? We may believe that he is acting as a master, showing the way to the seeker on the path of love, and to a certain extent we may be right to think so. But he is more likely to be talking to himself as he considers his own different states and tries to overcome the resistance of his own self. One of the signs of this self-analysis is the division of identity into distinct parts: reason ('*aql*'), heart (*dil*), the vital soul (*jān*). These internal parts very often engage in a dialogue or, at least, pursue an independent path. I will give here only one example of this,

Leaving aside customary good and evil,
Reason turned into nothing and became everything
And it is nothing that is everything.

Once he had completely burnt away his own self,
 From his own self he was thoroughly freed.
 Finding nothing elevated in 'Attar;
 It was humbled before him and reduced to dust.³⁵

So the poet is really looking at what is happening within his own self and, paradoxically enough, he is a witness to his own extinction, which is exactly what his poetry is about: finding the words both to encourage and to bear witness to his own suffering and dissolution. Only when this has been achieved can he become a model for others, for would-be readers who can in turn exert themselves to follow 'Attar's path.

Diminishing and then again diminishing: that is my religion
 Non-being in being is my creed.
 My condition cannot be contained in words
 Read my story in my tears of blood.³⁶

If his condition cannot be contained in words', yet his 'tears of blood' are to be seen in his words, which means that his didactic technique is definitely based on the mode of *isharat* or symbolic allusion. Since there are no words to express what happens in non-being, it can only be alluded to through subjective images, the function of which are to create an interior emotional commotion, in the speaker and the reader alike, so that for a moment at least the veil of selfhood can be torn away.

It is for this reason that a few lines from one of 'Attar's longer ghazals may serve as a fitting conclusion to this study. This poem tells a story which metaphorically sums up the key intricacies of love, suffering, poetry and selflessness. In this poem, both moth and candle are personified: the moth complains to the candle for always burning him in his flame, but the candle answers that he is himself burnt from within by a 'hidden candle'. We may argue that the moth here is the reader, both tantalized and burnt by the reading of 'Attar's poetry, and that the visible candle is 'Attar himself, while the hidden candle is the Beloved dwelling within the soul (*jan*). And in the end, when moth and candle have died and disappeared, only the radiance of the hidden candle remains through the echoes of the poet's wailing and the sweet scent of his verse:

One night, out of unbearable pain
 The moth came out and put on a claim:
 He asked the candle: Pray!
 How long will you be burning me thus, in dismay?
 And the candle said in return:

You heedless creature, what do you say?
 You burn in the blink of an eye
 And are freed from suffering and pain.
 All along the night till morning
 I spend my time weeping and burning in agony.
 At times, I laugh but it is at myself;
 At times, I weep in mourning ...
 There exists another candle but hidden from sight;
 A candle which is neither lit nor extinct.
 To that candle I am the moth, the ardent moth
 And from that comes my disposition to wailing
 It makes me burn as I make you burn:
 This is the ultimate sign of love
 Why do you thus bully me, since like you
 I spend my days in unbearable pain?
 If that candle would shine from the invisible world
 So many moths will fall prey to Him.
 ‘Aṭṭār shall continue candle-like to burn
 As long as there is a trace of him to burn.³⁷

Notes

1. References below are to Dt.
2. A *ḥikāyat* is a story or an anecdote which illustrates an idea and gives the force of experience to concepts.
3. In fact, this close relationship between love and the question of selflessness is the main theme of this essay.
4. This chapter is, along with the one on Ḥallāj (72), one of the longest and most touching ones of the whole work. If all the saints described by ‘Aṭṭār in the *Tadhkirat al-awliya*’ have reached, at various degrees, the station of *fanā*, Adham stands as an archetype of the process of self-annihilation for he descends from kingship to absolute poverty and humility.
5. TA, p. 106.
6. Aḥmad Ghazālī, *Sawāniḥ*, ed. N. Pūrjavādī (Tehran, 1359 Sh./1980). There is an English translation of this work by Nasrullāh Pūrjavādī, *Sawāniḥ: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits* (London and New York, 1986).
7. Dt, 6, 1–4; 8–9.
8. Cf. Dt, 96: The love for the Beloved’s beauty is an ocean of fire/If you are a lover, you’ll be burnt, for that is the path!
9. Dt, 49:1–2.
10. Dt, 49:10–11.
11. For a developed analysis of this important question, see J.T.P de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Persian Poems* (Richmond, 1997) and A. Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York, 1982).

30. Schimmel, *As Through a Veil*, p. 81.
31. Dt, 252:22.
32. Dt, 59:3.
33. Dt, 83:15.
34. Dt, 4:14.
35. Dt, 73:7-10.
36. Dt, 93.
37. Dt, 793:1-3, 5-7, 10-15.

Sufi Symbolism in the Persian Hermeneutic Tradition: Reconstructing the Pagoda of ‘Aṭṭār’s Esoteric Poetics

LEONARD LEWISOHN

Introduction

‘Aṭṭār is distinguished in the Persian-speaking Muslim world for his radical and subversive theology of love, expressed in poetic aphorisms often cited independently of their poems and read as maxims in their own right. These epigrammatic *dicta* are known by heart throughout Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and wherever Persian is spoken or understood, as in the lands of the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent. A few such verses immediately spring to mind:

Anybody who sets his step firmly down in love,
Will rise beyond the realm of faith and infidelity.¹

To heretics let heresy apply,
And to the faithful – grant them faith;
But for the heart of ‘Aṭṭār, let
One ounce of your pain remain.²

Unless the pain of your passion be given to ‘Aṭṭār,
He will discard both the faithful and infidel.³

In fact, the literary edifice of the symbolic poetics of medieval Persian Sufism was to a large degree set down on the foundations of ‘Aṭṭār’s bold ‘religion-of-love’ poetry, which deliberately celebrates infidelity and preaches iconoclasm as the poet’s personal ethic. As contemporary Muslim philosopher S.H. Nasr points out, ‘Aṭṭār’s use of the ‘scandalous’ and iconoclastic’ imagery constitutes ‘a powerful statement of the role of esotericism in making possible the crossing of the frontiers of religious universes. It is as if ‘Aṭṭār wanted to state in the classical language of Sufi poetry that veritable ecumenism is essentially of an esoteric nature and that it

is only through the esoteric that man is able to penetrate into the meaning of other formal universes'.⁴

The main focus of this study will be on 'Aṭṭār's symbolic poetics in general, and in particular on a genre of literature called 'songs of infidelity' (*kufriyyāt* or *qalandariyyāt*), in which the true 'infidel' is beheld as the poet's (and by extension, the reader's) own ego. To expound the subtleties of Sufi antinomian theology and elaborate the paradoxical faith sustaining such mystical infidelity, chapters of books and sometimes whole treatises were composed by some of the major Persian Sufi masters from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. Most of these drew heavily on 'Aṭṭār's poetry, since as Jan Rypka pointed out, 'there is probably no author in the whole of Persian literature whose biography and works present so many riddles as do those of 'Aṭṭār'.⁵ In truth, later Persianate Sufis both in Timurid Persia and early Mughal India were almost as preoccupied with delving into the poetic arcana of 'Aṭṭār's symbolic universe and in deciphering the riddles in his lyrics, replete with esoteric Christian and the abstruse and occult Mazdean symbolism, as were their Western contemporaries, the Platonizing literati of the Italian renaissance, obsessed with exposing esoteric Christian truths underlying ancient pagan Greek myths and reinterpreting Christian scripture in the light of Plotinus.

In particular, the Persian Sufis in the century following 'Aṭṭār's death were unusually preoccupied with the exegesis of a strange poem by 'Aṭṭār beginning:

That ancient Zoroastrian
 I am. It's me who raised on high
 The idol-house – pagoda – then
 Up on its roof I gave a cry,
 Declaimed to all the world's folk,
 Sounding 'infidelity' abroad:
 'O Muslims! Those idols I've rebuilt,
 Put varnish on their fusty paint again...'

Among mystics interested in the hermeneutical decoding of Persian Sufi poetry during the Mongol and Timurid period, this poem was a *locus classicus*. The commentaries on this poem will be the major focus of my essay. In my examination of these commentaries, the sharing of the esoteric symbology of 'Aṭṭār's poetry by Persian-speaking Sufis from Anatolia to the Indian subcontinent becomes readily apparent. 'Aṭṭār's hermetic verse and philosophy of love was rooted in an enormous learning in the Persian Sufi tradition. It is this tradition which animates and inspires his writings, a tradition that one may ignore or distrust out of innate scepticism or distaste for mysticism, yet like it or not, much of his verse is incomprehensible without understanding the Sufi symbolic terminology.

**‘Let not my love be called idolatry’: ‘Aṭṭār’s ‘Christian Child’
in Bākharzī’s *Fuṣūs al-ādāb***

It is self-evident that any understanding of the poetics of a Sufi poet, and particularly that of ‘Aṭṭār, the greatest Persian Sufi poet of the 12th century, demands comprehension of the principles of Sufi mystical doctrine and theology. To decipher ‘Aṭṭār’s arcane language it is therefore helpful if we turn to commentaries on his Sufi symbolism written by authors immediately following his death. One of the most interesting and original writers to concern himself with the meaning of ‘Aṭṭār’s poetic symbolism was Abū’l-Mafākhir Yaḥyā Bākharzī (d. 736/1335–1336), a Kubrawī Shaykh whose celebrated manual of Sufism *Fuṣūs al-ādāb*,⁶ relied on ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry to explain the hermeneutics of Sufi esoteric symbolism and terminology. For the purposes of the present essay, the most interesting aspect of Bākharzī’s Sufi manual is the extended commentary that he gives on several verses from a renowned poem of ‘Aṭṭār, an account in *ghazal* form of the celebrated tale of Shaykh Ṣan‘ān:

- 1 That gypsy Christian girl, of folly so full –
Idol of the soul – walked out her convent drunk,
 - 2 Her bell and wine held in palm, and her hand
Laid upon her girdle, and holy icon held to her heart,
Deploring us Muslims, she hawked her wine.
‘For sale! I’ve wine!’ She sang, as if ashamed.
 - 3 But when on her tress and her lips and her eyes
I gazed, all at once on the throne of my heart
That sovereign moon took up seat, such that she
 - 4 Became my heartlord, my suzerain. I fell down,
Her bounden slave, thrown down before those bright feet.
- I asked of her what she wanted: ‘What?’
I entreated her, ‘What would you have me do?’
‘You know – all too well’ – came the riposte:
5. ‘You puritan in pious robes, with your Sufi cassock,
If union is your wish, with me, my dear love’s zealot
Burn up your robes and turn your face another way
 - 6 To pray, for if you’d come with us in the chantry,
Then let us hear you hymn some verses, two or three
From our love’s diary too. Since all of these
 - 7 Will be asked of you in any case – for it’s the etiquette,
The rite and rule in our convent that all should set
Themselves aside – your mind, heart, soul, all three, you must
Renounce, then come and drink this wine with us:
 - 8 Until at last you’re drunk, and of your self bereft,
At last, in self-incognizance you’ll find all you’ve sought.

- 9 Then once it's clear to you that all there is, is *you* alone,
You may cry out *I am the Truth* in this human realm.'
- 10 'Aṭṭār, arise and flee away from all this idolatry
Of self – cast away all that belongs to mine and me
And so free yourself of all that hides me from thee.'⁷

Although Bākharzī limits himself to citation of only lines five and six of 'Aṭṭār's poem in his discussion, these two couplets constituted for him, as we shall see, a sacred text to be approached and interpreted with reverence. This attitude of deference and veneration adopted by Bākharzī towards 'Aṭṭār's lyrics also informs us of the canonical and saintly status of 'Aṭṭār's poetry within the Persian Sufi tradition during the Mongol period. Bākharzī's approach reflects the same hermeneutical spirit that 'Aṭṭār's contemporary Rūzbihān Baqlī, the famous 'Master of Paradoxes', manifested when he accorded canonical status to the ecstatic sayings (*shaṭhiyyat*) of the Sufi saints. For it is upon their lips, he said, just as upon those of the prophets, that 'God still discourses for us today',⁸ insofar as 'the ecstatic sayings of the Sufis are all analogies and equivocations (*mutashāba*) just like the analogies and equivocations of the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*.'⁹

Turning now to Bākharzī's commentary, he explains that the Arabic terms *miḥrāb* ('prayer niche') and *qibla* ('direction of ritual prayer') in this verse:

Gar vaṣl-i manat bāyad ay pīr-i muraqqa'-pūsh /
Ham khirqa bisūzānī, ham qibla bigardānī
Bā mā tū bi-dayr āyī, miḥrāb digar gīrī /
Waz daftar-i 'ishq-i mā saṭrī du sih bar-khwānī

If union is your wish, with me, my dear love's zealot
Burn up your robes and turn your face another way
To pray, for if you'd come with us in the chantry,
Then let us hear you hymn some verses, two or three
From our love's diary too.

– to signify to 'cognoscenti in mystical knowledge (*ahl-i ma'rifat*) that desired object and goal sought by the heart's transconscious self (*sirr-i dil*), and that to which the heart turns and directs all its attention. From this hermeneutical standpoint, 'for one person, God constitutes the direction of ritual prayer, whereas for another, that direction involves something other than God.' Bākharzī then details the levels of mystical significance contained within 'Aṭṭār's verse, highlighting the esoteric meaning of the *miḥrāb* and *qibla*:

The inner significance of this verse is that when you find yourself released from the ties, bonds, manacles and fetters of physical and sensual attachments so that you attain to the world of absolute spirituality and rapture. ... At that instant you will have switched your 'niche of prayer' (*miḥrabī*) and altered the direction of prayer (*qibla*) from where you had previously faced.¹⁰

In fact, the symbol of the Christian child who robs the poet of his heart, converting him to abandon conventional and puritanical forms of exoteric Islam and persuading him to embrace the kind of unconventional faith that may be called 'esoteric Christianity',¹¹ represents the higher iconic reality that sustains the idol's appearance. 'Aṭṭār's intention here is exactly identical to Shabistarī's gloss on this symbol in his *Garden of Mystery* (a work highly influenced by 'Aṭṭār, as Dr Ghom-shei has demonstrated in his essay in this volume).¹² The *child* is here, in fact, the *elder*, the master (*pīr*) of the erotic religion of Sufi adepts: he or she is an incarnation of the higher consciousness of the mystic, which 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadhānī (martyred 526/1132) a generation earlier so brilliantly called 'Real Infidelity' (*kufr-i ḥaqīqī*), a Ḥallājīan doctrine that modern scholars have shown that 'Aṭṭār knew quite well.¹³

A few lines later in his commentary Bākharzī launches into an extended analysis of the various meanings which one might draw from 'Aṭṭār's phrase 'let us hear you hymn some verses, two or three from our love's diary'. According to his exegesis, 'Aṭṭār's 'Christian chantry' functions as a foil for the Sufi temple while the 'Christian child' acts as the poet's initiator into the contemplative disciplines and the mystical states and stations of Sufism:

A further interpretation of 'let us hear some verses, two or three ...' might be that by the first line, (he meant to say that) whatever you do you do *for* (the sake of) God, that is, practice sincerity in acts of devotion and pious abstinence from hidden polytheism (*shirk-i khafī*).

By the second line, (he implied that) whatever you do should be done *within* God (*fi Allāh*), indicative of the spiritual station of mystical submergence and annihilation (*istighrāq u fanā*) in contemplation (*shuhūd*).

By the third line, (he meant to say that) whatever you do should be done *through* God (*bā-Allāh*), indicative of the spiritual station of subsistence in God (*baqā*), and the return to aid in the spiritual perfection of others.

Otherwise, one could infer that the first 'line' refers to esoteric knowledge (*ma'rifat*) of nature and the cosmos; that the second line refers to the esoteric knowledge of the soul, and that the third line alludes to esoteric knowledge of God Almighty.

Alternatively, (the poet's reference to recitation of) all 'three lines' could be implying 'so that you may comprehend the spiritual realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) and the heavenly dimension (*malakūt*) of physical bodies and the souls and the higher intelligences'.

(As 'Aṭṭār says in the previous verse of this *ghazal*¹⁴):

If union is your wish, with me, my dear love's zealot
Burn up your robes and turn your face another way to pray.

This verse means that you cast away the exoteric forms in which the defects of ungodly others and associating other deities with God (*ghayriyyat u shirk*) are found, and that you turn in pure devotion to God alone.¹⁵

The poem's celebration of the higher consciousness of 'esoteric Christianity' permeates Persian Sufi poetry of the Mongol period.¹⁶ In such poetry, the Christian child symbolizes 'the higher idolatry of love', a universal sentiment in love-poetry throughout the world, and in particular in Renaissance Europe. A perfect example of this symbolism appears in the first half of the octave of Shakespeare's Sonnet 105:

Let not my love be called idolatry
Nor my beloved an idol show,
Since all alike my songs and praises be
To one, of one, still such, and ever so.¹⁷

Like the beloved in Shakespeare's poem, the Christian child in 'Aṭṭār's lyrics is not 'an idol show' because he/she is a theophanic icon reflecting the Sufi vision of divine *tawḥīd*. It is exactly in this context that Bākharzī appropriately interprets the 'Christian child' symbol as signifying 'a spiritual communication, (*barīd-i rūḥānī*), that is to say, an infusion (*wārid*) from the spiritual realm which overwhelms the hearts, reason and psyche of the mystic through divine grace and so totally occupies him that he is unconscious of all else, utterly concentrating his soul'.¹⁸

Though 'Aṭṭār's poetic doxology in the above *ghazal* is nominally Christian, the deity he invokes is the Muslim's divine Unity (*tawḥīd*). By a poetic sleight of hand, which entails a process of inventive transmutation of Islamic theology, the poet contrasts the 'infidelity' of his erotic Sufi faith, where the Christian child is emblematic of the divine, to normative Islamic devotional piety, typified in the poem by the formalistic ascetic focused on self.

The Iconolatry of the Christian Child in the Magian Tavern

The glorification of infidelity in 'Aṭṭār's lyrics is so commonplace as to be virtually omnipresent. This is particularly true of the topos of 'transcending heresy and faith, passing beyond blasphemy and religion' frequently associated with 'Aṭṭār's poetry by later commentators on his *kufriyyāt*. And if Bākharzī's adoption of 'Aṭṭār's

lyrics to decipher the subtleties of Sufi antinomian erotic theology underscores the centrality of 'Aṭṭār's poetry among cognoscenti of the mystical sciences in medieval Iran, far more striking than Bākhārzi's short commentaries are the long theosophical ones ascribed to his contemporary, the founder of the Safavid order Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī (d. 735/1334), on a wide selection of 'Aṭṭār's verses. Muḥammad Shafī'i-Kadkanī has drawn attention to the fact that Ardabīlī used to frequent the mausoleum of a certain Majd al-Dīn Kākuli, who is cited as having been an associate in 'experiential and theoretical mysticism (*muṣāhib al-taḥqīq*) of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār'.¹⁹ From this statement it is evident that Ṣafī al-Dīn was directly affiliated with Sufi centres still imbued with the fragrance of the surviving 'Aṭṭārian tradition, then only a century old. Recorded by Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī's hagiographer Darwish Tawakkulī b. Ismā'īl b. Ḥājji Muḥammad (alias Ibn Bazzāz, d. 1391) in his *Ṣafwat al-Ṣafā'* (composed c.759/1357), these commentaries cover almost the full range of 'Aṭṭār's key mystical terms.²⁰

The celebration of infidelity in 'Aṭṭār's lyrics is most often expressed through the image of the Magian Temple (*dayr-i mughān*) or Tavern of Ruin (*kharābāt*), the sacred *temenos* of the Persian mystics where the fire of the religion of love is kept perpetually aflame. Ardabīlī takes the following two lines from a *ghazal* of 'Aṭṭār as his cue to give a Sufi interpretation of Zoroastrian symbolism in general and to expound the significance of the symbols of the Magian Temple and Fire Temple in particular:

What sort of holy man
of pious faith is he
who spends all day
in a Magian abbey?
I'll transcend vice and virtue,
discard both sin and grace
and infidelity and faith
cast aside, for many high
degrees beyond these exist.²¹

Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī explains these lines as follows:

The Magian Temple (*dayr-i mughān*) and Fire Temple (*ātashkada*) signify the World of Love (*'ālam-i 'ishq*). Just as in these places a flame is kept alight, likewise in the quarter of love (*kū-yi 'ishq*) where one engages in the practice of love (*'ishq-varzīdan*), the direction one faces for prayers is Love (*qibla 'ishq-ast*), while Love comprises all one's acts of worship.

... 'Good' and 'bad', 'heresy' and 'faith', 'intellectual theory' and 'practical application' only exist in the (purely mental realm of the) World of Reason (*'ālam-i 'aql*). But in the World of Love (*'ālam-i 'ishq*) – that is, the World of Placelessness

(*lā-makān* = *utopia*) – one encounters a myriad spiritual stations, such as the station of dematerialization and separation (*tajrīd u tafīd*), love and loving-kindness (*ishq u maḥabbat*), gnosis (*maʿrifat*), spiritual poverty (*faqr*), divine Unity (*tawḥīd*), as well as many others beyond description.²²

ʿAṭṭār’s typically Sufi approach to the topos of faith and infidelity, using encoded imagery from extraneous religions to convey esoteric truths, is visible in yet another *ghazal* (783) where he asserts that ‘religion’ or ‘faith’ (*dīn*) presupposes the experience, if not the practice, of infidelity (*kufr*). ‘Do not lay claim to religion without first having passed through and transcended infidelity,’ he admonishes. ‘If you are a man fit for this [Sufi] tradition, then buckle on the cincture of infidelity (*zunnār-i kufr*). How great the gap between you and Faith (*dīn*) there still is! Why fool yourself? Don’t lay claim to faith unless you have gone beyond infidelity. Once you’ve obliterated your ‘self’ in infidelity, then you will have overturned the foundation of faith. A hundred thousand demons lurk within your Magian soul: even if you refuse it to buckle it on, your own Magian cincture of infidelity is still there....’²³ *Ghazals* such as these, by no means infrequent in his *Dīwān*, belong to the literary tradition of *kufriyyāt*, the antecedents of which, as mentioned earlier, can be traced back to ʿAyn al-Quḍāt Hamadhānī and Ḥallāj.²⁴

It should be noted that the occasion prompting Bākharzī’s exegesis of selected verses from ʿAṭṭār’s songs of infidelity was their being chanted during a concert of Sufi sacred music (*samāʾ*). For Ardabīlī (as for Bākharzī, his contemporary), ʿAṭṭār’s *ghazal* on the higher morality of the Christian child’s faith contrasted to that of the formalist Muslim pietist, had particular appeal. Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī also made a practice of *samāʾ* sessions in which ʿAṭṭār’s *ghazals*, featured as part of every Sufi cantor’s required repertoire of songs, were regularly sung. So it is neither coincidence nor even very remarkable that the very same verse expounded by Bākharzī in his ‘Explanation of Terms used by the Singer in the Sufi Concert’ in his chapter on the ‘Etiquette of Performance of *Samāʾ*’ should also have been featured prominently in Ardabīlī’s exegesis of the Christian symbols in Persian Sufi poetry chanted during mystical *Samāʾ* seances. As if underlining the melopoetic context of all Persian Sufi poetry, Ṣafī al-Dīn’s extemporaneous exposition of Sufistic ‘esoteric Christianity’ is likewise given during a concert of Sufi mystical music (*samāʾ*). The reason why the Sufi concert also functions as the *mise-en-scène* for both Bākharzī’s and Ṣafī al-Dīn’s explanations of the spiritual meanings of these Christian symbols in ʿAṭṭār’s lyrics is simply because music²⁵ is the prime gateway into the magic mystery domain of the Sufi vision of ‘esoteric Christianity’.

As Ibn Bazzāz tells the story, several men of learning (*dānishmandān*) who were aware of only the most superficial theological sense of the poetic terms employed by the singer happened one evening to drop by while the customary *Samāʾ* session was being held. The first verse of ʿAṭṭār’s *ghazal* cited earlier was on the singer’s lips:

That gypsy Christian girl, of folly so full –
 Idol of the soul – walked from her convent drunk.²⁶

While they listened to this verse, the venerable master commented that the reason they were able to take pleasure in the conviviality of the musical concert was because in their minds they interpreted the term ‘Christian child’ (*tarsā-bacha*) as referring to the Prophet [Muḥammad], peace be upon him, who had been born of a pagan infidel. The learned men’s opinion of the verse was just as simple-minded as that, said the master, smiling benevolently as he spoke.²⁷

Şafī al-Dīn’s comment immediately prompted a discussion about the various hermeneutical senses within Sufi mystical poetry.

‘What then,’ queried Şadr al-Dīn, the son and successor of Şafī al-Dīn, ‘is the real meaning of the term “Christian child”?’

According to Şafī al-Dīn’s explanation, each Christian symbol used by the Sufi poets has a corresponding visionary reality – being the archetypal meaning of the concrete symbol – in the world of transcendent spiritual beings. The Sufi pilgrim encounters imaginal likenesses (*amthāl*) of these things in the process of traversing the Path. Each of these likenesses, if correctly apprehended, conveys different lessons about the nature of the veils that screen the eyes of the soul. Şafī al-Dīn’s explanation merits full quotation here since it presents us with a profound summary of some of the key metaphysical doctrines sustaining Persian Sufi poetry:

Amongst all the many realms that lie in the pilgrim’s way and through which he must pass, is a world called the ‘World of Spiritual Beings’ (*‘ālam-i rūḥāniyyat*). The ‘Christian child’ is a familiar of that world and dwells in that realm – since ‘Christians’ belong all to the nation of Jesus (peace be upon him) who is called the ‘Spirit of God’ (*rūḥ Allāh*), and all beings of that world God has created from pure Spirit. And that is the reason why he is called the ‘Christian child’.

In that realm, the pilgrim beholds beauteous forms and spiritual stations of beatitude as well. No realm presents more difficulty for the pilgrim than here because in this realm he beholds beautiful faces and righteous degrees. ... How many become enthralled and caught here, losing themselves on this plane of being because they lack all lofty ambition and have no will to transcend it!

Similarly, just as actual Christians (amongst their sacraments) possess bell, chapel and church, crucifixion, cincture, cross, and the herding of swine, so the Sufi pilgrim (*sālik*) in this world is forced to confront imaginal likenesses (*amthāl*) of all these things as well, since each of these things has a corresponding spiritual reality (*ma‘nī-yi*).

Then, if the pilgrim reaches this (spiritual) world while something of his carnal self (*naḥs*) still remains with him so that he is not worthy to be admitted as an

intimate member of their gathering, at that point (the symbol of) the 'swineherd' is revealed to him.

And when the pilgrim reaches that world and becomes overwhelmed by love and the wind blows his ascetic piety (*zuhd*) and devotion (*'ibādat*) all away, his act of worship becoming mere dusty particles dancing in love's wayward breeze, at that point 'the bell' (*nāqūs*) will be revealed and exposed to him. The bell symbolizes deficiency in ascetic piety and devotion and lack of perfect love. The adage 'the virtues of the pious are accounted sins by those brought close to God' testifies this experience.

...Likewise, the cross is a symbol denoting the two tresses of the spiritual-icong that-bear-witness-to-divine-beauty (*shāhidān-i ma'nawī*). Whoever falls in love and loses his heart over these two tresses also loses his conformist faith based on blind mimesis of tradition (*īmān-i taqlīdī*). When the pilgrim arrives at this spiritual station, the cross is revealed to him, whereupon he loses his [old] faith that was based on mere religious conformism:

Love of that face is my book of poems' title page;
In those curls' blasphemy lies the substance of my faith.

If the pilgrim arrives at that spiritual station still prepossessed of a sense of separative self-identity and conceited fancy (*hasī u pindār*), the cincture (*zunnār*) is revealed to him, which he now sees bound about his waist.

...Now, just as the Christians venerate the idol (of Christ) and the cross out of servile conformism as if these are proxies acting on behalf of Jesus – although the objects do not at all reach the interior spiritual reality of Jesus (*ḥaqīqat-i 'Isā*) – in the same way, whenever the pilgrim witnesses those spiritual-icons-that-bear-witness-to-divine-beauty, without having yet attained and seen for himself the reality of the Spirit (*ḥaqīqat-i rūḥ*) nor without having had any direct experiential verification and realization of the Spirit, he proceeds to blindly love these things as proxies, slavish and ignorantly aping that true divine love (*'ishq-i ḥaqīqī*). Thus it is that on the path of religion, in lieu of the idol (of Christ) and the cross, those spiritual icons become manifested to him.

Yet it is precisely this naïve mimicry of love-play (*'ishq-i taqlīdī*) that ultimately points the way to true divine love! It is in this sense the poet says:

In every state of mind,
the Sufis sport with that iconic form,
since all those forms act as guides upon
the way of love, infatuation and union.

