

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

POETRY AND PEDAGOGY:
THE HOMILETIC VERSE OF FARID AL-DIN ʿAṬṬĀR

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MARCH 2017

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For Nazafarin and Almas

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Note on Transliteration

In order to allow for the accurate, accessible, and consistent rendering of Persian and Arabic into Latin script, I have developed a system of transliteration based in large part on that of *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. My major concern, after accuracy, has been readability and accessibility for non-Persophone readers, so I default to Anglicized versions of Perso-Arabic names and technical terms when they are sufficiently well known. In the name of accessibility, I also use digraphs from American English (e.g. “ch,” “sh”) instead more esoteric diacritics to signify Persian consonants whenever possible, and I employ a vowel system that approximates the sounds of spoken Persian and distinguishes between long and short vowels using only a single circumflex: a/â, o/u, e/i. For the most part, I employ this Persian-style transliteration scheme throughout the dissertation, even when rendering Arabic titles of Persian books into Latin script. When transliterating directly from a quoted Arabic source, however, or referring to major authors who wrote primarily or exclusively in Arabic (e.g. Ibn al-Jawzī), I rely on a version of the Arabic transliteration system used by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*; the difference between the two systems lies mainly in the vowels. For the sake of clarity, I generally drop the definite article “al-” before a *nisba* that is used as a stand-alone proper name (e.g. Qushayrī). The details of these two systems (including their handling of the construct state, compounds, diphthongs, etc.) should be readily recognizable to those who are familiar with Persian and Arabic.

Acknowledgments

This project would not have come to fruition without the support, encouragement, and guidance of many people. The dissertation committee—consisting of Franklin Lewis, Thibaut d’Hubert, and Michael Sells—went well beyond the call of duty with their invaluable guidance and mentorship. I also owe an immense debt to Saeed Yousef, who patiently taught me Persian language and metrics over the past decade. In 2015-16, while several critical sections of the dissertation were percolating, I was a fellow at the Martin Marty Center; I benefited not only from the Marty Center’s material support, but also the atmosphere of intellectual exchange, and in particular the incisive comments of Alexandra Zirkle and Madeleine Elfenbein. The dissertation bears the traces of many of my colleagues who generously engaged my work, including Edmund Hayes, Jane Mikkelsen, Chris Markiewicz, Sabahat Adil, Kaveh Hemmat, Alidost Numan, Elizabeth Rogers-Sartell, Francesca Chubb-Confer, Kevin Blankenship, Maryam Sabbaghi, Nathan Miller, Theo Beers, and Laurie Pierce. I am particularly indebted to Cameron Cross and Matthew Miller, fellow scholars of Persian literature, for their critiques, camaraderie, and friendship throughout the writing process. This journey spanned ten years, the majority of which was spent in the company of my spouse, Nazafarin Lotfi, whose counsel and support kept me headed in the right direction. And finally I must thank my mother, Linda O’Malley, who read the entire manuscript multiple times with a penetrating eye, and who exemplifies the virtues of intellectual engagement and curiosity.

Introduction

Persian verse, and in particular mystical Persian verse, has found a sizable audience in the United States and Europe. The current favorite is, of course, Rumi, and translations (or looser “renderings”) of his poems continue to sell briskly in the American market. His predecessor, Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭār, is much less well known, but his work has also been translated multiple times into European languages in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the Persian-speaking world he is widely celebrated, and he has been a key figure in the canon of mystical poets since it was first formalized in the Timurid era. Today he is commonly understood by scholars as something of a “missing link” between Sanâ’i (d. c. 1131) and Rumi (d. 1273), and although such teleological literary histories can be problematic, ‘Aṭṭār’s importance in the development of mystical verse is hard to overstate.¹ Whereas Sanâ’i’s religious poetry is much more ascetic in tone, ‘Aṭṭār characterizes divine union in amatory terms, displays an ecstatic sensibility, and flirts more directly with antinomian imagery, and thereby paves the way for Rumi, ‘Erâqī, and other more explicitly sufi poets. Perhaps even more significantly, ‘Aṭṭār is one of the first truly successful amateur versifiers. He did not participate in the patronage economy but nonetheless managed to produce an expansive textual oeuvre dominated by courtly poetic forms like the *ghazal*, *qaṣida*, and *maṣnavi*. He thus marks a turning point in the popularization and mysticization of Persian literature.

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1. Moḥammad Reżâ Shafī‘i-Kadkani, introduction to *Manteq al-ṭayr*, by Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭār, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Sokhan, 1387 [2008-9]), 38-50; Julian Baldick, “Persian *Ṣūfī* Poetry up to the Fifteenth Century,” in *History of Persian Literature: From the Beginning of the Islamic Period to the Present Day*, ed. G. Morrison (Leiden: Brill, 1981); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Some Observations on the Place of ‘Aṭṭār within the Sufi Tradition,” in *Colloquio italo-iraniano sul poeta mistico Fariduddin ‘Aṭṭār (Roma, 24-25 Marzo 1977)* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1978), 12-3; Husayn Ilahi-Gomeshei, “Of Scent and Sweetness: ‘Aṭṭār’s Legacy in Rūmī, Shabistārī, and Ḥāfiz,” in *‘Aṭṭār and the Persian Sufi Tradition: The Art of Spiritual Flight*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and Christopher Shackleton (London: I. B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2006).

‘Aṭṭâr’s output is immense, including a large collection of lyric verse (*divân*), a separate anthology of quatrains, a prose hagiographical compilation, and four didactic *maṣnavis*—long poems of rhyming couplets that narrate edifying stories pointed with exhortations and admonishments.² Out of his entire oeuvre, the *maṣnavis* are generally considered the highlight and have garnered the most attention. He is a master of the short, dramatic anecdote, unlike Rumi, whose narratives tend to be more sprawling, and Sanâ’î, whose works tend to be dominated by direct exhortation. Moreover, ‘Aṭṭâr brings a new twist to the genre by embedding these various anecdotes and exhortations in an overarching frame-tale à la *One Thousand and One Nights*. Three of his four *maṣnavis* feature such frame-tales, the most famous being the *Conference of the the Birds* (*Manṭeq al-ṭayr*), in which a group of birds, led by the hoopoe, embark on a quest to reach their king, the Simorgh: it is commonly understood as an allegory of the sufi path. Similarly, the *Book of Affliction* (*Moṣibat-nâma*) tells of a cosmic journey made by a sufi adept under the direction of his spiritual guide, and the *Divine Book* (*Elâhi-nâma*) recounts a pedagogical discussion between a king and his princely sons.

The bulk of the scholarship on ‘Aṭṭâr’s *maṣnavis* has taken a straightforward hermeneutical approach, in the sense that it seeks to decode the poems’ theological, ethical, and metaphysical meanings. The allegorical frame-tales in particular have received quite a bit of attention, perhaps because their extended, book-length narratives are more amenable to modern

2. For the *maṣnavis* and the *Choice Book* (*Mokhtâr-nâma*), I primarily rely on the most recent editions by Shafi’i-Kadkani: *Asrâr-nâma*, ed. Moḥammad Reżâ Shafi’i-Kadkani, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Sokhan, 1388 [2009-10]); *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, ed. Moḥammad Reżâ Shafi’i-Kadkani, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Sokhan, 1387 [2008-9]); *Elâhi-nâma*, ed. Moḥammad Reżâ Shafi’i-Kadkani, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Sokhan, 1388 [2009-10]); *Moṣibat-nâma*, ed. Moḥammad Reżâ Shafi’i-Kadkani, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Sokhan, 1388 [2009-10]); *Mokhtâr-nâma*, ed. Moḥammad Reżâ Shafi’i-Kadkani, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Sokhan, 1389 [2010-11]). Shafi’i-Kadkani can be something of an aggressive editor, however, so I also consult earlier editions, including *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, ed. Sayyed Şâdeq Gowharin (Tehran: Bongâh-e Tarjoma va Nashr-e Ketâb, 1342 [1963-64]); *Moṣibat-nâma*, ed. Nurâni Veşâl (Tehran: Zavvâr, 1373 [1994]). For the *Divân* and *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, I use the editions of Tafazzoli and Este’lami: *Divân-e ‘Aṭṭâr*, ed. Taqi Tafazzoli (Tehran: Enteshârât-e ‘Elmi va Farhangi, 1386 [2007]); *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, ed. Muhammad Este’lami, rev. ed., (Tehran: Zavvâr, 1383 [2004-5]).

sensibilities: scholars like Corbin, Meier, and Purnâmdârîân have all attempted to interpret their mystical significance.³ It is somewhat more difficult to deal with the hundreds of short anecdotes that make up the bulk of each *maṣnavi*, but several studies have focused on particular thematic subsets of the corpus in order to reconstruct specific aspects of ‘Aṭṭâr’s personal thought-world: studies by Kermani, Yaghoobi, and Pourjavady all fall into this category.⁴ A more comprehensive approach has been taken by Hellmut Ritter in his massive work, the *Ocean of the Soul*, in which he extracts hundreds of stories from across the *maṣnavis*, re-arranges them into a thematic rubric of his own making, and interprets their didactic points.⁵

Another, somewhat smaller group of scholars has been more interested in ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetics from a formal, structural, and structuralist perspective. According to Dick Davis, for instance, the structure of the *Conference of the Birds*’ frame-tale is mirrored in two of the poem’s embedded anecdotes, both of which occupy structurally key positions in the text.⁶ Julian Baldick has also concerned himself with the poetic structure of the frame-tales, and Franklin Lewis has examined the semiotics of conversion and gender that underlie several of ‘Aṭṭâr’s narratives and favorite poetic tropes.⁷

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3. Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 198-203; Fritz Meier, “Ismailiten und Mystik im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert,” *Persica* 16 (2000), 15-8; Taqī Purnâmdârîân, “Negâhi be dâstân-pardâzi-ye ‘Aṭṭâr,” in *Didâr bâ simorgh* (Tehran: Pazhuhesh-gâh-e ‘Olum-e Ensâni va Moṭâla‘ât-e Farhangi, 1374 [1995-96]); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Flight of the Birds to Union: Meditations upon ‘Aṭṭâr’s *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*,” in *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).
 4. Navid Kermani, *The Terror of God: Attar, Job and the Metaphysical Revolt*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011); Claudia Yaghoobi, “Against the Current: Farid al-Din ‘Attar’s Diverse Voices,” *Persian Literary Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (Autumn-Winter 2012): 87-109; J. A. Boyle, “Popular Literature and Folklore in ‘Aṭṭâr’s *Mathnavîs*,” in *Colloquio italo-iraniano sul poeta mistico Fariduddin ‘Aṭṭâr (Roma, 24-25 Marzo 1977)* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1977); Nasrollah Pourjavady, “Ḥekmat-e divânagân dar maṣnavi-hâ-ye ‘Aṭṭâr,” *Nashr-e dânesht* 13, no. 1 (1371 [1992-93]): 2-16.
 5. Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār*, trans. John O’Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2003).
 6. Dick Davis, “The Journey as Paradigm: Literal and Metaphorical Travel in ‘Aṭṭâr’s *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*,” *Edebiyat*, n.s., 4 (1993): 173-83.
 7. Baldick, “Persian *Šūfī* Poetry,” 120-5; Franklin Lewis, “Sexual Occidentation: The Politics of Conversion,

Although many of these studies are insightful and useful, they tend to understand meaning as something fixed within the text, and they thus overlook the performative, socially situated manner in which meaning emerges from the audience's act of reading or listening. As 'Aṭṭār himself seems to have been aware, his texts are not simply carriers of religious information, but discursive performances that seek to create certain effects in the social realm. The pertinent question, then, is not just "what do these texts mean?" or "how are they structured?" but "what do these meanings and structures *do* for sufistic reader-listeners, and *how* do they do it?" In response to this question, I argue that 'Aṭṭār adopts the rhetorical positioning of a popular preacher, and that his poems, like a preacher's sermon, are designed to inculcate a sufi ethos in their audiences and spur pious reform. They are eminently rhetorical, being self-consciously directed towards an audience whom they seek to spiritually educate.⁸ At the same time, however, these are poetic texts, not oral performances, and they thus entail a very different mode of relationality between sender (in this case author) and recipient (in this case reader, or perhaps listener when the text is read out loud). Indeed, 'Aṭṭār is keenly interested in his own textual legacy and its rhetorical possibilities, and a good portion of our investigation will be devoted to the forms and implications of 'Aṭṭār's "textualized" oral homiletics.

Even though 'Aṭṭār's homiletic poetry exerts an influence on its readers (or listeners), they are by no means passive targets for his rhetoric. As we will see, 'Aṭṭār elicits active en-

Christian-Love and Boy-Love in 'Aṭṭār," *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 5 (2009): 693-723.

8. My thinking on these issues has been influenced by twentieth-century work on rhetoric, reader response, and the public sphere, including, inter alia, Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Wayne Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974); Louise M. Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994); Jane Tompkins, ed., *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980); Stanley Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," *New Literary History* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1970): 123-62; Stanley Fish, "Interpreting the *Variorum*," *Critical Inquiry* 2 (Spring 1976): 465-85; Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 49-90.

gement from his audience, not only in the sense of hermeneutic effort, but also specific textual practices—recitation, memorization, and liturgical reading—which maximize the poems’ pedagogic potential. The poems only do something for their reader-listeners because reader-listeners do something with the poems. Under the guidance of ‘Aṭṭār’s homiletic voice, and through a disciplined encounter with text, sufi readers can progress along the spiritual path and reach higher mystical states. The textual encounter, in this context, becomes a spiritual practice and a technique for ethical self-fashioning.

Despite their significance, however, the homiletic and pedagogical aspects of ‘Aṭṭār’s poetics have been more or less ignored in the scholarship. There are some exceptions, of course, but on the whole, hermeneutical and formal approaches to his work have dominated.⁹ This can be partly explained, I think, by the fact that we know very little about ‘Aṭṭār’s life and biography, which would seem to make it difficult to identify the context within which he wrote and disseminated his works, to say nothing of how they were consumed and received. Indeed, it has become something of a cliché to open studies on ‘Aṭṭār with the claim that we know nothing about ‘Aṭṭār’s life or his intended readers.¹⁰ These claims, however, are somewhat overblown. Indeed, as I will argue in the first chapter, we can tell a good deal about ‘Aṭṭār’s relationship to his earliest audience through a reassessment of the standard sources and the incorporation of some new data. The works themselves allude to a textual community that had formed around him in Nishapur and knew him personally, and beyond this it is also clear that ‘Aṭṭār hoped his works would circulate and reach a larger public. His allusions to this early

9. Notable exceptions include J. T. P. de Bruijn, “The Preaching Poet: Three Homiletic Poems by Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār,” *Edebiyat: Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures* 9, no. 1 (1998), 85-9; Fatemeh Keshavarz, “Flight of the Birds: The Poetic Animating the Spiritual in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*,” in Lewisohn and Shackle, *Spiritual Flight*, 112-34; Lewis, “Sexual Occidentation,” 694-5.

10. See, inter alia, De Bruijn, “Preaching Poet,” 88-9; Kermani, *Terror of God*, 25; Muhammad Este‘lami, “Narratology and Realities in the Study of ‘Aṭṭār,” in Lewisohn and Shackle, *Spiritual Flight*, 57-62.

textual community are thus not entirely disinterested, but constitute an attempt to summon a more distant readership to a certain subject-position; by attending to his rhetoric, we can therefore uncover the sorts of relations he sought to establish with this public and the reactions that he hoped to elicit.

In undertaking this project, we aim to show how Persian mystical poetry is not merely reiterative of pre-existing dogmatic systems, but constitutive of certain religious subjectivities. By bracketing questions of reception, scholars have ossified ‘Aṭṭār’s poems into self-contained literary artifacts unconnected to the lifeworlds of their audiences, reflecting a set of poetic assumptions that could not be further from ‘Aṭṭār’s own. Beyond a more accurate understanding of ‘Aṭṭār and his poetry, we aim to encourage the field of Persian literary studies to start taking the question of audience more seriously. Our study of ‘Aṭṭār serves as a useful test-case in this effort: despite the scarcity of sources on his life and reception, this dissertation shows that we can still productively think about the social-spiritual implications of the textual encounter. We are therefore hopeful that this dissertation will spark more research into the ways in which Persian religious literature is imbricated in the social lives and subjectivities of its audiences.

We focus predominantly on the *maṣnavis*, especially the *Conference of the Birds* (*Manteq al-ṭayr*) and the *Book of Affliction* (*Mosibat-nâma*). Although all of ‘Aṭṭār’s works could be productively explored from the perspective of pragmatic homiletics, the *maṣnavis* are most clearly informed by contemporary preaching practices and thus present a natural starting point. The frame-tale *maṣnavis* are especially germane to our topic because their anecdotes and exhortations are framed as fictional homiletic performances, and this carries important consequences for how reader-listeners relate to those texts. We have not hesitated to draw on ‘Aṭṭār’s other works, however—including the quatrains, prose hagiography, and lyric verses—whenever they helped elucidate his overall poetic project or the reception of the *maṣnavis*.

In the first chapter, we lay the groundwork for our inquiry by reviewing ‘Aṭṭār’s biography and oeuvre. One of the major issues in ‘Aṭṭār studies has been sorting out his authentic works from the mass of spurious attributions; we review the scholarship on this issue, which has been conducted mostly in German and Persian, and then, in conjunction with external sources, attempt to trace the contours of ‘Aṭṭār’s life. Although specific biographical details remain largely unknown, we argue that we can place him in a generally mystically minded milieu in Nishapur and that he regularly delivered popular sermons. A loose community formed around him by virtue of his preaching practice, which also informed his poetic activities.

The second chapter seeks to reconstruct the circumstances of his texts’ production and dissemination, and their assumed models of homiletic communication, by examining their self-reflexive portrayals of their intended audiences and spiritual function. We show that ‘Aṭṭār wrote in the first instance for a textual community that considered his works to be not just beautiful literary artifacts, but also routes for spiritual transformation: one of the dominant metaphors used to characterize his work is that of a medicine for the heart, capable of restoring audiences to spiritual health. ‘Aṭṭār’s depiction of this community and their modes of reading, although interesting for historical reasons, also functions rhetorically as an embodiment of ‘Aṭṭār’s ideal recipients. We will examine how this imagined audience, in conjunction with ‘Aṭṭār’s poetic persona and reflexive self-commentary, functions as a route of authorial control to promote the pedagogical efficacy of his texts.

The third chapter zooms in on the *Conference of the Birds*’ frame-tale and explores, from a narratological perspective, how it influences the audience’s experience of the embedded anecdotes. Didactic *maṣnavis* recall popular preaching in terms of their material and rhetorical positioning, but as public literary texts, they lack the co-presence of preacher and audience so critical to homiletic performance: the author is necessarily removed. ‘Aṭṭār, however, compen-

sates for this decontextualization through the frame-tale, which, among its several other functions, imagines a detailed performance context for the embedded anecdotes, complete with an elaborated speaker (the hoopoe) and a reactive audience (the birds). The relationship between the hoopoe and the birds, narrated in the frame-tale, parallels and elides with ‘Aṭṭâr’s own rhetorical stance vis-à-vis his reader-listeners: the hoopoe becomes ‘Aṭṭâr’s avatar, while readers are encouraged to identify with his avian flock. By constructing this fictional homiletic performance, ‘Aṭṭâr thus reinscribes his own homiletic authority.

In the fourth chapter, we turn to the anecdotes and exhortations embedded in the *Conference of the Birds* to investigate the sufi ethos that ‘Aṭṭâr promotes and the rhetorical strategies through which he seeks to inculcate it. Although these edifying stories have often been examined in isolation by scholars such as Ritter, we emphasize how they are clustered into larger discourses on specific themes by virtue of the frame-tale structure. Their formal and thematic connections suggest that they are not to be approached independently, but as a network of mutually informing, edifying anecdotes that together illustrate a set of heuristic principles for pious living. To concretize the discussion we will explore three discourses in detail—one focusing on the ontological connection between God and humankind, another on the terror and inevitability of death, and one on spiritual “manliness.”

The fifth and final chapter examines the frame-tale allegory of the *Book of Affliction*, in which a sufi adept undertakes a cosmic journey and visits forty different beings from all realms of creation before finally discovering a connection to the divine in his own soul. As many have pointed out, the narrative recalls the Prophet’s ascension (*me‘râj*). It is also structured like the forty-day sufi retreat (*chella*), and it functions as an allegory of the spiritual path (*ṭariqat*). But these congruencies are also reflexively extended to the reading process itself. The poem is offered to the reader as a simulated visionary experience, through which one can not only ob-

serve the adept from a distance, but also accompany him on his journey, synecdochically performing the sufi path in miniature. We will thus examine how the ascent, the sufi retreat, and the sufi path are all used to conceptualize the textual encounter, and what this can tell us about the ritualistic use of mystical literary texts.

Chapter I

‘Aṭṭâr, Preacher and Poet

Reliable biographical information on most pre-modern Persian poets is scanty, but the dearth is particularly acute in the case of ‘Aṭṭâr. Although his textual output is enormous, he seems to have remained a relatively minor poet of primarily local importance during his own lifetime. He sought no court patronage, and his followers never institutionalized into any sort of sufi brotherhood. Only two contemporaries mention him, and they both spent time in Nishapur—otherwise they likely would have never have heard of him—and their accounts are brief and conventional, conveying few biographical “facts.” ‘Aṭṭâr’s works themselves also seem to be of little help, containing only a couple of allusions to his biography and contemporary events. With such a paucity of evidence, many scholars have been reluctant to speculate on the social contexts in which ‘Aṭṭâr’s works took shape and were initially circulated. J. T. P. de Bruijn starkly sums up the situation as follows: “Next to nothing is known about his life. . . . Nothing can be known about the social circle for which his poems were written; no internal indications at all can be identified which could help us to identify their context.”¹

It is true that little positive data regarding ‘Aṭṭâr’s life can be directly extracted from his poems or other sources. Nevertheless, the situation is not quite so dire as de Bruijn suggests. Although names and dates—the building blocks of positivistic biography—are mostly absent, the general contours of the milieu in which ‘Aṭṭâr was writing can be partially recovered through a careful consideration of his poems in conjunction with the biographical literature. As we shall see, much of this evidence is oblique and indirect, but it collectively suggests that

1. De Bruijn, “Preaching Poet,” 88.

‘Aṭṭâr moved in sufi circles, delivered mystically minded sermons to popular audiences, and saw his poetry as part of a larger homiletic project.

Dozens and dozens of works have been attributed to ‘Aṭṭâr over the centuries—more spurious poems have accreted around him than perhaps any other medieval Persian poet—and since many of these more dubious works contain biographical information, it is imperative that we begin with a clear idea of which poems are authentic so as to build our analysis on firm foundations. Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of Sa‘id Nafisi, Hellmut Ritter, and Moḥammad Reżâ Shafi‘i-Kadkani, a relatively stable (although not entirely unproblematic) scholarly consensus regarding ‘Aṭṭâr’s oeuvre is beginning to form. Much of this research has been published in German and Persian; a comprehensive review will be provided here for the first time in English, along with emendations and qualifications where necessary.

On the basis of internal evidence, in conjunction with a reconsideration of the external accounts, we will argue that ‘Aṭṭâr operated as a mystically minded preacher and informal spiritual teacher in Nishapur for a loose community that had formed around him. Much of the scholarship on ‘Aṭṭâr has questioned whether he was “really” a sufi, often suggesting that he was not: such a question, however, assumes that practitioners of sufi piety constituted a distinct social and religious category when the historical reality on the ground was likely much more fluid. Although he may not have been formally invested by a sufi teacher, ‘Aṭṭâr was certainly committed to the cluster of devotional practices and beliefs that we often label “mystical” or “sufi,” and he seems to have maintained social contacts with like-minded scholars and religious figures. Moreover, as we will see, he actively sought to propagate these forms of piety through popular sermons and informal discussions with interested individuals. And, most importantly, his poetry seems to have functioned as an extension of these homiletic activities,

through which he aimed to inculcate mystical piety not only in his local audience in Nishapur, but also in a wider reading public.

‘Aṭṭâr’s Oeuvre and the Problem of Spurious Attributions

Although the debate has not yet been entirely settled, a scholarly consensus is beginning to form that out of the dozens of works attributed to ‘Aṭṭâr, only seven are likely genuine. These include four *maṣnavis*—the *Book of Affliction* (*Moṣibat-nâma*), the *Conference of the Birds* (*Manṭeq al-ṭayr*), the *Divine Book* (*Elâhi-nâma*), and the *Book of Secrets* (*Asrâr-nâma*)—all of which are long didactic poems composed of hundreds of anecdotes and homiletic exhortations in the vein of Sanâ’î’s *Garden of Truth* (*Ḥadiqat al-ḥaqīqa*) and Neẓâmi’s *Treasury of Secrets* (*Makhzan al-asrâr*). With the exception of the *Book of Secrets*, however, ‘Aṭṭâr’s *maṣnavis* are distinguished from their models by their innovative use of the frame-tale structure, a literary device in which ‘Aṭṭâr seems to have been particularly interested.² ‘Aṭṭâr also produced the first authorially curated and thematically organized collection of quatrains in Persian literary history, the *Choice Book* (*Mokhtâr-nâma*).³ His *Divân* (collected lyrical works) consists primarily of *ghazals*, but also includes a handful of *qaṣidas* and *tarji*’s; it represents an important mystical turn in the development of the Persian lyric. Finally, ‘Aṭṭâr’s collection of saints’ lives and dicta, the *Memorial of the Saints* (*Tazkerat al-owleyâ*), is routinely regarded as one of the high-points of the “simple” style of early Persian prose.⁴ Besides these seven extant works, ‘Aṭṭâr

2. For an overview of ‘Aṭṭâr’s frame-tales, see Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 2-4.

3. Although the authenticity of the *Choice Book* (*Mokhtâr-nâma*) has been doubted by Zarrinkub, his arguments are not entirely convincing. See Sayyed ‘Ali Mirafzali, “Âyâ Mokhtâr-nâma az ‘Aṭṭâr ast?,” *Nashr-e dâneš* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1379 [2000]): 32-43.

4. For an early assessment of the literary merit of the *Memorial* (*Tazkerat al-owleyâ*), see Mirzâ Moḥammad Qazvini, introduction to *Tazkerat al-owleya*, by Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr, ed. Reynold Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1905), 1:15. The authenticity of the work has occasionally been questioned. For example, Mohammad Habib suggests that it is spurious, pointing out that Jâmi seems to express some doubt as to ‘Aṭṭâr’s authorship when he writes that the *Memorial* “is attributed (*mansub*) to him [‘Aṭṭâr].” Although the phrasing is somewhat weaker than a positive claim of authorship, this is a far cry from an actual assertion of the work’s spuri-

also claims to have written—but to have subsequently destroyed—two other verse works, *Husking the Heart* (*Sharḥ al-qalb*) and the *Book of Essences* (*Ḥavâher-nâma*).⁵

Unfortunately, there are no known autograph copies of any of ‘Attâr’s extant works, but they can all be found in the manuscript tradition within about a century of his death.⁶ Although the identification of earlier reliable manuscripts would go a long ways towards alleviating some of the philological difficulties facing the study of ‘Attâr and his oeuvre, this is not an atypical situation for a pre-Mongol Persian poet: the earliest manuscripts of the *Book of Kings* (*Shâh-nâma*), for instance, date from around 200 years after the poet Ferdowsi’s death.⁷

Besides the above-mentioned genuine works, a number of spurious *maṣnavis* also came to circulate under ‘Attâr’s name. The pen-name “‘Attâr” was relatively common, and as Farid al-Din ‘Attâr’s fame grew, the works of other, lesser-known poets who had written under the same nom de plume were absorbed into his oeuvre; some poets even deliberately encouraged this confusion, eager to endow their own works with ‘Attâr’s fame and aura of sacrality.⁸ Some

ousness, especially since Jâmi was operating in a paradigm of knowledge that stressed consensus and the testimony of previous authorities. In any case, ‘Attâr’s authorship is also affirmed 150 years before Jâmi in Hamd-Allâh Mostowfi’s *Târikh-e gozîda*. Although most contemporary scholars accept ‘Attâr’s authorship of the *Memorial*, some later manuscripts also include an additional twenty-five biographies which are most likely not the product of ‘Attâr’s pen, but were inserted into the manuscript tradition sometime in the fifteenth century. Mohammad Habib, “Chishti Mystics’ Records of the Sultanate Period,” *Medieval India Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (October 1950), 37-9; M. I. Dar, “Is Attar’s *Tadhkirat-ul auliya* a Fabricated Work?,” *Medieval India Quarterly* 1, no. 3/4 (1954): 106-9; ‘Abd al-Rahmân Jâmi, *Nafahât al-ons men ḥazarât al-qods*, ed. Maḥmud ‘Âbedi (Tehran: Eṭṭelâ‘ât, 1375 [1996-97]), 597; Muhammad Este‘lami, introduction to *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, by Farid al-Din ‘Attâr, rev. ed. (Tehran: Zavvâr, 1383 [2004-5]), xxxvi-xxxviii.

5. *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 80. *Husking the Heart* (*Sharḥ al-qalb*) is also mentioned twice in the *Memorial*. In the second instance ‘Attâr implies that he is its author, writing, “Just as we have mentioned in *Husking the Heart* . . .” ‘Attâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 4, 466.
6. Mohammad Reżâ Shafi‘i-Kadkani, introduction to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, by Farid al-Din ‘Attâr, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Sokhan, 1389 [2010-11]), 55. The thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Choice Book* that allegedly resides in the British Museum (OR 11007), is, in fact, a work of Fakhr al-Din Râzî with a few of ‘Attâr’s quatrains appended. G. M. Meredith-Owens, *Handlist of Persian Manuscripts 1895-1966* (London: British Museum, 1968), 62.
7. Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Mo‘arrefi va arz-yâbi-ye barkhi az dast-navis-hâ-ye Shâh-nâma,” *Irân-nâma* 3, no. 3 (Spring 1364 [1985]): 378-406. Cf. Mirafzali, “Mokhtâr-nâma az ‘Attâr?,” 41.
8. On the many “‘Attârs” in the Persian literary tradition, see Moḥammad Reżâ Shafi‘i-Kadkani, ed., *Zabur-e pârsi: Negâhi be zendegi va ghazal-hâ-ye ‘Attâr* (Tehran: Âgâh, 1378 [1999-2000]), 91-103.

of these accretions were indexed in the fifteenth century by the Timurid anthologist Dowlat-Shâh, who believed them to be genuine: according to him, ‘Aṭṭâr composed a total of forty poetic works out of which thirteen survived, including titles such as the *Book of Ḥallâj* (*Ḥallâj-nâma*), the *Book of the Camel* (*Oshtor-nâma*), and the *Extracts of the Essence* (*Javâher al-zât*).⁹ By the sixteenth century, ‘Aṭṭâr was said to have produced 114 individual works, the same number of chapters (*suras*) as is in the Quran.¹⁰ Such a conventional and religiously charged number certainly cannot be taken as an accurate count of attributions, but it indicates something of the religious halo that had formed around ‘Aṭṭâr as well as the voluminosity of his alleged output. According to Miranṣâri, the author of an extensive biographical survey on ‘Aṭṭâr, at least fifty-nine independent works, many of them still extant, have at some point been attributed to him.¹¹

These attributions are widely divergent in terms of style and content, so much so that at least one of them—the *Ḥaydari Book* (*Ḥaydari-nâma*)—was questioned even in the pre-modern era. According to Dowlat-Shâh, some of his contemporaries argued that this poem was so stylistically unlike ‘Aṭṭâr’s other works that it could not possibly have been composed by him; instead, they argued, it was likely a false attribution encouraged by the followers of the *Ḥaydari*

9. Dowlat-Shâh enumerates ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetic works as follows: “In verse, that which is well-known is as follows: first, the *Book of Secrets*; second, the *Divine Book*; third, the *Book of Affliction*; fourth, the *Book of the Camel*; fifth, the *Book of Affliction* [sic]; sixth, the *Choice Book*; seventh, the *Extracts of the Essence*; eighth, the *Conference of the Birds*; ninth the *Book of the Nightingale* (*Bolbol-nâma*); tenth, *Gol and Hermez*; eleventh, the *Ḥaydari Book* (*Ḥaydari-nâma*); twelfth, the *Black Book* (*Siâh-nâma*); and thirteenth, the *Book of Ḥallâj*; these thirteen works are all in verse. They say that he composed forty poetic works, but these other texts are lost and unknown.” In addition to the poetic works, Dowlat-Shâh also mentions the *Memorial* and a prose work by the name of the *Brethren of Purity* (*Ekhvân al-ṣafâ*). *Tazkerat al-sho‘arâ*, ed. Fâṭema ‘Alâqa (Tehran: Pazhuhesh-gâh-e ‘Olum-e Ensâni va Moṭâla‘ât-e Farhangî, 1385 [2006-7]), 136.

10. This legend first appears in the *Assemblies of the Believers* (*Majâles al-mo’menin*), a Shi‘i-inflected biographical work by Nur-Allâh Shushtari (d. 1610); the notice on ‘Aṭṭâr begins with a verse epigraph that ascribes to him an equal number of works as there are chapters in the Quran. *Majâles al-mo’menin* (Tehran: Ketâb-forushi-ye Eslâmiya, 1365 [1986-7]), 99.

11. ‘Ali Miranṣâri, *Ketâb-shenâsi-ye Shaykh Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr-e Nayshâburi* (Tehran: Anjoman-e Âṣâr va Mafâkhar-e Farhangî, 1384 [2005-6]), 7-16.

order. Against these critics, however, Dowlat-Shâh accepts the poem's authenticity and explains its stylistic inconsistency as a result of the poem being a work of 'Aṭṭâr's youth.¹² Nevertheless, this intriguing statement shows that some serious literary-historical work was taking place in the Timurid milieu, and even if Dowlat-Shâh himself missed the mark, it leaves open the possibility that other attributions may have occasionally been challenged on stylistic grounds by more discerning readers. It was not until the early twentieth century, however, with the application of modern philological methods to Persian texts, that the vast majority of these attributions came to be questioned and rejected.

The Shi'i 'Aṭṭâr

The most significant early pioneers in this endeavor were Mirzâ Moḥammad Qazvini, with his lengthy introduction to Nicholson's 1905 edition of the *Memorial*, and Hellmut Ritter, with his 1939 article "Philologika X." They both emphasize the need for skepticism when dealing with works allegedly composed by 'Aṭṭâr, and they convincingly show several attributions to be either completely spurious or, at the very least, exceedingly suspect. For example, Qazvini demonstrates that the *Treasure of Secrets* (*Kanz al-asrâr*) cannot possibly be 'Aṭṭâr's work because, according to the text itself, it was completed in 1299-1300, likely at least seventy years after 'Aṭṭâr's death. Moreover, the work's authorial persona refers to himself as "the 'Aṭṭâr of the age," suggesting that he was a later poet who took 'Aṭṭâr as his namesake and poetic model.¹³ Subsequent copyists and readers, however, failed to distinguish between the two poets, and the *maṣnavi* of this later 'Aṭṭâr was absorbed into the oeuvre of his more famous predecessor. Other spurious works seem to have become attached to 'Aṭṭâr simply on the basis of their reli-

12. Samarqandi, *Tazkerat al-sho'arâ*, 333.

13. Qazvini, intro. to *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 1:14; Hellmut Ritter, "Philologika X: Farīdaddīn 'Aṭṭâr," *Der Islam* 25 (1939), 157.

gious content. The author of the attributed *Key of Revelations* (*Meftâḥ al-fotuḥ*), for instance, never identifies himself as ‘Aṭṭâr; on the contrary, he informs his readers that he hails from Zanjân and reports to have finished the work in 1290, many decades after ‘Aṭṭâr died. Nevertheless, the poem circulated under ‘Aṭṭâr’s name.¹⁴ A few other minor attributions are classified as “doubtful” in Ritter’s initial article but not rejected outright, including the *Book of the Tailor* (*Khayyât-nâma*), the *Last Will* (*Vaṣiyat-nâma*), and the *Treasure of Truths* (*Kanz al-ḥaqâ’eq*).¹⁵

Despite their skepticism, both Ritter and Qazvini continued to accept two Twelver-Shi‘i inflected *maṣnavis* as genuine: the *Tongue of the Unseen* (*Lesân al-ghayb*) and the *Locus of Wonders* (*Mazhar al-‘ajâ’eb*; an epithet for ‘Ali). Even though these poems diverge from ‘Aṭṭâr’s early works in terms of style and religious content (according to Qazvini, ‘Aṭṭâr must have suffered from “a decline of skill in old age,” and the earlier works all display a clearly Sunni orientation), they were accepted by Ritter and Qazvini because their author explicitly identifies himself as Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr, the composer of the *Conference of the Birds*, the *Book of Affliction*, and the *Memorial*.¹⁶ And because the *Locus* and *Tongue* contain rich biographical data, maintaining their authenticity allowed these scholars to provide fuller and seemingly more satisfying reconstructions of ‘Aṭṭâr’s life. For example, this pseudo-‘Aṭṭâr claims to have been born in Nishapur to a family that hailed from Tun;¹⁷ spent thirteen years as a youth in Mashhad;¹⁸ had some sort of spiritual relationship with Najm al-Din Kobra;¹⁹ and to have traveled extensively

14. Qazvini, intro. to *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 1:14; Ritter, “Philologika X,” 157.

15. Ritter, “Philologika X,” 158-60. Cf. Ritter’s *Encyclopaedia of Islam* article, where these poems are classified “demonstrably spurious on the basis of internal evidence.” “‘Aṭṭâr,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, et al., Brill, 1960-2007, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0074.

16. Qazvini, intro. to *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 1:7-8; Ritter, “Philologika X,” 155-6; Hellmut Ritter, “Philologika XIV: Fariduddîn ‘Aṭṭâr II,” *Oriens* 11, no. 1/2 (1958), 3.

17. Sa‘id Nafisi, *Jostoju dar aḥvâl va âṣâr-e Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr-e Nayshâburi* (Tehran: Eqbâl, 1320 [1941]), 147-9.

18. Qazvini, intro. to *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 1:6.

19. *Ibid.*, 1:15.

to Damascus, Egypt, Kufa, India, Turkestan, and China before resettling in Nishapur.²⁰ According to a long denunciation found in the *Tongue*, this pseudo-‘Aṭṭâr was persecuted for his Shi‘i beliefs by a sectarian jurist who reportedly burned the poet’s *Locus* and incited the local people to violence against him; as a consequence, he was forced to flee to Mecca.²¹ He also extensively catalogs his alleged oeuvre, claiming as his own not only ‘Aṭṭâr’s authentic works, but also poems that are now viewed with suspicion, such as the *Extracts of the Essence* (*Javâher al-zât*) and the *Book of the Camel* (*Oshtor-nâma*).²² Accepting the authenticity of the *Tongue* and *Locus* thus also entailed, for Qazvini and Ritter, accepting the above-named works as genuine. To confuse matters even more, many of these works diverge stylistically and religiously not only from the authentic works of ‘Aṭṭâr, but also from the explicitly Shi‘i *Tongue* and *Locus*, exhibiting, in Ritter’s words, a “dithyrambic” ecstasy focused not on ‘Ali but the figure of Ḥallâj, whom they elevate to an almost divine status.²³

To explain these changes, Ritter proposed a threefold periodization of ‘Aṭṭâr’s life and works.²⁴ (1) The first period allegedly saw the composition of the *Book of Secrets*, the *Divine Book*, the *Book of Affliction*, and the *Conference of the Birds*, which are, in Ritter’s words, characterized by a balance of narrative and exhortation and a tightly structured disposition. Also attributed to this period are the *Divân*, the *Choice Book*, and the *Memorial*, as well as the *Book*

20. Ibid., 1:6. Nafisi (*Jostoju*, 151) excoriates ‘Aṭṭâr-e Tuni as a liar in regards to these alleged travels. It is probably more productive, however, to see these claims as a mode of constructing of a certain sort of poetic persona that may not necessarily correspond in a one-to-one manner with his biographical self.

21. Ibid., 1:8-10.

22. Ibid., 1:11; Ritter, “Philologika X,” 155-6; Nafisi, *Jostoju*, 166.

23. Ritter, “Philologika X,” 143. For an examination of the Ḥallâjīan themes exemplified in this group, see Carl Ernst, “On Losing One’s Head: Ḥallâjīan Motifs in the Works Attributed to ‘Aṭṭâr,” in Lewisohn and Shackle, *Spiritual Flight*, 330-43.

24. This three-part development is first suggested by Ritter in “Philologika X” (143-4). Even after he accepted that the works of the second and third periods were not genuine, he continued to use these groupings as a useful way of distinguishing between attributed works in “Philologika XIV,” 7-8; “‘Aṭṭâr.”

of Advice (*Pand-nâma*), the *Book of the Nightingale* (*Bolbol-nâma*), the *Book of Ascent* (*Me'râj-nâma*), the *Book of the Skull* (*Ĵomjoma-nâma*), and the romance *Gol and Hermez* (often erroneously voweled as *Gol and Hormoz*).²⁵ (2) The poems of the second period in Ritter's scheme are characterized by a decreased interest in narrative, a marked use of anaphora, and a religious shift towards ecstatic celebrations of apotheosis, especially that of Ḥallāj; the *Book of the Camel* (*Oshtor-nâma*) and the *Extracts of the Essence* (*Ĵavâher al-zât*) are emblematic of this group of works.²⁶ (3) Finally, according to Ritter, 'Aṭṭâr must have converted to Shi'ism in the third period of his life and then composed the *Locus* and the *Tongue*.

The authenticity of the *Locus* and the *Tongue*, however, is thrown into question by several anachronisms and inconsistencies. These were first pointed out in 1927 by Maḥmūd Sherānī, writing in Urdu, who argued that the *Locus*, among many other attributions, cannot possibly be authentic.²⁷ Ritter knew of the article, and he had access to an English summary of it while composing "Philologika X," but he claims to have found its arguments unconvincing (although he would later reevaluate his position).²⁸ It was Nafisi, who seems to have been unaware of Sherānī's earlier work on the subject, who finally succeeded in casting doubt on the authenticity of the *Locus* for an Iranian and Orientalist audience with his revolutionary 1941 monograph on 'Aṭṭâr's life and works. As Nafisi convincingly shows, echoing many of

25. The name of the romance's eponymous hero is usually voweled as "Hormoz," but Shafi'i-Kadkani has pointed out that this cannot be the case since, within the poem, it rhymes with *hargez*. He thus suggests the name is associated not with the Iranian Homorzd, but with the hellenistic Hermes. See *Zabur*, 101.

26. This group also contains the *Book of Ḥallāj* (*Ḥallāj-nâma*/*Haylāj-nâma*), the *Book of Maṣṣūr* (*Maṣṣūr-nâma*), and the *Headless Book* (*Bisar-nâma*). Ritter characterizes the *Book of the Camel* (*Oshtor-nâma*) as a stylistic hybrid of the first and second periods because it combines the frame-tale structure associated with the former with the "dithyrambic" tenor of the latter. Ritter, "Philologika X," 155.

27. Maḥmūd Sherānī, "Taṣnīfāt-i Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār," *Urdū* 7 (January 1927): 1-97. For an English summary of some of his arguments relating specifically to the *Locus*, see 'Abdu'l-Ḳādir Sarfarāz, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Arabic, Persian and Urdu Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Bombay* (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1935), 60-5.

28. Ritter, "Philologika X," 160; Ritter, "Philologika XIV," 3.

Sherānī's earlier arguments, the *Locus* and the *Tongue* must have been products of a later poet who lived in the fifteenth century, wrote under the name 'Aṭṭār, and deliberately encouraged confusion between his own works and those of his more famous predecessor. This pseudo-'Aṭṭār claims to have been known as Farid al-Din and to have been born in Nishapur, but unlike his more famous namesake, he mentions that his family hailed from Tun; Nafisi thus styles him "'Aṭṭār-e Tuni."²⁹ The stylistic and religious divergences between the works of 'Aṭṭār-e Nayshāburi and 'Aṭṭār-e Tuni, are, according to Nafisi, simply too great to be explained by the evolution of personal style, with the explicit Twelver Shi'ism of the *Locus* and the *Tongue* being more consistent with the religious and poetic atmosphere of the fifteenth century than the thirteenth. Besides these general observations, a number of specific passages from the poems support the theory of their later provenance. As Ritter points out in a revised treatment of the poet informed by Nafisi's research, 'Aṭṭār-e Tuni refers to himself as a "second 'Aṭṭār" ("‘Aṭṭār-e ṣāni āmadam"), which explicitly signals a distance between him and his more famous predecessor.³⁰ Various verses in the *Locus* "foretell" the coming of future poets like Rumi (and his friend Shams al-Din), Qāsem-e Anvār, and Ḥāfez, which means that these verses must have been written *after* those figures gained fame.³¹ Some verses even allude to the legend that after 'Aṭṭār was killed, his decapitated head miraculously continued to speak as his headless body carried it towards the graveyard; these lines could only have been composed after 'Aṭṭār died and legends of his martyrdom and miraculous post-decapitation recitation had begun to circulate.³² 'Aṭṭār-e Tuni thus appears to have been a later poet who sought to pass his work off as that of

29. Nafisi, *Jostoju*, 147-8.

30. Ritter, "Philologika XIV," 3-4.

31. Sarfarāz, *Descriptive Catalogue*, 62; Nafisi, *Jostoju*, 152-5; Ritter, "Philologika XIV," 4.

32. Nafisi, *Jostoju*, 153-4. A spurious work of Ritter's second group, the *Headless Book* (*Bisar-nāma*), is said to be the very poem that 'Aṭṭār's decapitated head recited. It is first attested in sixteenth century. See Miranṣāri, *Ketāb-shenāsi*, 181-6; Nafisi, *Jostoju*, 107-8.

Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr, perhaps to ensure his own poetry’s dissemination or to appropriate the latter’s persona and oeuvre for the Shi‘i poetic canon. As part of his archaizing project, this pseudo-‘Aṭṭâr of Tun even claims to have composed the *Locus* in 1188-89 at an age of over one hundred years, meaning that he would have had to have been born prior to 1091-92, dates that must be dismissed as chronologically impossible given that the real ‘Aṭṭâr-e Nayshâburi likely died in 1221 or 1230.³³

In his revised 1958 investigation, Ritter accepted Nafisi’s argument that the works of the third group in his tripartite division of ‘Aṭṭâr’s oeuvre (i.e., the *Locus* and the *Tongue*) must have been composed by a later Shi‘i poet, thereby opening up the works of the second group to renewed scrutiny as well. Nevertheless, he resisted Nafisi’s uncritical urge to attribute many of the works in this second group to the same ‘Aṭṭâr-e Tuni.³⁴ First, they display significant stylistic and religious deviations: as previously mentioned, it is Ḥallâj, not ‘Ali, who plays the central role in these works, and there is no trace of the Shi‘ism that is openly confessed in the *Locus* and the *Tongue*.³⁵ Second, an early manuscript of the *Extracts of the Essence* (*Javâher al-zât*), one of the main representatives of this group of texts, is dated 1335, much earlier than ‘Aṭṭâr-e Tuni was thought to have been active.³⁶ There is some evidence that these Ḥallâj-centered works may have been circulating even earlier, perhaps even by the middle of the thirteenth century. According to an anecdote recounted in Aflâki’s Mevlevi hagiography, Rumi (d. 1273) spoke of a special relationship between ‘Aṭṭâr and Ḥallâj, claiming that the poet served as a site for the manifestation of the famous sufi martyr’s spiritual light: this may indicate that Rumi

33. Nafisi, *Jostojû*, 149.

34. Ritter, “Philologika XIV,” 7-8.

35. Ibid., 7.

36. Ibid.; Ahmed Ateş, “Konya kütüphanelerinde bulunan bazı yazmalar,” *Belleten* 16, no. 61 (January 1952), 94-7.

was familiar with some of the Ḥallāj-centric works of the second group.³⁷ Ritter thus holds out the possibility that the poems of the second group *may* be authentic works of ‘Aṭṭār, although he admits that the likelihood is remote.³⁸ Even though they have not yet been analyzed in depth, there is ample circumstantial evidence suggesting that these works are spurious: not only because they differ stylistically and religiously from ‘Aṭṭār’s known authentic poems, but also because they entered the manuscript tradition later than them and they do not appear in the earliest manuscripts of his collected works (*kolliyât*).³⁹

Similar philological and stylistic evidence has also led scholars to reassess the authenticity of some of the poems in Ritter’s first period. There are no internal anachronisms or contradictions that would indicate that these works are spurious, and Ritter initially held them to be genuine.⁴⁰ Perhaps the most popular work ever ascribed to ‘Aṭṭār, the *Book of Advice* (*Pand-nâma*), is a member of this group: over three hundred manuscripts are recorded by Miranşâri, and it was often translated, especially into Turkish.⁴¹ Although it was originally accepted by Ritter as authentic, by the end of his career he came to question that assumption: he pointed out that “manuscripts of the work are first known [only] in the 9th/[15th] century, it is not mentioned by the poet in his authentic works, it does not appear in the oldest kulliyât-

37. Ritter, “Philologika XIV,” 7-8; Shams al-Din Aḥmad Aflâki, *Manâqeb al-‘ârefin*, ed. Tahsin Yazıcı (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1959-61; repr., Tehran: Donyâ-ye Ketâb, 1382 [2003-2004]), 2:582. Jâmi alludes to the same anecdote in the *Nafahât al-ons* (597) and reports that some of his contemporaries used it as evidence to support the idea that ‘Aṭṭār was an Uwaysi inducted into sufism by the spirit of Ḥallāj.

38. “I therefore do not regard it as utterly impossible that the works of the second group should be genuine, though it is rather doubtful,” Ritter, “‘Aṭṭār.”

39. The *Book of the Camel* (*Oshtor-nâma*) and the *Book of Ḥallāj* (*Ḥallāj-nâma*) are first attested in the fifteenth century, and the *Headless Book* (*Bisar-nâma*) in the sixteenth. The *Extracts of the Essence* (*Javâher al-zât*) is the exception, being attested as early as 1335. See Miranşâri, *Ketâb-shenâsi*, 173-75, 182-85, 225-26, 283-85.

40. Nafisi also claimed that the *Book of Advice* (*Pand-nâma*) was “certainly from ‘Aṭṭār,” but he believed the *Book of the Nightingale* (*Bolbol-nâma*) to be a spurious attribution on the basis that it he found it “to a certain degree poetically weak and far from the style of ‘Aṭṭār.” *Jostoju*, 106-7, 108.

41. Miranşâri, *Ketâb-shenâsi*, 187-218; Hellmut Ritter, “Philologika XVI: Farīduddīn ‘Aṭṭār IV,” *Oriens* 13/14 (1960/1961), 229-39; Nafisi, *Jostoju*, 108-10.

manuscripts, and, finally, it does not accord with ‘Aṭṭâr’s thought-world.”⁴² Ritter’s reasoning does not decisively disprove the authenticity of the *Book of Advice*’s attribution to ‘Aṭṭâr, but it shows it to be circumstantially unlikely, and in response the scholarly community has adopted a circumspect attitude towards the text.⁴³ The same sort of reasoning can also be applied to the *Book of Ascent* (*Me’râj-nâma*), the *Book of the Nightingale* (*Bolbol-nâma*), and the *Book of the Skull* (*Jomjoma-nâma*): like the *Book of Advice*, none appears in the earliest collected works, none is referenced by ‘Aṭṭâr in a known authentic work, and none enters the manuscript tradition before the fifteenth century.⁴⁴

The Case of the Wandering Titles

It has proven somewhat more difficult, however, to determine the authenticity of the romance variously known as the *Khosrow-nâma*, *Gol and Hermez/Hormoz*, and *Gol and Khosrow*.⁴⁵ Originally classified by Ritter as a work of ‘Aṭṭâr’s first period, this poem was always considered something of an outlier because it is not an overtly mystical or religious *maṣnavi*, but a hellenistic romance like *Varaqa and Golshâh* or *Vis and Râmin*.⁴⁶ Despite its incongruity with the rest of ‘Aṭṭâr’s oeuvre, it was widely assumed to be authentic for two main reasons: first, because it includes a preface in which ‘Aṭṭâr seems to identify himself as the author; and, sec-

42. Ritter, “Philologika XVI,” 228-9.

43. The *Book of Advice* is now listed as a spurious work in most modern bibliographical handlists. See François de Blois and C. A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey* (London: Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1992-94), 5.2:308-9; Miranṣâri, *Ketâb-shenâsi*, 187.

44. Manuscripts of the *Book of the Nightingale* (*Bolbol-nâma*) and the *Book of Ascent* (*Me’râj-nâma*) are first attested in the fifteenth century, and the *Book of the Skull* (*Jomjoma-nâma*) in the seventeenth. Miranṣâri, *Ketâb-shenâsi*, 178-79, 222, 261.

45. On the vowelizing of “Hermez,” see p. 18n25.

46. For a synopsis of the plot, see Ritter, “Philologika X,” 161-71.

ond, because it is mentioned along with other genuine poems from the first period in the preface to the *Choice Book* (*Mokhtâr-nâma*):⁴⁷

The dominion of the *Khosrow-nâma* [lit. *Book of the King*] has appeared in the world, and the *Book of Secrets* has been published, and the language of the birds of the *Book of the Birds* (*Ṭoyur-nâma*) has transported rational souls to the site of unveiling, and the burn of the *Book of Affliction* has passed bounds and limits, and the register of the *Divân* has been made complete. And the *Book of Essences* (*Javâher al-zât*) and *Husking the Heart* (*Sharḥ al-qalb*), both of which were in verse, were left unfinished out of passion, surrendered to the flame, and washed away.

سلطنتِ خسرونامه در عالم ظاهر گشت و اسرارِ اسرارنامه منتشر شد و زبانِ مرغانِ طیورنامه
ناطقۀ ارواح را به محلّ کشف رسید و سوزِ مصیبتِ مصیبت‌نامه از حدّ و غایت در گذشت و
دیوانِ دیوان ساختن تمام داشته آمد و جواهرنامه و شرح القلب که هر دو منظوم بودند از سر
سودا نامنظوم ماند که حرق و غسلی بدان راه یافت.⁴⁸

This seemingly unambiguous claim to authorship is repeated a second time at a later point in the same introduction; here ‘Aṭṭâr divides his oeuvre into two trilogies (*moṣallās*), the first composed of the *Book of Secrets*, the *Khosrow-nâma*, and the *Conference of the Birds* (*Maqâmât-e ṭoyur*), and the second composed of the *Divân*, *Book of Affliction*, and the *Choice Book*.⁴⁹ Thus, if the authenticity of the *Choice Book* and its introduction is accepted, as it is by most scholars, then it would seem to follow that the *Khosrow-nâma* must be accepted as well.⁵⁰ Shafi‘i-Kadkani, however, has recently cast considerable doubt on the attribution of the so-called *Khosrow-nâma*, suggesting on the basis of both internal and manuscript evidence that it is the product of a later poet. According to this argument, the title *Khosrow-nâma* was originally applied not to

47. Its authenticity is maintained in several oft-cited reference works: Ritter, “‘Aṭṭâr”; De Blois and Storey, *Persian Literature*, 5.2:276-78; B. Reinert, “‘Aṭṭâr, Farid-al-Dîn,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, 1982-, article updated August 17, 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/attar-farid-al-din-poet>.

48. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 70.

49. Ibid., 71-2. Over the course of only a few pages, the *Conference of the Birds* is referred to as both the *Ṭoyur-nâma* and the *Maqâmât-e ṭoyur*, showing the fluidity of titles even for a work’s own author.

50. On ‘Aṭṭâr’s authorship of the *Choice Book*, see Mirafzali, “Âyâ Mokhtâr-nâma az ‘Aṭṭâr ast?”

this romance, but to the *maṣnavi* now known as the *Divine Book*, and it is to that work which ‘Aṭṭâr refers in the above-quoted enumeration.⁵¹

The argument begins with certain “inconsistencies” in the introduction to the romance *Khosrow-nâma* (i.e., *Gol and Hermez*), in which the poem’s author explicitly identifies himself as ‘Aṭṭâr-e Nayshâburi. The poet recounts how he composed the *Book of Affliction* and the *Divine Book* in his drugstore between patients, an element which made its way into scholarly biographies of ‘Aṭṭâr, and he also mentions the titles of the *Conference of the Birds* and the *Choice Book*.⁵² The presence of this last title, however, presents a problem: the *Khosrow-nâma* is mentioned as a completed work in the *Choice Book*, and the *Choice Book* is mentioned as a completed work in the *Khosrow-nâma*! There are other puzzling elements of introduction as well, including a complex, multi-stage origins story: first, one of ‘Aṭṭâr’s friends allegedly asked him to versify a pre-existing prose *Khosrow-nâma*, but later we are told that the poem is actually an abridgment of an earlier poem that too closely resembled the *Book of Secrets*. To make sense of this data, Ritter proposes that ‘Aṭṭâr composed one version of the *Khosrow-nâma*, then the *Choice Book*, and then reworked the *Khosrow-nâma* into its current form. Shafi‘i-Kadkani, however, believes that something more nefarious is going on.⁵³

More specifically, according to Shafi‘i-Kadkani, the introduction to the *Khosrow-nâma*—which connects the poem to ‘Aṭṭâr—is a fifteenth-century forgery.⁵⁴ Besides his general suspicion of the origins story, Shafi‘i-Kadkani points out that the introduction uses mystical terminology associated with Ibn ‘Arabî, which was not popularized in Persian poetry until the four-

51. Shafi‘i-Kadkani, intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 33-59.

52. Reinert, “‘Aṭṭâr, Farîd-al-Dîn.”

53. Ritter, “Philologika X,” 144-55.

54. Shafi‘i-Kadkani, intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 57.

teenth century with the works of Shabestari.⁵⁵ Several verses, moreover, appear to be poetic responses (*taẓmin*) to verses of that poet, a clear indication of their later origin.⁵⁶ Unlike ‘Aṭṭâr’s genuine works, in which the poet vows to never compose any panegyric, the introduction to *Gol and Hermez* praises a certain Sa’d al-Din Abu’l-Faẓl b. al-Rabib in terms appropriate for a spiritual guide of the Timurid era.⁵⁷ A Timurid provenance for the introduction is further suggested by a reference to the riddle (*mo‘ammâ*) as a high literary art, which is consonant with the cultural milieu of the fifteenth century, but not the thirteenth.⁵⁸ Such a dating would also be consistent with *Gol and Hermez*’s manuscript tradition, which, Shafi‘i-Kadkani claims, cannot be reliably identified until the beginning of the fifteenth century, almost a full century after the appearance of all of ‘Aṭṭâr’s genuine works.⁵⁹ As for the romance itself, sans introduction, Shafi‘i-Kadkani originally identified its excessive anaphora as a sign of Timurid decadence far from the style of ‘Aṭṭâr. The point is not entirely convincing, however, as protracted anaphora can also be found in ‘Aṭṭâr’s genuine works, although perhaps not quite to the same extent.⁶⁰ More recently, he has suggested that the romance was written by another Farid-e ‘Aṭṭâr, roughly contemporary with our ‘Aṭṭâr-e Nayshâburi, who was a panegyrist to the

55. Ibid., 48-50. He highlights a technical usage of the terms *asmâ* (names) and *mosammâ* (named).

56. Ibid., 46-7.

57. Ibid., 50-2. For example, the honorifics *Pole of the Saints* (*Qoṭb al-owleyâ*) and *Khwâja* are both applied to Ebn al-Rabib, which, according to Shafi‘i-Kadkani, were not used for spiritual leaders in Persian until the fifteenth century.

58. Ibid., 45-6.

59. Ibid., 55-6. Numerous manuscripts of the *Khosrow-nâma* exist from the fifteenth century onwards; the earliest is dated 816/1413 (Ritter, “Philologika XIV,” 9) and not 826/1423, as Shafi‘i-Kadkani claims. See Miranşâri, *Ketâb-shenâsi*, 234-6; De Blois and Storey, *Persian Literature*, 5.2:276-78; Ritter, “Philologika X,” 172-3. An allegedly very early manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Blochet 1294) is dated 696/1297, but a number of its folios bear traces of alteration in the nineteenth century. A detailed examination of this manuscript remains a desideratum; if authentic, it could have major implications for the validity of Shafi‘i-Kadkani’s theory. Somewhat surprisingly, he himself never acknowledges its existence. E. Blochet, *Catalogue des Manuscrits Persans* (Paris: Réunion des Bibliothèques Nationales, 1905-34), 3:144-5; Ritter, “Philologika X,” 87-8.

60. Shafi‘i-Kadkani, intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 57. For an example of anaphora in ‘Aṭṭâr’s authentic works, see the extensive repetition of “stone” (*sang*), “finger” (*angosht*), and “ring” (*angoshtari*) in the *Asrâr-nâma*’s opening praise of the Prophet (195-242).

Khwârazm-Shâh Moḥammad b. Tekish.⁶¹ That the two poets shared a name could naturally lead to mix-ups, so it is unsurprising that the spurious fifteenth-century introduction attributed the work to ‘Aṭṭâr-e Nayshâburi, who was by then much more well known.⁶²

Shafi‘i-Kadkani further argues that ‘Aṭṭâr’s *Divine Book* was originally known as the *Khosrow-nâma*. He points out that in the introduction to the *Choice Book*, ‘Aṭṭâr lists the otherwise doubtful *Khosrow-nâma* but fails to mention the *Divine Book*, which is almost certainly an authentic work. To solve this problem, Shafi‘i-Kadkani suggests that ‘Aṭṭâr used the title “*Khosrow-nâma*” to refer not to the romance *Gol and Hermez*, but to the *maṣnavi* that is today known as the *Divine Book*. The title “*Divine Book*” is itself rather generic, being, in De Bruijn’s characterization, “an appellation rather than the proper name of a book,” indicating simply “a book of religious contents.”⁶³ The *Khosrow-nâma*, however, would have been an appropriate title for this *maṣnavi* because its frame-tale recounts a spiritually edifying dialogue between a caliph/king (*khosrow*) and his six sons.⁶⁴ The extant manuscripts of this poem are all titled the *Divine Book*, but even the earliest one dates from around one hundred years after ‘Aṭṭâr’s death, ample time

61. Shafi‘i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 83-6. He also claims that a number of this poet’s *ghazals* and *qaṣidas* have found their way in to ‘Aṭṭâr-e Nayshâburi’s *divân*.

62. Although he initially discounted the entire introduction, Shafi‘i-Kadkani now believes that certain portions of it—specifically its opening praise of God and the Prophet—originally belonged to the *Divine Book*, and that they were removed by the forger and placed in the *Khosrow-nâma* to bolster its attribution to ‘Aṭṭâr. This explains, in his opinion, the widely divergent versions of the *Divine Book*’s doxology in the extant manuscripts—they are all spurious attempts to reconstruct that which was excerpted. This means, however, that Shafi‘i-Kadkani must now date this intervention to before 1331, the year of the earliest reliable manuscript of the *Divine Book*, in spite of his former (very strong) arguments that the current introduction to the *Khosrow-nâma* was forged in the fifteenth century. Perhaps this shift is also an attempt to account for the existence of the early Paris manuscript? It is also not exactly clear how a single forger (or a small group of forgers) could have completely removed all traces of *Divine Book*’s original doxology from that poem’s textual tradition. Moḥammad Reżâ Shafi‘i-Kadkani, introduction to *Elâhi-nâma*, by Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Sokhan, 1388 [2009-10]), 54-63, 85-86. Cf. Shafi‘i-Kadkani, intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 57.

63. J. T. P. de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry: The Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Ḥakīm Sanâ‘î of Ghazna* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 128. He gives the example of Sanâ‘î’s *Ḥadiqat al-ḥaqiqa*, one manuscript of which bears the name *Divine Book* in the colophon; Rumi also refers to the *Ḥadiqat al-ḥaqiqa* by this name, as does Ḥâjjī Khalifa.

64. Shafi‘i-Kadkani, intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 37-8.

for the title to shift, and there is no philologically reliable internal evidence to suggest that the *Divine Book* is necessarily the work's original proper name.⁶⁵ On the contrary, Shafî'i-Kadkani has managed to pull together some positive indications that the *maṣnavi* may have originally circulated under the name of the *Khosrow-nâma*. As already mentioned, the introduction to the romance *Khosrow-nâma* alludes to an earlier version of the poem that was too similar in content to the *Book of Secrets*, prompting its revision. The content of the romance *Khosrow-nâma*, of course, has absolutely nothing at all in common with the *Book of Secrets*, but this would nicely describe the content of the *Divine Book*, which may have still been circulating under its original name at the time that this introduction was composed.⁶⁶ Likewise, an early manuscript of 'Aṭṭâr's collected works lists both titles—the *Khosrow-nâma* and the *Divine Book*—on its simple calligraphic frontispiece, even though the manuscript, which appears to be complete, actually contains only the text of the *Divine Book*.⁶⁷ According to Shafî'i-Kadkani, this indicates that both titles likely existed together at the time of the manuscript's completion, which confused the copyist, who initially took them to refer to separate works.⁶⁸ The presence of both titles on the frontispiece (and in the broader literary memory) then motivated later readers and copyists to search for the “missing” *Khosrow-nâma*.

In short, the didactic *maṣnavi* now known as the *Divine Book* was, according to Shafî'i-Kadkani, originally known as the *Khosrow-nâma*. Over the course of the following century, however, the generic title “*Divine Book*” became attached to the work as a proper name, and it is under this title that it is preserved in the manuscript tradition. The romance known as *Gol*

65. Ritter, “Philologika XIV,” 58; Shafî'i-Kadkani, intro. to *Elâhi-nâma*, 63-7; Shafî'i-Kadkani, intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 57-8.

66. Shafî'i-Kadkani, intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 39-40.

67. Badri Âtâbây, *Fehrest-e divân-hâ-ye khaṭṭi-ye Ketâb-khâna-ye Saḷṭanati* (Tehran: Châp-khâna-ye Zibâ, 2535 sh. [1976]), 799-805.

68. Shafî'i-Kadkani, intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 56.

and Hermez or *Khosrow-nâma* and attributed to ‘Aṭṭâr is a later forgery (or at least its introduction—where the attribution is explicitly made—is a forgery) that took advantage of this confusion. Shafi‘i-Kadkani’s argument is somewhat speculative, but it has generally been met with approval by the scholarly community. Thus, a stable—if tentative—scholarly consensus has formed regarding ‘Aṭṭâr’s oeuvre, which is now thought to consist only of the four didactic *maṣnavis* (the *Book of Secrets*, the *Conference of the Birds*, the *Book of Affliction*, and the *Divine Book/Khosrow-nâma*), the *Divân*, the *Choice Book*, and the prose *Memorial*.⁶⁹

Table 1: Significant Works Attributed to ‘Aṭṭâr

Title	Author	Provenance	Comments	Ritter’s Group
<i>Book of Secrets</i> (<i>Asrâr-nâma</i>)	Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr	12th-13th century		I
<i>Conference of the Birds</i> (<i>Manteq al-ṭayr</i>)	Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr	12th-13th century	Some manuscripts contain a late 12th- century date	I
<i>Book of Affliction</i> (<i>Moṣibat-nâma</i>)	Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr	12th-13th century		I
<i>Divine Book</i> (<i>Elâhi-nâma</i>)	Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr	12th-13th century		I
<i>Husking the Heart</i> (<i>Sharḥ al-qalb</i>)	Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr	12th-13th century	Destroyed	I
<i>Book of Essences</i> (<i>Ḥavâher-nâma</i>)	Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr	12th-13th century	Destroyed	I
<i>Memorial of Saints</i> (<i>Tazkerat al-owleyâ</i>)	Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr	12th-13th century	Likely composed before the <i>Mokhtâr-nâma</i>	I

69. Many spurious works continue to be read as authentic, especially in non-academic religious circles in Iran. For example, the contemporary religious scholar Qâder Fâzeli maintains the authenticity of many apocryphal attributions and believes them to be spiritually valuable for modern Shi‘i readers. He has compiled an extensive subject correspondence for ‘Aṭṭâr’s works, including the *Book of Affliction*, the *Conference of the Birds*, the *Book of Secrets*, the *Book of Advice* (*Pand-nâma*), the *Locus of Wonders* (*Mazhar al-‘ajâ‘eb*), and the *Book of Ḥallāj* (*Ḥallāj-nâma*). See his *Farhang-e mowzu‘i-ye adab-e pârsi: Mowzu‘-bandi va naqd va barrasi, Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr Nayshâburi* (Tehran: Ṭalâya, 1374 [1995-96]); *Andisha-ye ‘Aṭṭâr: Taḥlil-e ofoq-e andisha-ye Shaykh Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr-e Nayshâburi* (Tehran: Ṭalâya, 1374 [1995-96]). Also see Ernst, “Losing One’s Head,” 337-8.

Table 1, Continued

<i>Choice Book</i> (<i>Mokhtâr-nâma</i>)	Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr	early 13th century?	Composed after the <i>maṣnavis</i>	I
<i>Divân</i>	Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr	12th-13th century	Reworked around the same time the <i>Mokhtâr- nâma</i> was compiled	I
<i>Khosrow-nâma</i>	Disputed	?	Shafi‘i-Kadkani argues that the prologue is a 15th-century forgery	I
<i>Extracts of the Essence</i> (<i>Ḥavâher al-zât</i>)	Unlikely ‘Aṭṭâr	Before 1335	First known manuscript dated 1335; exhibits a “dithyrambic” style	II
<i>Book of the Camel</i> (<i>Oshtor-nâma</i>)	Unlikely ‘Aṭṭâr	14th century?	Stylistically similar to <i>Ḥavâher al-zât</i>	II
<i>Book of Ḥallâj</i> (<i>Ḥallâj-nâma</i>)	Unlikely ‘Aṭṭâr	14th century?	Stylistically similar to <i>Ḥavâher al-zât</i> and <i>Oshtor-nâma</i>	II
<i>Locus of Wonders</i> (<i>Mazḥar al-‘ajâ’eb</i>)	‘Aṭṭâr-e Tuni	15th century?	Contains many references to events that occurred after ‘Aṭṭâr’s death; clear Shi‘i orientation	III
<i>Tongue of the Unseen</i> (<i>Lisân al-gayb</i>)	‘Aṭṭâr-e Tuni	15th century?	Stylistically similar to the <i>Mazḥar al-‘ajâ’eb</i>	III
<i>Book of Advice</i> (<i>Pand-nâma</i>)	Unlikely ‘Aṭṭâr	15th century or earlier	Does not appear in the manuscript tradition until the 15th century	I

‘Aṭṭâr’s probable oeuvre is thus both quite extensive and formally diverse. This is all the more remarkable when we recall that ‘Aṭṭâr operated outside of the confines of the patronage economy. He was not the first amateur to compose poetry, of course, but previous amateur production tended to circulate orally and was limited to specific folk forms like the quatrain. ‘Aṭṭâr, by contrast, worked in a full range of poetic forms and carefully managed his textual legacy: it included not only quatrains (which he himself compiled into the *Choice Book*), but also *ghazals*, *qasidas*, and *maṣnavis*. By composing in these forms, he proved that he could

work in all of the major formal types expected of a professional poet, even though he rejected the patronage system for ethical and religious reasons.⁷⁰ He speaks admiringly of the verse of court poets like Anvari, Khâqâni, and Azraqi and presents himself as their poetic heir, while simultaneously claiming to surpass these forbearers not only aesthetically, but ethically and religiously as well.⁷¹ Likewise, ‘Aṭṭâr seems to have been familiar with, influenced by, and in competition with his near-contemporary Neẓâmi, even though he does not mention him by name. Aṭṭâr’s penchant for long, book-length narrative structures was likely inspired by Neẓâmi’s example, and Barât Zanjâni has identified a number of verses in ‘Aṭṭâr’s *maṣnavis* that seem to be agonistic responses to lines from Neẓâmi.⁷² ‘Aṭṭâr’s oeuvre thus seems to have been carefully planned in order to demonstrate the breadth of his talent and engagement with the tradition: through it, he lays claim to a place in the canon even as he distances himself from his models by rejecting the practice of patronage, celebrating his amateur status, and stressing the religious content of his poems.

Biography and Social Milieu

The scholarly inquiry into the authenticity of ‘Aṭṭâr’s works carries important consequences for our understanding of his biography. For both Qazvini and Ritter, the *Tongue of the Unseen* (*Lisân al-ghayb*) and the *Locus of Wonders* (*Mazhar al-‘ajâ’eb*) served as major sources for their initial reconstructions of ‘Aṭṭâr’s life, but because these poems were later recognized as fabrications, the seemingly rich conclusions that they were able to draw had to be dismissed, including ‘Aṭṭâr’s alleged travels, his meeting with Najm al-Din Kobra, Shi‘i confession, conflict

70. See Chapter 2, p. 97-100.

71. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 718, 722.

72. Barât Zanjâni, “Ḥakim Neẓâmi-ye Ganjavi va Shaykh Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr,” *Âyanda* 2, no. 9 (Ordibehesht 1362 [April-May 1983]).

with the jurist Samarqandi, and subsequent exile to Mecca.⁷³ The doubts regarding the authenticity of the romance *Khosrow-nâma* also reverberate through any potential biography of ‘Aṭṭâr: no longer can Ebn al-Rabib be considered ‘Aṭṭâr’s spiritual guide, nor can ‘Aṭṭâr be assumed to have been a successful perfumer-druggist, composing his poems in his store between patients.⁷⁴ In the works now accepted as authentic, ‘Aṭṭâr reveals almost nothing directly about himself or his contemporary circumstances: he mentions no birthdate, no legal affiliation, no sufi shaykh, and no contemporary political events; he provides no overview of his literary contacts, personal travels, or chronology of his poetic activities.⁷⁵ Reliable external sources do not fill many of these biographical gaps, either. The earliest notices on the poet, found in the works of Ibn al-Fuwaṭī and ‘Owfi, are exceedingly terse, providing only a few lines of information and omitting the sort of positive biographical data that twentieth-century researchers longed for.⁷⁶ And while later sources such as Jâmi and Dowlat-Shâh are much more extensive, they were written more than 200 years after ‘Aṭṭâr’s death and motivated by a hagiographical agenda, narrating ‘Aṭṭâr’s life according to the strictures of saintly biography (which, ironically, ‘Aṭṭâr

73. Ritter, “Philologika X,” 134-42; Qazvini, intro. to *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 1:5-15.

74. Badi‘ al-Zamân Foruzânfar, *Sharḥ-e aḥvâl va naqd va tahlil-e âsâr-e Shaykh Farid al-Din Moḥammad ‘Aṭṭâr-e Nayshâburi* (Tehran: Châp-khâna-ye Dâneshgâh, 1339 [1960-1]; repr., Tehran: Âsim, 1389 [2010-11]), 27-30. Page numbers refer to the reprint edition. It is Foruzânfar who has most strongly suggested that ‘Aṭṭâr was a disciple of the Ebn al-Rabib, and he exerts a great deal of effort trying to identify this figure. Regarding ‘Aṭṭâr’s profession, once the *Khosrow-nâma*’s description of his bustling drugstore is rendered inadmissible, there is little evidence in the authentic works to suggest that ‘Aṭṭâr actually worked as an apothecary except for a short anecdote in the *Asrâr-nâma* (2858-74). According to its narrative, ‘Aṭṭâr was once asked to compound a syrup (*sharbat*) for an afflicted miser in Nayshâbur; he attempted to administer rosewater but the patient refused the treatment. The anecdote does not necessarily imply that ‘Aṭṭâr was a professional apothecary, however. As Shafi‘i-Kadkani points out (intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 28-9), the pen-name could also have been inherited from his father.

75. Although he mentions no legal affiliation, Este‘lami argues that he was a Ḥanafī on the basis of the sobriquets applied to Abu Ḥanifa in the *Memorial*. See “Narratology and Realities,” 59-60.

76. Moḥammad ‘Owfi, *Lobâb al-albâb*, ed. Edward Browne (Leiden: Brill, 1903-6), 2:337-39; Kamâl al-Dīn b. al-Fuwaṭī, *Talkhiṣ majma‘ al-ādâb fī mu‘jam al-aqâb*, ed. Muṣṭafâ Jawâd (Damascus: Wizârat al-Thaqâfa wa’l-Irshâd al-Qawmī, 1963-65), 4:3:461-62.

had himself helped to popularize in the Persian language), complete with sudden conversion, extravagant martyrdom, and continuing spiritual presence in the world after death.⁷⁷

It has therefore become common to bemoan that lack of reliable data regarding ‘Aṭṭār’s life and social milieu. Nevertheless, even though details of his biography remain murky, we can still infer the broad outlines of his social context, and, more importantly, the sorts of readers and listeners that he was targeting. In the following pages, we will review what is known about ‘Aṭṭār’s life and show that he was, in addition to an amateur poet, a mystically minded preacher and informal spiritual guide, and that these homiletic activities formed an important context for his poetic work.

Towards a Chronology of Attar’s Life and Poetic Activity

The earliest mention of ‘Aṭṭār’s death is found in the work of Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, according to whom the poet “was martyred by the Tatars [Mongols] at Nishapur.”⁷⁸ Most scholars have taken this to refer to the initial Mongol destruction of the city in 1221, but this need not necessarily be the case.⁷⁹ Jāmi and Dowlat-Shāh both give a death date of 1230, and Shafi‘i-Kadkani has argued, not entirely convincingly, that this is more likely to be correct.⁸⁰ In particular, he points out that Dowlat-Shāh provides not just the year of ‘Aṭṭār’s death, but the month and day as well—10 Jomādi II 627 / 3 May 1230. According to Shafi‘i-Kadkani, such specificity is contrary to Dowlat-Shāh’s standard habit; therefore, he likely had access to a “special source” that he

77. On the narrative conventions of saintly biography and the tendency towards typification, see John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 11-140, 235-55.

78. Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Talkhīṣ*, 462.

79. ‘Alā’ al-Din Atā-Malek Jovayni, *History of the World-Conqueror*, trans. John Boyle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), 176-8; Ritter, “Philologika XIV,” 7; Ritter, “‘Aṭṭār”; Foruzānfar, *Sharḥ-e aḥvāl-e ‘Aṭṭār*, 70-2; Reinert, “‘Aṭṭār, Farīd-al-Dīn.” Ritter mistakenly places the Mongol massacre in 1220, not 1221.

80. Jāmi, *Nafahāt*, 598; Samarqandi, *Tazkerat al-sho‘arā*, 332.

deemed particularly reliable, because otherwise he would not have included this unusually exact date. Furthermore, Shafi'i-Kadkani speculates that this "special source" was 'Aṭṭâr's original gravestone, which he suspects Dowlat-Shâh had personally visited.⁸¹ His argument, however, assumes a rather high level of historical subtlety on the part of the notoriously unreliable Dowlat-Shâh, and there is no way for us to independently verify the accuracy of this "special source." Even if such a source existed, and even if Dowlat-Shâh believed it to be particularly reliable, the exact day and month that it gives could still have easily been invented by its author in order to endow the date with an appearance of exactitude and authenticity.

The birthdate that Dowlat-Shâh provides, 6 Sha'bân 513 / 19 November 1119, is even more problematic because it would mean, as he himself points out, that 'Aṭṭâr lived a miraculously long life of 114 (lunar) years.⁸² (It seems Dowlat-Shâh's arithmetic here is a little bit off; if 'Aṭṭâr was born in Sha'bân and killed in Jomâdi II, then he would have actually died just a couple of months shy of his 114th birthday.) Shafi'i-Kadkani attempts to account for this and maintain the credibility of his hypothetical "special source" by suggesting that Dowlat-Shâh misread (or miscopied) it, rendering *khamṣin* (fifty-) as *'ashar* (-teen), so that 'Aṭṭâr would have actually been born in 553/1158.⁸³ It seems rash, however, to attribute any sort of accuracy to a "reverse engineered" date in a completely unknown and unseen source that a rather careless biographer like Dowlat-Shâh *may* have deemed accurate. Moreover, the legend of 'Aṭṭâr's 114-year life certainly could not have originated with Dowlat-Shâh's alleged mistake as Shafi'i-Kadkani suggests, since Jâmi, who wrote before Dowlat-Shâh, also assigns a death year of 1230

81. Shafi'i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 50-4.

82. Samarqandi, *Tazkerat al-sho'arâ*, 323-4.

83. Shafi'i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 53-4.

and a lifespan of 114 years to ‘Aṭṭâr.⁸⁴ It is more likely that these dates were already circulating, and that part of their attraction for biographers like Dowlat-Shâh can be explained by the sacrality associated with the number 114.⁸⁵ And by quoting the exact day and month along with the year, Dowlat-Shâh bolsters the authenticity of this miraculously long life.

Other sources are not much help in establishing a birthdate, either. ‘Owfi includes ‘Aṭṭâr among the poets who lived after Sultan Sanjar (d. 1157), by which he likely means that most of his poetic activity occurred after Sanjar’s reign, but which leaves open the possibility that he was born earlier.⁸⁶ Foruzânfar notes that ‘Aṭṭâr never attributes more than “seventy-some” (*haftâd-o-and*) years to himself, and on this basis he counts back from 1221, which he takes as ‘Aṭṭâr’s death, to arrive at a possible birth year of around 1145.⁸⁷ If, however, we follow Shafi‘i-Kadkani in taking 1230 as his death year, then this methodology would suggest that a birthdate around 1155 is most likely.

The relative chronology of ‘Aṭṭâr’s literary activity is also difficult to reconstruct. None of his works can be reliably dated on the basis of internal evidence. Some manuscripts of the *Conference of the Birds* include a concluding verse that claims the poem was completed in 573/1177-7; other variants cite different years, including 583/1187-8 and 570/1174-75. In any case, these dates do not appear in most manuscripts, including the earliest ones, so they are difficult to accept with any certainty, and most scholars have deemed them later interpolations.⁸⁸ The only point of chronology that seems beyond dispute is that the *Choice Book* must

84. Jâmi, *Nafahât*, 598.

85. The number’s significance derives from the fact that the *Qur’an* contains 114 *suras*. ‘Aṭṭâr was also said to have composed 114 works; see p. 14 above.

86. ‘Owfi, *Lobâb al-albâb*, 2:337.

87. Foruzânfar, *Sharḥ-e aḥvâl-e ‘Aṭṭâr*, 7-11.

88. De Blois and Storey, *Persian Literature*, 5.2:281; Foruzânfar, *Sharḥ-e aḥvâl-e ‘Aṭṭâr*, 61-3; Ritter, “Philologika XIV,” 50-6; Shafi‘i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 74.

have been completed and disseminated in its current form after the other authentic poetic works mentioned by name in its introduction. Even this fact, however, does not preclude the possibility that ‘Aṭṭār revised those earlier works at a later date: many works of pre-modern Persian literature existed in multiple authorial recensions, and the *Choice Book* itself explains how the *Divân* went through at least two very different forms.⁸⁹

Although the poems themselves are not much help in establishing a chronology, some external evidence suggests that the *maṣnavis* were produced closer to the end of ‘Aṭṭār’s life. More specifically, the biographer-anthologist ‘Owfi, who visited Nishapur in 1206-7, fails to mention any of ‘Aṭṭār’s *maṣnavis* even though he always enumerates *maṣnavis* attributed to other poets. According to Shafi‘i-Kadkani, this may suggest that ‘Aṭṭār’s *maṣnavis* were all completed after ‘Owfi’s visit (assuming, of course, that the date in some manuscripts of the *Conference of the Birds* is a later interpolation).⁹⁰ Even if we follow Shafi‘i-Kadkani in attributing ‘Aṭṭār’s *maṣnavis* to the last decades of his life, however, the order in which they were written remains difficult to determine. For example, Foruzānfar argued that the *Book of Secrets* and the *Divine Book* must have been produced later than the other *maṣnavis* because they contain more vociferous complaints against old age, but given the conventionality of this trope, it does not seem to be a particularly reliable way to establish the relative dating of works in the corpus, especially if they were all written near the end of the ‘Aṭṭār’s life as Shafi‘i-Kadkani suggests.⁹¹ Others have claimed that the *Book of Secrets* was likely ‘Aṭṭār’s first *maṣnavi* because it lacks a frame-narrative, a sign of his alleged poetic immaturity.⁹² The *Divine Book* was

89. ‘Aṭṭār, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 70-1.

90. Shafi‘i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manteq al-tayr*, 72-4.

91. Foruzānfar, *Sharḥ-e aḥvâl-e ‘Aṭṭâr*, 61.

92. ‘Abd al-Ḥosayn Zarrinkub, *Ṣedâ-ye bâl-e simorgh* (Tehran: Sokhan, 1386 [2007-8]), 70-1; J. A. Boyle, “The Religious *Mathnavîs* of Farîd al-Dîn ‘Aṭṭâr,” *Iran* 17 (1979), 9-10; De Bruijn, “Preaching Poet,” 93; Kermani, *Terror of God*, 30-1; Reinert, “‘Aṭṭâr, Farîd-al-Dîn.” Boyle’s oft-quoted assertion seems to be based partly on a misun-

thought for a time to be the last of the *maṣnavis*, because it is absent from ‘Aṭṭār’s enumeration in the *Choice Book*; but if we accept the argument that this work was originally known as the *Khosrow-nâma*, then this data-point must be jettisoned.⁹³ Shafi‘i-Kadkani himself has suggested that the *maṣnavis* were written in the order that they are mentioned in the *Choice Book*: first the *Divine Book*, then the *Book of Secrets*, the *Conference of the Birds*, and the *Book of Affliction*.⁹⁴ Some scholars have also argued that either the *Book of Affliction* or the *Conference of the Birds* is ‘Aṭṭār’s last *maṣnavi* on the basis that it embodies a more “mature” mysticism or world-view; the difference of opinion here betrays the subjectivity of the criterion.⁹⁵

Did ‘Aṭṭār Have a Sufi Master?

But for most scholars, premodern and modern alike, the most vexing problem of ‘Aṭṭār’s biography has been whether or not he ever had a formal spiritual guide (*pir*, shaykh), and the attendant question of the nature of his relationship to the sufi tradition. A novice’s initiation into the sufi tradition, as portrayed in normative manuals of sufi practice and dogma, required a period of tutelage and training in the service of a sufi master; after this period, generally several years, the novice would be granted a cloak (*kherqa*) signifying his membership in the community.⁹⁶ In his authentic works, however, ‘Aṭṭār does not allude to any spiritual master he may have had, much to the consternation of later scholars. On one occasion, in the introduction to the *Memorial*, he recounts a visit to a certain pious man whose name is given in Este‘lami’s edi-

derstanding of Ritter’s proposed chronology in “Philologika X,” 155.

93. Ritter, “Philologika X,” 155; Boyle, “Religious *Mathnavis*,” 10; Fritz Meier, “The Spiritual Man in the Persian Poet ‘Aṭṭār,” *Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* 4 (1954), 273.

94. Shafi‘i-Kadkani, intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 31-2.

95. Kermani, *Terror of God*, 31; Purnâmdârîân, “Negâhi be dâstân-pardâzi-ye ‘Aṭṭâr,” 274; Zarrinkub, *Şedâ-ye bâl-e simorgh*, 93.

96. For one of the classic early descriptions of sufi training and investiture, see ‘Ali b. ‘Oṣmân Hojviri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, ed. Maḥmud ‘Âbedi (Tehran: Soroush, 1392 [2013-14]), 74-5. Translated by Nicholson as *The “Kashf al-Mahjûb”: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism* (London: Luzac, 1911), 54-56.

tion as Majd al-Din Khwârazmi; some scholars have taken this figure to be ‘Aṭṭâr’s *pir*, although the anecdote itself seems to suggest only an informal relationship between two men with a shared inclination towards mystical piety.⁹⁷ According to this narrative, ‘Aṭṭâr once visited Khwârazmi—whom ‘Aṭṭâr styles “imam”—to find him weeping; when he asked him why, Khwârazmi replied, “last night I prayed to God to make me one of that tribe [i.e., sufis of elevated spiritual states], or an observer of that tribe, and perhaps God has answered my prayer.” Their exchange suggests that ‘Aṭṭâr respected and was on intimate terms with this Khwârazmi, who shared his veneration of sufi holy men, but it does not necessarily imply he was his formal disciple.

The exact identity of Majd al-Din Khwârazmi is also opaque, and the name does not appear in any of our standard sources.⁹⁸ Many pre-modern scholars seem to have found the name just as puzzling since they often “correct” it to Majd al-Din Baghdâdi, a famous disciple of Najm al-Din Kobra who was allegedly executed by drowning in 1209.⁹⁹ Jâmi, for example, quotes this passage in his hagiographical *Breaths of Intimacy* (*Nafahât al-ons*), where he renders the name as Majd al-Din Baghdâdi and interprets the encounter to mean that ‘Aṭṭâr was Bâghdâdi’s formal disciple (*morid*).¹⁰⁰ There is a certain logic to this identification since Baghdâdi did indeed hail from the region of Khwârazm—the village of Baghdâdak to be precise (hence his sobriquet). Nevertheless, he does not seem to have ever been known as Khwârazmi and most modern scholars thus reject the identification.¹⁰¹

97. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 8-9.

98. Shafi‘i-Kadkani, intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 26.

99. Shafi‘i-Kadkani, *Zabur*, 70-1; Hamid Algar, “Kobrawiya ii. The Order,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated July 15, 2009, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kobrawiya-ii-the-order>.

100. Jâmi, *Nafahât*, 596-7.

101. One still finds instances in which modern scholarship continues to identify this Majd al-Din Khwârazmi as Baghdâdi, however; see Kermani, *Terror of God*, 26; Reinert, “‘Aṭṭâr, Farîd-al-Dîn.”

One early manuscript of the *Memorial* gives the name as Aḥmad Khwâri, yet another Kobravi mystic.¹⁰² Shâfi'i-Kadkani has opined that this reading is likely correct, but a more rigorous analysis of the *Memorial's* manuscript tradition would be necessary before his claim could be accepted as anything more than initial speculation.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the possibility is intriguing, since Aḥmad Khwâri was one of Majd al-Din Baghdâdi's prominent disciples, for whom he wrote his treatise the *Gift of the Free (Toḥfat al-barara)*.¹⁰⁴ 'Aṭṭâr would thus be connected to Majd al-Din Baghdâdi after all (albeit indirectly though his student) and therefore likely familiar with Kobravi doctrines and practices.¹⁰⁵ According to Hermann Landolt, if the anecdote does indeed refer to Aḥmad-e Khwâri, then his weeping and cryptic remarks could be understood as a veiled reference to the execution of his teacher, Majd al-Din Baghdâdi, meaning that the *Memorial* was compiled after 1209.¹⁰⁶ In any case, regardless of whether 'Aṭṭâr refers here to Aḥmad-e Khwâri or an otherwise unknown Majd al-Din Khwârazmi, the anecdote is significant in that it shows 'Aṭṭâr was embedded in a social context in which he associated with other mystically minded individuals even if no formal relationship of spiritual discipleship can be ascertained.

Jâmi's desire to identify this Majd al-Din (whoever he may actually have been) as 'Aṭṭâr's formal sufi master is emblematic of a broader tendency within Timurid sacred biogra-

102. Blochet 403. Variant noted in *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, ed. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1905-7), 1:8-9, 1:19-20.

103. See Shafi'i-Kadkani, intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 26; Shafi'i-Kadkani, *Zabur*, 80-1.

104. Hermann Landolt, "'Aṭṭâr, Sufism, and Ismailism," in Lewisohn and Shackle, *Spiritual Flight*, 10.

105. Ibid., 10-1. 'Aṭṭâr's works, at times, seem to suggest such a familiarity. For example, as Landolt points out, he makes a distinction between the "journey to God" and the "journey in God" at the end of the *Book of Affliction* (7078-79). 'Aṭṭâr's interest in sufi retreat (*chella*), as evinced in the frame-tale of the same work, was also shared with the Kobravis. Also See Muhammad Isa Waley, "Najm al-Dīn Kubrā and the Central Asian School of Sufism (the Kubrawiyyah)," in *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 89.

106. Landolt, "'Aṭṭâr, Sufism, and Ismailism," 10.

phy. From the earliest periods of sufism, legendary spiritual heroes tended to be attached to other prominent sufi figures in the tradition's hagiographical writings, and this trend was reinforced in the Timurid era by the growing importance of the *selsela*, chains of spiritual initiation stretching back to the Prophet, which had become a pre-requisite for every self-respecting sufi. In 'Aṭṭâr's case, Timurid biographers were particularly troubled by the poet's failure to explicitly identify the spiritual guide they assumed that he must have had. They thus proposed several possible candidates for this historical role, all based on spurious sources or overly biographical readings of 'Aṭṭâr's works. For example, according to Dowlat-Shâh, 'Aṭṭâr did associate with the aforementioned Majd al-Din Baghdâdi, but received only a non-initiatory cloak of benediction (*kherqa-ye tabarrok*) from him; his primary shaykh, according to Dowlat-Shâh, was Rokn al-Din Akkâfi (d. 1155).¹⁰⁷ This Nayshâburi religious scholar features prominently in a number of anecdotes in 'Aṭṭâr's *maṣnavis*, and he is usually portrayed in a positive light; this fact, combined with the Timurid expectation of a clear *selsela*, likely motivated Dowlat-Shâh's identification of him as 'Aṭṭâr's *pir*. None of these anecdotes, however, implies that 'Aṭṭâr personally met Rokn al-Din, and given that the latter died from complications of his imprisonment at the hands of the Ghuzz Turks when 'Aṭṭâr was either very young or possibly not even born, any relationship of spiritual training is unlikely.¹⁰⁸ Also according to Dowlat-Shâh, 'Aṭṭâr associated with Qoṭb al-Din Ḥaydar (d. c. 1221), the famous qalandar mystic of Khorâsân.¹⁰⁹ 'Aṭṭâr's father was allegedly a disciple of Ḥaydar, and the poet also "found the gaze" of the holy man in

107. Samarqandi, *Tazkerat al-sho'arâ*, 326, 332-33; Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 712.

108. Foruzânfâr, *Sharḥ-e aḥvâl-e 'Aṭṭâr*, 24-5.

109. Little is known for certain about Qoṭb al-Din Ḥaydar's life. See Tahsin Yazıcı, "Qoṭb-al-Din Ḥaydar Zâvi," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 11 June 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/qotb-al-din-haydar-zavi>; Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200-1550* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 44-6.

his youth, foreshadowing his future spiritual achievement.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, this assertion of Dowlat-Shâh's is difficult to take seriously when 'Aṭṭâr himself makes no mention of the incident in any genuine work. The account seems to be motivated by the spurious *Ḥaydari Book* (*Ḥaydari-nâma*) that Dowlat-Shâh accepts as genuine, but which was a controversial attribution even in the Timurid era.¹¹¹ Finally, even though Jâmi himself argues that Majd al-Din Bâghdâdi was 'Aṭṭâr's *pir*, he reports that others believed him to be an Uwaysi saint inducted into sufism by the spirit (*ruhâniyat*) of Ḥallâj, a notion that likely derived from the spurious Ḥallâj-centric *maṣnavis* of Ritter's second group, such as the *Book of the Camel* (*Oshtor-nâma*) and the *Extracts of the Essence* (*Javâher al-zât*).¹¹²

Perhaps more reliable, but still far from certain, is the spiritual lineage recorded for 'Aṭṭâr by Faṣiḥ Khwâfi in his fifteenth-century chronicle, the "*Faṣiḥ-ian*" *Compendium* (*Mojmal-e Faṣiḥi*), in which he connects the poet to Abu Sa'id by way of the latter's well-known great-grandson and hagiographer, Ebn Monavvar, via a series of rather obscure figures. More specifically, he claims that 'Aṭṭâr was trained in sufism by one Jamâl al-Din Moḥammad b. Moḥammad al-Noghondari al-Ṭusi, known as Imam al-Rabbâni; from there the lineage passes

110. Samarqandi, *Tazkerat al-sho'arâ*, 332-3.

111. Foruzânfâr, *Sharḥ-e ahvâl-e 'Aṭṭâr*, 25. See page 14 above.

112. Jâmi, *Nafahât*, 597. It was a widespread notion in the Timurid era, especially among those associated with the Naqshbandi order, that a certain class of holy figures existed who were inducted into sufism by the spirit of deceased masters; they were called Uwaysis after Uways al-Qaranî, the legendary "companion" of the Prophet who never actually saw Muhammad in the flesh but communicated with him telepathically. 'Aṭṭâr himself discusses Uwysis in his notice on Uways al-Qaranî in the *Memorial* (25), but he understands them only as holy men instructed by the Prophet across space and/or time, and not as sufis inducted into sufism by the spirits of deceased sufi masters. In the *Nafahât* (16), Jâmi actually quotes 'Aṭṭâr's discussion of Uwysis saints and their special relationship to Muhammad, but he amends it with his own explanation of how one can also be initiated by the spirits of past sufi masters, a relationship which, he claims, also qualifies one to be "included among the Uwysis." As evidence for the claim that 'Aṭṭâr was an Uwaysi, (which he himself does not espouse), Jâmi alludes to an anecdote, transmitted by Aflâki, in which Rumi suggests that the light of Ḥallâj manifested itself in 'Aṭṭâr's heart and guided him: see p. 20 above. 'Aṭṭâr also makes reference to a "Ḥallâjîan *pir*" in one of his *ghazals*, which may be significant in this regard; see Matthew Thomas Miller, "Poetics of the Sufi Carnival: The 'Rouge Lyrics' (*Qalandariyât*) of Sanâ'i, 'Attâr, and 'Erâqi" (PhD diss., Washington University in Saint Louis, 2016), 130-1.

back through a Shaykh Sharaf al-Din al-Radâd and a Shaykh Ṣalâḥ al-Din Aḥmad al-Ostâd to Ebn Monnavar, and from there to the hagiographer's grandfather, Abu'l-Faṭḥ Ṭâher, before terminating with Abu Sa'îd himself.¹¹³ Initially noted by Nafisi, this spiritual lineage has recently received renewed attention from Shafi'i-Kadkani who, ever the philologist, suggests that the very obscurity of its members may be a testament to its authenticity.¹¹⁴ According to Shafi'i-Kadkani, the text-editing principle of *lectio difficilior* can be usefully applied to *selsela*-criticism; if the lineage were forged, so the argument goes, it would have likely included well-known scholars and mystics who could easily be imagined as the spiritual forefathers of the great 'Aṭṭâr, and not the three obscure figures who appear here between 'Aṭṭâr and Ebn Monavvar. And despite their obscurity, Shafi'i-Kadkani believes that he has managed to locate possible references to these seeming-unknowns in various other sources that fit chronologically with the proposed *selsela*.¹¹⁵

Shafi'i-Kadkani's arguments have been criticized by Landolt, who claims that the entire lineage was likely invented to bestow some historicity on the spiritual relationship between Abu Sa'îd and 'Aṭṭâr alluded to in some of the latter's poems.¹¹⁶ According to Landolt, the desire to connect 'Aṭṭâr to the famed Abu Sa'îd could have easily motivated the emergence of this *selsela*, especially during the Timurid era when unbroken spiritual lineages had become de rigueur. Nevertheless, even if the historical connection to Abu Sa'îd is rejected as suspect and

113. Faṣiḥ Khwâfi, *Mojmal-e Faṣiḥi*, ed. Seyyed Moḥsen Nâji-Naṣrâbâdi (Tehran: Asâṭir, 1386 [2007-8]), 2:764. On Ebn Monavvar, Abu Sa'îd, and his descendants see Moḥammad Reżâ Shafi'i-Kadkani, "Khândân-e Abu Sa'îd-e Abu'l-Khayr dar târikh," in *Nâma-ye Minovi*, ed. Iraj Afshâr, et al. (Tehran: Kâviân, 1350 [1971]).

114. Sa'îd Nafisi, *Sar-chashma-ye tasavvof* (Tehran: Eṭṭehâd, 1343 [1965]), 190-1; Shafi'i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manteq al-tayr*, 63-74.

115. Shafi'i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manteq al-tayr*, 65-8.

116. Landolt, "'Aṭṭâr, Sufism, and Ismailism," 10. 'Aṭṭâr speaks of Abu Sa'îd quite often in his anecdotes, where he portrays him as an exemplary figure of mystical piety. Moreover, in one of his *qaṣidas* (792) he claims to have found fortune through the "the breath of Bu Sa'îd" and the "light of his breast." On the basis of these lines Foruzânfar (26) also suggests that 'Aṭṭâr may have been an Uwaysi, initiated not by the *ruḥâniyat* of Ḥallâj, but by Abu Sa'îd.

the entire notion of a formal *selsela* a later back-projection, the point still stands that if the lineage were wholly invented, one would not expect ‘Aṭṭār’s immediate teachers to be so obscure. Rather than a complete forgery, it seems more likely that ‘Aṭṭār had some sort of relationship with this relatively minor Imam al-Rabbâni, which was later remembered as a formal spiritual discipleship in a *selsela* stretching back to Abu Sa‘id. Thus, even if we reject the designation of Imam al-Rabbâni as ‘Aṭṭār’s formal *pir*, the proposed lineage still suggests that ‘Aṭṭār interacted in some capacity with local religious leaders.

Finally, even if ‘Aṭṭār cannot be definitively linked to a specific spiritual guide, his own work suggests that he was committed to the idea that some sort of pedagogical guidance was necessary for spiritual success, although perhaps not necessarily within the confines of formal discipleship to a sufi *pir*.¹¹⁷ The importance of spiritual guidance is emphasized in various anecdotes in the *maṣnavis* as well as their frame-tales, all three of which are structured as discourses between a spiritual authority and those who seek his guidance. In the frame-tale of the *Divine Book*, a king dialogues with his six sons, explaining to them the meaning of their desires and guiding them towards the alchemy of the heart; in the *Conference of the Birds*, a hoopoe shepherds the other birds on an arduous quest towards union with their king, the Simorgh; and in the *Book of Affliction*, a *pir* guides his disciple on a visionary journey through the universe and into the self, where he is finally effaced in the the divine. Given ‘Aṭṭār’s high estimation of such pedagogical relationships, it would seem odd if he had not received some sort of spiritual guidance himself, even if we cannot specifically identify his teacher.

117. Reinert, “‘Aṭṭār, Farīd-al-Dīn”; Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1968), 237. Cf. Nasr, “Some Observations on the Place of ‘Aṭṭār within the Sufi Tradition,” 5-9.

But Was He Really a Sufi?

In part because of the ambiguity surrounding his spiritual training, there has been a tendency to doubt whether ‘Aṭṭār was an “actual” sufi.¹¹⁸ Ritter, for example, concludes that “‘Aṭṭār was a pharmacist and doctor, and whilst not actually a Ṣūfī, he admired the holy men and was edified by the tales told about them, from his youth onward.”¹¹⁹ According to Kermani, ‘Aṭṭār was “more of an empathetic observer of Sufism than an active exponent,” who “consciously kept his distance from the Sufi scene, concentrating all the more intently on saving the great legacy from oblivion with his *Lives of the Saints* and verse epics.”¹²⁰ Besides the lack of a *pir*, proponents of this theory often turn to ‘Aṭṭār’s own writings for support, especially a few lines from the *Memorial* in which ‘Aṭṭār claims to be merely “pretending” (*tashabbōh*) to sufism and impudently seeking the friendship of the friends of God.¹²¹ For ‘Aṭṭār, however, such claims functioned not as transparent statements of autobiographical “fact,” but as performative proclamations entirely consistent with an eastern Iranian, Malāmati-infused sufism that stressed humility, veneration of past spiritual heroes, and the active rejection of a pious reputation.

On an even more fundamental level, however, the question of whether or not ‘Aṭṭār was “really” a sufi relies on a problematic understanding of sufism as a discrete socio-religious category. Such an understanding is partially an anachronistic back-projection from later periods, when being a sufi necessarily entailed membership in a trans-regional, institutionalized *ṭariqa*. But it is also encouraged by earlier sources, including the manuals of Hojviri, Qushayrī, and Kalābādhi, who tend to portray the “the sufis” as a stable, clearly identifiable, and more-or-less homogeneous group. A closer reading of these manuals, however, in conjunction with histori-

118. De Bruijn, “Preaching Poet,” 88.

119. Ritter, “‘Aṭṭār.”

120. Kermani, *Terror of God*, 26-7.

121. ‘Aṭṭār, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 6, 9.

cal and literary sources, suggests these clear-cut religious boundaries were a rhetorically motivated idealization, and that the reality on the ground was much more fluid. During the eleventh century, when both the madrasah (religious college) and the *khânaqâh* (sufi lodge) were becoming more widespread, there was significant overlap between the two.¹²² In Nishapur, well-known sufis such as Qushayrî managed madrasahs in which the exoteric religious sciences were taught alongside mystical topics.¹²³ Similarly, legal scholars also endowed sufi lodges, as in the case of the *khânaqâh* of Moḥammad-e Maṣṣūr, a Ḥanafî scholar and preacher in Sarakhs.¹²⁴ And despite the emphasis on secrecy and initiation, many sufi figures—including luminaries such as Abu Saʿid and Aḥmad-e Ghazzâlî—routinely delivered public sermons in which they disseminated sufi beliefs and practices to a broad public that would have almost certainly been uninitiated to sufism in a formal sense.¹²⁵ Therefore, it seems more useful to approach sufism as a network of practices, attitudes, beliefs, and social relationships that admitted varying degrees of participation rather than a discrete, all-encompassing socio-religious category.

When sufism is understood in this way, ʿAṭṭâr can be seen as a deeply engaged sufi, even if he had never been invested by a formal spiritual master. He was familiar with canonical sufi writers like Qushayrî and Hojviri, upon whom he relies as sources, and he promotes mysti-

122. On the fluid boundary between madrasah and *khânaqâh*, see Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 98-100; Margaret Malamud, “Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 3 (August 1994): 427-42.

123. H. Halm, “al-Ḳuṣṣayrî,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0548.

124. De Bruijn, *Piety and Poetry*, 64; Franklin Lewis, “Reading, Writing, and Recitation: Sanāʿî and the Origins of the Persian Ghazal” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1995), 73-4; Franklin Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 27-8.

125. G Böwering, “Abū Saʿid Abiʿl-Ḳayr,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 21 July 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abu-said-fazlallah-b>; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-quṣṣāṣ waʾl-mudhakkirîn*, ed. and trans. Merlin Swartz (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1971), 104-6, 125-6/trans. 184-6, 210. Ibn al-Jawzī was no fan of Aḥmad-e Ghazzâlî, and he seems particularly concerned by the latter’s influence over the “common people.”

cal beliefs and sensibilities. Regardless of whether he had a formal spiritual guide, he seems to have been socially involved with other mystically minded individuals, such as Majd al-Din Khwârazmi. We should also note that important sufi figures like Kalâbâdhî and Sarrâj do not seem to have been invested by a shaykh, and no one questions whether they were “real” sufis.¹²⁶ Finally, the testimony of contemporaries like ‘Owfi and Naşir al-Din ʿTusi shows that ‘Aṭṭâr’s mystical piety was no mere private inclination, as is sometimes intimated, but manifested itself in the public sphere. According to their accounts, ‘Aṭṭâr was recognized as a local mystical authority who actively propagated a sufi worldview through sermons and dialogue.

‘Owfi’s account is the earlier of the two. It is found in his biographical anthology, the *Marrow of Minds* (*Lobâb al-albâb*), which was likely completed around 1221-22. The notice on ‘Aṭṭâr, however, is probably based on information he personally collected in 1206-7, when he stayed in Nishapur for a time.¹²⁷ ‘Aṭṭâr was almost certainly alive then, and ‘Owfi, contrary to his usual habit in the *Marrow*, speaks of him in the present tense, perhaps signifying that he believed ‘Aṭṭâr to be still living when he finally compiled the work over a decade later.¹²⁸ There is no indication that ‘Owfi personally met the poet, but at the very least he would have learned of him and his poetry through his local contacts. Although silent on the question of ‘Aṭṭâr’s shaykh, he nevertheless understood ‘Aṭṭâr as a practitioner of mystical piety: he describes him as “a traveller (*sâlek*) of the path of truth (*ḥaqiqat*) and a resident of the prayer rug of the way (*ṭariqat*),” a formulation clearly linked to sufism on a terminological and conceptual level, and ‘Owfi praises other known mystical poets in similar terms.¹²⁹ He also signals the mystical con-

126. Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 67-71.

127. ‘Owfi, *Lobâb al-albâb*, 2:337-39; Edward Browne, preface to *Lobâb al-albâb*, by Moḥammad ‘Owfi (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1906), 1:7-9.