Nonetheless, the Sufi will never be able to attain to that true divine love through this unreal mimicry of love (*'ishq-i majāzī*) except by drinking and thereby relishing the 'sapiential taste' of the wine of love (*dhawq-i shurb-i may-i maḥabbat*), the

(through its drunkenness) he become bereft of his 'self-existence'. At this point, he will realize the being of that Real One. Only when his own being is negated and his existence turned to non-existence, shall he reach the existence of that Real Love (*hastī-yi 'ishq-i ḥaqīqī*).²⁸

In this passage Ṣafī al-Dīn explains that the pilgrim must of necessity first become an idolater, caught up in an illusory play of images. On the imaginal level, these images point to a higher love and are bearers of a transcendent significance. Constellated for him in the heaven of his soul, such images act as icons appearing on the horizon of his spiritual journey while the veils are gradually lifted. This iconic symbolism is 'theophanic' because the form that bears witness (*shāhid*) to the divine hails from the spiritual realm where it *necessarily* appears, initially at least, through Christian symbols – as if only through the dream of Christianity can the pilgrim awake into the bright daylight of Islam. If the pilgrim falls in love *in flesh* with a Christian maiden, she at last reveals herself to be *in soul* a Muslim houri. For this reason if he follows the path of her 'blasphemy' with sincerity (*ṣidq*), he will find true faith. And when he comprehends her 'infidelity', he will experience the interior reality of faith. The Sufi pilgrim should grasp both the inner significance and validity – while simultaneously comprehending the vanity and, ultimately, the illusion of – the Christian imagery that the Persian Sufi poets use.²⁹

In sum, the above survey of the visionary topography of Bākhārī's and Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabilī's Sufi exegeses upon 'Aṭṭār's esoteric Christianity and Zoroastrianism exposes an experience of mystical Islam far beyond the boundaries of conventional piety. The terminology of infidelity is freely used to evoke the transports of faith and the ecstasies of erotic mysticism. 'Aṭṭār speaks here in a language beyond language,³⁰ a language comprehensible not through the faculty of reason but intuited by the *mad love* that commingles heaven and earth, monotheist theology and pagan idolatry. His poetry thus becomes the great subversion of exoteric thinking and ratiocentric theology – in which the human mortality incarnated in the Christian child becomes immortalized and divinized through the ecumenical spirit of Sufi love.

Gabriyya: Reconstructing the Pagoda of 'Aṭṭār's Esoteric Poetics

You ascetic on the cold stone, you are not safe
From the tricks of God's zeal: the distance between the cloister
And the Zoroastrian tavern is not after all that great.

Hāfiz³¹

Analysing the relationship of Persian Sufi poetic imagery to Zoroastrianism in Iran during the reign of the Samanids, Alessandro Bausani notes that the earliest

Persian poets, such as Daqīqī (d. c. 978), generally exhibited ‘absolute ignorance and incomprehension of the historic Zoroastrian religion.’³² While ‘Zoroaster’s religion was coupled (by early Persian poets) with three other “joyful”, carefree and libertine elements, i.e. music, wine and beautiful boys – all three prohibited by official religion and symbols of “defamation”’. Bausani also underlines how in Daqīqī’s lyrics of infidelity, ‘Zoroaster’s religion – together with the other three – is a strong motif of poetic defamation and is quoted precisely because it is reprehensible and therefore loved by the poet’.

The early Persian poets of the tenth century deliberately associated their profession with the idea of bad reputation, shamelessness, licentiousness (*bad-nāmī*, *rusvā’ī*, *rindī*).³³ Bausani thus points out that from that early period, even if the traditional Persian poet was extremely religious and an orthodox Muslim, he often felt obliged to praise heresy and unbelief (*kufr*), extol the idolatrous temple-tavern, prefer the ‘religion of Zoroaster (a pure symbol of unbelief, as we shall see, which had nothing to do with Mazdaism) to that of Muḥammad, and the beardless young Christian to the Preacher and the Mullah.’³⁴ Such aesthetically idealized ‘Zoroastrianism’ simply was an element of the Persian poetic tradition.³⁵ Thus, Daqīqī’s simile that compared the Friend to an ‘idol’, one of ‘Aṭṭār’s most frequently used metaphors, represents both ‘the greatest possible heresy for Islam’, as well as is ‘one that has nothing to do with Zoroastrianism.’³⁶ Daqīqī also had linked the Zoroastrian religion ‘with wine, ruby lips and sound of the lute as motifs of revelry and defamation in the eyes of the world’, although these motifs in his verse owed little or nothing to historical Zoroastrianism.³⁷

One of the best examples of the Sufis’ ignorance of – or at best, their feigned disregard for – the historical niceties of the sacraments of historical Zoroastrianism, appears a generation after ‘Aṭṭār in the poetry of Sa’dī. In Sa’dī’s *Gulistān*, one sees ‘Magi, Brahmins, bishops, priests and atheists, as well as Hindu temples, a Christian convent and a temple to Fire, all lumped together under the common denominator of *kufr* (unbelief, idolatry, atheism).’³⁸ After examining Sa’dī’s strange and apparently irrational mixture of religious motifs from these diverse faiths, Bausani reflects that the Sufi portrayal of Mazdaism resembles a ‘literary-esoteric cypher,’ more than any historical memory or knowledge of Zoroastrianism. Not only in the writings of Sa’dī, but in most Persian Sufi poetry, he concludes,

It becomes clear that the literary-esoteric cypher of *kufr* (unbelief) signifies the in-depth study of religious realities and their experimental realization (*taḥqīq*) beyond the veils of exterior and, at times, hypocritical fidelity ‘to the letter’. Any non-Islamic religion (including idolatry) can serve as a symbol of this: Zoroastrianism – true historical Zoroastrianism – does not enter into the picture and there is no need to assume any direct link (unless it is the purely casual link of the knowledge of certain terms for contingent reasons due to the fact that Zoroastrianism developed

in Iran) between Zoroastrian tradition and Islamic lyrical and mystical tradition. In fact – as we mentioned above – a blasphemous Christian rite had already been described in Arab poems.³⁹

Thus, the relationship between the living tradition – or even the moribund intellectual doctrine – of Zoroastrianism, and the rise of Persian Sufi lyrical poetry seems to have been inspired more by the shadow of an attractive poetic simile than any substance of historic fact or actual extra-Islamic religious influence. Concerning blasphemous poetic images, often of Zoroastrian origin, in the *qalandariyyāt* genre of poetry, J.T.P. de Bruijn similarly comments that 'one should therefore take care not to read a reflection of reality in these poetic images. Poets such as Sanā'ī and Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, who used them very frequently in their poetry, were certainly not antinomian mystics, but pious Muslims who put much emphasis on the obedience to God's will as it was laid down in the *sharī'at*.'⁴⁰

In the following part of this essay, the general significance of 'Aṭṭār's 'Sufi-Zoroastrian-symbolist verse' (*gabriyya*) is analysed. If we divided it into genres, Persian Sufi antinomian poetry might be characterized as constituting a ternary:

- (1) 'Songs of Infidelity' (*Kufriyya*), within which appears the sub-genre of
- (2) 'Wild-man Poetry' (*Qalandariyya*),⁴¹ followed by a further sub-genre of
- (3) 'Sufi-Zoroastrian-symbolist verse' (*Gabriyya*).

The 'lyrics celebrating infidelity', or *kufriyya*, feature non-Islamic, and sometimes deliberately anti-Islamic imagery and symbols drawn from the theological and doctrinal lexicons of Christianity, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism which are used to glorify the transcendence of esoteric spiritual realization and the Sufi Path.⁴² But the *kufriyya* genre in turn belongs to a more inclusive genre of Sufi literature known as *Shaṭḥiyyāt*, ecstatic sayings or paradoxical utterances often bordering on blasphemy.

To comprehend the symbolism of the (third) *gabriyya* genre in classical Persian Sufi poetry no better way exists than to study 'Aṭṭār's poetry, a large part of which is written in this genre.⁴³ The focus of my analysis will be on a single *ghazal* by 'Aṭṭār belonging to this genre on which several commentaries were composed by Persian Sufi writers from the 13th to the 16th centuries. In the poem 'Aṭṭār confesses to being a Zoroastrian missionary bent on preaching infidelity. (It may be pointed out that in Persian literature the term *Gabr* primarily indicates a Zoroastrian, and but secondarily 'infidel' or 'unbeliever'.⁴⁴) If anything could be worse than this, he admits to being an adulterer who has slept with his own mother!

*Man ān gabr-i dīrīna kih but-khāna banā kardam / Shudam bar bām-i but-khāna,
darīn 'ālam nadā kardam // Šalā-yi kufr dar dādam shumā rā ay musalmānān!//*

*Kih man ān kuhna buthā rā digarbāra jalā kardam // Az ān mādar kih man zādam,
digarbāra shudam juftish / Az ānam gabr mīkhānand kih bā mādar zanā kardam
// Bih bakrī zādam az mādar az ān ‘Isā’yam mīkhānand / Kih man īn shīr-i mādar
rā digarbāra ghadhā kardam // Agar ‘Aṭṭār-miskīn rā darīn gabrī bisūzānand /
Guwā bāshīd ay mardān kih man khwud rā fanā’ kardam.*

- 1 That ancient Zoroastrian
I am. It's me who raised on high
The idol-house – pagoda – then
Up on its roof I gave a cry,
- 2 Declaimed to all the world's folk,
Sounding 'infidelity' abroad:
O Muslims! Those idols I've rebuilt,
Put varnish on their fusty paint
- 3 Again. I'm born again, have wed
My mother as my mate again!
With her I've had a liaison
Once more – hence I'm called, 'Zoroastrian'
- 4 Through mother-incest.⁴⁵ I was born
By virgin birth from her, and this
Is why my name is 'Jesus', since
My mother's milk I've sipped up twice.
- 5 If 'Aṭṭār, this wretch, hapless, piteous
You'd set alight and burn to ashes
In such a Zoroastrian state –
That's proof, O men, that I've effaced
Myself, my ego made annihilate.⁴⁶

Around a century after 'Aṭṭār's death, the symbolic meaning of this strange poem became the subject of controversy. It evoked intense scrutiny and debate amongst a number of Persian Sufis, provoking them to pen commentaries on the poem. Although attention was first drawn by Yevgeni Edvardovich Bertels in the 1920s to one of these commentaries, followed by Alessandro Bausani's citation of another in the 1950s, neither scholar took care to examine the theosophical doctrines within the commentaries in any depth or detail. For instance, while commenting on the ethics and aesthetics within 'Aṭṭār's tale of Shaykh Ṣan'ān, Bausani rightly posited that the solution to 'the problem of the duality of meanings (earthly love – divine love, etc.) of Persian traditional lyric poetry' should be sought in the *malāmatī* elements in early Persian Sufism. He thus correctly judged that this *ghazal* (along with the commentary he cites) is 'a great help towards understanding this "set of concepts" (if they can be called such)!'⁴⁷ However, both scholars scoffed and regarded rather slightly our native Persian Sufi hermeneuts' careful and elaborate

theosophical commentaries on the poem. Grounded in the apparently 'rational' and 'objective' terrain of Academe, these orientalist gawked and gawped at the Sufi commentaries as if they were curious wild beasts thrashing about in a menagerie. The Iranian symbolist beasts presented them with an exciting and exotic spectacle, no doubt, but they seemed nonetheless potentially dangerous animals: the poem comprises an 'overturned ecumenicity of "sacred heresy"', Bausani thus bemusedly remarked.⁴⁸ But once we turn to ruminate upon the various commentaries written on 'Aṭṭār's 'Sufi Zoroastrian' poem, something far more profound emerges, as I shall show below.

My first commentary is by Shaykh Ādharī Ṭūsī (d. 866/1461), the poet laureate of Sulṭān Aḥmad Shah Bahmanī (r.825–837/1421–1433) and his son 'Alā' al-Dīn Bahmanī (r.837–862/1433–1457) in India. Ādharī's commentary was composed in 840/1436. It is found in his still unpublished prose masterpiece, the *Jewels of the Mysteries* (*Jawāhir al-asrār*).⁴⁹ This commentary, he claims, is but a summary of another commentary on the poem by the great Kubrawī Shaykh 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī (659/1261–736/1326). The second commentary is by an anonymous sixteenth-century Mevlevi shaykh which was published in Persian and translated into Russian in 1924 by Bertels. In the course of my translation and discussion of these commentaries, brief citation will also be made from two other commentaries that expound the meaning of the notorious 'mother-incest' verse in the *ghazal*, by respectively Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabilī and Ṣā'īn al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad Turkah Iṣfahānī (d. 830/1427).

Ādharī's *Jewels of the Mysteries* is an encyclopaedic work wherein much of the author's extraordinary erudition is devoted to composing esoteric hermeneutical commentaries (*ta'wīl*) on various versified sayings of Sufi masters, explaining the arcane symbols and elucidating the abstruse imagery in selected verses of many of the great classical Persian poets, including Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Anwarī, Amīr Khusraw, Ḥāfiz, as well as many others. Some twenty pages of this work are significantly devoted to expounding the doctrinal meaning and metaphysical purport of many of 'Aṭṭār's outrageous *kufriyyāt*, as well as some of the outwardly 'heretical' lyrics of contemporary Persian Sufi poets such as Kamāl Khujandī (d. 803/1400) and Maghribī (d. 810/1408). Just as we saw with Bākharzī, 'Aṭṭār is virtually canonized by Ādharī. He states that the great poet of Nishapur is so highly esteemed as a thinker that 'most of the adepts of the Sufi Path follow Aṭṭār's gnostic lore (*ma'rifat*)'.⁵⁰

As if to demonstrate his own esteem, Ādharī's hermeneutical analysis of the 'ancient Zoroastrian' poem spans some fourteen pages (folios 171r–77v),⁵¹ being by far the longest and most detailed exegesis of the poem ever written. It is even more significant in the literary history of Persian Sufism because it purports to be a paraphrase of the (apparently no longer extant) commentary on the poem by

Simnānī. One of the most celebrated Sufis of the Kubrawī school of his day (whose life and writings have been the object of much study by scholars over recent decades), Simnānī is praised by Ādharī as having been 'supreme among the gnostics of his day'. Having said that, since the commentary is not listed among Simnānī's extant works, whether major or minor,⁵² it is evidently *not* by him. I have referred to its author, whoever he is, below as Pseudo-Simnānī.

Pseudo-Simnānī called his commentary *Gabriyya* (Zoroastrianism), states Ādharī. Confessing reluctantly that he 'doesn't feel any great confidence in the instructive value of the commentary – but God knows best', nonetheless Ādharī decided to provide the gist of it. But this gist is by far the most insightful and thorough commentary on the poem that I have encountered to date. Although the entire Persian text of Simnānī's commentary has been translated below, several breaks will be taken from the translation to analyse germane topics that require further elucidation for the modern reader unfamiliar with the mystical theology and the multiple levels of meaning within the Sufis' symbolic universe and the analogical relationships among these various levels.

The commentary is divided into two parts, here respectively termed *Gabriyya I* and *Gabriyya II*.

Gabriyya I provides an exoteric verse-by-verse analysis, approaching the poem as an acknowledgement of the poet's spiritual failure and a personal confession of 'Aṭṭār's sin and transgression.

Gabriyya II is completely esoteric, interpreting the poem, also verse by verse, as communicative of divine mysteries revealed to the poet in states of mystical rapture and intoxication, the secrets of which can only be divulged by a hermeneutical exegesis of the symbolic meanings of the images utilizing a codex of Sufi terminology.

Both commentaries, however, are based squarely on the study of Sufi symbols and terms, as Ādharī states at the outset, 'The problematic of these verses lies in the codex of terminology therein (*iṣṭilāḥāt*) so unless that codex be explained, objections always will be bound to come up'.⁵³ Further explaining the difference between the two (exoteric and esoteric) parts of the commentary, he observes:

...Those who possess understanding and comprehension of ideas (*arbāb-i fahūm u ma'ānī*) are two parties. First come the scholars who cannot transgress beyond the limits of the literal meaning, whether that be briefly or profusely expressed. Second come the wise adepts in esoteric knowledge (*'urafā-yi 'ilm-i bāṭin*) who have set foot in the boundless wilderness of visionary experience and stroll among the realities of the Spirit (*kashf u ma'ānī*).

Thus any commentary on these verses must address both aspects. Though on the one hand, the commentary should be acceptable to exoteric scholars, on the other, it should also gain the approbation of veteran mystics who know the Way by

personal experience. And in this I will make exertions to the utmost... for God is both Provider and Withholder.⁵⁴

Gabriyya I: Uroboric Incest in the Womb of Chaos

For as the *Persian Magi* once
Upon their *Mothers*, got their *Sons*,
That were incapable t'injoy,
That Empire any other way;
So *Presbyter* begot the other,
Upon the *Good Old Cause* his Mother.
Samuel Butler, *Hudibras*⁵⁵

As for the first (exoteric) aspect, all I can state – although God knows best – is that the composer of these verses is telling a tale about his own mystical states.

He is informing us about the very genesis of creation (*mabdhā'-yi khalqat*), as was related in the *ḥadīth*: 'Verily God Almighty created the creatures in darkness, then He sprinkled some of His Light upon them. [Those whom some of that Light reached took the right way, while those whom it missed wandered from the straight road.]'⁵⁶ In this saying, God's friend (Muḥammad), peace be upon him, informed us about the very beginning of the genesis and creation of living beings.

The term Zoroastrian (*gabr*) [used in the first verse of the poem] denotes this darkness of (the dawn of) creation.

At the same time the poet conveys to us the farthest limit of his mystical state, as well as his realization of the grace of the illumination of faith, at the point when divine Unity's bright Sun – of 'then He sprinkled some of His Light' – cast its brilliant rays down upon terrestrial existence, into the pure mine (of life).

The term 'pagoda' (*butkhāna*)⁵⁷ designates the farthest reach of the foundation of the Elements' existence – that is to say, that compound of Water, Fire, Air and Earth – which is the locus of darkness and the source-spring of the murkiness and gloom of these four (elements).

Hence, the first couplet recalls and mentions this primordial darkness.

In the same manner, when the poet states in the (first) hemistich of the first couplet, that 'That ancient Zoroastrian/I am. It's me who raised on high/The idol-house – pagoda.' (*manam ān gabr-i dīrīna kih butkhāna banā kardam*), in the second hemistich he then proceeds to make mention of the illumination of faith, stating, 'Up on its roof I gave a cry,/ Declaimed to all the world's folk,' (*shudam bar bām-i butkhāna, bih 'ālam dar nadā kardam*).⁵⁸

(What he means to say here is that) whenever the light of Faith (*nūr-i imān*) with certitude shines within the house of human nature, everything that lies concealed in the secret recesses of that dark house immediately becomes illuminated and plainly exposed for all to view. Likewise, when it becomes evident that in man's nature certain reprehensible qualities have appeared, such as lust, anger,

arrogance, envy, greed, he becomes subject to various fluctuations of temperament due to the number of blameworthy characteristics, such as the passional drives of domineering soul (*nafs-i ammāra*), the idol of desire, and the mutual opposition of the four humours, all residing within him. Because of this, sometimes he is seized by lust and cast upon the earth. Sometimes anger gives him a tumble. Sometimes he is borne aloft by pride and arrogance. Other times he is abandoned to envy. Sometimes he is fettered down by chains of desire like a lunatic; other times, his hands are bound and he is lead helplessly into temptation, becoming trampled under the feet of passion and desire, so the holy garments of his god-fearing piety become soiled and defiled by sin. In this fashion, being in thrall to idle sports and sinful pastimes, the light of his faith is dragged through the mire of the Valley of Ruin and Perdition.⁵⁹

According to Pseudo-Simnānī then, the call to infidelity on the part of the ancient Zoroastrian represents the poet's descent into the elemental depths of his own soul where he discovers the light of faith shining through the darkness of infidelity. The poet's metaphors express both psychological conditions and mystical states (*aḥwāl-i khwud*), as well as a psychologically interiorized vision of the Islamic creation myth. The ascent to the rooftop of the Pagoda is paradoxically understood as a descent into lower degrees of elemental, inanimate existence: the entry into the 'primordial darkness' lying at the genesis of creation. When the poet gazes within his soul, beholding the light of faith illuminating the pall of this lower darkness, he finds by Faith's illumination various idols – symbolic of vices such as 'lust, anger, arrogance, envy, greed' – hidden therein, plaguing the soul.

So according to this exoteric interpretation, the first line amounts to both a confession of sin and a revelation leading to the realization that the origins of creation are concealed within the soul. Pseudo-Simnānī elaborates the psychological aspect of this illumination as follows:

So in all fairness, the poet stands up in order to acknowledge his madness (*i'tirāf al-junān*) and – since 'infidelity' (*kufr*) here connotes 'concealment' (*pūshish*) – confesses (in the second verse):

...Sounding 'infidelity' abroad:
O Muslims! Those idols I've rebuilt,
Put varnish on their fusty paint
Again...

In the first hemistich of the couplet he gives a fair evaluation of himself while in the second hemistich a confession and acknowledgement (of his madness) is given.

His mentioning of putting new lacquer on the idols in the second hemistich refers to actualization of the innate circumstances required by each (individual).

That is to say, as was previously stated, all beings have been generated, in the innermost part of their nature, from Mother Love (*mādar-i maḥabbat*). By means of her upbringing, they become manifest and obtain a being with a substantial external existence.⁶⁰

Revamping of the idols, putting new coats of paint and lacquer on them then is symbolic of the inner workings of Mother Nature – or as Simnānī calls it, the metaphysical affairs of ‘Mother Love’ within each individual. ‘Mother Love’ is the main animating force in medieval Natural Theology, whether this be Muslim, Jewish or Christian,⁶¹ in her capacity as ‘heavenly love’ – Spenser’s Dame Nature – she holds the entire Chain of Being in her hand that stretches from the foot of God’s Throne to the meanest of inanimate objects.⁶²

Although the cosmological role and place of Mother Love is not precisely identified by Pseudo-Simnānī, she seems to be more or less equivalent here to the Universal Soul operating as *anima mundi*. In the mystic attuned to the Universal Soul, she inspires ‘serenity’, the cosmic peace to which all particular human souls aspire, which in Sufi psychology is designated as the level of the ‘serene soul’ – *al-naḥs al-muṭma’inna*. Continuing his commentary, he explains the role played by Mother Love within the general scheme of Islamic knowledge:

Now, the worthy and noble child favoured by fortune is one who conducts himself uprightly, behaving in a manner pleasing to his mother and father, while a child who abandons this course falls into deviant behaviour, pursuing rebellious and unjust principles of behaviour. As the adage goes: ‘the fornicator is an oppressor and the oppressor a fornicator’, and it was to this sense of the word ‘fornicator’ that the poet alluded in the (third) verse:

*Az ān mādar kih man zādam digarbāra shudam juftish/
Az ānam gabr mikhwānand kih bā mādar zanā kardam*

I’m born again, have wed
My mother as my mate again!
With her I’ve had a liaison
Once more – hence I’m called, ‘Zoroastrian’
Through mother-incest.

...In this manner, as soon as the manifestation of myself emerged into visible (material) being, I also would have risen in revolt against the Mother who is endowed with the quality of Love. I would have become her consort and become a rebel thereby. And such conduct constitutes ‘being Zoroastrian’ (*gabrī*), which is the significance of his declaration that ‘hence I’m called, ‘Zoroastrian’.⁶³

It is obvious from this passage that Pseudo-Simnānī considers the poet to be confessing his sin against Mother Love. By following his passions, he has rebelled against her; his act of incest involves precisely this ‘sinful transgression’. Historically speaking, as the Samuel Butler’s epigraph to this section indicates, the priestly caste of the Magi were reputed for following the custom among the ancients of begetting their children upon their own mothers, as attested by Sextus Empiricus, Strabo and Diogenes Laertius, among others.⁶⁴ Similar beliefs about Zoroastrians can be found among Muslim authors. The commentator now proceeds to explain the precise meaning of his ‘infidelity’, the sacreligious ‘Zoroastrian’ behaviour. In the following interpretation of line 4, the scribe substitutes ‘Magian’ (*gabr mīkhunand*) for the poem’s original reading of ‘Jesus’ (*‘Īsāyam mīkhunand*):

So he now engages in blaming his domineering sensual soul (*nafs-i ammāra*), discoursing in an apologetic tongue. For he had revealed that in his primordial nature (*aṣl-i fiṭrat*) – according to the (*ḥadīth*) that states that ‘every infant is born according to an innately divine nature (*‘ala’l-fiṭra*)’⁶⁵ – ‘I had been in a Christ-like state of purity, but through falling into the meshes and toils of sin and transgressions that are characterized with selfishness, I was changed and rendered gloomily dark in humour.’ It was to this same the idea that he alluded (in line 4) with these words:

I was born
By virgin birth from her, and this
Is why my name is ‘Magian’, since
My mother’s milk I’ve sipped up twice.

He expresses himself thus to convey and confess his wretched and poor condition, being aware that justice demands that anyone who perpetuates works of iniquity and ill deeds should be committed to the flames of the Inferno, so it should be understood that anything which befalls him in the way of punishment and chastisement is the very quintessence of Justice, and does not exist solely for punishment’s sake alone. According to the Qur’ānic verse: ‘Whatever of good befalls you, O man, it is from God, and whatever ill befalls you it comes from yourself’ (4:79) Therefore one should attribute all ill to oneself, and blame no one but oneself. It is for this reason that he concluded his discourse with this verse:

If ‘Aṭṭār, this wretch, hapless, piteous
You’d set alight and burn to ashes
In such a Zoroastrian state –
That’s proof, O men, that I’ve effaced
Myself, my ego made annihilate.⁶⁶

In short, in sum and in substance, this first part of the commentary views the poem as 'Aṭṭār's confession of his transgressions against Mother Love. Pseudo-Simnānī thinks the poet calls down a well-deserved chastisement upon his own head. In this part the commentator does not go beyond the literal obscenity of the images, reducing, desecrating and desacralizing the higher metaphysical values of the poem by viewing its images to be purely and simply 'pagan' perversions.⁶⁷ *Gabriyya I*'s interpretation of the poem's symbolism reduces sanctity to infidelity, treats worship as fornication, and then transforms the sacral transpersonal into the obscene personal, where the images are viewed as a regression into unconsciousness and descent to the underworld, corresponding psychologically to the stage of consciousness that Erich Neumann has designated as 'uroboric incest':

The stage of uroboric incest is the lowest and earliest phase in the ego's history. Regression to, and fixation at, this level occupy an important place in the life of the average person, and they play a decidedly negative role in the life of the neurotic and they play a decidedly positive one in the life of creative man. It depends on the intensity of consciousness and on the phase of development reached by the ego whether uroboric incest will be regressive and destructive or progressive and creative. Since the world of the uroboros is the world of origination and regeneration, from which life and the ego are eternally reborn like day from night, it follows that the uroboros has creative value. For this reason many creation myths have as their emblem the uroboros: for while uroboric incest is the symbol of death, the maternal uroboros is the symbol of rebirth, of the nativity of the ego, and of the dawn of consciousness, the coming of light.⁶⁸

Very little detail concerning the symbolism of infidelity, adultery or incest is given in this part of the commentary, nor are the meanings of the non-Islamic images in the poem adequately explained. In fact, the symbolic tenor of the poem, as expressed in *Gabriyya II* below, is totally ignored. Speaking of the rites of renewal in primitive mythologies the world over, Carl Jung notes that if we 'translate these ideas into the concretism of the Freudian theory,' they become simply 'a regression to incest.' Such interpretations, however, leave out something very important, and if taken seriously, amount to no more than

...the neurotic misunderstandings of people who have remained partly infantile and who do not realize that such things have been practiced since time immemorial by adults whose activities cannot possibly be explained as a mere regression to infantilism. Otherwise, the highest and most important achievements of mankind would be nothing but the perverted wishes of children, and the word 'childish' would have lost its *raison d'être*.⁶⁹

One could also say that the poem as depicted in *Gabriyya I* is expressive of what medieval alchemy termed the *nigredo* stage, in which the adept enters into the darkness of *prima materia*, chaos: *massa confusa*.⁷⁰

Gabriyya II: The Ecstasy of Spiritual Vision

The first part of his summary of Pseudo-Simnānī's commentary having come to an end, Ādharī now offers another commentary that is far more esoteric in approach. The second part, here entitled *Gabriyya II*, is heavily steeped in the technical terminology of Ibn 'Arabī and totally opposed both in style and content to the foregoing one. Here, Pseudo-Simnānī attempts to interpret the poem as an expression of the high paradox that earmarks much spiritual poetry. As he says in the introduction to this part, he intends to approach the poem as having been composed 'in the language of birds with the temperament of Solomon, who know naught besides divine Reality (*ḥaqīqat*) and the Sufi Path (*ṭarīqat*). For none but drinkers from the wellsprings of the theosophical sciences can relish this poem's delightful taste or understand its esoteric sense. "Only natives of this town knows the origin of our folktales."⁷¹

Ādharī begins by citing Pseudo-Simnānī's highlighting of the intoxicated nature of the poet:

This poem was composed while the poet was drowned in utter drunkenness (*'ayn-i sukr*), under an influx of mystical consciousness (*ghalaba-yi ḥāl*), just like an epileptic who is overwhelmed by the light of revelation of divine Unity (*maghlūb-i tajallī-yi aḥadiyyat*). He had fallen down, having been trussed up and bound, subjected to the sway of the overwhelming might of annihilation (*fanā*), just as the *ḥadīth* which describes those who approach God through both the 'nearness of supererogatory works' and the 'nearness of obligatory works', so that God thereby becomes their ears, eyes and tongue.⁷² ...All the words he uttered, issued through the absolute envelopment of the self (in God), not from his finite, ego-bound self-identity. The cause of the manifestation of the selfhood (*man*) from the hidden recesses of the subtle or esoteric being (*bāṭiniyya*) out into the wide spaces of outward phenomenal being (*zāhiriyya*) was Mother Love (*mādar-i maḥabbat*) [as the *ḥadīth* says: 'I was a hidden treasure and I] passionately desired to be known.'⁷³

Therefore, I disclosed myself to outward phenomenal being, irradiating to all things of an imaginary nature, which thus came into being with an outwardly apparent existence, emerging from the [hidden divine] knowledge (*'ilm*) into [external] self-determined existent entities (*ta'ayyun*). [Hence, as the *ḥadīth* continues] 'So I created the creatures, that I might be known.'⁷⁴

Pseudo-Simnānī considers 'Aṭṭār to be discoursing here from the highest level of mystical realization, which is the state of annihilation (*fanā*), and drunken

inspiration.⁷⁵ Within the sacred space of the poem's symbols, the poet reunites the opposites of faith and infidelity, transcending conventional piety, the presence of 'heretical' imagery signalling the poet's drunken transcendence of self. Like erotic poets who use religious terms to express the inexpressible culmination of erotic experience, orgasm, mystical poets use erotic terms for their spiritual experience of rapture, also inexpressible. It is in this spiritual sense, or rather, through this *dissolution of physical sense*, that the poet dissolves his 'finite, ego-bound self-identity' in Mother Love: She who is the reality of the icon behind the Zoroastrian apparition. Only in intoxication, that is, during the absence and abeyance of self-consciousness, is it permissible to utter ecstatic sayings such as these, as Shabistārī had stated.⁷⁶

It is for this reason that the poet is depicted by Pseudo-Simnānī as being 'bound' by a state of attraction (*jadhba*), enraptured at having achieved the highest degrees of nearness to God, both on the level of ritual observances and supererogatory practices. 'Aṭṭār's public proclamation of Zoroastrianism is interpreted as symbolizing the revelation of the *deus absconditus* Who wished to be known in order to manifest the 'hidden treasure' of mystical love. This Mother Love represents the essential theopathy that generates the microcosm and macrocosm; her revelation to the soul and the world expressing 'the nostalgia of the "Hidden Treasure" yearning to be known, the nostalgia which is the secret of Creation', as Henry Corbin put it so eloquently.⁷⁷ The proclamation of 'Zoroastrianism' thus functions as a symbolic description of the essential relationship between God and his creatures, in which all of creation appears as a mirror for God's theophanic manifestation.⁷⁸ The commentator provides further elaboration of this metaphysical doctrine in the ensuing passage:

Therefore, since all things to which the term 'existence' is diffusely and generally applied, have come into existence through My Being, in reality, I alone exist (as the adage goes) 'no other dweller exists but Us in every land and clime.' The existence of all other beings is purely fictional. ...For all things are at the beck and call of His Lordship, subject to the ordinance of the divine Name, 'the Lord' (*Rabb*). Indeed, all beings tread the 'Straight Path'. Read: [Qur'ān 11:56]: 'There is not an animal but that He seizes it by its forelock. [Surely, my Lord is on a Straight Path].'