128. Qazvini, intro. to *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 1:2-3.

129. ‘Owfi, *Lobâb al-albâb*, 2:337; Shafi‘i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manteq al-ṭayr*, 44-47, 70. ‘Owfi employs similar plays on *ṭariqat* and *ḥaqiqat* in his descriptions of Şafi al-Din Yazdi (1:278-79) and Shams al-Din Moḥammad b.

tent of ‘Aṭṭār’s work and its popularity among sufi audiences by speaking of its great appeal for the “people of taste” and “lords of passion and taste,” epithets commonly applied to the mystically inclined.¹³⁰

The only other contemporary report on ‘Aṭṭār is from the famous Naṣir al-Din Ṭusi (b. 1201) via his student Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, who served as the librarian at Ṭusi’s Marâgha observatory.¹³¹ More specifically, Ibn al-Fuwaṭī produced an unfinished biographical dictionary that contains a notice on ‘Aṭṭār based mostly on information from Ṭusi, his mentor and teacher. The poet is presented as a practitioner of mystical piety, with the epithet “knower of god” (‘âref) appended to his name in the heading of the notice.¹³² He was, according to Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, “one of the virtuous exemplars of the age in speech and deeds, gnosis and fundamentals, and action and knowledge.”¹³³ Quoting explicitly from Ṭusi, ‘Aṭṭār is further described as a “prolific and eloquent shaykh, and wonderfully knowledgeable and insightful regarding the dicta of the shaykhs, gnostics, and imams who travel the mystical path.”¹³⁴ The notice continues, “He has a

Toghân Kermâni (1:279-81), two contemporary mystical poets. Shâfi‘i-Kadkani interprets the phrase *sâken-e sejâda-ye ʿariqat* to mean that ‘Aṭṭār was in seclusion when ‘Owfi visited Nishapur (he speculates that ‘Aṭṭār would have withdrawn to the village of Kadkan). Although possible, it seems more likely that this phrase signifies not a specific devotional practice (seclusion or otherwise), but rather a general adherence to a sufi way of life.

130. ‘Owfi, *Lobâb al-albâb*, 2:337.

131. Charles Melville, “Ebn al-Fowaṭī, Kamâl-al-Dīn ‘Abd-al-Razzâq,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 6 December 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ebn-al-fowati>; Moḥammad Taqī Modarres-Rāzavi, *Aḥvâl va âşâr-e Moḥammad ben Moḥammad ben al-Ḥasan al-Ṭusi molaqqab be Khwāja Naṣir al-Dīn* (Tehran: Bonyâd-e Farhang-e Irân, 1354 [1974-75]), 252-7.

132. Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Talkhīṣ*, 4.3:461. He gives ‘Aṭṭār’s full name as “Farid al-Dīn Sa‘id b. Yusof b. ‘Ali al-Nisâburi, known as ‘Aṭṭār, al-‘Aṭṭār al-‘Âref.” The given name Sa‘id must be mistaken, however, since ‘Aṭṭār explains that his name is Moḥammad in the *Book of Affliction* (7155) and that he shares a name with the Prophet in the *Conference of the Birds* (406). According to de Blois, Ibn al-Fuwaṭī may have mistaken the epithet *sa‘id*, which can be applied to deceased individuals much like the English “late,” as a proper given name. Regarding his father’s name, Dowlat-Shâh writes that it is Ebrâhim, which Shafi‘i-Kadkani believes to be more reliable; he also suggests that the father may have been known as Abu Sa‘id and ‘Aṭṭār as Ibn Abi Sa‘id, which Ibn al-Fuwaṭī then mistakenly collapsed into ‘Aṭṭār’s given name. Foruzânfar, *Sharḥ-e aḥvâl-e ‘Aṭṭâr*, 1-8; De Blois and Storey, *Persian Literature*, 5.2:271; Shafi‘i-Kadkani, intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 22-3; Shafi‘i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manteq al-tayr*, 59-60.

133. Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Talkhīṣ*, 4.3:461.

134. *Ibid.*, 4.3:461-2.

large *divân* and the *Conference of the Birds* is one of his *maṣnavis*. He was martyred at the hands of the Tatars in Nishapur. He said: ‘I heard that Dhu’l-Nūn Miṣrī would say: ‘sufis prefer God over all things, and God prefers them over all things.’”¹³⁵ It is somewhat unclear if the report of ‘Aṭṭār’s fondness for this maxim is to be understood as a continuation of the direct quotation from Ṭusi, but in any case it is likely that Ṭusi is the source. The notion that ‘Aṭṭār was “prolific and eloquent” seems a clear reference to his literary activities, and the observation that he was well versed in the saints’ dicta is born out by any cursory examination of his *maṣnavis* and the *Memorial*, which contains, in Persian translation, the very same saying attributed to Dhu’l-Nūn mentioned here.¹³⁶

This is the first historical reference to the *Conference of the Birds*, and it is also the first source to mention ‘Aṭṭār’s death, which it attributes to the Mongols. Although no specific date is given, it is often thought that this must have occurred during the Mongols’ violent razing of the city in 1221.¹³⁷ If a 1221 date is accepted for ‘Aṭṭār’s death, then the meeting with Ṭusi must have taken place while the latter was relatively young, no more than twenty years old, although he would have already been well into his philosophical education at the time.¹³⁸ According to Shafī’i-Kadkani, who maintains that ‘Aṭṭār died in 1230, this meeting could have also occurred several years later, which would mean that Ṭusi was active in Nishapur after the attack.¹³⁹ In any case, despite the ambiguity over when exactly this meeting occurred, its historicity is on much stronger footing than the later legend of ‘Aṭṭār’s alleged encounter with

135. Ibid., 4.3:462.

136. ‘Aṭṭār, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 136.

137. On ‘Aṭṭār’s death date, see page 32 above.

138. Foruzânfar, *Sharḥ-e aḥvâl-e ‘Aṭṭâr*, 12-3; Modarres-Raḡavi, *Aḥvâl-e Naṣir al-Din Ṭusi*, 5-9.

139. Shafī’i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manteq al-tayr*, 62.

Rumi.¹⁴⁰ Whereas Rumi and his immediate disciples are silent on that encounter, which does not appear in the historical record until a century and a half later, Ṭusi's own student, Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, reports his teacher's meeting with 'Aṭṭār within fifty years of his passing. Moreover, there are obvious ideological reasons motivating the story of Rumi's meeting with 'Aṭṭār, since Rumi was understood to be 'Aṭṭār's poetic-spiritual successor, but it is not exactly clear what Ṭusi's friends and disciples could hope to gain by attaching the Shi'ī philosopher to the sufi poet from Nishapur.

'Aṭṭār cannot be linked to any *pir*, and he should not be understood as Ṭusi's shaykh, either; nevertheless, the anecdote suggests that he played the role of informal spiritual guide on an ad hoc basis, transmitting his knowledge of legendary sufi heroes and their sayings to younger aspirants of diverse intellectual backgrounds. Of particular interest is 'Aṭṭār's transmission to Ṭusi of a saintly dictum that is also found in Persian translation in the *Memorial*, and which shows that some of the material in his texts was also communicated via oral discourse to younger interlocutors. Although 'Aṭṭār's works have come down to us in a textual form—and he himself seems to have been quite concerned with managing his textual legacy—this anecdote provides a glimpse into the oral pedagogical practices that may have complemented his written productions.

Ṭusi's meeting with 'Aṭṭār is confirmed by the recently discovered *Miscellany of Tabriz* (*Safina-ye Tabriz*), which provides a more detailed account of their spiritual relationship.¹⁴¹ This miscellany, compiled in the fourteenth century by the scholar Abu'l-Majd Moḥammad Tabrizi, contains a variety of works on diverse topics. The anecdote in question is found in a collection

140. Landolt, "'Aṭṭār, Sufism, and Ismailism," 12; Lewis, *Rumi*, 262-3.

141. Abu'l-Majd Moḥammad b. Mas'ud Tabrizi, *Safina-ye Tabriz: Châp-e 'aksi az ru-ye noskha-ye khaṭṭi-ye Ketâb-khâna-ye Majles-e Shurâ-ye Eslâmi* (Tehran: Markez-e Nashr-e Dâneshgâhi, 1381 [2001-2]), 521.

of narratives and scholarly discussions that Abu'l-Majd assembled from the lectures of his teacher, Amin al-Din Ḥâjj Bola.¹⁴² According to the anecdote, 'Aṭṭâr regularly delivered sermons to an informal group of followers, and it was in one of these preaching sessions that Ṭusi first became acquainted with him:

When Khwâja 'Aṭṭâr had become enamored with the divine and would recount miraculous stories, he would go to the Mani'i mosque, which was the congregational mosque of old Nishapur—according to some every day, and according to others three times every week—and proclaim the oneness of God.¹⁴³ One day he was occupied with discoursing on the oneness of God. Khwâja Naṣir al-Din Ṭusi—may he rest in peace!—who was then in the period of his youth, was behind a pillar.”

خواجہ عطار در آن زمان کی شیفته شده بود و کرامات می گفت بعضی می گویند هر روز و بعضی می گویند هر هفته ای سه زور در نیسابور کهن در مسجد منیعی کی جامع آنجا بود برفتی و کلمات توحید گفتی روزی به کلمات توحید مشغول بود خواجہ نصیرالدین طوسی طاب ثراه در زمان جوانی، پس ستونی حاضر بود.¹⁴⁴

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142. Little is known about this Amin al-Din Ḥâjj Bola (d. 720/1320), but he certainly seems to have greatly influenced his student Abu'l-Majd. Thirteen works/compilations are ascribed to him in the *Safina*, including treatises on jurisprudence, history, philosophy, and prosody. See Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, “Casing the Treasury: The *Safina-yi Tabriz* and Its Compiler,” in *The Treasury of Tabriz: The Great Il-Khanid Compendium*, ed. Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab and S. McGlinn (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2007), 20; Sayyed Ali Al-e Davud, “A Review of the Treatises and Historical Documents in *Safina-yi Tabriz*,” in Seyed-Gohrab and McGlinn, *The Treasury of Tabriz*, 79-89; ‘Abd al-Ḥosayn Ḥâ’eri, introduction to *Safina-ye Tabriz: Châp-e ‘aksi az ru-ye noskha-ye khaṭṭi-ye Ketâb-khâna-ye Majles-e Shurâ-ye Eslâmi*, by Abu'l-Majd Moḥammad b. Mas‘ud Tabrizi (Tehran: Markez-e Nashr-e Dânesghâhi, 1381 [2001-2]), viii.
143. The Mani'i mosque was the Shafi'i congregational mosque of “old Nayshâbur”; it was sacked during the Ghuzz rebellion, well before Ṭusi was born. Afterwards, much of Nayshâbur's cultural and economic life shifted to a “new Nayshâbur” built up in the former suburb of Shâdyâkh. This anecdote would seem to suggest, however, that the Mani'i mosque continued to operate and that 'Aṭṭâr was based in the old city, not the newer center of Shâdyâkh. It is also possible, however, that this piece of data is a later interpolation driven by the mosque's fame and name-recognition; anecdotes such as these are often set in emblematic locales. See Richard W. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 77-8; ‘Abbâs Eqbâl-Ashtiâni, “Jâme‘-e Mani'i-ye Nayshâbur,” *Mehr* 3, no. 11 (Farvardin 1315 [March-April 1936]), 1090; Moḥammad b. ‘Ali Râvandi, *Râhat al-ṣodur va âyat al-sorur*, ed. Moḥammad Eqbâl (London: Luzac, 1921; repr., Tehran: Asâtir, 1384 [2005-2006]), 180-2; Ibn al-Athîr, *al-Kâmil fi'l-târikh*, ed. ‘Umar Tadmuri (Beirut: Dâr al-Kitâb al-‘Arabî, 1997), 9:203.
144. Tabrizi, *Safina-ye Tabriz*, 521; Shafi'i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manteq al-tayr*, 60. Shafi'i-Kadkani suggests that instead of “*karâmât*” we read “*ṭâmât*,” which in this context would seem to refer to strange inspired boasts. This reading implies that 'Aṭṭâr had taken on some of the qualities of the famed holy fools that populate his *maṣnavis*.

‘Aṭṭâr was explaining the fundamental non-existence of all contingent being, which exists only through the necessary being of God, when a questioner pointedly asked about the status of individual human existence. ‘Aṭṭâr replied, “It is the second image of a strabismic eye.”¹⁴⁵

When Khwâja Naṣir al-Din heard this, it was as if a spell appeared in his heart. He stood up and kissed the hand of Khwâja ‘Aṭṭâr. He said to the crowd (*jamâ’at*): “Kiss his hand, since he has arrived [at an exalted spiritual station]!” He then went out from that gathering (*maḥfel*) and sang this quatrain:

The being of God is the primary unicity,
Everything else is just illusion and fantasy.
Whatever enters your gaze besides him,
Is only the second image of a strabismic eye.

خواجه نصیرالدین چو این بشنید رقتی در دل او ظاهر گشت بر خاست و بر دستِ خواجه عطار
بوسه داد و به جماعت گفت «دستِ او را بوسه دهید کی به جایی رسید» خواجه نصیرالدین از آن
محفل بیرون آمد این رباعی بگفت:

باقی همه موهوم و مُخِل باشد	موجود بحق واحد اول باشد
نقش دومین چشمِ احوّل باشد ¹⁴⁶	هر چیز جزو کی آید اندر نظرت

Ṭusi continued to associate with ‘Aṭṭâr after that, attending his sermons and even copying a selection of his quatrains for personal use:

He [Ṭusi] said: “I had never heard this expression ‘the second image of a strabismic eye.’” Naṣir al-Din was always a believer (*mo’taqed*) in ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetry. They say that during the period when Naṣir al-Din attended ‘Aṭṭâr’s circle (*majma’*), he had copied the *Pointers* (*Eshârât* [of Avicenna]) and had solved Euclid, and at the end of that period, he had written down four hundred of ‘Aṭṭâr’s quatrains in his own hand.

و گفت من این عبارت کی «نقش دومین چشمِ احوّل باشد» نشنیده بودم و خواجه نصیرالدین
همیشه معتقدِ شعرِ عطار بودی و گویند در آن هنگام کی خواجه نصیرالدین در مجمعِ عطار
حاضر بود اشارات یادداشت و اقلدیس حل کرده بود و در اواخر چهارصد رباعی عطار به خطِّ
خود نوشته بود.¹⁴⁷

145. Tabrizi, *Safina-ye Tabriz*, 521; Shafi’i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manteq al-tayr*, 60-1.

146. Tabrizi, *Safina-ye Tabriz*, 521; Shafi’i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manteq al-tayr*, 61. This quatrain is attributed to Naṣir al-Din in other sources as well; see Modarres-Raḡavi, *Aḥvâl-e Naṣir al-Din Ṭusi*, 620.

147. Tabrizi, *Safina-ye Tabriz*, 521; Shafi’i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manteq al-tayr*, 61.

‘Aṭṭâr thus preached regularly (i.e., “proclaimed the oneness of God”) to a circle of individuals in his hometown of Nishapur.¹⁴⁸ His sessions are portrayed as fairly well attended, the attendees being referred to as a crowd (*jamâ‘at*) and a gathering (*maḥfel*). Ṭusi is said to have been present in ‘Aṭṭâr’s assembly (*majma‘*) for a period of time, implying that these gatherings were consistent and exhibited some continuity. The fact that Ṭusi simultaneously studied philosophy with other masters shows that these were by no means ‘Aṭṭâr’s exclusive disciples, but that attendance at his sessions overlapped with other social and intellectual commitments. ‘Aṭṭâr was thus situated in a distinctly pedagogical and homiletic socio-rhetorical context, not as a scholar teaching a cadre of students, or as a sufi *pir* training a circle of disciples, but as a mystically minded preacher delivering regular public sermons and calling his audience to a sufi form of life. And if Ṭusi’s experience is any indication, ‘Aṭṭâr was valued not so much for his knowledge as his ability to expound on religious and spiritual issues in a rhetorically powerful fashion. Particularly interesting is the claim that Ṭusi became a “believer” (*mo‘taqed*) in ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetry—terminology that was often applied to the followers of specific popular preachers—and that he copied out 400 quatrains for his own use.¹⁴⁹ ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetry thus seems to have circulated within this group of followers, and in at least one case it was deemed meritorious enough for the compilation of a personal textual recension.

Of course, the *Miscellany*’s account of their relationship cannot be accepted entirely at face value. The extent of Ṭusi’s devotion to ‘Aṭṭâr is likely exaggerated since he never mentions him in any of his works. And the anecdote clearly conforms to the conventional expectations

148. Homiletic poems, especially those that praise God, were often classified as *she‘r-e towḥid*, or poems of God’s oneness; see Miller, “Poetics of the Sufi Carnival,” 1-2. ‘Owfi (2:337) even introduces one of ‘Aṭṭâr’s *qaṣidas* as a “*qaṣida* of *towḥid*.” In the above-quoted anecdote, “speaking *towḥid*” or “proclaiming the oneness of God” seems to refer to the act of preaching, or perhaps the act of opening a sermon with the testament of faith.

149. Jonathan Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 26.

of a conversion narrative: Ṭusi hides behind a pillar as a skeptical outsider, but he is pulled into the group, almost despite himself, by the powerful effect of a particular turn of phrase. Although some details may be doubtful, none of this is fatal to the anecdote's general portrayal of 'Aṭṭâr's social context and homiletic practice. On the contrary, there is good reason to accept this narrative as a reliable source. First, it originated in an environment that was chronologically, geographically, and socially close to Ṭusi, who was active near Tabriz in the later part of his life. From 1259 until a few months before his death in 1274, he operated the observatory in Marâgha, which became something of a scholarly hub in the region, and his enduring influence on the western Iranian intellectual milieu is evidenced by the large number of his works found within the *Miscellany*.¹⁵⁰ Amin al-Din Ḥâjj Bola (d. 1320), the direct source of the anecdote, seems to have been a prominent scholar in Tabriz, and it is not out of the question that he may have met Ṭusi himself when he was younger. Alternatively, he may have heard the anecdote as it circulated orally among Ṭusi's friends, disciples, and students in the area. Second, as previously mentioned, there seems to be little ideological motivation for Amin al-Din or Abu'l-Majd to forge the narrative. Unlike Jâmi or Dowlat-Shâh, they were not invested in establishing chains of poetic initiation. Nor do they seem particularly interested in 'Aṭṭâr as a poet; none of his poems were excerpted for inclusion in the *Miscellany*, although one finds the poems of Sanâ'i, Ferdowsi, Neẓâmi, and even Owḥad al-Din Kermâni represented therein.¹⁵¹

There is no denying the paucity of evidence regarding the life of the historical 'Aṭṭâr. Nevertheless, through the accounts of 'Owfi and Ṭusi, we can begin to trace the outlines of his particular social milieu and his place within it. What emerges is a relatively clear picture of a

150. Seyed-Gohrab, "Casing the Treasury," 34.

151. Abu'l-Majd was, however, a disciple of Shabestari, who speaks very highly of 'Aṭṭâr. See Seyed-Gohrab, "Casing the Treasury," 20.

mystically minded preacher and spiritual authority who sought to spread sufi piety to a general audience, and this portrait will become even clearer through a careful reading of the rich prefatory and concluding material that mediates his poems. As we will see over the course of this dissertation, ‘Aṭṭâr’s homiletic context is not only of historical interest, but is also critical for understanding his poetry: his *maṣnavis* rely on the thematics and formal structures of popular preaching, his authorial persona takes on the rhetorical stance of a preacher vis-à-vis his audiences, and the text itself is conceptualized as a homiletic act aimed at effecting the “re-conversion” of its mystically minded reader-listeners.

‘Aṭṭâr’s Reception in the Persianate World

Although anything beyond local fame seems to have eluded ‘Aṭṭâr in life, after death his renown increased throughout Iran, Transoxania, and Anatolia, especially in sufi circles. Less than half a century after his death, ‘Aṭṭâr’s influence is clearly visible in Rumi (d. 1273), who retells stories from ‘Aṭṭâr’s *maṣnavis* and responds to his *ghazals*; Rumi’s son and successor, Soltân Valad (d. 1312), explicitly names ‘Aṭṭâr and Sanâ’i as his father’s poetic-spiritual precursors.¹⁵² ‘Aṭṭâr is also mentioned with admiration by Maḥmud Shabestari (d. c. 1340), the Âzarbâyyânî sufi poet and theorist in the tradition of Ibn ‘Arabî; in the introduction to his *Rosegarden of Secrets* (*Golshan-e râz*), Shabestari humbly confesses that his verse pales in comparison to that of ‘Aṭṭâr.¹⁵³ Another Âzarbâyyânî, Amin al-Din Hâjj Bola—whose anecdote regarding ‘Aṭṭâr was recorded in the *Miscellany of Tabriz* (*Safina-ye Tabriz*) and discussed above—introduces the poet as if he were already a familiar figure for a scholarly audience, but he does not single him out for any special praise. Also around this time in northwestern Iran, ‘Aṭṭâr’s

152. Lewis, *Rumi*, 240, 288-91; Ilahi-Gomeshei, “Scent and Sweetness,” 30-40.

153. Ilahi-Gomeshei, “Scent and Sweetness,” 40-4; Leonard Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Maḥmūd Shabistari* (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 1995), 8, 20-21.

lyric verses were being recited and interpreted in the mystical sessions of Şafi al-Din Ardabili (d. 1334), the eponym of the Safavid order, as attested by his hagiographer Ebn Bazzâz.¹⁵⁴ Judging by the number of manuscripts, however, it was ‘Attâr’s *Memorial* that had the widest readership; his prose work is also the only one to be explicitly named by Ḥamd-Allâh Qazvini in his notice on the poet in his fourteenth-century *Selected History* (*Târikh-e gozida*).¹⁵⁵

‘Attâr’s works also began to appear in India in the fourteenth century. The *Memorial* came to be particularly popular in the subcontinent, and many later hagiographical compilations relied on it as a model.¹⁵⁶ In the early part of the century, it was explicitly listed as a source by Rokn al-Din Kâshânî in an unusual bibliography that accompanies his extensive sufi compendium.¹⁵⁷ Hagiographical stories about ‘Attâr himself were also circulating during this period; several examples can be found in the famous *Maxims of the Heart* (*Favâ’ed al-fo’âd*), a textualization of the mystical sessions of Neẓâm al-Din Owleyâ (d. 1325).¹⁵⁸ The *Conference of the Birds* was also popular, and it was apparently even used for prognostication like the Quran.¹⁵⁹ Several later *maṣnavis* are said to bear its influence, including the *Rose and Nightingale* (*Gol o bolol*) of Bu ‘Ali Shâh (d. 1324) and the *Secrets of the Trees* (*Asrâr al-ashjâr*) of Bâbâ Dâ’ud Kashmiri (d. 1685).¹⁶⁰

154. Book Four of Ebn Bazzâz’s hagiography contains Şafi al-Din’s commentaries on selected verses from various poets, especially ‘Attâr and Rumi. See *Şafvat al-şafâ*, ed. Gholâm Reżâ Ṭabâtabâ’i-Majd (Tehran: Zaryâb, 1376 [1997-98]), 534-95.

155. Ḥamd-Allâh Mostowfi Qazvini, *Târikh-e gozida*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥosayn Navâ’i (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1339 [1960]), 740; Ritter, “Philologika XIV,” 62-76; Miranşâri, *Ketâb-shenâsi*, 84-103.

156. Karim Najafi Barzegar, “‘Attâr dar shebh-e qârra-ye Hend,” in *Dânesht-nâma-ye adab-e fârsi*, ed. Ḥasan Anusha (Tehran: Vezârat-e Farhang va Ershâd-e Eslâmi, 1380 [2001]), 4.2:1783.

157. Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 257.

158. Barzegar, “‘Attâr,” 4.2:1782; Ḥasan Dehlavi, *Favâ’ed al-fo’âd*, ed. Moḥammad Laţif Malek (Lahore: Malek Serâj al-Din, 1966), 89, 427-8.

159. Barzegar, “‘Attâr,” 4.2:1783.

160. Ibid.

The Timurid era witnessed an explosion in ‘Aṭṭâr’s popularity in Iran with a number of lavishly illustrated manuscripts produced in court ateliers.¹⁶¹ He was not only given a place in the coalescing canon of Persian literature, but also a place in the canon of saintly figures, with Jâmi and Dowlat-Shâh providing extended hagiographical notices on the poet’s life in their biographical anthologies.¹⁶² Likewise, he is featured in the *Sessions of Lovers* (*Majâles al-‘oshshâq*, completed 1503-4), a collection of imaginative, prosimetric hagiographies of famous sufis (both poets and non-poets) from the earliest times up through the contemporary Timurid period, including the likes of Ebrâhim ebn Adham, Ḥallâj, Rumi, Bahâ al-Din Naqshband—and even Shaykh Ṣan‘ân!¹⁶³ ‘Aṭṭâr’s *Conference of the Birds* was the subject of a poetic response in the Chaghatay language by ‘Ali Shir Navâ’i, the famed litterateur and taste-maker of Ḥosayn Bâyqarâ’s court, who also financed the re-construction of ‘Aṭṭâr’s tomb in Shâdyâkh, a suburb of Nishapur.¹⁶⁴ In short, this local, amateur versifier had become firmly ensconced in the cultural memory as an exemplary instance of the saint-cum-poet type, along with cultural heroes like Sanâ’i, Rumi, and ‘Erâqi.

Any one of these myriad audiences would be a fit subject for a reception study of ‘Aṭṭâr, and together they could be expanded into a full, diachronic reception history of the poet’s works. Although we will occasionally deal with later audiences in the following chapters, we are most concerned with how ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetry was received by the textual community

161. Yumiko Kamada, “A Taste for Intricacy: An Illustrated *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art,” *Orient* 45 (2010), 160-3.

162. Jâmi, *Nafahât*, 596-8; Samarqandi, *Tazkerat al-sho‘arâ*, 321-33.

163. Mîr Kamâl al-Din Ḥosayn Gâzorgâhi, *Majâles al-‘oshshâq*, ed. Gholâm Rezâ Ṭabâṭabâ’i-Majd (Tehran: Zarrin, 1375 [1996-97]); Shiro Ando, “Gâzorgâhi, Mîr Kamâl-al-Dîn Ḥosyan,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 3 February 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gazorgahi->.

164. M. E. Subtelny, “Mîr ‘Ali Shîr Nawâ’i,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5208. The circumstances of this reconstruction are recounted in Samarqandi, *Tazkerat al-sho‘arâ*, 328-9.

among whom it first circulated. Because this community existed during ‘Aṭṭâr’s lifetime and dynamically interacted with him, their demands and needs are imprinted on the poems—especially the introductory and concluding sections—through which we can reconstruct their concerns, anxieties, and textual practices, at least as ‘Aṭṭâr perceived and responded to them. Moreover, beyond this initial textual community, ‘Aṭṭâr clearly addresses an imagined devotional public that he hoped his poems would reach. Our investigation, by restricting itself to those audiences that were imagined and engaged with by ‘Aṭṭâr himself—his immediate textual community and this larger devotional public—is able to account for the intentionality of his rhetoric in a way that a more traditional reception study could not, but without losing sight of the poems’ perlocutionary function vis-à-vis real audiences in the social realm.

Chapter II

Talk Therapy: Audience, Homiletics, Persona

In the previous chapter, we used external evidence to argue that ‘Aṭṭâr was not an isolated, inward-looking loner, as he has sometimes been portrayed, but that he was a socially active preacher and teacher who called others towards a life of piety. In the present chapter, we turn to internal evidence from ‘Aṭṭâr’s works themselves in order to explore how his literary activities were integrated into this social, homiletic project. Key to our investigations are ‘Aṭṭâr’s self-reflective evaluations of his own works’ rhetorical positions and didactic functions. Keeping in mind that these sorts of authorial reflections are not usually transparent descriptions, but themselves rhetorical strategies designed to control a reader-listener’s experience, we will attempt to glean as much information from them as we can about how ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetry and prose was initially composed and disseminated, and—just as importantly—how ‘Aṭṭâr imagined it would be consumed and understood by a larger devotional public. As we shall see, reader-listeners are repeatedly nudged towards a contemplative mode of reading in which the textual encounter becomes a means of ethical and ontological self-transformation. By attending to these moments of poetic self-reflection and self-representation, we can better understand how homiletic speech was conceptualized by the mystically minded and how ‘Aṭṭâr attempted to control his works’ reception within the parameters set by those discourses.

Our investigation draws on authorial reflections from across the oeuvre (especially the *Choice Book*, the *Memorial*, and the *maṣnavis*) that variously represent—and thereby shape—the audience’s relationship to ‘Aṭṭâr’s texts. These meta-discursive reflections can be divided into three categories, each one focusing primarily on a different component of the literary transaction: audience, text, or author/speaker. These categories often overlap, but they nonetheless

constitute a useful heuristic for structuring our argument. We begin with audience; through a detailed examination of the *Choice Book*'s prose introduction we show that the collection was initially compiled for a loose textual community that had formed around 'Aṭṭâr and who approached his quatrains as both aesthetically pleasing literary artifacts and as avenues to spiritual wisdom. In addition to being a valuable historical source, the introduction's representation of this early audience constructs an idealized readership for the work and thus plays an important role in its rhetorical positioning. Next, we turn to 'Aṭṭâr's portrayal of his own texts' homiletic purposes. Implicit in his discussion is the notion that they function as a form of spiritual therapy: according to 'Aṭṭâr, his works not only inform reader-listeners, but existentially transform them, instigating ethical change and ontologically elevating them towards God. Finally, we explore the pious, self-critical poetic persona found in all four of his *maṣnavis*. We approach this persona not as a window onto the historical 'Aṭṭâr, but as a rhetorically motivated performance designed to prove the poet's sincerity and thereby legitimate his claims to utter spiritually transformative verse.

Textual Community and the "Request from Friends"

Besides a few oblique references in 'Owfi, Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, and the *Miscellany of Tabriz* (*Safina-ye Tabriz*), we have no detailed third-party accounts of how 'Aṭṭâr's poetry was composed, the manner in which it circulated, or the audiences whom it addressed.¹ 'Aṭṭâr himself, however, hints at the socio-literary processes through which his texts were produced and initially received, especially in his prose introduction to the *Choice Book*. In those same pages, 'Aṭṭâr also presents an idealized portrayal of both his initial audience and his wider intended

1. On external sources for the life of 'Aṭṭâr, see Chapter 1, p. 30-57.

readership, all while seeking to rhetorically control his work's reception. Thus, by carefully attending to the *Choice Book*'s introduction, we can better understand the social context and literary practices through which 'Aṭṭār's works were rendered meaningful to mystically minded reader-listeners.

The *Choice Book* is an authorially curated collection of quatrains, containing approximately two thousand poems arranged into fifty thematic chapters.² Approximately half of these chapters are devoted to ethical and theological themes common to sufi homiletics, including the universality of death, the virtue of silence, the ineffable origin of the soul, and the individual's effacement in God.³ Most of the remaining chapters consist of études on conventional poetic tropes, such as descriptions of the beloved's mouth, eyes, and waist.⁴ A testament to 'Aṭṭār's continual obsession with poetic disposition, the first three chapters of the *Choice Book* mirror the thematic arrangement common to the doxological exordiums that open most *maṣnavis*: the first chapter describes God's oneness; the second praises the Prophet; and the third eulogizes the Prophet's companions, including one quatrain each for Abu Bakr, 'Omar, 'Oṣmân, 'Ali, Ḥasan, and Ḥosayn.⁵ The fiftieth and final chapter is even a sort of "account of the poet's

2. Shafi'i-Kadkani, intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 11-6; Daniela Meneghini, "Mokhtâr-nâma," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 7 April 2008, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/mokhtar-nama>; Daniela Meneghini, "Il Mox-târ-nâme di 'Aṭṭâr: Prefazione e capitolo nono su ḥeyrat e sargaštegî," in *Scritti in onore di Giovanni M. D'Erme*, ed. Michele Bernardini and Natalia L. Tornesello (Naples: Università degli Studi di Napoli "l'Orientale", 2005). Regarding the quatrain form in Persian literature, including discussions of prosody and literary history, see L. P. Elwell-Sutton, "The 'Rubā'ī' in Early Persian Literature," in *Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. R. N. Frye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Sirus Shamisâ, *Sayr-e robâ'i dar she'r-e fârsi* (Tehran: Âshtiânî, 1363 [1984]); Franklin Lewis, "Rubā'ī," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene, 4th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

3. 'Aṭṭâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 104-14, 138-43, 162-4, 194-7.

4. Ibid., 265-7, 271-6.

5. Ibid., 75-90. On the doxologies often found in longer *maṣnavis*, see De Bruijn, *Piety and Poetry*, 186-8; Ch.-H. de Fouchécour, "The Story of the Ascension (*Mi'raj*) in Nizami's Work," in *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love, and Rhetoric*, ed. Kamran Talattof and Jerome Clinton (New York: Palgrave, 2000). The parallelism between these doxologies and the opening chapters of the *Choice Book* has been previously noted by Meneghini in her article in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Shafi'i-Kadkani, in his introduction to the text (54-55), points out that just as 'Aṭṭâr devotes a single quatrain to each of the four rightly guided caliphs (as well as Ḥasan and Ḥosayn) in the *Choice Book*, so too does he devote an equal number of verses (with a few minor

state” (*hasb-e hâl*), parallel to those found in the concluding sections of ‘Attâr’s four *maṣnavis*: its quatrains consist primarily of self-praise, exhortations to careful reading, as well as a few complaints of loneliness and misunderstanding.⁶

In itself, a thematic arrangement of individual poems is not unusual. Until the sixteenth century, when organization by rhyme and meter became the norm, most collections of lyric verse were organized in a loosely thematic fashion.⁷ Such collections, however, were usually governed only by a handful of vague thematic categories and lacked paratextual headings.⁸ The *Choice Book*, in contrast, is comprised of individually titled thematic chapters consisting solely of quatrains, which is unusual for the early thirteenth century. Ritter has identified only one thematically organized set of quatrains that precedes the *Choice Book*, a selection of primarily amatory poems from various poets compiled by Abu Ḥanifa b. Abi Bakr for the Seljuk Moḥyi al-Din b. Qilich Arslan; it exists only in an extracted form.⁹ Soon after ‘Attâr’s death, however, such organizational structures became more common in quatrain collections. The Khayyamian corpus, for instance, was thematically arranged in the *House of Joy* (*Ṭarab-khâna*), and quatrains from a large number of poets were thematically ordered in the famous anthology *Delight of Assemblies* (*Nozhat al-majâles*).¹⁰

deviations) to the four rightly guided caliphs in the *maṣnavis*.

6. ‘Attâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 75-90.
7. Ahmad Nizar, “Some Original Prose and Poetical Pieces of Hakím Saná’i,” *Indo-Iranica* 16, no. 2 (June 1963), 48-65. J. T. P. de Bruijn, “The Transmission of Early Persian Ghazals,” *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 3 (1988), 27-8; De Bruijn, *Piety and Poetry*, 104-8, 110; Lewis, *Rumi*, 295.
8. The earliest manuscript of ‘Attâr’s *Divân* (Majles 2600), for instance, is arranged into a series of thematic clusters, although they are not individually titled as such. See Miller, “Poetics of the Sufi Carnival,” 17-9.
9. Ritter, “Philologika XVI,” 195; Hellmut Ritter, “Philologika XI: Maulânâ Ġalâladdîn Rûmî und sein Kreis,” *Der Islam* 26 (1942), 245-6.
10. Moḥammad Amin Riâḥi, “Nozhat al-Majâles,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 13 September 2010, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nozhat-al-majales>; Yâr-Aḥmad b. Ḥosayn Rashidi Tabrizi, *Ṭarab-khâna*, ed. Jalâl al-Din Homâ’i (Tehran: Tâbân, 1964), 5.

In addition to its unusual thematic arrangement, the *Choice Book* is also noteworthy because it was authorially produced. Before the Timurid period, it was not standard practice for poets to compile exhaustive collections (*divâns*) of their own lyrical works (including *ghazals*, *qaşidas*, the less-common stanzaic forms, and, sometimes, quatrains).¹¹ This endeavor was usually left to the poet's friends, disciples, or professional colleagues, often after the former's death, as in the case of Moḥammad Golandâm's compilation of Ḥâfeẓ's *ghazals*. During their own lifetimes, poets might gift friends or patrons smaller, non-standardized collections of poems (*daftars*) tailored to their specific interests or for special occasions; these usually consisted of *qaşidas* and longer poems, while *ghazals* and quatrains were more likely to circulate orally. Individuals could also compile private copies of a poet's poems for their own use, as in the previously mentioned case of Naşir al-Din ʿAṭṭâr, who allegedly copied out four hundred of 'Aṭṭâr's quatrains.¹²

Contrary to standard practice, however, 'Aṭṭâr claims in the preface to the *Choice Book* to have compiled and disseminated not only his *maşnavis*, but also his complete *divân*, which allegedly included a full set of quatrains. The preface opens with the following passage, allegedly spoken by "a group of friends," which enumerates his works:

The dominion of the *Khosrow-nâma* [lit. *Book of the King*] has appeared in the world, and the *Book of Secrets* has been published, and the language of the birds of the *Book of the Birds* (*Ṭoyur-nâma*) has transported rational souls to the site of unveiling, and the burn of the *Book of Affliction* has passed bounds and limits, and the register of the *Divân* has been made complete. And the *Book of Essences* (*Javâher al-zât*) and *Husking the Heart* (*Sharḥ al-qalb*), both of which were in

11. It later became de rigueur for poets to compile multiple *divâns*, each containing poems composed in a discrete stage of life; see the examples of Amir Khosrow (a rather early case), Jâmi, and Navâ'i: Sunil Sharma, *Amir Khusraw: The Poet of Sufis and Sultans* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 48; Paul Losensky, "Jâmi i. Life and Works," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 10 April 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jami-i>; Subtelny, "Mîr 'Alî Shîr Nawâ'î."

12. Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 229-32; Lewis, *Rumi*, 295-7; Julie Scott Meisami, "Hafez v. Manuscripts of Hafez," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 1 March 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hafez-v>. Regarding Naşir al-Din ʿAṭṭâr, see Chapter 1, p. 46-52.

verse, were left unfinished out of passion, surrendered to the flame, and washed away.

سلطنتِ خسرونامه در عالم ظاهر گشت و اسرارِ اسرارنامه منتشر شد و زبانِ مرغانِ طیورنامه
ناطقهٔ ارواح را به محلّ کشف رسید و سوز مصیبتِ مصیبت‌نامه از حدّ و غایت در گذشت و
دیوانِ دیوان ساختن تمام داشته آمد و جواهرنامه و شرح القلب که هر دو منظوم بودند از سرِ
سودا نامنظوم ماند که حرق و غسلی بدان راه یافت.¹³

If we take this passage at face value, then the *Choice Book* was compiled after the four *maṣnavis* and the *Divân* had already been completed and disseminated in some form to this textual community. Nevertheless, ‘Aṭṭâr seems to have retained control over the texts, even after their initial circulation, for the purposes of revision and alteration.¹⁴ As the passage continues, we learn that these friends complained that the *Divân*—in its then-current form—contained too many quatrains and lacked any sensible arrangement, so much so that they found the text difficult to use. They thus recommended curating a thematically organized selection of quatrains as an independent work, a request that ‘Aṭṭâr was only too happy to oblige:

So, according to the command of the appeals of the brothers of religion, out of the quatrains that had been composed—which amounted to about six thousands verses—around one thousand which were not fit for this world were washed from the page and sent to that world, for, as they say, “Guard your secret, even from your button”—and one cannot go to that world without a washed face and having been purified. And from the five thousand that remained, I selected and ordered a number of them in this collection, and I left the rest in the *Divân*. *Whoever seeks and strives, finds*. And I titled this the *Choice Book*.

13. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 70. The *Memorial* is not mentioned, perhaps because it is a prose work. Nevertheless, it seems that the *Memorial* must have been completed in some form before the *Choice Book*, because the introduction to the *Memorial* references *Husking the Heart* (*Sharḥ al-qalb*) as if it were still extant, but the introduction to the *Choice Book* claims that it has been destroyed. See *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 4, 466.

14. There is growing realization that medieval authors would often produce several different recensions, sometimes with drastic differences; the search for a single, authorial archetype is often a fool’s errand. See Lewis, “Reading, Writing, and Recitation,” 270-5, 295-309; Franklin Lewis, “The Modes of Literary Production: Remarks on the Composition, Revision and ‘Publication’ of Persian Texts in the Medieval Period,” *Persica* 17 (2001): 69-83; Barbara Flemming, “From Archetype to Oral Tradition: Editing Persian and Turkish Literary Texts,” *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 3 (1998), 8; De Bruijn, *Piety and Poetry*, 119-20; Adam Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), s.vv. “Textual criticism and editing,” “Textual variants.”

پس بنابر حکم دواعی اخوان دین رباعیاتی که گفته شده شش هزار بیت بود قریب هزار بیت شسته شد که لایق این عالم نبود و بدان عالم فرستادیم که گفته‌اند اِحْفَظْ سِرَّكَ وَلَوْ عَنْ زِرِّكَ و ناشسته روی و غسل ناکرده بدان عالم نتوان رفت و از پنج هزار دیگر که باقی ماند این مقدار که درین مجموعه است اختیار کردیم بدین ترتیب و باقی در دیوان گذاشتیم و من طَلَبَ و جَدَّ وَجَدَ و نام این مختار نامه نهادیم.¹⁵

In short, even though the *Divân*'s text was circulating amongst this community in some fashion, 'Aṭṭâr was able to transfer two thousand quatrains to a new collection, and he states with confidence that he destroyed the textual traces of five hundred others: he “washed” them from the page, as he had previously done with the *Book of Essences* (*Ĵavâher-nâma*) and *Husking the Heart* (*Sharḥ al-qalb*), and thereby “sent them to that world,” punning on the ritually mandated washing of the dead. The fact that 'Aṭṭâr was able to exert this degree of control over the textual transmission of his work, ensuring the destruction of five hundred poems that had been previously recorded and were circulating in some capacity, is perhaps an indication of the small size of this textual community; it may also reflect the authority that he was accorded as a spiritual leader.

The “request by friends” is a conventional trope in pre-modern Islamicate literatures, found in many prominent prose and poetic works.¹⁶ Given the ubiquity of the convention, we may naturally doubt the historicity of 'Aṭṭâr's claim to have compiled the *Choice Book* in accordance with a request from a specific group of friends. Nevertheless, the persistence of this con-

15. 'Aṭṭâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 71. The *Choice Book* contains approximately two thousand quatrains, so according to 'Aṭṭâr's own numbers, he must have left approximately five hundred in the *Divân*. Most manuscripts of the *Divân*, however, contain no quatrains. The earliest manuscript, Majles 2600, contains only six, a far cry from the five hundred that we would expect. One may speculate that 'Aṭṭâr tinkered further with the *Divân* after compiling the *Choice Book*, removing most or all of those that remained. Later scribes may also have chosen to drop the quatrains from the *Divân*, believing that the existence of the *Choice Book* rendered them redundant.

16. For other examples, see Maḥmud Shabestari, *Majmu'a-ye âşâr-e Shaykh Maḥmud Shabestari*, ed. Şamad Movahhed (Tehran: Ṭahuri, 1365 [1986-7]), 68-9; Sa'di, *Golestân-e Sa'di*, ed. Gholâm-Ḥosayn Yusofi (Tehran: Khwârazmi, 1384 [2005-6]), 53. For the significance of this trope regarding the sociability of the literary endeavor and authorial subject-formation, see Prashant Keshavmurthy, “Creaturely Exertion, Reforming Genius: Indo-Persian Conceptions of Literary Authorship, 1220-1920 C.E.” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2009), 106-9.

vention, and its continuing intelligibility to generations of pre-modern readers, testifies to the extent that textual production and dissemination was a fundamentally social activity during the manuscript age. An author's or compiler's text could only circulate if an audience had access to an authorial copy and was willing to accept the expense of copying and further dissemination; a successful author would thus be wise to ensure his or her work appealed to a known audience.¹⁷ A committed local readership would have been especially critical for a poet like ʿAṭṭâr, since he did not write for a patron, and, as far as we know, never left Khorâsân. ʿAṭṭâr therefore likely did have a specific group of local readers in mind when compiling the *Choice Book*, and he must have arranged it with their particular needs and expectations in mind.

Furthermore, ʿAṭṭâr's account of his friends' request seems too specific and unusual to be explained away as the mere unthinking continuation of convention; rather, one suspects that the alleged request contains a kernel of historical truth or, at the very least, preserves ʿAṭṭâr's perception of his local audience's needs. As ʿAṭṭâr tells the story, this group of friends complained that the quatrains in the *Divân* lacked any sort of arrangement and were too numerous to be useful:

The quatrains in the *Divân* are great in number and memorizing them (*ẓabt-e ân*) is difficult.¹⁸ They lack the ornament of arrangement, and they are empty of the essence of brevity. Although compiled, they are not arranged, and many of the seekers remain bereft of their lot and aspirants return without having reached their destination. If an abridgment were made and a selection were chosen on the basis of order and arrangement, their disposition and adornment would increase, and from the beauty of brevity, their brilliance would grow.

17. On the process of "publication" in the Iran and the Middle East during the pre-modern period, see Lewis, "Modes of Literary Production," 24-5; Johannes Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*, trans. Geoffrey French (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 20-36. Also see Samer Ali, *Arabic Literary Salons in the Islamic Middle Ages: Poetry, Public Performance, and the Presentation of the Past* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 38-46.

18. *Loghat-nâma-ye Dehkhodâ*, s.v. "ẓabt."

رباعیاتی که در دیوان است بسیارست و ضبط آن دشوار و از زیور ترتیب عاطل و از خلاصه
 ایجاز ذاهل اگرچه ترکیبی دارد ترتیبی ندارد و بسیاری از جویندگان از نصیب بی‌بهره می‌مانند
 و طالبان بی‌مقصود باز می‌گردند اگر انتخابی کرده شود و اختیاری دست دهد از نظم و ترتیب
 نظام و زینت او بیفزاید و از حسن ایجاز رونق او زیاده گردد.¹⁹

According to their request, the quatrains would gain a “brilliance” from this new brevity and disposition. At the same time, however, such an arrangement serves a practical purpose by making specific quatrains or types of quatrains easier to locate: as the friends explain in religiously charged terminology, “aspirants” (*tâlebân*) and “seekers” (*juyandagân*) are more likely to attain to their “goal” (*maqṣud*) when the poems are arranged according to an overarching structure. The *Choice Book* thus seems to have been envisioned as a sort of treasury, organized by theme so that its readers could easily retrieve verses on desired topics. Indeed, it has been suggested that its title—the *Choice Book*—refers neither to the quality of the poems nor to ‘Aṭṭâr’s authorial act of selection, but to the reader’s ability to quickly choose verses relevant to his or her particular interests.²⁰ We should also keep in mind that the *divâns* of previous poets rarely contained more than a few hundred quatrains, and often many less. By placing the majority of his quatrains in a stand-alone work, ‘Aṭṭâr thus brought his *divân* into closer alignment with professional poetic norms.

In any case, according to the passage, this textual community would not only have read the quatrains but memorized them, presumably for later recitation. Indeed, a pithy, mnemonic form like the quatrain would have had very little attraction as a purely literary phenomenon. Quatrains were routinely sprinkled into both religious and secular discourse, serving to illustrate didactic points and cap completed discussions.²¹ We know that Abu Sa‘id-e Abu’l-Khayr,

19. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 70-1.

20. Meneghini, “Mokhtâr-nâma.” As a form VIII Arabic participle, *mokhtâr* can be read as either active or passive. The title could thus also be translated as the *Book of the Selector*.

21. On the spiritual uses of quatrains, see J. T. P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Persian Poems* (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 1997), 6-28; Franklin Lewis, “The Spirituality of Persian Is-

one of ‘Aṭṭâr’s spiritual heroes, routinely used quatrains in his sermons and assemblies (*ma-jâles*); he also ordered them sung in his *khânaqâh* during *samâ’*, a controversial ritual that involved music and ecstatic movement, and which gained popularity among certain sufi groups in eleventh-century Khorâsân.²² As discussed in the previous chapter, ‘Aṭṭâr, like Abu Sa‘id, is said to have used quatrains while preaching, and although we have no positive evidence that he engaged in *samâ’*, the amatory and sufistic content of many of his poems would have rendered them ideal candidates for such performances. Indeed, one of ‘Aṭṭâr’s unspoken motivations for compiling the *Choice Book* may have been to facilitate the spread of his quatrains to *khânaqâhs* across the region, where they could be used in *samâ’* sessions. Whatever various *Sitze im Leben* ‘Aṭṭâr may have had in mind, it is clear that he envisioned the quatrains being recited orally in a sufistic milieu, and that he compiled them thematically in order to aid in their memorization. As such, the *Choice Book* is emblematic of the complex interrelations between textuality and orality that characterizes much medieval literary production.

Finally, even if the alleged request is completely fictional, ‘Aṭṭâr’s description of these friends still functions as an idealization of his intended readership and thus sheds light on the sorts of audiences that he was targeting. Throughout the prologue, these idealized readers are imagined in terms that imply devotion to sufi forms of piety. For example, ‘Aṭṭâr opens the preface by praising them in the following way:

lamic Poetry,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Islamic Spirituality*, ed. Bruce Lawrence and Vincent Cornell (Chichester, UK: John Wiley, forthcoming).

22. The *Secrets of God’s Oneness* (*Asrâr al-towḥid*), a hagiography devoted to Abu Sa‘id, contains numerous examples of quatrains being used in both *samâ’* and preaching situations (indeed, the line between the two is often ambiguous): Moḥammad ebn Monavvar, *Asrâr al-towḥid fi maqâmât al-Shaykh Abi Sa‘id*, ed. Moḥammad Reżâ Shafî‘i-Kadkani (Tehran: Âgâh, 1376 [1997]), 1:16, 1:23-24, 1:26-27. Also see Terry Graham, “Abū Sa‘id ibn Abī’l-Khayr and the School of Khurâsân,” in *Classical Persian Sufism: From Its Origins to Rumi*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), 94-106; Muhammad Isa Waley, “Contemplative Disciplines in Early Persian Sufism,” in Lewisohn, *Classical Persian Sufism*, 518-9. The close connection between quatrains and *samâ’* is attested as far back as the writings of Sarrāj. See Fritz Meier, *Die schöne Mahsati* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1963), 1.

A group of intimate companions, like-minded lovers, far-sighted confidants, and allied associates, who have hearts illuminated like the sun, breathe sincerity like the true dawn, and—like candles—smile as they burn . . .

جماعتی از اصدقاء محرم و از احباء همدم و قرینان دوربین و موافقان همتشین که چون آفتاب
دلی روشن داشتند و چون صبح صادق نفس از صدق می زدند و چون شمع از سر سوز می
خندیدند . . .²³

The “friends” (*aṣḍeqâ*) are endowed with pious traits that ‘Aṭṭâr promotes in his works: illuminated hearts, implying a close connection to the divine; sincerity, or an alignment between truth and self-presentation; and the ability to consider even pain and tragedy as a gift from God. The term “sufi” is never used, perhaps because of the negative connotations it had taken on over the course of the previous century, or perhaps because ‘Aṭṭâr was envisioning an audience broader than just those who had been formally initiated into the sufi tradition. Nonetheless, he repeatedly describes his ideal audience in terms that indicate an affinity for sufi approaches to piety, if not necessarily formal affiliation. Regarding those quatrains in the *Choice Book* that treat the features of the beloved and lack overt religious meanings, ‘Aṭṭâr expresses confidence that his reader-listeners will untangle their secret divine referents, an esoteric hermeneutical mode that was commonly avowed by mystically minded poets and audiences in response to religious anxiety over the amatory content of their poems. “The people of taste (*zowq*) and attributes (*ṣefat*),” he writes, “will move past form and towards meaning, to witness the holy spirit clothed in a variety of forms.” The epithet with which he refers to this ideal audience—“the people of taste and attributes”—is also redolent of mystical piety, alluding to the “tasting” of mystical intuition and a familiarity with the divine attributes.²⁴ And in the in-

23. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 70.

24. Ibid., 71. Also see the discussion in De Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, 22-3. Other mystically minded poets and writers made similar claims. See Franklin Lewis, “Towards a Chronology of the Poems in the “Dīvân-i Shams”: A Prolegomenon for a Periodization of Rumi’s Literary Oeuvre,” in *The Philosophy of Ecstasy: Rumi and the Sufi Tradition*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2014), 162-3; Shabestari, *Âṣâr-e Shabestari*, 97-108.

roduction's final lines, where authors traditionally implore their readers to remember them in their prayers, 'Aṭṭâr imagines a mystically minded audience engaging his work: he calls on the "possessors of taste (*ashâb-e zowq*)" to pray for the forgiveness of his sins.²⁵ These ideal readers may be a literary fiction, deployed rhetorically in order to create a subject-position from which later readers might approach the text. But like all successful rhetorical maneuvers, these framings are specifically tooled to be amenable to their recipients. 'Aṭṭâr's characterization of his ideal readers can therefore tell us a good deal about his intended audiences' values and aspirations, which he seeks to further shape and refine.

Of Drugs and Discourse

Besides gesturing towards the work's mystically minded audience, the preface to the *Choice Book* also embodies and promotes certain understandings of poetry's religious function. Namely, 'Aṭṭâr suggests that poetry such as his not only informs its audience, but it existentially transforms them.²⁶ When properly reflected upon, religious poetry does not simply transfer a set of dogmatic propositions gussied up in rhyme and meter, but it provides a literary experience that alters its reader-listeners on an affective, ethical, and even ontological level. Its religious "content" remains significant—according to 'Aṭṭâr, comprehension is key to poetry's transformative power—but speech's total effect exceeds the transference of propositional meanings. 'Aṭṭâr never systematically theorizes speech's spiritual efficacy, but he alludes to this underlying conception of poetic function at key points in his texts, especially in introductory and concluding material—and not only in the *Choice Book*, but in the *maṣnavis* and even

25. 'Aṭṭâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 73.

26. One recalls Pierre Hadot's pithy observation that ancient philosophy functioned not to "inform" but to "form," a turn of phrase he adapted from Victor Goldschmidt. See *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 119n101.

the prose *Memorial* as well. These meta-discursive passages not only illuminate the poetic and rhetorical assumptions that subtend ‘Aṭṭâr’s production, but in so far as they condition the texts’ reception, they also gesture towards a phenomenology of thirteenth century sufi homiletic literature. Through them, we can better understand how a mystically minded readership would have understood, experienced, and used these texts.

‘Aṭṭâr’s Therapeutic Verse

In the introduction and conclusion to the *Choice Book*, ‘Aṭṭâr not only comments on the circumstances of its compilation, but also boasts of his poetic prowess. Such self-praise is common, especially in the concluding and introductory material of poetic texts, and it can be found not only in the *Choice Book*, but across ‘Aṭṭâr’s oeuvre.²⁷ In the conclusion to the *Divine Book*, for example, ‘Aṭṭâr boasts—with self-conscious hyperbole—that his poems will be recited by houris in paradise.²⁸ In the *Book of Affliction*, he claims to have exhausted all possible metaphorical tropes; he names himself the “Seal of the Poets,” the final and greatest poet of humankind, just as Muhammad, the “Seal of the Prophets,” was the final and greatest of God’s messengers.²⁹ The final section of the *Choice Book*, too, contains a number of quatrains in which ‘Aṭṭâr claims his superiority over all other poets:

Why bother with the poetry of others? *This* is poetry!
When the ocean appears, ablutions with sand (*tayammom*) come to an end.

27. E. Wagner and Bichr Farès, “Mufākḥara,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0777.

28. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Elâhi-nâma*, 6352-3.

29. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 7098, 7104. The moniker “Seal of the Poets” is usually associated with Jâmi, to whom it was likely first applied during the nineteenth-century Revival movement (*Bâz-gasht*). See Franklin Lewis, “To Round and Rondeau the Canon: Jâmi and Fânî’s Reception of the Persian Lyrical Tradition,” in *Jâmi and the Intellectual History of the Muslim World: The Trans-Regional Reception of ‘Abd al-Rahmân Jâmi’s Works, c. 9th/15th-14th/20th*, ed. Thibaut d’Hubert and Alexandre Papas (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

Now that ‘Atṭâr’s poetry has appeared in the world, there is no need to bother with the verses of others, just as the appearance of the ocean after a desert journey signals the end of stop-gap ablutions performed with sand. Similar boasts, in prose, can also be found in the introduction to the *Choice Book*. ‘Atṭâr claims, for example, that his quatrain collection is completely unique, and that any possible competitors ought to be dismissed as mere imitators: “no poet has made anything like this,” he writes, “and even if one did, any mirror can reflect a face.”³¹ According to him, the quatrains also contain unprecedented subtleties and points of divine wisdom:

I know of no *divân* in which you can find the likes of these verses or obtain such subtleties, since this is a treasure of the holy meanings of “*I was a hidden treasure and I wanted to be known*” and a storehouse of the points of the unknown of “*He has the keys of the unknown, and no one knows them but him*.”

ندانم تا در هیچ دیوان مثلی این ابیات توان یافت یا چندین لطایف به دست توان آورد از بهر آنکه
این گنجیست از معانی قدس که «كُنْتُ كَنْزاً مَخْفِياً فَأَرَدْتُ أَنْ أُعْرِفَ» و خزانه‌ای است از نتایج
غیب که «و عِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ».³²

Throughout the Persian literary tradition, poets often speak of their poems as collections of jewels or pearls.³³ In the above passage, this treasure imagery is coupled with the Quranic reference to God’s keys to the unseen (*ghayb*) and the famous “hidden treasure” *ḥadiṣ qodsi* (non-Quranic revelation said to have been uttered by Muhammad). ‘Atṭâr’s poetry is thus likened not just to ordinary jewels, but to an entire “treasury” of divine knowledge and self-manifestation.³⁴

30. ‘Atṭâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 2069.

31. Ibid., 71.

32. Ibid.

33. The action of stringing pearls on a necklace was an especially common metaphor for the process of poetic composition. The image was made famous in William Jones’s translation of the Ḥâfeẓ’s famous “Shirâzi Turk” ghazal. See A. J. Arberry, “Orient Pearls at Random Strung,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 11, no. 4 (1946): 699-712.

34. Quran 6:59.

Over the course of such self-praise, ‘Aṭṭâr extols not only the purported beauty of his verses and their subtle contents, but also the spiritual benefits they provide to an attentive audience:

If the reader (*khwânanda*) comes to the secret of this treasure with contemplation and meditation (*tadabbor va ta‘ammol*) then in no case will his goal (*maqṣud*) not be achieved.

اگر خواننده به تدبّر و تأمل به سرّ سِرّ این گنج رسد در هیچ نوع نبود که مقصود او به حصول
نییوندد.³⁵

In other words, when readers or reciters (the Persian *khwânanda* could mean either) approach the *Choice Book* in a contemplative fashion and meditate on its meanings, they will, according to ‘Aṭṭâr, be sure to reach their “goal.” The exact nature of the goal is not specified, but for the mystically minded audience that ‘Aṭṭâr was targeting, such a term would immediately evoke the proximity to God that constitutes the aim of the sufi path; the quatrains of the *Choice Book* are endowed with a certain spiritual efficacy, propelling their reader-listeners towards that spiritual *telos*. Similarly, as we have already seen, ‘Aṭṭâr’s friends also draw on the semantic field of sufi progress when they first suggest that the poet should compile a selection of his quatrains into a separate book. Speaking of the unorganized quatrains in the *Divân*, they claim that “many of the seekers (*juyanda*) remain devoid of their lot and aspirants (*tâlebân*) return without having reached their goal (*maqṣud*).”³⁶ Terms like “goal,” “seeker,” and “aspirant” all recall the notion of the sufi as traveller on a spiritual journey; the friends thus seem to be intimating that a more organized selection of the quatrains will not only help readers locate specific poems, but also aid their spiritual progress.

35. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 71.

36. Ibid.

As the above passage makes clear, however, such spiritual benefits can only be reaped through particular hermeneutical processes; audiences must approach the text “with meditation and contemplation” (*bâ tadabbor va ta’ammol*) in order to reach their goal. Contemplation was a widespread spiritual exercise practiced by the piety-minded throughout the Islamic world, and it encompassed more than just close or careful reading.³⁷ Although the exact nature of these exercises is not entirely clear—the sources are frustratingly low on detail, and specific practices would likely have changed from place to place and over time—contemplation usually seems to imply a repeated, introspective process of evaluation in the hopes of ethical transformation.³⁸ In the *Memorial*, ‘Aṭṭâr recounts how various spiritual heroes would “sit in contemplation,” often over the course of an entire night.³⁹ Shabestari, in his *Rosebed of Secrets*, also exhorts contemplation as a means of ascent towards the divine.⁴⁰ The most detailed treatment, however, is found in Abū Ḥāmid Ghazzālī’s *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*), a classic work of religious scholarship with which ‘Aṭṭâr was likely familiar.⁴¹ According to Ghazzālī, contemplation consists of repeated and consistent intention towards various signs, verbal or non-verbal, including Quranic verses, sayings of the Prophet, and natural phenomena. The spiritual significance of those signs is deduced and then used as the basis for self-appraisal in the hopes of altering one’s behavior and state of being. For example, a state of repen-

37. Sufi sources use a number of terms to refer to the activity of contemplation, including *tafakkor*, *tadabbor*, *ta’ammol*, *tazakkor*, *naẓar*, and *e’tebâr*; Abū Ḥāmid Ghazzālī draws some subtle distinctions between them, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (Cairo: Lajnat Nashr al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya, 1356-57 [1937-38]), 15:2807.

38. For an overview see Waley, “Contemplative Disciplines,” 538-47. Also see Gavin Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam: The Life and Works of al-Muḥāsibī* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2011), 199-204.

39. Dā’ud-e Ṭā’i, for instance, is reported to have meditated (*tafakkori mi kard*) on God’s domain (*malakut*) from the roof of his house one night; he became so overwhelmed that he lost consciousness and fell (229). Likewise, Ḥasan al-Baṣri praises the previous generation, “who knew the Quran was a book sent to them from God; at night they meditated (*ta’ammol kardandi*) upon it, and during the day they acted upon it” (39).

40. Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity*, 217-67.

41. Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, 15:2802-44. This section is partially translated by Waley in “Contemplative Disciplines.”

tance can be induced by dwelling on one's sins in conjunction with the eschatological threats in the Quran and hadith.⁴² Likewise, a state of thankfulness can be fostered through contemplation of the many beautiful gifts and favors God has bestowed on humankind.⁴³ Such contemplation, according to Ghazzālī, should be performed daily, ideally in both the morning and evening, as a consistent spiritual practice.⁴⁴

According to the *Choice Book's* introduction, the quatrains should also be approached contemplatively, as sites of a self-reflective hermeneutical encounter aimed at spiritual transformation. Composed predominately in a hortatory mode, they do not usually state religious truths abstractly or systematically, but rather urge their reader-listeners to practical pious reform. For example, the following quatrain presents the universality of death in a few striking images, on the basis of which it exhorts the addressee to abstain from chasing material wealth:

Since the lion of the appointed hour lies in ambush for you,
Your final disintegration to dust is certain.
With the passing of time, don't amass wealth, but consider—
Your final lot from fate will be two meters of earth.

در خاک فتادنت یقین خواهد بود	شیر اجلت چو در کمین خواهد بود
⁴⁵ قسمت ز زمان دو گز زمین خواهد بود	در دور زمان مساز املاک و بدان

The quatrain pithily expresses the long-standing notion, common not only to sufism but the broader Irano-Mediterranean wisdom tradition, that material possessions are rendered fundamentally worthless by human beings' inherent mortality. The first two hemistichs explain that death is a certainty, not only in a general sense, but for *you* individually, the poem's addressee: the lion of death waits in ambush for *you*, and *your* disintegration to dust is certain. The uni-

42. Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, 15:2814.

43. Ibid., 2814.

44. Ibid., 2817.

45. 'Aṭṭār, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 912.

versality of death is not permitted to mask the individual significance of its call. The third hemistich derives the moral significance of this fact: in light of the temporality of human existence, *you* ought to refrain from amassing material wealth and possessions, the utility of which is voided by the shortness of life. And the final distich as a whole presents a powerfully concrete *memento mori*, exhorting the addressee to consider (*bedân!*) the two meters of earth that will constitute his or her final resting place. The inevitability of death is thus not to be forgotten, but contemplated as a means of weakening greed and strengthening ascetic resolve. The recitation of the quatrain itself constitutes such a contemplative performance: it guides the audiences's gaze towards forceful images of their own temporality, through which it aims to instigate ethical change. And because quatrains are short and easily memorizable, they can be held in the mind and contemplated throughout the day.⁴⁶

The alleged spiritual efficacy of 'Aṭṭâr's verse is frequently implied through comparisons with medicine. Near the end of the *Choice Book's* prologue, for example, the reader encounters the following metaphor: "In truth, the words of 'Aṭṭâr are an antidote (*taryâk*)"—or, alternatively parsed, "'Aṭṭâr's words are an antidote leading to Truth."⁴⁷ The "speech as medicine" metaphor was commonly used to conceptualize homiletic discourse in 'Aṭṭâr's age: popular preachers, who aimed to instigate repentance and spiritual reform in their audiences, likened themselves to physicians who treated the spiritually ill through speech.⁴⁸ Such

46. Abu Sa'îd, for example, allegedly memorized a quatrain from Bu'l-Qašem, his first spiritual teacher, and continuously recited it to himself whenever he was alone; he is said to have attributed his spiritual success to this practice. Ebn Monavvar, *Asrâr al-towḥîd*, 1:19.

47. 'Aṭṭâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 71. In modern Persian, *taryâk* refers to opium; in 'Aṭṭâr's day, the term would have likely referred to a variety of medicines and antidotes, including opium, but not exclusively so. *Loghat-nâma-ye Dehkhodâ*, s.v. "*taryâk*."

48. Ibn al-Jawzî, the author of the most famous Islamic preaching manual, often represents homiletic speech through this medical metaphor. For example, in the following quotation, taken from an anecdote in the biographical portion of his work, an old man begs the preacher Abū 'Āmir to "cure" him of his impiety through exhortations: "O Abū 'Āmir! May God wash the stain of sins from your heart. I do not cease to long for you desiring to hear your exhortations, for I have a festering sore whose cure has resisted all the efforts of the

metaphors shift the emphasis from speech's meaning to its effects; they suggest that a homily's purpose is not first and foremost to inform, but to counteract irreligious influences and thereby bring its listeners back to a state of spiritually normative "health."⁴⁹ By using the metaphor in the *Choice Book*, 'Aṭṭâr highlights not only the quatrains' thematic and sociological relationship to oral homiletics, but also their alleged influence over the spiritual states of their audiences. According to this model of poetic discourse, the quatrains do not simply transfer information on a cognitive level but, like a medicine, affect their reader-listeners' bodies and emotions as well. They manipulate the audience's valuations and temperament, leading to altered behavior and ethical reform, and thereby elevating them towards God.

The notion of therapeutic speech carries over into 'Aṭṭâr's other works as well. Although the *maṣnavis* lack the prose introduction of the *Choice Book*, they contain many meta-poetic treatments of speech and poetry, especially in their concluding sections, where 'Aṭṭâr boasts of the transformative power of his verse, often in medical terms. For example, the conclusion to the *Conference of the Birds* contains the following boast:

Whoever suffers from the poison of religious deviation (*zahr-e bed'at*),
 These lofty words are antidote (*taryâk*) enough for him!
 Although I am an 'aṭṭâr and a dispenser of anecdotes (*taryâk-deh*),
 I have just burnt liver, like those who sell adulterated musk.

preachers and the remedy of which even the physicians have found impossible. I heard of the effectiveness of your ointment for the treatment of wounds and pain. Therefore, I beg you not to neglect the application of the medicine (*taryâq*) even though its taste may be bitter, for I am one of those who patiently endures the pain of the remedy out of hope for the cure," *Quṣṣâs*, 20/trans. 142. The metaphor also informs the titles of many of Ibn al-Jawzî's works, such as the *Best of Vials* (*Ru'ūs al-qawārîr*), a collection of homiletic materials. This association recalls the Hellenistic conception of philosophy as a therapy for the soul. See Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Merlin Swartz, "Arabic Rhetoric and the Art of the Homily in Medieval Islam," in *Religion and Culture in Medieval Islam*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 56n26; Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 28-9.

49. Cf. Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 14-37.

بس بود تریاکش این حرفِ بلند
سوخته دارم جگر چون ناک ده⁵⁰

هر که شد از زهرِ بدعت دردمند
گرچه عطّارم من و تریاک ده

In terms that foreshadow the prologue to the *Choice Book*, the first verse casts ‘Aṭṭâr’s speech as an antidote to the “poison of religious deviation.” The poet immediately undercuts this boast in the next verse, however, by confessing his hypocrisy and comparing himself to those perfumists who fraudulently sell burnt liver instead of true musk. There is also something of a double entendre here, since to speak of one’s liver as “burnt” also suggests a high rank among the suffering lovers of God.⁵¹ We will attend to issues of sincerity and hypocrisy in the next section, in the context of ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetic persona; here I simply wish to point out that ‘Aṭṭâr plays on his pen-name in order to suggest his verse’s medicinal power. “Attâr” is usually translated as “perfumist,” and compounding and selling scents was certainly an important dimension of the craft of ‘aṭṭâri. But, as the above verses make clear, an ‘aṭṭâr was also a “dispenser of anecdotes,” and in this sense the term is perhaps better translated as “apothecary” or “druggist.” ‘Aṭṭâr here links this aspect of his pen-name to his poetic activity, claiming to cure spiritual illness through verbal concoctions. And after his death, the broader literary tradition continued to understand his poetry through the lens of his nom de plume and presumed profession. For instance, Nur-Allâh Shushtari, the sixteenth-century Shi‘i hagiographer, opens his chapter on ‘Aṭṭâr with the following verse, incorporating medical terms suggested by the latter’s pen-name in order to convey the spiritual efficacy of his poetry:

The bearer of the drug (*dâru*) of effacement, ‘Aṭṭâr,
Whose verse (*naẓm*) cures afflicted lovers . . .

که نظم اوست شفابخش عاشقانِ حزین⁵²

همان خریطه‌کش داروی فناء عطّار

50. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 4592-3.

51. Musk was understood to be the congealed blood of the musk deer, and apparently it could be adulterated with burnt liver. See ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 776-7n4593; *Loghat-nâma-ye Dehkhodâ*, s.vv. “moshk,” “nâk.”

52. Shushtari, *Majâles al-mo’menin*, 99.

To ‘Aṭṭâr’s mind, and the minds of his later audiences, ‘Aṭṭâr’s most significant medicines were not the herbs of his shop, but the words of his poetry.

In fact, it is possible that ‘Aṭṭâr was not a druggist at all and that his pen-name was intended in an entirely metaphorical sense. Out of those works now accepted as authentic, there is only a single anecdote in the *Book of Secrets* that may suggest he was actually a practicing apothecary. In it, ‘Aṭṭâr explains how he was summoned to compound a syrup (*sharbat*) for a dying miser; he attempted to administer rosewater to ease the man’s pain, but the miser refused this treatment for fear of wasting the precious liquid. After his death, the miser’s rosewater stash was then poured on his grave, and it was of such a quantity to turn the area to mud; ‘Aṭṭâr wryly observes that since he could not bear to enjoy rose-water’s benefits in life, the miser must now wallow in mud in his death. The story does not necessarily mean that ‘Aṭṭâr was a professional apothecary, though, since it could also be read metaphorically: the miser refused to be “cured” by the “rose-water” of ‘Aṭṭâr’s stories and exhortations while he was alive, and after his death it was too late.⁵³

Such metaphors may seem to suggest that poetry can transform its audiences regardless of whether or not they understand its meaning, just as a medicine’s efficacy does not depend on its patients’ comprehension of its mechanisms. Although occasionally ‘Aṭṭâr seems to suggest that spiritual efficacy is somewhat independent of semantic signification, at other times he makes it clear that “correct” understanding is critical to poetry’s transformative force. We have already seen, for example, how ‘Aṭṭâr urges readers to approach the quatrains with “contemplation and meditation,” alluding to a spiritual practice that stresses deep, repeated hermeneutical engagement with various signs in the world, both textual and non-textual. And a number of

53. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Asrâr-nâma*, 2858-75; Shafî‘î-Kadkani, intro. to *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 28-9.

‘Atṭār’s meta-poetic verses enjoin their addressees to uncover his poems’ meanings through intense interpretive labor, as in the following quatrains from the final chapter of the *Choice Book*:

We threaded one hundred pearls as allusions, then left.
 We picked one hundred roses as expressions, then left.
 If you are wise, don’t look to the verbal form (*lafẓ*), but contemplate (*bendish*)
 The secret that we said in symbols, then left.

صد گل به عبارتی برُفتیم و شدیم	صد در به اشارتی بسفتیم و شدیم
آن راز که ما به رمز گفتیم و شدیم ⁵⁴	گر دانایی به لفظ منگر بندیش

Poetry is imbued with a secret meaning, accessible through various allusions and symbols, and the reader is invited to reflect on these deeper significations instead of merely basking in its verbal beauty. Another quatrain from the same chapter makes a similar point, urging readers to ruminate on the poems slowly and carefully:

I have strung many pearls of certainty for you,
 You should know that I am not sleeping like you.
 Don’t pass so quickly from this back to frivolity,
 But think a bit about what I have told you.

آگاه شوی که من نخفتم با تو	بس درّ یقین که می بسفتم با تو
باری بندیش تا چه گفتم با تو ⁵⁵	مگذر به گزاف سرسری از سر این

Similarly, the *maṣnavis* also end with entreaties to read repeatedly and carefully in order to unlock their transformative potential. In the conclusion to the *Book of Affliction*, for example, ‘Atṭār claims that if one of the “people of secrets”—a common epithet for those who practice sufistic piety—spends “a long life in this book,” then at every moment “it will bestow new light upon him.”⁵⁶ And at the end of the *Conference of the Birds*, ‘Atṭār likens the book to a coquettish

54. ‘Atṭār, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 2053.

55. Ibid., 2078.

56. ‘Atṭār, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 7110-2.

bride that removes her veil only slowly, and urges his audience to read the poem multiple times, so that with each reading new secrets might be revealed to them.⁵⁷

In short, the poems' spiritual efficacy—articulated in medical terms—must be read in conjunction with 'Aṭṭār's stress on the hermeneutic labor required to uncover their inner meanings, which reveal themselves only after extended contemplation and multiple literary encounters. The medicinal metaphor thus implies not so much a black-box instrumentality as a perlocutionary efficacy, in which poetry's significance begins in the semantic realm but then expands to include the bodily, emotive, and even ontological changes that it aims to induce in its reader-listeners.⁵⁸

Saints' Words and the Human Heart

In comparison with the other works in 'Aṭṭār's oeuvre, the *Memorial* is something of an outlier. The only work of prose, it recounts the spiritual feats and sayings of dozens of spiritual heroes claimed by the sufi tradition, from Ovays-e Qarani to Hallāj.⁵⁹ Similar material, of course, can be found in the *maṣnavis* as well, along with beast fables, historical anecdotes, and stories of the prophets. But the *Memorial* is exclusively focused on the feats and dicta of the saints, and 'Aṭṭār's own authorial voice is much more subdued. The anecdotes are sparse, conveying only the necessary narrative detail, and they lack the homiletic extrapolations that are so important

57. 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 4507-8.

58. I use "perlocutionary" in a sense close to that of John Austin, for whom "the perlocutionary act . . . is the achieving of certain effects by saying something." But whereas Austin deals almost exclusively with oral utterances in "ordinary" language situations, 'Aṭṭār's homiletic perlocutions are carried out in a textual medium and rely on fiction and persona. *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 92-93, 121.

59. For a useful overview of the work and its contents, see Paul Losensky's introduction to his translation, *Memorial of God's Friends: Lives and Sayings of Sufis* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 1-37; Paul Losensky, "Words and Deeds: Message and Structure in 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*," in Lewisohn and Shackle, *Spiritual Flight*, 75-92. Also see John Renard's generic typology of Islamic hagiographical writings in *Friends of God*, 240-6.

to the *maṣnavis*. All in all, ‘Aṭṭār’s presence in the *Memorial* is not so much that of a sermonizing story-teller as an editor and compiler.⁶⁰

Despite these formal differences, the prose *Memorial* is also cast as a spiritually transformative and therapeutic text, reminiscent of the *Choice Book*. The *Memorial*’s audience is enjoined to read carefully and contemplatively as part of a daily exercise of self-fashioning. They are instructed to approach the saints’ feats and dicta as yardsticks for evaluating their own selves, through which they can become aware of their own spiritual shortcomings and nurture an ethos of pious humility. And this transformative potential is again expressed in medicinal terms. The words of the saints, according to the *Memorial*’s introduction, are a sort of medicine for the heart, which alters the state of being of those who attend to them.

The *Memorial* is comprised of a general introduction and seventy-two hagiographical chapters, each one of which is devoted to the spiritual feats and dicta of an individual pious virtuoso.⁶¹ The saints are presented in a loosely chronological order, from the generation after the Prophet to the famous tenth-century sufi martyr Ḥallāj.⁶² Each chapter follows a standard structure: they begin with a bit of rhymed prose in praise of their subject, followed by accounts of his or her spiritual feats and a collection of spiritual sayings; they generally conclude with a few anecdotes related to the saint’s death and posthumous appearance in dreams. Much of this material is adapted from earlier biographical collections written in Arabic and dialectical Per-

60. It should be noted, however, that ‘Aṭṭār often alters the material in subtle but significant ways. See Paul Losensky, “The Creative Compiler: The Art of Rewriting in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tazkirat al-awliyā*,” in *The Necklace of the Pleiades: Studies in Persian Literature Presented to Heshmat Moayyad on his 80th Birthday*, ed. Franklin Lewis and Sunil Sharma (Leiden University Press: Leiden, 2010).

61. On the possible symbolic significance of the number of biographies, see Losensky, “Words and Deeds,” 78-9.

62. The first chapter is actually devoted to Ja‘far-e Šādeq, a clear violation of the chronological structure maintained throughout the rest of the book. Nonetheless, ‘Aṭṭār begins with him “for the sake of spiritual blessings” (*be sabab-e tabarroḳ*). Ja‘far is also the only member of the Prophet’s family to be included in the *Memorial*. He seems to function as a synecdoche for that entire class of spiritually-privileged persons, and his presence at the beginning of the book demonstrates that spiritual authority is ultimately derived from the Prophet through them. ‘Aṭṭār, *Tazkerat al-owleyā*, 5, 11-12.

sian, such as the works of Sulamī, Anṣārī, and Hojviri.⁶³ As ‘Aṭṭār explains in the introduction, he translated the Arabic and modernized the archaic Persian so that “all might be included” in the blessings of the saints; he thus seems to have understood the *Memorial* as a popularizing project.⁶⁴ He elaborates other reasons for compiling the work as well, including his life-long devotion to the saints, his hope for their blessing and intercession, and his desire to reinvigorate the religion of an allegedly decaying age through accounts of their words and deeds.⁶⁵

But it is the text’s potential to existentially transform its reader-listeners that is arguably the dominant theme of the introduction. Among the dozen or so reasons that ‘Aṭṭār adduces for the compilation of the *Memorial*, a number of them specifically reference saintly speech’s alleged influence on the heart. For example, ‘Aṭṭār quotes a saying attributed to Jonayd, according to which saintly speech aids the “heart-broken”:

[Jonayd] said: “Their words are an army of the armies of the Lord—glory and majesty are his—and if a devotee (*morid*) is heart-broken (*del-shekasta*), he can find strength through them and gain aid from that army.” And the proof of these words is that God most high has said: “O Muhammad! We tell you stories of the those who have passed so that your heart may be calmed and strengthened through them.”

گفت: «سخن ایشان لشکری است از لشکرهای خدای عزّ و جلّ که بدان مرید را اگر دل شکسته بود قوی گردد و از آن لشکر مدد یابد.» و حجت این سخن آن است که حق تعالی می فرماید که: «و کلاً نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الرُّسُلِ مَا نُنَبِّئُ بِهِ فَوَادِّكَ» ما ای محمد قصه گشتگان با تو می گوئیم تا دل تو بدان آرام گیرد و قوی شود.⁶⁶

The words of the saints are sent by God to strengthen and calm “devotee[s]” (*morid*), a term which gestures towards the sufistic inclinations of the text’s intended audience. The site of

63. Regarding ‘Aṭṭār’s possible sources, see Este‘lami, intro. to *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, xxvii-xxxiv.

64. ‘Aṭṭār, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 7.

65. Ibid., 7-9. See the analysis of Alessandro Bausani, “Considerazioni sulla *Tadhkiratu ‘l-Auliya’* di ‘Aṭṭār,” in *Colloquio italo-iraniano sul poeta mistico Fariduddin ‘Aṭṭār* (Roma, 24-25 Marzo 1977) (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1978); Renard, *Friends of God*, 250-2.

66. ‘Aṭṭār, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 6.

these words' action is the heart—specifically the “broken” heart—which is justified through a Quranic proof text.⁶⁷ Other passages throughout the introduction also affirm saintly speech's influence over the heart, often in explicitly medicinal terms. For example, ‘Aṭṭâr explains his love for the saints and their dicta as follows:

For no apparent reason, from childhood onwards, love for this clan has swelled in my soul, and their words were always a *mofarreḥ* for my heart.

بی سببی از کودکی باز دوستی این طایفه در جانم موج می زد و همه وقت مفرّح دل من سخن ایشان بود.⁶⁸

Mofarreḥ was a sweet-tasting drug composed of valuable ingredients that was thought to strengthen the heart and liver; ‘Aṭṭâr here likens the saints' dicta to a *mofarreḥ* for the heart, echoing some of the language from the previous quotation, where their speech was said to aid and strengthen heart-broken devotees.⁶⁹

According to sufi psychology, the heart is a spiritual faculty by means of which human beings can envisage and approach God, and through which divine blessings are in turn bestowed on the body. Thus, as Najm al-Din Râzi succinctly explains, the heart serves as the ontological link between the microcosm and the divine realms:

The human heart has one face turned towards the world of divinity and the other face towards the world of the bodily frame. It is for this reason that it is called *qalb*, since it contains the two worlds, corporal and spiritual, and it distributes [to the body] every sustaining grace that it receives from the spirit.

67. ‘Attâr provides the proof-text, Quran 11:120, in Arabic as well as Persian, but I have rendered only the latter into English above. His translation of the Arabic is rather free, and he has manipulated the sense of text to more clearly support his claim. For instance, the original Arabic refers specifically to “the messages of the prophets” (*anbâ’ al-rusul*), which would seem to exclude stories of the saints, but ‘Aṭṭâr’s Persian translation speaks more generally of “stories of those who have passed” (*qeṣṣa-ye gozashtegân*).

68. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 7-8.

69. *Loghat-nâma-ye Dehkhodâ*, s.v. “*mofarreḥ*.”

دل آدمی را یک روی در عالم روحانیت است و یک روی در عالم قالب و دل را ازین وجه قلب خوانند که در قلب دو عالم جسمانی و روحانی است تا هر مدد فیض که از روح می ستاند دل مقسم آن فیض بود.⁷⁰

Here Râzi puns on the etymology of *qalb*, the Arabic term for “heart”—its trilateral root encompasses notions of turning, facing, and rotation—in order to highlight the heart’s ontological liminality, through which it mediates between the individual’s material body and the divine realm.⁷¹ Through ascetic practice the heart can be directed more and more towards the second of these two poles; then, according to Râzi, when “it reaches perfection through nurturing, purification, and intention towards God, it becomes the manifestation of the total attributes of divinity.”⁷² ‘Aṭṭâr’s works encode a similar understanding of the heart as the intermediary between the physical and spiritual, and we will examine several anecdotes that elaborate on these themes in subsequent chapters.⁷³ Here, however, we simply wish to stress that, for ‘Aṭṭâr and his readers, the heart was not only the physiological organ that circulates blood or the metaphorical seat of affect, but the spiritual faculty through which the believer could envision and access God, and even become a conduit for his manifestation in the world. Thus, as Bausani points out, the “heart-broken devotees” who the *Memorial* aims to cure should not be understood as suffering from an affect disorder, but an ontological state of estrangement from the divine.⁷⁴ Sainly speech, by “strengthening and calming the heart,” ontologically alters its recipients, providing them with a channel for the re-establishment of a pre-eternal proximity to God.

70. Najm al-Din Râzi Dâya, *Merşâd al-‘ebâd*, ed. Moḥammad Amin Riâhi (Tehran: Bongâh-e Tarjoma va Nashr-e Ketâb, 1391 [2012-13]), 189. Translated by Hamid Algar as *The Path of God’s Bondsmen from Origin to Return* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1982).

71. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. “q-l-b.”

72. Dâya, *Merşâd al-‘ebâd*, 191.

73. See Chapter 4, p. 217-222.

74. Bausani, “Considerazioni,” 78.

This transformative potential is explicitly claimed by ‘Aṭṭâr not just for the saints’ dicta in general, but for the *Memorial* in particular. Near the end of the introduction, he writes that after the Quran and hadith, “there is no better book in creation” than the *Memorial*.⁷⁵ Its alchemical power is expressed in a gendered hierarchy, through which the book allegedly elevates its audience:

This is a book that changes effeminates (*mokhanneshân*) into men, and men into lion-men, and lion-men into paragons, and paragons into passion itself; how can it fail to turn them into passion itself? Whoever recites this book and reflects upon it as is prescribed will become aware of what passion lay in the saints’ souls to bring forth such deeds and words like this from their hearts.

این کتابی است که مختنّان را مرد کند و مردان را شیرمرد کند و شیرمردان را فرد کند و فردان را عین درد گرداند و چگونه عین درد نگرداند؟ که هر که این کتاب چنان که شرط است بر خواند و بنگرد آگاه گردد که این چه درد بوده‌است در جانهای ایشان که چنین کارها و از این شیوه سخنها از دل ایشان به صحرا آمده‌است.⁷⁶

We will discuss the notion of spiritual “manhood” in more detail in a subsequent chapter;⁷⁷ here it suffices to note that, according to ‘Aṭṭâr, the *Memorial* not only provides its audience with ethical instruction but changes the very nature of their being. It transforms effeminates into men and men into lion-men and so forth, elevating its readers through the ranks of “manliness” until they realize the painful, passionate drive for God that dominates the souls of the saints and which gives rise to their words and deeds. To activate this transformative power, the reader must engage with the work in a specific way: he or she is to recite the saints’ words out loud (*bar khwândan*), attending to them visually, aurally, and bodily thorough vocal production.⁷⁸

75. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 8.

76. Ibid.

77. See Chapter 4, p. 242-260.

78. Leili Anvar-Chenderoff, “Le genre hagiographique à travers la *Tadhkirat al-awliâ*’ de Farid al-Dîn ‘Attâr,” in *Saints orientaux*, ed. Denise Aigle (Paris: De Boccard, 1995), 49-50; Bausani, “Considerazioni,” 83-4.

Even though the saints' dicta are presented in medicinal, and sometimes even talismanic terms, the audience still must comprehend—and reflect upon—their meanings. The saints' words, according to 'Aṭṭâr, are similar to the Quran, which is like a medicine (*dâru*); it has an "effect" (*aṣar*) even if one does not understand what one is consuming. Nevertheless, 'Aṭṭâr continues, the effect is much greater if one does understand.⁷⁹ Readers are urged to contemplate the *Memorial* as part of a hermeneutics of the self, evaluating their own spiritual states against those of the pious heroes lionized within. According to 'Aṭṭâr, neither he nor his contemporaries can fully live up to the ideals encoded in these dicta. Nevertheless, through them they can be made aware of their own failings and thereby cleansed of false pride:

Abu 'Ali Daqqâq (God have mercy on him!) was asked: "Is there any use in listening to the words of the men when we cannot act on them?" He replied: "Yes, it has two uses. First, if the man is a seeker, his aspiration will be strengthened and his yearning increased. Second, if he sees any pride in himself, it will be broken. And he will drive pretension from his mind, and his good will seem bad, and if he is not blind, he will contemplate himself." Just as Shaykh Maḥfuz said: "Don't weigh the people according to your scale; weigh yourself according to the scales of the men of the path, so that you may know their worth and your bankruptcy."

شیخ ابو علی دقاق را گفتند رحمه الله که: «در سخن مردان شنیدن هیچ فایده هست چون بر آن کار نمی توانیم کرد؟» گفت: «بلی در وی دو فایده هست: اول آنکه اگر مرد طالب بود قوی همت گردد و طلبش زیادت شود. دوم آنکه اگر در خود دماغی بیند آن دماغ فرو شکند و دعوی از سر بیرون کند و نیک او بد نماید و اگر کور نیست خود مشاهده کند.» كما قال الشيخ محفوظ رحمه الله: «لا تَزِنِ الخلقَ بِمِيزَانِكَ وَ زِنِ نَفْسَكَ بِمِيزَانِ الْمُوقِنِينَ لِتَعْلَمَ فَضْلَهُمْ وَ إِفْلَاسَكَ.» یعنی خلق را به ترازوی خود وزن مکن اما به ترازوی مردان راه خود را بسنج تا بدانی فضل ایشان و افلاس خود.⁸⁰

According to 'Aṭṭâr (via Daqqâq), one listens to the saints' words not in the hopes of imitating them directly, but in order to develop a renewed appreciation of one's own spiritual weakness.

79. 'Aṭṭâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 7.

80. Ibid., 6. Shaykh Maḥfuz's words are provided in both Arabic and Persian; I have translated only the Persian above, in which 'Aṭṭâr renders *al-mawqinîn* (those who have firm knowledge of God) as *mardân-e râh* (the men of the path).

The dicta provoke pious listeners—or in the words of Daqqâq, those who “are not blind”—to turn inwards and evaluate their spiritual standing according to a new metric, one in which they are measured relative not to their contemporaries, but to the exemplars of the past. When reader-listeners realize their own spiritual bankruptcy, they may be motivated to reform: Abu ‘Ali explains that seekers’ aspiration will be heightened when they hear the saints’ words. But even more fundamentally, such a realization shatters the prideful delusions of spiritual achievement. In this sense, simply recognizing the extent of one’s spiritual weakness constitutes a step forward on the spiritual path.

In short, the *Memorial* is presented as a text that not only informs its readers, but existentially transforms their onto-ethical mode of being. And for a reader interested in maximizing these effects, ‘Aṭṭâr recommends a practice of daily reading. Consistent with the venerative ethos of the *Memorial*, he does not make this claim directly but instead relies on a quotation attributed to Yusof-e Hamadâni (d. 1140), a spiritual master from a previous generation:

Yusof-e Hamadâni (God have mercy on him!) was asked: “When this age passes, and this clan withdraws behind the veil of concealment, what will we do to remain in health? [*be-salâmat bemânim*]?” He said: “You will read eight pages of their sayings every day.” I therefore considered it an incumbent religious obligation to compose some daily readings [*verd*] for the ignorant.

امام یوسف همدانی رحمه الله را پرسیدند که: «چون این روزگار بگذرد و این طایفه روی در نقابِ تواری آرند چه کنیم تا بسلامت بمانیم؟» گفت: «هر روز هشت ورق از سخن ایشان می خوانید.» پس وردی ساختن اهل غفلت را فرض عین دیدم.⁸¹

Implicit in the question is the belief that the saints maintain the well-being of the world and those within it, and that they will vanish in accordance with the widely accepted model of generational societal decay. In response, Hamadâni explains that future generations will still have access to the saints’ blessings through textual accounts of their feats and sayings. He thus rec-

81. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 7.

ommends a daily reading of eight pages of their utterances in order to maintain spiritual health. According to ‘Aṭṭâr, the *Memorial* was composed to serve just such a purpose, being a set of daily readings (*verd*) for those who would otherwise remained mired in the ignorance of the age. The term he employs here, *verd*, usually refers to litanies of Qurānic verses and pious phrases that would be recited at specific hours, often late at night or early in the morning, as a form of supererogatory devotion.⁸² ‘Aṭṭâr’s application of the term to the *Memorial* may therefore suggest that he intended it to be read every day at prescribed times. The term also has theurgic overtones—it can refer to a verbal charm, especially one derived from the Qurān—which also gestures towards saintly speech’s spiritual efficacy above and beyond its semantic content.⁸³

Given the paucity of external sources regarding their reception and interpretation, meta-discursive gestures such as these are invaluable in any attempt to reconstruct the practices and conceptualizations of reading that were current in the mystically minded communities whom ‘Aṭṭâr took as his primary audience. The *Memorial*, the *Choice Book*, and the *maṣnavis*, despite the vast generic gaps between them, all represent reading as a spiritually therapeutic activity. According to ‘Aṭṭâr’s framings of these works, they do not simply transfer knowledge, but rather act upon their reader-listeners’ hearts and souls, leading to ethical reform and elevation towards the divine. And like a medicine, the healing power of speech depends on its patients’ adherence to a particular course of treatment. More specifically, reader-listeners are urged towards an intense hermeneutical engagement with the works over time. Regarding the *Memorial*, readers are invited to read eight pages of saints’ dicta a day, a daily

82. F. M. Denny, “Wird,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7914.

83. Mahmoud Omidshah, “Charms,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 13 October 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/charms-lat>.

practice through which they will internalize the saints' wisdom and benefit from their spiritual power. Similarly, in the introduction to the *Choice Book*, the audience is urged to memorize and contemplate the quatrains so that they can embody the wisdom contained therein. Finally, in the *Conference of the Birds*, they are instructed to carefully recite the poem as often as possible, scanning for new "secrets" every time; this is not a book to be read once and then put away. In short, 'Aṭṭâr's spiritual therapy is durational, and reader-listeners must be actively engaged in their own treatment. His works, like the sufi ritual practices to which they are compared (litanies and *zêkr*, contemplation and mediation, and, as we shall see in Chapter 5, the forty-day retreat), not only reiterate a sufi worldview, but become sites in which sufi subjectivities are generated and performed.

Speaker and Authority

The rhetorical effect and spiritual efficacy of an utterance is not derived from its meaning alone, but is intimately tied to the religious authority and spiritual state of its speaker. According to a piece of proverbial wisdom current in 'Aṭṭâr's time, one should not seek medical treatment from an ill physician; likewise, one should not accept the admonishments of a preacher who fails to conduct himself in a pious and God-fearing manner.⁸⁴ The perlocutionary power of a homily depends on the sincerity of the preacher, whose own exercise of piety authorizes him to berate, exhort, and otherwise call his listeners to a more religiously valuable mode of being. In addition to the issue of persuasive force, something of the speaker's own ethical and ontological state was thought to be captured in his speech and thereby made accessible to his listeners. In an oral environment, a preacher's reputation for piety would likely already

84. 'Ali Akbar Dehkhodâ, *Amṣâl va ḥekam* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1960), 2:1067.

be known to his audience, or at least readily communicable through non-linguistic channels. ‘Aṭṭâr, however, circulated his works in a textual form, and he clearly intended them to reach audiences outside of his own immediate social milieu. He therefore needed to find a way to textually convey his spiritual authority to an impersonal readership, all the more so because of the vague cloud of religious opprobrium that hung over poetic discourse throughout much of the pre-modern Islamic world. ‘Aṭṭâr thus carefully constructs the personae he adopts to “speak” his texts, justifying his spiritual authority and alternately defending and apologizing for his use of the poetic form. In his verse works, in addition to the traditional literary self-encomium, ‘Aṭṭâr boasts of his piety and passion for God while actively distancing himself from the panegyrist and their “irreligious” verse. Simultaneously, he fosters an aura of sincerity by confessing his spiritual shortcomings in connection with his practice of poetry.⁸⁵ In the prose *Memorial*, on the other hand, ‘Aṭṭâr attempts to recede into the background as a devoted editor and compiler who valorizes the spiritual states of the saints and transmits their sayings without contamination. In the present section, we will more closely examine how ‘Aṭṭâr constructs these personae while attending to the ways in which they are used to justify his claims to produce—or, in the case of the *Memorial*, transmit—spiritually therapeutic speech.

Miraculous Feats and Saintly Speech

In twelfth-century sufism, the saints (*owleyâ*) were those who, through some combination of divine grace and their own striving, had achieved a degree of proximity to God. They are, according to *Memorial*’s opening benediction, illuminated by divine light, freed from the creaturely aspects of their being, and effaced in the oneness of God.⁸⁶ And by virtue of this privi-

85. See the material collected by Ritter under the title “The Poet on Himself” in *Ocean of the Soul*, 151-64.

86. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 3.

leged ontological position, they are endowed with authority over the rest of creation. They are God's deputies on earth, channels through which his blessings—and his wrath—are made manifest in the world.⁸⁷ Their mediatory status is, as several scholars have pointed out, encapsulated in the two possible vowelings of the term “*velâyat/valâyat*” (sainthood); while “*valâyat*” signifies intimacy between friends, and refers to the saints' relationship with God, “*velâyat*” signifies delegated authority, and refers to their relationship with the rest of creation.⁸⁸ Holy men were believed to wield very real supernatural powers, and they could thus attract huge followings and patronage from political authorities eager to secure their blessings.⁸⁹ After their deaths, they were often thought to continue intervening in the world, and their shrines became major destinations for those seeking intercession. Stories of their miraculous feats were set down in writing by their followers and descendants: the well-known hagiographies devoted to Abu Sa'îd-e Abu'l-Khayr, Aḥmad-e Jâm, and Rumi are typical in this regard.⁹⁰ 'Aṭṭâr does not seem to have been devoted to any single living saintly figure, but he regards himself as a follower of all the deceased spiritual heroes claimed by the mainstream sufi tradition. As we have

87. Jamil Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace: The Sufi Brotherhoods in Islamic Religious Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 51-5; Renard, *Friends of God*, 260-6.

88. Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), xvii-xx.

89. The socio-political power of sufi groups and their leaders has been explored in a number of contexts; see, inter alia, Jürgen Paul, “Forming a Faction: The *Ḥimāyat* System of Khwaja Ahrar,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 4 (1991): 533-48; Asom Urunbaev and Jo-Ann Gross, *The Letters of Khwāja 'Ubayd Allāh Aḥrār and His Associates* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1-22; Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*; Omid Safi, “Bargaining with Baraka: Persian Sufism, “Mysticism,” and Pre-modern Politics,” *Muslim World* 90 (Fall 2000): 259-88.

90. Heshmat Moayyad and Franklin Lewis, eds., trans., *The Colossal Elephant and His Spiritual Feats: Shaykh Aḥmad-e Jâm; The Life and Legend of a Popular Sufi Saint of 12th Century Iran* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2004), 40-7; Lewis, *Rumi*, 242-60; Fritz Meier, *Abū Sa'îd-i Abū l-Ḥayr (357-440/967-1049): Wirklichkeit und Legende* (Tehran: Bibliothèque Pahlavi, 1976), 19-22; Shafi'i-Kadkani, “Khândân-e Abu Sa'îd”; Gerhard Böwering, “Bestāmī, Bāyazīd,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 15 December 1989, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bestami-bastami-bayazid-abu-yazid-tayfur-b>. Also see John O'Kane's introduction to his translation of Ebn Monnavar's hagiographical collection, *The Secrets of God's Mystical Oneness; or, The Spiritual Stations of Shaikh Abu Sa'îd* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers in association with Bibliotheca Persica, 1992), 9-11, 45-50.

seen, by collecting and disseminating their sayings and feats, he hoped to secure their blessings during his lifetime and their intercession on the day of judgement.⁹¹

The sayings collected in the *Memorial* are thus endowed with spiritual power not only because of their specific content, but because they were uttered by the saints, the friends of God and his deputies on earth. And the proof of the saints' elevated rank in the cosmic hierarchy consists of, among other things, their miraculous performances and feats of superhuman asceticism.⁹² Although readers with even a rudimentary knowledge of sufism would likely have already been familiar with the figures treated in the *Memorial*, 'Aṭṭâr activates and sustains the valorizing discourse surrounding them by reciting stories of their alleged miracles, and he thereby legitimates his venerative attitude towards their persons and words. Ultimately, 'Aṭṭâr is far more interested in the saints' sayings than their feats: he mentions the former forty-two times in the introduction, but alludes to the latter only seven.⁹³ Nevertheless, each saint's dicta are authenticated and legitimated by the miracle narratives that introduce them. Their sayings are worth dwelling on because they were spoken by those who had achieved proximity with the divine, a spiritual rank evinced by their superhuman achievements.⁹⁴

Given the saints' ontological proximity to the divine, their speech is not like that of other humans: it originates not through creaturely exertion, but is bestowed on them directly by God. This is made clear in the first Persian-language paragraph of the *Memorial's* prologue, which immediately follows the Arabic benediction:

91. 'Aṭṭâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 6, 9.

92. On saintly miracles as evidence of spiritual authority, see *Friends of God*, 247-8, 267-75.

93. Anvar-Chenderoff, "Le genre hagiographique," 41-4; Losensky, "Words and Deeds," 75-6.

94. Unlike traditional chains of transmission (*esnâds*), the miracle narratives do not ensure that a particular dictum was transmitted correctly; rather, they confirm the speaker's sainthood and thus guarantee the saying's spiritual worth. Cf. J. A. Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqât Genre from al-Sulamî to Jāmî* (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2001), 107, 178.

Besides the Quran and the traditions, there are no other words higher than the words of the shaykhs of the path—may God have mercy on them. Their words are the result of feats and states (*kâr o hâl*), and not the fruit of memorization and narration (*hefz o qâl*); and from clear revelation (*‘ayân*), not from declaration (*bayân*); and from secrets (*asrâr*), not from repetition (*takrâr*); and from divine knowledge (*‘elm-e ladonni*), not acquired knowledge (*‘elm-e kasbi*); and from boiling (*jushidan*), not from exertion (*kushidan*); and from the world of “My lord molded me,” not from the world of “My father taught me,” because they are the inheritors of the prophets—God’s prayers upon them all!

چون از قرآن و اخبار گذشتی هیچ سخن بالای سخن مشایخ طریقت نیست رحمهم الله که سخن ایشان نتیجه کار و حال است نه ثمره حفظ و قال و از عیان است نه از بیان و از اسرار است و نه از تکرار و از علم لدنی است نه از علم کسبی و از جوشیدن است نه از کوشیدن و از عالم آدبانی ربی است نه از جهان علّمنی اُبی که ایشان ورثه انبیاءاند صلوات الرحمن علیهم أجمعین.⁹⁵

According to ‘Aṭṭâr, these dicta well up spontaneously in the souls of the saints, untainted by the normal human means of generating and transmitting knowledge. Their sayings are not produced through individual effort or acquired through memorization at the feet of human teachers. Instead of repeating the uncertain learning of previous generations, the saints are endowed with knowledge of divine secrets poured directly into their hearts by God. Their speech originates, as ‘Aṭṭâr succinctly puts it, from the world of “My lord molded me” and not “My father taught me.” Their dicta are thus both more significant and more epistemologically secure than normal human discourse: they are products of the “clear revelation” of divine knowledge, while human knowledge is the mere parroting of “declaration” across the generations.

Given its divine origin, saintly speech often takes on a revelatory character in ‘Aṭṭâr’s works and is even portrayed as a form of extra-Quranic inspiration. The saints are, as ‘Aṭṭâr explains in the above quotation, the “heirs to the prophets” and thus God’s delegates on earth in a post-prophetic age. Similarly, near the end of the *Memorial*’s introduction, the saints are said to be “in the likeness of the prophets,” a claim that is supported with the famous hadith, “The

95. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 4.

scholars among my community are like the prophets among the Tribe of Israel.”⁹⁶ Like the prophets, the saints function as exemplars and intercessors, and their sayings are a channel for the continuing divine presence in the world. Of course, the Quran still takes theoretical precedence. As ‘Aṭṭâr tirelessly reminds his readers, “there is no speech higher than the words of the saints, *excepting the Quran and the hadith*.”⁹⁷ Sainly dicta are also repeatedly described as a commentary (*sharḥ*) on the Quran, the assumption being that a commentary, in relation to its object, is ontologically derivative.⁹⁸ At the same time, however, commentaries also render their objects accessible and intelligible to new audiences. Many people, ‘Aṭṭâr explains, are ignorant of Arabic morphology and syntax and thus lack access to the Quran and the hadith. He therefore collected saintly dicta and circulated the *Memorial* so that both the “elect” and the “masses” could access the spiritual benefits of the Quran and hadith by means of this “commentary.”⁹⁹ In other words, although theoretically subordinate to the holy book, saintly dicta not only provide access to its meanings, but also function as a more immediate and intelligible corpus of inspired speech for a wide swath of ‘Aṭṭâr’s popular Persian-speaking audience.

Throughout the *Memorial*’s introduction, ‘Attâr casts himself as a careful transmitter, faithfully rendering the saints’ inspired dicta into contemporary Persian without any authorial “contamination.” Except when absolutely necessary “to ward off the misunderstanding of the uninitiated,” he refrains from adding his own commentary or annotations: “I did not think it would be proper (*adab nadidam*),” he writes, “to place my speech alongside theirs.”¹⁰⁰ Such annotations are, according to ‘Aṭṭâr, in any case usually unnecessary, as the saints’ words speak

96. Ibid., 8-9.

97. Ibid., 4, 6.

98. Ibid., 4, 8, emphasis mine.

99. Ibid., 7.

100. Ibid., 5.

for themselves: “If anyone needs a commentary, he ought first to look at their words and interpret them again.”¹⁰¹ In short, ‘Aṭṭâr is reluctant to inject his authorial voice into the material and thereby increase the distance between the audience and the text’s saintly subjects. On the contrary, he aims to minimize his own role, so that readers can focus on the words of the saints directly, as if they were seated in one of their preaching sessions or teaching circles.¹⁰² ‘Aṭṭâr even does away with the *esnâds*, or authenticating chains of transmission, that are typical of the earlier Arabic hagiographical compilations, including those of Qushayrî, Iṣfahânî, and Sulamî.¹⁰³ This is not to suggest that historical accuracy was unimportant to ‘Aṭṭâr, or that he rejects *esnâds* on methodological grounds. On the contrary, the transformative power of the dicta depends on the authenticity of their saintly origin, and ‘Aṭṭâr thus claims to have “exercised utmost caution” to include only authentic sayings and narratives.¹⁰⁴ The traditional scholarly apparatus documenting that process, however, was not included in the text so as to provide ‘Aṭṭâr’s readers with a more direct and seemingly unmediated encounter with the saints’ inspired words.

Of course, ‘Aṭṭâr is much more involved in his material than he initially lets on. His translations are often quite free and introduce rather significant shifts of emphasis.¹⁰⁵ And although he disavows editorial commentary in the introduction, any reader will notice that, in fact, he tends to provide quite a bit of his own interpretation. Nevertheless, the establishment of this persona—who transmits without injecting his own voice—is crucial to the texts’ spiritual significance. For ‘Aṭṭâr and his readers, the saints’ speech is an extension of their persons, so

101. Ibid.

102. Anvar-Chenderoff, “Le genre hagiographique,” 42.

103. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 5.

104. Ibid.

105. Losensky, “Creative Compiler.” Also see p. 85n80.

by providing his reader-listeners with their “unmediated” dicta, he also grants them access to the channels through which God’s blessings continue to flow into the world in a post-prophetic age.

Homiletic Sincerity and Poetic Persona

By the nature of the genre, ‘Aṭṭâr is forced to adopt a very different sort of persona in his homiletic *maṣnavis*. In these works, instead of simply transmitting the dicta of spiritual heroes, he admonishes his readers in his own authorial voice. And if these homiletic endeavors are to bear fruit, he must convince his readers to accept him as a spiritual authority and submit to his exhortations. One of the central pillars of homiletic authority is the preacher’s sincerity (*ekhlâṣ*, *ṣedq*), which involves a certain alignment between actions, words, and “inner states.”¹⁰⁶

As Ibn al-Jawzî explains, to be effective a preacher must embody the state of piety to which he verbally calls others. Quite literally, he must practice what he preaches:

It is necessary for the preacher to eschew the excesses of life and wear modest clothes so that others might imitate him. . . . When the physician himself abstains, his dietary prescriptions are effective, but when he partakes, his admonishments to others do no good. . . . How can the hearts of the people respond to a preacher who goes around in an obese condition and dressed in luxurious clothes so that he might associate with sultans?¹⁰⁷

Piety here serves a rhetorical purpose—according to Ibn al-Jawzî, exhortations carry more force with an audience when they see that the speaker himself lives in accordance with them. The preacher’s pious displays, however, must not be born out of dissimulation, as Ibn al-Jawzî goes on to explain, “but an expression of genuinely upright motives.”¹⁰⁸ The preacher will then

106. See Sâremi, *Moṣṭalaḥât*, s.vv. “*ekhlâṣ*,” “*ṣedq*”; Ghazzâlî, *Iḥyâ’ ‘ulûm al-dîn*, 14:2693-746.

107. Ibn al-Jawzî, *Quṣṣāṣ*, 26-7/trans. 112-3. Translation modified.

108. *Ibid.*, 7/trans. 113.

become a model for emulation, steering his audience towards piety not only with his speech, but through his personal example.¹⁰⁹

This model of homiletic authority assumes an oral performance environment, where the audience could see the preacher and evaluate non-verbal signs of his piety; in smaller communities, audiences would also have been likely to know something of the preacher's personal life and social habits, either directly or through his reputation, and thus be in a position to judge the sincerity of his speech. While 'Aṭṭâr does seem to have preached in Nishapur, and his closest followers likely recognized his religiosity first-hand, he also aspired to disseminate his texts to a wider readership that he could never meet face-to-face. And the *maṣnavis* are not simply collections of homiletic material, but authorial literary works that attempt to "textualize" and versify the experience of attending a homiletic session; 'Aṭṭâr must therefore create an authoritative poetic persona capable of standing in for himself, the absent author, through whom he can perform the virtue of sincerity in the literary arena.