Understand *this* to be the inner mystery of the Sacred Law (*Sharī'a*): for whether you see pagoda (*butkhāna*) or Ka'ba, Brahmin or pious pilgrim (*hājji*), savant or madman – all of them exist and derive their being through the beneficence of My grace. All are My subjects and devotees.⁷⁹

Pseudo-Simnānī refers here to the Sufi theological doctrine known as the 'Transcendent Unity of God's Creativity' or the 'Oneness of Divine Action' (*tawḥīd-i af'ālī*),⁸⁰ according to which God is the One Real Actor on the stage of existence. The doctrine is not necessarily particular to Sufism; it was expressed with equal

clarity by Emily Dickinson.⁸¹ It was expressed by ‘Aṭṭār’s forbear, Sanā’ī of Ghazna (d. 525/1131) in a famous verse in the exordium to his *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqat*:

Both infidelity and faith
upon his path run apace,
united in their praise confess
that ‘He is One without likeness.’⁸²

The mystical theology of ‘Aṭṭār as understood by Pseudo-Simnānī in the above passage has been well summarized by the famous commentator on Shabistārī’s *Garden of Mystery*, Muḥammad Lāhijī, who tells us that, ‘the mystic should behold God’s theophany manifest in every form, whether this form be that of infidelity (*kufr*) or Islām. Verbally one should acknowledge that the only Real and True Being (*mawjūd-i ḥaqīqī*) is God, the Real (*Ḥaqq*) and thus everything which is, is Him. Make it your heart’s firm conviction that all that exists is God, and all else besides but pure nullity and non-existence.’⁸³ However, in this transcendental realm, infidelity and faith are subject to the all-inclusive, all-pervasive reality of the divine Essence, as our commentator further expounds:

However, while one person manifests the divine Name ‘the Guide’ (*al-hādī*), another incarnates the divine Name ‘the Misleader’ (*al-muḍill*); another is a devotee of the Name ‘the Withholder’ (*al-mānī*), while another receives nourishment from the divine Name ‘the Avenger’ (*al-muntaqim*). And yet, they all are subject to the authority of the name ‘Allah’ among the Transcendent Divine Names, despite the fact that these contrary names all stand in opposition to each other.⁸⁴ The Name ‘Allah’ serves to express the existence of the One divine Unity – Unique in Essence but unified in its Attributes.

When I revealed myself from my Presence of divine Unicity (*ḥaḍrat-i wāḥidiyyat*)⁸⁵ through the theophanic form of the divine Name ‘the Guide’ (*al-hādī*), my manifestation took the form of a ‘Faithful Believer’ (*mu’minī*), expressed in a person of piety, holy rectitude and a gnostic adept (*‘ārif*). But when my luminous apparition appears in a theophanic form (*maẓharī*) of the divine Name ‘the Misleader’, then the guise it assumes and the form it takes will be either an ‘Infidel’ (*kāfirī*), Zoroastrian (*gabrī*), or else a *débauché* (*fāsiqī*).

Therefore, whenever you shut your eyes to outer phenomenal appearances (*maẓhar*) and contemplate that theophanic form (*maẓhar*) through the eyes of the gnostic adepts (*‘ārifān*), neither ‘error’ nor ‘misguidance’ (*ḍalālat*) will appear to your eyes. Why? Because the Lord (*rabb*) who directs everyone on the Straight Path is the Lordship (*rubūbiyyat*).

But only the tongues of gnostics at the spiritual station of intoxication (*maqām-i sukr*) can ever give voice to this mystery. None but the ears of gnostics, who audit it directly through that particular theophanic form (*maẓhar*) can hear it. Thus, it is

a *gnostic* discoursing from this spiritual station who informs us from *Yonder*, that 'That ancient Zoroastrian/I am. It's me who raised on high/The idol-house – pagoda – then/Up on its roof I made the cry,/Declaimed to all the world's folk.'⁸⁶

The Sufi mystical theology discussed in this passage, known as 'the *Coincidentia Oppositorum* of Infidelity and Faith in the Unity of Being', has been elaborated in detail elsewhere,⁸⁷ so it need not detain us long here. According to this doctrine, God may and in fact *must* be apprehended in all His diverse, contradictory forms, whichever divine quality, Name or theophany be displayed. But only in a state of drunkenness, when the mystic is bereft of the false discernment of his ratiocinative understanding and becomes immersed in God's Existence, can the underlying unity of this confusing diversity of manifestation be understood. That is why the commentator explained at the outset of *Gabriyya II* that, 'all the words he utters issue through the absolute envelopment of the self (in God), not from his finite ego-bound self-identity'. Only when subject to the *furor* of that divine drunkenness can any realization of the ultimate ontological conjunction and theophanic unity of the divine Names 'the Guide' and 'the Misleader' be experienced.

And yet, it is still God who is manifest, albeit under His wrathful aspect as 'the Misleader' in this verse, the commentator now emphasizes:

His crying out from the rooftop of the pagoda points to the divine Name 'the Misleader' (*al-muḍill*), [to which the Qur'ānic verse 40:16 testifies] 'Whose is the Kingdom today? God's, the One, the Omnipotent', while his discourse is bound and attached to the theophany of essential omnipotence.

Now, since the Transcendent Divine Essence, in its omnipotence and unrelentingly severity of strength, is independent and needless of both the faith of the believer and the infidelity of the heretic – for neither can the divine Essence receive any injury from the latter, nor the kingdom of divine impassivity reap any advantage from the former – therefore, discoursing from the heights of divine Independence, he declared (in the second verse), 'Sounding "infidelity" abroad:/O Muslims! (*Ṣalā-yi kufr dar dādam shumā ay musalmānān*)'. This 'call' should only be interpreted to mean the following:

According to its own measure, capability and aptitude, each of the multiple theophanic apparitions manifested in variegated phenomenal forms should be understood to comprise various local apparitions and habitations of the divine Name 'the Misleader' (*al-muḍill*). When that Name shines forth in all its divine radiance (*tajallī*) each person apprehends a different thing as his or her object of adoration and desire. That thing they then adore with utter longing and a commensurate belief, whether it be earth or ocean, sun or moon, fire or light, as the verse says: 'We found our fathers following a certain religion, so we are following in their footsteps' (43:22). And because of (the attitude expressed in the verse 38:5), 'What, has he

made the gods into One God! What a strange thing is this!', they consider their conduct to be fine and fair. Ignoring the admonitions of all advisors, the sanctions of all their supervisors and casting aside all censors' criticisms, they refuse to recant their beliefs. "Whomsoever God misleads, for him there is no guide." (Qur'ān 7:186; 13:33; 39:23)⁸⁸

The summons to infidelity shouted by the Zoroastrian from the rooftops is thus interpreted as the poet's call to comprehend the transcendental divine source of religious diversity. Ultimately all creatures are attuned, one way or another, to the presence of their Lord – whether their vision be illuminated by the divine Name 'the Guide' or benighted by the Name of 'God-the-Misleader'. The following verses by Shabistārī in his *Garden of Mystery* provide the best illustration of this doctrine in all of Persian Sufi literature:

If Muslims knew what idols were, they'd cry
that faith itself is in idolatry.
And if polytheists could just become aware
of what the idols are, they'd have no cause to err
in their beliefs. The graven image they
have seen is but external handiwork and form,
and so by Holy Writ their name is 'infidel'.
No one will call you 'Muslim' thus, by the word of Law
if you cannot perceive the Truth concealed therein,
see the God within an idol hid.⁸⁹

The exoteric manifestation of 'the progenitive source of love' revealed by the Christians' love for Christ reflects in Sufi terminology what Ibn 'Arabī called devotion to the 'gods of belief' on the part of believers in different religions or adherents of various sectarian denominations within a single faith. 'The gods of belief are all fabricated.' Ibn 'Arabī asserted. 'Absolutely no one worships God as He is in Himself. Everyone worships Him inasmuch as He has been fabricated within the worshipper's self. So understand this secret! It is extremely subtle.'⁹⁰ It is this very knowledge of the fabricated nature of belief that constitutes "the inner mystery of the Sacred Law (*Sharī'a*)," as Pseudo-Simnānī calls it, 'for whether you see pagoda (*butkhāna*) or Ka'ba, Brahmin or pious pilgrim (*hājji*), savant or madman – all of them exist and derive their being through the free beneficence of My grace: all are My subjects and devotees.'⁹¹ Continuing his commentary now, Pseudo-Simnānī highlights some more of the theomonist (*waḥdat al-wujūdī*) tenets underlying the rest of the verses in the poem, omitting, however, any interpretation of line 4 (on the virgin birth) and skipping directly to the last verse:

Thus, by means of the discriminating insight of '[and We have removed the veil from you,] and piercingly sharp is your sight today' (Qur'ān L: 22) it becomes distinctly clear to the gnostic that all is Him (*hama ū'st*), that what was in the beginning is the same as what is now in the end. He realizes that it is this same Love that is the cause of the outward exteriorization (*zuhūr*) as well the cause of concealment and interiorization (*buṭūn*). This was, in fact, the very meaning that he (the poet) preferred to express in these words:

I'm born again, have wed
 My mother as my mate again!
 With her I've had a liaison
 Once more – hence I'm called 'Zoroastrian'
 Through mother-incest.

You should understand that the 'Mother' spoken of here is Love (*maḥabbat*). Although he (the poet) was the immediate cause or motive (*bā'ith*: i.e. of the act of incest), it should be known that it was Adam (i.e. the primordial archetype of humanity) whose qualities were thereby manifested and disclosed.

[His statement that] 'With her I've had a liaison once more' denotes concealment after manifestation (*khafā-yi ba'd az zuhūr*).

The term 'Zoroastrianism' signifies infidelity (*kāfirī*), and infidelity connotes concealment (*pūshish*) – [so the term is thus] metaphorical of this 'second concealment' (*khafā-yi thānī*). [His statement that] 'I committed adultery or mother-incest with my mother' denotes the return to the hidden interior depths of Love (*buṭūn-i maḥabbat*). Understand who may understand!⁹²

In conclusion, according to Pseudo-Simnānī's *Gabriyya II*, Aṭṭār's metaphors of mother-incest are not to be taken literally. Rather than facilely reducing the poet's mother-incest to a Freudian sort of infantile regression, an expression of purely negative uroboric incest,⁹³ the commentator explains the motif as referring to the Sufi's journey back to the original womb of divine Love, where the mystic is protected from experiencing fragmentation into egocentric consciousness. The incest motif's archetypal significance in world mythology will be explained in greater detail in my conclusion below.

Before terminating this translation and study of Pseudo-Simnānī's commentary, it will be helpful at this juncture to review briefly two other interesting commentaries on the adultery/mother-incest verse, both of which closely reflect and so serve to illuminate Pseudo-Simnānī's exegesis in *Gabriyya II*. The first is by Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī as recorded by his hagiographer Ibn Bazzāz, and the second by Ṣā'īn al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad Turkah Iṣfahānī.

Ṣafī al-Dīn concludes that the origins and meaning of such 'heretical' imagery must be sought from within the visionary experience itself, and he confirms the

verity of Pseudo-Simnānī's view cited above that the poet is expressing his will to return to the 'hidden interior depths of Love':

...Now since the spirit's return is to that place from which it was born, which is its primordial origin, the spirit must necessarily 'marry' itself back to that place, and thus become worthy to be paired and united itself with that again. So when it regains that place and becomes aware of the arcane mysteries of those spirits and obtains intimate experience of these affairs, it is incumbent upon it to conceal these mysteries. So it hides them. And since the word 'blasphemy' or 'infidelity' (*kufṛ*) in its original etymological sense means 'to conceal' or 'cover up',⁹⁴ the term 'Zoroastrian' (*gabr*: symbol for an 'infidel' or 'heretic' in Persian poetry that was used by the poet in the previous verse) was used to convey this 'concealment'. The saying of Junayd, 'Infidelity is incumbent upon me' (*wajaba al-kufṛ 'alayya*)⁹⁵ has the same sense.

The meaning of the poet's claim that 'I committed adultery or mother-incest with my mother' is that the seeker who experiences this mystical state beholds through visionary experience (*wāqī'a*) that he is coupled with his mother.⁹⁶

Şā'in al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad Turkah Işfahānī (d. 830/1427), who has been described as 'perhaps the most important figure in Islamic philosophy after Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, figuring as the key link in the chain (of philosophical thought stretching) between Mullā Şadrā, Suhrawardī and Ibn Sīnā',⁹⁷ also commented on the meaning of 'Aṭṭār's adultery verse in his Treatise on Spiritual Capacity (*Risāla dar ma'nā-yi qābiliyyat*), which deals with the notion of receptivity (rendered below by two terms: *qābiliyyat*, individual receptiveness or capacity, and *isti'dād*, personal talent, aptitude). Şā'in al-Dīn cites a paradoxical verse by Ḥallāj to illustrate his discussion, which he follows with a sentence of commentary on the 'adultery verse' in 'Aṭṭār's 'ancient Zoroastrian' poem, adduced to support his quite abstruse philosophical discussion. Şā'in al-Dīn's commentary on this verse – actually a riddle – by Ḥallāj, again serves as an apt illustration of the idea that the Creator is the First Cause of every act, circumstance and incident:

My mother gave birth to her father: and this (too) is a wondrous marvel:
That I am just a suckling infant in the custody of a wetnurse.⁹⁸

By this verse he meant to say that the 'Mother of Receptive Capacity (*mādar-i qābiliyyat*)' – from whose womb everything in the generated realm of existence has been begotten – generated or gave birth, signifying herself here as the Active Agent (*fa'al*) to her own Father – meaning all that exists, even so-called 'receptive vessels' (*qābil*, resembling offspring) that could have been issued out of his loins in the birth-place of phenomenal appearances. ...At the same time, that 'Agent' is merely but one of the 'children' of that 'Primordial Receptive Vessel' (*qābil-i awwal*), which is actually

the Living Mother of all things. This is quite close to the meaning intended by ‘Aṭṭār when he said:

I’m born again, have wed
 My mother as my mate again!
 With her I’ve had a liaison
 Once more – hence I’m called ‘Zoroastrian’
 Through mother-incest.⁹⁹

Şā’in al-Dīn here interprets the verse as a metaphor for the poet’s union with the Great Mother of all being, as in Pseudo-Simnānī cited above. In the Christian alchemical tradition, the mother-son incest motif usually symbolizes the cosmic embrace of Nous and Physis, the immersion of the masculine principle of light and Logos (the Gnostic Nous) in the embrace of physical nature (Physis).¹⁰⁰ But in the Sufi interpretation presented here, exactly the opposite symbolic meaning is given by both Şā’in al-Dīn and Pseudo-Simnānī (in *Gabriyya II*). Incest, at least in the positive symbolic sense found in these Persian Sufi texts, signifies a mystical sublimation – instead of a regressive Freudian *abaissement du niveau mental* – a realization of the higher conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) of the soul with the Logos or Word (on which, see below).

But let us now return to the commentary by Pseudo-Simnānī on the final verse of the poem. So far we have seen it is this symbolic dimension of the mother-incest theme, in which the Sufi Hero is paired with primordial Mother-Love, which is highlighted in the second part of Simnānī’s *Gabriyya*. That the incest is symbolic, not literal, is made even clearer in the ensuing passage of his commentary:

So in order to express the original purity of man’s innate nature (*fiṭrat*), by virtue of [the *ḥadīth*] that ‘every infant is born according to an innately divine nature (‘*ala’l-fiṭra*)’¹⁰¹ – he wished to excuse himself from the three souls, (as if to say) ‘I have not become at all acquainted with any sins, major or minor. Just like Jesus who, when in his cradle said, “He (God) has made me blessed, wherever I may be” (19:31), I was born of Mother Love (*mādar-i maḥabbat*), and instead of milk, I was suckled on the wine of love. It is this (love) that I brought home; I have thus by myself become free.’

So beware that you understand (the difference between) the emotional concordance of today (*muwāfiqat-i imrūzīna*)¹⁰² and Primordial Eternal Love (*maḥabbat qadīmiyya*), and it is the Ancient Lover (‘*āshiq-i dīrīna*) who knows (the significance of the poet’s statement): ‘I was born/By virgin birth from her (my mother) (*biḥ bakrī zādam az mādar*).’

In this passage Simnānī highlights the role of Mother Love in Sufi mystical theology. She is the purveyor of the Wine of Love, the Saki or Muse of the Sufi, of whose beauty he – the ‘ancient lover’ (‘*āshiq-i dīrīna*)¹⁰³ – is enamoured. The commentator

claims that the poet has asserted his transcendence of the psychological conditions characteristic of those subject to the renowned Sufi psycho-spiritual ternary: the base passional soul (*nafs al-ammāra*); the reproaching soul (*al-lawwāma*) and the 'serene soul' (*nafs al-muṭma'inna*).¹⁰⁴ The poet has thus effectively realized a state of Christlike purity. Obviously however, the pure 'virgin' nature of Mother Love is perceived only by the 'ancient lover', whose contemplation of her is *sub specie aeternitatis*, because he discerns in her the divine Original Archetype reflected through the poor human image.

In the final section of commentary on 'Aṭṭār's poem, Pseudo-Simnānī informs us:

Therefore, it may happen that the specialists in the Canon Law of Islam (*ahl-i shari'at*) and companions on the Sufi Path (*yārān-i ṭarīqat*) hear me discoursing in *la langue de la condition humaine* (*zabān-i bashariyyat*), during a mystical state of drunkenness and annihilation (*mastī u fanā*) in words that give an indication of the enduring presence and continuing persistence of the selfhood (*anāniyyat*). Then, if from these words they imbibe a scent of the Sufis' haughty highfalutin paradoxical sayings,¹⁰⁵ and wish, availing themselves of *fatwas* issued by the legal authorities, to commit a utter nonentity like me over to the flames of blame and persecution to be roasted and burnt alive, so be it, for – (as the poet says) 'no lover is he who thinks of himself' – I have become so immersed in the Sea of divine Reality (*baḥr-i ḥaqīqat*) that I am literally 'up to my neck' in it. And while you would have me stand in awe of some drops of rain, the first thing that I have sacrificed and offered up was my own dear soul! Yes!

It was on this condition that my heart abandoned itself in your way
That even if the soul did survive, it should not be left alive.

It was for this reason that he brought the poem to a close and concluded by saying that,

If 'Aṭṭār, this wretch, hapless, piteous
You'd set alight and burn to ashes
In such a Zoroastrian state –
That's proof, O men, that I've effaced
Myself, my ego made annihilate.

In a word, what comes to the mind of this lowly devotee regarding the spiritual significance of the words that that true scholar (*muḥaqqiq*)¹⁰⁶ is exactly what was jotted down by pen above – whatever the author's intention may actually have been.¹⁰⁷

In the final verse of the *ghazal*, exactly in the same manner of Ḥallāj, ‘Aṭṭār offers himself up as a sacrifice for his mystical beliefs to the benighted Muslim public who deny him. The esoteric nature of his spiritual doctrine is provocatively flaunted. He is portrayed by Pseudo-Simnānī as publicly scorning both the Muslim jurists and conventional mystics, daring and taunting his critics to condemn him to death. An Ḥallājian ambience, in fact, seems to hover over almost all of ‘Aṭṭār’s epic and lyric poetry,¹⁰⁸ and this is especially visible in the poet’s deferential reference to the martyr of Baghdad as the ‘jewel (*nigīn*) in the signet-ring of the Sufi Path (*ṭarīqat*)’¹⁰⁹ in his *Dīwān*. In another *ghazal*, ‘Aṭṭār evokes the strange figure of a Sufi master who renounces Islam, binds on a Christian cincture, drinks wine, and ‘being disgusted with the good and ill of the world,’ deliberately draws down upon himself the execration of the conventional Muslim community, who then condemn him to death. In the final two verses of this *ghazal*, the legend of Ḥallāj (*qiṣṣa-i ān pīr-i Ḥallāj*) is celebrated as being ‘the guide for ‘Aṭṭār’s heart’s plain and within the cavities of his breast.’¹¹⁰

Pseudo-Simnānī terminates his commentary by attempting to clarify the poet’s esoteric poetics and hermeneutics. Here, he reveals his own sentiments regarding literalist critics who refuse to acknowledge the presence of any inner meaning in poetic symbols. In view of the archetypal and anagogic nature of ‘Aṭṭār’s symbolism, Ādharī makes a major hermeneutical point here, to which I shall return in my conclusion.

The ‘Zoroastrian’ Sufi, ‘Hero of the Esoteric’

The final commentary on this poem to be considered, which was written by an anonymous sixteenth-century Mevlevi shaykh,¹¹¹ is just as significant for the understanding of the hermeneutic tradition of ‘Aṭṭār’s esoteric poetics as that by Pseudo-Simnānī. As Bertels points out in his Russian summary and translation of this text, ‘Aṭṭār elaborates a number of deep philosophical issues veiled in the guise of symbols which the commentator, step by step, subjects to logical analysis and rational exposition.’¹¹²

Like Adharī’s/Pseudo-Simnānī’s gloss, this commentary is also composed of two parts. The first part comprises a short glossary of Sufi symbolic terminology devoid of philosophical or literary merit, replete with trite analogies and far-fetched definitions of almost no value for the understanding of the hermeneutics of Persian poetry, which are far inferior, for instance, to the standards of the masters of this genre such as Lāhijī or Fayḍ-i Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680).¹¹³ The second part, featuring a commentary on the *ghazal*, however, is lucid and illuminating, and of much greater value. With its emphasis on the metaphysical doctrine sustaining ‘Aṭṭār’s heretical imagery, this part of the commentary resembles *Gabriyya II*. The author’s basic purpose is to decode the symbol of the Zoroastrian and to expound the theosophy

underlying the mother-son incest motif. As can be seen from the following passage, he views this Zoroastrian as the only true Muslim unitarian, boldly challenging the formalist Muslim, who adores a 'God who is absent', to worship by rites belonging to the higher idolatry of love:

Come forward so that you may see that the faith of the unitarians (*muwahhidān*) bears no resemblance to the faith of those who blindly follow religious precedent (*muqallidān*)! Behold how the devotion of those who directly witness and experience God (*shāhidān*) bears no likeness to the devotion of those veiled from Him (*maḥjūbān*)!

Rather, they (the unitarians) are a company called 'Zoroastrians' by way of designating their sublime aspiration and high spiritual will.

'That ancient Zoroastrian/I am. It's me who raised on high/The idol-house – pagoda', he thus announces, as if to indicate that 'I am the one who, while I was (stranded) betwixt servanthood (*'ubūdiyyat*)¹¹⁴ and the invisible world (*'ālam-i ghuyūb*), did not take repose in anything else (but God) due to the beloved's jealous exclusiveness (*ghayrat*).

...And when he remarked that he had gone up on top the roof of the pagoda and cried out in this world, he meant to say that when the *potestas clavium* (power of the keys) of these doors were imparted to me, I was not stingy, nor did I reserve this repast of contemplative vision for my own selfish enjoyment, but rather summoned all my brothers to the feast as well. That is what the poet meant by saying 'I gave out the summons to infidelity, O Muslims! Those idols I've rebuilt, put varnish on their fusty paint again ...'

... And yet, I have been swept under (the waves) of this ocean, from whence I have brought many pearls of great price up to the surface. These pearls, which are suitable for all those present in the feast of contemplation, I have strewn down on your head to give you encouragement. In these two couplets (*bayt*) the proper course of conduct that you must take in order to voyage across this deep ocean has been revealed to you.

Regarding the esoteric rites and strange heretical faith of this weird 'Zoroastrian Sufi', the Mevlevi author here clarifies three important points:

First, the unconventional mystic who experiences visionary unveiling (*kashf*) is dubbed a 'Zoroastrian' because of his will to transcend the literally interpreted, exoteric religion of outward form which preaches blind conformism to religious precedent (*taqlid*). The 'Zoroastrian' represents, one could say, the supreme Hero of the Esoteric.

Second, the 'Zoroastrian' symbolizes the higher esoteric truth of the *Qur'ānic* revelation. It is this truth that animates his zeal, permeates his faith, and which 'Aṭṭār paradoxically hails as a 'summons to infidelity'.

Third, the 'Zoroastrian' is a unitarian. But he is a *Sufi* unitarian who practices the religion of love; he is jealous for love's sake, zealous in love's faith, espousing an ecumenical vision of the divine immanence (*tashbīh* rather than *tanzīh*) permeating all creation.

The author now proceeds to the most difficult and controversial part of the poem, venturing an interpretation of those mysterious verses:

I'm born again, have wed
 My mother as my mate again!
 With her I've had a liaison
 Once more – hence I'm called, 'Zoroastrian'
 Through mother-incest. I was born
 By virgin birth from her, and this
 Is why my name is 'Jesus', since
 My mother's milk I've sipped up twice.

That is to say, in the paradisaical gardens of contemplation of the divine beauty which transcends all qualification, I was vouchsafed a feeling of spiritual expansion (*inbisāt*) that caused me to seize by hand the 'strongest cord'¹¹⁵ of the Book of God (the Qur'ān). When I considered the principal origin of things, I saw that the Scripture was related to me just like my own mother, so when I reached her, she embraced me with myriad sorts of loving kindnesses. I found the Paradise of Contemplation to be beneath her feet while in her company, since 'Paradise is beneath the feet of mothers.'¹¹⁶ ... Therefore, it must be understood that whoever attains – in spirit not in flesh – to the Book of God has effectively attained to the Paradise of Contemplation (*jannat-i mushāhidāt*), where he is illuminated by the beauteous luminous irradiation of the brilliant lights of the divine Essence.¹¹⁷

In the above passage, the Zoroastrian's incestuous relationship with his mother is explained as symbolic of the mystic's connection with the *mater* of the Qur'ānic revelation. In this respect, the commentator probably based himself on Ibn 'Arabī's theory of the 'Mothers of the divine Names',¹¹⁸ according to which these 'Mothers' behave as the seven main 'leaders' of the other names, from which all the divine names derive. From them in turn all other possible beings are engendered.¹¹⁹ Having consummated his *hieros gamos* with the Qur'ān, that is, with the 'Mother of all Revelation', the 'Zoroastrian' effectively attains to the Muslim Paradise of Contemplation, entering into the highest 'heaven of the divine Essence'. According to 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī's (d. 1329) classic Sufi schema, this paradise represents the fourth and highest degree of contemplation.¹²⁰

The 'Zoroastrian' Muslim's incestuous marriage, of course, as the author says, takes place 'in spirit not in flesh', apparently without any element of subjective inclination or of personal feeling on the poet's part for the act itself. The commentator's

approach to 'Aṭṭār's *kufriyyat* here disregards the literal meaning of his symbols, being concerned with the highest stage of poetic symbolism – what Northrop Frye has termed the 'anagogic phase of literature'. In this phase, the archetypes behind the outer visual images and poetic expressions are exposed so that 'nature becomes, not the container, but the thing contained, and the archetypal universal symbols, the city, the garden, the quest, the marriage, are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs *inside nature*, but are themselves the forms of nature. Nature is now *inside the mind* of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way.'¹²¹ The 'Zoroastrian' then, in the anagogic sense beheld from *inside* the Sufi tradition, is the 'Hero of the Esoteric'. He represents a kind of 'apocalyptic' figure as Frye terms it,¹²² whence his association with the 'revelation' of the Qur'ān by our Mevlevi commentator.