'Aṭṭâr's unifying persona manifests itself in a variety of ways: as we will see in the following chapter, this persona converges with the various teacher-figures in the *maṣnavis*' frame-tales, and in this capacity it narrates anecdotes, interjects moralizing commentary, and delivers the attendant exhortations. The *maṣnavis*' introductory and concluding sections, however, represent especially fecund sites for explicit poetic self-fashioning. Here, 'Aṭṭâr reflexively comments on himself, his motivations, and his poetic project. Because of its overt authorial nature and key structural position, this sort of self-commentary exerts outsize influence on the readers' hermeneutic processes, cuing their expectations and guiding their retrospective interpretations of the text.¹¹⁰

109. On para- and extra-linguistic channels for homiletic communication, see Chapter 3, p. 136-138.

110. Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin and Richard Macksey (Cambridge:

For example, after the conventional doxologies, many *maṣnavis* contain sections devoted to meta-reflections on the poetic art. In these sections, poets praise the power and value of speech, and, in a courtly context, thereby remind their patrons of their value and suitability for reward. Indeed, these sections often occur very near opening dedications and panegyric praise. ‘Aṭṭār’s *Book of Affliction* also contains an introductory discourse on speech, but it is devoted to an explicit critique of the patronage economy and associated genres.¹¹¹ ‘Aṭṭār dismisses panegyric as aesthetically lacking and ethically problematic; at the same time, however, he defends poetry from those religious critics who would dismiss it wholesale.¹¹² According to ‘Aṭṭār, poetry *per se* is not impious, although it has been misused by those who would make it a vehicle for the flattering of temporal rulers. What is needed is not a rejection of poetry all together, but to reclaim it for religious ends:¹¹³

Poetry has become reviled in our age,
Because the mature have left and only the raw remain.
No doubt speech is currently worthless;
Panegyric is abrogated, it is time for wisdom!

Cambridge University Press, 1997), 196-239. Also relevant here are the set of cognitive biases known as the “serial position effect”—the tendency to recall information presented near the beginning and the end of a list better than information presented in the middle. These biases may help explain the power of introductions and conclusions in shaping readers’ impressions. See Andrew M. Colman, *A Dictionary of Psychology*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), s.vv. “Primacy Effect,” “Recency Effect,” “Serial Position Effect”; Meir Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 93-7.

111. *Moṣibat-nâma*, 715-883.

112. On ‘Aṭṭār’s defense of poetry as a legitimate mode of religious discourse, see Nasrollah Pourjavady, “Naqd-e falsafi-ye she’r az naẓar-e ‘Aṭṭār va ‘Owfi,” *Ma’âref* 4, no. 3 (1366 [1987-88]): 3-18; Nasrollah Pourjavady, “She’r-e ḥekmat: Nesbat-e she’r va shar‘ az naẓar-e ‘Aṭṭār,” *Ma’âref* 5, no. 2 (1367 [1988]): 3-56; Rafal Stepień, “A Study in Sufi Poetics: The Case of ‘Aṭṭār Nayshābūrī,” *Oriens* 41 (2013), 90-9; J. T. P. de Bruijn, “Comparative Notes on Sanā’ī and ‘Aṭṭār,” in Lewisohn, *Classical Persian Sufism*, 375-7.

113. Also see Solṭān Valad and Jāmi’s positions on these issues, treated in Franklin Lewis, “The Unbearable Lightness of Rhyming Meter: Jāmi’s Confessions of a Versification Junkie,” in *Jāmi and the Intellectual History of the Muslim World: The Trans-Regional Reception of ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmi’s Works, c. 9th/15th-14th/20th*, ed. Thibaut d’Hubert and Alexandre Papas (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming); Lewis, *Rumi*, 174-5.

پختگان رفتند و باقی خام ماند
مدح منسوخ است وقتِ حکمت است¹¹⁴

شعر چون در عهدِ ما بدنام ماند
لاجرم اکنون سخن بی‌قیمت است

The poetry of panegyre (*madh*) and jest (*hazl*) is nothing,
The poetry of wisdom (*hekmat*) is best, for there is no defect in it.

شعرِ حکمت به که در وی پیچ نیست¹¹⁵

شعرِ مدح و هزل گفتن هیچ نیست

‘Aṭṭâr thus presents his own verse as an alternative to that of his courtly predecessors; his “poetry of wisdom” is aesthetically and ethically superior, and his refusal to associate with kings and compose such frivolous poetry is presented as evidence of his piety and sincerity of intention.

‘Aṭṭâr alludes to several specific reasons for his rejection of court patronage, both religious and practical. From a practical standpoint, the position of court poet, like that of other courtiers, was not without personal risk. Princely favor was notoriously fickle, and poets could quickly fall from their patron’s good graces.¹¹⁶ Those who were suspected of disloyalty could even be executed or imprisoned: the classic example is the Ghaznavid poet Mas‘ud-e Sa‘d-e Salmân, who was imprisoned multiple times over the course of his career.¹¹⁷ Likewise, quality literary work could easily go unrewarded in the patronage economy—Sultan Maḥmud is said to have given Ferdowsi only a few thousand dirhams for his *Book of Kings*, a paltry sum for a masterpiece thirty years in the making.¹¹⁸ Religiously, the more pious members of society have

114. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 737-8.

115. Ibid., 793.

116. In the *Conference of the Birds* (957-68), the hoopoe delivers a whole discourse devoted to explaining the dangers of associating too closely with princes. Also see Lewis, “Reading, Writing, and Recitation,” 153-4; and Ibn al-Jawzî’s not-so-veiled allusions to the dangers of admonishing kings, *Quṣṣâs*, 143/trans. 228-9.

117. The imprisonment of Mas‘ud-e Sa‘d-e Salmân, along with an exploration of the perils of being a court poet, is treated in Sunil Sharma, “Poetics of Court and Prison in the *Divân* of Mas‘ud-e Sa‘d-e Salmân” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1999), 14-25, 33-40. Also see Vali-Allâh Zafarî, *Habsiya dar adab-e fârsi: Az âghâz-e she‘r-e fârsi tâ pâyan-e Zandiya* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1364 [1984-85]).

118. The standard treatment of the story can be found in Neẓâmi-ye ‘Aruzi, *Chahâr Maqâla (The Four Discourses)*, trans. Edward G. Browne (London: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial, 1978), 77-81. In the *Divine Book* (6369-72), ‘Aṭṭâr also criticizes Ferdowsi for his greed and lack of contentment, which led him to enter the patronage economy in the first place.

always been reluctant to accept money from the royal treasury out of concern that it was acquired through taxes that failed to comply with the shariah: ‘Aṭṭâr’s *Memorial* is full of examples of such scrupulousness, often carried to a ridiculous extreme.¹¹⁹ And besides concerns over the legality of princely monies, a vague aura of irreligiosity and immorality has always hovered over court life. Much poetic activity would have taken place in wine symposia in pleasure gardens, situations that piety-minded poets like ‘Aṭṭâr would doubtlessly have found highly problematic.¹²⁰

Even more than licentious behavior and illegal monies, however, ‘Aṭṭâr is concerned with the ethico-spiritual state of those who would accept patronage. The patronage relationship entails, for ‘Aṭṭâr, submission to worldly authorities of questionable legitimacy, which places aesthetic and ethical constraints on poets who must then flatter their “unworthy” patrons in the highest terms. At its worst, according to ‘Aṭṭâr, such hypocrisy may even constitute a form of hidden idolatry, as he explains in the conclusion to the *Conference of the Birds*:

Thank God that I am no courtier,
That I am unbound to any reprobate.
Why should I bind my heart to anyone,
And take the name of some degenerate as lord?
I have not eaten the victuals of a tyrant,
Nor have I closed my book with a patron’s name.
My high aspiration suffices for my patron,
Sustenance of body and power of spirit are enough for me.

بسته هر ناسزاواری نیم
نام هر دون را خداوندی نهم

شکر ایزد را که درباری نیم
من ز کس بر دل کجا بندی نهم

119. For example, the sister of Beshr-e Ḥâfi is said to have been concerned about inadvertently benefiting from the light cast by the torches of the caliph’s men out on the street at night. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 117.

120. De Bruijn, *Piety and Poetry*, 155-60; Dominic P. Brookshaw, “Palaces, Pavilions and Pleasure-Gardens: The Context and Setting of the Medieval *Majlis*,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 6, no. 2 (July 2003): 199-223; Franklin Lewis, “Sincerely Flattering Panegyrics: The Shrinking Ghaznavid *Qasida*,” in *The Necklace of the Pleiades: Studies in Persian Literature Presented to Heshmat Moayyad on His 80th Birthday*, ed. Franklin Lewis and Sunil Sharma (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2010), 215; Lewis, *Rumi*, 173-5.

نه کتابی را تخلص کرده‌ام
قوتِ جسم و قوتِ روحم بس است¹²¹

نه طعام هیچ ظالم خورده‌ام
همتِ عالیم ممدوحم بس است

Subtending this condemnation is the notion that composing encomium for worldly rulers impinges on the rights of God, the ultimate object of praise. ‘Aṭṭâr thus gives thanks that he has not taken any “degenerate” as his “lord” (*khodâvand*), a term which was regularly applied to God, but which was also widely used in the panegyric verse of ‘Aṭṭâr’s day to refer to patrons in positions of political authority. ‘Aṭṭâr’s implication seems to be that only God is truly worthy of the title: it is borderline idolatrous to accept a human king as “lord” through the institutions of patronage. God furnishes ample sustenance for the body, so there is no need to resort to “the victuals of a tyrant.” He thus takes pride in the fact that the *Conference of the Birds* is not inscribed with a patron’s name, being instead motivated only by high spiritual aspiration.

Besides his direct condemnations of patronage, ‘Aṭṭâr also illustrates his position through edifying anecdotes. The *Book of Affliction*’s opening discourse includes a pair of illustrative narratives, formally similar to those found in the body of the *maṣnavi*, through which ‘Aṭṭâr attempts to conceptualize his own rejection of court patronage in terms of ethical paradigms set by ancient spiritual heroes. The first of these two narratives features Socrates, who is often remembered as a pious ascetic and even a sort of proto-Muslim in Islamicate literatures:¹²²

The wise Socrates, that pure man,
Was walking down the road, on foot, in pain.
A questioner asked him, “The kings of the age
Are all seeking you, but you are nowhere to be found;
You have many followers, demand a horse,
So that you don’t have to go on foot.”

121. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manteq al-tayr*, 4601-4.

122. Ilai Alon, *Socrates in Mediaeval Arabic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 87-96. Also see the anecdote of Socrates on his deathbed, Chapter 4, p. 240.

Socrates said, “The weight of my body on my feet
Is better than the weight of favor on my neck.”

در رهی می شد پیاده دردناک
جمله می جویندت و تو بر کنار
تا پیاده رفتنت نبود به راه
به که بارِ منّتی بر گردنم¹²³

گفت: سقراطِ حکیم آن مردِ پاک
سایلی گفتش ملوکِ روزگار
معتقد داری بسی اسپی بخواه
گفت هم بر پای من بارِ تنم

The anecdote illustrates the logic of ‘Aṭṭâr’s refusal in accordance with a paradigm of wise withdrawal from political life exemplified by a celebrated pre-Islamic ascetic. Although we may doubt whether all “the kings of the age” were actually seeking ‘Aṭṭâr out as they were allegedly seeking Socrates, the story nevertheless constitutes a significant site in ‘Aṭṭâr’s project of poetic self-fashioning and self-presentation. Through the example of Socrates, ‘Aṭṭâr conceptualizes his rejection of court patronage in terms of an ethos in which freedom from obligation is valued above material wealth and comfort. Moreover, in explaining his actions with reference to Socrates’ paradigmatic asceticism, he appeals to a widely accepted ethical authority to justify his actions. This narrative of a past exemplar thus provides ‘Aṭṭâr with a conceptual model for understanding—and persuasively communicating—the moral dimensions of his own life.

Throughout the poem, such anecdotes are almost always followed by short homiletic discourses in which ‘Aṭṭâr clarifies their ethical or theological import and enjoins his reader-listeners to take heed and reform themselves accordingly. In this particular case, after the story of Socrates’ refusal to accept a mount, he urges reader-listeners to preserve their freedom and avoid obligations to others, but he also connects this general injunction to his own personal decision to eschew court patronage:

Whatever in the world has a claim on one,
It’s better to be free of it.
Although I might have some eloquence (*balâghat*),
I only have eloquence in my freedom (*farâghat*).

123. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 815-8.

If I were to enter the orbit of some fool,
 Neither eloquence nor fresh verse (*she'r-e tar*) would remain.
 Although the king may be an Alexander,
 Only an ass would make himself a slave.

زان بسی بهتر فراغت بی‌شکی آن بلاغت در فراغت باشدم نه بلاغت مانند نه شعر تر بنده کردن خویشتن را از خریست ¹²⁴	هر چه در عالم طلب دارد یکی در سخن گرچه بلاغت باشدم گر شوم سر گشته هر بی خبر گرچه شه را منصب اسکندریست
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The ethical import of Socrates' action is thus generalized into a universal sententia, "Whatever in the world has a claim on one / It's better to be free of it," which 'Aṭṭâr then applies to his own poetic situation. He explains that his eloquence is a product of his freedom from obligation, so if he were to participate in the patronage economy, he would have "neither eloquence nor fresh verse." The passage closes with the assertion that "only an ass would make himself a slave," a line with a proverbial ring that recalls the issue of Socrates' mount while also foreshadowing the themes of self-enslavement and animality that run through the following anecdote.

This next anecdote features Hippocrates, or, as he was known in the Islamic world, Boqrât, who, in the anecdotal literature, is often portrayed as a pious, pre-Islamic ascetic and sage, more-or-less interchangeable with Socrates.¹²⁵ According to this anecdote, Boqrât inhabited a cave in the wilderness and subsisted solely on grass—"like an animal"—so that he could avoid an ethically problematic life at court:

A king went into the mountains for the hunt.
 Boqrât was at that moment in the corner of a cave.
 Just like an animal he was eating grass,
 Looking this way and that way absentmindedly.
 One from among the royal retinue saw him from the road.
 He said: "The king has been calling you for a whole lifetime,

124. Ibid., 819-22.

125. Most versions of this story, in fact, feature Socrates as the protagonist. At the same time, however, Hippocrates is said to have refused to join Ardashir-Bahman's court, which perhaps lead 'Aṭṭâr to conflate the two here. See Shafi'i-Kadkani's commentary (531n823) and Lutz Richter-Bernburg, "Hippocrates," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 22 March 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hippocrates>.

So that you might be his companion day and night,
 But you flee and don't come when summoned."
 —A soul that is content to be a beggar is
 In truth a king!—
 Boqrât said to him: "O you who are deluded by the king,
 If only you were content (*qâne*) with vegetation;
 If, like me, you were satisfied with grass,
 Would you ever have made your free self a slave?"

بود بقراط آن زمان در کنج غار
 هر سویی بی خود نگه می کرد خوش
 گفت عمری کرد استداعات شاه
 می گریزی می نیایی در طلب
 در حقیقت پادشایی می کند
 گر تو قانع بودی هم از گیاه
 کی تن آزاد بنده کردی¹²⁶

خسروی در کوه شد بهر شکار
 همچو حیوانی گیاه می خورد خوش
 از حشم یک تن بدید او را ز راه
 تا تو باشی همنشینش روز و شب
 نفس قانع کو گدایی می کند
 گفت بقراطش که ای مغرور شاه
 بر گیاه چون من بسنده کردی

Socrates and Hippocrates, like the other wise-fool characters of whom 'Atṭâr was so fond, engage in socially transgressive behavior for spiritual ends. In the medieval Islamic world, vegetarianism was not a mainstream spiritual practice; at best it was thought a little odd, and at worst heretical, since it denied the favors that God had bestowed on the world.¹²⁷ In the beginning of this anecdote, Hippocrates' vegetarianism seems to be associated with a sub-human, animalistic existence. Like a dumb beast, he inhabits a cave and glances this way and that as he contentedly munches grass. Once confronted by the courtier, however, Hippocrates inverts this animal-human binary: because he is content with an "animalistic" lifestyle, eating grass and sleeping in a cave, he has remained free (*âzâd*) as is proper for a human. The courtier, on the

126. 'Atṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 823-9.

127. The richest source for medieval Islamic thought on vegetarianism is Abū'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arri's exchange of letters with the Ismā'īlī *dā'i* (missionary) of Cairo, al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, introduced, reproduced, and translated in D. S. Margoliouth, "Abu'l-'Alā al-Ma'arri's Correspondence on Vegetarianism," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1902): 289-332. Also see Paulina B. Lewicka, *Food and Foodways of Medieval Cairenes* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 253-64; Richard Foltz, "Islam, Animals, and Vegetarianism," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron R. Taylor and Jeffrey Kaplan (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005). 'Atṭâr, in his *Memorial* (66), also includes an anecdote that suggests Râbe'a may have practiced vegetarianism.

other hand, is “deluded by the king” and lacks the spiritual fortitude to practice contentment; thus, like an ass, he has willingly accepted the burden of slavery.

Following this anecdote is another self-reflective homily, in which ‘Aṭṭâr again uses the narrative to explicitly justify his rejection of court patronage on ethical grounds. Just as Boqrât could avoid kings’ summons by subsisting on grass, so too ‘Aṭṭâr believes he should resist the patronage economy by practicing contentment and satisfaction:

When a soul is content with this small satisfaction,
 What could a king do for him?
 What would I do with a group of dissolutes?
 How much trouble for one unfixed?
 I have my provisions for this moment until my death,
 Whatever I could want, I have more than that before me.
 What would I do with gold, since I am not Qarun?
 How long should I spin about, since I am not the sphere?

تا چه کار آید مر او را پادشا	چون دهد نفسی بدین اندک رضا
بی‌قراری چند بی‌آرام را	تا چه خواهم کرد مثنی خام را
هر چه خواهم بیش از آنم پیش هست	این دمم تا مرگ برگ خویش هست
چند خواهم گشت اگر گردون نی‌ام ¹²⁸	زر چه خواهم کرد اگر قارون نی‌ام

Besides justifying his amateurism and developing his pious persona, ‘Aṭṭâr also interprets the previous narrative in a self-reflective way, showing how the poem’s anecdotes can be used to triangulate and assess one’s spiritual standing. The stories of Socrates and Hippocrates do not differ substantially from the hundreds of anecdotes that populate the bulk of the text, but the homilies which follow the latter are almost always directed towards the audience and not applied by ‘Aṭṭâr to himself. Here, however, ‘Aṭṭâr uses the anecdotes to conceptualize and assess his own ethical state: he thus models how to interpret and apply these exempla. For ‘Aṭṭâr, pious heroes like Socrates and Hippocrates are not to be imitated exactly, but rather approached as hyperbolic, illustrative embodiments of pious principles and attitudes. Unlike Hippocrates,

128. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 830-3.

‘Aṭṭâr does not eat grass. On the contrary, it seems that he had some amount of material wealth—in his own words, “I have my provisions for this moment until my death / Whatever I could want, I have more than that before me.” In fact, according to Foruzânfar, ‘Aṭṭâr may have even been a landowner in Kadkan.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, he still conceptualized the moral dynamics of his life in terms of a paradigm set by the grass-eating Hippocrates. He thus models a hermeneutical mode in which these exemplary figures become signposts for triangulating pious principles and attitudes, if not necessarily templates for direct imitation. Moreover, by using the material to evaluate and assess his own ethical and religious state, he demonstrates his sincerity to his audience. He not only practices what he preaches, but also strives to understand and shape himself through the text’s illustrative anecdotes, just as he expects his reader-listeners to do.

‘Aṭṭâr’s most effective demonstrations of his sincerity, however, are to be found—paradoxically—in the proclamations of *insincerity* that conclude each of the four *maṣnavis*. At a discrete point in each conclusion, ‘Aṭṭâr shifts from literary self-praise to religious self-criticism in which he renounces his poetic-homiletic project as an inherently self-absorbed and sinful endeavor.¹³⁰ He berates himself for merely “speaking” instead of “acting,” and suggests that his work is motivated by a pride in his own poetic talents rather than a sincere homiletic impulse. The following quotation, taken from the *Divine Book*, is typical of this sort of discourse:

How long will you speak these subtle words,
When you must eventually sleep in the dark?
You are like Abraham in your speech,
But like Nimrod in your actions!

129. He argues this on the basis of a reference in the *Conference of the Birds* to “our village” (*deh-e mâ*); it is not entirely clear to me, however, why this must signify possession and not simply origin. See Foruzânfar, *Sharḥ-e aḥvâl-e ‘Aṭṭâr*, 52; ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 3627.

130. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 7120-4; ‘Aṭṭâr, *Elâhi-nâma*, 6401-16; ‘Aṭṭâr, *Asrâr-nâma*, 3190-204; ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 4531-51.

If you can't die like a man for the task,
 It would be a shame to die a piece of carrion!
 How long will you stumble around speech?
 Stride forth in ecstasy, if you're lion-man!
 If your heart is eased by speech,
 How can it take a name from the states of men?
 In the end, this speech is nothing more than a husk,
 Strive, like the men, for a state!
 You have spent your sweet life
 All in speaking, when will you act?
 Even if poetry is at the degree of perfection,
 If you look carefully, it is still just the menstruation of men.
 If you had even a hair of awareness,
 You wouldn't have anything to do with story-telling!
 Poetry has always been your idol,
 You have no occupation other than idol-worshipping.

که می باید ترا تاریک خفتن چرا نمرود رفتار آمدی تو زهی حسرت اگر مردار میری قدم در حال نه گر شیر مردی کجا از حال مردان نام گیرد طلب کن همچو مردان حال آخر همه در گفت کردی کی کنی کار چو نیکو بنگری حیض الرجال است نبودی با خبرگویی ترا کار ترا جز بت پرستی نیست پیشه ¹³¹	ترا تا چند ازین باریک گفتن چو ابراهیم گفتار آمدی تو چو نتوانی که مرد کار میری بگرد قال آخر چند گردی دل تو گر ز قال آرام گیرد چو قشری بیش نیست این قال آخر چو تو عمر عزیز خود به یک بار اگر چه شعر در حد کمال است اگر بودی ترا مویی خبردار بت تو شعر می بینم همیشه
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At issue is the alleged gap between speech and action, since speech, however lofty and pious it may be, is ultimately useless if not enacted and embodied. 'Aṭṭâr thus berates his heart for being content with speech, the husk of religiosity, at the expense of state (*ḥâl*) and action. There is even the suggestion that speech and action are mutually exclusive, and that true spiritual progress can only begin once speech has ceased. In condemnation of his excessive blabbering, 'Aṭṭâr goes so far as to proclaim his poetic practice a form of idolatry, an activity that distracts him from God even as it purports to be religiously motivated.¹³² Particularly eye-catching is the

131. 'Aṭṭâr, *Elâhi-nâma*, 6407-16.

132. Court poets who composed mystically minded verse, such as Sanâ'i and Jâmi, also voice varieties of such self-

image of poetry as the “menstruation of men.” The phrase, rooted in a discourse in which spiritual weakness is gendered feminine, was applied to the miracles of the saints—or “the men,” as they were often styled—by those who considered their supernatural acts to be prideful displays of ostentation. In using the term here, ‘Aṭṭâr suggests that his seemingly pious verse is rooted not in sincere love of God, but a “feminine” self-satisfaction in his own talent and desire for recognition.¹³³

These passages of self-criticism have puzzled commentators, especially because they come on the heels of such fulsome self-praise. Some scholars have tried to reconcile these differences into a stable “attitude” or “philosophy” of poetry, while others have explained them away as cognitive dissonance or the product of an alleged tension between poetry and mysticism.¹³⁴ All of these positions, however, miss the dynamic, homiletic performativity of ‘Aṭṭâr’s persona. Self-criticism is a common feature of Islamic popular preaching and reminiscent of Malâmati spirituality, a Khorâsâni movement that stressed the importance of sincerity and the dangers of hypocritical conceit, and encouraged its adherents to actively disavow any pious reputation they might have had. By the tenth century, the Malâmatiya had been subsumed into mainstream sufism—which retained the former’s emphasis on humility and self-accusation in a more tempered form—and from there it filtered into Islamic popular piety more generally.¹³⁵ In

criticism and dissatisfaction with the accepted contours of the normative patronage relationship: see J. T. P. de Bruijn, “Chains of Gold: Jami’s Defence of Poetry,” *Journal of Turkish Studies* 26, no. 1 (2002): 81-92; De Bruijn, “Comparative Notes,” 375-7; Lewis, “Versification Junkie.”

133. Even though the term is clearly negative and intended in the first instance as a form of self-criticism, in this context it simultaneously contains a measure of self-praise since it gestures towards his poetry’s “miraculous” nature. For more on this gendering of spiritual weakness, see Chapter 4, p. 242-260.

134. Pourjavady, “Naqd-e falsafi”; Pourjavady, “She‘r-e hekmat”; Stepien, “Sufi poetics.” Also see Davis’ comments in the introduction to his translation with Darbandi, where he explains why they chose to exclude these sections: *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (New York: Penguin, 1984), 25.

135. On the history of Malâmati spirituality and its characteristics, see Sara Sviri, “Ḥakīm Tirmidhī and the Malâmatī Movement in Early Sufism,” in Lewisohn, *Classical Persian Sufism*, 583-613; Christopher Melchert, “Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur,” *Iran* 39 (2001): 237-47; Alexander D. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 94-9. The connection between Malâmati-style piety and ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetic self-

the *Memorial*, ‘Aṭṭâr speaks approvingly of various figures associated with the Malâmatîya and narrates stories and sayings that stress their sincerity and humble self-estimation.¹³⁶ Similarly, popular preachers associated with Malâmatî-style religiosity would often confess their impiety from the pulpit, weep before their audiences, and even refuse to preach on the basis of a self-alleged sinfulness. Such displays did not usually drive audiences away, however; on the contrary, these performances proved the preachers’ sincerity and truthfulness and could therefore inspire even greater devotion among their followers. For example, according to an anecdote found in Ibn al-Jawzî, Abu ‘Oṣmân al-Ḥîrî (d. 910), a Nayshâburi preacher of Malâmatî persuasions, one day refused to preach, instead reciting some verses regarding the inability of a sick doctor to cure his patients—the implication being that he considered himself too sinful to exhort others. With this rejection of his own pious reputation, however, the audience was thrown into a religious fervor, making it clear that they found his self-criticism to be proof of his elevated spiritual station and a powerful homiletic act in and of itself.¹³⁷

As we will see in more detail in the next chapter, ‘Aṭṭâr adopts the material, tone, and rhetorical strategies of contemporary homiletic practice throughout the *maṣnavîs*. Here it suffices to note that his concluding self-criticism constitutes one last homiletic maneuver, an attempt to demonstrate the sincerity of his poetic persona. By confessing that he fails to live in accordance with his words—and that the very act of speaking may preclude his spiritual progress—‘Aṭṭâr does not invalidate his earlier exhortations, but paradoxically confirms them:

criticism has been noted by Muhammad Isa Waley, “Didactic Style and Self-Criticism in ‘Aṭṭâr,” in Lewisohn and Shackle, *Spiritual Flight*, 215-40.

136. See, for example, the biographies of Hamdun-e Qassâr, Abu Ḥafs Ḥaddâd, and Abu ‘Oṣmân al-Ḥîrî, et. al, 340-49, 350-53, 419-21.

137. For more on this anecdote, see Chapter 3, p. 136.

by recusing himself from the position of poet-preacher, he demonstrates that he is precisely the man for the job.

These concluding sections, like the introductions, allow ‘Aṭṭâr to reflect on—and thus represent—the poem and his persona in a literary space that exerts considerable influence on how reader-listeners conceptualize their experience. They are thus prime sites of authorial control, through which ‘Aṭṭâr can emphasize the religious value of his verse and cast himself as a pious, sincere speaker who is authorized to admonish and exhort his reader-listeners. Self-criticism, and the attendant call for silence, also functions to elegantly explain the cessation of the narratorial voice at the text’s end: ‘Aṭṭâr’s persona has “transitioned” from speaking to acting. In his silence, he thus becomes a model for his audience one last time, reminding them that after they have consumed his speech, they still must embody it in their lives.

Inspiration and Authenticity

Sincerity, as we have seen, entails a certain alignment between words, actions, and inner state, and ‘Aṭṭâr deploys a variety of rhetorical strategies to cultivate an ethos of sincerity around his poetic-homiletic persona. At times he ventures even further, suggesting that his speech not only aligns with a state of inner piety, but constitutes a direct, “unmediated” outpouring of subjective experience. According to ‘Aṭṭâr, truly sincere poetry—or perhaps we can speak of an “authentic” poetry here, adapting Trilling’s famous distinction—involves a certain *Sturm und Drang*.¹³⁸ Unlike the ostentatious and “artificial” encomiums of the court poets, ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetry is allegedly born out of an inner experience of religious passion, which is then verbally trans-

138. Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972). At the risk of inflicting some violence on Trilling’s nuanced discussion, sincerity is a social virtue whereas authenticity is a private one; sincerity entails an alignment between inner experience and social presence, whereas authenticity entails being “true to one self” without taking social presence into account.

mitted in a pure, transparent language uncontaminated by self-serving rhetorical concerns or social motivations. Such a poetics is problematic on a variety of levels—linguistic, philosophical, and literary—especially because pre-modern Persian verse is, to modern eyes, so obviously governed by a robust set of socially determined conventions. With what justification are spontaneous affective states privileged over carefully wrought rhetoric? Is it even possible that speech could transmit these mental states without “contamination” from the social realm? And how would it be possible to assess whether or not a piece of literary writing is truly authentic, lacking some extra-textual channel into the author’s mind? Such problems are serious indeed, and I have no intention of answering them here. Rather, I aim to explore the rhetorical role that the language of authenticity plays in ‘Aṭṭâr’s works, how it legitimates his speech and affirms its spiritual value. According to this particular strand of ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetic self-presentation, his verse originates in spontaneous religious passion that is immediately poured out onto the page in an unmannered, un-mediated way; thus, by consuming it, the audience might get a “taste” of this passionate state for themselves. At times, ‘Aṭṭâr even suggests that his work is borderline inspired, and he implies a certain convergence between his verse and saintly dicta. Although such a poetic self-assessment may seem, to us, rather naïve, it was a significant component of ‘Aṭṭâr’s authorial persona and by attending to its complexities we can better understand how mystical didactic poetry was consumed and interpreted in pre-modern sufi communities.

Let us return one last time to the prologue of the *Choice Book*, where ‘Aṭṭâr boasts that his beautiful verses were born directly out of a subjective experience of painful religious passion:

These verses originate in the experience of passion (*kâr-oftâdegi*), not in artificiality (*kâr-sâkhtegi*), and they are free from affectation (*takallof*). I wrote them just as they came and entered my blood. If, one day, the vision (*vâqe‘a*) of those who have experienced passion (*kâr-oftâdegân*) seizes the skirt of your soul, and for several nights you withdraw your head into the collar of

bewilderment, then you will know from which nest these sweet nightingales and sugar-eating parrots have flown: *Whoever doesn't taste, doesn't know.*

و این ابیات از سر کارافتادگی دست داده نه از سر کار ساختگی و از تکلف مبرا است چنانکه آمده
است نوشته‌ایم و در خون می گشته اگر روزی واقعه کارافتادگان دامن جانت بگیرد و شبی چند
سر به گریبان تحیر فرو بری آن زمان بدانی که این بلبلان نازنین و این طوطیان شکرچین از
کدام آشیان پریده‌اند مَن لَمْ يَذُقْ لَمْ يَعْرِفْ.¹³⁹

The quatrains allegedly came to him in the throes of some sort of intense experience, and he set them down in writing immediately without alteration or additional ornamentation. His poems are thus imbued with a simplicity and authenticity of feeling, free from the “artificiality” and “affectation” that contaminates other forms of verse. The implied target here is again the over-wrought, sycophantic poetry of the court poets, whom ‘Atṭâr, as we have seen, criticizes in the sharpest terms. While their poetry is a mere semantic game, an exercise in rhetorical self-assertion and flattery, his poetry is born out of genuine experience, which he has committed to the page immediately so as to preserve something of that subjective state for his reader-listeners. Nevertheless, although the beautiful “birds” of his speech may provide an inkling of this experience—the “nest” from which they have flown—the painful intensity of ‘Atṭâr’s passion can only ever be truly understood by those who have been “seized” by it themselves.

For ‘Atṭâr and the larger tradition in which he worked, poetic ability was often conceived of as an inborn nature (*tabʿ*): a potential innate to certain human beings, that could, through proper training, be activated, manipulated, and deployed as they saw fit.¹⁴⁰ In contrast to this understanding of poetry as the product of innate talent, however, the quatrains of the *Choice Book* are described as coming to ‘Atṭâr from outside himself, from a place beyond his

139. ‘Atṭâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 71; *Loghat-nâma-ye Dehkhodâ*, s.v. “*kâr-oftâda*”; *Farhang-e sokhan*, s.v. “*kâr-oftâda*.”

140. ‘Atṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 760-1, 7156-8; ‘Atṭâr, *Asrâr-nâma*, 3148.

control. There is, of course, a long tradition of conceptualizing poetry as mantic discourse, from Socrates, who considered poets to be afflicted with divine madness, to the Quran, which recognizes—and belittles—poetry’s supernatural origin in order to mark itself off as a higher form of revelation.¹⁴¹ In ‘Aṭṭâr’s poems, as well as those of other Persian poets with mystical inclinations, poetry is often associated with non-prophetic revelation (*kashf*) and the ecstatic spiritual “states” (*aḥvâl*) bestowed on sufis by God.¹⁴² Likewise, in the above passage, the quatrains are said to “come” to ‘Aṭṭâr as part of a visionary experience (*vâqe‘a*). They spring from a place known to those who, over the course of several nights, “withdraw [their] head[s] into the collar of bewilderment”: this suggests the practice of meditation (*tafakkor*), which, as we have seen, was associated with the revelation of divine secrets. Finally, the passage’s concluding proof text mentions “tasting” (*zowq*), a critical sufi term that refers to the acquisition of knowledge of God through personal experience instead of logical deduction or human transmission. The passage thus emphasizes poetry’s inspired status while recalling ‘Aṭṭâr’s description of saints’ dicta at the beginning of the *Memorial*: their speech, too, was said to be the fruit of a divinely bestowed “bubbling” in their souls instead of a product of their own learning.¹⁴³

While it may be difficult to reconcile the careful structure of ‘Aṭṭâr’s *maṣnavis* with the image of an exuberant poet, he nonetheless claims that they, too, arose out of intense affective experiences.¹⁴⁴ According to ‘Aṭṭâr, the ideal human state is a passionate, painful longing for

141. Michael Zwettler, “A Mantic Manifesto: The *Sûra* of “The Poets” and the Qur’ānic Foundations of Prophetic Authority,” in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, ed. James L. Kugel (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Michael W. Dols and Diana Immisch, *Majnûn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 211-23.

142. Franklin Lewis, “Solṭân Valad and the Political Order: Framing the Ethos and Praxis of Poetry in the Mevlevi Tradition after Rumi,” in *Persian Language, Literature and Culture: New Leaves, Fresh Looks*, ed. Kamran Talattof (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2015), 24-5; Lewis, “A Prolegomenon for a Periodization,” 160-1; Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity*, 14-24; Graham, “School of Khurāsân,” 94-7.

143. See p. 91.

144. Lewis, *Rumi*, 314-5; Lewis, “A Prolegomenon for a Periodization,” 162. Cf. Annemarie Schimmel, *Pain and Grace: A Study of Two Mystical Writers of Eighteenth-Century Muslim India* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 120.

the divine that exceeds even the dread of eschatological judgment. In his works' conclusions, he seeks to demonstrate not only that his own internal state accords with this paradigm, but also that his poetic products were causally produced thereby. The following self-apostrophe, which begins the *Book of Affliction*'s conclusion, is representative:

What passion is this, O Farid, in the soul?
 Wail, from a hundred tongues, "Is there yet more?!"
 When the grave grinds your body to atoms,
 The passion of your soul will not diminish one iota.
 If you aim towards the truth with this passion,
 You will tear the shroud on the first night.
 Since this passion of yours resides in the pure soul,
 In this passion, you will bring your head out of the earth.

نعره زن از صد زفان هل من مزید کم نگرده ذره‌ای از جانت شور در نخستین شب کفن را شق کنی سر درین شور آوری از خاک بر ¹⁴⁵	این چه شور است از تو در جان ای فرید گر کند شخص تو یک ذره گور گر تو با این شور قصد حق کنی چون بود شورت به جان پاک در
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‘Attâr’s very being is allegedly infused with a passion for God, a passion that originates not in the physical body, but in the soul. It will thus subsist after death, propelling his soul towards reunion with the divine and animating his actions on the day of resurrection. This passion, however, is a heavy, painful burden. It prompts his body to “wail” in lamentation and ask, “Is there yet more?”—the phrase which, according to the Quran, will be uttered by hell personified on the day of judgement in response to God’s question, “Are you filled?”¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, this painful passion afflicted ‘Attâr as he produced the poem, and is perhaps even responsible for its composition—thus the title:

Since every verse that I inscribed,
 Was an occasion for lamentation,
 In affliction (*moṣibat*) I constructed this assembly (*hangâma*),
 So I gave it the name *Book of Affliction*.

145. ‘Attâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 7087-90.

146. Quran 50:30.

...
Be the companion of ‘Aṭṭâr’s pain,
And partake in a hundred thousand treasures.

بر سرِ آن ماتمی می داشتم
نامِ این کردم مصیبت‌نامه من

زانکه هر بیتی که می بنگاشتم
در مصیبت ساختم هنگامه من

...
وز هزاران گنج برخوردار باش¹⁴⁷

...
لازمِ دردِ دلِ عطار باش

This painful passion was encoded into the *Book of Affliction*, which ‘Aṭṭâr conceives of as a social project: an “assembly” in which he calls others to share in the spiritual benefits of his—previously private and individual—religious experience. Similar passages can be found in his other *maṣnavis* as well, including the following example from the *Conference of the Birds*:

O man of the way, don’t look in my book
With an eye for poetry and pride.
With an eye for pain look in my cahier,
So that you might believe even one percent of my pain.

از سرِ شعر و سرِ کبری نگاه
تا ز صد یک درد داری باورم¹⁴⁸

در کتابِ من مکن ای مردِ راه
از سرِ دردی نگه کن دفترم

In rejecting the label of “poetry,” which he associates with “pretension,” ‘Aṭṭâr again has the professional panegyrists in mind. Unlike their insincere verse, devoted to flattery and empty ostentation, ‘Aṭṭâr’s amateur endeavor is allegedly born out of authentic religious pain. And according to him, a sympathetic, mystically minded reader should be able to recover a whiff of that experience through the text.

As was the case in the *Choice Book*, the *maṣnavis* also suggest that ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetry may have an inspired origin. ‘Aṭṭâr, of course, is careful to distinguish between such inspiration and prophecy proper, which is the province of law-givers sent by God to specific communities and has been sealed by Muhammad’s final mission. Much of the introductory chapter on poetry in

147. Ibid., 7121-5.

148. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 4495-6.

the *Book of Affliction* is devoted to proving that verse is indeed a legitimate mode of religious discourse while simultaneously distinguishing it from—and maintaining its inferiority to—the speech of true prophets.¹⁴⁹ Formally speaking, prophetic speech (and ‘Aṭṭâr clearly has the Quran in mind here) lacks the strict metrical requirements of verse, which ‘Aṭṭâr argues is actually a sign of its superiority; prophetic speech is endowed with such a density of signification that it cannot “fit” into a single metrical pattern.¹⁵⁰ ‘Aṭṭâr devotes so much space to this issue precisely because he is eager to maintain prophecy’s superiority in the face of his frequent suggestions that saintly dicta, prophecy, and authentic religious verse all share certain essential characteristics. ‘Aṭṭâr often praises his own texts in prophetic terms, as when he extols his verse as the “Persian Psalms” (*zabur-e pârsi*), the Psalms being the revealed text that God bestowed on the prophet David.¹⁵¹ Similarly, in the conclusion to the *Book of Affliction*, he refers to the poem as “the most beautiful story” (*aḥsan al-qeṣṣa*), a phrase reminiscent of the Quranic epithet for the tale of Joseph.¹⁵² And in the introduction to the same work, he declares panegyric to be abrogated (*mansukh*) by his own “poetry of wisdom” (*she‘r-e ḥekmat*) and thereby casts his literary-historical intervention in terms of prophetic procession.¹⁵³ These metaphors carry multiple significations and their primary function is not necessarily to claim an inspired status. The comparison to the Psalms suggests beauty and lyricism, and the allusion to the Quranic tale of Joseph is intended as a rebuttal to those who would label ‘Aṭṭâr a mere storyteller (*qeṣṣa-gu*). Nonetheless, such metaphors rely on—and reinforce—a certain parallelism between ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetry and revealed texts. These intimations of an inspired origin were picked

149. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 715-806.

150. Ibid., 746-73.

151. Ibid., 7144; ‘Aṭṭâr, *Divân-e ‘Aṭṭâr*, *ghazal* 39.

152. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 7107. The Quranic phrase is “*aḥsan al-qīṣaṣ*” (12:3); ‘Aṭṭâr has changed it slightly for metrical reasons.

153. Ibid., 738, 793.

up by later interpreters, such as the fifteenth-century biographer and anthologist Dowlat-Shâh, who articulates ‘Aṭṭâr’s ecstatic inspiration in less uncertain terms. “The poetic craft (*shâ‘erî*) is not ‘Aṭṭâr’s way,” he writes, “On the contrary, his speech is composed of inspirations from the unseen (*vâredât-e ghayb*).”¹⁵⁴

In any case, ‘Aṭṭâr’s comparisons of his poems with sacred prophetic texts—whether intended as a boast of eloquence or an implied claim to divine inspiration—smacks of a certain egoism and self-assertion that seems to fly in the face of the Malâmati demand for a sincere humility and selflessness. In this sense, the comparisons recall the other forms of self-praise that we have identified as hallmarks of ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetic self-presentation, including his reflections on the beauty of his verse, his pious rejection of panegyre, and his claims of spiritual efficacy. As we have seen, however, after indulging in such fulsome self-praise, ‘Aṭṭâr forcefully rejects it as hypocritical and self-motivated, and yields to the call to silence. ‘Aṭṭâr thus walks a thin line, promoting his verse as authentically inspired, but never too explicitly or without a subsequent display of sincere humility. These two discursive trends neither cancel each other out nor work completely in parallel, but intersect and interweave as sometimes complementary, sometimes competing dimensions of ‘Aṭṭâr’s complex literary persona.

The presence of such a persona is one of the factors that unifies ‘Aṭṭâr’s works into authorial literary artifacts instead of simply open collections of homiletic material. The audience is likely to sense a certain intentionality behind his words and to understand them as having been shaped by his personality—a personality that they will understand in large part on the basis of his own self-presentations. Not only is the text “spoken” by a particular persona, but it also encodes a specific subject position from which reader-listeners are summoned to the poem

154. Samarqandi, *Tazkerat al-sho‘arâ*, 323.

according to an implicit theory of homiletic communication. These all function as tools of authorial control, which allowed ‘Aṭṭâr to address a larger sufi public outside of his immediate textual community in Nishapur with some confidence that his message would be delivered. His most ingenious strategy of authorial control, however, was the frame-tale structure itself, which, as we will see in the next chapter, portrays an idealized speaker and a group of recipients in an imagined oral performance setting, through which ‘Aṭṭâr can further manipulate his own constructed relationship with his readers.

Chapter III

Preaching Through Text

‘Aṭṭār’s didactic *maṣnavis*, like those of his predecessors Sanâ’i and Neẓâmi, contain hundreds of edifying anecdotes pointed with interpretive exhortations that explain and amplify their ethical and theological points. But unlike the works of his predecessors, three of ‘Aṭṭār’s four didactic *maṣnavis* are structured around overarching frame-tales that feature fictional characters who narrate the anecdotes and deliver the exhortations typical of the genre. This results in an instance of what narratologists call “intra-diegetic narration”—that is, narration within narration.¹ The most elaborate of Aṭṭār’s frame-tales belongs to the *Conference of the Birds* which recounts the non-liturgical, hortatory sermons of the hoopoe as he attempts to convince an audience of birds to journey towards their king, the Simorgh. The poem’s embedded, “hypo-diegetic” anecdotes are thus not spoken directly by ‘Aṭṭār’s “extra-diegetic” poetic persona as they are in Sanâ’i and Neẓâmi’s *maṣnavis*, but represent the hoopoe’s “intra-diegetic” preaching.

The birds’ quest for the Simorgh can be easily read as an allegory of the sufi’s journey towards God, and scholarly discussions of the frame-tale have tended to focus on the various theological implications of such an allegorical reading.² No sustained investigation has been made, however, into the poem’s representation of homiletic performance, even though the bulk

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1. For an overview of narratological approaches to levels of diegesis, see Didier Coste and John Pier, “Narrative Levels,” in *Living Handbook of Narratology*, ed. Peter Hühn et al., Hamburg University, 2009-, updated 23 April 2014, <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/narrative-levels-revised-version-uploaded-23-april-2014>. Also see Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 227-34; Mieke Bal and Eve Tavor, “Notes on Narrative Embedding,” *Poetics Today* 2, no. 2 (Winter, 1981): 41-59.
 2. See, for example, Nasr, “The Flight of the Birds to Union: Meditations upon ‘Aṭṭār’s *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*””; Corbin, *Visionary Recital*, 198-203; Lucian Stone, “Blessed Perplexity: The Topos of *Ḥayrat* in Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*” (PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 2005); Purnāmdārīān, “Negāhi be dāstān-pardāzi-ye ‘Aṭṭār.”

of its narration is devoted to the hoopoe's sermonizing, and, as we shall see, such representations are key to the success of 'Aṭṭār's poetic project. Implicit in his portrayal of these practices is an understanding of homiletic speech as powerfully perlocutionary, even therapeutic; it alters its recipients' valuations and attitudes, setting them on the "straight path" and ideally transforming their entire mode of being.³ By affirming the perlocutionary effect of oral homiletic speech, 'Aṭṭār stakes a claim for the *Conference of the Birds*' own transformative power, aided by the self-reflexive potential of the frame-tale structure.⁴ Through its nested representations of paraenetic speech-events, 'Aṭṭār reinforces the homiletic axis between his own narratorial persona and his readers, and thereby influences the terms of the work's reception.

By constructing an imagined performance context for the embedded anecdotes, the frame-tale also helps to compensate for the abstracted nature of the literary text. A homily's meaning is determined not by verbal signs alone, but also by gesture and situational context, neither of which can be easily captured in a textual medium. 'Aṭṭār's frame-tales, however, partly offset this deficiency by creating an imagined performance situation, complete with a developed speaker and a responsive audience: readers are thereby invited to imagine themselves among the birds listening the hoopoe, and thus to approach the poem as a textual simulation of an aural homiletic experience. And this simulated orality paradoxically allows 'Aṭṭār more control over his text's message: the work is no longer an open collection of anecdotes, but a structured literary experience regulated through the accompanying homilies and the

3. For more on therapeutic speech and the medicinal metaphor, see Chapter 2, p. 68-88.

4. The frame-tale structure is often used as a vehicle for reflection on the act of narration and storytelling. Both the *Seven Viziers* (*Sendbâd-nâma*) and the *One Thousand and One Nights* (*Alf layla wa-layla*), for instance, deal with themes of entertainment and storytelling and their intersections with gender and power. In the *Conference of the Birds*, too, we find a meditation on homiletic storytelling as a particular mode of discourse.

hoopoe's fictional performance. The frame-tale thus grants 'Aṭṭâr a new tool of authorial control while it simultaneously endows the work with increased perlocutionary force.

The present chapter will thus attend to the rhetorical implications of the frame-tale structure and explore the ways in which its representation of homiletic discourse shapes the poem's didacticism. We will first survey the history of the homiletic *maṣnavi* and the frame-tale device, before overviewing contemporary practices of popular preaching. Next, we will show how these practices constitute the armature of the frame-tale, which assumes the transformative power of homiletic speech. We will then examine how the frame-tale controls the meanings that readers might derive from individual, hypo-diegetic anecdotes and how it reinforces the paraenetic rhetorical stance of the poem as a whole. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an analysis of the poem's closing anecdote, in which the birds' diegetic actions are reflected in, and perhaps determined by, an embedded, hypo-diegetic narrative featuring the prophet Joseph. Through this blending of narrative levels, 'Aṭṭâr meditates on the transformative power of edifying story-telling.

Homiletic Maṣnavis and the Frame-Tale Structure

The *Conference of the Birds* belongs to a class of texts often referred to as "didactic *maṣnavis*," a well-developed genre by 'Aṭṭâr's time.⁵ The *maṣnavi* form consists of rhyming couplets, which frees poets from the constraints of mono-rhyme and allows them to compose sprawling works reaching thousands of verses. Didactic *maṣnavis* make good use of the form's potential for length: they often contain hundreds of edifying anecdotes, representing a wide variety of material, accompanied by direct exhortations to piety and virtue. The genre appears

5. A useful overview of this genre of texts can be found in Nasrollah Pourjavady, "Genres of Religious Literature," in *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 308-11.

to have crystallized very early. Its main characteristics can already be recognized in extant fragments from a tenth-century *maṣnavi*, Abu Shakur Balkhi's *Wondrous Book* (*Āfarin-nāma*); the work seems to have consisted of gnomic observations on practical morality and exhortations to wisdom and virtue, as well as short narratives and animal fables.⁶ Being of such an early date, it unsurprisingly lacks the mystical outlook and Islamic sensibilities of its successors; nevertheless, it presages some of the thematic concerns and rhetorical techniques of later didactic *maṣnavis*, such as those of Sanâ'i and Neẓâmi, both of which display a decidedly more Islamic orientation. 'Aṭṭâr mentions Sanâ'i by name, so it seems reasonable to assume that he was familiar with the latter's poetry, although this does not constitute definitive proof.⁷ And as we have already seen, even though he does not explicitly mention Neẓâmi (d. 1209), several scholars have argued that 'Aṭṭâr's works bear traces of his influence.⁸ One might even speculate the frame-tale structure represents an attempt to combine the narrative unity of Neẓâmi's romantic *maṣnavis* with the didactic breadth of his *Treasury of Secrets* (*Makzan al-asrâr*) and Sanâ'i's *Garden of Truth* (*Ḥadiqat al-ḥaqīqa*). In any case, 'Aṭṭâr's didactic *maṣnavis* follow the same general format as these earlier generic exemplars although he tends to devote more space to anecdotes and tales than Sanâ'i, further evidence of his personal predilection for narrative elements that is also manifest in his innovative use of the frame-tale.⁹ Reflective of broader po-

6. For a collection of attributed fragments and a French translation, see Gilbert Lazard, *Les premiers poètes persans (IXe - Xe): Fragments rassemblés, édités et traduits* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1964), 1:94-126, 2:79-128. Also see Gilbert Lazard, "Abū Šakūr Balkī," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 21 July 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abu-sakur-balki-poet-of-the-samanid-period>; J. Matini, "Āfarīn-nāma," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 22 July 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/afarin-nama-a-poem-in-the-motaqareb-meter-by-the-4th-10th-century-poet-abu-sakur-balki-q>.

7. 'Aṭṭâr explicitly references Sanâ'i three times in *Moṣibat-nāma*, 717, 4603, 7142.

8. Zarrinkub, *Šedâ-ye bâl-e simorgh*, 71-72, 84; Zanjâni, "Neẓâmi va 'Aṭṭâr." If correct, this could also help us date 'Aṭṭâr's works by establishing a *terminus a quo*. The chronology of Neẓâmi's works is reviewed in Domenico Parrello, "Kamsa of Neẓâmi," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 10 November 2010, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kamsa-of-nezami>.

9. J. T. P. de Bruijn, "The Stories in Sanâ'i's *Faxri-nâme*," in *Pand-o sokhan: Mélanges offerts à Charles-Henri de Fouchécour*, ed. Christophe Balaÿ, et al. (Tehran: Institut français de recherche en Iran, 1995), 79; De Bruijn,

etic trends, the sufistic ethos, already latent in Sanâ'i and Neẓâmi, comes to the fore in 'Aṭṭâr and his poetic successors, most obviously Rumi, whose *Spiritual Couplets* (*Maṣnavi-ye ma'navi*) was allegedly modeled on 'Aṭṭâr's *Conference of the Birds*.¹⁰

These texts participate in a broad current of didacticism that runs throughout the Persian literary tradition and across its traditionally defined genres and forms. This represents a continuation of the strong paraenetic orientation found in many Middle Persian texts, especially the *andarz* (testament) literature, which consists of the wise maxims of past sages and kings in the domains of practical morality, religion, and statecraft.¹¹ During the tenth century, this mode of discourse was quickly incorporated into the nascent New Persian literary tradition: the *Wondrous Book* (*Âfarin-nâma*), for example, is often described as a versified, New Persian *andarz* on the grounds that its surviving fragments enjoin wisdom and pious living, invoke the authority of wise predecessors, and display a penchant for generalizing sententiae.¹² Indeed, the extant corpus of tenth-century Persian poetry as a whole is often concerned with practical, secular wisdom, delivered with pith, wit, and grace: it represents a tradition of elegant truth-telling which exhorts its audience towards proper living.

In the ninth century, even before the New Persian literary tradition had begun, the legacy of Middle Persian *andarz* was already being incorporated into Arabic through the as-

"Comparative Notes," 372.

10. Jâmi, *Nafahât*, 470.

11. Useful overviews of Middle Persian *andarz* can be found in Shaul Shaked, "Andarz i. Andarz and Andarz Literature in Pre-Islamic Iran," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 3 August 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/andarz-precept-instruction-advice>; M. Macuch, "Pahlavi Literature," in *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran: Companion Volume I to "A History of Persian Literature"* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 160-72; Mary Boyce, "Middle Persian Literature," in *Iranistik: Literatur* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 51-5; Jean de Menasce, "Zoroastrian Pahlavî Writings," in *Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 3.2:1180-6. Its continuing influence on New Persian and Arabic literature is treated in Ch.-H. de Fouchécour, *Moralia: Les notions morales dans la littérature persane du 3e/9e au 7e/13e siècle* (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1986); Z. Safa, "Andarz ii. Andarz in New Persian," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 3 August 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/andarz-precept-instruction-advice>.

12. Safa, "Andarz in New Persian."

cetic poetry (*zohdiyyāt*) of the Abbasid poets.¹³ This poetic genre, associated especially with Abū'l-ʿAtāhiyya (d. c. 825), counsels detachment from worldly matters and remembrance of death, often in simple, direct language.¹⁴ Although many specimens of ascetic poetry are completely “secular” in a manner consistent with the *andarz* inheritance, others display an explicitly Islamic orientation; ascetic verses were often used by preachers, and some of the genre’s earliest practitioners’ were said to be preachers themselves.¹⁵ Arabic ascetic verse in turn fed back into the nascent New Persian literary tradition, where, in conjunction with indigenous Persian forms of moralizing verse, it gave rise to specifically Islamic forms of Persian exhortative poetry in the eleventh century; significant figures in this new, religious Persian poetry include Nāṣer-e Khosrow and, slightly later, Sanāʿi.¹⁶ Much like the early wisdom poetry of the tenth century, their verse exhorts readers to attend to their own mortality and avoid excessive attachment to world, but within an explicitly Islamic ontology, ethics, and discursive tradition. Their exhortations and admonishments remain rooted in concrete analogy and imagistic description, capped by maxims and proverbs. Instead of creating new knowledge through logical deduction, they aim to present already agreed upon religious truths in a new, rhetorically more forceful light.

Such a stance has been labeled “homiletic” by de Bruijn, in the sense that the poet adopts the rhetorical position of a “preacher on his pulpit, addressing the people at his feet.”¹⁷

13. A. Hamori, “Ascetic Poetry (*Zuhdiyyāt*),” in *Abbasid Belles Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Paul Kennedy, “Zuhdiyya,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1392. As these scholars point out, ascetic poetry was informed by certain pre-Islamic Arabic literary trends as well.

14. Gregor Schoeler, “Bashshār b. Burd, Abū'l-ʿAtāhiyah and Abū Nuwās,” in *Abbasid Belles Lettres*, ed. Julia Ashtiany, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); James D. Martin, “The Religious Beliefs of Abū'l-ʿAtāhiya According to *Zuhdiyyāt*,” in *Transactions, Volume XXIII, 1969-1970*, ed. William McKane (Glasgow: Glasgow University Oriental Society, 1972).

15. Kennedy, “Zuhdiyya.”

16. De Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, 86-8; De Bruijn, *Piety and Poetry*, 183-5.

17. De Bruijn, *Piety and Poetry*, 164-70; De Bruijn, “Preaching Poet,” 96. Also see Th. Emil Homerin, “Preaching

Like the preacher, the homiletic poet deals with topics of Islamic piety already familiar to his audience; his primary aim is not to instruct, but to persuade, in the hopes of convincing his listeners to adopt a more religiously valuable manner of being.¹⁸ De Bruijn's notion of homiletic poetry can be productively applied to many different poetic forms, as he himself notes, but it is especially apt in the case of didactic *maṣnavis*, whose use of illustrative narrative material finds its counterpart in contemporary preaching practices.

Soon after the Arab conquests, storytellers-cum-preachers (*qoṣṣâṣ*) began to play a critical role in the spread and formation of a distinct Islamic identity, interpreting the Quran and exhorting their listeners to piety through exemplary stories of Muhammad, his companions, and pre-Islamic prophets (the latter often derived from Christian or Jewish sources).¹⁹ The practice continued in 'Aṭṭâr's time, when the terms "preaching" (*va'z*) and "story-telling" (*qaṣaṣ*) were used more-or-less interchangeably in reference to non-liturgical homiletic assemblies (as opposed to the liturgically mandated Friday *khoṭba*) conducted in semi-public spaces, like mosques and *khânaqâhs*, and directed towards a popular audience.²⁰ According to manuals of hortatory preaching, and corroborated by the few specimens that have been preserved, these

Poetry: The Forgotten Verse of Ibn al-Šahrazûrî," *Arabica* 38 (1991): 87-101.

18. De Bruijn, "Preaching Poet," 87.

19. On the importance of the early storytellers see Ch. Pellat, "Qāṣṣ," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4002.

20. Non-liturgical preaching has been a topic of some interest throughout twentieth-century scholarship, and its study has only increased in the past decade. Useful overviews can be found in Julie Scott Meisami, "Oratory and Sermons," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London: Routledge, 1998), 2:593-94; B. Radtke, "Wā'iz," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1332. Important longer studies include Linda Jones, *The Power of Oratory in the Medieval Muslim World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 158-92; Daniella Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria: Mosques, Cemeteries and Sermons under the Zangids and Ayyūbids (1146-1260)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 115-48; Berkey, *Popular Preaching*; Swartz, "Arabic Rhetoric"; Merlin Swartz, "The Rules of Popular Preaching in Twelfth-Century Baghdad, According to Ibn al-Jawzī," in *Prédication et propagande au Moyen Âge: Islam, Byzance, Occident*, ed. George Makdisi, et al. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1983); Johannes Pedersen, "The Islamic Preacher: Wā'iz, Mudhakkir, Qāṣṣ," in *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, ed. Samuel Löwinger and Joseph Somogyi (Budapest: 1948); Johannes Pedersen, "The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher," *Die Welt des Islam*, n.s. 2, no. 4 (1953): 215-31. Also see Merlin Swartz's introduction to his edition and translation of Ibn al-Jawzī's *Kitāb al-quṣṣāṣ wa'l-modhakkirīn* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1971), 46-70.

sermons usually included both direct exhortation and narrative exempla.²¹ The famous preacher Ibn al-Jawzī even compiled collections of anecdotes he deemed appropriate for preaching, including individual volumes devoted to the virtuous acts of ‘Omar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, ‘Omar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Fozayl b. ‘Eyāz, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Ma‘ruf al-Karkhi, Beshr al-Ḥāfi, Ebrāhīm b. Adham, and “other pious men” (*sāliḥūn*).²² And although such sermons could be delivered to huge crowds, this form of discourse scaled to more intimate settings as well. Sufi shaykhs, for example, would hold smaller sessions for their disciples, some of which have been recorded in works like Rumi’s *For What It’s Worth* (*Fihī mā fihī*) or Amir Ḥasan Sijzī’s *Maxims of the Heart* (*Favâ‘ed al-fo‘âd*). Although smaller mystical sessions were often softer in tone and would touch on more esoteric topics than a large public sermon, they nonetheless recall the material and presentation of their more public cousins, displaying the same pedagogical orien-

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21. The term *va‘z* can be used in several different senses. As a noun, it can refer to a sermon in general, and as a verbal-noun, the activity of sermonizing more broadly. It is in this latter sense that *va‘z* is often be equated with *qaṣaṣ*. Ibn al-Jawzī attempts to distinguish between the two (9-11/trans. 96-8), but his discussion seems more a scholastic exercise than reflection of actual use, and he himself admits (with some reluctance) that the terms have become more or less interchangeable; on this issue also see Berkey, *Popular Preaching*, 14. In a more narrow sense, *va‘z* also refers to a specific, formally bounded section of the sermon. According to Swartz, Ibn al-Jawzī divided the sermon into four main sections: a benediction (*khoṭba*), a pious story or stories (*qeṣṣa*), and then the homily proper (*va‘z*), which consists of exhortations and admonishments often thematically linked to the prior anecdotes. After the *va‘z* the preacher would conclude with closing verses (*khawâtim*). Certainly, not all sermons would follow Ibn al-Jawzī’s formula exactly; nevertheless, it shows that *va‘z*, in addition to signifying the sermon as a whole, could refer to one of its specific sections (for more on this schema see Swartz, “Arabic Rhetoric”). Finally, the term *va‘z* can also be used as a generic/modal term designating discourse that resembles that of the preachers; it is in this sense that medieval littérateurs speak of “homiletic poetry” (*she‘r-e va‘z*). Like the medieval sources, I use ‘homily’ and ‘homiletic’ to refer to sermons in general, the act of preaching, a specific exhortative section of the non-liturgical sermon, and a particular rhetorical stance. The intended sense is usually apparent from context, and if it is not I am careful to specify further.
22. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Quṣṣāṣ*, 145-46/trans. 231-33. In addition to these collections, Ibn al-Jawzī also mentions that he produced several compendia of exhortations and admonishments (*va‘z* in the narrow sense of the sermon’s explicitly exhortative section), as well the *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, a collection of hagiographical anecdotes that ‘Aṭṭār may have used as source for the *Memorial* and which Ibn al-Jawzī recommends to aspiring preachers as a book “that includes narratives concerning the ascetics and pious men from the time of our Prophet up to the present.” On the link between textual collections of exempla and the practice of preaching, see Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety*, 218.

tation and consisting largely of edifying narratives and similitudes, coupled with interpretive exhortations.

Such material also recalls the content of many didactic *maṣnavis*, which also contain exemplary stories about early pious heroes and similar figures, coupled with interpretive exhortations. This is not to claim that didactic *maṣnavis* are necessarily genetic descendants of popular sermons, but rather to suggest that the genre's tone, rhetorical stance, and subject matter would, for most medieval audiences, evoke the sessions of hortatory preachers, and that these associations would inform their experience of the text. For the medieval reader-listener, the implied setting of a didactic *maṣnavi* like the *Garden of Truth* (*Ḥadiqat al-ḥaqīqa*) or the *Treasury of Secrets* (*Makhzan al-asrār*) was a hortatory preaching session; the poet's primary persona was that of a mystically minded preacher, sermonizing from atop a pulpit or at the head of a teaching circle, and his reader-listeners were invited to imagine themselves as members of the audience assembled around him.

Unlike previous poets, however, 'Aṭṭār was not content to merely imply a homiletic setting for his didactic *maṣnavis*; instead, he depicted elaborate (fictional) homiletic settings within the poems themselves by means of the frame-tale device. The frame-tale, a literary technique possibly of Indian origin, was well established in Persian and Arabic literatures by 'Aṭṭār's time and often used to structure prose story collections.²³ One of the earliest examples of the frame-tale structure in Islamicate letters is *Kalila and Demna*, a story cycle first recorded in Sanskrit and best known through Ebn al-Moqaffa's Arabic translation from a lost Middle

23. Useful overviews of the frame-tale device can be found in Klaus Kanzog, "Rahmenerzählung," in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, ed. Paul Merker and Wolfgang Stammeler, 2nd ed. (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1977); Bonnie D. Irwin, "What's in a Frame? The Medieval Textualization of Traditional Storytelling," *Oral Tradition* 10, no. 1 (1995): 27-53; Stephen Belcher, "Framed Tales in the Oral Tradition: An Exploration," *Fabula* 35 (1994): 1-19; Werner Wolf, "Framing Borders in Frame Stories," in *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*, ed. Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).

Persian version.²⁴ It features two jackals who serve as courtiers in the court of the lion-king, where they narrate fabulistic stories on practical morality and the art of statecraft; it is often considered an example of “mirrors for princes” literature.²⁵ Several New Persian versions were also produced, including a versification by Rudaki, but only a few scattered verses have survived.²⁶ Indian origins have also been suggested for other Perso-Arabic collections unified by the frame-tale device, such as the *Seven Viziers* (*Sendbâd-nâma*) and the *Book of the Parrot* (*Ṭuṭi-nâma*), both of which contain entertaining stories of an often ribald nature.²⁷ The most famous Islamicate story collection is, of course, the *One Thousand and One Nights*, versions of which seem to have circulated in Arabic from at least the ninth century onwards.²⁸ It features a frame-narrative of Indo-Persian origin, in which the protagonist, Shahrazâd, repeatedly delays her own execution through the narration of entertaining tales; these embedded narratives include

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24. Dagmar Riedel, “Kalila wa Demna i. Redactions and Circulation,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 20 April 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kalila-demna-i>.
 25. See, for example, Ernst J. Grube, *A Mirror for Princes from India: Illustrated Versions of the “Kalilah wa Dimnah,” “Anvar-i Suhayli,” “Tyar-i Danish,” and “Humayun Nameh”* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1991); Gustav Richter, *Studien zur Geschichte der älteren arabischen Fürstenspiegel* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1932), 22-4. Cf. R. Irwin, who objects to the term on the basis that the primary intended audience of *Kalila* was not the caliph, but rather his courtiers, “The Arabic Beast Fable,” *Journal of the Warburg Courtauld Institutes* 55 (1992), 39-40.
 26. Sa’id Nafisi, *Mohit-e zendegi va aḥvâl va ash‘âr-e Rudaki* (Tehran: Ebn Sinâ, 1341 [1961-62]), 425-33, 532-40; De Blois and Storey, *Persian Literature*, 5.1:221-23; François de Blois, *Burzōy’s Voyage to India and the Origin of the Book of “Kalilah wa Dimnah”* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1990), 51.
 27. Like most story cycles, their transmission history is complex. They seem to have both existed in Pahlavi versions but have not survived in that form. The *Seven Viziers* was translated into Arabic as early as the tenth century; the most widespread New Persian version is that of the twelfth-century Zāhiri Samarqandī. The alleged Indian origin of its frame-narrative is contested by Perry. As for the *Book of the Parrot*, the most famous New Persian version is that of Zīā al-Dīn Nakhshabī, who claims to have translated directly from the Sanskrit *Śūka-saptati* (he introduces a number of changes, however). See Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature,” 190-1; J. P. Guillaume, “Sindbād al-Ḥakīm,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7047; B. E. Perry, “The Origin of the Book of Sindbad,” *Fabula* 3, no. 1 (January 1959): 1-94; E. Berthels, “Nakhshabī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5776; Gholām-Ḥosayn Yusofi, “Čehel Ṭuṭi,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 15 December 1990, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cehel-tuti>; Mohammad Karimi Zanjani Asl, “Naḵṣabī, Zīā’-al-Dīn,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 19 April 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/naksabi-zia>.
 28. On the development of the *Nights* cycle, see David Pinault, *Story-Telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 1-12; Mia I. Gerhardt, *The Art of Storytelling: A Literary Study of the Thousand and One Nights* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 9-12. Also see Nabia Abbott, “A Ninth-Century Fragment of the ‘Thousand Nights’: New Light on the History of the *Arabian Nights*,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 8, no. 3 (July 1949): 129-64.

stories of Indian, Persian, and Arabic origin, likely incorporated into the collection at different points in its development.²⁹ By the thirteenth century, the frame-tale device and many of these very same story cycles were also popular in Europe: both the *Seven Viziers* and *Kalila and Demna* were translated into Castilian in the 1250s, after which the frame-tale structure was used to great effect by Boccaccio and Chaucer.³⁰

‘Aṭṭār’s innovation lies in his application of the frame-tale structure to the mystical didactic *maṣnavi*, through which he unifies its diverse anecdotes and homilies and situates them in an imagined performance context. Unlike the *Garden of Truth* (*Ḥadiqat al-ḥaqīqa*) or *Treasury of Secrets* (*Makhzan al-asrār*), the anecdotes and exhortations in the *Conference of the Birds* are cast as the intra-diegetic utterances of the hoopoe, the frame-tale’s fictional protagonist. In the style of a popular preacher delivering a large public sermon, the hoopoe exhorts an assembly of birds to undertake the arduous journey towards the Simorgh. The bulk of the poem is devoted to these homiletic performances, by means of which the hoopoe ultimately succeeds in prodding his listeners onto the spiritual path. The poem’s various hypo-diegetic anecdotes thus unfold in an imagined communicative situation, complete with a fictional speaker, setting, and a responsive audience.

The Performance of Preaching

In constructing this fictional homiletic situation, the *Conference of the Birds* does not exhaustively catalog every aspect of the hoopoe’s performance; instead, it relies on the prior knowledge and experience of its reader-listeners, who are required to fill in the necessary gaps. This would not have been a problem for ‘Aṭṭār’s medieval audiences, most of whom would have

29. Ch. Pellat, “Alf layla wa layla,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 1 August 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/alf-layla-wa-layla>.

30. David A. Wacks, *Framing Iberia: Maqāmāt and Frametale Narratives in Medieval Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 23.

likely attended homiletic assemblies (*majâles-e va‘z*) themselves, but our own knowledge of such practices is much more limited. Oral performance events are temporally bounded and inherently fleeting, and thus notoriously difficult to reconstruct, even for modern ethnographers equipped with advanced recording equipment and sophisticated notation systems. And for those of us studying medieval phenomena, we must rely on pre-modern texts whose primary aim was certainly not the accurate description of ephemeral “happenings.”³¹ Only a few homiletic assemblies were ever committed to text, and while they may include the sermon’s verbal message (or a reconstruction thereof), they do not often indicate the larger situational context, the preacher’s gestures and style of delivery, or the reaction of the audience.³² Besides individual sermon-texts, a number of works were compiled that functioned as treasuries of material for preachers to memorize and use in their sessions; these sources can help clarify a typical sermon’s content, but they too have little to say regarding performance and reception. Historical and hagiographical anecdotes, however, and especially travelers’ accounts, often furnish contextualizing information and performance details not found in the sermon-texts or homiletic treasuries. Preachers also wrote manuals for their craft, most notably Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Storytellers and Preachers* (*Kitāb al-quṣṣāṣ wa’l-mudhakkirīn*), which provide a rare glimpse into how they approached and conceptualized their art. Through these sources we can begin to reconstruct, however tentatively, the central characteristics of Islamic homiletic performance in the eastern Islamic lands during ‘Aṭṭār’s age.

31. See the discussions in Jones, *Power of Oratory*, 33-7; Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety*, 117-8.

32. Berkey and Jones have identified a few texts, several still in manuscript, of homiletic assemblies delivered by individual preachers. See *Popular Preaching*, 18-9; *Power of Oratory*, 27. Persianists are quite lucky to have a set of seven edited sermons attributed to Rumi that seems to be authentic, as well as his more intimate mystical teaching sessions. See Jalāl al-Din Rumi, *Majâles-e sab‘a: Haft kheṭāba*, ed. Towfiq Sobḥāni (Tehran: Kayhân, 1365 [1986]); Jalāl al-Din Rumi, *Fihi mâ fih va payvast-hâ-ye no-yâfta*, ed. Towfiq Sobḥāni (Tehran: Pârsa, 1388 [2009-1010]); Pourjavady, “Genres of Religious Literature,” 290-3; Lewis, *Rumi*, 128-33, 292-94.

Public homiletic assemblies took place in a variety of settings: in mosques, madrasahs, and *khânaqâhs*, or their attached courtyards; in shrines and cemeteries; or when the session was sponsored by a private donor, in the courtyard of a palace or residence.³³ Popular preachers like Ibn al-Jawzî and Aḥmad-e Ghazzâlî could attract huge crowds, and the hoopoe's assembly is hyperbolically described as consisting of one hundred thousand attendees.³⁴ The preacher would usually ascend a pulpit, especially in these larger gatherings, increasing his visibility and marking him as a spiritual authority. According to Ibn al-Jawzî, immediately after mounting the pulpit, the preacher should open the session with praise of God and Quranic recitation, performed either by himself or a professional reciter (*moqrî*). The traveller Ibn Jubayr, who witnessed three of Ibn al-Jawzî's sermons in Baghdad, describes twenty reciters seated before the famous preacher, chanting in rounds.³⁵ The recitation is followed by eulogy of the prophet (*ṣanâ*), a prayer for the reigning caliph and his subjects (*do'â*), and what Ibn al-Jawzî calls a "*khoṭba*" (pl. "*khoṭob*"), a benediction of rhymed prose in praise of God, usually climaxing in a Quranic verse or phrase; if the preacher does not have the skills to compose one himself, Ibn al-Jawzî suggests memorizing one (he even circulated collections of his own *khoṭob* appropriate for memorization in works like the *Best of the Vials* [*Ru'ūs al-qawārîr*]).³⁶ The Quranic recitation and rhyming *khoṭba* endow the performance with a ritual quality and cultivate a sense of pious awe and wonder, encouraging audience attention and receptivity to the sermon proper

33. The sponsored sessions were often held in or near the residence of the patron but would be open to the public. For example, Ibn al-Jawzî often preached for the caliph al-Mustaẓî in a palace courtyard near Bâb Badr; the gates would be opened and mats would be spread on the ground for the people to sit on, while the caliph would watch from a belvedere above. See Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥlat Ibn Jubayr* (Beirut: Dâr Ṣādir, 1964), 198; Swartz, "Rules of Popular Preaching," 226, 234, 236n10.

34. 'Aṭṭâr, *Manteq al-ṭayr*, 1659.

35. Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, 196-200. A full translation can be found in Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, trans. R. J. C. Broadhurst (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), 229-34.

36. Ibn al-Jawzî, *Quṣṣās*, 137-38/trans. 221-22; Ibn al-Jawzî, *Ru'ūs al-qawārîr*, ed. Muḥammad Nābil Sunbul (Tanta, Egypt: Dâr al-Ṣaḥāba li'l-Turāth, 1410 [1990]), 15-39; Swartz, "Rules of Popular Preaching," 228; Swartz, "Arabic Rhetoric," 41-3.

(*vaʿz*), which tends to be more discursive and didactic than the opening material; it usually consists of Quranic exegesis along with related exhortations to pious behavior and “stories of pious men” (*ḥikāyāt al-ṣāliḥīn*).³⁷

Throughout the course of the performance, the preacher seeks to cajole, entice, brow-beat, and generally prod the audience towards a more pious way of life. Invoking God’s wrath and punishment was considered an especially effective means of inducing pious behavior and constraining the “natural human disposition” that tends towards “corroding pleasures and frivolous preoccupations.”³⁸ The audience, for their part, would often respond to the preacher’s discourse with displays of intense affect and proclamations of repentance, thereby registering its salubrious effect on their own souls. During particularly intense moments, some listeners would raise their hands upwards signaling their engagement and approval of the material.³⁹ Others would demonstrate their repentance by publicly cutting their forelocks, or having the preacher do it for them, recalling Jewish, Christian, and Greek traditions of initiation, penance, and sacrifice.⁴⁰ Ibn al-Jawzī himself boasts of having “cut off the hair of more than ten thousand lax young men” over the course of his career, a number which seems hyperbolic.⁴¹ Nevertheless, there is little doubt that Ibn al-Jawzī engaged in the practice. Ibn Jubayr, the famed traveller, describes a sermon that Ibn al-Jawzī delivered in Baghdad, after which he snipped the forelocks of repentant young men who then fainted out of the intensity of the experience.⁴²

37. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Quṣṣās*, 140/trans. 224; Swartz, “Rules of Popular Preaching,” 229; Swartz, “Arabic Rhetoric,” 41.

38. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Quṣṣās*, 20/trans. 106-7.

39. The motion of ‘raising the hands’ (*rafʿ al-yadayn*) can be traced back to pre-Islamic practices of prayer and supplication, but it also evokes the gestures of Islamic ritual prayer. Its use in hortatory assemblies, like weeping and ecstatic movements, was sometimes contested, but Ibn al-Jawzī seems to have approved. See Swartz’s long note on the subject in his translation of Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Quṣṣās*, 120-21n5.

40. Christopher R. Hallpike, “Hair,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005).

41. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Quṣṣās*, 145/trans. 231.

42. Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, 198.

Such displays of extreme affect, including weeping, fainting, and ecstatic movements seem to have been common, if contested, modes of audience response. Judging from the extant anecdotes and treatises, weeping was nearly ubiquitous in the assemblies, especially when preachers admonished listeners to consider their own sins and reminded them of the terrible fate in store for those who violate God’s law.⁴³ Crying has a long history as a spiritual practice in late antique and medieval religiosity—a whole class of early Muslim ascetics were known as “the weepers” (*bakkâ’un*)—so its appearance in hortatory assemblies is unsurprising.⁴⁴ Ecstatic behavior (*vajd*) is also reported, similar to that which occurred in sufi *samâ’* ceremonies; attendees would allegedly flail about, striking each other and themselves, and sometimes even ripping off their clothing.⁴⁵ Some were said to fall down in swoons and even die.⁴⁶ These intense displays of affect were a focus of much scholarly debate: in general, Ibn al-Jawzî did not approve of them, not because he thought the audience should remain unmoved by the preacher, but because he worried that these particular practices were often feigned and insincere, and that ecstatic movements could lead to a potentially lascivious mingling of the sexes. He does not condemn them outright, but suggests that, in most cases, they are to be discouraged.⁴⁷ On the question of crying, Abū Ḥāmid Ghazzālī is more permissive, allowing it on the part of both the preacher and the audience.⁴⁸ Sibṭ b. al-Jawzî (d. 1256) even considered the audience’s weep-

43. Jones, *Power of Oratory*, 243-4; Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety*, 141-4.

44. Fritz Meier, “Bakkâ’,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1104.

45. Ibn al-Jawzî, *Quṣṣāṣ*, 95/trans. 174-75. We should keep in mind that Ibn al-Jawzî opposed these practices as we read his descriptions.

46. Swartz, “Rules of Popular Preaching,” 234-5. Several of the biographical anecdotes in the *Quṣṣāṣ* mention such deaths. Similarly, there are many accounts of Quranic recitation producing swoons, ecstasy, and death. See Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Quran*, trans. Tony Crawford (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), 303-45.

47. Ibn al-Jawzî, *Quṣṣāṣ*, 117, 140-42/trans. 203, 225-26.

48. Pedersen, “The Islamic Preacher: *Wā’iz*, *Mudhakkir*, *Qāṣṣ*,” 247.

ing to be the sign of a sermon's efficacy, and he boasts of his own ability to reduce great men to tears.⁴⁹ In any case, despite scholarly debates over their legitimacy, these practices appear to have been widespread. Indeed, as the accounts of Ibn Jubayr show, the assemblies of Ibn al-Jawzī were full of weeping and ecstatic displays, even though he opposes them in his writings.

Various rhetorical devices were used to embellish the sermon and increase its persuasive power and affective force; at the same time, however, there was some anxiety that excessive ornamentation—especially rhyming prose—could devolve into frivolous ostentation and distract the audience from the intended meaning.⁵⁰ According to Ibn al-Jawzī, simple, unadorned statements like “Praise be to God” and “Fear God” were unlikely to carry much emotive weight—some embellishment was needed, especially in the *khōṭba*, to shock listeners into a more visceral understanding.⁵¹ “Those who have studied the Quran and its allusions (*kināya*), metaphors (*tajawwuz*), and figurative speech (*isti‘āra*),” he writes, “know what an impact eloquent speech can have on the hearts of people.”⁵² Thus, preachers should strive for eloquence in their own *khōṭbas*, including the use of rhyme, in order to maximize their efficacy.⁵³ At the same time, however, he discourages rhyme in the prayer (*do‘ā*) that precedes the *khōṭba*, which is intended to be a spontaneous outpouring of an “inner burning desire” and thus incompatible

49. Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety*, 141-2.

50. Jones, *Power of Oratory*, 94-8.

51. Ibn Jubayr comments explicitly on the quality of Ibn al-Jawzī's rhyming prose *khōṭbas* in the *Rihla*, 198.

52. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Quṣṣās*, 138/trans. 222. Throughout this chapter, translations from Ibn al-Jawzī's *Quṣṣās* are adapted from Swartz.

53. Many of Rumi's sermons also begin with Arabic *khōṭbas* in rhymed prose. The practice has clear parallels in textual prose discourse; books of all genres usually begin with opening benedictions, often rhyming, which can subtly shape readers' expectations. See Baki Tezcan, “The Multiple Faces of the One: The Invocation Sections of Ottoman Literary Introductions as a Locus for the Central Argument of the Text,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 12, no. 1 (April 2009): 27-41; Aziz K. Qutbuddin, “A Literary Analysis of *Tahmīd*: A Relational Approach for Studying the Arabic-Islamic Laudatory Preamble,” in *Reflections on Knowledge and Language in Middle Eastern Societies*, ed. Bruno De Nicola, Yonatan Mendel, and Husain Qutbuddin (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

with the artificiality of rhyming prose.⁵⁴ According to Abū Ḥāmid Ghazzālī, preachers should limit the amount of rhyming prose in each homily to a mere two sentences, since the Prophet himself considered it an “affectation” (*takallof*) and an example of “mannerism” (*taṣannoʿ*).⁵⁵ Ghazzālī is more permissive regarding the use of metered verse in sermons, however, which by all accounts was very widespread. Well-timed verses could function as proof texts, concluding the discussion at hand while endowing it with the ring of proverbially-accepted truth. According to Ghazzālī, there is nothing objectionable in the occasional use of poetry in this way, as either “evidence” (*esteshhād*) or “epimythium” (*esteʿnās*) for a particular moral or piece of wisdom.⁵⁶ But amatory verses, which sufistic preachers often used to illustrate a mystical longing for God, were likely to be misunderstood by the common people and thus best restricted to more controlled settings. Ibn al-Jawzī, similarly, commends the use of “ascetic poetry,” but councils against the recitation of verses containing erotic or wine-themes, which were likely to be misinterpreted and incite lust in the hearts of simple-minded listeners.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, at times he himself recited such poetry, and to great emotive effect: according to Ibn Jubayr, Ibn al-Jawzī declaimed both ascetic and amatory verses (*ashʿār min al-nasīb*) in a sermon delivered at the caliphal palace, which “ignited hearts in ecstasy (*wajd*).”⁵⁸

In addition to its formal rhetorical features, a homily derived a great part of its meaning and persuasive power from the extra- and paralinguistic aspects of the preacher’s perfor-

54. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Quṣṣāṣ*, 138/trans. 222.

55. Ghazzālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 1:59.

56. Ibid., 1:60.

57. Ibid.; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Quṣṣāṣ*, 115, 140/trans. 199-200, 224. Regarding these issues also see Homerin, “Preaching Poetry,” 87-90. Abu Saʿīd, the famous eleventh-century mystical preacher, also seems to have been criticized for his use of verses on the pulpit; see Ebn Monavvar, *Asrār al-towḥīd*, 1:68-69.

58. Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, 199. Homerin (89-90) points out that the verses quoted by Ibn Jubayr, although amatory, are not explicitly sexual.

mance.⁵⁹ These more fleeting channels of communication were naturally less likely to be recorded than the sermon's verbal message, but the sources nevertheless provide some clues regarding these dimensions of homiletic delivery. Ibn al-Jawzī was keenly aware that a preacher's authority derived in large part from his reputation for piety, and that he therefore had to carefully manage his image, both on the pulpit and off. To be effective, the preacher must embody his discourse in his appearance and daily life: eating little to maintain an emaciated body, eschewing luxurious clothes for a woolen cloak, and holding himself apart from frivolous socializing with both people of power and the masses:

How can the hearts of the people respond to [the preacher] who goes around in an obese condition and dressed in luxurious clothes and in order that he might associate with sultans? He is listened to only by those people who pursue amusements such as evening stories told by entertainers. Now figures and external forms frequently exert greater influence over people than words. Someone has said: "If a man's appearance does not profit you, neither will his exhortations." It is thus imperative for the preacher that he keep himself apart from the masses in order that his words might have a wholesome effect because of the awe in which he is held.⁶⁰

Just as patients cannot be expected to follow medical advice that the physician himself neglects, homiletic audiences cannot be expected to follow pious principles that the preacher fails to uphold.⁶¹ The preacher's own piety thus validates and legitimizes his speech, as well as rendering him an "example for others to follow."⁶² Concern for a pious appearance must not, however, devolve into dissimulation or putting on airs, as Ibn al-Jawzī is quick to note. The preacher's cultivation of this ethos must be "an expression of genuinely upright motives."⁶³

59. Franklin Lewis comments on the importance of performance context to the meaning of the *ghazal*, and his observations are also apropos to our discussion of homily. See "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 108-10.

60. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Quṣṣāṣ*, 27/trans. 13.

61. Ibid., 136/trans. 219.

62. Ibid., 26/trans. 112.

63. Ibid., 27/trans. 113.

As for specific vocal and bodily techniques, the preacher might emphasize certain points by striking the pulpit with a sword or staff, his traditional accoutrements; such an action helps “arouse the hearts of the people and prepares them to snatch up the exhortations avidly.”⁶⁴ Tone and modulation were important as well; Ibn al-Jawzī recommends “raising the voice and displaying zeal in warning and exhortation,” and he adduces a hadith in support of this position, according to which the Prophet would visibly display his excitement while preaching and his eyes would become bloodshot. According to Ibn Jubayr’s accounts, Ibn al-Jawzī reacted visibly and emotionally to his own material in a way that increased its rhetorical effect, especially when reciting poetry:

Emotion visibly overtook him and tears prevented him from speaking so that we feared lest he would choke. Then suddenly he got up from his seat and descended from the minbar [pulpit], and having instilled fear into the hearts of those present, he left them as though on burning coals. They followed him with tears of agitation, some weeping profusely, and some rolling in the dust.⁶⁵

Some preachers would even allegedly apply a salve of mustard seed and vinegar under their eyes to produce tears on demand. Such behavior is harshly criticized on the grounds of its insincerity, but it nevertheless demonstrates how a preacher could trigger affective responses in the audience through his own non-verbal emotional displays.⁶⁶

Silence, too, could be used to manipulate audiences and provoke certain reactions. Particularly striking in this regard is an anecdote featuring the ninth-century Malāmati Abu

64. Ibid., 137/trans. 220. On the preacher’s staff and sword, see C. H. Becker, “Die Kanzel im Kultus des alten Islam,” in *Orientalische Studien: Theodor Nöldeke zum siebzigsten Geburtstag (2. März 1906)*, ed. Carl Bezold (Gießen: A. Töpelmann, 1906), 336-7.

65. Ibn Jubayr, *Rihla*, 199. Translation from Swartz, “Rules of Popular Preaching,” 234.

66. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Quṣṣās*, 94/trans. 171. Also see Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety*, 121; Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The Medieval Islamic Underworld: The Banū Sāsān in Arabic Society and Literature* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 1:112.

‘Oṣmân al-Ḥiri, briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, which is found in Ibn al-Jawzī’s manual:⁶⁷

[Abu ‘Oṣmân al-Ḥiri] left his house and came and sat in the place where he usually did when he gave public exhortations. But this time he was silent, and his silence drew out for some time. So a man called to him: “You appear to be saying something in your silence.” Then he recited the following verse:

The people are commanded to be pious
by those who are impious
And they are treated by physicians who
are infected by disease.

Thereupon the people began to cry out and weep.⁶⁸

With these verses al-Ḥiri invokes the metaphorical identification of preacher with physician, along with the proverbial notion that a diseased doctor cannot successfully treat patients, to imply his own impiety and thus inability to “cure” his audience. He thus implies, through the poem, that his silence results from a recognition of his own inadequacy as a preacher. But the audience’s reaction suggests something more complicated is going on here: they weep and cry out, as audiences are wont to do at the most climatic portions of the homily. Al-Ḥiri’s silent self-criticism, is, in fact, itself a successful homiletic act; by confessing his own spiritual laxity, he paradoxically proves his humility and fear of God, and calls on the audience to evaluate their own lives in comparison.

In short, a whole host of somatic and para-linguistic techniques were deployed by homiletic preachers, such as the striking of the pulpit, weeping, raising the voice, and the rhetorical use of silence. There were undoubtedly many others, of which preachers and audi-

67. There is also a chapter devoted to Abu ‘Oṣmân al-Ḥiri in ‘Aṭṭâr’s *Memorial* (414), which specifically mentions his homilies (*va‘z*) and “measured and effective speech” (*sokhan-e mowzun va mo’aṣṣer*). For other examples of the rhetorical use of silence in preaching, see Berkey, *Popular Preaching*, 53.

68. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Quṣṣāṣ*, 80/trans. 158.

ences may have been only vaguely aware, but nevertheless contributed greatly to the homily's meaning and persuasive force.

By its very nature, oral homily demands a "circumambient actuality" in which the audience and preacher are present in the same space over the course of the performance.⁶⁹ The audience can therefore influence how that performance unfolds, either directly by posing questions and voicing objections, or more indirectly through subtle changes in body posture and mood. Most preaching events were semi-improvised, so a skilled preacher could pick up on the audience's expectations and adjust his performance accordingly. This dynamic has been well documented by ethnographers in modern oral performance settings, and while our own medieval sources are much more reticent on such matters, they do hint at the extent to which audience reaction shaped the course of a homiletic assembly. For example, Abu Sa'ïd is said to have been able to intuitively sense when a listener was struggling with a particular concept and immediately clarify his position with an apt verse or anecdote:

The shaykh would speak at an assembly every day, and whenever a concern would pass through someone's heart, he would turn to him or her in the middle of his discourse and respond to whatever was in their heart with an allusion (*ramz*), a verse (*bayt*), or a narrative (*hekâyat*) in such a way that they would understand.⁷⁰

The above quotation is taken from Ebn Monavvar's hagiographical work, which often ascribes the shaykh's perceptiveness in such matters to a miraculous, preternatural intuition (*ferâsat*). But these legendary abilities can also be interpreted in a more mundane light, as the knack of an expert orator and teacher for identifying resistant or confused listeners on the basis of bodily cues and adjusting the performance accordingly. Audiences could also control the direction

69. The term is Ong's: see "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," *PMLA* 90, no. 1 (Jan. 1975), 10.

70. Ebn Monavvar, *Asrâr al-towhîd*, 1:62.

of the homily in a more direct fashion by asking questions. Numerous anecdotes attest to the medieval homily's interactive, semi-dialogical character, and in some of the sermons that have been preserved one can even detect traces of how audience questions may have driven the discussion.⁷¹ Ibn al-Jawzī, for his part, seems to have taken audience questions very seriously; according to Ibn Jubayr, the majority of his meetings could be spent answering audience questions, which were both posed verbally and passed to him in the form of notes (*reqâ'*).⁷² And to bring the discussion back to the *Conference of the Birds*, the vast majority of the hoopoe's homiletic utterances are cast as responses to specific questions posed by his flock.

Of course, 'Aṭṭâr's poem does not completely or accurately describe a real-world homiletic performance; rather, it presents a stylized, literary portrayal. Nevertheless, the poem draws on actual homiletic practices in its depiction, including such details as the hoopoe's stance on the pulpit, the preliminary recitation of Quranic verses, and the audience's affective and verbal responses. By constructing this imagined, but entirely familiar, performance setting, the *Conference of the Birds* provides an interpretive context for its didactic exhortations and edifying narratives while simultaneously exploring the nature of the homiletic project itself. As we will see in the next section, 'Aṭṭâr is especially concerned to demonstrate—and simulate—the perlocutionary power of homiletic speech. If the birds ultimately attain to the Simorgh, it is only by virtue of the hoopoe's homilies, which not only convinced them to set out, but also rendered them fit for the journey.

71. See, for instance, Berkey's discussion of British Library Or. 7528 in *Popular Preaching*, 54-5.

72. Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, 198; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Quṣṣāṣ*, 139/trans. 233.

Narrating the Hoopoe's Homilies

The *Conference of the Birds*, it is often said, recounts the birds' allegorical journey through seven valleys towards the Simorgh. It is important to note, however, that its narration focuses less on the journey itself than on the homiletic performances that precede the journey. In fact, the vast majority of the poem is devoted to the intra-diegetic discourses of the hoopoe, in which he exhorts his audience to adopt a pious manner of being and enjoins them to set out towards the Simorgh. Through his speech, the hoopoe not only informs his audience, but also prepares them for the mystical path, instigating a series of cognitive, ethical, and psychological transformations that ultimately conclude in their reunion with the divine. The poem thus presents homiletic discourse as powerfully perlocutionary, serving as both a cause and a vehicle for spiritual progress. Here we will trace the narrative of the hoopoe and the birds, paying special attention to those moments when the former uses performative speech as a tool to effect the latter's spiritual transformation.

The Feather of the Simorgh

Even before reading a single verse, the poem's title hints at the importance it attaches to speech and discourse. Titles were notoriously fluid in the medieval period, and the poem circulated under several names in the manuscript tradition, including the *Conference of the Birds* (*Manẓeq al-ṭayr*), the *Stages of the Birds* (*Maqâmât-e ṭoyur*), and the *Book of the Birds* (*Ṭoyur-nâma*). All of them, however, can be traced back to either 'Aṭṭâr or the poem itself, and they are all somehow related to language. For example, a verse from the conclusion seems to refer to the poem, or perhaps to the events of the frame-tale more generally, as both the "speech of the birds" (*manẓeq al-ṭayr*) and the "stages of the birds" (*maqâmât-e ṭoyur*):

The conference of birds and the stages of the birds
Have found their completion in you [O 'Aṭṭâr], like light in the sun.

Regarding the former, the Arabic root n-ṭ-q encompasses a semantic field related to language and meaning: “*manṭeq*” is usually translated as “speech,” “language,” or “logic,” but also “oration,” whence the poem’s common English title, *Conference of the Birds*.⁷⁴ The phrase also alludes to Solomon, who, according to the Quran, was able to speak “the language of the birds” (*manṭeq al-ṭayr*), perceiving the significance in what others mistakenly believe to be meaningless chirping; he was thus able to command an avian host and dispatch the hoopoe to the Queen of Sheeba as a messenger.⁷⁵ The second expression from the above-quoted verse, *maqâmât-e ʿoyur*, is usually translated as the *Stages of the Birds*, and ‘Aṭṭâr uses this as one of the poem’s proper titles in his introduction to the *Choice Book*.⁷⁶ In technical sufi terminology, a “stage” (*maqâm*) refers to one of the psycho-ethical waypoints along the sufi path towards the divine, and the seven valleys traversed by the birds can easily be read allegorically as such a sequence of mystical stages. Yet there is a significant polysemy here: *maqâmât* is also the plural of *maqâma*, which signifies the place in which one stands to deliver a discourse, especially a homiletic one, and by way of metonymy, the homily itself.⁷⁷ It is used in this sense in the picaresque *maqâmât* genre, collections of stories in which eloquent, rogue heroes repeatedly daz-

73. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 4487.

74. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. “n-ṭ-q”; *Loghat-nâma-ye Dehkhodâ*, s.v. “*manṭeq*.”

75. Quran 27:15-27.

76. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 72. Peter Avery suggests that the two titles refer to two distinct sections of the poem; the *Conference of the Birds* (or as he renders it the *Speech of the Birds*) would refer to the hoopoe’s homilies about the way, and the *Stages of the Birds* would refer to their traversal of the stages. See Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭâr, *The Speech of the Birds: Concerning Migration to the Real*, trans. Peter Avery (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1998), 397, 539n458.

77. In actuality, both *maqâm* and *maqâma* could refer to a homily: C. Brockelmann and Ch. Pellat, “Maqâma,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0634; Jones, *Power of Oratory*, 18-19, 164, 171. By the eleventh century, the latter term was also associated with the picaresque counter-genre inaugurated by Hamadhâni. According to Stewart, the singular *maqâma* may be more properly applied to the picaresque writings, and *maqâm* to the non-ironic harangue. See “The *Maqâma*,” in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, ed. Roger Allen and D. S. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 154-5.

zle audiences with their oratory in a variety of locales. The *Maqâmât-e ʔoyur*, then, could also be translated as the *Homilies of the Birds*, with a nod to the hoopoe’s episodic preaching on the sufi path. Finally, yet another title is suggested in the prologue to the *Choice Book*, where ‘Aṭṭâr names (and praises) his previous works. The title is rather generic—the *Book of the Birds* (*ʔoyur-nâma*)—but in his subsequent self-praise, ‘Aṭṭâr again draws from the conceptual field of language and even includes a Persian calque of the Arabic “*manṭeq al-ṭayr*”: “the language of the birds (*zabân-e morghân*) of the *Book of the Birds* has transported rational souls to the site of unveiling (*kashf*).”⁷⁸ The work thus constitutes a kind of language, a language which transports rational—that is speaking (*nâṭeqa*)—souls to a place in which they can receive inspiration directly from the divine.

After the customary doxologies, the frame-tale begins with ‘Aṭṭâr’s narratorial voice welcoming various birds one-by-one onto the field of action, including a parrot, peacock, eagle, pheasant, and falcon, among others.⁷⁹ The various fowl, once they have assembled themselves into a group (*jam*^c, *majma*^ç), resolve that since every other “clime” in the world has a king, they ought to seek one out, too.⁸⁰ At this point the hoopoe introduces himself, recounting his bonafides as Solomon’s companion and explaining that, in fact, the birds already have a king: the fabled Simorgh.⁸¹

This fabulous bird played a central role in pre-Islamic Iranian mythology, and it remained a resonant cultural symbol even after the Islamization of Iran. In the Avesta, the bird Saēna is said to inhabit an “all-healing” tree that contains the seeds of all other plants and rises

78. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 70.

79. For a list of all the birds named by ‘Aṭṭâr and a discussion of their poetic characteristics, see Shafi’i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 169-80.

80. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 682, 688.

81. Ibid., 691-735.

from the middle of Lake Vurukasha at the edge of the world. In Middle Persian sources the bird is known as the Sēnmurw, and it is associated with the scattering of seeds and bringing of rain.⁸² Among early New Persian literature, the Simorgh is most famously found in the *Book of Kings* (*Shâh-nâma*). After the infant Zâl is abandoned by his father, the Simorgh brings him to its perch on Mt. Alborz where it raises him to adolescence; it continues to provide the hero and his family with magical assistance (especially healing) throughout the poem. The bird also appears in other epics, and its description can be found in various bestiaries.⁸³ In the following centuries the Simorgh was incorporated into Islamic mystical writings, where it was often associated with Gabriel, the Holy Spirit, and the Active Intellect.⁸⁴ It appears, for example, in Sohrawardi's *Scarlet Intellect* (*'Aql-e sorkh*) and *Simorgh's Whistle* (*Şafir-e simorgh*); in the latter treatise it calls a hoopoe upwards towards unification with itself.⁸⁵ Similarly, Avicenna's *Treatise of the Birds* (*Resâlat al-ţoyur*) features a bird that escapes from terrestrial hunters and subsequently journeys across seven mountains to the summit of an eighth, the residence of the supreme king; although not explicitly identified as the Simorgh, the king's mountainous perch certainly recalls that of the mythological fowl.⁸⁶ Ahmad-e Ghazzâli later composed his own rendition of the *Treatise of the Birds*, in which a group of birds journey to the seventh and final

82. Hanns-Peter Schmidt, "Simorġ," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 20 July 2002, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/simorg>; 'Ali Soltâni Gerd-Farâmarzi, *Simorgh dar qalamrov-e farhang-e Irân* (Tehran: Mobtakerân, 1372 [1993-94]), 11-37; Taqi Purnâmdârîân, "Simorgh va Jebra'il," in *Didâr bâ simorgh* (Tehran: Pazhuhesh-gâh-e 'Olum-e Ensâni va Motâla'ât-e Farhangi, 1374 [1995-6]), 75-6.

83. Purnâmdârîân, "Simorgh va Jebra'il," 76-81; Gerd-Farâmarzi, *Simorgh*, 39-126.

84. Throughout the history of Islamic philosophy there has been a tendency to interpret the angels as allegorical references to the various cosmic intellects; among philosophers of the Illuminationist (*eshrâqî*) school, the Simorgh is often added into this mix as well. See Corbin, *Visionary Recital*, 46-122; Purnâmdârîân, "Simorgh va Jebra'il," 81-93; Gerd-Farâmarzi, *Simorgh*, 193-229.

85. Shehâb al-Din Yahyâ Sohrawardi, *Majmu'a-ye moşannafât-e Shaykh-e Eshrâq*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Tehran: Anjoman-e Shâhanshâhi-ye Falsafa-ye Irân, 1977), 226-39, 314-32.

86. Ebn Sinâ's treatise was translated into Persian by Sohrawardi. See the commentary and translation in Corbin, *Visionary Recital*, 183-95. Also see Taqi Purnâmdârîân, "'Aţţâr va resâla-hâ-ye 'erfâni-ye Ebn Sinâ," in *Didâr bâ simorgh* (Tehran: Pazhuhesh-gâh-e 'Olum-e Ensâni va Motâla'ât-e Farhangi, 1374 [1995-96]).

island in the western ocean and the home of their avian king, the phoenix (*‘anqâ*), who exhibits clear parallels with the Simorgh.⁸⁷

‘Attâr likely drew on Aḥmad-e Ghazzâlî’s work as the main source for the frame-tale of *Conference of the Birds*, but he characterizes the legendary Simorgh in even more explicitly sufi terms.⁸⁸ The hoopoe’s opening speech begins by focusing on the Simorgh’s transcendence and ineffability. According to the hoopoe, the Simorgh is not to be found in the terrestrial world, but is located behind Mt. Qâf, the mountainous limit that, in Irano-Islamic cosmology, rings the Earth and is often associated with Mt. Alborz.⁸⁹ The hoopoe informs the birds that the Simorgh “is close to us, but we are far, far from it,” an allusion to the well known Quranic verse, “we [God] are closer to him [humankind] than his jugular vein.”⁹⁰ He continues to explain that the Simorgh is the “absolute king” who resides in the “harem of glory.”⁹¹ The world’s share of beauty (*jamâl*) and majesty (*jalâl*), is, in comparison with the Simorgh’s attributes, nothing but an illusion.⁹² The Simorgh cannot be contained in speech, vision, intellect, or knowledge: “no wisdom has seen his perfection, and no sight has envisioned his beauty.”⁹³ When attempting to describe its attributes, both soul and intellect are “stupefied” and “resemble clouded eyes.”⁹⁴ The hoopoe’s discussion immediately recalls Islamic discussions of God’s

87. Aḥmad Ghazzâlî, *Majmu‘a-ye aṣṣâr-e fârsi-ye Aḥmad-e Ghazzâlî*, ed. Aḥmad Mojâhed (Tehran: Dâneshgâh-e Tehrân, 1979), 77-92. On the question of the treatise’s authorship see Mojâhed’s introduction to the work, 75-6. An English translation of Ghazzâlî’s text is included as an appendix in Avery’s translation of ‘Attâr, *The Speech of the Birds*, 551-60. Also see the commentary in Corbin, *Visionary Recital*, 196-8.

88. Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 8-10; Foruzânfar, *Sharḥ-e aḥvâl-e ‘Attâr*, 256-63.

89. ‘Attâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 713. On Mt. Qâf, see M. Streck and A. Miquel, “Kaf,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3770; Gerd-Farâmarzi, *Simorgh*, 270-7.

90. Quran 50:15. Also see the notes to Avery’s translation, 471n37.

91. ‘Attâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 715, 718.

92. Ibid., 725.

93. Ibid., 723.

94. Ibid., 722. This line seems to imply that God’s attributes are unknowable, which was not a common position. The standard Asharite view is that the attributes are knowable, but somehow incomparable to their human analogues. See Nader El-Bizri, “God: Essence and Attributes,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic*

ineffability, according to which he (or at least his essence) cannot be made the object of any human faculty, since this would relate him to his creation and thus violate his perfect oneness; most readers would pick up on this connection immediately, and have no difficulty interpreting the Simorgh as a symbol for the divine.⁹⁵

Although the Simorgh transcends the created realm, it remains visible through various traces and signs that somehow gesture back towards it without violating its transcendence, a common theme in Islamic mysticism. To explain this paradoxical situation, the hoopoe launches into his first edifying anecdote, the mythic account of the Simorgh's feather and the origins of artistic activity:

The beginning of the matter of the Simorgh—how wondrous!—
 Manifest, it crossed over China at midnight.
 In the middle of China a feather fell,
 And consequently every province was thrown into a tumult.
 They all made tracings of the feather,
 And all who saw them were much affected.
 That feather is now in China's icon-house,
 From whence "*Seek out knowledge even unto China.*"⁹⁶
 If the image of its feather were never revealed,
 There wouldn't be all this uproar in the world.
 All of these works of creation (*şon'*) are from its grandeur;
 They are all manifestations (*anmudâr*) of the image (*naqsh*) of its feather.
 Because no beginning is apparent, and no end to its description,
 It is not appropriate to say more than this.
 Now, whoever among you is a man of action,
 Turn your face to the road, and march your feet forward!

جلومگر بگذشت بر چین نیمشب
 لاجرم پرشور شد هر کشوری
 هر که دید آن نقش کاری در گرفت

ابتدای کارِ سیمرغ ای عجب
 در میان چین فتاد از وی پری
 هر کسی نقشی از آن پر بر گرفت

Theology, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 128-31.

95. On the basis of the philosophical tradition's tendency to allegorically conflate the Simorgh, angels, and the intellects, some scholars argue that the Simorgh is not a symbol for God himself, but for the Active Intellect. See Corbin, *Visionary Recital*, 182-3; Purnâmîdârîân, "Simorgh va Jebra'il," 89-90; Meier, "Ismailiten und Mystik im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert," 17.

96. A well-known hadith of the Prophet.

«أَطْلُبُوا الْعِلْمَ وَلَوْ بِالصِّينِ» ازینست
 این همه غوغا نبودی در جهان
 جمله انمودار نقش پرّ اوست
 نیست لایق بیش ازین گفتن سخن
 سر به راه آرید و پا اندر نهید⁹⁷

آن پر اکنون در نگارستان چینست
 گر نگشتی نقش پرّ او عیان
 این همه آثار صنع از فرّ اوست
 چون نه سر پیداست وصفش را نه بُن
 هر که اکنون از شما مرد رهید

Through the feather, the Simorgh's otherwise ungraspable beauty is made "manifest" (*jelva-gar*) in the created world, but in such a way that does not bind or constrain the transcendence of its source. In the *Book of Kings* (*Shâh-nâma*), the feather is a magical object through which the Simorgh can be summoned, and while that legend would certainly be present in readers' minds, the relationship between the feather and Simorgh here goes beyond sympathetic magic; it is the concrete manifestation of the un-manifestable (*tajalli*).⁹⁸ This mediated revelation is mirrored by a parallel process in which those who gaze on the feather are "thrown into a tumult," gripped by a desire to anagogically re-ascend towards the divine signified. Perhaps most intriguingly, the myth suggests a link between the process of divine self-disclosure and human artistic activity. After the feather fell to earth, people began to make tracings (*naqsh*) of it for themselves, and those representations continued to partake in the signifying and affective power of their exemplar. The hoopoe then explains that "all these works of creation" are all products of—and symbols for—the Simorgh's glory; he is undoubtedly referring to the natural world as evidence of God's handiwork—a standard use of the phrase—but 'creation' (*son*) can also indicate the human crafts, and in light of the repeated references to drawing and images, such a connotation here comes to the fore.⁹⁹ Like the created objects of the natural world, works of human artistic production point back to the divine source of their aesthetic power, and they thereby constitute another route of symbolic access to the Simorgh: they are "imita-

97. 'Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 737-44.

98. Gerd-Farâmarzi, *Simorgh*, 151-2.

99. Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. "ṣun"; *Loghat-nâma-ye Dehkhodâ*, s.v. "ṣon".

tions” (*anmudâr*) of the “image” (*naqsh*) of the feather, itself an icon onto the Simorgh’s otherwise unobservable “grandeur” (*farr*).

As noted by Bürgel, the terminology is primarily visual. China is associated in Islami-cate culture with idols and painting, and the feather is stored in China’s fabled “icon-house,” where the Persian literary tradition imagines the world’s most beautiful artistic representations to be housed; visibility thus seems to be key to the signifying properties of both the feather and the human crafts it engenders.¹⁰⁰ But there is also the tantalizing suggestion that verbal dis-course and poetry, which are themselves often compared to the plastic arts, could also impas-sion their reader-listeners through an anagogic taste of the divine.¹⁰¹ That this is indeed the case seems to be affirmed by the birds’ reaction to the hoopoe’s intra-diegetic narration, which is impressive to say the least:

All the birds there became
Restless from the glory of this king.
Passion (*showq*) for him had gone to work in their souls
They all became quite impatient.
They resolved to set out and went forward:
In love of him, enemies to themselves.