Here, it is worth recalling a later incarnation of a similar 'Zoroastrian Hero of the Esoteric' in Persian Sufism. In book five of his *Mathnawī*, Rūmī describes a certain Zoroastrian who has been invited to convert to Islam by a formalist Muslim. The Zoroastrian (*gabr*) declines, and confessing his secret infatuation with the inspired faith of Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī (d. 261/875), objects to the dry exoteric form of 'Islam' that is offered him by his pharisaical 'Muslim' neighbour, which he rejects as being 'empty, hollow, and without substance', since it 'chills the love of anybody with even a mite of potential faith'. Like 'Aṭṭār's Zoroastrian, Rūmī's Zoroastrian detests exoteric Islam while he claims to possess a religious conviction based on the interior spirit of Bāyazīd's faith, which manifests 'a subtle, glorious and radiant faith, superior to all other faith'.¹²³ This link between the 'Zoroastrian Hero of the Esoteric' and Bāyazīd, of course, had already been made by 'Aṭṭār in his account of the latter in the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*.¹²⁴ In certain sayings Bāyazīd declares that one should stand before God as if one is a 'Zoroastrian infidel' about to convert to Islam,¹²⁵ even going so far as to say that he has prayed for thirty years imagining himself as a Zoroastrian (infidel) about to sever his cincture (*zunnār*) and recant.¹²⁶ In this saying of his as well: 'The infidelity of adepts with high aspiration (*ahl-i himmat*) is nobler than the Islam of egotists (*ahl-i maniyyat*)',¹²⁷ the Bāyazīdian fragrance in 'Aṭṭār's *malāmatī* spirit seems redolent.

We may now turn to the author's decoding of the poetic imagery in the rest of his commentary:

...But when he declared that 'I have wed/ My mother as my mate again!/ With her I've had a liaison/ Once more,' it was as if to say: 'At first, just as I came from the World of the Divine Command (*'ālam-i amr*) into this created realm (*'ālam-i khalq*), so at last I shall return from the created realm back to that realm of the Command.' In this regard, it should be understood that by 'the World of the Divine Command' is denoted the 'Logos or Word' (*Kalām*) and by 'the created realm' is signified [the world of] 'corporeal bodies' (*ajsām*).

'Adultery' (*zinā*) at this spiritual station (*maqām*) signifies the conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) of the soul with the Logos or Word, since adultery is said to be a peculiar act of intercourse that takes place between man and woman. If this act occurs during marriage or is exercised through rightful possession (of a slave) it cannot be termed adultery, nor can it be considered to be at all sinful. It is only called adultery when it occurs outside the stipulations and bounds of these two conditions, at which point, since it is a great sin, the punishment that one must need impose for it is stoning or death.¹²⁸

Exactly the same spiritual meanings are applicable in the realm of the psyche (*'ālam-i anfus*), which is the world of the essences – and vice-versa – as well. Just as here (in this created realm), there is neither sin in marriage nor in rightful possession (of a slave), and thus the divine writ (regarding the sin of adultery) does not apply to anyone, whether through written or verbal pronouncement, likewise in that world (of the Divine Command) as well he does not suffer any ill-consequences.¹²⁹ This is because suffering the dual consequences of written and verbal (condemnation) only occurs in the created realm.

However, one who attains direct visionary experience of the soul (*kashf-i jān*), leaving (behind) this physical and verbal script which is the literal 'Word of God' (*kalām Allāh*), has a great reward. It is in this sense that such a person is called 'great' – and the term *Gabr* (Zoroastrian) actually denotes 'greatness'.¹³⁰

Looking closely at the above commentary, we see that several interpretations of the meaning of adultery are offered by the commentator:

Firstly, he decodes the Zoroastrian's mother-son incest – the act of 'Adultery' described by 'Aṭṭār – as signifying return to the divine womb. This womb is the Eternal home of the gnostic adept – in the transcendent realm of the Divine Command. This is the supernal realm of the Logos, which is also the wellspring of the Qur'ān's inspiration. The 'adultery' is a sacred *hieros gamos* in which the soul is reunited with the Logos, the 'copulation' of the human with the divine intellect, a notion found in Western 'erotic spirituality',¹³¹ not to mention Judaism (in Maimonides), and Islam.¹³² Thus Ghazālī speaks, like our Mevlevi commentator, of the Qur'ān as the Active Intellect, 'illuminating' and causing the human intellect to pass from potentiality to actuality.¹³³

Secondly, since it is a matter of having the symbolic meaning of a spiritual phenomenon disclosed through 'direct visionary experience of the soul (*kashf-i jān*),' there is no punishment in the world of the psyche for – this purely symbolic – act of adultery. 'Adultery' in this context merely denotes the mystic's relinquishing the bare literal text of revelation and attaining its essence. Here, the author's views approach the Nizārī Ismaili position on the supremacy of the *bāṭin* of revelation over its exoteric *ẓāhir*, boldly enunciated by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī in his Ismaili tract, the *Taṣawwurat*.¹³⁴

Lastly, an important etymological point. In his interpretation of the technical term for Zoroastrian (*gabr*), the author is apparently indulging in a orthological pun on the

word's etymology. If *gabr* is written in Persian without an extra line over the Arabic letter 'g', it becomes *kibr*, meaning (i) 'pride, insolence, haughtiness' or (ii) 'pomp, greatness or magnificence.' Although the two words are apparently derived from completely different etymological roots, from this minor orthological pun, he draws what amounts to a major hermeneutical point: that true 'greatness' lies in understanding the esoteric sense of the Qur'ān.¹³⁵ And it is that hermeneutical understanding alone that transforms the 'Zoroastrian' into the supreme Muslim hierophant.

In the final part of his commentary the author interprets the drinking of mother's milk twice over again as symbolizing the milk of devotion that is the spiritual result of 'the recitation and writing of the Qur'ān.' Placing the poem in the context of Sufi mystical theology, the commentator explains that these symbols allude to steps or degrees on the path of devotion. Nourished on the milk of devotion, the devotee intuits the reality of the revelation, enters into the valley of Spiritual Poverty (*faqr*), and finally gains gnosis (*ma'rifat*). Upon gaining gnosis, he then attains to divine Unity, and

When he reaches divine Unity, the brilliant rays of the beauty of divine epiphanies flash forth and, through Love, take the man, whether or not he wish to be transported, out from behind the veil of the 'people whom He loves' and into the tavern of those 'who love Him'.¹³⁶

Gnosis, according to this commentator on 'Aṭṭār, enables the mystic to transcend the confines of his egocentric self, bearing him aloft to the heights of divine Unity, whereupon he drinks with delight and relish the wine of the religion of love. This gnosis is, however, entirely visionary, and cannot be likened to the understanding of one who merely reads the poem without having intuited the reality of its symbols.

Conclusion: the Archetypal Context of 'Aṭṭār's Esoteric Poetics

What matter that you understood no word!
Doubtless I spoke or sang what I had heard
In broken sentences. My soul had found
All happiness in its own cause and ground.
Godhead on Godhead in sexual spasm begot
Godhead. Some shadow fell. My soul forgot
Those amorous cries that out of quiet come
And must the common round of day resume.
W.B. Yeats¹³⁷

All the commentaries so far examined – by Bākharzī, Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī, Adharī/Pseudo-Simnānī, Ṣā'īn al-Dīn Turkah Iṣfahānī and the anonymous six-

teenth-century Mevlevi shaykh – reveal that ‘Aṭṭār’s parables in verse and riddles in rhyme were not only the stuff of legend but the script of song sung in the Sufi *khānaqāhs* that dotted the geographical and religious topography of Mongol and Timurid Persia as well as Ottoman Turkey. The profound nature of these commentaries definitively demonstrate that the hermetic nature of ‘Aṭṭār’s verse can only be understood in the light of the Persian Sufi tradition. For the student of Persian poetry such commentaries are invaluable. Indeed, without recourse to them, it is hardly possible to have any grasp of ‘Aṭṭār’s symbolism of adultery and infidelity, nor can one relish the taste of the Sufi doctrines underlying his poetry, or even imbibe a single intellectual draught of the gnostic teachings hidden therein.

Rypka’s remark about ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry containing more riddles than any other poet in the whole of Persian literature must here be recalled and highlighted. These riddles lie at the very heart of ‘Aṭṭār’s thought. One has at best a very superficial grasp of his thought and verse unless they are decoded; to put it bluntly, unless we grasp the meaning of his symbolic poetry of infidelity (*kufriyyat*) none of these riddles can be deciphered.¹³⁸ Thus, where ‘Aṭṭār admonishes in one *ghazal* (no. 783: 2; discussed on p. 262 above) not to ‘lay claim to religion without first having passed through and transcended infidelity’, in order to read the poem we must refer ourselves to the Sufi codex of terminology behind its metaphors and symbols. Of course, such symbols as the ‘Christian child’ and the ‘ancient Zoroastrian’ by ‘Aṭṭār’s day had become timeworn literary clichés in both Arabic and Persian poetry. In all of ‘Aṭṭār’s lyrics belonging to the *gabriyya* genre, one can find the allegory of the Magian Master (*pīr-i muḡhān*) purveying the wine, which is also fire, to a young initiate, that intoxicates and fills him with a rapture burning up ‘both his faith and infidelity’ – as Hātif Iṣfahānī says in his *Tarjī‘-band*, the most famous evocation of this archetypal ceremony in all Persian Sufi poetry. Although the significance of this cliché has been noted by a number of major scholars, such as Massignon,¹³⁹ Bausani¹⁴⁰ and A.S. Melikian Chirvani¹⁴¹ (to mention only a few), considerably enhancing our understanding of its historical origin and literary significance, no one (with the possible exception of Taqī Pūr-nāmdāriyān) has bothered to take seriously the archetypal and mystical meanings evoked by the symbolism in the way our medieval commentators have done. We may thank these scholars however for having finally disproved Mu‘īn’s theory that there was a direct Mazdean pre-Islamic influence on Persian literature, and for having debunked the contemporary Iranian nativistic view of Sufism as a kind of crypto-Zoroastrianism in Islamic guise.¹⁴²

‘But why this fascination with infidelity in ‘Aṭṭār’s works?’ it may be asked. ‘Whence this penchant for the impious, this strange interest in imagery in all respects *anti-Muslim*?’

The answer to this question of course can only be obtained by recourse to the symbology of the Sufi tradition itself. By employing Christian—and more importantly, Zoroastrian—imagery and by advocating a doctrine that is deliberately

heretical if judged according to the standards of conventional Islamic morality, 'Aṭṭār conveys to us at least five different esoteric messages that relate respectively to the spheres of erotic theology, ascetic psychology, Sufi *malāmatī* doctrine, mystical theology and contemplative discipline:

The Sphere of Erotic Theology

In the first place, it should be underlined that the erotic theology of Persian Sufism has always been always conceptualized *within the religious tradition of Islam*. Unlike the sister tradition of courtly love in the Christian West,¹⁴³ love in Muslim mysticism was not viewed as a heresy or an independent doctrine outside or at times in opposition to orthodoxy. Love might be accounted a sin but was hardly ever considered a heresy.¹⁴⁴ The philosophy of love in 'Aṭṭār's poetry expresses simultaneously an ascetic theology, an aesthetic, and – what is the favourite theme and promise of Romanticism – the soteriological belief that salvation can be found only through love. This belief was summed up in the Sufi teaching that the lover contemplates the eternal forms of the celestial realm of the Spheres by medium of human forms in the physical world.¹⁴⁵ The secular works on love penned in Arabic by Ibn Dāwūd (d. 297/909) and Ibn Ḥazm (d. 457/1064)¹⁴⁶ taught this in a systematic way, while renowned Sufi masters such as Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. 520/1126) and Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 606/1210) faithfully integrated that philosophy of love into Sufi mystical theology.¹⁴⁷ The sentiment underlying 'Aṭṭār's erotic lyrics is thus quite similar to the *fin' amors* (refined, purified love) of medieval Provençal 'courtly love'.¹⁴⁸

However, despite this apparent 'orthodoxy' of love, the essential subversiveness of Sufi erotic theology was hardly mitigated. We know that the subversive power of the feudal code in 12th–13th century Europe was a double violation of the feudal social ethos, the lady must be married, and her lover, the troubadour, must be of inferior rank.¹⁴⁹ *Eros* in medieval Europe broke taboos both of society and religion; love was potentially adulterous, ritually idolatrous,¹⁵⁰ and always actually illicit. A similar transgression across social and religious norms occurs in the Sufi ideals of *'ishq* in medieval Persia. Here, however, Love's great act of subversion was, both erotically and religiously, even more imaginative than it was in the West, with the divinity or icon of the divine appearing to the Sufi lover in a *Christian* or *Zoroastrian* form. Just as among the Provençal poets, the Lord becomes the divinized Lady (who is now the superior and masculine element in the love relationship), while the lover is transformed into her inferior vassal, both changing social places, in medieval mystical Islam the hierarchy of believer/infidel was completely subverted and contravened. 'Aṭṭār's erotic morality tale of Shaykh Ṣan'ān is the supreme illustration of this inversion in Persian literature. In both traditions, religious and social taboos are broken, conventional pieties are violated and the ecumenical and universal nature of love is ultimately revealed.¹⁵¹

The Sphere of Ascetic Psychology

In the second place, the poet aims through use of the shocking imagery of infidelity and blasphemy to mortify his passions and thus publicly expose the base impiety of his own carnal soul, which is, ultimately, the real psychological source of infidelity. The poet's relentless honesty in using such subversive imagery is, as Carl Ernst has termed it, a deliberate act of 'religious self-excommunication', or 'spiritual *takfir*'.¹⁵² By this self-abasement the poet aims to attain the highest level of spiritual poverty (*faqr*) and ultimately, the degree of self-annihilation (*fanā*).

The Sphere of Malāmātī Spirituality

Thirdly, since the alpha of the *via mystica* is self-denial, and its omega self-annihilation, any pilgrim to the Holy Land of Religion, according to the Sufis, must necessarily pass through a number of 'valleys of heresy.' This in essence was the doctrinal position of the *malāmātī* Sufi masters. If 'Aṭṭār was not a member by way of direct affiliation of these third/ ninth-century Adepts in the Art of Blame (*malāmat*) who had thrived in his hometown Nishapur several centuries earlier,¹⁵³ both his epic and lyric poetry nonetheless relied heavily on the sayings of the masters of this school, in particular Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār and Abū Ḥafs al-Ḥaddād. Commenting on the *qalandarī* and *malāmātī* tendencies in Sanā'ī's poetry, one literary historian concluded that if 'these poems were never intended as expressions of plain libertinism, it is also likely that they are not direct reflections of antinomian practice'. Rather, such *qalandarī* imagery functions 'as a set of symbols for the preaching of a kind of *malāmātī* spirituality which remained within the boundaries of Islamic orthopraxis'.¹⁵⁴ Exactly the same phenomenon applies to the *kufriyya* of 'Aṭṭār and later poets such as 'Irāqī.¹⁵⁵ They consciously exploited the symbolism of heresy, just like the early *malāmātī* masters, to express the highest reaches of faith.

The Sphere of Mystical Theology

Fourthly, in terms of Sufi mystical theology, 'Aṭṭār's 'Zoroastrian Hero of the Esoteric' is a direct literary reincarnation of Ḥallāj's vision of Iblīs as the spiritual model *par excellence* of the Muslim mystic. Modelled closely on Ḥallāj's favourite Hero, Satan, 'Aṭṭār's 'Zoroastrian' is a Hero because he refuses to renounce his interior vision despite its apparent exoteric 'heresy'.¹⁵⁶ Like Ḥallāj, 'Aṭṭār's interiorised vision of the meaning of both faith and infidelity was couched in a poetically provocative and subversive language that is at once radically ecumenical and esoteric. Ḥallāj had taught that there were only two sound preachers, Iblīs and Aḥmad.¹⁵⁷ 'My friend and teacher are Iblīs and Pharaoh', he announced. 'Iblīs was threatened

with the fire, but he did not go back on his preaching. And Pharaoh was drowned in the Red Sea, but he did not acknowledge any mediator at all... And if I were killed, or crucified, or if my hands and feet were cut off, I would not go back on my preaching.¹⁵⁸ Likewise, 'Aṭṭār's Zoroastrian Hero offering himself up as a 'sacrifice' to the so-called 'Muslims' who condemn him to death, expressing what Peter Awn called Iblīs's 'saving power of martyrdom',¹⁵⁹ involves a re-enactment in verse of the Ḥallājīan myth of the devoted monotheist who is condemned for heresy.

The Sphere of Sufi Contemplative Discipline

Fifthly and lastly, these so-called 'blasphemous' symbols depict certain well-known visionary landscapes through which all pilgrims on the Sufi Path invariably tread: these images are not merely the product of a personal, subjective poetic imagination, but derive from an intimately existentialized, and self-realized imaginal experience attained at the highest level of Sufi contemplative discipline. This visionary landscape, moreover, was more or less well-mapped; it was as Bausani rightly proposed, composed of quite 'objective' concepts that could be learnt by anyone who studies the dictionary of its symbols,¹⁶⁰ the product of the paradoxical 'social hermeticism' of classical Persian Sufi poetry, in contrast to the individualistic hermeticism of modern poetry, which is reckless and imprecise.

But to crack the code and resolve the riddles of 'Aṭṭār's poetry, we must look beyond Sufi ascetic and mystical theology, *malāmatī* tradition and even, contemplative experience, to investigate the parabolic *trobar clus* used by the 'urafā-yi 'ilm-i bāṭin, the wise adepts in esoteric knowledge, as Pseudo-Simnānī called them. We need to recapture the language of analogy whose terms establish relations of an imaginal character, within a transcendent, immaterial hierarchy of being that is considered today by our contemporary rationalist mentality to be a completely fanciful and vacuous delusion.¹⁶¹ The huge error of today's positivistic criticism is that it overlooks the fact that all art is intentional. If Persian miniature painting or Sufi *ghazals* are 'unrealistic', this shows neither ineptitude nor inexactness but simply the will to transcend the conventional vision based on the horizontal literality of our affectively dead ratiocentric vision. The great medieval works of Islamic literature were all composed in what Marshall Hodgson rightly terms 'the mytho-visional genre'. They also belong to what Northrop Frye refers to as 'the anagogic phase' of literary symbolism.¹⁶² Such works were written, as Hodgson underlines, in a deliberately 'esoteric style' in which 'a certain gradation and concealment of knowledge became normal', and 'archetypal symbolism often recurs. The point of this symbolism must be grasped, if not on the level of universal human unconscious images, then at least on the level of deeply appropriate forms of interresonances of forms of being, usually selected and preserved in enduring traditions.'¹⁶³

‘Attār’s poetry all belongs to this genre. His lyrics in particular are all composed in the Sufi ‘science of symbolic allusions’ (*‘ilm al-ishārāt*), which is traditionally classified amongst the ‘esoteric sciences’ (*‘ulūm-i bāṭin*) of the Sufis.¹⁶⁴ Symbolic discourse, of course, was long before ‘Attār a highly developed feature of classical Persian Sufi poetry,¹⁶⁵ and he himself admits his penchant for this type of discourse in a key verse where he says that the language of love is entirely spoken in symbolic allusions (*ishārāt*).¹⁶⁶

Without necessarily becoming a master argonaut in the ocean of contemplation that the Mevlevi commentator above demanded, understanding ‘Attār’s hermetic symbolism and parabolic language is possible if we explore the archetypal dimension of his metaphors, which function as projections of psycho-spiritual contents that appear in the form of three mythological motifs, namely the Hero, the Great Mother and Mother-incest. His ‘Ancient Zoroastrian’ poem, in particular, is completely typical of the figurative expressions, almost impossible for rational discourse to comprehend, that are usually manifested by such archetypal contents.¹⁶⁷ Such mythological symbols, as Kathleen Raine points out, hail from an ‘imaginative space that cannot be measured’¹⁶⁸ and for this reason ‘Attār’s prophetic voice will always remain out of earshot of the closed frontiers of religious ideologues and positivistic literary critics. Neumann writes,

In the symbol, i.e., image of the archetype, a meaning is communicated that can be apprehended conceptually only by a highly developed consciousness, and then only with great pains. For this reason the following remark of Jung’s is still applicable to the modern consciousness. ‘Myth is the primordial language natural to these psychic processes, and no intellectual formulation comes anywhere near the richness and expressiveness of mythical imagery. Such processes deal with the primordial images, and these are best and most succinctly reproduced in figurative speech.’¹⁶⁹ This ‘figurative speech’ is the language of the symbol, the original language of the unconscious and of mankind.¹⁷⁰

This symbolic language can only be comprehended by what Neumann calls a ‘mythological apperception’ that intuitively comprehends ‘the tendency of the symbol to combine contradictory elements, to bring the most diverse provinces of life into contact with one another, by crossing, blending, and weaving them together.’¹⁷¹ Couched in a particularly bold language that is at the same time completely in accordance with archetypal symbolism found in cultures the world over, ‘Attār’s Zoroastrian poem contains all three mythological motifs mentioned above (the Hero, the Great Mother, and Mother-incest).

It is not incidental that all of the great religions of early Near Eastern cultures were dominated by the Mother Goddess and her son-lovers: Attis, Adonis, Tammuz, and Osiris. These son-lovers are Heroes who first are born of their mother,

then have incest with her, and are finally slain, buried, and bewailed by her, and then reborn through her.¹⁷² Similar motifs reappear in New World mythology as well. In Aztec mythology the myth of Xochiquetzal and her son-lover is re-enacted during a fertility ritual game, after which the successful player is given the honorary accolade of being a 'great adulterer'! Commenting upon this, Neumann suggests that, 'In incest with his mother, the hero begets himself. But since the son-lover succumbs to the Great Mother in "matriarchal incest", an early death is prophesied for the "great adulterer"'.¹⁷³ 'Aṭṭār's 'Zoroastrian' follows exactly the same archetypal pattern as well. The Sufi Hero (of the Esoteric Religion of Love) has incest with his mother, then proudly announces his own adultery, following which he welcomes the ritual punishment of death meted out to him.

As for the mother-incest motif, psychological speaking, where Pseudo-Simnānī interprets the verse 'With her I've had a liaison once more' as denoting 'concealment after manifestation (*khafā-yi ba'd az zuhūr*)', this again is clearly symbolic of a higher experience of consciousness, the poetic symbolism of copulation with the Great Mother expressing the idea of mystical marriage. Erich Neumann notes that in mythology, 'whenever the incest motif appears, it is always a prefiguration of the *hieros gamos*, of the sacred marriage consummation which attains its true form only with the hero'.¹⁷⁴ The *hero's* incest, furthermore, he underlines, 'is a regenerative incest. Victory over the mother, frequently taking the form of actual entry into her, i.e., incest, brings about a rebirth. The incest produces a transformation of personality which alone makes the hero a hero, that is, a higher and ideal representative of mankind'.¹⁷⁵ Interpreted properly, understood in their proper *esoteric* sense, these strange verses concerning mother-incest indicate precisely this regenerative spiritual experience. The actual regeneration experienced is ineffable, beyond 'the murmuring shell of time and not in any language', as Eliot says.¹⁷⁶ Hence it is that 'the Mysteries' are always expressed through apophatic discourse.¹⁷⁷ Vocal expression of such experiences, insofar as it is possible, belongs to what 'Aṭṭār calls the 'language of spontaneous spiritual feeling' or 'tongue of ecstatic consciousness' (*zabān-i ḥāl*).¹⁷⁸

When 'Aṭṭār's Hero presents himself to the exoteric authorities ('O Muslims') as a sacrificial offering to be burnt, this is a purely *symbolical act* representing what Neumann calls 'the positive symbol of sacrifice, which stands for an active offering up of the ego to the unconscious. Both symbols – castration and sacrifice – are united in the archetype of surrender, which can be active and passive, positive and negative, and rules the ego's relation to the self in the various stages of development'.¹⁷⁹

'Aṭṭār's evocation of being burned to ashes after mother-incest represents another archetypal symbol. As Neumann points out, 'the matriarchal mother-son incest is enacted not only on the lower plane of fertility but also on a higher plane' that is always accompanied by fire and light symbolism. This is visible in 'the Catholic rite of the consecration of the font – the maternal generative principle – when the

burning candle is about to be dropped into the water, the celebrant says: "*Ab immaculate divini fontis utero in novam renata creaturam progenies coelestis emergat*" [May a heavenly offspring, conceived in holiness and reborn into a new creation, come forth from the stainless womb of this divine font]. Through the *hieros gamos* with light and fire, the upper and lower feminine principles are kindled, and Mary is still "*igne sacro inflammata*".¹⁸⁰ The symbol of the Feminine fecundated by the son within her is based on secret background of the spiritual experience of mother incest. 'Christ too, is the bridegroom of Mary – Mother Church, who is and remains his mother. This ancient matriarchal mystery of the birth of the luminous son lives in the words: "The Virgin has given birth; the light grows".¹⁸¹ 'Aṭṭār's verses 3–4 depict this higher plane of mother-incest, while v. 5 represents the ultimate sublimation of the experience, expressive of the final level of the Sufi mystic: unselfish love manifested by the mortification of self, being stripped of the personal 'I' and self-will, annihilation and passing away into the Godhead.¹⁸²

Envoi

The multi-layered complexity of 'Aṭṭār's language, on the mythological and mystical as well as the theological and theosophical levels, should by now be obvious beyond all shadow of doubt. Approaching the mysteries of Mother Love and fathoming the soul of her son-lover – the pious infidel enthralled by a blessed sin wherein natural and supernatural with the self-same ring are wed – is therefore not the task of one who thinks that Persian poetry can be comprehended without also deciphering the riddles of the Persian Sufi tradition – lest we forget to heed Ḥāfiz's admonition:

When you hear the words of the heart-specialists,
Don't say they're wrong. As an assessor of words,
You're not a good judge, my dear; that's where the error is.¹⁸³

Notes

1. MT, p. 67, v. 1178.
2. MT, p. 14, v. 252.
3. *Muṣibat-nāma*, ed. Nūrānī-Wiṣāl (Tehran, 1338 Sh./1959), p. 15, v. 5.
4. S.H. Nasr, 'The Flight of Birds to Union: Meditations upon 'Aṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*', in his *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Ipswich, 1987), p. 107.
5. J. Rypka, 'Poets and Prose Writers of the Late Saljuq and Mongol Periods', in J.A. Boyle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 5, The Saljuq and Mongol Periods* (Cambridge, 1968), p. 587.
6. *Awṛād al-aḥbāb wa fuṣūṣ al-ādāb*, ed. Īraj Afshār (Tehran, 1345 Sh./1966), vol. 2, p. 247. A good indication of the place and significance of this manual is given by M.I. Waley, 'A Kubrawī Manual of Sufism: The *Fuṣūṣ al-ādāb* of Yaḥyā Bākhārzi', in Leonard Lewisohn,

ed., *The Heritage of Sufism* (Oxford, 1999), II: *The Legacy of Mediæval Persian Sufism*, pp. 289–310.

7. Dt, no. 822, pp. 659–660.

8. Rūzbihān Baqlī Shirāzī, *Sharḥ-i shaṭḥīyyāt*, ed. H. Corbin (Tehran, 1966), p. 59.

9. Ibid., p. 57.

10. *Awṛād al-aḥbāb wa fuṣūṣ al-ādāb*, p. 247.

11. See my 'The Esoteric Christianity of Islam: Interiorisation of Christian Imagery in Medieval Persian Sufi Poetry', in Lloyd Ridgeon, ed., *Muslim Interpretations of Christianity* (London, 2001), 127–156.

12. See Šamad Muwaḥḥid, ed., *Majmū'a-i āthār-i Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistarī* (Tehran, 1365 Sh./1986), *Gulshan-i rāz*, vv. 969–972.

13. On the concept of real infidelity in classical Sufism see my 'In Quest of Annihilation: Imaginalization and Mystical Death in the *Tamhīdāt* of 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadhānī' in Leonard Lewisohn, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism* (Oxford, 1999), I: *Classical Persian Sufism: from its Origins to Rūmī*, pp. 285–336. Taqī Pūrnamdāriyān has established beyond shadow of doubt that 'Aṭṭār not only knew of 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's doctrine of real infidelity, but actually versified this doctrine in several of his poems quite precisely, apparently following the exact word and text of the *Tamhīdāt*. See his *Dīdār bā Sīmurgh: haft maqāla dar 'irfān wa shi'r wa andīsha-i 'Aṭṭār* (Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995), pp. 198–207 where he discusses the symbolism of this very *ghazal* as well. An excellent summary of the impact of 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's theories of the sciences of the opposites on 'Aṭṭār's works is given by Peter Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden, 1983), pp. 151–78.

14. Dt, no. 822, v. 5.

15. *Awṛād al-aḥbāb*, pp. 247–248.

16. See n. 11 above.

17. See Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 444–447. The following discussion is indebted to Prof. Vendler's analysis of this sonnet.

18. *Awṛād al-aḥbāb wa fuṣūṣ al-ādāb*, p. 245.

19. M.R. Šafī'i-Kadkanī, *Zabūr-i Pārsī: nigāhi bi zindagī wa ghazalhā-yi 'Aṭṭār* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999), p. 51, citing Ibn Bazzāz's *Šafwat al-šafā'*, ed. Ghulām Riḍā Ṭabāṭabā'ī Majd (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997), p. 771. Šafī al-Dīn commented on a number of verses by other poets as well (Sanā'ī, Rūmī, 'Irāqī) but it was to 'Aṭṭār's poetry that he devoted the greatest attention.

20. Cf. *Zabūr-i Pārsī*, p. 50.

21. This *ghazal* is not in the *Dīwān-i 'Aṭṭār* edited by Dr. Tafaḍḍulī, but is found in an edition thrown together by J. Manṣūrī (Tehran, 1379 Sh./2000), p. 126.

22. Ibn Bazzāz, *Šafwat al-šafā'*, p. 559.

23. Dt, no. 783.

24. See my *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Maḥmūd Shabistarī*, (Richmond, 1995), p. 278ff.; and conclusion below.

25. See my 'The Sacred Music of Islam: *Sama'* in the Persian Sufi Tradition', *The British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 6 (1997), pp. 1–33.

26. Dt, no. 822. In the *Šafwat al-šafā'*, another variant version of this verse (the *ghazal's maṭla'*) is given: *Tarsā-bacha mastam hamchūn but-i rūḥānī / az dayr birūn āmad sarmast binādānī*, but this hardly changes the sense.