بی‌قرار از عزّت این پادشاه	جمله مرغان شدند آن جایگاه
هر یکی بی‌صبری بسیار کرد	شوق او در جان ایشان کار کرد
عاشق او دشمن خویش آمدند ¹⁰²	عزم ره کردند و در پیش آمدند

The myth thus not only explains the manner of the Simorgh’s continuing presence in the world, but it also affects the birds on a profoundly emotive level. According to the hoopoe,

100. J. Christoph Bürgel, *The Feather of Simurgh: The "Licit Magic" of the Arts in Medieval Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 5-8.

101. Jerome Clinton, “Esthetics by Implication: What Metaphors of Craft Tell us about the ‘Unity’ of the Persian *Qasida*,” *Edebiyat* 4, no. 1 (1979): 73-97; K. Abu Deeb, *al-Jurjānī’s Theory of Poetic Imagery* (Warminster, UK: Aris and Phillips, 1979), 316-7. Sa’di, for example, describes his prosimetrum *Rose-Garden* (*Golestān*) in visual terms as “China’s icon-house” in a verse that simultaneously praises both his own skill and the taste of his patron: “When you bring your lordly glance to it, it is a Chinese icon-house, a painting of the *Artang* [Māni’s fabled illustrated book],” *Golestān-e Sa’di*, 55.

102. ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 745-7.

those who gazed upon the feather in China (or upon images derived from it) were stricken with desire for the Simorgh, and his own audience, too, loses their composure after hearing his recitation. They are instilled with a “passion” (*showq*) for their king, whom they resolve to seek out “in love” as “enemies of themselves.” In classical Persian poetics, lovers are conventionally portrayed as denying their own bodily needs—wasting away in separation from the beloved—but the notion of becoming an “enemy to oneself” is also a central pillar of sufi psychological ethics, which enjoins individuals to counteract the influence of the lower, concupiscent self—often figured as a recalcitrant dog, snake, or noxious animal—through interior and ascetic struggle. Only after the lower, concupiscent self has been subdued can the heart and soul flourish, which are the faculties through which the believer attains to proximity with God. The hoopoe’s recitation of this myth, then, seems to have produced its desired effect: it has instilled a passion for the Simorgh in the birds, who resolve to journey towards him by means of an ethical purification of the self.

The Hoopoe on the Pulpit

But then several of the birds begin to balk. The first to object is the nightingale, who informs the hoopoe that the rose is the sole object of his desire.¹⁰³ Why search for the Simorgh, he asks, when the rose suffices? Why endure ascetic deprivations (*bi-bargi*), when he could dally with his beloved, adorned with a hundred petals (*barg*)? The hoopoe responds critically, accusing the nightingale of falling prey to the superficial charms of an inappropriate beloved:

The hoopoe said to him, “O you who are mired in form,
Don’t boast of your love for a flirt!
Love for a rose-face has given you many thorns;
She has really done a number on you!
Although the rose is lovely,

103. Ibid., 753-71.

In only a week her beauty begins to fade.
 Love of a something that decays
 Repulses those who are wise.
 Although the rose's smile gets you going,
 She throws you into plaintive singing, day and night.
 Pass the rose by, for every new spring the rose
 Laughs at you, not for you! Have some shame!

بیش از این در عشقِ رعنائی مناز
 کارگر شد بر تو و کارت نهاد
 حسن او در هفته‌ای گیرد زوال
 کاملان را آن ملال آرد پدید
 روز و شب در ناله زارت کشد
 بر تو می خندد نه در تو شرم‌دار¹⁰⁴

دهدش گفت ای به صورت مانده باز
 عشق روی گل بسی خارت نهاد
 گل اگر چه هست بس صاحب جمال
 عشق چیزی کان زوال آرد پدید
 خنده گل گرچه در کارت کشد
 در گذر از گل که گل هر نو بهار

Although the rose is beautiful, her beauty is temporarily bounded. Born of contingency, she is destined to wither within a week, and it is the height of folly to love something so ephemeral. According to the hoopoe, her smile is in fact a mocking grin as she laughs at the nightingale's foolishness. For all these reasons, the hoopoe castigates the nightingale, asking whether he has any shame and exhorting him to "pass by the rose" and towards the Simorgh, who is the only object worthy of such a love. He then transitions into an illustrative narrative that concretizes this point: it tells the story of a dervish who falls in love with a princess who smiles at him, and the dervish faces execution for this breach of decorum—but before he is killed, he learns that the princess' smile (like that of the rose) was one of mockery, and all his love-pains have all been for naught.

The hoopoe's excoriating tone in the above passage reflects the rough-and-tumble nature of homiletic rhetoric, as well as the power imbalance between the preacher and his audience. His address opens with the disparaging epithet, "O you who are mired in form," and he admonishes the nightingale to "have some shame." Although harsh and seemingly contemptu-

104. Ibid., 772-7.

ous, such a tone is in fact pedagogically motivated. The nightingale, like many of his avian fellows, resists a transformation that would ultimately be to his own benefit; therefore, he must be made to see the precariousness of his current spiritual situation, and a belittling, cajoling address is, according to contemporary homiletic norms, one way to do this. Ibn al-Jawzī, for example, addresses his listeners with vocatives such as “O you who forget,” and “O you who are banished from the company of the pious.”¹⁰⁵ Likewise, homiletic poets such as ‘Aṭṭār and Rumi routinely chastise their reader-listeners for their weakness or ignorance. These homiletic reproaches are often gendered on the basis of an assumed association between masculinity and spiritual strength and effeminacy and spiritual weakness; thus, the wayward individual is often derided in ‘Aṭṭār’s poems as a “woman” (*zan*) or a “sissy” (*mokhannas*), while the spiritual hero is praised as a “man” (*marḍ*).¹⁰⁶ One of the most common epithets applied to the addressee in homiletic poetry, and especially in the works of Nāṣer-e Khosrow, is “son/boy” (*pesar*), which figures the poem’s addressee as male, but not quite a man; it entails a measure of dismissal but also hints at the responsibility that the speaker feels for his interlocutor’s spiritual development, suggesting that he is an older father-figure, perhaps a sage or spiritual director.¹⁰⁷ The hoopoe, likewise, adopts a rhetorical stance vis-à-vis his audience that is at once pedagogical and agonistic. He aims to bring the birds towards the truth even if they resist, at times goading them forwards through sharp language. His activity thus has a touch of violence about it, a fact that was not lost on medieval readers: according to Dowlat-Shâh, the fifteenth-century anthologist and biographer, ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry was “known as ‘the whip of the people of the path.’”¹⁰⁸

105. See some of the examples collected in Swartz, “Arabic Rhetoric,” 44, 60n59.

106. Lewis, “Sexual Occidentation,” 694-5.

107. Julie Scott Meisami, “Nāṣir-i Khusraw: A Poet Lost in Thought?,” in *Pearls of Persia: The Philosophical Poetry of Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, ed. Alice C. Hunsberger (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 224. It is worth noting the the king in the *Divine Book* is *both* a father and spiritual guide for his sons.

108. Samarqandi, *Tazkerat al-sho‘arâ*, 323.

The hoopoe thus adopts the preacher's conventional language of rebuke in an effort to disabuse the nightingale of his foolish attachment to terrestrial beauty. He repeats the same formula to counter the objections of nine other birds: for each of them, he begins a cajoling admonishment with a dismissive epithet and then narrates an illustrative anecdote. Each of these dissenters embodies a particular spiritual fault on the basis of its species' conventionally understood appearance and behavior.¹⁰⁹ The duck is thus portrayed as a fastidious ascetic, constantly performing ablutions; he is too concerned with purity to seek the Simorgh. The owl, known to haunt ruins associated with buried treasure, is a miser so myopically obsessed with gold that he sees no profit in the long journey. The falcon proudly serves temporal kings, and because they have restricted his sight with blinders and hood, he cannot see their deficiencies in comparison with the Simorgh. The hoopoe lambasts each of them for their spiritual weaknesses and exhorts them to move past such short-sighted objections.

Table 2: *The Birds' Objections*¹¹⁰

<i>Bird</i>	<i>Objection</i>	<i>Hoopoe's response</i>
Nightingale	Loves only the rose	The rose passes away
Parrot	Desires only eternal life	Life must be sacrificed for the beloved
Peacock	Desires only to return to paradise	Seek the whole, not the part
Duck	Pridefully content with his own asceticism and purity	Purity is for the unclean
Partridge	Desires only gems	Don't be dazzled by color
Homâ	Sees no reason to seek out the Simorgh because he himself makes kings	Don't take so much pride in yourself

109. For a discussion of the birds' conventional traits, see Shafî'i-Kadkani, intro. to *Manṭeq al-tayr*, 169-80. For an extensive summary of this section, including the embedded tales, see Stone, "Blessed Perplexity," 79-96.

110. Cf. Davis, "Journey as Paradigm," 174; Baldick, "Persian *Ṣūfī* Poetry," 122; Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 11-2; Foruzânfar, *Sharḥ-e aḥvâl-e 'Aṭṭâr*, 269-72.

Table 2, Continued

Falcon	Proudly serves human kings	The Simorgh is the ultimate king; human kings are fickle and dangerous
Heron	Content to sit mournfully beside the sea	Unlike the Simorgh, the sea is inconstant and unstable
Owl	Desires only treasure	Love of treasure is idolatry
Sparrow	Considers himself, like Jacob, too weak to travel to the Simorgh.	This is hypocrisy; Set out on the path!

The birds next ask several questions as a group, including how “weak ones” such as themselves could ever soar to the the great heights of the Simorgh. The hoopoe responds with a discourse on love and the transformative power of pain, which constitutes the homiletic context for his recital of the tale of Shaykh Ṣan‘ân, the longest and most well-known narrative in the *Conference of the Birds*.¹¹¹ It recounts the story of an accomplished shaykh, who, after witnessing a disturbing dream foreshadowing his future apostasy, travels from Mecca to Byzantium where he falls hopelessly in love with a Christian girl. In an attempt to win her affections, he renounces his faith and, at her bidding, performs a series of un-Islamic, sacrilegious, and humiliating tasks, including drinking wine, worshipping an idol (presumably an icon), and serving as a swineherd for a year. Although he follows her instructions to the letter, she does not return his affections. Eventually, through the intervention of the Prophet in a dream, the shaykh is cured of his love-affliction and sets out to return to Mecca; the Christian girl only then realizes her own love for the shaykh and hurries after him into the desert. She finally catches up to him and his disciples and converts to Islam, but exhausted from the journey

111. At 410 verses, it is also the longest tale in ‘Aṭṭâr’s oeuvre. On the issue of the story’s origins, analogues, and the possibility of a historical Ṣan‘ân (Ṣam‘ân in some manuscripts), see ‘Abd al-Ḥosayn Zarrinkub, *Na sharqi, na gharbi, ensâni* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1353 [1974]), 268-76; Foruzânfar, *Sharḥ-e aḥvâl-e ‘Aṭṭâr*, 245-56, 263-4; Fâtema Ṣan‘atiniâ, *Ma’âkhez-e qeşaş va tamşil-e maşnavi-hâ-ye ‘Aṭṭâr-e Nayshâburi* (Tehran: Zavvâr, 1369 [1990-91]), 137-9; Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 400-2.

and the intensity of her affect, she promptly dies. The story is somewhat enigmatic, and several different analyses have been offered; our focus here, however, is on how the narration is keyed as an oral story-telling event in a homiletic mode with particular perlocutionary effects.¹¹² The hoopoe controls the narrative flow through standard story-telling formulae, such as “by chance . . .,” “it so happened . . .,” and “in the end . . .”; he also comments on the narrated material through exclamations (“Ah, the pity!”) and rhetorical questions (“With his beloved present, how could he have resisted?”).¹¹³ Perhaps most significantly, he breaks into the narrative at several points to harangue his audience directly, reaffirming the pedagogical and homiletic goals of the narration. For example, after the shaykh has defiled himself by becoming a swineherd, the hoopoe admonishes the birds to not reproach the shaykh, but to scrutinize their own souls for “swine” lurking within:

Inside everyone’s being a hundred swine lie,
 Either burn those swine, or tie on the Christian girdle!
 Do you assume, O you nobody,
 That such a danger threatened this spiritual director (*pir*), and no one else?
 Inside everyone this danger lies,
 It raises its head once the journey begins.
 If you aren’t aware of your own swine,
 You’re excused, since you’re no man of the way!
 But if you set foot on the way, like a man of action,
 Of idols and swine, hundreds of thousands you’ll see.
 Kill the swine! burn the idols! on the field of love,
 Or become disgraced in love, like the shaykh.

112. For example, see Lewis, “Sexual Occidentation,” 696-9; Davis, “Journey as Paradigm,” 175-9; Claudia Yaghoobi, “Subjectivity in ‘Attār’s Shaykh of San‘ān Story in *The Conference of the Birds*,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 16, no. 1 (2014), doi: 10.7771/1481-4374.2425; Ardalān ‘Aṭṭārpur, *Eqtedā be kofr: Pazhuheshi dar dāstān-e Shaykh Ṣan‘ān* (Tehran: Ān o Hama, 1382 [2003-4]); Jalāl Sattāri, *Pazhuheshi dar qeṣṣa-ye Shaykh Ṣan‘ān va dokhtar-e tarsā* (Tehran: Markaz, 1378 [1999]). Also see Christopher Shackle, “Representations of ‘Aṭṭār in the West and in the East: Translations of *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* and the Tale of Shaykh Ṣan‘ān,” in Lewisohn and Shackle, *Spiritual Flight*, 165-93.

113. ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1386, 1594. The immediate narrator here would seem to be the hoopoe, behind whom stands ‘Aṭṭār’s persona as the root narrator of the entire poem. Oftentimes, however, these two preacher-figures converge, and it is difficult to determine which narrator takes precedence, or who is speaking on which narrative level. See p. 185-194.

خوک باید سوخت یا زَنار بست
 کاین خطر آن پیر را افتاد و بس
 سر برون آرد چو آید در سفر
 سخت معذوری که مردِ ره نه‌ای
 هم بت و هم خوک بینی صد هزار
 ورنه همچون شیخ شو رسوای عشق¹¹⁴

در نهادِ هر کسی صد خوک هست
 تو چنان ظن می‌بری ای هیچ‌کس
 در درون هر کسی هست این خطر
 تو ز خوک خویش اگر آگه نه‌ای
 گر قدم در ره نهی چون مردِ کار
 خوک کش بت سوز در صحرای عشق

The exhortative interlude includes the now-familiar cajoling address (“O you nobody!”), again calling attention to the spiritual authority of the hoopoe vis-à-vis his audience. He provides an allegorical and moralizing interpretation, not of the tale as a whole, but of the previously narrated scene—the pigs and idols are internal spiritual weaknesses present in everyone, and the audience is exhorted to “kill the swine and burn the idols” that lie within.¹¹⁵ The recognition of such faults is itself spiritually praiseworthy and necessary self-knowledge for the “man of the way” (again gendering spiritual achievement in masculine terms). The hoopoe’s rebuke of his audience, however disparaging, is predicated on his belief that they can rise to the challenge, and become “men of action”; otherwise, they would not be harangued or admonished, but simply excused. The homiletic intervention points this section of the story with a particular didactic moral, but it also re-indexes the tale as an oral utterance of the hoopoe delivered to a fictive audience.

When the hoopoe completes the narrative of Shaykh Ṣan‘ân, the birds are once again overcome with desire for the Simorgh and resolve to set out on their journey. They draw lots to select a leader from amongst themselves, a duty which, appropriately enough, falls to the hoopoe. Although they have committed themselves to the journey, they do not actually set out at this point. Instead, as they gaze on the endless road in front of them, they recoil in terror.

114. ‘Atṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1429-34.

115. Such an allegorical interpretation, interjected into the narrative, recalls the didacticism of the Akvân Div episode in Ferdowsi’s *Shah-nâma*.

Confessing that they remain mired in confusion, and that “this path cannot be trod in ignorance,” they gather around the hoopoe as their “imam of tightening and loosening”—an authoritative religious leader—and entreat him to ascend the pulpit and instruct them in the dangers of the way and the customs of Simorgh’s court so that they might be prepared for the quest:

It is our wish that, for our immediate benefit,
 Since you are our imam of tightening and loosening,¹¹⁶
 That you ascend the pulpit (*menbar*) here,
 And make your tribe worthy of the road.
 Explain the customs and manners of kings,
 Since this path can’t be trod in ignorance.
 Everyone has a troubled heart,
 But this road demands that hearts be emptied.
 First loosen the problems in our hearts,
 So that we may, after that, make proper resolutions.
 We’ll question you regarding our hearts’ difficulties,
 So that we may extract from our hearts these doubts,
 Since we know that this long path,
 Gives no light in the midst of doubt.
 When the heart is emptied, we will give the body to the road;
 Without heart or body, we will head for that court.

چون تویی ما را امام حلّ و عقد
 پس بسازی قوم خود را سازِ راه
 زانکه نتوان کرد بر جہل این سلوک
 می بیاید راه را فارغ دلی
 تا کنیم از بعد آن عزمی درست
 بستریم این شبہت از دلہای خویش
 در میان شبہہ ندد نور باز
 بی دل و تن سر بدان درگہ نہیم¹¹⁷

رای ما آن است کاین ساعت بنقد
 بر سر منبر شوی این جایگاه
 شرح گویی رسم و آداب ملوک
 هر یکی را هست در دل مشکلی
 مشکل دلہای ما حل کن نخست
 چون بپرسیم از تو مشکلهای خویش
 زانکه می دانیم کاین راه دراز
 دل چو فارغ گشت تن در ره دہیم

For the birds, the hoopoe’s instruction is intimately bound up with spiritual progress. It not only provides them with information necessary for spiritual wayfaring, but is itself a cause of

116. In classical Islamic political theory, the “people of tightening and loosening” (*ahl al-ḥall wa’l-‘aqd*), were the scholars and religious elites who were theoretically responsible for the selection of the caliph.

117. ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1649-56.

psychological and existential transformation: through his speech, their hearts are emptied of earthly attachments and they are rendered worthy of the way.

The hoopoe complies with their request and ascends the pulpit to conduct the homiletic assembly. ‘Atṭâr’s description is stylized to be sure, but it is also rooted in contemporary homiletic practices:

Then the hoopoe made the preliminaries for his speech,
He ascended the pulpit (*korsi*) and began.
The crowned hoopoe sat on his throne,
Whoever saw his face found high fortune.
The troop of birds formed ranks, shoulder to shoulder,
More than a hundred thousand before the hoopoe.
The nightingale and turtle dove came forward together,
That they might together serve as Quran-reciters (*moqri*).
They drew forth such intonations (*alḥân*) at that moment,
The world was thrown by them into a tumult.
As for those whose ears were struck by their melody—
Agitated (*bi-qarâr*) they came and stupefied (*madhush*) they left.
An ecstatic state (*ḥâlat*) came over everyone,
None were with themselves, nor without.
Then the hoopoe began his homily,
He withdrew the veil from the face of meaning.

بر سر کرسی شد و آغاز کرد
هر که رویش دید عالی بخت شد
صف زدند از خیلِ مرغان سر به سر
تا کنند آن هر دو تن مُقری به هم
غلغلی افتاد از ایشان در جهان
بی‌قرار آمد ولی مدھوش شد
کس نه با خود بود و نه بی‌خود پدید
پرده از روی معانی باز کرد¹¹⁸

بعد از آن هدهد سخن را ساز کرد
هدهد با تاج چون بر تخت شد
پیش هدهد صد هزاران بیشتر
پیش آمد بلبل و قمری به هم
هر دو الحان بر کشیدند آن زمان
لحن ایشان هر که را در گوش شد
هر یکی را حالتی آمد پدید
بعد از آن هدهد سخن آغاز کرد

The passage describes the hoopoe carrying out the activities of a hortatory preacher as he opens his assembly. He ascends the pulpit and sits, where he performs the “preliminaries” for the homily: presumably the invocation, praise of the Prophet, and perhaps the *khoṭba*.¹¹⁹ By

118. Ibid., 1657-64.

119. Hortatory sermons were usually delivered sitting, as opposed the liturgical *khoṭba*, which was delivered

virtue of the crown of feathers lining his head, he is cast as a king on his throne (*takht*), bestowing fortune on those who approach him—it is useful here to recall Becker’s argument that at the dawn of Islam, the pulpit (*menbar*) functioned not only as a platform for oratory, but as a “throne” for the Prophet.¹²⁰ Before the hoopoe begins the homily proper, the nightingale and the turtle dove, both renowned for their beautiful voices, play the role of Quran-reciter (*moqri*). According to preaching manuals, an opening Quranic recitation was a key component of the hortatory assembly, and it was often delivered by a professional reciter other than the preacher himself; for larger orations, multiple reciters could be used, as Ibn Jubayr attests.¹²¹ Here the turtle dove and nightingale are said to draw forth “melody” (*lahn*) and “intonations” (*alḥân*) with the Quran, a particular style of recitation that was criticized for being too close to secular singing. Ibn al-Jawzī, for instance, fiercely attacks it, writing that melodious recitation “pleases and stirs human nature” and thereby “diverts the people from contemplating the Quran itself.”¹²² As discussed above, Quranic recitation could also sometimes trigger ecstatic states in its listeners, which was a source of religious anxiety for more sober critics, who worried that these behaviors were insincere affectations. According to some accounts, audience members would, under the influence of Quranic recitation or an especially effective homily, rend their garments, weep and cry, or flail about erratically and violently: bodily practices that recall the equally fraught sufi *samâ’* ceremony. The birds behave in precisely this way; the melodious recitations of the nightingale and the turtle dove throw them into an ecstatic “tumult.”

standing. See Jones, *Power of Oratory*, 161-12.

120. Becker, “Die Kanzel,” 335-44.

121. Ibn Jubayr, *Rihla*, 197.

122. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Quṣṣāṣ*, 120-21/trans. 205. Regarding the debate over appropriate styles of Quranic recitation, see F. M. Denny, “Tadjwid,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1145.

After these preliminaries, the hoopoe resumes his discourse, proceeding in the style already established in the earlier portions of the poem—edifying narratives buttressed by interpretive homilies in response to questions from the audience. Such audience involvement was a major component of contemporary homiletic assemblies, often taking up the majority of the event, as we have already discussed. Likewise, this particular round of question-and-answer constitutes the largest section of the *Conference of the Birds*, comprising approximately 1500 lines, or forty percent of the narrative.¹²³ Unlike the hoopoe’s initial discourses, which he delivered in response to the objections of specific birds, the questioners here are left anonymous. He responds to around twenty inquiries, and each one is introduced by the formula “another said to him” (*degari goftash*) or “another asked of him” (*degari porsid az u*). Approximately the first ten questions involve specific spiritual weaknesses. One bird admits that he is scared of death, another that he is enmeshed in earthly love, and another that he suffers from excessive pride; the hoopoe castigates them for their failings, and attempts to guide them to the straight path. After this group, other birds inquire of the specific mystical virtues that they have already begun to develop, such as love of justice, submission to the divine will, and high mystical “aspiration” (*hemmat*): these birds meet with the hoopoe’s praise.¹²⁴ Still others ask the hoopoe what they ought to bring to the Simorgh as a gift, or boast of their exclusive focus on the divine. The hoopoe answers each of these interlocutors with some mixture of praise or admonishment, fol-

123. These exchanges run from verse 1665 to 3240 in Shafi‘i-Kadkani’s edition.

124. Davis divides the questions into two groups of ten, the first of which focuses on negative spiritual attributes, and the second on positive. This is part of his effort to show that a total of thirty birds pose questions (twenty anonymous questioners in this section along with the ten objectors from the beginning of the poem), who together represent the thirty birds who complete the journey. As Davis himself admits however, this division requires a little “juggling.” In actuality more than thirty questions are asked—I count a total of thirty-three, excluding two questions that the birds ask as a group. It seems to me that such methodologies can easily fall into the trap of numerological confirmation bias. See Davis, “Journey as Paradigm,” 174, 181-82n4. Cf. Julian Baldick, “Medieval *Šūfi* Literature in Persian Prose,” in *History of Persian Literature: From the Beginning of the Islamic Period to the Present Day*, ed. G. Morrison (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 120-2.

lowed by a series of illustrative anecdotes coupled with explanatory homilies; generally speaking, each of his responses contains around four or five anecdote-homily pairs. His responses thus recall the material and formal features of contemporary homilies, as well as the perlocutionary, transformative aims of homiletic discourse: through his performance, the hoopoe aims to effect psychological and ethical reform, and thereby prepare the birds for their spiritual journey towards the Simorgh.

Table 3: *The Birds' Questions*¹²⁵

<i>Interlocutor's Question/Topic</i>	<i>Hoopoe's Response</i>
What is our relation to the Simorgh?	We are connected to the Simorgh through the heart
How can we, being so weak, travel this way?	Tale of Shaykh Ṣanʿân
Why is the way empty?	Because of the glory of the king
How did you [i.e. the hoopoe] take precedence over us?	Divine grace
What if I die on the journey?	We all must die anyways; better to try and fail
What if I am sinful?	The door of repentance is open
Effeminacy/fickleness	Such is the human condition; work to constrain the lower soul
Power of the lower soul	The lower soul will never be worthy
Power of the devil	Withdraw from the world
Love of gold	Look to inner meaning, not external form
Love of possessions/worldly entanglement	The world is a trash pit and death is coming
Love of a beautiful human beloved	The human form is grossly material and contingent; true beauty belongs to the unseen
Fear of death	Death is inevitable
Worldly sorrows	These will pass away with the world
Obedience to God's command	We are all his slaves

125. Cf. Davis, "Journey as Paradigm," 174; Baldick, "Persian *Ṣūfī* Poetry," 122; Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 12-5; Foruzānfār, *Sharḥ-e aḥvāl-e ʿAṭṭār*, 272-86.

Table 3, Continued

Going “all in” (<i>pâk-bâzî</i>)	To travel this way, you must lose all you have
Spiritual Ambition	High spiritual ambition propels us forward
Justice	Justice is desirable; it is best preformed in secret to minimize the threat of hypocritical egoism
Can one speak frankly with God?	Only those intimates who have lost their reason to love
I love God, and it is time for union	You cannot attain to the Simorgh by vain boasts
What if I have already reached perfection through ascetic practice?	You are deluded by your self
What will bring me happiness on the way?	Happiness is through him
What reward should I ask of him at the end of the way?	Ask him for nothing but himself
What gift should I bring?	The burning of your soul and the pain of your heart

The Seven Valleys and Effacement in the Simorgh

After these discourses on mystical ethics, one of the birds asks how long the upcoming journey to the Simorgh will be. In reply, the hoopoe names the seven valleys that they will have to traverse on their journey; this psycho-spiritual geography is one of the best-known aspects of the *Conference of the Birds* and represents an allegorization of the various mystical “stages” that, according to the sufi manuals, populate the mystical path. It is worth stressing yet again, however, that the birds do not actually undertake the journey at this point. Rather, the hoopoe speaks *about* the journey in the context of his ongoing hortatory assembly: discourse and homily again take precedence over narrative action. The hoopoe replies to his questioner that the route consists of seven valleys: desirous seeking (*talab*), love (*‘eshq*), gnosis (*ma‘refat*), independence (*esteghnâ*), unification (*towhîd*), bewilderment (*ḥayrat*), and, finally, spiritual poverty

and effacement (*faqr o fanâ*).¹²⁶ He then launches into a homiletic explanation of each of these valleys, telling the birds what will befall them therein and exhorting them to the specific psycho-ethical mode of being associated with each stage.

In technical sufi parlance, the “stages” (*maqâm*, pl. *maqâmât*) are a series of ethical and psychological modalities through which the spiritual wayfarer must pass by means of his or her own spiritual effort, as opposed to the mystical “states” (*hâl*, pl. *ahvâl*), which are bestowed on him or her solely by the grace of God.¹²⁷ The distinction can only be carried so far, however; because God is the ultimate agent in the world, the stages are in a very real sense the product of his will and the wayfarer’s effort is only an intermediary cause. Nevertheless, the distinction remained heuristically significant for most sufi thinkers and practitioners. Various sequences of stages were proposed by different mystical thinkers, and there is no consensus regarding their order or number: some thinkers posited only four stages, while others enumerated seven, forty, or even one hundred.¹²⁸ From a heuristic perspective, a more abridged ordering, like that presented in *Conference of the Birds*, would be easier to memorize and thus likely more useful for novices and the popular audience that ‘Attâr was targeting.

According to the hoopoe, the first valley that the birds will encounter is that of desirous seeking (*ṭalab*); it is characterized by the wayfarer’s continuous struggle to approach God in the face of adversity and pain. It thus presupposes, like the system of stages more broadly, that the spiritual wayfarer exercises some sort of individual agency within the context of mystical

126. ‘Attâr, *Manẓeq al-ṭayr*, 3246-55. cf. Muhammad’s enumeration of the stages of the *sâlek*’s inner journey in the *Moṣibat-nâma*, 4028-33.

127. A classic treatment of this distinction can be found in Hojviri, *Kashf al-maḥjub*, 274-6. Also see Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 303-6.

128. For a theological interpretation of the specific order of the stages as presented in the *Conference of the Birds*, see Lucian Stone, “‘Blessed Perplexity’: The Topos of *Ḥayrat* in ‘Attâr’s *Manẓiq al-Ṭayr*,” in Lewisohn and Shackle, *Spiritual Flight*, 95-111.

longing and spiritual progress, even though his or her motivation is ultimately buttressed and augmented by the divine:

When you come to the valley of desirous seeking,
A hundred fevers afflict you at every moment.
There's a hundred catastrophes here for every breath,
The sphere's parrot is here just a fly.¹²⁹
Years of effort and exertion are required of you here,
Since here affairs are inverted.
Here you must cast off your dominion,
Here you must wager your property.
You must wade in your own blood,
And you must move outside of everything.
When no wherewithal remains,
You must purify the heart of everything that is.
When your heart is purified of attributes,
Light of the essence will begin to shine from the presence.
When that light shines on the heart,
Your heart's desirous seeking (*ṭalab*) will increase a thousand-fold.
If fire springs up in his way,
And if before him lie a hundred inhospitable valleys,
Out of frenzied passion, he will throw himself,
Moth-like, upon the flame.

...
The dry-lipped, drowning man,
Seeks the beloved's secret with his soul.
He desires to know the secret such,
He fears not the soul-stealing denizens of the deep.

پیشست آید هر زمانی صد تعب	چون فرو آیی به وادی طلب
طوطی گردون مگس اینجا بود	صد بلا در هر نفس اینجا بود
زانکه اینجا قلب گردد حالها	جدّ و جهد اینجا بااید سالها
ملک اینجا بایدت در باختن	ملک اینجا بایدت انداختن
وز همه بیرونّت باید آمدن	در میان خونّت باید آمدن
دل ببايد پاک کرد از هر چه هست	چون نماند هیچ معلومت به دست
تافتن گیرد ز حضرت نور ذات	چون دل تو پاک گردد از صفات
در دل تو یک طلب گردد هزار	چون شود آن نور بر دل آشکار
ور شود صد وادی ناخوش پدید	گر شود در راه او آتش پدید
بر سر آتش زند پروانهوار	خویش را از شوق او دیوانهوار

129. "The sphere's parrot" is a metaphor for the sky, which, in the Perso-Arabic literary imagination, is often understood to be green.

سرّ جانان می کند از جان طلب
زاژدهای جانستان نهراسد او¹³⁰

غرقه دریا بماند خشک لب
زارزوی آنکه سیر بشناسد او

According to the hoopoe, wayfarers in this stage are characterized by a particular set of attitudes and cognitive states in which they are gripped by an unquenchable desire and struggle to approach the divine regardless of suffering and hardship. As the the hoopoe elaborates, “years of effort and exertion” are required from wayfarers in this valley. They must “come in blood,” indications of their pain and struggle, leaving aside their possessions and belongings and moving outside of the familiar. He enjoins his listeners to purify their hearts, invoking the old sufi metaphor of the heart as a metal mirror covered with the rust of humanly attributes and worldly attachment. Once polished through ascetic exercise, the mirror’s sheen returns; its own surface disappears as it reflects the light of God. In the valley of desirous seeking, however, the appearance of divine light in the heart does not mark the fulfillment of the wayfarer’s desire or the end of his or her struggle, but its thousand-fold intensification. The wayfarer should press onwards, even over one thousand inhospitable valleys, but now this movement seems less driven by his or her own agency and more an inevitable result of God’s magnetic pull; even if fires should leap up before him or her, explains the hoopoe, he or she will plunge into them straight away like a frenzied moth. One of ‘Aṭṭâr’s favorite images appears next, the drowning man who continuously thirsts; although submerged, he remains “dry-lipped” and desirous, and in his yearning to know the secret of the beloved, he does not fear the dangerous monsters that lurk in the shadows of the deep.¹³¹ Although the hoopoe concerns himself here mostly with the spiritual attitudes and emotions associated with desirous seeking, he also alludes to specific spiritual practices through which such attitudes may be produced and intensi-

130. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manteq al-ṭayr*, 3257-70.

131. Similar imagery can be found at the conclusion of the *Moṣibat-nâma*, 6901-6.

fied. For example, the birds are admonished to jettison their belongings and relinquish the familiar; these exhortations are reminiscent of Qushayrī's recommendation to novices that they abandon their possessions and cut social ties during the first stage of the mystical path (which he calls repentance [*towba*]), so that they may more completely intend towards God.¹³²

After this introductory homily, the hoopoe launches into a series of anecdotes related to themes of striving and exertion, which are amplified through further direct exhortations. This pattern repeats itself with the other six valleys: for each of them, the hoopoe delivers an introductory homily, followed by anecdotes and further exhortations, for a total of almost 800 verses regarding the upcoming journey and its stages.

Very near the end of the poem, the hoopoe finally ends these preparatory, homiletic discourses and the birds at last embark upon their journey. This is one of the longest sections of extra-diegetic narration in the *Conference of the Birds*, but it still contains no more than a few dozen verses. In his frame-tales, 'Aṭṭār is far more interested in homiletic discourse, which instigates and culminates in spiritual development, than in narrative accounts of spiritual development itself. According to the brief narrative passage at issue here, the hoopoe's performance succeeds in impassioning the birds and convincing them to embark on the perilous journey. The affective power of his speech is so great that many of them die on the spot, still lacking the strength to bear the truth. Among those who survive this shock and actually set out on the path, many succumb to dangers along the way, so that out of the thousands of birds who initially accompanied the hoopoe, only a handful reach the destination:

Their souls became restless from these words,
And many died right in that staging area.

132. Abū'l-Qāsim Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-qushayriyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd b. al-Sharīf (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1966), 2:736. Translated as by Alexander Knysh as *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism* (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 2007).

And all of the birds left in that place,
Headed out on the road in longing.
For years, they travelled high and low,
A long lifetime exhausted on their way.

...

In the end, from among that host,
Few were those who followed the path to that court.
From among all those birds, only a few arrived there;
Only one out of every thousand arrived there.
And some of them drowned in the sea,
And some of them were effaced and disappeared,
And some of them, from the tops of high mountains,
Gave up their souls in thirst, pain, and suffering,
And some, from the heat of the sun,
Had their feathers burnt and their hearts roasted,
And some, at the hands of leopards and panthers on the way,
Were pitifully destroyed in a single moment,
And some just disappeared,
Having fallen into the talons of fearsome raptors,
And some, dry-lipped in the desert,
Thirsty, died of fever in the heat,
And some, for the sake of a single grain,
Killed themselves like lunatics,
And some, exhausted and pained,
Fell behind and lost their way,
And some, from the wonders of the route,
Stood transfixed in place,
And some, in pleasure and mirth,
Eased their bodies and lost their desire.
Finally, only one out of every hundred thousand—
No more than a small group—reached the goal.
A world of birds had set out,
But only thirty arrived there.

هم در آن منزل بسی مردند زار
سر نهادند از سر حسرت به راه
صرف شد در راهشان عمری دراز

...

کم کسی ره برد تا آن پیشگاه
از هزاران کس یکی آنجا رسید
باز بعضی محو و ناپیدا شدند
تشنه جان دادند در گرم و گزند
گشت پرها سوخته دلها کباب
کرد در یک دم به رسوایی تباه
در کف ذات المخالب ماندند

زین سخن شد جان ایشان بی قرار
وان همه مرغان همه آن جایگاه
سالها رفتند در شیب و فراز

...

آخر الامر از میان آن سپاه
زان همه مرغ اندکی آنجا رسید
باز بعضی غرقه دریا شدند
باز بعضی بر سر کوه بلند
باز بعضی را ز تفت آفتاب
باز بعضی را پلنگ و شیر راه
باز بعضی نیز غایب ماندند

تشنه در گرما بمردند از تعب
خویش را کشتند چون دیوانه‌ای
باز پس ماندند و مهجور آمدند
باز استادند هم بر جایگاه
تن فرو دادند فارغ از طلب
بیش نرسیدند آنجا اندکی
بیش نرسیدند سی آن جایگاه¹³³

باز بعضی در بیابان خشک‌لب
باز بعضی ز آرزوی دانه‌ای
باز بعضی سخت رنجور آمدند
باز بعضی در عجایب‌های راه
باز بعضی در تماشای طرب
عاقبت از صد هزاران تا یکی
عالمی پر مرغ می بردند راه

The sufistic notion of spiritual development is informed by the metaphor of the journey, so the hazards and dangers of travel—more acute in the pre-modern era than today—were quite naturally mapped onto the sufi way. The pilgrimage to Mecca, of course, was the paradigmatic journey for pre-modern Muslims, and the predominantly desert imagery used by ‘Aṭṭâr here evokes the dangers of that route, which would be foolhardy to attempt alone without a knowledgeable guide. Likewise, those who desired to travel down the mystical path needed to attach themselves to a spiritual guide who had already traversed the way and knew its potential pitfalls. Sufi manuals continuously reiterate the dangers of the path: the novice can be seduced by visions, waylaid by the devil, or blinded by arrogance and pride, and while a trusted guide can mitigate some of these risks, the sufi path can never be completely safe.¹³⁴ Although guided by the hoopoe, most of the birds succumb to various dangers along the road, which can be allegorically mapped onto the hazards that threaten sufi novices: some are bewitched by arresting visions and myopically abandon the ultimate goal;¹³⁵ others are destroyed by leopards and pan-

133. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 4161-70.

134. For example, see Dâya, *Merṣâd al-‘ebâd*, 226-35; Qushayrî, *al-Risâla al-qushayriyya*, 2:735-43.

135. Many authors warn that novices can be seduced by visions and unveilings that they may witness, especially during the forty-day sufi retreat (*chella*); see Chapter 5, p. 284-286.

thers, often understood as symbols of the concupiscent soul;¹³⁶ and some, lacking the necessary strength, perish in the unforgiving terrain.

Out of the thousands who had set out, only thirty birds survive these dangers and arrive at the court of the Simorgh, consistent with the sufi notion that proximity with God is a privilege only afforded to an elect few. But the birds' travails are not quite at an end; just as they believe they have reached their goal, they are turned away by the Simorgh's chamberlain, who informs them that the Simorgh, in his perfect transcendence, has no use for them. But when they turn away dejected and resigned, he suddenly calls them back, presents them with a scrap of paper, and commands them to read it. Written on the paper is the tale of Joseph's reunion with his brothers, which they interpret as an allegory for their own relationship to the Simorgh. The birds are then admitted to "the light of proximity" and, much to their surprise, they see their own faces reflected in the visage of Simorgh. 'Aṭṭâr playfully explores this mystical merging of identities through the famous pun on Simorgh and "thirty birds" (*si morph*):

The light of proximity shone from ahead,
All their souls were dazzled by that beam.
And reflected in their faces, the thirty birds of the world,
Saw the visage of the Simorgh.
When those thirty birds (*si morph*) looked closer,
Without a doubt, these thirty birds (*si morph*) were that Simorgh!
In confusion all were bewildered,
These didn't know how they'd become that.
They saw themselves as the complete Simorgh,
And the Simorgh itself was thirty birds (*si morph*) perpetually.
When they looked towards the Simorgh,
That Simorgh was these over here.
And when they glanced at themselves,

136. Such an interpretation is especially prominent among the Kobravis, who believed that the concupiscent soul, or "the soul that commands to evil" (*al-nafs al-ammâra be'l-su'*), appears to the novice in dreams and visions in the form of various beasts: see Dâya, *Merşâd al-'ebâd*, 294-5; Jamal Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: The Life and Thought of 'Alâ' al-Dawla as-Simnânî* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 140-1. Cf. Najm al-Dîn Kubrâ, *Fawâ'ih al-jamâl wa fawâtiḥ al-jalâl*, ed. Fritz Meier (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1957), 25-6, where the animal imagery seems to be metaphorical and the actual visionary experience is limited to abstract forms and colors.

These Simorgh, they were that one there.
 And when they glanced at both at once,
 Both were one Simorgh, more or less.
 This one was that and that one this,
 No one in all the world has heard such a thing!

آفتابِ قربت از پیشان بتافت	جمله را از پرتو آن جان بتافت
هم ز عکسِ رویِ سیمرغ جهان	چهرهٔ سیمرغ دیدند آن زمان
چون نگه کردند آن سی مرغ زود	بی شک این سی مرغ آن سیمرغ بود
در تحیر جمله سرگردان شدند	می ندانستند این تا آن شدند
خویش را دیدند سیمرغ تمام	بود خود سیمرغ سی مرغ مدام
چون سوی سیمرغ کردند نگاه	بود آن سیمرغ این کاین جایگاه
ور به سوی خویش کردند نظر	بود این سیمرغ ایشان آن دگر
ور نظر در هر دو کردند به هم	هر دو یک سیمرغ بودی بیش و کم
بود این یک آن و آن یک بود این	در همه عالم کسی نشنود این ¹³⁷

The pun is an example of “compounded paronomasia” (*tajnis-e morakkab*), a rhetorical device in which a word is juxtaposed with a phrase of an identical or similar pronunciation and spelling: in this case, “Simorgh” and “*si morgh*” (thirty birds).¹³⁸ The two terms are repeated twelve times in only seven verses, the sheer weight of the anaphora serving to emphasize their linguistic and ontological near-equivalence. In most contexts, “thirty birds” would be written as two words—“*si morgh*”—and the term generally appears that way in the first half of the passage presented here. But by the second half only “*simorgh*” remains, even when “thirty birds” seems to be the common-sense signification, as in the line, “When they glanced at themselves / These ‘*simorgh*’ were that one there.”¹³⁹ The thirty birds’ supposed ontological identification with the Simorgh is thus performed not only meta-linguistically, but even orthographically. They have attained to their destination, and they have found therein a version of themselves.

137. ‘Atṭār, *Manteq al-ṭayr*, 4261-9.

138. Edward Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1902-24), 2:49-50.

139. Here I follow the orthography of the early Konya manuscripts. See Gowharin’s edition, 4235-41; cf. Shafi’i-Kadkani’s edition, 4261-68. Some manuscripts use “*simorgh*” throughout the whole passage; this is the case in University of Michigan Islamic Manuscripts 290.

The conclusion suggests that humans are ontologically rooted in the divine, but that this truth must be actualized through external action. The birds realize that they themselves are reflections of the Simorgh, and that the goal of their quest was never an external destination, but their true selves. Nevertheless, the external quest was necessary for them to comprehend this internal truth; only through the transformation of the self through spiritual wayfaring—motivated by the hoopoe’s homiletic instruction—could they become aware of their inherent “Simorgh-ness.” The birds in the story can thus be allegorically mapped onto the mystical transformation of the human soul; once the sufi purifies his or her lower self (*nafs*) through ascetic striving and passage through the mystical stages, he or she can actualize the inherent participation of the spirit (*ruh*) in God.

And yet, the birds’ identification with the Simorgh is never complete. Even as the birds see themselves in the Simorgh and the Simorgh in themselves, an unbridgeable gap remains. In their perplexity, the birds call on the Simorgh to explain the secret of this “you-ness and I-ness,” and a non-verbal “voice” responds:

Since you came here as thirty birds (*si morgh*),
You appeared as thirty in this mirror.
If you were to return as forty or fifty,
You would still remove the veil from yourselves.
Far have you roamed, but
You see and have seen only yourselves.
How could anyone’s vision reach us?
How could an ant catch sight of the Pleiades?
Have you seen an ant carry an anvil?
Or a fly grab an elephant in its teeth?
Whatever you know or see—it’s not that!
Whatever you say or hear—it’s not that!
...
You remain thirty birds (*si morgh*), perplexed,
Heart-broken, patience-tried, soul-stripped,
But we in our “simorgh-ness” are so much greater,
Since we are the essence of the true Simorgh.

Be effaced in us, in a hundred glories and comforts,
So that in us you may find yourself again.

سی درین آیینه پیدا آمدید
پرده‌ای از خویش بگشایید باز
خویش را ببینید و خود را دیده‌اید
چشم موری بر ثریا کی رسد؟
پشه‌ای پیلی به دندان بر گرفت؟
و آنچه گفتی و شنیدی آن نبود

...

بی‌دل و بی‌صبر و بی‌جان مانده‌اید
زانکه سبمرغ حقیقی گوهریم
تا به ما در خویش را یابید باز¹⁴⁰

چون شما سی مرغ اینجا آمدید
گر چل و پنجاه مرغ آیید باز
گرچه بسیاری به سر گردیده‌اید
هیچ کس را دیده بر ما کی رسد؟
دیده‌ای موری که دندان بر گرفت؟
هرچه دانستی چو دیدی آن نبود

...

چون شما سی مرغ حیران مانده‌اید
ما به سبمرغی بسی اولی‌تریم
محو ما گردید در صد عزّ و ناز

Their experience of co-identity is born out of their own limited perspective; whoever reaches this court witnesses not the Simorgh itself, but some reflected aspect of his or her own being. The Simorgh remains the “true Simorgh,” elevated far above the thirty ragged, exhausted birds. The melding of their identities occurs only from the perspective of the birds, who have gazed into a mirror—it does not reflect any “objective” equivalence. The ontological gap between them and the Simorgh remains irreducible: how could an ant lift an anvil, or a fly grab an elephant in its teeth? And yet, after the Simorgh has castigated them for their delusion, they are invited to lose—and find—theirself within its being yet again. The result is a dynamic vacillation between identification and differentiation: the thirty birds see themselves in the Simorgh, even as they are reminded of the infinite gap between them.¹⁴¹

After the birds attain to the Simorgh and enter into the fluctuating states of annihilation and subsistence (*fanâ vo baqâ*), their journey is complete and the frame-narrative ends. As a whole, however, the poem’s focus lies less on the journey’s end-point than its beginning, and the spoken discourse by means of which the birds are initially prodded onto the way. It is their

140. ‘Attâr, *Manteq al-tayr*, 4275-85.

141. See Corbin’s eloquent analysis of this final scene in *Visionary Recital*, 201-3.

receptivity to the hoopoe's speech and their active participation in his assemblies that inaugurates the spiritual transformation that ultimately leads them to the Simorgh. Homiletic speech, as portrayed in the frame-tale, is powerfully perlocutionary: it inculcates a sufistic ethos in its recipients and thereby instigates the cognitive, ethical, and psychological transformations of the sufi path, ultimately leading to the realization of a new form of being in-and-through God.

Framing the Anecdotes

Besides encoding a particular conception of homiletic speech, the frame-tale also influences the meaning of the embedded anecdotes and their relation to the poem as a whole. Frame-narratives are often said to perform a unifying function, especially in the case of large, generically diverse story collections like the *Canterbury Tales* and *One Thousand and One Nights*.¹⁴² Although somewhat more consistent, the anecdotes of the *Conference of the Birds* are also quite diverse: the hoopoe narrates stories featuring early ascetics, the companions of Muhammad, and pre-Islamic prophets, as well as historical kings, various mythological beings, and personified animals and objects.¹⁴³ The majority of the anecdotes are usually quite short, featuring only a couple of characters and minimal action (mostly dialogue), but he occasionally narrates long, extended tales as well, including the stories of Shaykh Ṣanʿân, Sarpâtak, and Marḥuma, which recall more elaborate popular romances and folk tales.¹⁴⁴

The overarching frame-tale smooths out these generic and formal differences and justifies the inclusion of such diverse narratives in a single text. The *Conference of the Birds* is par-

142. Wolf, "Framing Borders in Frame Stories," 197-8; Ong, "Writer's Audience," 16; Irwin, "What's in a Frame?" 31.

143. For a few of the animal fables found in ʿAṭṭâr, see Boyle, "Popular Literature," 60-1.

144. Franklin Lewis, "One Chaste Muslim Maiden and a Persian in a Pear Tree: Analogues of Boccaccio and Chaucer in Four Earlier Arabic and Persian Tales," in *Metaphors and Imagery: Studies in Classical Persian Poetry*, ed. Asghar Sayed-Gohrab (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 164-77; Boyle, "Popular Literature," 63-70; Meier, "Spiritual Man," 275-7. For studies of the Shaykh Ṣanʿân tale, see p. 153n112 above.

ticularly successful in this regard because its frame-tale is relatively robust in comparison with its “framed” content. After every cluster of anecdotes, the frame-tale resurfaces as the birds react to the hoopoe’s discourse, pose a question, or voice an objection. Within each of these clusters, many anecdotes are explicitly marked as quoted speech, often beginning with “*goft*” (he said). And after most of his narrations, the hoopoe highlights their moral significance in a direct exhortative address, sometimes with explicit references to the Simorgh and the birds’ upcoming journey. By means of this continuously renewed, fictional oral performance setting, the *Conference of the Birds* is endowed with a certain coherence that non-frame-tale *maṣnavis* lack.

The frame-tale not only unifies the work, but it also generates a sense of sequentiality. The anecdotes themselves, considered without reference to their position in the frame-tale, do not seem to display any sort of development in their manner of meaning-making, nor do their didactic points seem to become more difficult or complicated. When considered in the context of the frame-tale, however, they are endowed with a certain direction: they are tied to specific themes in the hoopoe’s discourse, and the frame-tale suggests those themes ought to be considered sequentially as part of the birds’ progressive journey towards the Simorgh. By virtue of the frame-tale, the poem’s anecdotes are thus presented as more than a collection of edifying tales and exhortations; rather, they constitute a sequential program, that, like the sufi path, must be tread in order.

The frame-tale also seeds certain themes and structures that are then reiterated in the hypo-diegetic material. Davis, for instance, argues that the story of Shaykh Ṣan‘ân—which, as we have seen, is the longest tale in the poem and occupies a critical juncture in the birds’ narrative—mirrors the overall structure of the birds’ journey through the seven valleys. According to his reading, this structure is also repeated, in a somewhat different form, in one of the very last anecdotes of the poem; the arc of the frame-narrative is thus distilled and reproduced at

key points within the embedded material.¹⁴⁵ Somewhat more simply, I would also argue that the vast majority of anecdotes mirror the frame-tale in their depiction of paraenetic speech-events. Most of them feature a teacher-figure who instructs or exhorts a wayward interlocutor, recalling the hoopoe's rhetorical stance vis-à-vis the birds as well as that of 'Aṭṭâr's extradiegetic persona vis-à-vis his audience. The rhetorical implications of these recursively reiterated communicative patterns will be explored in more detail in the next section; here it suffices to note that paraenetic discourse and homiletic speech-situations can be found throughout the poem on all of its diegetic levels, which helps it read as a coherent whole.

Besides these global effects, the frame-tale structure also influences how particular anecdotes are understood and interpreted. When considered in isolation, many of the poem's embedded narratives support multiple divergent interpretations, but by elaborating a fictional performance context for their delivery, 'Aṭṭâr acquires another tool for controlling his reader-listeners' hermeneutic activity. First, individual anecdotes are narrated in response to specific questions from the hoopoe's audience, which forms a horizon for their interpretation. Second, each anecdote is usually followed by a direct address in which the hoopoe reveals his homiletic motives and urges his audience to attend the story's didactic point. The narratives are thus effectively sandwiched between two mechanisms of interpretive control.¹⁴⁶

As a short example, let us take a closer look at the tale of the Qoqnos, one of the more popular anecdotes in 'Aṭṭâr's oeuvre, and also one of the more unusual.¹⁴⁷ It describes the strange life and death of the phoenix-like Qoqnos, a "wondrous bird" (*torfa morghi*) that lives

145. Davis, "Journey as Paradigm," 175.

146. Interpretive homilies, of course, are also found in didactic *maṣnavis* that lack the frame-tale structure—they are one of the defining characteristics of the genre.

147. 'Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 2334-67.

somewhere in India.¹⁴⁸ There can be only one Qoqnos in existence at a time, and it lives for nearly a thousand years. Among its many fabulous characteristics is its perforated beak, by means of which it produces mournful music in the manner of a reed flute. The human science of music even owes its origins to the Qoqnos; the bird was observed by a “philosopher” (perhaps we can read Pythagoras?) who thereby learned the secrets of melody. The affective power of its music is so great that all the other animals lose their composure whenever they hear it:

In every hole, another note,
Beneath every note, another mystery.
Through those holes, when it mournfully wails,
The birds and fish all lose their composure.

زیر هر آواز او رازی دگر	هست در هر ثقبه آوازی دگر
مرغ و ماهی گردد از وی بی‌قرار ¹⁴⁹	چون به هر ثقبه بنالد زار زار

More strange still is the Qoqnos' process of dying. When it has reached the end of its allotted life-span, it gathers brushwood around itself while emitting a mournful dirge from every hole in its beak. All the animals gather around, attracted by this lament; many of them die from the sheer intensity of Qoqnos' self-threnody. It then trembles and flaps its wings, producing sparks and igniting the fuel piled at its feet. When its self-immolation is complete, and the fire has been reduced to embers and then to ashes, a fledgling Qoqnos emerges from the pyre.