27. Ibn Bazzāz, *Şafwat al-şafā'*, pp. 537–538.
28. Ibid., pp. 538–539.
29. Digressing slightly here into comparative mysticism, it should be noted that the interpretative premises of the Sufis' 'esoteric Christianity' differed considerably from what the mystics of early classical Christianity understood of these symbols. One of the most important early Christian mystics, Pseudo-Dionysius, devoted considerable effort to elaborating a 'symbolic theology', the premises of which in many respects correspond exactly to the Persian Sufi hermeneutical principles. Şafī al-Dīn no doubt would have agreed with his esoteric elitism that, 'There are two reasons for creating types for the typeless, for giving shape for what is actually without shape. First, we lack the ability to be directly raised up to conceptual contemplations. ...Second, it is most fitting to the mysterious passages of scripture that the sacred and hidden truth about the celestial intelligences be concealed through the inexpressible and the sacred and be inaccessible to the *hoi polloi*.' *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, tr. Colm Luidheid (New York, 1987), 'The Celestial Hierarchy', p. 149. Şafī al-Dīn's reproach to mystics who 'blindly love these symbols as proxies', imagining them to have an independent reality also completely echoes Pseudo-Dionysius' view that only the initiated can understand the interior meaning of these symbols: 'But let us not suppose that the outward face of these contrived symbols exists for its own sake. Rather, it is the protective garb of the understanding of what is ineffable and invisible to the common multitude. This is so that the most sacred things are not easily handled by the profane but are revealed instead to the real lovers of holiness. Only these latter know how to pack away the workings of the childish imagination regarding the sacred symbols.' (*Complete Works*, p. 283).
30. Cf. Dt, p. 209, where 'Aṭṭār describes our master (*pīr-i mā*) as having reached a realization beyond linguistic exposition (*āshināyī yāft bā chīzī kih natavān dād sharḥ*).
31. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiz*, ed. Parvīz Nātil Khānlārī (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983), *ghazal* 75, v. 8. tr. Robert Bly and Leonard Lewisohn.
32. Alessandro Bausani, *Religion in Iran: from Zoroaster to Baha'ullah*, tr. J.M. Marchesi (New York, 2000), p. 267.
33. Bausani, *Religion in Iran*, p. 251.
34. Ibid.
35. 'Symbols associated with Zoroastrians such as the cup of Djamshīd, wine, the tavern, the old mōbad, and the youth came to represent those things forbidden by Islam in Persian poetry with *malāmātī* Şūfī connotations.' M. Morony, 'Madjūs', *EP*, vol. 5, p. 1113.
36. Bausani, *Religion in Iran*, p. 252.
37. Ibid., p. 265.
38. Ibid., p. 267.
39. Ibid.
40. J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: an Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Poems* (London, 1997), p. 75.
41. On which see, J.T.P. de Bruijn, 'The *Qalandariyyāt* in Mystical Poetry, from Sanā'ī Onwards', in Lewisohn, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism*, II, pp. 75–86.
42. For further elaboration, see my *Beyond Faith and Infidelity*, pp. 278ff.
43. For good examples of Zoroastrian imagery in 'Aṭṭār, see Muḥammad Mu'īn, *Mazdayasnā wa adab-i pārsī* (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1984), pp. 269–278.
44. A. Bausani, 'Gabr', in *EP*, vol. 2, p. 970; M. Shaki, 'Gabr', in *Elr*, vol. 10, pp. 239–240.

45. Although this line is not in Tafaddulī's edition of the *Dīwān*, it occurs in many other editions, and is commented upon and cited as being 'Aṭṭār's by both Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī and Ṣā'in al-Dīn Turka. For these reasons I have included it in my translation here.

46. Dt, no. 504. This *ghazal* is absent from four out of the fourteen MSS. used in Tafaddulī's edition.

47. Bausani, *Religion in Iran*, p. 268.

48. Ibid., p. 270.

49. All references to the *Jewels of the Mysteries* (*Jawāhir al-asrār*) below are to British Library manuscript No. 1269, found in the Hermann Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the India Office Library* (London, 1980), p. 1128 (no. 2036). I have also consulted another manuscript of the *Jawāhir*, featuring the same treatise, in E. Sachau, ed., *Catalogue of Persian, Turkish, Hindustani and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford, 1889), p. 785 (1269) (= MS. Elliott 175), folios 190–194.

50. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fol. 169v.

51. The version of the poem cited here by Ādharī, which is slightly different from that offered by the anonymous Mevlevi author cited below and not completely concordant with Dr Tafaddulī's published edition of the *Dīwān*, is as follows: *Musalmānān man ān gabram kih but-khāna banā kardam / Shudam bar bām-i but-khāna, dū 'ālam rā nadā kardam // Ṣalā-yi kufr dar dādam shumā ay musalmānān! / manam k'īn jumla buthā rā digarbāra jalā kardam // Az ān mādar kih man zādam, digarbāra shudam juftish / az ānam gabr mikhwānand kih bā mādar zanā kardam // Bih bakrī zādam az mādar az ānam gabr mikhwānand / bih jāyi shīr az mādar may-i shīrīn ghadhā kardam // Agar 'Aṭṭār-i miskīn rā darīn ātash bisūzānand / guwā bāshī musalmānān kih man jān rā fadā kardam.*

A literal translation of these verses reads: (1) O Muslims, I am that Zoroastrian/Who has built the pagoda./On this nether world's idol-temple's roof/ I climbed up and cried out to both worlds. (2) I sent forth the call of infidelity/ O you Muslims! I cried out: I have put new lacquer on all these idols again. (3) From that mother from whom I was born/ I have become paired again. It's because of this I'm called a Zoroastrian/ That I committed adultery with my mother. (4) The mother who gave me birth was a virgin/ And that is why I'm called a Zoroastrian/ For in place of my mother's milk, I drank sweet wine. (5) If poor 'Aṭṭār were burnt and tarred and feathered in this fire, / this itself will suffice as proof, O Muslims, that I have sacrificed my soul.

Since this version is not the same as the one that his commentary expounds (which in fact closely parallels Dr. Tafaddulī's published text anyway), the textual corruptions present in the above version neither diminish the significance and depth of Ādharī's exegesis of 'Aṭṭār nor alter the basic symbolism of the poem.

52. See Jamal Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: the Life and Thought of 'Alā ad-dawla as-Simnānī* (Albany, NY, 1995), 'Appendix A: The Written Works of Simnānī', pp. 165–203.

53. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fol. 171v.

54. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fol. 171v–172r.

55. Samuel Butler, *Hudibras*, ed. John Wilders (Oxford, 1967), Part 3, Canto II: 13–18, p. 234.

56. A well-known *ḥadīth*. See Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, *Aḥādīth-i Mathnawī* (Tehran, 1361 Sh./1982), p. 6.

57. Although the term 'pagoda' in modern English generally refers to a Buddhist temple,

etymologically (see OED, s.v.) it is originally derived from the Persian *butkada*, which is the connotation and sense that is used here. 'The word *but* is probably derived from *Buddha*', as A.S. Melikian Chirvani points out ('Buddhism, ii: in Islamic Times', *EIr*, vol. 3, p. 497. See also William L. Hanway, 'Bot', *EIr*, vol. 3, pp. 389–390.

58. Although this reading differs slightly from Tafaḍḍulī's published text, neither the literal nor symbolic meanings are significantly affected or altered thereby.

59. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fol. 172r–172v.

60. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fol. 172v.

61. Cf. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, tr. Stephen MacKenna (New York, 1992), III, 5–6.

62. E.M.W. Tillyard, 'The Chain of Being', in his *The Elizabethan World Picture*, 5th ed. (London, 1990), p. 33; A.J. Smith, *The Metaphysics of Love: Studies in Renaissance love poetry from Dante to Milton* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 104ff. The term *mādar-i maḥabbat* translated here as 'Mother Love' does not here refer to the maternal empathy (i.e. *maḥabbat-i mādarī*) displayed by a mother for her child (which child-psychology calls mother-love), but rather to the archetype of 'Great Mother Love' who is the 'Mother-who-incarnates-Love' and whose maternal nurturing compassion sustains all creation, through her 'one serene Omnipresence' which is 'in that beauty furled/ which penetrates and clasps and fills the world' (Shelley, 'Epipsychidion'). The 'upbringing' of Mother Love is that same divine 'care' for all creatures regardless of their faith described by Spenser in *The Fairy Queen*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (New York, 1997), p. 237; 2, viii. 1–2.

63. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fols. 172v–173r.

64. Samuel Butler, *Hudibras*, ed. John Wilders, p. 420, II: n. 13

65. The theology underlying the above passage is discussed by D.B. Macdonald, 'Fiṭra', *EF*, vol. 2, pp. 931–932.

66. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fol. 173r.

67. Such a literalistic, exoteric interpretation of terms such as *Gabr* and *Mugh* as meaning 'infidel' can also be found in many Sufi lexicons of and dictionaries of mystical terms. Cf. J. Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Symbolism* (London, 1988), vol. 3, pp. 214ff. (s.v. 'Mazdaism', 'The Magian', 'The Zoroastrian', etc.).

68. Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, tr. R.F.C. Hull, (Princeton, NJ, 1993), p. 278.

69. C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* (London, 1953), p. 131.

70. Although outside the scope of the present essay, it is also instructive to interpret the poem as an expression of various alchemical processes and stages (cf. C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, pp. 229ff.).

71. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fol. 173r–173v.

72. The author is referring to the Sufi doctrines of *qurb al-farā'id* (nearness to God through doing obligatory works) and *qurb al-nawāfil* (nearness to God through doing supererogatory works), both of which are mentioned in the extra-Qur'ānic *ḥadīth qudsī*: 'My servant draws near to Me through nothing I love more than that which I have made obligatory for him. My servant never ceases drawing near to Me through supererogatory works until I love him. Then, when I love him, I am his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his hand through which he grasps, and his foot through which he walks.' See W.C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY, 1989), p. 325.

73. The full text of this *ḥadīth qudsī* (ascribed to the Prophet David) is: 'I was a hidden treasure, and I passionately desired to be known, so I created the creatures, that I might be known.' (Furūzānfar, *Aḥādīth-i Mathnawī*, no. 70).

74. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fol. 173v.

75. For discussion of 'Aṭṭār's metaphysics of annihilation, see *Ocean*, p. 649ff.

76. *Gulshan-i rāz*, in *Majmū'a-i āthār-i Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistārī*, ed. Šamad Muwaḥḥid (Tehran, 1986), pp. 97–98.

77. *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī*, tr. R. Manheim (Princeton, NJ, 1969), p. 152.

78. Cf. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 268.

79. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fols 173v.–174r.

80. On which, see my 'The Transcendental Unity of Polytheism and Monotheism in the Sufism of Shabistārī', in Leonard Lewisohn, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism, II: The Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Sufism* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 390–391. On this doctrine in 'Aṭṭār, see Ritter, *Ocean*, pp. 617ff.

81. Albeit under the influence of Emersonian Transcendentalism, she summed up the idea in these memorable lines: 'The only shows I see/ Tomorrow and today/ Perchance Eternity/ The only one I meet/ Is God. The only Street/ Existence. This traversed/ If other news there be/ Or admirabler shows/ I'll tell it you.'

82. *Ḥadiqat al-ḥaqīqat*, ed. Mudarris Riḍawī (Tehran, 1950), p. 4.

83. Muḥammad Lāhijī, *Mafātiḥ al-i'jāz fī sharḥ-i Gulshan-i rāz*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Barzgar Khālīqī and 'Iffat Karbāsī (Tehran, 1371 Sh./1992), p. 543.

84. Here the author describes the process of self-manifestation (*tajallī*) according to Ibn 'Arabī. The Absolute emerges from divine knowledge into outer existence, as the reference to the 'hidden treasure' in the *ḥadīth* indicated. A good discussion of this process of emanation is given by Toshiko Izutsu, *A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism – Ibn 'Arabī and Lao-Tzu* (Tokyo, 1966), ch. 11. For a good summary of Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine of the divine Names, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 66ff.

85. *Wāḥidiyyat* is, according to Ibn 'Arabī, the level or presence of divine Oneness that includes multiplicity as well as the self-determined prototypes of things. It is distinguished from the Presence of divine Unity (*aḥadiyyat*): the transcendent Oneness that excludes all multiplicity. These two Presences are alternatively described/ translated as 'Unity of the Many' vs. 'Unity of the One' and 'Inclusive Unity' vs. 'Exclusive Unity'.

86. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fol. 174r. *manam ān gabr-i dīrīna kih butkhāna banā kardam / shudam bar bām-i butkhāna, bih 'ālam dar nadā kardam.*

87. See my *Beyond Faith and Infidelity*, p. 290ff.

88. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fol. 174r–174v.

89. Cf. Shabistārī, *Gulshan-i rāz*, vv. 879–882, in *Majmū'a-i āthār*, p. 103.

90. Cited by W.C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn 'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany, NY, 1994), p. 165.

91. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fol. 173v.–174r. The same doctrine can also be found in 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadhānī's *Tamhīdāt*, ed. Afif Osseiran (Tehran, 1962), p. 285, no. 370.

92. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fol. 174v.

93. As Neumann points out (*The Origins and History of Consciousness*, p. 278): 'The stage of uroboric incest is the lowest and earliest phase in the ego's history. ...As the term "uroboric

incest" makes clear, this longing for death is a symbolical expression for the tendency of the ego and consciousness to self-disintegration, a tendency with a profoundly erotic character.'

94. For an philosophical-etymological study of this connotation of *kuf*r in Persian Sufism of the Mongol period, see my *Beyond Faith and Infidelity*, pp. 283–287.

95. This is actually a saying of Ḥallāj found in the *Akḥbār al-Ḥallāj*, *Recueil d'oraisons et d'exhortations du martyr mystique de l'Islam*, ed. and tr., L. Massignon and P. Kraus (3rd ed., Paris, 1957), no. 66. Ḥallāj's saying is also given by 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadhānī, in his *Tamhīdāt*, p. 215 (no. 275), in the form of a verse: 'I have become an infidel to the religion of Allāh and infidelity is incumbent upon me, although for Muslims it is something detestable.' Upon which, 'Ayn al-Quḍāt remarked: 'Alas! I wish I had that infidelity which was his religion!' Junayd also uttered an ecstatic saying faintly resembling this paradox: 'I would far prefer to confront God with the sins of all creatures on my back than to engage in artificial affectation (*taṣannu'*),' upon which Rūzbihān commented: 'This is because affectation is a kind of pretentious exaggeration (*takalluf*) which stems from distracted consciousness, whilst in Unification, it is heresy to have any distracted consciousness.' Rūzbihān Baqlī, *Sharḥ-i shaṭḥīyyāt*, p. 198.

96. Ibn Bazzāz, *Ṣafwat al-ṣafā'*, p. 541.

97. Ṣā'in al-Dīn Turkah, *Risālah-i i'tiqādāt* in Sayyid 'Alī Musavī Bihbahānī and Sayyid Ibrāhīm Dibājī, ed., *Chārdah Risāla-yi Farsī Ṣā'in al-Dīn... Turkah Iṣfahānī* (Tehran, 1351 Sh./1972), introduction by S.H. Nasr, pp. b, j. I am indebted to my colleague, Muhammad Reza Jozi, for his help in translating this abstruse passage.

98. I have not been able to trace this distich exactly although a similar verse is found in Ḥallāj's poems; see 'Dīwān: Essai de reconstitution par Louis Massignon', *Journal Asiatique*, 218 (1931), *Qaṣīda* 10.

99. Turkah, *Risāla dar ma'nā-yi qābiliyyat*, in *Chārdah Risāla*, pp. 271–273.

100. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, p. 331.

101. A *ḥadīth* cited above, see n. 75.

102. This sentence must be interpreted in the context of Sufi love theory. According to al-Tahānawī, *Kashāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn*, ed. M. Wajih, Abd al-Haqq and Gholam Kadir, with W. Nassau Lees (Calcutta, 1862), 1, p. 270, there are eleven degrees of love, the first of which is emotional concordance and the last, passionate love (*'ishq*).

103. The *ancient lover* (not incidentally) is also a technical term used by Ḥāfiẓ in the following verse (*Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, ed. Khānlārī, Tehran 1980, pp. 60–61; *ghazal* 22) in his most famous erotic *ghazal*, redolent with the same 'Aṭṭārian fragrance of Sufi *kufriyya*:

She put her lips close to my ear and said
In a whisper these words: 'What is this?
Are you my ancient lover – Are you asleep?'

104. On these stages, see Javad Nurbakhsh, *The Psychology of Sufism*, tr. Terry Graham et al. (London, 1992), pp. 51–59.

105. The translation here simplifies the convoluted baroque syntax of the original text: *Tashmīm-i dā'iḥā-yi shaṭḥ kunand*.

106. Apparently a reference by Ādharī to Simnānī.

107. *Jawāhir al-asrār*, fol. 175r.

108. See Taqī Pūrnamdāriyān, *Didār bā sīmurgh*, p. 205; Riḍā Ashrafzāda's *Tajallī-yi ramz wa riwāyat dar shī'r-i 'Aṭṭār Nīshāpūrī* (Tehran, 1373 Sh./1994), pp. 239–245; *Ocean*, s.v. 'Hallāj' in Index. See also the essays in this volume by Lucian Stone and Carl Ernst.

109. Dt, no. 96, p. 70; also see Ashrafzāda, *Tajallī*, p. 240. The decision to conclude the 72 biographies of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* with Hallāj also demonstrates that 'Aṭṭār considered him to be the 'seal' of the Sufi tradition.

110. Dt, no. 251, pp. 193–195. For a good discussion of this *ghazal*, see Kenneth Avery, 'The Theme of the Sufi Master and the Tavern in the Lyric Poetry of 'Attār', *Sufi*, 48 (2000–2001), pp. 11–12.

111. An analysis of the treatise is given by Bertels under the title of 'Darbāra-yi Sharḥī bar *ghazal-i 'Aṭṭār*', and the actual treatise itself, under the title of *Sharḥī bar ghazal-i 'Aṭṭār*, was published in his *Taṣawwuf wa adabiyāt-i taṣawwuf*, tr. from Russian into Persian by S. Īzādī (Tehran, 1979), pp. 483–486; 487–491.

112. Bertels, 'Darbāra-yi Sharḥī bar *ghazal-i 'Aṭṭār*', p. 486.

113. See Fayḍ's *Risāla-yi Mishwāq* (Tehran, 1348 Sh./1969), ed. Muṣṭafā'ī Fayḍī Kāshānī.

114. 'Ubudiyyat is the state of obedience or servanthood to God which is the intermediate state of the contemplative between the simple observance of ritual practices (*al-'ibāda*) and the realization of total adoration or devotion (*al-'ubūda*). Victor Danner, tr., Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh's *Ṣūfī Aphorisms (Kitāb al-Ḥikam)*, (Leiden, 1973), Glossary, p. 79.

115. A reference to Qur'ān 2:256; 3:103.

116. A well-known ḥadīth. See Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, *Aḥādīth-i Mathnawī*, p. 157.

117. Bertels, *Sharḥī bar ghazal-i 'Aṭṭār*, pp. 489–490.

118. See Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany, NY, 1992), p. 63.

119. See W.C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 42; idem. *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn 'Arabī's Cosmology* (Albany, NY, 1998), p. 403 n.15.

120. 'There are four paradises: First is the paradise of the realm of forms, which contains delicious food, sweet drinks, and lovely women – given as a reward for meritorious actions. This is called the paradise of deeds or the heaven of the soul. The second is the paradise of the prophetic legacy; this is the paradise of ethics, which one attains by correctly following the Prophet. The third is the paradise of divine Attributes. This is the spiritual paradise, realized through the theophany of divine Names and Attributes. It is the paradise of the heart. The fourth is the paradise of the divine Essence, attained by contemplation of the beauty of divine Oneness. This is the paradise of the Spirit.' Kāshānī, *Kitāb Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya. A Glossary of Sufi Technical Terms*, tr. from the Arabic by Nabil Safwat, featuring the Arabic text (London, 1991), pp. 60–63.

121. N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (3rd ed., Princeton, NJ, 1973), p. 119 (the italics are mine). Although Frye had not read 'Aṭṭār when composing this sentence, he exactly paraphrases here two verses from Dt, *ghazal* 776: vv. 8, 10!

122. 'The form of literature most deeply influenced by the anagogic phase is the scripture or apocalyptic revelation. The god, whether traditional deity, glorified hero, or apotheosised poet, is the central image poetry uses in trying to convey the sense of unlimited power in a humanized form. ...Anagogic criticism is usually found in direct connection with religion, and is to be discovered chiefly in the more uninhibited utterances of the poets themselves.' Ibid., pp. 120, 122.

123. *Mathnawī-yi ma'nawī*, ed. R.A. Nicholson (Tehran, 1984), v. 3356ff.
124. Rūmī's story about the Zoroastrian's love of Bāyazīd derives from TA, p. 176; *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, ed. Nicholson, I, p. 149. Later on (ibid., p. 208), Bāyazīd refers to himself as a sinner 'whose hair has turned white for seventy years living in Zoroastrianism (*gabrī*). The associations between Bāyazīd and Zoroastrianism, which deserve much further study, are briefly explored by Qassim al-Samarrai, *The Theme of Ascension in Mystical Writings* (Baghdad, 1968), p. 232f.
125. Sahlaḡī, *al-Nūr min kalamāt Abī Tayfūr*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī in his *Shaṭaḡhāt al-ṣūfiyya*, (Kuwait, 1978), p. 69.
126. *Tarjuma-yi Risāla-yi Qushayriyya*, ed. Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar (Tehran, 1361 Sh./1982), p. 39.
127. *Kashf al-mahjūb*, ed. V.A. Zhukovskii, (St. Petersburg, 1899; Leningrad, 1926), p. 541.
128. For a good discussion of this, see Wiebke Walther, *Women in Islam* (Princeton, NJ, 1993), pp. 61–62.
129. The word in Persian is *ajr*, meaning recompense or reward, but it is apparent from the context that the author here is referring to 'ill-consequences' not rewards.
130. Bertels, 'Darbāra-yi Sharḡī bar ghazal-i 'Aṭṭār', pp. 490–491.
131. See T. Anthony Perry, *Erotic Spirituality: The Integrative Tradition from Leone to John Donne* (Alabama, MI, 1980), p. 12.
132. Murata, *The Tao*, pp. 155–158.
133. Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on Intellect* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 137–138.
134. This text has been published as *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought*, ed. and tr. S.J. Badakhchani (London, 2005).
135. I think that it is probably safer to think of 'Aṭṭār's reference to mother-incest as a symbol of the Archetypal Feminine which has been traditionally depicted in mythology the world over as Magna Mater. The etymological associations that the term 'Zoroastrian' has, with *gabr* (Zoroastrian) aligned closely to *kibr* (greatness, hugeness) is perhaps not unrelated to the archetypal association of the noun 'mother' with the adjective 'great'. As Erich Neumann points out: "Mother" in this connection does not refer merely to a relationship of filiation but also to a complex psychic situation of the ego, and similarly the term "Great" expresses the symbolic character of superiority that the archetypal figure possesses in comparison to everything human and with created nature in general. If in Egypt the Goddess Ta-urt is called "The Great", this is consequently a symbolic expression for the impersonal anonymity of the archetype." Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (Princeton, NJ, 1970), p. 11.
136. An allusion to Qur'ān 5:54. 'O you who have faith! Whoever of you turns away and becomes a renegade to his faith, God will for sure bring (in his stead) a people He loves, and who love Him...' Bertels, *Sharḡī bar ghazal-i 'Aṭṭār*, p. 491.
137. W.B. Yeats, 'Ribh in Ecstasy'.
138. The conspicuous absence of such key 'Aṭṭārian technical terms as *kufr*, *gabr*, *mugh*, etc. from Suhaylā Sārimī's excellent *Muṣṭalahāt-i 'irfānī wa mafāhīm-i bar-jasta dar zabān-i 'Aṭṭār* (Tehran, 1373 Sh./1994), demonstrates just how marginalized this hermetic symbolism has become today, even among the best native Iranian scholars of Persian literature.
139. L. Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (2nd

ed., Paris, 1954), p. 89f; and L. Massignon, tr. B. Clark, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism* (Notre Dame, IN, 1997), p. 75f.

140. Bausani, *Religion in Iran*, pp. 271–276.

141. 'The Wine-Bull and the Magian Master', in *Recurrent Patterns in Iranian Religions: from Mazdaism to Sufism*, in *Studia Iranica*, 11, (1992), pp. 101–134.

142. I am referring here to modern Iranian nativism which attempts to trace the origins of Sufism back to Zoroastrianism. Thus, Nader Naderpour crudely asserts that all the great Sufi poets, including 'Aṭṭār 'expriment leurs idées non-islamiques – plongeant leurs racines dans le Bouddhisme, le Mazdéisme et le Manichéisme – habilement camouflées sous des apparences pro-islamiques.' 'Un contradiction: l'âme iranienne et l'esprit islamique', in J.C. Bürgel, ed., *Der Islam im Spiegel Zeitgenössischer Literatur der Islamischen Welt* (Leiden, 1985), p. 130. Even more feeble intellectually are those who advocate that Zoroastrian imagery in Sufism should be traced back to a mythical esoteric tradition called 'Khusravian Theosophy' (*Ḥikmat-i Khusravānī*): see Hāshim Raḍī, *Ḥikmat-i khusravānī: ḥikmat-i ishrāq wa 'irfān az Zartusht tā Suhrawardī* (Tehran, 1379 Sh./2000), who advocates the idea (see pp. 186–188) that all of Sufism and even the entire Platonic tradition should be traced back to purely Persian Zoroastrian teachings. The poetic symbol of the Magian Master (*pir-i mughān*), as used by Nizāmī, Rūmī, Ḥāfiz, etc., Raḍī interprets as pointing to a secret Mithraic tradition derived from ancient Persian teachings, rather than any Islamic source (see pp. 192–194). Such theories have been already refuted by Bausani, *Religion in Iran*, pp. 275, 288; see also J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *Symbols and Values in Zoroastrianism* (New York, 1966), pp. 156–157, citing Bausani, *ibid*. In fact, careful study shows that hardly any presence of, or penchant for, mystery, allegorical interpretations or ecstatic practices in pre-Islamic Sassanian Zoroastrianism; cf. Shaul Shaked, 'Esoteric Trends in Zoroastrianism', *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences*, 3 (1969), pp. 175–200. Furthermore, as Melikian Chirvani ('The Wine-Bull', p. 119) argues, no sign or trace of the allegory of the initiation of a Sufi mystic by a Zoroastrian master can be found 'in Zoroastrian religious literature, early or late'.

143. On 7 March 1277, Bishop Etienne Tempier of Paris condemned as 'Errors of Philosophy' some 219 Averroistic opinions of Siger de Brabant and Boetius of Dacia that were taught at the University of Paris, including some of the propositions advanced by Andreas Capellanus in his *Art of Courtly Love*, which is the best summation of this tradition. See A.J. Smith, *The Metaphysics of Love: Studies in Renaissance Love Poetry from Dante to Milton* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 31f.

144. 'Aṭṭār's love theory in context of the Persian Sufi tradition is discussed in Taqī Pūrnamdāriyān's 'Shuhūd-i zibā'ī wa 'ishq-i ilāhī', in his *Dīdār bā sīmurgh*, pp. 11–71, and by Ritter, *Ocean*, ch. 24–27. An excellent account of the development of Sufi love-theory is given by Carl Ernst, 'The Stages of Love in Persian Sufism, from Rābī'a to Rūzbihān', in Lewisohn, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism*, I, pp. 435–455.

145. Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, 5:310–316; Shabistarī, *Gulshan-i rāz*, vv. 623–630; 716–719.

146. Ibn Hazm, *The Ring of the Dove: A Treatise on the Art and Practice of Arab Love*, tr. A.J. Arberry (London, 1994).

147. See Ritter's lengthy discussion of 'Religious Love of a Beautiful Person', *Ocean*, ch. 26, pp. 448–519; Joseph Lumbard, 'Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. 517/1123 or 520/1126) and the Metaphysics of Love' (Ph.D. thesis, 2003).

148. Cf. Octavio Paz, *The Double Flame: Essays on Love and Eroticism* (London, 1996), pp. 30–32; 68, 73–75.

149. Ibid., p. 110; also cf. T. Anthony Perry, *Erotic Spirituality*, p. 30.

150. 'On this principle of idolatry – on this worship of the idol – turn the conventions of courtly love, replete with ritual and a revealed law, courtly love is both a parody and an inversion of Christianity, similarly centered on a God of Love (Cupid), a Mother of God (Venus), and a saint (the beloved) whom the disciple worships.' Barbara Parker, *Precious Seeing: Love and Reason in Shakespeare's Plays* (New York, 1987), p. 27.

151. As Octavio Paz (*The Double Flame*, pp. 113–114) notes: 'Love has been and is still the great act of subversion in the West. As with eroticism, the agent of the transformation is imagination. Except that in the case of love the transformation results in an opposite relationship: it does not deny the Other or reduce the Other to a shadow but is instead the negation of one's own sovereignty. This self-negation has a counterpart: the acceptance of the Other. The image, contrary to what happens in the realm of eroticism, takes on substance, the Other, male or female, is now not a shadow but a carnal and spiritual reality. I can not only touch it but *talk* to it as well. And I can hear it – and drink in its words. Transubstantiation once again: the body becomes a voice, a meaning, a soul. Every love, then, is eucharistic.'

152. Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany, NY, 1985), pp. 65–66.

153. See Sara Sviri, 'Ḥakīm Tirmidhī and the *Malāmātī* Movement in Early Sufism', in Lewisohn, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism*, I, pp. 583–613; Fritz Meier, 'Khurāsān and the End of Classical Sufism', in Fritz Meier, ed., *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, tr. John O'Kane (Leiden, 1999), pp. 189–219.

154. De Bruijn, 'The Qalandariyyāt in Persian Mystical Poetry, from Sanā'ī Onwards', in Lewisohn, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism*, II, pp. 85–86.

155. 'A *Malāmātī* element pervades the whole of Persian traditional lyric poetry and it must always be borne in mind as one of the components of this kind of impudent praise of impiety, heresy, and wine', Alessandro Bausani notes in *Religion in Iran*, p. 267. Cf. Ritter, *Ocean*, pp. 298–299.

156. This is clearly evident in a short *ghazal* (*Dīwān*, no. 633, p. 506) in which 'Aṭṭār claims: 'I am that ancient Zoroastrian who's anti-Muslim/ I am ashamed of Faith and famed for Infidelity... When Satan comes to me, he bows down his head! For in inspiration I am the master of Satan!'

157. Al-Ḥallāj, *Kitāb al-ṭawāsīn*, ed. Louis Massignon (Paris, 1913), p. 41, no. 1, cited by Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblīs in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden, 1983), p. 123.

158. Al-Ḥallāj, *Kitāb al-ṭawāsīn*, pp. 49–52, nos. 21, 24–25; cited by Awn, *Satan's Tragedy*, p. 125.

159. See Peter Awn's detailed comparisons between 'Aṭṭār and Ḥallāj: *Satan's Tragedy*, pp. 167–78; also cf. Ashrafzāda, *Tajallī*, pp. 239–245.

160. Bausani, *Religion in Iran*, p. 256.

161. On which, see Kathleen Raine's brilliant essay 'On the Symbol', in her *Defending Ancient Springs* (Ipswich, 1985), pp. 105–122.

162. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 119–120.

163. Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago, 1977), vol. 2, pp. 311–313.

164. Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, *Miršād al-'ibād*, ed. Muḥammad Amīn Riyāḥī (Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995), pp. 481–482.

165. De Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, pp. 70–71.
166. Dt, no. 110:1, p. 82.
167. As Carl Jung observes, 'An archetypal content expresses itself, first and foremost, in metaphors. If such a content should speak of the sun and identify it with the lion, the king, the hoard of gold guarded by the dragon, or the power that makes for the life and health of man, it is neither the one thing nor the other, but the unknown third thing that finds more or less adequate expression in all these similes, yet – to the perpetual vexation of the intellect – remains unknown and not to be fitted into a formula.' 'The Psychology of the Child Archetype', in his *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 9, i. tr. R.F.C. Hull (New York and London, 1959), p. 157.
168. K. Raine, *The Inner Journey of the Poet*, ed. Brian Keeble (London, 1982), p. 195.
169. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, p. 25.
170. Neumann, *Great Mother*, p. 15.
171. Ibid., p. 17.
172. Neumann, *Origins*, p. 46.
173. Neumann, *Great Mother*, p. 198.
174. Neumann, *Origins*, p. 17.
175. Ibid., p. 154.
176. T.S. Eliot, 'The Dry Salvages', III.
177. See Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago, IL, 1994).
178. On this term in 'Aṭṭār, see De Bruijn, 'Comparative Notes on Sanā'ī and 'Aṭṭār', in Leonard Lewisohn, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism, I: Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi*, p. 373. For a good general overview of the term in Rūmī, see Naṣru'llāh Purjavādī, 'Zabān-i ḥāl dar Mathnawī-yi ma'nawī', in *Nashr-i Dānish*, 17 (2001), pp. 14–26; and in 'Aṭṭār, also cf. Purjavādī, *Bū-yi jān; maqālahā-yi darbāra-yi shī'r-i 'irfānī-yi fārsī* (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), pp. 113–116; Ritter, *Ocean*, p. 530, calls 'Aṭṭār 'the unrivalled master in the art of making mythical and cosmic essences and mute creatures speak through "the language of states"'.
 179. Neumann, *Origins*, pp. 54–55, n. 16.
 180. Neumann, *Great Mother*, pp. 311–312.
 181. Ibid., p. 312.
 182. Hans Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, tr. P. Watson, (London, 1982) pp. 649–650.
 183. *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, ed. Khānlārī, *ghazal* 26, v. 1., tr. Robert Bly and the author.

Mystical Quest and Oneness in the *Mukhtār-nāma* Attributed to Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār

EVE FEUILLEBOIS-PIERUNEK

Introduction: the Text and its Attribution to ‘Aṭṭār

The *Mukhtār-nāma* is a collection of approximately 2,100 quatrains concerned with Sufi themes. The work is divided into fifty chapters, most of them dealing with different aspects of mysticism, and each with a separate title. It was published by Muḥammad-Riḍā Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī in 1979.¹ The oldest known manuscript dates from 1330, which is a good hundred years after the death of ‘Aṭṭār, but because of its shortcomings another manuscript, dated 1422, was used as the origin of the edition. In all, eighteen copies of this collection are known to exist.

The quatrain form was employed very early on by numerous Persian mystical authors, such as Bābā Ṭāhir, Aḥmad Ghazālī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī, and Aḥmad-i Jām. Its fine cut, lapidary nature made it ideal for transmitting profound messages in an elegant form. Each poem was thus the expression of a spiritual ‘moment’, or a sentence carved out of realization of a mystical truth. The chapters of the *Mukhtār-nāma* may be divided into several themes:

- Expressions of Oneness and Unification (*tawḥīd*): 1–9
- Spiritual Anthropology: 10–13
- The Way, Mystical States and Spiritual Stations: 14–29
- Descriptions of the Beloved: 29–40
- Descriptions of the Lover: 41–43
- Poetic Images (e.g. Rose, Dawn, Candle, Moth), the Inspired Libertine, ‘Infidelity’, Wine and Bacchanalia: 44–49

The *Mukhtār-nāma* has traditionally been attributed to ‘Aṭṭār by most scholars, including Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī. Only ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb questioned its attribution, although on the basis of intuition rather than clear evidence.² Sayyid ‘Alī

Mīr-Afḍalī entered into a polemic discussion with him on this subject.³ We cannot summarize here the arguments exchanged, but it is certain that numerous questions arise when reading the *Mukhtār-nāma*.

Above all, we are struck by the heterogeneousness of its contents. This work is for the greater part a collection of mystical poems, whose form and content correspond – more or less, but not always – to what we discover in the undeniably authentic writings of ‘Aṭṭār. Nevertheless, as well as these, there are also philosophical poems showing the influence of ‘Umar Khayyām,⁴ as well as quatrains celebrating earthly love.⁵ It is true that certain mystical poets sometimes express themselves in a manner reminiscent of Khayyām, but even if they give evidence of some metaphysical confusion or libertine leanings, they seldom go as far as to voice expressions of atheism, agnosticism, bitter despair, or fierce criticism of the Creator, themes which are found in the *Mukhtār-nāma*. Also, the spirit of *carpe diem* and regret when faced with death is quite foreign to ‘Aṭṭār’s spirituality. Indeed, he criticized Khayyām in the *Ilāhī-nāma*, calling him an impostor (*mudda’ī*), and imperfect (*nā-tamām*).⁶

Although figures of speech describing the Divine Lover are also to be found in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Dīwān*, it is unusual to find them being used to depict an obviously human beloved. The physical description of the Beloved appears in a form which was already codified from the time of Sanā’ī. But the classification into different chapters devoted to the face and the hair, the eyes and lips and so on, is reminiscent of the treatises on terminology which appeared from the beginning of the fourteenth century.

The author of the introduction to the *Mukhtār-nāma*, supposedly ‘Aṭṭār himself, maintains that he made his selection from a total of 6,000 quatrains; he claims to have suppressed a good thousand, and put about 2,500 into this collection, the remainder going into his *Dīwān*. However, most of the manuscripts of the *Dīwān* contain no quatrains; one alone, copied in 1283, possesses six quatrains, four of which also appear in the *Mukhtār-nāma*. As for the *Mukhtār-nāma* manuscripts, they have between 2,000 and 2,300 quatrains, an expansion which indicates successive additions.

We may also observe in the introduction a recapitulation of ‘Aṭṭār’s work. There is no mention of the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*, nor of the *Ilāhī-nāma*, whose attribution to ‘Aṭṭār is beyond doubt. On the other hand, the *Khusraw-nāma* is quoted, although this is a romantic *mathnawī* composed in the fifteenth century. Shafī’ī-Kadkanī has attempted to counter this argument by stating that two compositions exist which were confused with one another: the *Khusraw-nāma* was simply the first name of the *Ilāhī-nāma*, whilst the same title was then given to a later work.⁷

Zarrīnkūb expressed strong doubts as to whether ‘Aṭṭār himself had collected and classified his quatrains. The operation must have been carried out much later

for purposes of instruction, and the *Mukhtār-nāma* would have belonged to the category of collections of apocryphal quatrains, such as those assembled under the name of Abū Saʿīd. In truth, numerous collections can be found which bring together the quatrains of one or several authors, often made by their disciples or by third parties, which prove that there is nothing unusual about this practice, but also that it was rarely carried out by the author himself.⁸ In some sources later than the *Mukhtār-nāma*, certain quatrains from this collection have been attributed to Abū Saʿīd, Anṣārī, Rūmī, Awḥadī, Khayyām, Bābā Afḍal, and ʿIrāqī. On the other hand, none of them have been attributed to other authors in sources contemporary with or previous to ʿAṭṭār.⁹ There are also some problems with the organization of the material: the titles of the chapters do not always fit their content,¹⁰ and their terminology sometimes differs from that used in the *rubāʿīs* themselves.¹¹

In order to undertake further research into the authenticity of the *Mukhtār-nāma*, it will be necessary to examine the text itself and, in so doing, to compare its thought and symbolic expressions with the rest of ʿAṭṭār's work. But the study of ʿAṭṭār is not yet sufficiently advanced to permit genuine comparisons. Even if the *mathnawīs* of this poet have already been critically examined, the same is not true of the *Dīwān* and the *Mukhtār-nāma*, which have been neglected up until now. Therefore, I shall concentrate below on the analysis of only some of those themes of the *Mukhtār-nāma* that are reminiscent of ʿAṭṭār, omitting the profane quatrains from my study.

Spiritual Anthropology

Islamic mysticism traditionally recognizes three psycho-spiritual levels of the incorporeal components of man: the carnal soul (*nafs*), the heart (*qalb*), and the spirit (*rūh*). Basically, there are two types of description concerning spiritual progress. Some insist upon the evolution of the soul, which is achieved through three formative stages in which knowledge of the self is refined: the soul governed by desire (*ʿammāra bi'l-sūʾ*), the soul governed by blame (*lawwāma*), and finally the soul at peace, accepted and transfigured by the Lord (*muṭmaʿinna*). Others emphasize the fierce struggle between the carnal soul and the spirit for the possession of the heart (*dil*), which assumes the nature of the victorious element.

In the mystical expression of Persian poetry, we often observe a variant of these two in which the struggle takes place between the self (*khwud*) and the heart (*dil*). The 'self' here is not totally identified with the *nafs*. The 'self' is not only the passionate soul, the egoistic being, sensual and destructive, but also the individual creature, existing as a separate being, 'other' than God, which disintegrates and divides it. The soul must cast aside its individuality, which diminishes it, to regain the original Unity. It must become depersonalized in order that the One alone may remain.

1. *The Spirit (jān)*

In the *Mukhtār-nāma*, numerous poems are concerned with the Spirit (*jān*), the carnal soul (*nafs*), and, to a lesser degree and in a more scattered fashion, with the heart (*dil*). The chapter dedicated to the Spirit shows an anomaly in the title, for the term employed in the title is *rūḥ*, whereas that appearing in the quatrains themselves is *jān*.¹² Might it be reasonably concluded that the title was not given by the person who wrote most of the poems? We shall see that 'Aṭṭār used both terms, although he clearly preferred *jān*. The word *jān* is ambiguous because of its various meanings in Persian: it can simultaneously mean the soul, the spirit, the vital principle, and even 'life' itself. Here, it should be translated as 'Spirit', not as 'soul'. And it is interesting to note that the author of the collection felt the need to clarify this point in the choice of the title.

The emphasis is laid upon the exile of the Spirit. The Spirit comes from a world of glory; it is noble, endowed with wisdom, more beautiful than anything else in the world.¹³ It is a dove escaped from the Divine Throne.¹⁴ It cannot be described,¹⁵ and the chalice reflecting the universe is to be found within it.¹⁶ It is as unattainable and unknowable as God Himself. It is necessary first to know the Spirit in order to accede to the Divine Being. It can be recognized, for we already encountered it in Pre-eternity. It was the white falcon perched on the King's forearm, but now wanders among the ruins like an owl.¹⁷ It was Joseph in the holy land of Egypt, but now lies in the lower depths of the well of the body.¹⁸ How can the ruler of the divine realms find any joy while in the company of the vile carnal soul?¹⁹ Like a nightingale struck down by sorrow, it has become a prisoner in the net of misery and accustomed to the confines of a narrow cage, no longer remembering from Whom it has been separated.²⁰

In its exile, the Spirit has also forgotten *who* it was, and has created a completely false self-image, identifying itself with the miserable body,²¹ believing itself to be made of a simple morsel of dust.²² It has fastened itself to the world, which has covered it with red rust,²³ and is enthralled by its desires. But it should leave this world, abandon this body and these impure desires, become aware of its value and its noble rank, and embark upon the road to the Real World (*'ālam-i pur-ma'nī*).²⁴ In this way it will recover its light-bearing quality²⁵ and become once more a mirror reflecting the Beloved – provided that it conceals the secret within its bosom, and places its aspirations in a suffering which has no remedy.²⁶ If today, the Spirit is lost and abandoned to the body, tomorrow, the body will be lost and abandoned to the Spirit. The Spirit is responsible for the body and in charge of its redemption.²⁷

2. *The Heart (dil)*

The heart is closely connected to both the Spirit and the carnal soul. Because of the latter, the heart lost its existence as a drop, and did not reach the sea.²⁸ It must detach itself from the world in order to attain the divine realm. Dismayed and disoriented at first, the heart assumes regency (*sulṭānī*) once it has passed through the veil of secrecy.²⁹ The order to act in harmony with the Spirit is given to it so that it may reach its destination.³⁰ In fact, the heart must be subordinated to the Spirit, for the Spirit is that part of the Divine which is concealed in the depths of the heart. The Spirit is the seventh veil of the heart, its deepest part, unsuspected of existing by the heart itself.³¹ The heart is visionary and capable of perceiving the universal theophany:

My heart is shattered because of each atom, for when the veil is drawn away from them, it sees a hundred suns shining in each one.³²

In truth, the heart is the essence of the mystical pilgrim. All admonitions concerning seclusion and silence and all holy appeals to be consumed by tears and desire, and to become the 'same colour' (*yakrang*) as the Spirit, are addressed to it. The heart experiences sorrow and astonishment; it is sensitive to the various spiritual experiences which it undergoes.

The heart is constantly in movement, lacking stability. Let it cease its vain agitation and concentrate on its inner life: the road is to be found within itself.³³

When the bird of my heart knew the craft of the setter of snares,
and learned, through suffering, what was the essence of the secret,
For a thousand years, it travelled into itself,
till it was able to recognize itself behind the veil.³⁴

3. *The Carnal Soul (nafs)*

As for the carnal or animal soul, it is an impure and faithless female dog. It is so tyrannical and ferocious that it may be compared to a hundred lions and panthers concealed behind each hair whitened by ascetic practices.³⁵ It infects the pilgrim with its passions (*shahwat*), greed (*āz*), and evil desires (*niyāz*). It is intimately assimilated into the 'ego' of man, as part of his very being (*khwud, hastī-yi khwīsh*),³⁶ which is the reason why it is so difficult to eradicate:

Each day I killed myself a thousand times, but this pagan carnal soul
is still alive.³⁷

While the owner of the carnal soul attempts to retrain and train it by means of

asceticism, it veers away from any discipline, and even manages to flourish.³⁸ It becomes ever more successful, thanks to its tricks and lies. Ever dormant within those who throughout their lives have worked mercilessly to destroy their carnal souls, a thousand dragons lie in wait ready to awaken at the hour of death:³⁹

Even if you are consumed by flames during many lifetimes,
the stench of the ego (*manī*) will always rise from your ashes!⁴⁰

One of the allies of the carnal soul is the world (*dunyā*), which is an illusory phantasy (*khiyāl*), a smoke screen, a place of disgrace, dishonour, treachery and vileness. It is compared to a thorn bush, to the heating system of public baths (renowned for their stench and filth), to a court of injustice, to a rotting creature. Only harmful and impure animals, such as vultures, panthers, dogs, pigs, can ever be at ease there. Anyone who attaches himself to the world assumes the same nature as these repulsive creatures. Not only is the world vain and worthless, but it also brings sorrow, suffering and spiritual downfall. God hates it, so attachment to this world is incompatible with the love of God. The world is populated by the rabble and non-initiates (*nā-ahl*, *nā-maḥram*), so death or hell are preferable to being in the company of such people.⁴¹

Qualities Required for the Mystical Quest

The chief qualities required for the mystical quest, which are discussed in the *Mukhtār-nāma*, are silence (*khamūshī*), solitude (*‘uzlat*, *khalwat*), lofty aspiration (*himmat*) and ardent desire (*ārzū*).

1. Silence and Solitude (*khamūshī*, *‘uzlat*)

Two whole chapters (16–17) are dedicated to the necessity of retiring into silence and solitude. Although difficult for beginners to endure, this isolation bears much fruit. The text emphasizes the deep moral isolation of the mystic. He suffers from a cruel lack of companions in whom he can confide; he is always seeking kindred spirits who might help him overcome the difficulties of the mystical life, or, at least, might be sympathetic (*hamdam*) with his suffering. Divine favours are as difficult to endure as the sorrows of exile; the author dreams of sharing the jewels of the divine mystery and spiritual truths with a confidant. This can only be with a person following the same path and of the same spiritual rank,⁴² but such people are very rare. Since no trustworthy confidant can be found, it is better to keep silent.⁴³

O heart, if you have tasted the wine of knowledge,
tighten your lips and do not unveil the divine secret.

Do not boil like a torrent at the sight of any gathering;
you will become the Ocean if you remain in solitude.⁴⁴

Since, in any event, neither spiritual experiences nor the divine mysteries of the Friend can be expressed in words, it is better for them to remain hidden in the bosom of the mystic. But sometimes, he endures such interior turmoil that he cannot prevent himself from speaking and trying to express the inexpressible.⁴⁵ Words, furthermore, apart from the fact that they are a betrayal of the Beloved, disperse and destroy the mystic's concentration; they bring him out of himself. On the contrary, he should seek nourishment in silence and solitude, so as to become all ears. Words also serve to externalize the pain, or to make the Beloved more concerned. But since they can never allow one to attain the goal, silence should be imposed not only upon the tongue, but also upon the heart. To speak of the Friend is presumptuous; the pilgrim must know how to keep his place and not babble on about something that he can never comprehend.⁴⁶

Silence and solitude are inseparable. The pilgrim must cease all wanton and vain agitation; he should seat himself on the prayer carpet of submission and remain in isolation (*'uzlat*), exercising patience, abandoning all desire, and there, in a state of perfect passivity, await revelations.⁴⁷

At the beginning, my heart dwelt in tumult
and felt at each moment a thousand kinds of longing.
Then, when it saw that all of this was useless,
it ceased to desire anything, and retreated into solitude.⁴⁸

Being alone permits the seeker to abandon dispersion of consciousness (*tafriqa*) in order to attain full and wholehearted concentration (*jam'*). The separative difference between the lover and his Beloved causes torture, but this dissolves away with the abnegation of the self. All ties must be broken: the pilgrim must separate himself from his wife and children, break loose from the self and from everything that exists (*hast*), overcoming the illusion of independent existence, and concentrating upon the examination of his inner conscience (*murāqabat*). Unification absorbs both the worlds as if they were but a single breath.⁴⁹

2. *Lofty Aspiration* (*himmat-i buland*)

In order to pursue the quest, it is absolutely necessary to be a man of the Way (*mard*, as opposed to woman, *zan*, or someone effeminate: *mukhannath*⁵⁰) and to possess lofty aspiration (*himmat-i buland*).⁵¹ If the beauty of the Beloved's face is unveiled to the pilgrim, his gaze should be full of courteous deference (*adab*) and his heart suffused with respect.⁵² Lofty aspiration allows the pilgrim to concentrate

upon the object of the quest, to travel into his interior depths (*dar bāṭin-i khwīsh safar kun*) and not to wander aimlessly about. The interior journey is contrary to the outer journey in this world, which is all vanity. Spiritual aspiration allows him to struggle against slothful negligence (*ghaflat*), which consists of sleeping and remaining inactive, whilst all the atoms are occupied with their search for God.⁵³ Indeed, men tend to favour delay, and try to put off the moment when they must begin the journey:

Enough of discussions and idle thoughts delaying the journey!
 You are making snow an excuse in July!
 The Men of this world have already traversed a hundred spheres,
 and you are still there, standing on your two feet, thinking.⁵⁴

The aspirant travelling on the Way progresses on bloodstained feet. Burdened and distressed, he sets off without asking questions and without hesitation: the Way itself will tell him how to advance. He should devote all his earthly life to this noble task; any second lost in delay and any lack of action or negligence is a waste of the only real wealth that man possesses in this world, that is, his life.⁵⁵

Do not waste your life, for at any moment thereof,
 you may gain one hundred kingdoms.⁵⁶

The exercise of lofty aspiration is not contradictory to the mystic's absolute powerlessness. The pilgrim does not arrogate his own acts to himself, since he knows that all is accomplished according to Divine decree. He has nothing to say concerning his being, and has no influence upon events, which occur anyway, irrespective of his own action or inaction.⁵⁷

3. Ardent Desire (*ārzū*)

Another indispensable quality is ardent desire (*ārzū*, more rarely 'longing': *shawq*) for union with and vision of the Beloved. This intense desire possesses the pilgrim who has experienced a foretaste (*dhawq*) of the joys of the encounter with God, and urges him to advance on the Way; it is truly the driving force of the quest. It makes the lover completely insatiable: even if he drinks a hundred oceans, he still suffers from the agony of an unquenchable thirst. He is ready to offer up a thousand lives, dancing in the hope of imbibing a whiff of the Beloved's perfume. Even death will not deliver him from desire; if he were interred whilst subject to the fervour of love, he will be reborn in the same condition. This passionate desire is incompatible with patience (*ṣabr*); the man afflicted by the pain of separation resembles a diver who cannot breathe; he who becomes accustomed to absence

is worse than a dog.⁵⁸ Ardent desire leads to annihilation of the self, and permits return to the divine Origin.

The intoxication of love (for You) caused me to come into existence.
Ardent desire caused me to return to non-being ('adam').⁵⁹

The *Mukhtār-nāma* also mentions the gift of tears, which have a purifying value, for they drown the 'pharaohs' who dwell within the pilgrim. These tears, which accompany the whole journey, are the fruit of ardent desire and passionate concentration. Because of separation, the pilgrim weeps when thinking of death or, again, because these tears bring joy to the Beloved. They flow like rain from a cloud struck by the lightning of the Spirit; their tumultuous rolling is like the waves of the river Oxus. They are a steed for the heart, which, weary of inhabiting the confines of the body, mounts upon them and bravely ventures out into the vastness of the desert. Tears shed for love extinguish the flames devouring the heart.⁶⁰

Another condition of the journey is the knowledge that the Beloved is unattainable. He is jealously hidden behind one hundred locked doors to which there are no keys. The reason for this separation is the weakness of the lover: he resembles an ant who wishes to become the companion of an elephant, a limping fly who wishes to drink from the same cup as the Archangel Gabriel, or a weak mosquito chasing a prancing stallion.⁶¹ All his efforts to attain union are already doomed to failure.

O! Ill fortune! I have obtained no sign from Him
who is without sign, and the meaning of His Ocean
of Manifestation has not been revealed to me.
Throughout my life, I remained by the water's edge,
and not a drop of water reached my spirit.⁶²

The heart had certainly received a foretaste (*dhawq*) of union, but found only the tunic of the Friend. The lover had heard tell of his curl, but was unable to grasp a single lock of hair. He saw the moon, but it disappeared as soon as it appeared. So he resigned himself to exile (*hijr*), despairing of union (*waṣl*). Even if he were to travel for one hundred years on the path leading to Him, he would still discover in the end that he is only on the first step. For the Friend does not appear to 'others'; nothing finite can apprehend Him – neither the senses, nor the frail, impure vision, nor the pilgrim who is still subject to duality.⁶³

No one knows our language – thine and mine.
Outside this world is another world – of thine and mine.
Since you are continually with me, and I with you,
whence comes this distance (*dūrī*) between us both?

I was one (*yaktā*), but duality (*dūtā'ī*) afflicted me.
 I lived in the Proximity, but now
 am subject to the agonies of separation (*judā'ī*).⁶⁴

Spiritual States of the Way

1. Perplexity, Bewilderment (*ḥayrat*)

In the *Mukhtār-nāma*, the theme of perplexity (*ḥayrat*, *sar gashtagī*) is discussed directly following the description of Unity (*tawḥīd*), and the manner of attaining it (*fanā*, *baqā*). This central position, as well as the number of quatrains devoted to this idea, bear witness to its importance.⁶⁵ Perplexity is a universal phenomenon; at every step of the way the traveller meets thousands of lost souls who, like himself, are wandering in the desert where all 'knowledge' is ignorance. For this lack of direction is linked with the condition of earthly existence. As long as we live in this world, our perplexity will increase in proportion to the intensity of our quest for certainty (*yaqīn*).⁶⁶

We went into the desert in the hope of discovering certainty;
 We emigrated from the world of the body to the world of the Spirit.
 We meditated day and night for an entire lifetime.
 We entered this world perplexed and left it completely bewildered!⁶⁷

Confusion is particularly due to the intermediate state of the pilgrim in the 'desert', where he has lost contact with this world, without yet having access to the One Yonder. He finds himself in a kind of non-place, with neither future nor past, day nor night, where he can neither live nor die, neither remain nor depart, where neither pure wine nor the bitter dregs are given to him, and where he is neither conscious nor unconscious of himself (*na bā-khabaram zi khwīsh wa na bī-khabaram*).⁶⁸

He does not know which road to take, for one hundred roads depart from each atom. Not knowing how to resolve this dilemma causes tremendous suffering.⁶⁹ He finds himself a wanderer without home or family, exhausted and lost, without heart or religion, wavering between disbelief and faith, tossed back and forth like a polo ball hit by a mallet from one end of the polo field to the other.⁷⁰ This uncomfortable situation is a result of the destructive action of the tyrannical soul that dominates the ignorant heart, causing it to hesitate between the pleasures of this world and the quest for the Beloved Beyond.⁷¹

Sometimes we waned like the moon because of the desire for God;
 sometimes filled the house of the heart with perishable goods.

The heart is satisfied neither with this world's goods nor with God:
so we always rise hungry from the feast.⁷²

2. *Sorrow and Pain* (*ghamm*, *dard*)

The journey is carried on in pain and suffering. The true lover suffers from the tips of his toes to the top of his head – so deep is his pain that every atom in the world pities his fate. The clay of his flesh has been moulded with pain.⁷³ The temptation to despair is always present, because his sense of powerlessness and rejection is so strong. Throughout the course of his life, the seeker has followed the caravan which journeyed across the desert without ever reaching the Ocean. He has never known the slightest feeling of joy and has always struggled with difficulties. He has traversed the two worlds but has arrived nowhere. He has sifted earth but discovered only air to be in his sieve. He has acted in ignorance in hope of acquiring some knowledge, but neither his physical body compounded of water and clay, nor his blithe spirit, nor his heart, have been of any help to him. Even when the Friend came to occupy his heart and showed him the way, he exhausted himself in vain efforts and did not reach the desired end. He feels that he is running in one place, without ever advancing or retreating.⁷⁴ With humility, he is obliged to acknowledge his weakness and powerlessness (*'ajz*).

Throughout my whole life, I ran in ignorance –
I told myself that I could acquire some knowledge thanks to my intelligence.
Finally, here I am seated behind the veil of weakness
complaining as old women do.⁷⁵

The road is infinitely long, strewn with snares without end, and has no termination. Where the pilgrim is concerned, the veils of illusion are many, and where God is concerned, there are only the veils of secrets! But the situation is not static; contrary to what might be thought, the lover does progress. He acquires a certain knowledge of the Beloved; each step reveals a little more of the distance separating him from God. Gradually he becomes aware of the extent of the divine transcendence and of his own miserable condition, and this awareness is unbearable.⁷⁶

Do not come nearer nor go further from Him,
for the nearer you are, the further you are.⁷⁷

Since the Beloved gives value to suffering, the lover submits to pain, and even regards it as valuable because it gives pleasure to the One he loves. The torment of love (*ranj*) and sorrow (*ghamm*) are treasures which he would not exchange for all the kingdom of Jamshīd; they bring solace to his heart and allow him to find

the Beloved in all he sees. He who succeeds in establishing the kingdom of pain (*mamlakat-i dard*) will gain power over both worlds.⁷⁸

In fact, it is not so much the absence of God (*bī tū būdan*) as the confusion caused by His many manifestations that brings suffering and grief to the immature pilgrim.⁷⁹ The adept-of-the-heart takes sorrow for his confidant, adjunct and escort; he enters the Way through the door of sorrow, and sets off furnished with sorrow (*andūh*), even if this is finally dissolved in love.⁸⁰

If you wish to free yourself from attachment to the two worlds
and become the confidant and intimate companion of the Pure Ones,
do not allow yourself to be distracted for a single moment from your pain,
but enter into suffering, so as to become a man of the Way.⁸¹

3. *The Libertine Way* (*qalandar, rind*)

The inspired libertine (*rind*) is presented in the *Mukhtār-nāma* as a former ascetic who has abandoned reasonable behaviour and has no concern for name, fame and reputation. He wanders about aimlessly, worshipping idols, drinking dregs in the tavern for lack of having tasted the pure wine of the Faith (*ṣāfi-yi dīn*). He is equidistant between good and evil, hovering between faith and disbelief. The cause of this condition is the suffering of love, which in turn is willed by the Beloved.

‘How can I become an ascetic,’ he asks himself, ‘if He wishes me to be a vagabond (*qalandar*)?’ This man presents himself as a slave to the Magian Master or the Cupbearer (*Sāqī*), both symbols of the Beloved. He has thrown off the gaudy tunic of conventional habit (*khirqā-i rasm*), and robed himself in the Secret. He has firmly decided to overcome all obstacles that might waylay him on his journey, even if his life be at stake. For the sake of love of the Beloved, he has abandoned Islam for Christianity and knotted the belt of the infidel around his waist. He has exchanged his turban – proof of Muslim self-respectability – for one draught of the dregs of sorrow. The ethos of the inspired libertine is closely linked to sadness and perplexity. Nostalgia requires the lover to be subject to madness and to the drunkard’s dipsomania (*khumār*). Before he knew the pangs of pain, which bound him hand and foot and threw him into a corner of the tavern, he was an immature pilgrim who wished to be wise (*‘āqil*) and practice asceticism within the customary bounds of faith (*ṣuwma‘a-i dīn*).

Nevertheless, the dregs of the tavern of ruin are forbidden to him as long as his heart has not been purified and cleansed of both the worlds – that is, so long as his desire remains unrefined and immature. Let him take care, however, not to be self-satisfied with hypocritical asceticism, but let him rather escape to the souk of libertinage (*qalandarī*). There, he will turn his back on the good and ill of both this

world and the Next, debasing himself in dissolute drinking, gambling, and stroking the locks of an enchanting young Christian.⁸² Spiritual chivalry (*mardī*) consists in becoming an inspired libertine and a gambler, free from both Alpha and Omega, being the same colour, whether expressing what's Hidden or Manifest. The libertine does not take the eyes of his heart off the face of the Beloved, but perseveres in silence and patience.⁸³

Fulfilment of the Mystical Quest

1. Unification (tawhīd)

Everything that exists in the two worlds is a manifestation of divine Light. Each atom is a sign which cries to the troubled heart, 'Come, I am here.'⁸⁴ God continually manifests Himself at every moment in a different form, and all things are epiphanies or manifestations of the Godhead born in the world of being, and which then return to non-being.

You ask what is this metaphorical image (*naqsh-i majāz*)?

This takes a long time to explain.

It is an image which came out of the Ocean,

and which immediately returned to its depths.⁸⁵

The infinity of God is emphasized: a drop taken from the Ocean of Divinity contains more than 18,000 worlds. This Ocean seethes unceasingly, revealing itself at each moment, and in each atom, under a different guise. The world is a mirror wherein the face of God is reflected; man is asked to gaze upon the face, not upon the mirror. When the veil of illusion is drawn aside, He alone remains: 'you' and 'I' fade away.

Duality is lack of reverence and constitutes polytheism, for the two worlds are but an atom of One Being. The pilgrim should see only one Face behind all those he encounters in the two worlds. He who puts his trust in the outward appearance of things will remain excluded from knowledge of the truth. The face of the Divine possesses an unspeakable beauty, but its very light prevents the seeker from distinguishing its features.

The Spirit which finally reaches the Sea loses itself therein. When the pilgrim's heart is perfectly purified, all that can be seen is but a drop of the divine Sea, whilst the point of unity in which his Spirit is lodged has the appearance of an endless circle. When the heart has become entirely detached from the finite partial world (*'ālam-i juzwī*), it returns to the universal Whole or Integral Realm (*'ālam-i kullī*).⁸⁶

Seeing the dregs coming from that sea, the bird had its heart broken,
and made its way to the same sea. It said to itself,
'I will drink all that water'. Its share was but a single drop,
and it fainted in the waters of that sea.⁸⁷

When you see the myriad universes full of stars combined in one house of the Zodiac, then your heart will have reached the divine Dwelling. The spirit which has reached the Ocean emerges from itself and is immediately immersed in the Ocean. The two worlds are but an atom before it, and this atom also abandons its state as an atom to return to its Origin. Unification (*tawhīd*) constitutes the universe of the Spirit, which is a realm with no separation or multiplicity, in which there is neither man nor woman, body nor Spirit, ego nor plurality.⁸⁸ In this world, God is neither hidden nor manifest. Since there is nothing other (*ghayr*) than Him, to whom can He manifest Himself and from whom can He hide Himself?⁸⁹ The first wave of this Ocean flowed into the hearts of lovers, rendering them 'selfless' (*bī-khwud*) and plunging them into amazement; another wave will submerge them and cause them to completely and permanently disappear. First of all they die to themselves; then they depart this world to return to their origins.⁹⁰

Unification is, thus, not the attainment of an extraordinary state, but simply the realization of what one is.⁹¹ For a whole lifetime, the heart has hastened to seek Him, and when it finally reaches Him, it realizes the two have always been one!⁹² All creatures are engaged in this quest; but, even so, each one believes that he is the only one who strives to return to the Sea.⁹³

One of the preconditions of unification is annihilation (*fanā*'). How can the mosquito behold the Pleiades, or an ant contemplate the garden of Paradise? Unless the drop becomes the same colour as the sea, how can it ever notice the sea upon which it floats?⁹⁴ Where He is, duality and plurality do not exist. Where He is, the deepest annihilation takes place. There, where I am, says 'Aṭṭār, 'all is Thee.'⁹⁵

2. Annihilation (*fanā*') and Subsistence (*baqā*')

Three chapters (6–8) of the *Mukhtār-nāma* are explicitly devoted to annihilation (*fanā*):⁹⁶ Although they are very long, they are not complicated and are often quite repetitive. Subsistence (*baqā*)⁹⁷ is discussed only superficially. In certain poems, *baqā*' is not interpreted in the sense of a rebirth in God but, on the contrary, as the ignoble subsistence of the individual being.⁹⁸

We are able to know the Sun because one of its rays has appeared in our breast. Our heart is nothing but a drop of the Ocean that it seeks. It is a slave and, at the same time, enjoys kingly dominion (*sulṭānī*).⁹⁹

The heart said to itself, 'I am a miserable drop;
how then can I attain the shores of the Ocean?'
Yet when this drop found the Ocean gates,
it exclaimed, 'But this is myself!'¹⁰⁰

From whence the Divine spark found in the constitution of every created being? Indeed, it is his very essence. There are two categories of being: the first is the Eternal Being (*qidam*), which possesses the Essence in and of Itself; and the second is created being (*khalq*), which in itself is nothing, whose essence is vouchsafed by another, and as a result it is ephemeral. Creation is a mirror unaware of itself, which only exists through the Face reflected in it.¹⁰¹ Spiritual progress consists in becoming aware of this reality and in casting off individual being (*hastī*), or rather, abandoning the illusion of independence (*pandār-i wujūd-i khwud*) and renouncing the self (*bī-hastī* or *bī-khwud*). This experience of self-dispossession is called *fanā*'. The pilgrim melts into the sea of annihilation as a shadow vanishes in the sunlight.

To become the boon companion of the Friend, one must shake off the shame of self-existence. Seeing oneself as distinct from God is irreverent: therefore it is necessary to die to oneself before actually dying.¹⁰² During *fanā*', the heart disappears and only God remains, but the heart is none other than Him; in being nothing, he becomes Everything.

Each time my heart appears from behind the veil,
the whole world is plunged into trouble and tumult.
When the ocean of my heart goes wandering in the desert,
a thousand oceans appear in each one of its waves.¹⁰³

He who imagines that he possesses individual existence tries to drink water from an empty jug.¹⁰⁴ Even if one single hair remains yours, it will grow to the size of a mountain.¹⁰⁵ As long as we remain outside God's dwelling, burdened with our illusory being, we are nothing but poor beggars. Once we enter into His dwelling we become kings, freed from both being (*wujūd*) and non-being (*'adam*). This annihilation is strange: upon entering the tent of Secrets, the humblest disciple becomes a master, the lowliest slave becomes a free man.¹⁰⁶ Once annihilated, the pilgrim becomes aware of the non-being of the whole universe.¹⁰⁷

This condition is followed by *baqā*', for the absence of the self (*bī-khwudī*) is the source of all being (*hast*).¹⁰⁸ When the Divine Beloved sees that His lover has become nonexistent, He pours true existence into him and transfigures him: therefore it is necessary to be nothing so that God may be everything. The *fanā*' and the *baqā*' reach the Spirit first and then the body.

When His sun-like face shines, the rays reach the Spirit,
 Then shine over the body. They ask me, 'What has happened?'
 You wish me to tell you? Since I have become nothing,
 His being cast its radiance over me.¹⁰⁹

In *baqā'*, the pilgrim ceases to exist by means of his own being (*az wujūd-i khwud*) but lives through another, higher existence (*ba wujūd-i dīgar*).¹¹⁰ However, in this life, *fanā'* and *baqā'* are unstable, so the lover perpetually swings between being and non-being, intoxicated with the perfume of the love of God, but not yet entirely freed from the self.¹¹¹

Conclusion

Let us now ask whether the foregoing thematic analysis allows us to decide in favour of the *Mukhtār-nāma* being by, or inspired by the work of, 'Aṭṭār. It is true that the work shows a remarkable similarity with the known works of 'Aṭṭār in respect to thought, vocabulary, and images. However, the weight of tradition is so heavy in Persian literature that many of the ideas and metaphors attributed to this author are also shared by other poets. Thus, one cannot definitively confirm the authenticity of the *Mukhtār-nāma* on the basis of the presence of doctrines which are so general and widespread. The only truly convincing elements are those instances in which 'Aṭṭār's thought shows a certain originality in respect to the tradition, and where his interpretation of it is slightly different from other poets belonging to the same extended spiritual family. The use of vocabulary might also provide proof, especially if it shows characteristics that are specific to him. The same is also true of images which he alone may have used, and which did not become standardized later on. However, in the present state of research it is something of a gamble to pick out what is original to 'Aṭṭār from what is the common property of the Sufi tradition. It is hoped that deeper analyses into the thought and modes of expression of the Persian mystical poets will appear over the next few years, which will then allow us to make more valid comparisons.

Finally, it must be observed that the form affects the content. A subject is not developed in the same way in a quatrain as it is in a *mathnawī* or a *ghazal*. We must therefore remember that we are attempting to compare texts which are not really comparable.

In spite of such difficulties, a few points deserve emphasis. The anthropology of the *Mukhtār-nāma*, especially regarding the struggle between the spirit and the carnal soul for the possession of the heart, certainly resembles that found in 'Aṭṭār's other works. Yet this conception is also common to the formative period of Persian mystical literature (which will later dwell upon the conflict between 'self' and 'heart'). The use of the word *jān* to designate the 'Spirit' is quite characteristic

of 'Aṭṭār, as is the infrequent use of the preferred term of most other Persian poets: 'self' (*khwud*, *khwudī*, *khwīsh*), and 'Aṭṭār's preference for the terms 'individual being' (*hastī*), or 'ego' (*manī*).¹¹²

As for the conditions of the journey, the idea of spiritual chivalry (*javānmardī*) is typical of 'Aṭṭār's poetic lexicon, even more so because we find in the *Mukhtār-nāma* examples of the characteristic opposition of the man of the Way (*mard*) to the woman, or to effeminate types. On the other hand, the need for retirement into silence and solitude, for possessing lofty aspiration and ardent desire are found equally in the poetry of Sanā'ī.

There is no better source for studying 'Aṭṭār's concept of *ḥayrat* than the description which he gives of the Valley of Perplexity in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*,¹¹³ which is described in quite similar terms as well as in the *Mukhtār-nāma*. Nevertheless, while 'Aṭṭār propounds in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* that amazement or perplexity must follow *tawḥīd*, in the *Mukhtār-nāma*, it appears to precede *tawḥīd*.

Pain (*dard*, *ranj*) and sorrow (*andūh*, *ghamm*) are perhaps the central concepts in 'Aṭṭār's thought, but so they are in most Persian mystical poetry as well. We find beautiful descriptions of pain – much more moving than in the *Mukhtār-nāma* – in 'Aṭṭār's epic and lyric poetry.¹¹⁴ The characters of the inspired libertine (*rind*) and *qalandar* appear principally in the *Dīwān*, where they are linked with sorrow, love and unity,¹¹⁵ and only rarely appear in his longer epic mystical *mathnawīs*.¹¹⁶

The themes of the Uniqueness of God and annihilation in God are of too universal provenance in Sufi thought to allow us to draw any definitive conclusions on the basis of such a superficial examination. This is especially so since all these mystical authors tend to tirelessly re-use a somewhat limited store of stereotyped images to depict the indescribable nature of God, thus running the risk that these images may no longer be able to portray a living experience, and so merely repeat by rote an accepted doctrine which has become enfeebled by uninspired repetition.

'Aṭṭār makes clear his opinion concerning unification in the introductions and conclusions of his *mathnawīs*.¹¹⁷ The experience of *tawḥīd* is only possible for the Spirit (*jān*), and its essential condition is annihilation (*maḥw wa fanā*).¹¹⁸ However, higher existence is rather neglected in the *Mukhtār-nāma*, whereas it is carefully explained by 'Aṭṭār elsewhere.¹¹⁹

And yet, the uncertain attribution of the *Mukhtār-nāma* takes nothing away from the value of the work. The *Mukhtār-nāma* is neither entirely a forgery, nor a completely authentic work of 'Aṭṭār. The choice of subtitles and the classification of themes are certainly not his own. Where the contents are concerned, we probably have authentic quatrains by 'Aṭṭār to which have been added other apocryphal poems, which were first collected and then bound together in single volume during the fourteenth century. Unless, of course, they are all particularly successful imitations 'in the style of 'Aṭṭār'!

Notes

1. 'Aṭṭār, *Mukhtār-nāma*, ed. M.R. Shafī'i-Kadkanī (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996). References below [as MN] are to chapters and quatrain numbers of the *second edition* which includes 12 extra *rubā'īs* in the text and 191 others in a separate chapter entitled *Additions* from a supplementary manuscript that has been used besides those included in the first edition of 1358 Sh./1979.

2. 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb, *Az gudhashta-i adabī-yi Īrān* (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996), pp. 334–335; *Hikāyat hamchinān bāqī* (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997), pp. 179–187; *Ṣadā-yi bāl-i sīmurgh* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999), pp. 13, 59–60, 62–63, 87.

3. Sayyid 'Alī Mīr-Afḍalī, 'Āyā *Mukhtār-nāma* az 'Aṭṭār ast?', *Nashr-i Dānish*, 17 (1379 Sh./2000), pp. 32–43.

4. Particularly in MN, 24 (death), 43 (libertine behaviour), and 44 (the rose). Twenty *rubā'īs* in MN, 44 appear in more recent texts attributed to Khayyām, of which the *Tarab-nāma* is one.

5. MN, 44–48, concerning the images of the rose, the dawn, and the candle.

6. *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. H. Ritter (2nd ed., Tehran, 1368 Sh./1989), p. 272 (17th song, 3rd tale).

7. MN, p. 37ff. [On this discussion, see also Hermann Landolt's essay above – eds.]

8. For example, Ibn Ḥanīfā's *Majma' al-rubā'īyyāt*, Khalīl Shīrwānī's *Nuzhat al-majālis*, Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī's quatrains, *Mu'nis al-aḥrār*. See Mīr-Afḍalī, '*Mukhtār-nāma*', p. 36.

9. Mīr-Afḍalī, '*Mukhtār-nāma*' p. 39.

10. See MN, 20.

11. See section 1.1 below on *rūḥ* in the title of MN, 10 for *jān*.

12. MN, 10: *Dar ma'ānī-yi mukhtalif kih ta'alluq ba rūḥ dārad*.

13. MN, 10: 467.

14. MN, 10: 480.

15. MN, 10: 475.

16. MN, 10: 465.

17. MN, 10: 464.

18. MN, 10: 469.

19. MN, 10: 468.

20. MN, 10: 463.

21. MN, 10: 476.

22. MN, 10: 474.

23. MN, 10: 483.

24. MN, 10: 470.

25. MN, 10: 483.

26. MN, 10: 486.

27. MN, 10: 491.

28. MN, 13: 572.

29. MN, 6: 243.

30. MN, 13: 573.

31. MN, 6: 246.

32. MN, 6: 290.

33. MN, 10: 487.

34. MN, 10: 494.

35. MN, 12: 552.

36. MN, 12: 544.

37. MN, 12: 545.

38. MN, 12: 549.

39. MN, 12: 555.

40. MN, 12: 557.

41. MN, 14: 601, 603, 604–608, 610, 615, 626, 629.

42. MN, 15: 631, 633, 637, 647, 649.

43. In 'Aṭṭār's work, the man of knowledge speaks discreetly, for the secrets of the Friend should not be revealed to the first comer. If he does not find the ideal companion, he will learn to do without men. Cf. *Asrār-nāma*, ed. Šādiq Gawharīn (Tehran, 1338 Sh./1959), vv. 2135–2141.

44. MN, 17: 675.

45. See in the authentic work of 'Aṭṭār, *Asrār-nāma*, 18–22.

46. MN, 17: 672, 674, 676, 677, 682, 686.

47. MN, 16: 654, 655, 666.

48. MN, 16: 661.

49. MN, 19: 751, 755, 761, 764.

50. 'Aṭṭār uses the same expressions as, indeed borrowing this classification of human beings from, Shibli who declared that the real 'man' is he who seeks God alone, while the eunuch or effeminate person is he who seeks reward in the Hereafter, and he who seeks the world is as base as a woman. See A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1975), p. 212.

51. *Himmat*, spiritual aspiration or lofty intention, is usually defined as the concentration of the heart upon desire for God, so as to attain its own perfection. See Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-ta'rīfāt*, trans. and ed. M. Gloton (Tehran, 1994), p. 445: 'It is the direction and the aim of the heart which concentrates all its spiritual forces towards God the Real, to actualize its own perfection, and that of others.'

52. MN, 18: 697.

53. MN, 18: 698.

54. MN, 18: 734.

55. MN, 18: 716, 722, 729, 731, 734.

56. MN, 22: 851. 'Aṭṭār compares lofty aspiration to a bird beyond the realm of created being, whose flight transcends the world, or to the magnetism which is the inspiration of all

true lovers. It is impossible to reach the divine Kingdom without this quality, for it constitutes the wings of the spirit. Cf. MT, 2641–2643, 2602–2605, 2617–2619.

57. MN, 21: 815, 821, 824.
58. MN, 29: 1089, 1092, 1118, 1123, 1124, 1134, 1140.
59. MN, 29: 1145.
60. MN, 26: 983, 1005, 1007, 1016.
61. MN, 31: 1182, 1192, 1193, 1194, 1195.
62. MN, 31: 1207.
63. MN, 31: 1212, 1215, 1220, 1225.
64. MN, 31: 1250, 1251.
65. [On this theme in 'Aṭṭār's other works see the essay by Lucian Stone above – eds.]
66. MN, 9: 420, 421, 422, 423, 456.
67. MN, 9: 424.
68. MN, 9: 426, 440, 446, 448.
69. MN, 9: 440, 442, 443.
70. MN, 9: 449, 450.
71. MN, 9: 462.
72. MN, 9: 451.
73. MN, 43: 1639, 1652, 1657.
74. MN, 27: 1030, 1032, 1038, 1049, 1055, 1064.
75. MN, 27: 1036.
76. MN, 27: 1061, 1065, 1066.
77. MN, 27: 1054.
78. MN, 43: 1653.
79. MN, 33: 1329, 1334, 1340, 1358.
80. MN, 41.
81. MN, 43: 1636.
82. MN, 44: 1659–1678.
83. MN, 16: 664.
84. MN, 4: 201.
85. MN, 4: 162.
86. MN, 4: 126, 128, 129, 135, 139, 140, 151, 152, 180, 183, 200.
87. MN, 4: 145.
88. MN, 4: 161.
89. MN, 4: 126, 128, 151, 161, 195.
90. MN, 4: 149.
91. MN, 4: 156.
92. MN, 4: 176.
93. MN, 4: 157.
94. MN, 4: 177.

95. MN, 4: 210.

96. Dissolution of the ego in the Divine. *Fanā'* is at the same time a human experience, and the manifestation of God to Himself. In annihilation the partial or relative self dissolves completely into the primordial Non-being; it is the erasing of someone who has never existed. *Fanā'* is a state of ontological unification (*jam'*). Cf. F. Rahman, '*Baqā' wa fanā'*', *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden, 1960–), vol. 1, p. 980.

97. *Baqā'* is the higher existence of He who never ceased to be; it comes after *fanā'*. Man emerges from Non-being clothed in true Being, possessing all the divine qualities. It is the unification of the unification (*jam' al-jam'*) or rebirth in God. Cf. Rahman, *loc. cit.*

98. For example, MN, 8: 362.

99. MN, 6: 228, 243.

100. MN, 6: 229.

101. MN, 7: 8: 413.

102. MN, 8: 377, 378.

103. MN, 6: 235.

104. MN, 7: 345.

105. MN, 8: 363.

106. MN, 6: 244, 245, 251, 253.

107. MN, 7: 348.

108. MN, 8: 378, 381.

109. MN, 6: 306.

110. MN, 8: 413.

111. MN, 8: 404.

112. '*Aṭṭār, Ilāhi-nāma*, ed. Fu'ād Rūḥānī (Tehran, 1351 Sh./1972), v. 578 f.; *Dīwān*, 551/8 and 212/5; MT, 3250–3251, 3131 and 1979–1982. The heart is described in ch. 39 of the *Muṣibat-nāma*, where it appears as being the penultimate questioner of the pilgrim, the final one being the spirit. Cf. *Muṣibat-nāma*, ed. Nūrānī Wiṣāl (Tehran, 1373 Sh./1994), p. 345, vv.10–19; see also *Ilāhi-nāma*, 3017, 2898–2902.

113. MT, 3801–3813; *Asrār-nāma*, 1951–68, for which see further the chapter by Lucian Stone in this volume.

114. *Ilāhi-nāma*, 6670 ff.; MT, 4466–4474; *Dīwān*, 263/6–7, 47/8–9.

115. See for example *Dīwān*, 53/6–14, 361/1–11, 58/6–11.

116. For example, MT, 3427–3448.

117. E.g. *Asrār-nāma*, 10–60, *Ilāhi-nāma*, 357/8–13.

118. *Dīwān*, 299/10–11.

119. MT, 3942–3957, 4231–4261, 4287–4292.

On Losing One's Head: Ḥallājīan Motifs and Authorial Identity in Poems Ascribed to 'Aṭṭār

CARL W. ERNST

In the concluding lines of his celebrated mystical epic, the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār made the following declaration:

This book is the adornment of time, offering a portion to both elite and common.

If a frozen piece of ice saw this book, it would happily emerge from the veil like the sun.

My poetry has a marvellous property, since it gives more results every time.

If it's easy for you to read a lot, it will certainly be sweeter for you every time.

This veiled bride in a teasing mood only gradually lets the veil fall open.

Till the resurrection, no one as selfless as I will ever write verse with pen on paper.

I am casting forth pearls from the ocean of reality. My words are finished, and this is the sign.

If I praise myself a lot, how can that praise please anyone else?

But the expert himself knows my value, because the light of my moon is not hidden.¹

This passage is remarkable for the boast it contains, in which 'Aṭṭār claims that no one has ever annihilated his ego as successfully as he. Conjoined as it is with a bold advertisement of the quality of 'Aṭṭār's literary works, this paradoxical boast of ego-annihilation raises a difficult question regarding the nature of the authorship of Sufi writings. If the goal of the Sufi is the annihilation of the self, what sort of self may be ascribed to the authors of the central writings of Sufism? In principle,

this question is an extension of the fundamental paradox of sainthood in Sufism: if sainthood means the extinction of the ego, how can the saint know that he is a saint? The concept of divinely inspired writings also parallels the ecstatic sayings (*shaṭhiyyāt*) of the Sufis, which are in theory overflowings of inspiration that occur in the absence of the ego. As 'Aṭṭār himself remarked in comparing Ḥallāj's utterances with Moses' encounter with the burning bush on Sinai, it was not the bush that spoke, but God. Aṭṭār's declaration is a specimen of the rhetoric of sainthood, which permitted the spiritual elite to engage in a boasting contest (*mufākhara*) to demonstrate the extent of God's favours to them.² The debates of literary historians over the authenticity of the literary works ascribed to 'Aṭṭār collide with this paradoxical notion of selfless sainthood. Who is the real 'Aṭṭār? The differing understandings of this question depend entirely on the basic presuppositions that interpreters bring to it.

Helmut Ritter memorably presented the issues surrounding 'Aṭṭār's authorial identity in the article he devoted to 'Aṭṭār in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Here Ritter candidly admitted that he had completely revised his original understanding of 'Aṭṭār's writings. The problem, as Ritter saw it, was that 'the works attributed to him ['Aṭṭār] fall into three groups which differ so considerably in content and style that it is difficult to ascribe all three to the same person.'³ Briefly, these three groups of writings are: (1) *mathnawī* poetic compositions (*Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, *Ilāhī-nāma*, *Asrār-nāma*), usually characterized by clear frame stories, containing a rich variety of narrative material; (2) mystical epics (*Ushtur-nāma*, *Jawhar al-dhāt*) focused more narrowly on the identity of God and the world, with frequent reference to Ḥallāj; and (3) other writings (*Lisān al-ghayb*, *Maẓhar al-'ajā'ib*) characterized by a strongly Shi'ite devotion to 'Alī. Ritter himself had initially entertained the possibility that 'Aṭṭār had undergone an evolution of both thought and style, in which he had ultimately converted to Shi'ism in his old age. Sa'īd Nafīsī, following the earlier researches of Maḥmūd Sherānī, had then demonstrated that a separate individual named 'Aṭṭār Tūnī had in the fifteenth century composed the Shi'ite writings of the third group. Nafīsī supposed that it was conceivable that the same person had authored the writings of the first and second groups but, while admitting this possibility, Ritter on the whole considered it unlikely. He went on to describe a fourth category of clearly spurious writings that had been falsely ascribed to 'Aṭṭār.⁴ More recently, François de Blois has concluded that seven works are authentic compositions of 'Aṭṭār (five *mathnawī* narrative poems, plus a *Dīwān* of *ghazals* and the collection of *rubā'īs* known as *Mukhtār-nāma*), and he has enumerated a total of twenty-five other works that may be considered apocryphal. Nevertheless, de Blois is willing to consider the possibility that three of these doubtful works (*Ushtur-nāma*, *Jawhar al-dhāt*, *Lisān al-ghayb*) may be in fact by 'Aṭṭār, though this question requires further research.⁵

There are in fact several diverse criteria that scholars have used to determine the authenticity of the works attributed to 'Aṭṭār. In the area of style, for instance, one may consider that narrative is a typical component in 'Aṭṭār's writings, and the relative prominence or lack of narrative could be one index by which to accept or reject a particular work. Likewise, the stylistic device of repetition or anaphora, which is used at great length in several doubtful works, has been cited as evidence for rejecting them, although it should be noted that the accepted works of 'Aṭṭār display a certain taste for anaphora from time to time.⁶ The age of particular manuscripts has been used as a criterion for judging certain works (or portions of works) as authentic or not. Metre could also be a factor, especially since some of the works which are considered apocryphal display surprising variations in metrical form, suggesting the possibility of different hands at work. From a thematic perspective, a focus on 'Alī and Shi'ism, an obsession with Ḥallāj, and excessive boasting have all served as indications for considering a work of 'Aṭṭār as apocryphal. Another approach is to use autobiographical references in 'Aṭṭār's writings as a way of compiling an authentic canon of his works. But since the most detailed autobiographical information occurs in works (*Lisān al-ghayb*, *Mazhar al-'ajā'ib*) already judged to be doubtful, little actually remains that would allow us to fix 'Aṭṭār or his evolution as a writer with any confidence.

Much depends, though, on how one is disposed to understand in particular the themes of 'Aṭṭār's poetry and his character as an author, and scholars differ in how they evaluate these questions. The lines quoted above from the conclusion to the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* were omitted from the excellent English translation by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis, on the grounds that this conclusion 'consists largely of self-praise and is a distinct anticlimax after a poem devoted to the notion of passing beyond the Self.⁷ Although an argument against the authenticity of this passage might be made on the basis of the absence of the conclusion from some early manuscripts of the text,⁸ Darbandi and Davis reject the conclusion as being thematically and dramatically at odds with the rest of the poem. Yet there are difficulties with applying an overly strict construction of authorial consistency. One still has to face the fact that, up until the dawn of modern criticism, the chief expositors of the tradition of Persian Sufism, such as Jāmī, have accepted even the dubious works as authentic compositions of 'Aṭṭār. Even in recent times, there have been regular publications of the doubtful works, produced either in blissful ignorance of the controversy or decidedly in opposition to scholarly orthodoxy, although these editions are not always easy to find.⁹ How have the various defenders of the dubious works understood their themes and their author?

In the generally accepted works of 'Aṭṭār (*Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, *Ilāhī-nāma*, *Asrār-nāma*, *Muṣibat-nāma*), for example, the Sufi martyr Ḥallāj frequently appears with brief references to his mystical state and dramatic end, which 'Aṭṭār portrayed so eloquently in his hagiographical anthology, the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*.¹⁰ At the

same time, however, these poems contain blatant examples of boasting, in which ‘Aṭṭār claims to be the greatest poet of all time; sometimes this boasting includes a rejection of poetry, which has special reference to the role of court poet.¹¹ All this is combined with the mystical insistence that one annihilate the ego. In comparison, the doubtful works (*Lisān al-ghayb*, *Maḥḥar al-‘ajā’ib*, *Pand-nāma*) may be said to contain the very same elements, but in sometimes greatly exaggerated form. In particular, the theme of headlessness – a universal theme perhaps – becomes a Ḥallājīan metaphor for transcending the self, particularly in the *Bīsar-nāma*, or The Headless Epic.¹² Thus the mere appearance of these themes would in itself not be a convincing reason for rejecting the texts completely, although one still would need to account for the different style and presentation of these themes and their author – such as the remarkable claim (found in the *Maḥḥar al-‘ajā’ib* and *Pand-nāma*) of the ultimate unity of Ḥallāj, ‘Aṭṭār, and ‘Alī.

In the examination which follows, I juxtapose a number of passages from both the accepted and doubtful writings of ‘Aṭṭār with the interpretations that certain readers have brought to ‘Aṭṭār. While it may be intrinsically impossible to reach an understanding of mystical authorship according to positivist standards, it is nevertheless useful to clarify the reading strategies employed by various interpreters to illuminate the conflicting concepts of authorship that they bring to the subject. But simple decisions on the nature of authorship ignore a series of difficult issues, including the question, ‘Is the human self infinite or finite?’¹³ Even without a consideration of postmodern literary theory, it is by no means unproblematic to define authors by either stylistic or thematic consistency. As Maimonides pointed out, there are many reasons besides drunkenness and madness that may cause an author to be inconsistent in the treatment of a given subject. A good case in point from Islamic culture would be Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, who was notorious for dealing with the same subject differently for diverse audiences; certain critics have consequently rejected some works ascribed to him on the grounds of inconsistency. By provisionally dealing with the doubtful works as part of the overall corpus of ‘Aṭṭār’s writings, we at least open up the possibility of understanding how he has been understood by generations of interpreters.

The headless Ḥallāj is standard figure in such scenes as the following from ‘Aṭṭār’s *Asrār-nāma*,

They saw Ḥallāj in a dream one night, his head cut off, but with cup in hand.
They asked, ‘How is it your head is cut off? Tell – how long you
have chosen this cup?’
He said, ‘The king of blessed name gave this cup to the headless one.
‘Those who forget their own heads can drink from this spiritual cup.’¹⁴

‘Aṭṭār indeed proclaims Ḥallāj as his teacher in several of his lyrical verses:

That very fire that fell into Ḥallāj is the same that fell into my life.¹⁵
 The story of that sage Ḥallāj at this time is gladdening the hearts of the pious.
 Within the breast and the desert of the heart, his tale became the guide for
 ‘Aṭṭār.¹⁶

In the Sufi tradition, authorities such as Jāmī accepted ‘Aṭṭār as having had a mystical relationship with Ḥallāj that fell into the category of Uwaysī initiation; like the Prophet Muḥammad’s contemporary, Uways al-Qaranī, ‘Aṭṭār was considered a spiritual disciple who did not require physical or temporal proximity in order to obtain a genuine mystical initiation. Jāmī quoted with approval the remark of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī that ‘the light of Manṣūr [Ḥallāj] after one hundred fifty years manifested to the spirit of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār and became his spiritual authority.’¹⁷ Some stories even claim that, when the Mongols attacked Nishapur, ‘Aṭṭār went to his death by decapitation, welcoming his executioner as a manifestation of his beloved.¹⁸ That headless destiny would certainly be an extreme form of Ḥallājianism!

If ‘Aṭṭār was indeed on the Ḥallājian path towards annihilating the self, this may explain in part his ambivalence toward writing. On one hand, he was not comfortable with the role of the poet as flatterer of kings. ‘I have not eaten the food of any tyrant, nor have I signed any book with my pen-name.’¹⁹ At times there is a discomfort with the role of the poet: ‘Don’t count me any longer as one of the poets; don’t see me any longer with the eye of the poets.’²⁰ At the same time, ‘Aṭṭār put the following words into the mouth of a nameless Sufi, who may be expressing ‘Aṭṭār’s own mixed attitude towards his poetry:

My entire *Dīvān* is madness; intellect is a stranger to these words.
 I don’t know what I’m saying – strange;
 how long will I seek what is not lost? – strange
 ...But I am excused in what I say, even if I recite my own poetry...
 Since I saw no one trustworthy in the whole world, I spend time
 reciting my own poetry.²¹

The possibility that ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry is incomprehensible to others does not prevent him from making remarkable claims, however, including being ‘the seal of the poets.’²² All these remarks come from ‘Aṭṭār’s accepted writings.

Much in the same vein can be found in the apocryphal works. A sampling of Ḥallājian boasts from the *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib* includes the following:

‘Aṭṭār, like Manṣūr, cries ‘I am the Truth’, striking the entire world on fire.²³
 The secrets of God are in my soul; my faith is the manifestation of the
 secret of God.²⁴

There is no bird like ‘Aṭṭār in the world; he is the nightingale of this garden.²⁵
Your ‘Aṭṭār came to know the meaning through God; he declared this in the
way of Maṣṣūr.²⁶

Here one also finds the repeated declarations of phrases, the anaphora referred to above, in which the poet begins fifteen or twenty lines in the same words, ‘Go forth like Maṣṣūr, to the gallows of annihilation, till you see the light of God beyond encounter...’²⁷ In the *Ḥaylaj-nāma*, extended passages ring variations on Ḥallāj’s famous cry, ‘I am the Truth’ (*anā al-Ḥaqq*), as in the following:

From that wine, cry, ‘I am the Truth’ like me; behold yourself in your body,
through your body.
From that wine, cry, ‘I am the Truth’ at the lover’s door, for you will see the
grace of all – none but you is in the world.
From that wine, cry, ‘I am the Truth’ like Ḥallāj. Come out on top of heaven,
wearing that crown.
From that wine, I have drunk, my chosen shaykh; I have most certainly seen
the beloved in reality.²⁸

Ḥallāj is described bluntly as the thief who has stolen and revealed reality: ‘Maṣṣūr, you have spoken the absolute secret: ‘I am God,’ you have stated, ‘I am the Truth.’²⁹ ‘Aṭṭār focuses furiously on union with Ḥallāj:

You are one with me, you rebel Maṣṣūr, and tomorrow I shall consume you
with fire!
You are one with me in heart and soul – you are I, and I am you,
master of union!³⁰

In verses of stupefying grandiosity, ‘Aṭṭār claims to be Ḥallāj, God, and the sun and the stars; all creation is seeking his mercy.³¹

In addition, we find in these apocryphal works a new emphasis on the role of ‘Alī, who somehow takes the leading role in an apotheosis in which ‘Aṭṭār and Ḥallāj both merge.

If you have faith, you become all light; you make the boast, ‘I am the Truth,’
like Maṣṣūr.
‘I am the Truth,’ says that enlightened pure one. He drank the wine of
longing from the hand of ‘Alī.³²

Elsewhere 'Aṭṭār's apostrophes are dedicated to 'Alī alone:

Who am I to describe you in speech? For you are hidden in all souls.
 Commander of the Faithful! I have spoken my soul, threading pearl of
 meaning upon meanings.
 Commander of the Faithful! Tell me the secret of God's secrets face to face,
 So my heart is clear and my soul complete, and I may recite your praises
 in full!³³

In long invocations addressed to 'Alī, 'Aṭṭār himself becomes a second Maṣṣūr in search of the divine essence.³⁴ In turn 'Alī has revealed to him all of his secrets.³⁵

Despite the bold claims made in the apocryphal works, there is occasionally a delicate reflection on the phenomenon of ecstatic speech (*shatḥ*), in which we see the flickering of the authorial ego in the storm of divinity:

What am I saying? What do I know? Who am I? In listening and speaking,
 who am I?
 He is speaking, like light in my body, for by his tongue I tell my story.
 I relate these words from him, giving guidance to the people of the world.³⁶

Nevertheless, 'Aṭṭār occasionally shifts his authorial ego entirely to Ḥallāj: 'All of the secret that lies in the essence of the book is from that Maṣṣūr, and is unveiled in him.'³⁷ At other times, the shift to identification with God is complete: 'It is not 'Aṭṭār, behold! It is the beloved who is in the text and the proof. Behold!'³⁸ Indeed, we find unadulterated boasts about annihilation of the self: 'It was reality; I myself saw annihilation (*fanā*). I saw annihilation and arrived at divine eternity (*baqā*).'³⁹ Hyperbolic claims are made about the efficacy of these writings, and readers of the *Jawhar al-dhāt* and the *Mazhar al-'ajā'ib* are promised miraculous results.⁴⁰

It would be easy to multiply examples of Ḥallājian headlessness, deification, and adoration of 'Alī from the apocryphal writings, given how large all of these works are. It is difficult to deny that these works exhibit a much more extreme emphasis on these topics, and that at times they become monotonous in their relentless theophanic assertions. How have these works been understood by those who defend their authenticity?

The most prominent scholar to embrace these apocryphal works as genuine compositions by 'Aṭṭār was undoubtedly Louis Massignon who, in the course of decades of work devoted to the study of Ḥallāj, paid special attention to the role that 'Aṭṭār played in the dissemination of the Ḥallājian legend. Massignon maintained that 'it was above all due to the literary works of 'Aṭṭār that the Ḥallājian theme became one of the most famous 'leitmotifs' in Iranian Muslim poetics,

wherever Islam was propagated together with the love of Persian poetry.⁴¹ The remarkable emphasis on Ḥallāj found in the apocryphal 'Aṭṭārian works required Massignon to deal with the issue of authenticity raised by Nafisī and others. Massignon brushed aside the theory of pseudonymous authorship of these works, endorsing instead Jāmī's quotation from Rūmī, that the light of Manṣūr after many years had transfigured the spirit of 'Aṭṭār.⁴² Massignon acknowledged that there had been tampering with the texts of works like the *Jawhar al-dhāt*, remarking that Attar's 'extraordinary literary fecundity may perhaps also be explained by the flowering a century later of a cycle of pastiches,' which seems to be a tacit admission of pseudonymous composition.⁴³ Massignon described the 'Aṭṭārian apocrypha as 'amazing collections flowing with repeated outbursts, whose dimensions are as immense as the Hindu epics or the interior monologues of ... Joyce, ... in which 'Aṭṭār tirelessly sings of the mystical drowning of the soul in divine totality, using Ḥallāj, "the highway brigand" (*duzd-i rāh*), as the model and herald of this ardent annihilation.'⁴⁴ Giving emphasis to the decapitation motif, Massignon provided numerous examples of Ḥallājian themes in these writings. It is notable that Massignon depicted 'Aṭṭār's intellectual lineage with considerable flexibility, linking him to the philosophers Suhrawardī and Avicenna as well as to the Ismā'īlīs.⁴⁵ Massignon became almost rhapsodic in describing works like the *Haylaj-nāma*: 'This esoteric book, in which 'Aṭṭār reveals to us all of his thoughts on Ḥallāj, is very important. It is not only a canonization, it is a total and absolute divinization.'⁴⁶ At the risk of appearing dismissive, one feels obliged here to point out that Massignon had a tendency to see Ḥallāj everywhere. What was frankly a life-long obsession with Ḥallāj impelled Massignon to accept as canonical those 'Aṭṭārian works that canonized Ḥallāj.

Yet as the ongoing publication of 'Aṭṭārian apocrypha reveals, there are evidently audiences, particularly in Iran, who continue to find reasons for accepting the validity of these works. One recent example is Qādir Fāḍilī, who has written on 'Aṭṭār as well as on contemporary religious thought in Iran.⁴⁷ Fāḍilī's large subject concordance to the writings of 'Aṭṭār furnishes a distinctively Shi'ite perspective on the 'Aṭṭārian apocrypha. Fāḍilī begins, however, from an unusual methodological position, arguing that the very concept of pseudonymous authorship and pseudepigrapha is illogical:

Some believe that this book (*Mazhar al-'ajā'ib*) and the *Pand-nāma* are falsely attributed to 'Aṭṭār, and their proof is the weakness of metre in this book. Thus they say someone else published his own works in the name of 'Aṭṭār. This theory does not appear to be correct with such reasoning, because no one who is an author with ability attributes his work to another.⁴⁸

Fāḍilī thus regards the 'Aṭṭār who wrote the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, *Ilāhī-nāma*, and *Muṣibat-nāma* as identical with the author of the *Mazhar al-'ajā'ib*. Acknowledging that there are problems with the rhyme and metre in certain writings, Fāḍilī

pieces this together with autobiographical statements in the apocryphal *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib* (‘Aṭṭār’s best work, in his opinion), in which ‘Aṭṭār states his age as over 100 years; old age and weakness, he concludes, are responsible for any slips on ‘Aṭṭār’s part.⁴⁹

Moving on to the question of Shi‘ite references, Fāḍilī maintains that the challenge to the apocryphal works is motivated by anti-Shi‘ite prejudice.

It is only Sunni fanaticism that motivates the questioning or rejection of these works as being by ‘Aṭṭār, because his devotion to ‘Alī and the Shi‘ite Imāms makes it clear that he is Shi‘ite. All true gnostics, even if they observe Sunni practice and the edicts of the four Sunni imāms, from the viewpoint of the mystics, their creed is Shi‘ite and they consider themselves Shi‘ite. Their *Dīvāns* and books are filled with poems in praise of the family of the Prophet and their role in the order of existence. This applies to many great past masters of mysticism and literature, such as Rūmī, Sa‘dī, Sanā‘ī, Nizāmī, Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Qayṣarī, etc.⁵⁰

The assumption that all true mystics are Shi‘ites handily eliminates any question of inconsistency about the move toward veneration of ‘Alī in the apocryphal works.

Nevertheless, Fāḍilī is not able to overcome certain critical theological reservations about the radicalization of Ḥallāj in these ‘Aṭṭārian works, particularly the blatant tilt toward divinization that shifts from Ḥallāj’s ‘I am the Truth’ into an outright ‘I am God’. This he sees as extremism, fundamentally in contradiction with the mystical teachings with which Ḥallāj inspired ‘Aṭṭār, as Rūmī and Jāmī have attested. Thus a certain suspicion attaches to these writings of ‘Aṭṭār insofar as he presents Ḥallāj in such a radical form.⁵¹ Fāḍilī therefore takes ‘Aṭṭār to task for having written the verse, ‘I am God, I am God, I am God!’ Fāḍilī views this as logically impossible, because the very use of the separate words ‘I’ and ‘God’ demonstrates an inescapable duality.⁵²

In the end, Fāḍilī is deeply uncomfortable with the self-praise that appears in many ‘Aṭṭārian writings. For one thing, he considers this to involve implicit criticism and denigration of others, as when ‘Aṭṭār styles himself ‘seal of the poets’, or ‘the unique pearl (Farīd) of the age’. Fāḍilī concedes that there is an ambiguity in the Ḥallājian claim, ‘I am the Truth’. It can mean the elimination of the ego and total submission to God through annihilation. Amazingly, Fāḍilī quotes a poem from Khomeini to this effect: ‘I abandoned my self and clashed the cymbals of “I am the truth”; like Manṣūr, I became a customer of the gallows.’ In this manner Fāḍilī demonstrates at length what he sees as the difference between legitimate proximity to God and extreme claims to union with God that no genuine prophet or saint has ever made.⁵³ Throughout his interpretation of ‘Aṭṭār, Fāḍilī has recourse to firm dogmatic principles that allow him, with a certain circularity of logic, both

to claim as authentic the disputed works of ‘Aṭṭār and to criticize them when they fall short of his standards.

The persistence of apocrypha and pseudepigraphic writing has been noted in many of the world's literary traditions. While it is perhaps easy to dismiss such works as forgeries, many questions remain, particularly when recent criticism runs into long-established traditions in which these writings have been accepted (this has been particularly true of the criticism of Biblical texts and other sacred writings). In part, the production of pseudepigrapha forms part of the reception history of texts, and it is particularly challenging to assign a motive for the production of such works. Is it vanity? A crude attempt to gain consideration for writings that would otherwise be dismissed? An innocent and admiring tribute? A confident submission of truths considered to be inspired? There are many possibilities.⁵⁴ The following brief remarks are offered as a speculative reconstruction of this particular process.

One may assume that the works of ‘Aṭṭār were initially in private circulation in Khurāsān, and that they began to attain more popularity in the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This period coincides with an increase in ‘Alid piety in Persianate lands, as well as the popularization of monistic philosophies summarized under the heading of ‘the unity of existence’ (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), particularly through the medium of Persian poetry. The annihilation of the authorial ego leaves open special opportunities for would-be imitators of the great masters of Sufi literature. The boldness of Ḥallāj was so captivating, after all, precisely because he revealed the secret (*ifshā’ al-sirr*), publicizing the intimacy of his relationship with God. Although some judged this revelation to be a crime, others clearly took it to be a licence and authorization for new authors to declare the same truth, that they too had become one with God. The very popularity of ‘Aṭṭār’s writings as manifestos of mysticism made them almost a *sui generis* category of literature: what we might call the poetry of annihilation (*fanā’iyyāt*), in parallel with the poetry of wine (*khamriyyāt*) or unconventionality (*qalandariyyāt*). Thus ‘Aṭṭār, like ‘Umar Khayyām, may be said to have become ‘no longer a historical person but a genre’.⁵⁵ From the frequently quoted testimony of Rūmī and Jāmī, we know that ‘Aṭṭār has been considered to be particularly inspired by the spirit of Ḥallāj. It is less well known that ‘Aṭṭār himself has performed similar initiatic functions in certain Sufi circles, particularly those associated with the Shaṭṭārī Sufi order. In the complicated lineages claimed by the sixteenth-century Shaṭṭārī master Shaykh Muḥammad Ghawth, Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār plays a central and inspiring role.⁵⁶ Both the annihilation of the ego and the expansion of ‘Aṭṭār’s popularity make it easier to understand how his literary oeuvre might miraculously expand as well.

The growth of a Shi‘ite interpretation of or response to ‘Aṭṭār should be no more surprising than the extension of the Ḥallājian message. According to Ivanow, ‘Aṭṭār was particularly popular with Ismā‘ilī readers, and we may assume that they

brought their own hermeneutic to bear upon his writings.⁵⁷ At roughly the same time that the 'Aṭṭārīan apocrypha may have been produced (i.e., the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), the works of Rūzbihān Baqlī were likewise undergoing alteration in a Twelver Shi'ite direction. In their biographies of Ruzbihan, his descendants typically translated his Arabic writings into Persian with dramatic shifts of emphasis, in which 'Alī takes over the central role as dispenser of mystical knowledge.⁵⁸ While the blatant Shi'ite partisanship of Fāḍilī may be overdone, it forms part of a long tradition of strongly Shi'ite interpretation of Sufi texts.

The critical evaluation of the writings of 'Aṭṭār is a fairly recent phenomenon. Before the twentieth century, it was normal to read all the epics ascribed to 'Aṭṭār as part of a continuous whole. An eclectic and inclusive reading strategy was a characteristic aspect of the history of these texts. It is certainly legitimate for scholars to raise questions about these works in terms of their style and themes. But the changes in Ritter's views on this question, the Ḥallājīan enthusiasm of Massignon, and the Shi'ite rationalism of Fāḍilī demonstrate how differently readers continue to approach the 'Aṭṭārīan corpus, even after the introduction of modern criticism. In short, there is still no agreement about who 'Aṭṭār really was. This debate would no doubt have been amusing to 'Aṭṭār, who after all had so eloquently expressed this fundamental paradox, the boast of the author without ego: 'Till the resurrection, no one as selfless as I will ever write verse with pen on paper.'

Notes

1. Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nīshābūrī, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, ed. Muḥammad Jawīd Mashkūr (3rd ed., Tehran, 1968), p. 288, lines 1–9 (emphasis mine).

2. I have explored the topic of the rhetoric of sainthood in several places: *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany, NY, 1984); 'The Man without Attributes: Ibn 'Arabi's Interpretation of Abu Yazid al-Bistami', *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, 13 (1993), pp. 1–18; *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism* (London, 1996).

3. Helmut Ritter, "'Aṭṭār, Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrīhīm', *EI*, vol. 1, pp. 752b–755a.

4. See also B. Reinert, "'Aṭṭār, Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn', *E Ir*, vol. 2, pp. 20–25.

5. François de Blois, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey* (London, 1994), vol. 5, part 2, *Poetry ca. A.D. 1100 to 1225*, pp. 270–313. (But the difficulty of achieving consensus is indicated by Eve Feuillebois-Pierunek's discussion of the authenticity of the *Mukhtār-nāma* in her chapter above –eds.)

6. As is demonstrated by the J.C. Bürgel's essay above –eds.

7. Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *The Conference of the Birds*, tr. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (Harmondsworth, NY, 1984), Introduction, p. 25. The translators also omitted the proemium, on the grounds that the lengthy praise of God contained there is irrelevant to the main thrust of the book.

8. De Blois, *Persian Literature*, p. 281, notes that certain old MSS of *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* lack this *khātima*.

9. The works of 'Aṭṭār, both accepted and doubtful, were frequently published in lithographed editions in British India, often in the form of large anthologies. For a comprehensive description of editions, commentaries, and translations into Indian languages, plus detailed accounts of manuscripts in Indian libraries, see Riḍā Muṣṭafawī Sabzawīrī, "Aṭṭār dar shibh-qārra-yi Hind (Puzhūhishī dar nuskhahā-yi khāṭṭī va chāpī va sharḥhā-yi āthār-i 'Aṭṭār)," *Qand-i Pārsī* (New Delhi, 1373 Sh./1994), no. 8, pp. 1–126. Modern Iranian editions of the works of 'Aṭṭār not mentioned by de Blois include the following: *Haylāj-nāma*, ed. Aḥmad Khwushnivīs (Tehran, n.d.); *Jawhar al-dhāt*, ed. Muḥammad Mīr Kamīlī (Tehran, 1936); *Jawhar al-dhāt* (Tehran, n.d.; repr., Tehran, 2001); *Majmū'ayi az āthār-i Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm 'Aṭṭār Nīshābūrī: Bīsar-nāma, Bulbul-nāma, Sī faṣl, Pand-nāma, Nuz'hat al-aḥbāb, Bayān-i irshād*, ed. Aḥmad Khwushnivīs (Tehran, 1984); *Mazhar al-'ajā'ib*, ed. Taqī Ḥatīmī Nīshābūrī (Tehran, 1966); *Mazhar al-'ajā'ib va Mazhar al-asrār*, ed. Aḥmad Khwushnivīs (Tehran, 1991); *Ushtur-nāma*, ed. Mahdī Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1960; repr., Tehran, 1979); *Waṣlat-nāma* (Tehran, 1957). Recent studies on dubious works of 'Aṭṭār include Ḥusayn Ḥaydarkhīnī, *Andīshāha-yi 'Aṭṭār dar Lisān al-ghayb va Waṣlat-nāma va Miftāḥ al-irāda* (Tehran, 1997).

10. Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nīshāpūrī, *Iliḥī-nāma*, ed. Fū'ād Rūḥānī (Tehran, 1351 Sh./1972), pp. 86–87, 246; *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, pp. 150, 276, 311. On Ḥallājīan themes in 'Aṭṭār, see also Meer, index, s.n. 'Hallāc'; Riḍā Ashraf-zāda, *Tajallī-yi ramz va rivāyat dar shī'r-i 'Aṭṭār-i Nīshābūrī* (Tehran, 1373 Sh./1994), pp. 239–245; Aḥmad Shawqī Nawbar, *Guft: Ān Yār ... Shakhṣīyyāt-i Ḥallāj va bāztāb-i ān dar ash'ār-i panj shī'r-i buzurg (Sanā'ī, 'Aṭṭār, Mawlawī, Ḥāfiẓ va Ṣā'ib)* (Tabrīz, 1377 Sh./1998), pp. 72–75; Marina Reisner, 'Ma'ānī-yi qiṣṣa-i Ḥallāj dar ghazaliyyāt-i 'Aṭṭār,' *Kayhān-i Farhangī*, 12, (Adhar 1374 Sh./1995), pp. 32–33; Natalia Chalisova, 'Hallāj az nigāh-i 'Aṭṭār,' *ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

11. Reinert, "Aṭṭār," p. 22a.

12. For the theme of decapitation treated comparatively, see Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, 'Headless Magicians; and an Act of Truth,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 64 (1944), pp. 215–217.

13. Donald E. Pease, 'Author,' in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. ed., *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago and London, 1990), p. 105.

14. Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nīshābūrī, *Asrār-nāma*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīmī (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997), p. 42.

15. Dn, p. 127, v. 2215.

16. Dn, p. 228, vv. 4221–4222.

17. Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmīn Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-uns min ḥaḍarāt al-quḍs*, ed. Maḥmūd 'Ābidī (Tehran, 1370 A.Hsh/1991), p. 597. See also Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad Aflākī, *The Feats of the Knowers of God (Manāqeb al-'arefīn)*, tr. John O'Kane, *Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts*, 43 (Leiden, 2002), p. 399, para. 570.

18. Muḥammad Ibrāhīmī, introduction to *Asrār-nāma*, pp. [ii–iv], citing Fakhr al-Dīn 'Alī Ṣafī, *Laṭā'if al-ṭawā'if*.

19. *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, p. 293, line 16.

20. *Asrār-nāma*, p. 23.

21. *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, p. 292, vv. 9–10, 16; p. 293, v. 1.

22. *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 364, bottom line.

23. Lacking access to independent editions of these titles, I have consulted the extensive

subject concordances to the works of 'Aṭṭār compiled by Qādir Fāḍilī, *Farhang-i mawḍū'ī adab-i Pārsī, mawḍū'ī-bandī va naqd va barrasī*, 1-2: *Manṭiq al-ṭayr va Pand-nāma*; 3-4: *Asrār-nāma va Haylāj-nāma*; 5-6: *Muṣibat-nāma va Maḥṣar al-'ajī'ib* (Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995), who unfortunately does not provide exact information on the text editions he has used. This verse comes from *Maḥṣar al-'ajī'ib*, p. 25 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:414).

24. *Maḥṣar al-'ajī'ib*, p. 45 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:416).

25. *Maḥṣar al-'ajī'ib*, p. 61 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:416).

26. *Maḥṣar al-'ajī'ib*, p. 152 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:418).

27. *Maḥṣar al-'ajī'ib*, pp. 57-58 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:368). Several of these lines substitute Abū Dharr for Maṣṣūr. Other interesting anaphora passages use phrases like 'I am not crazy, but ...', in *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 112 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:338-39); 'I am the secret you have spoken ...', *ibid.*, p. 159 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:339); 'It is not Maṣṣūr ...', *ibid.*, p. 112 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:342).

28. *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 82 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:187); see Fāḍilī, 5-6:184-93, for further examples on this topic.

29. *Haylāj-nāma*, pp. 37-39 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:387-88).

30. *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 42 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:388).

31. *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 247 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:396).

32. *Pand-nāma*, p. 115 (Fāḍilī, 1-2:243).

33. *Maḥṣar al-'ajī'ib*, p. 181 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:412).

34. *Maḥṣar al-'ajī'ib*, pp. 242-243 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:422-23).

35. *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 203 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:343).

36. *Maḥṣar al-'ajī'ib*, p. 42 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:415).

37. *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 70 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:389).

38. *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 352 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:340).

39. *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 181 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:355).

40. *Maḥṣar al-'ajī'ib*, p. 8 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:473); *ibid.*, p. 45 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:474).

41. Louis Massignon, *The Passion of Al-Ḥallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islām*, tr. and ed. Herbert Mason (Princeton, NJ, 1994), vol. 2, *The Survival of al-Ḥallāj*, pp. 361-362.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 362.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 363.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 364.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 382. Fritz Meier has also explored similarities between Ismaili thought and the accepted works of 'Aṭṭār in 'Ismailiten und Mystik im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert', *Persica*, 16 (2000), pp. 9-29. (On which, see also the first essay of this volume by Hermann Landolt - eds.)

46. Massignon, *The Passion of Al-Ḥallāj*, p. 385.

47. Qādir Fāḍilī, *Andīsha-i 'Aṭṭār: taḥlīl-i āfāq-i andīsha-i Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nīshābūrī* (Tehran, 1995), to which I have unfortunately not had access; *idem.*, *Khāṭṭ-i qirmiz: naqd va barrāsī-yi Kitāb-i Farbihtar az idī'uluzhī* (Tehran, 1994), a critique of *Farbihtar az idī'uluzhī* by 'Abd al-Karīm Surūsh; *idem.*, *Yād-i yīr: 160 khāṭira az 'allāma-yi ustād Muḥammad Taqī Ja'farī, va chand maqāla-yi dīgar dar khuṣūṣ-i vay* (Tehran, 1999).

48. Fāḍilī, *Farhang* (see above, n. 22), 3-4:16.

49. Fāḍilī, *Farhang*, 3-4:17.

50. Fāḍilī, *Farhang*, 3-4:18.

51. Fāḍilī, *Farhang*, 5-6:16.

52. Fāḍilī, *Farhang*, 1–2:434–35, citing *Pand-nāma*, p. 55.
53. Fāḍilī, *Farhang*, 5–6:440–45.
54. For methodological reflections on pseudonymity in New Testament studies, see Frank W. Hughes, ‘Pseudonymity as Rhetoric: A Prolegomenon to the Study of Pauline Pseudepigrapha’, *Journal for the Study of Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament*, available online at <http://rhetjournal.net/Hughes.html>, accessed July 15, 2003.
55. De Blois, *Persian Literature*, p. 363.
56. Muḥammad Salīm Akhtār, ‘Ta’thīr-i ‘Aṭṭār-i Nishābūrī dar shibh-qārā...’, *Haft guftār darbāra-yi Sanā’ī va ‘Aṭṭār va ‘Irāqī* (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996), pp. 129–142.
57. See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 454, references cited in n. 38.
58. Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli*, esp. ch. 3.

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