Prior to 'Aṭṭâr, a few references to the Qoqnos and similar beasts can be found in the scientific and “wonders of creation” literature (*‘ajâ’eb al-makhluqât*). The philosopher Abu'l-Barakât Baghdâdi, in his collection of Aristotelian wisdom, names the Qoqnos as the sole example of asexual animal reproduction, and he describes its music and death ritual much as 'Aṭṭâr does.¹⁵⁰ A peculiar animal is also mentioned in an early wonders work, the *Offering of*

148. Ibid., 2334.

149. Ibid., 2337-8.

150. See Shafi'i-Kadkani's commentary, 649-51n2334; Şan'atiniâ, *Ma'âkhez*, 148-9; 'Abd al-Ḥosayn Zarrinkub, *Bâ kârvân-e andisha: Maqâlât va eshârât dar zamîna-ye andisha va akhlâq* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1363 [1984]),

Oddities (*Toḥfat al-gharâ'eb*), which displays many of the characteristics of ‘Aṭṭâr’s Qoqnos but remains unnamed. According to the *Offering*, this creature resembles a deer with a perforated horn; when the wind blows, the horn produces music that attracts the other animals and throws them into ecstasy, and the philosopher Plato allegedly removed this horn and used it as a musical instrument.¹⁵¹ Whatever ‘Aṭṭâr’s sources may have been (and they could have just as easily been oral legends as texts), his version of the story, when taken in isolation, recalls not a preacher’s exemplum so much as the wonders of creation literature. The continued invocation of terms like “wonder” (*‘ajab*), “wonders” (*‘ajâ’eb*), and “wondrous” (*torfa*) may constitute a wink towards these generic origins and suggests that the anecdote’s purpose is not to admonish its reader-listeners but to dazzle them with a description of this unusual bird and its behaviors. Several other thematic and rhetorical strands can also be isolated from the narrative. As an origins story for the human practice and science of music, it explains the affective power of song, especially the lament. The Qoqnos’ power to attract other beasts and throw them into a potentially fatal ecstasy recalls the sufi *samâ’* ceremony as well as the stories of the prophet David. One could also read the Qoqnos as a symbol of rebirth and resurrection. There is perhaps even a hint of metempsychosis here: at one point, the narrator rhetorically questions, “Has this ever come to pass, for anyone else? / That after death he emerges, un-born?” suggesting that the fledgling Qoqnos may be more than just a new member of the same species, but a new incarnation of the same individual.¹⁵²

234-5. It should be noted, however, that the Qoqnos does not appear in the most popular examples of the wonders genre, such as those by Qazvini and Ṭusi, nor does it appear in the bestiary of Jāhiz.

151. Moḥammad b. Ayyub Ṭabari, *Toḥfat al-gharâ’eb*, ed. Jalâl Matini (Tehran: Ketâb-khâna, Muza, va Markez-e Asnâd-e Majles-e Shurâ-ye Eslâmi, 1391 [2012-13]), 123-4.

152. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 2358.

All of these latent themes contribute to the anecdote's total effect, but within the wider context of the hoopoe's discourse, the story is deployed primarily to illustrate the universality of death and the pain of the mortal situation. It is narrated by the hoopoe in response to a bird's confession that he fears death too much to undertake the journey to the Simorgh:

... I am frightened of death;
This is a wide valley, and I am without provisions or supplies.
My heart is terrified of death such that
My soul would emerge at the first stage.

وادی دور است و من بی زاد و برگ
جان بر آید در نخستین منزل¹⁵³

... می ترسم ز مرگ
این چنین کز مرگ می ترسد دلم

The hoopoe rebukes this bird from atop his pulpit, castigating him not for fearing death, but for allowing that fear to stand in the way of spiritual progress. You are nothing more than a sack of bones, the hoopoe tells the bird, and a lifetime lasts only a moment or two; all the more reason, then, to purify the self now in preparation for the inevitable end. He then recites the story of the Qoqnos, followed by an explanatory homily in which he articulates the narrative's "point," which, for the hoopoe, is not the promise of resurrection, but the inevitability of death: every creature, even the singular Qoqnos, must ultimately die:

In the end, death got its due,
It came and scattered its [the Qoqnos'] ashes on the wind,
So that you might know that from death's claws
None escapes alive. How long with these stratagems!?
In all the world, there is no one without death,
And behold this wonder, that no one can stand this fact!
Although death is a harsh tyrant,
All must submit their necks to him.

آمد و خاکسترش بر باد داد
کس نخواهد برد جان چند از حیل

آخر الأمرش اجل چون داد داد
تا بدانی تو که از چنگِ اجل

153. Ibid., 2319-20.

وین عجایب بین که کس را برگ نیست
گردنان را نرم کردن لازم است¹⁵⁴

در همه آفاق کس بی مرگ نیست
مرگ اگر چه بس درشت و ظالم است

In other words, the tale of the Qoqnos functions as a sort of illustrative limit case, by means of which the hoopoe demonstrates the universality of death to his avian audience and impresses upon them the seriousness of this condition. If the Qoqnos, a bird who lives a thousand years, is mournfully preoccupied with his own death, then how much more so ought these regular birds—whose lifetimes only last “two breaths” in comparison—attend to their own mortality? The Qoqnos thus becomes an emblem of life’s inherent transitoriness; it dies, according to the hoopoe, “So that you might know that from death’s claws / None escapes alive.” The story is narrated to force the audience to confront the reality of their own mortality and give up their “stratagems” for maintaining a happy ignorance. The true wonder, according to the hoopoe, is not the fabulous Qoqnos, with its thousand-year lifespan and perforated beak, but the fact that no one has the strength to confront their own mortal nature.

In short, the anecdote’s didactic point emerges against the background of this imagined homiletic context. By virtue of the frame-tale structure, the polysemous anecdote is positioned as an utterance in a hortatory assembly narrated with a clear didactic intent in response to a specific individual’s stated fear of death. And within this imagined communicative setting, the Qoqnos serves not as an astonishing example of the wonders of creation, but as a pointed lesson on the inevitable transience of human life.

Framing the Textual Encounter

Even as the frame-tale recasts and repackages the poem’s framed content, it also creates certain subject-positions from which reader-listeners are invited to experience the poem and

154. Ibid., 2363-6.

conceptualize their relationship to it. The frame-tale is thus not limited to formal or semiotic significance; it also plays a fundamental role in the work's rhetorical positioning vis-à-vis its reader-listeners. In the following pages, we identify and explore three areas in which the frame-tale calls on its audience to adopt the stance of receptive subjects of the hoopoe's homiletic discourse. First, we show how the frame-tale cultivates a specific form of narratorial illusion, in which readers are invited to imagine their encounter with the text as an aural experience. Next, we argue that the hoopoe and the birds function, respectively, as an idealized speaker-teacher and a group of listener-students, and that they thereby model the rhetorical relationship that 'Aṭṭār seeks to establish with his audience. Finally, we consider the embedded Joseph anecdote that the birds read together at the conclusion of their quest, through which 'Aṭṭār diegetically demonstrates the poem's intended transformative power.

Reading and Listening

In a medieval context, knowledge was not a set of vehicle-neutral propositions, but its validity depended on its mode of transmission and the authority of the transmitter. Generally speaking, oral discourse with a reputable spiritual master, and not the reading of books, was the preferred mode of religious education and spiritual direction.¹⁵⁵ This book-master dichotomy, however, is problematized by texts like the *Conference of the Birds*, in which the frame-tale structure imaginatively frames the textual encounter as an aural, interpersonal experience. Readers are

155. Muhsin Mahdi, "The Book and the Master as Poles of Cultural Change in Islam," in *Islam and Cultural Change in the Middle Ages*, ed. Speros Vryonis (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975); Fritz Meier, "Khurāsān and the End of Classical Sufism," in *Essays on Islamic Piety*, ed. and trans. John O'Kane and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Laury Silvers-Alario, "The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism: A Reassessment of Fritz Meier's Definition of the *Shaykh al-tarbiya* and the *Shaykh al-ta'lim*," *The Muslim World* 93 (January 2003): 69-97; Ali, *Arabic Literary Salons*, 38-46.

re-centered among the birds as attendees at a fictional, oral preaching session, and the textual poem is thereby legitimized as an independent source of spiritual guidance.¹⁵⁶

One of the more intriguing problems in the phenomenology of reading is that of “aesthetic illusion,” defined by Werner Wolf as the “feeling, with variable intensity, of being imaginatively and emotionally immersed in a represented world and of experiencing this world in a way similar (but not identical) to real life.”¹⁵⁷ Such an immersion is never totally complete since most readers remain conscious of its illusive, representational quality; nevertheless, immersive texts can produce a powerful simulated reality.¹⁵⁸ We are concerned here with a specific form of aesthetic illusion, identified by Ansgar Nünning as “narratorial illusion,” which involves the reader’s sense that he or she is “being addressed by a personalized voice or teller.”¹⁵⁹ This simulated orality can be cultivated in a number of ways, but Nünning focuses on meta-narrative comments, in which the narrator repeatedly references his or her own (imagined) act of oral narration and thereby “evoke[s] the impression of a speaking voice or fictional orality . . . calling up a cognitive schema of an oral communication situation of a storytelling frame.”¹⁶⁰

156. Recent scholarship has begun to question the literacy-orality binary in sufism more generally; see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, “Companionship (*ṣuḥbat*) Versus Books (*kitāb*) According to ‘Azīz-e Nasafī,” in *Festschrift for Todd Lawson*, ed. Stephan Günther and Omid Ghaemmaghami (forthcoming); Devin Deweese, “Orality and the Master-Disciple Relationship in Medieval Sufi Communities,” in *Oralité et lien social au moyen âge (Occident, Byzance, Islam)*, ed. Marie-France Auzépy and Guillaume Saint-Guillain (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d’histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2008); Nile Green, “The Uses of Books in a Late Mughal *Takiyya*: Persianate Knowledge Between Person and Paper,” *Modern Asian Studies* 44 (2010): 241-65.

157. Werner Wolf, “Illusion (Aesthetic),” in Hühn et al., *Living Handbook of Narratology*, updated 17 January 2014, <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/illusion-aesthetic>.

158. Ibid.

159. Ansgar Nünning, “On Metanarrative: Towards a Definition, a Typology and an Outline of the Functions of Metanarrative Commentary,” in *The Dynamics of Narrative Form: Studies in Anglo-American Narratology*, ed. John Pier (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 17, 33; Ansgar Nünning, “Mimesis des Erzählens: Prolegomena zu einer Wirkungsästhetik, Typologie, und Funktionsgeschichte des Akts des Erzählens und der Metanarration,” in *Erzählen und Erzähltheorie im 20. Jahrhundert: Festschrift für Wilhelm Fäger*, ed. Jörg Helbig (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 2001); Wolf, “Framing Borders in Frame Stories,” 189-90.

160. Nünning, “Metanarrative,” 33.

‘Aṭṭâr’s *maṣnavis*, like the vast majority of medieval Persian verse, contain many such meta-narrative comments, especially in the prefatory and concluding material, in which ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetic persona routinely characterizes his own narration as oral discourse. He does not write poetry, but sings it (*goftan*); his poems are described as speech (*sokhan*) and utterances (*gofta*). Through such meta-narrative comments, the poem is cast as an aural experience, which helps legitimize its didactic force. Nevertheless, even though an oral framing arguably dominates, sometimes ‘Aṭṭâr also invokes a textual schema. At these points the poem’s textual materiality is emphasized, and the recipient’s experience is cast as primarily visual, rather than aural:

O man of the way, don’t look (*negâh makon*) in my book (*ketâb*),
 With an eye for poetry and pride.
 With an eye for pain look (*negâh kon*) in my cahier (*daftar*),
 So that you might believe even one percent of my pain.

از سرِ شعر و سرِ کبری نگاه	در کتاب من مکن ای مردِ راه
تا ز صد یک درد داری باورم ¹⁶¹	از سرِ دردی نگاه کن دفترم

These meta-narrative comments call attention to the poem as written; it is inscribed in a “book” or “cahier,” and the audience is instructed to “look” therein, not listen. Sometimes a single verse will rely on both textual and oral framings, as in ‘Aṭṭâr’s opening to the *Book of Affliction*:

Become an ear (*gush*), head to foot, without a veil,
 So that I may set out for you the basis of this book (*ketâb*)

تا نهم با تو اساسِ این کتاب ¹⁶²	گوش شو از پای تا سر بی حجاب
--	-----------------------------

The first hemistich names three body parts—ear, head, and foot—an instance of a common rhetorical device known as “observance of the similarity” (*morâ’ât al-naẓir*) in which the poet aims to fluidly mention several objects of the same genus within a single distich or

161. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 4495-6.

162. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 884.

hemistich.¹⁶³ But even if ‘Aṭṭâr’s inclusion of the word “ear” is motivated by ornamental concerns, the resulting metaphor relies for its coherence on the notion that the act of reading involves a vicarious listening; a narrator “speaks,” and the textual audience “listens.” By calling on the audience, by way of hyperbolic synecdoche, to become the organ of aural perception, ‘Aṭṭâr requests his readers’ attention and receptivity to the following material. The second hemistich then refers to the poem in textual terms as a “book” (*ketâb*), but it is a book about which—and through which—the poet orally addresses his audience. The aural and the textual are thus mutually intertwined, and the text becomes a site from which an imaginary orality emerges.

The frame-tale device extends this narratorial illusion even further, as Wolf perceptively observes. When cultivated by extra-diegetic narrators, narratorial illusion usually remains secondary to the primary illusion of the audience’s immersion in the diegetic world.¹⁶⁴ But a frame-tale makes the act of narration itself an object of narration, and thereby elaborates the narratorial situation in greater detail than is usually possible using only extra-diegetic, meta-narrative comments; the frame-tale structure can thus intensify a work’s illusionist potential to “permit the recipient to imagine him- or herself being present in an oral storytelling (or storyreading) situation.”¹⁶⁵ In the *Conference of the Birds*, nearly every anecdote is explicitly cued as an oral narration of the hoopoe, who comments on their significance in a hortatory style reminiscent of oral preachers.¹⁶⁶ In the longer tales, such as Shaykh Şan‘ân, the hoopoe will even interrupt his narration to deliver a direct homiletic address. Although hardly a full-

163. Natalia Chalisova, “Rhetorical Figures,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, posted 20 July 2009, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/rhetorical-figures>.

164. Wolf, “Framing Borders in Frame Stories,” 190.

165. *Ibid.*, 189-90.

166. In this capacity the hoopoe’s voice sometimes elides with that of ‘Aṭṭâr’s own extra-diegetic persona, as we will see in the subsequent subsection.

fledged character in a modern sense, the hoopoe's motivations and spiritual bonafides are explained in some detail, as is the communicative situation of his speech. The poem thus repeatedly frames its hypo-diegetic material as an oral discourse delivered by a specific preacher-figure to a listening audience, and it thereby offers its readers the opportunity to imagine themselves among those fictive auditors.

The notion of aesthetic illusion was developed with the modern novel in mind, and there are questions as to how well the concept transfers across historic and generic boundaries.¹⁶⁷ Didactic *maṣnavis* are not informed by the same mimetic approach to representation, and it follows that readers would not value them for their immersive qualities in the same way. Nevertheless, Nünning's notion of narratorial illusion—that a text can simulate an aural experience—remains germane for a work like *Conference of the Birds*, not only because this imagined performance situation is so deeply encoded in the work, but also because the act of reading was, for medieval audiences, existentially bound up with aural apprehension in many ways. In the first place, the *Conference of the Birds* likely would have been read out loud in a group setting. Although we have no direct accounts of how 'Aṭṭār's works were performed, we know that other *maṣnavis*, like Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings* (*Shâh-nâma*) and Rumi's *Spiritual Couplets* (*Maṣnavi-ye ma'navi*), were routinely read out loud or recited from memory to larger audiences.¹⁶⁸ Even when a poem was read alone, medieval readers accustomed to oral performance and the robust metrical system of Persian prosody would likely not have perused the words silently, but mouthed or enunciated them, adding an additional layer of bodily entanglement

167. Wolf, "Framing Borders in Frame Stories."

168. Neẓâmi-ye 'Aruzi, *Chahâr Maqâla*, 79-80; Aflâki, *Manâqeb al-ârefîn*, 2:777. According to Neẓâmi-ye 'Aruzi, Ferdowsi employed a reciter, Bu Dolâf, to perform the *Book of Kings*. The position of "*maṣnavi*-reciter" (*maṣnavi-khwân*) is mentioned in Aflâki's fourteenth-century hagiography as if it were already an institutionalized post during the leadership of Ḥosâm al-Din Chalabi (d. 1284).

and aural apprehension to the textual encounter. Some of ‘Aṭṭâr’s verses explicitly suggest that he may have had such a mode of reading in mind. For example, in the following line he uses the verb “*bar khwândan*” (to read out loud, to recite) to describe how spiritual benefits accrue to those who read his work:

Whoever recited (*bar khwând*) this became a man of action;
Whoever understood this, reaped its benefit.

هر که این بر خواند مرد کار شد و آن که این دریافت بر خوردار شد¹⁶⁹

One must also keep in mind that many of the edifying anecdotes narrated by the hoopoe likely circulated orally. ‘Aṭṭâr may have relied on some textual sources when compiling his *maṣnavis*, but the oral tradition could never have been too far afield. A number of his anecdotes draw on common folk-motifs or consist of hagiographical legends that, in addition to any possible textual vectors, were likely to have been retold in mystically minded assemblies in Khorâsân. His reader-listeners, too, would likely have already heard many of these stories, and those prior aural encounters would have influenced how they received and experienced ‘Aṭṭâr’s text. In short, in the medieval world, texts were often informed by oral sources, mimicked forms of oral discourse, and preformed in oral contexts, which helps to legitimate ‘Aṭṭâr’s framing of the former in terms of the latter.

But there is also an important rhetorical motivation behind this framing: by evoking an oral homiletic environment, the poem legitimizes itself as a source of spiritual guidance and lays claim to greater didactic force. Even though orality and textuality intersected in complicated ways in medieval Islamdom, knowledge was generally considered epistemologically more sound and didactically more effective when transmitted orally within specific social settings.¹⁷⁰

169. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manteq al-tayr*, 4502.

170. Lewis, “Reading, Writing, and Recitation,” 292-5.

Hadith science is perhaps the most obvious example; it places great emphasis on the unbroken chain of oral transmission from the Prophet. In most varieties of sufism, a novice's training also depends on a personal master-disciple relationship; the former, who has already reached the goal, must not only instruct the latter, but personally show him or her the way. (It ought to be noted, however, that the reading of texts would, for many novices, have likely figured into this personal training relationship). Likewise, hortatory preaching relies to a great extent on the circumambient actuality of oral performance for its perlocutionary effect: in such an environment, audience members could assess a preacher's trustworthiness on the basis of his ethos and appearance, and the preacher could dynamically react to the audience, not only verbally but through extra- and para-lingual channels as well. *The Conference of the Birds*, as a text, can never totally reduplicate these aspects of oral homiletic communication for its readers. Nevertheless, by continuously casting itself as speech and constructing a fictional performance situation, it activates an aural cognitive scheme and invites readers to participate in an imaginary, but nonetheless very real, simulation of such a homiletic speech-event. With the frame-tale structure, 'Aṭṭâr shows his readers how to approach the reading of a static text as an extension of the auditory experience, and he thereby validates his work as an independent source of spiritual guidance:¹⁷¹

As your leader (*rahbar*), my utterances (*gofta*) suffice,
 Since this speech (*sokhan*) is a guide on the path (*pir-e rah*) for everyone.

کاین سخن پیر ره هر کس بود¹⁷²

گفته من رهبر تو بس بود

171. Irwin's comments (35) are apropos here: "By depicting an oral composition and performance and drawing from traditional sources, the frame tale provides the medieval audience with a continuity of reception between the act of listening and that of reading." Also see Ong, "Writer's Audience," 16; Belcher, "Framed Tales," 19.

172. 'Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 4572.

Even when textualized—and therefore abstracted from the shared interpersonal context of homiletic performance—‘Aṭṭâr’s speech guides its recipients down the spiritual path. Indeed, it is precisely the power of text to capture and prolong inherently fleeting homiletic speech-events that allows ‘Aṭṭâr to reach a broader readership that far exceeds the bounds of his immediate friends, family, and spiritual devotees.

Slippage of Speaker and Address

Besides strengthening narratorial illusion, the frame-tale structure also guides reader-listeners towards a specific reception-stance through its recursive depiction of paraenetic speech-events. The poem’s diverse anecdotes and multiple levels of narration are linked by their joint interest in a common rhetorical situation, in which a wise speaker seeks to instigate spiritual change in his or her audience through verbal exhortation. On the diegetic level, the hoopoe prepares the birds for their journey to the Simorgh through his homilies, and a similar pattern repeats itself in many of the embedded, hypo-diegetic anecdotes, which feature various teacher-figures urging their addressees to reform themselves and lead more pious lives. These repeatedly portrayed communicative situations gesture towards the poem’s own didactic aims and reflexively characterize its rhetorical stance. The hoopoe serves as an avatar for ‘Aṭṭâr’s extra-diegetic persona, whose role as preacher and spiritual teacher is thereby clarified, while the birds function as model reception figures, guiding the readers’ approach to the poem.¹⁷³

The birds participate in the hoopoe’s assemblies not only to acquire knowledge, but to be cognitively and psychologically transformed, and thereby guided towards the Simorgh.¹⁷⁴ And this promise of spiritual transformation is also extended to ‘Aṭṭâr’s reader-listeners, for

173. Wolf, “Framing Borders in Frame Stories,” 190.

174. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1651-6.

whom the hoopoe's homilies are reproduced verbatim by 'Aṭṭâr's poetic persona, the root-level narrator of the entire poem. In the extensive epilogue, the poem's transformative powers are touted by 'Aṭṭâr *in propria persona*. There, as we have seen, the work is personified as a spiritual director: according to 'Aṭṭâr, it is a "guide on the path for everyone," and whoever reads it "becomes a man of the way"; if one who is "frozen like ice" sees the book, "he comes out dancing from behind the veil like fire."¹⁷⁵ Its homiletic discourse is likened to a medicine, in that it effects a fundamental change in existential state: "Whoever suffers from the poison of religious deviation / These lofty words are antidote enough for him."¹⁷⁶ In other words, the *Conference of the Birds* claims a spiritually transformative power over its audiences, and this claim is corroborated by the birds' reaction to the material; they listen to the same narratives and discourses as 'Aṭṭâr's human readers, and their narrated transformations confirm the material's potential to spiritually re-shape its recipients.

Like the frame-tale, the embedded hypo-diegetic anecdotes also depict paraenetic speech-events. Usually these are not hortatory assemblies in the strict sense of the term, but informal situations in which one character verbally urges another to evaluate and reform his or her actions, attitudes, or way of life. These anecdotes, and the hoopoe's accompanying homilies, are the primary means by which the poem inculcates a sufi habitus in its readers, and they will be the subject of an in-depth analysis in the following chapter. Here we will limit ourselves to an examination of a rather typical anecdote to show how it mirrors the frame-tale in its portrayal of paraenetic speech. The anecdote in question features a king who has expended a hundred thousand dinars to construct an elaborate, paradisiacal palace, full of carpets and ornaments. Onlookers from across the land come to gaze on the building, and the king has gold

175. Ibid., 4502, 4505.

176. Ibid., 4592.

and jewels scattered before them. He then summons his boon companions and wise men, seats them on thrones, and asks them whether they have ever seen so magnificent of a palace anywhere else on earth; predictably enough, they all reply in the negative. Suddenly, an ascetic leaps up and proclaims that the palace has one fundamental flaw: a crack in the wall. The king rebukes him and angrily demands to know why he is “stirring up strife”; the ascetic replies:

. . . O you who are proud in kingship,
That crack is the crack open for ‘Azrâ’il.
If only you could have fastened that breach—
Otherwise, what’s the use of a palace, a crown, and a throne?
Although this palace is delightful like paradise,
Death will render it ugly to your eye.
Nothing lasts; life is here and now,
It does not last—there’s no stratagem to extend it.
Don’t take so much comfort in your domain and palace!
Don’t spur on this mount of pride and rebellion!

رخنه‌ای هست آن ز عزرائیل باز
ور نه چه قصر تو و چه تاج و تخت
مرگ بر چشم تو خواهد کرد زشت
لیک باقی نیست این را حیل نیست
رخش کبر و سرکشی چندین متاز¹⁷⁷

. . . ای به شاهی سرفراز
بو که آن رخنه توانی کرد سخت
گرچه این قصر است خرّم چون بهشت
هیچ باقی نیست هست این جای زیست
از سرای و قصر خود چندین مناز

The ascetic wittily harangues the king, calling on him to reevaluate his attachment to material objects and temporal power; however paradisiacal his palace may seem, it cannot, unlike the eschatological gardens, protect its inhabitants from the constant march of time. Although the ascetic speaks from a position of spiritual authority, such a rebuke was clearly a breach of courtly decorum with potentially deadly consequences; none of the “wise men” whom the king had summoned to his palace had dared to point out this fatal flaw themselves. The king himself suggests the political implications of the ascetic’s criticism when he accuses him of fomenting “strife” (*fetna*), a term that conjures up images of political collapse. The ascetic delegitimizes

177. Ibid., 2179-84.

the structures of kingship by publicly pointing out the “flaw” in the king’s palace and dismissing the symbols of secular rule as foolish vanities in the face of death.

We do not know if the king heeds the ascetic’s advice or what becomes of him; like most of the anecdotes in the *Conference of the Birds*, this one ends with its protagonist’s verbal calls to reform. Nevertheless, in its depiction of this hortatory speech-event, the anecdote echoes the frame-tale’s larger thematic focus on paraenetic discourse. There are, of course, significant differences: the hoopoe addresses a collective audience according to the accepted conventions of the hortatory assembly, whereas the ascetic rebukes a single recipient (the king) without the benefit of such formal legitimating structures.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, they both speak in a paraenetic mode, exhorting their respective audiences from self-assured (if not uncontested) positions of spiritual authority.

Variations on this pattern recur hundreds of times throughout the *Conference of the Birds* (as well as ‘Aṭṭâr’s other *maṣnavis*), and the poem derives a great measure of its coherence from the repeated portrayal of paraenetic speech within its various narrative levels. Moreover, these various levels are not hermetically sealed, but mutually elaborate and reinforce each other. Each hypo-diegetic exhortation implies a series of higher-level exhortations: when the ascetic harangues the king, those exhortations are also spoken by the hoopoe for his own avian audience, whom he aims to thereby educate and transform; and ‘Aṭṭâr’s persona, the root-level narrator of the entire poem, also “speaks” these anecdotes and homilies, and thereby urges his reader-listeners to a more pious form of life. In short, at each narrative level, the same basic didactic pattern is repeated and re-intensified. The role of disciple-addressee is jointly played by

178. Ibn al-Jawzī advises aspiring preachers to tread carefully when sermonizing to sultans; one should soften one’s admonishments and speak generally, so as to not offend the ruler or call his authority into question. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Quṣṣāṣ*, 143/trans. 228-29.

‘Aṭṭâr’s addressees, the hoopoe’s avian audience, and the various recipients of didactic harangues within the embedded anecdotes, while the position of teacher-speaker is shared by ‘Aṭṭâr’s extra-diegetic narratorial persona, the hoopoe, and corresponding figures within the embedded material.

For a premodern audience, these various teacher- and student-figures represent tokens of fundamental types, and thus remain, to a certain extent, interchangeable. Indeed, the narrative levels of the poem often bleed together, and it can be difficult to determine whether a specific exhortation is to be understood primarily as an utterance of a hypo-diegetic character to his or her addressee, the hoopoe to the birds, or ‘Aṭṭâr’s extra-diegetic persona to his audience. This ambiguity is not part of a modern project of defamiliarization, but rather a result of the tendency to elide the inhabitants of the various narrative levels depending upon the role they play within this overarching didactic schema. As previously mentioned, most of the hypo-diegetic anecdotes end with a verbal exhortation uttered by one of the characters, which is followed by the hoopoe’s own homiletic commentary. But ‘Aṭṭâr does not explicitly mark the transition between these speakers, and due to the similarity of their subject matter and rhetorical stance, the narratological boundary between them often remains ambiguous.

For example, let us take a look at an anecdote in which Ḥasan al-Baṣrî asks Rabe‘a how she managed to achieve such an elevated spiritual state without any formal study in the religious sciences. She chalks it up to her scrupulousness, and explains how she once refused to hold two coins in a single hand out of fear that it might arouse her greed.

Rabe‘a said to him: O Shaykh of the age,
I had woven a few strands of rope,
I took them and sold them, and was glad of heart,
Two coins of silver were my profit.
But I wouldn’t take both in one hand at one time,
I took this one in this hand, that one in that.
Because I was terrified that if they joined forces,

They would waylay me on the path and I wouldn't be able to resist.
 The worldly man puts his heart and soul in blood,
 And falls in a hundred thousand other snares.
 If he takes even one bit of gold from an illegal source,
 Once he's obtained it and dies, that's it;
 And his heir, for whom that gold is legal inheritance,
 Well, he too is mired in the sorrow and burden of sin
 O you who have sold the Simorgh for gold,
 You've lit your heart like a candle in love of gold.
 Since there is no room in this way for a single hair,
 No one can have both a store of treasure and a sallow face.

چند پاره رشته بودم ریسمان	رابعه گفتش که ای شیخ زمان
دو درستِ سیم آمد حاصلم	بردم و بفروختم خوش شد دلم
این درین دستم گرفتم آن در آن	هر دو نگرفتم به یک دست آن زمان
رازن گردد فرو نتوان گرفت	زانکه ترسیدم که چون شد سیم جفت
صد هزاران دام دیگرگون نهد	مرد دنیا جان و دل در خون نهد
چون به دست آرد بمیرد والسلام	تا به دست آرد جوی زر از حرام
او بماند در غم وزر و وبال	وارث او را بود آن زر حلال
دل ز عشق زر چو شمع افروختی	ای به زر سیم رخ را بفروختی
179 نیست کس را گنج گنج و روی زر	چون درین ره می ننگد موی در

Rabe'a is explicitly cued as the speaker at the beginning of this passage, but at some point the speaker shifts: the line "O you who have sold the Simorgh for gold," is clearly spoken not by Rabe'a to Ḥasan al-Baṣri, but by the hoopoe to the other birds (and also by 'Aṭṭār's persona to his own audience). But where exactly does this shift occur? It is difficult to say, and this ambiguity is likely intentional: 'Aṭṭār could have easily marked a change of speaker with a phrase like "the hoopoe said" or even "*ke*" (the medieval Persian equivalent of the quotation-introducing colon) but none of these are present. Premodern Persian lacks quotation marks, but Shafi'i-Kadkani includes them in his editions, so he is forced to explicitly mark the ending of Rabe'a's speech in a way that the manuscript sources do not. According to his reading, Rabe'a's utterance ends with her explanation of why she refused to carry both coins in one hand; he places

179. 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 2136-44.

the closing quotation mark after the line, “Because I was terrified that if they joined forces / They would waylay me on the path and I wouldn’t be able to resist.” Such a reading is certainly defensible; the passage at this point shifts from an example of Râbe‘a’s scrupulousness, narrated in the first-person, to general observations on the spiritual dangers of wealth and material attachment, narrated in the third. But other readings are possible as well. We could easily understand these general observations on the dangers of wealth to be a continuation of Râbe‘a’s speech, her didactic extrapolation from her own personal situation. The only reason Shafî‘i-Kadkani must give a definitive answer to this question one way or another is because he uses modern grammatical markings; ‘Atṭâr himself is under no such obligation, and there is no indication that he or his readers were troubled by the resulting narratological ambiguity: the hoopoe and Râbe‘a both function as teacher-figures who urge their addressees to a life of piety, and their particular voices easily merge.

Just as hypo-diegetic exhortations bleed into the hoopoe’s intra-diegetic homilies, the latter often converge with ‘Atṭâr’s own extra-diegetic admonishments to his readers.¹⁸⁰ A particularly interesting example of such a melding occurs after an anecdote during the hoopoe’s discussion of the valley of oneness (*towḥid*), the fifth stage that the birds will traverse on their way towards the Simorgh, in which God’s unity embraces and effaces all difference:

As long as you are, there is good and evil,
But when you lose yourself, all is passion.

180. Porousness between levels of narration is often considered a powerful defamiliarizing device; in many post-modern works, metaleptic transgressions are used to draw attention to the work’s fictionality and constructiveness. In the *Conference of the Birds*, however, the effect is quite the opposite. The narrators from different levels do not *intrude* into each other’s domains so much as they *merge* by virtue of their shared rhetorical stance, and instead of drawing attention to the narrated world’s fictionality, this convergence stresses the poem’s edifying function and the reader’s role as listener-student. See John Pier, “Metalepsis,” in Hühn et al., *Living Handbook of Narratology*, updated 13 July 2016, <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/metalepsis-revised-version-uploaded-13-july-2016>; Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 235. Also relevant are Wolf and Nünning’s comments on how frame-stories and metanarration can be used to both break and intensify a literary work’s aesthetic illusion: Wolf, “Framing Borders in Frame Stories,” 192, 196; Nünning, “Metanarrative,” 34-5.

If you remain in your own existence,
 You'll see much good and evil, and the road is long.
 Ever since you've emerged from nothingness,
 You've been entangled in the bonds of self.
 If only you could be now like you were in the beginning—
 That is to say, divorced from being.
 Become completely purified of your negative attributes,
 And then become dirt, blown from the hand by the wind.

چون تو گم گشتی همه سودا بود	تا تو باشی نیک و بد اینجا بود
نیک و بد بینی بسی و ره دراز	ور تو مانی در وجود خویش باز
در گرفت خود گرفتار آمدی	تا که از هیچی پدیدار آمدی
یعنی از هستی معطل بودی	کاشکی اکنون چو اول بودی
بعد از آن بادی به کف با خاک شو ¹⁸¹	از صفات بد بکلی پاک شو

The difference between good and evil has meaning only from a human perspective rooted in earthly existence; in the divine realm, all is unified. Human beings can participate in this divine unity by relinquishing their misplaced, egotistical claims to independent agency and existence, a transformation that is at once psychological, ontological, and ethical. One must realize one's fundamental non-existence in the face of God, and individuals who have attained to this state can no longer be said to exist in a normal way; instead, they have re-entered into that proximity with God that they enjoyed in pre-eternity, before their own creation. But this ontological transformation is bound up with an ethical reform; it is attainable only through a purging of "negative attributes." At this point, the passage moves into a homiletic digression in which these negative attributes are cast as noxious animals that must be extirpated from within the self.

Don't you know, inside your body,
 What impurities and rubbish heaps you have!
 Snakes and scorpions are inside you, under a veil,
 They're sleeping, having hidden themselves away.
 If you excite them with the tip of a single hair,
 You'll transform each of them into a hundred dragons!

181. 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 3745-9.

Everyone has a hell-pit full of serpents,
 Until you empty out that pit, it continues thus.
 If you escape from each one of them pure,
 Soundly will you will sleep in the earth.
 But if not, beneath the earth, snakes and scorpions,
 Will sting you until the day of reckoning.

چه پلیدی‌هاست چه گلخن تو را
 خفته‌اند و خویشتن گم کرده‌اند
 هر یکی را همچو صد ثعبان کنی
 تا بپردازی تو دوزخ کار هست
 خوش به خواب اندر شوی در خاک تو
 می‌گزندت سخت تا روز شمار¹⁸²

تو کجا دانی که اندر تن تو را
 مار و گژدم در تو زیر پرده‌اند
 گر سر مویی فرا ایشان کنی
 هر کسی را دوزخ پر مار هست
 گر برون آیی ز یک‌یک پاک تو
 و نه زیر خاک چه گژدم چه مار

The addressee is urged to uproot and drive out the vermin of his or her own self, and the eschatological punishments that await those destined for hell are interpreted as external manifestations of inner ethical failings.

Most interesting, however, is the following narratorial intervention, in which ‘Attâr reveals himself to be the speaker of the above lines:

How much of this metaphorical language, O ‘Attâr?
 Come back to the secret of the secrets of oneness (*towhîd*).
 When the wayfaring man arrives at this place,
 The place where he stands is effaced from the road . . .

با سر اسرارِ توحیدِ آی باز
 جایگاهِ مرد بر خیزد ز راه¹⁸³

تا کی ای عطار ازین حرفِ مجاز
 مردِ سالک چون رسد این جایگاه

‘Attâr calls on himself to leave aside these “metaphorical” musings—meaning the allegorization of negative attributes as inner vermin—and return to the topic of unity. Self-exhortation is a standard feature of homiletic address, since preachers would often want to show that they too, like their audiences, must strive to make spiritual progress. Apostrophes to the self are also a common technique for facilitating poetic transitions. For our purposes, however, the most in-

182. Ibid., 3750-5.

183. Ibid., 3757-8.

teresting aspect of this particular self-apostrophe is that these verses would have otherwise seemed to have been uttered by the hoopoe, who has, up to this point, been describing the valleys, narrating the anecdotes, and delivering the homilies to the other birds in preparation of the upcoming journey. Nevertheless, here they are revealed to be the utterances of ‘Aṭṭâr *in propria persona*. This metalepsis, even if it is an unintentional “slip,” nonetheless reinforces the notion that there is a certain equivalence between ‘Aṭṭâr’s persona and the hoopoe, and this equivalence is rooted in their shared rhetorical stance: they both aim to inculcate a pious ethos in their respective audiences as part of a project of spiritual transformation.¹⁸⁴ And parallel to this convergence of speaker is an implied convergence of addressee: just as the hoopoe functions as the alter-ego of ‘Aṭṭâr’s persona, the birds function as a model audience, with whom ‘Aṭṭâr’s reader-listeners are encouraged to identify as ideal recipients of homiletic discourse and subjects of spiritual progress. The poem thus blurs the seemingly hard-and-fast ontological boundaries between the hoopoe’s homilies, narrated within a fictional story-world, and its own didactic work.

The Readers in the Text

The self-reflexive potential of the frame-tale structure is most consciously exploited in the final hypo-diegetic anecdote before the thirty surviving birds attain to the presence of the Simorgh. It is at this point that the Simorgh’s chamberlain, who had initially rebuked the birds and sent them away, calls them back, gives them a scrap of paper (*roq‘a*) with writing on it, and instructs them to “read it through to the end.”¹⁸⁵ The text on this scrap, explains ‘Aṭṭâr in an aside,

184. See Ong’s comments on the slippage between story-teller and hero in a performance of the *Mwindo* epic, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982), 45-6.

185. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 4229.

clarifies the birds' situation "by way of allegory" (*az rāh-e meṣâl*).¹⁸⁶ The anecdote is thus marked as unusual and significant before it even begins: it occupies a key structural position in the poem, and whereas the previous embedded anecdotes were all framed as oral narrations of the hoopoe, this one is cast as a text that the birds read together as a group. Moreover, it is the only anecdote to be specifically introduced by 'Aṭṭâr as an allegorical explanation of the birds' spiritual states.

This mysterious text contains a scene from the story of Joseph's reunion with his brothers; the tale seems to have been a favorite of 'Aṭṭâr's, as another episode from the same story appears earlier in the poem.¹⁸⁷ The outlines of the story, of course, are found in the *Qurān*, but they were retold in more elaborate detail in the "stories of the prophets" literature, which 'Aṭṭâr likely relied on here.¹⁸⁸ According to this version, the brothers wrote out a bill-of-sale when they first sold Joseph into slavery, and this document played a critical role in their reunion many years later:

Joseph, for whom the stars burnt rue,
Was sold by his ten brothers,
And purchased by Mâlek-e Zo'r,
Who wanted a receipt (*khaṭṭ*), since he had bought him cheap.
He requested a receipt from them right there,

186. *Ibid.*, 4229-30.

187. The earlier anecdote narrates the incident of the goblet during brothers' second visit to Egypt. According to most accounts, after Joseph became ruler of Egypt and Canaan was struck by famine, his brothers visited him three times. The first time, they came to buy grain, a request with which Joseph complied. However, he kept their brother Simeon as a hostage and told them to return with Benjamin (who was Joseph's younger full brother). On their second visit, they returned with Benjamin, to whom Joseph revealed his true identity; neither of them could bear to be separated from one another, however, so Joseph hid his goblet in Benjamin's saddle bags, so that he could accuse Benjamin of theft and have him detained. After the alleged theft was discovered, Joseph struck the goblet and claimed he could interpret the resonances produced thereby, and that they testified to the brothers' guilt. The brothers then returned a third time, at it was at this point that Joseph revealed himself to them; the episode recounted at the end of the *Conference of the Birds* deals with this final revelation. 'Aṭṭâr, *Manteq al-ṭayr*, 2726-59; Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 327; Abū Ishāq Tha'labī, *'Arā'is al-majālis fī qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*; or, *Lives of the Prophets*, trans. William M. Brinner (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 214-28. Cf. *Qurān* 12:58-92; Genesis 42-45.

188. Out of the standard collections of stories of the prophets, this particular version of the episode is found only in Maybudi. See Ṣan'atiniâ, *Ma'âkhez*, 169-71.

And received from those ten brothers their testimony.
When the 'Aziz of Egypt bought Joseph,
That perfidious note came into Joseph's hands.

ده برادر چون ورا بفروختند
خط ایشان خواست کارزان می خرید
پس گرفت آن ده برادر را گواه
آن خط پر غدر با یوسف رسید¹⁸⁹

یوسفی کانجم سپندش سوختند
مالک دُعرش چو زیشان می خرید
خط ستد زان قوم هم بر جایگاه
چون عزیز مصر یوسف را خرید

Joseph kept the receipt over the course of his rise to power until he became the king's advisor and managed Egypt's preparations for the coming famine (according to 'Aṭṭâr's text, Joseph actually became the the king [*pâdashâh*] himself). While Egypt enjoyed plenty thanks to Joseph's foresight, Canaan was stricken with a shortage of food. Joseph's brothers came to Egypt in search of aid and threw themselves at the king's feet as supplicants without realizing his true identity. Joseph then promised them bread if they would read a Hebrew manuscript for him, a request to which they readily agreed. The manuscript, of course, proves to be none other than the bill-of-sale that they themselves had written:

In the end, when Joseph became king,
The ten brothers came there,
Not recognizing Joseph's face,
They threw themselves before him.
They begged sustenance for their souls,
They made themselves piteous, pleading for bread.
Said truthful Joseph, "O people,
I have a note (*khaṭi*) in the Hebrew alphabet.¹⁹⁰
No one from my retinue can read it,
If you would recite it for me, I will give you much bread."
They were all fluent in Hebrew and more than willing;
They gladly said, "O king, bring the note!"
—Let him be blind-hearted, who, in this state (*ḥâl*) from the presence (*ḥozur*),
Does not hear his own story—how much with this pride!—
Joseph handed them the note they had written,
And a trembling fell upon their limbs.
They couldn't bring themselves to read a single line of it,

189. 'Aṭṭâr, *Manteq al-tayr*, 4231-4.

190. *Khaṭṭ* must be read as *khaṭ* for metrical reasons.

They didn't know how to explain.
 They were all mired in regret and sadness,
 They remained afflicted by the matter of Joseph.
 All of their tongues became drunk at once,
 They were mortified by this difficult affair.
 Joseph said: "It is as if you were unconscious,
 When you read the note, why did you fall silent?"
 They all said to him, "We choose silence,
 Because it is better than reading and losing our heads."

عاقبت چون گشت یوسف پادشاه	ده برادر آمدند آن جایگاه
روی یوسف باز می نشناختند	خویش را در پیش او انداختند
خویشتن را چاره جان خواستند	آب خود بردند تا نان خواستند
یوسف صدیق گفت ای مردمان	من خطی دارم به عبرانی زفان
می نیارد خواند از خیل کسی	گر شما خوانید نان بخشم بسی
جمله عبری خوان بُدند و اختیار	شادمان گفتند شاهها خط بیار
کور دل باد آن که این حال از خصور	قصه خود نشنود چند از غرور
خط ایشان یوسف ایشان را بداد	لرزه بر اندام ایشان برفتاد
نه خطی زان خط توانستند خواند	نه حدیثی نیز دانستند راند
جمله از غم در تأسف ماندند	مبتلای کار یوسف ماندند
مست شد حالی زبان آن همه	شد ز کار سخت جان آن همه
گفت یوسف گویی بی هوش شدید	وقت خط خواندن چرا خامش شدید؟
جمله گفتندش که ما و تن زدن	به ازین خط خواندن و گردن زدن ¹⁹¹

Before proceeding further with this analysis, we should note that this episode involves a parallel series of recursively nested textual encounters and hermeneutic acts that constitute a *mise en abyme*, or the mirroring of a narrative within the narrated world.¹⁹² More specifically, the birds are given a text by the Simorgh's chamberlain, who commands them to read it, and that text in turn tells how Joseph gave a text to his brothers and commanded them to read it. These repeated textual encounters, moreover, bring to mind the reader's own encounter with the *Conference of the Birds*, and, as we shall see, imply something significant about the poem's transformative force.

191. 'Atṭār, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 4235-47.

192. On *mise en abyme*, see Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 236; Dorrit Cohn, "Metalepsis and *Mise en Abyrne*," trans. Lewis S. Gleich, *Narrative* 20, no. 1 (January 2012): 105-14; Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

Despite these repeated acts of reading, the episode does not necessarily oppose the ethos of orality that imbues the *Conference of the Birds*. Indeed, even as the birds read their manuscript, ‘Aṭṭâr’s narratorial persona intervenes, turning to his audience in a manner reminiscent of oral delivery. He calls on his reader-listeners to “hear” in the story of the brothers’ encounter with Joseph an allegory for their own spiritual “state[s]” (*ḥâl*) in relation to the divine “presence” (*ḥożur*). The narrative thus not only clarifies the birds’ journey by way of allegory, as was promised at the beginning of the narration, but is also presented as an explication of the reader’s condition. Significantly, the poem’s earlier anecdote adapted from the Joseph story is framed in exactly the same way:

He’s blind who hears this story (*qeşşa*),¹⁹³
 And doesn’t take from it his own portion!
 Don’t look so hard into the story;
 It’s all your story, you ignoramus!

بشنود زین بر نگیرد حصّه او
 قصّه توست این همه ای بی‌خبر¹⁹⁴

کور چشمی باشد آن کاین قصّه او
 تو مکن چندین در آن قصّه نظر

These repeated calls to consider and interpret recall some aspects of the Quranic treatment of the same material. Joseph, of course, is the hermeneut par excellence of Islamic myth, capable of interpreting all sorts of dreams and signs. And the Joseph narrative is itself proffered by the Quran to its audience as an interpretable sign: “In their stories,” reads the last verse of the chapter, “is a lesson (*‘ibra*) for those with discernment.”¹⁹⁵ The lesson that the Quran suggests, however, is primarily a message of God’s power and involvement in human affairs; ‘Aṭṭâr, on the other hand, presents the story as an allegory of the soul’s internal relation to the divine.

193. The term *qeşşa* here is likely motivated by Quran 12:3, the famous opening to the Joseph chapter: “We narrate (*naquşşu*) to you the most beautiful of stories (*aḥsan al-qaşāş*).”

194. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 2745-6.

195. Quran 12:111.

The birds themselves model what such a reflexive, internalizing interpretation of the tale might look like. In reading the bill-of-sale, Joseph's brothers were confronted with an indexical sign of their own treachery; in reading the story of Joseph, the birds see an allegorical icon of their self-imposed exile from the divine:

When those thirty, miserable birds looked
 Into the writing (*khat*) of that credible manuscript (*roq'a-ye por 'etebâr*),
 Whatever they had done, all of that,
 Was inscribed therein, until the end.
 It was hard for them—
 When those captives looked closely,
 They saw that they had gone and made their own way,
 Thrown their own Joseph into the well,
 Burned their Joseph-souls in debasement,
 And then sold him for a pittance.

در خطِ آن رقعۀ پر اعتبار
 بود کرده نقش تا پایان همه
 کان اسیران چون نگه کردند نیک
 یوسفِ خود را به چاه انداخته
 وانگه او را بر سری بفروخته¹⁹⁶

چون نگه کردند آن سی مرغ زار
 هرچه ایشان کرده بودند آن همه
 آن همه خود بود سخت این بود لیک
 رفته بودند و طریقی ساخته
 جانِ یوسف را به خواری سوخته

In mystically minded Persian literature, the beautiful Joseph is often used as a symbol for the soul. Not the concupiscent self (*nafs*), which spurs the individual to evil and 'Attâr often likens to a noxious creature, but the soul (*ruh*) that enjoyed proximity to God during pre-eternity on the day of the covenant.¹⁹⁷ Through the soul, which is intimately connected to the divine world, the individual can even transcend death; and yet, the birds have sold this most valuable part of themselves—their own “Joseph-souls”—for a pittance, just as Joseph's brothers sold their own kin. In other words, by letting their lower, carnal selves dominate their lives, the birds are cut off from their true selves, which subsists in and through the divine. This ethical failing is thus

196. 'Attâr, *Manṭeq al-tayr*, 4248-52.

197. Corbin, *Visionary Recital*, 200; Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 348, 374-5, 526.

bound up with a larger ontological deficiency, in which individual earthly existence implies an inherent distance from God that must be overcome.

For both the brothers and the birds, the textual encounter instigates a two-staged reaction: first shame and regret, followed by transformation and reunion. In reading the text of the receipt, Joseph's brothers are confronted with their own written testimony of their crimes, and they react with pain, regret, and fear of execution. 'Atṭâr's version ends there, but pre-modern Muslim readers would certainly be familiar with the rest of the story and know that the brothers are ultimately forgiven and reconciled with Joseph.¹⁹⁸ This pattern of reading, recognition, and reconciliation is then re-enacted on a higher narrative level by the birds. After reading the story and finding inscribed there "all that they had done," the birds are "captives" at the Simorgh's court, and, much like the brothers, are afflicted by shame (*tashvir*) and regret (*hayâ*) such that their bodies turn to tutty (*tutiâ*).¹⁹⁹ Nevertheless, the revelation of their own guilt ultimately paves the way for their subsequent elevation to "proximity" with the Simorgh:

Again from the beginning, they became fresh servants of God;
 Again they were bewildered, but in a different way.
 All that they had previously done or not done,
 Was erased and purified from their breasts
 The light of proximity (*qorbat*) shone from ahead;
 All their souls were dazzled by that beam.

باز از نوعی دگر حیران شدند
 پاک گشت و محو شد از سینه‌شان
 جمله را از پرتو آن جان بتافت²⁰⁰

باز از سر بنده نو جان شدند
 کرده و ناکرده دیرینه‌شان
 آفتابِ قربت از پیشان بتافت

Through their allegorical reading of the tale, they are, like the brothers, confronted with evidence of their moral failings. But the resulting self-awareness also presages their subsequent

198. Joseph's forgiveness is, according to some exegetes, the reason why the story is described as "the most beautiful," Tha'labî, *Lives of the Prophets*, 181-2.

199. 'Atṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 4257.

200. Ibid., 4259-61.

effacement and subsistence in the unity of the Simorgh, just as the brothers' recognition of their sins also leads to a reconciliation with Joseph. All their failings, "all that they had previously done or not done," are erased; they are rendered servants of the divine anew, and ushered into a state of proximity in which they recognize their simultaneous identity and difference with the the divine.

This internalizing interpretation of the Joseph anecdote is also urged onto 'Aṭṭâr's flesh-and-blood readers. The poet castigates his addressees in the same terms that he used to criticize the birds: the have sold their "Joseph-souls," resulting in their own separation from the God:

Don't you know, you worthless beggar,
That you sell a Joseph at every moment?
When your Joseph becomes the king,
He will be the leader at the court.
In the end, hungry and begging,
Naked will you go before him.
Since your affair will be illuminated by him,
Why did you have to sell him lightly?

می فروشی یوسفی در هر نفس
پیشوای پیشگه خواهد شدن
سوی او خواهی شدن هم برهنه
از چه او را رایگان باید فروخت²⁰¹

می ندانی تو گدای هیچ کس
یوسفت چون پادشه خواهد شدن
تو به آخر هم گدا هم گرسنه
چون ازو کار تو بر خواهد فروخت

But 'Aṭṭâr's reproaches do not foreclose all hope; his reader-listeners, like the birds, can look forward to a transformation and reunion with their true selves at some future point. "In the end, hungry and begging / Naked will you go before him," 'Aṭṭâr informs them with the certainty of the future indicative, "[And] your affair will be illuminated by him." This may be understood as an eschatological redemption, but such a reunion may also occur in this life, a result of the spiritual wayfaring urged by 'Aṭṭâr on his readers and demonstrated by the birds in their journey towards the Simorgh.

201. Ibid., 4253-6.

In this climatic episode of the text, the line between narration and “actuality” is thus blurred and obscured. On the hypo-diegetic level, Joseph’s brothers are faced with a text, written in their own hand (*khaṭṭ*), that testifies to the terrible treachery that they have committed. Although this textual proof triggers mute terror and regret, it also presages their forgiveness and reunion with their wronged brother. The birds who peruse this story, written on the scrap given to them by the Simorgh’s chamberlain, likewise find therein proof of their own ontological deficiencies and moral failings; the story illuminates, “by means of allegory,” how they have sold their “Joseph-souls,” that part of themselves that participates in the divine, for a pittance. But in addition to revealing their divorced state, the story also presages their eventual reunion with the Simorgh. The tale of Joseph’s brothers, allegorically interpreted, becomes a script enacted by the the birds in their own world; the hypo-diegetic thus foreshadows and directs the events of the frame-tale. Likewise, ‘Aṭṭâr’s reader-listeners find in the story of Joseph—and in its interpretation by the birds—an allegorical explanation for their own relationship to the divine, as well as a script of their own encounter with the *Conference of the Birds*. The poem as a whole, like the manuscript given to the birds by the herald, aims to not only explain the nature of human beings’ relationship to God, but to instigate a spiritual transformation, propelling its reader-listeners along the sufi path and towards the final goal of reunion and effacement. By virtue of these malleable narrative levels, ‘Aṭṭâr’s audience is placed into the story and interpellated into its narrative of spiritual progress.

There is thus a sense in which the reader-listener’s progression through the frame-narrative itself constitutes a symbolic traversal of the sufi path, a phenomenon that we will discuss with reference to the *Book of Affliction* in the final chapter. But this spiritual transformation is also born out of the ethical teachings presented in the embedded anecdotes, which, in the *Conference of the Birds*, prepare the fowl for their journey and promise to do likewise for ‘Aṭṭâr’s

reader-listeners. These embedded stories and sermons inculcate a sufi ethos and thereby shape the audience's behavior and mode of being in the "real world" outside of the textual encounter. It is to these embedded anecdotes and their heuristic homiletics that we now turn.

Chapter IV

Sermons, Stories, and the Sufi Ethos

The bulk of the *Conference of the Birds* is comprised not of the frame-tale, but the embedded anecdotes and homilies through which the hoopoe exhorts his audience towards the Simorgh. These anecdotes' themes and mystical implications have been the focus of several studies, foremost among them Ritter's *Ocean of the Soul*, which aims at nothing less than the elucidation of the twelfth-century sufi thought-world. In this encyclopedic work, Ritter extracts hypo-diegetic anecdotes from across 'Attâr's four *maṣnavis*, translates them and clarifies their didactic points, and then rearranges them into a thematic rubric of his own design. As he himself recognizes, his method presumes that each anecdote can be approached in isolation, without reference to those that surround it, the accompanying exhortations, or even its position within the overarching frame-tale.¹ A similar methodology was adopted by Navid Kermani in his *Terror of God*, but with a somewhat more limited aim: he mines the *maṣnavis* for anecdotes that may shed light on 'Attâr's theodicy and attitudes regarding divine culpability for human suffering.² Like Ritter, he assumes the anecdotes are self-contained carriers of independent meaning, and that they can therefore be productively examined without reference to their larger literary context.

Although the importance of their work should not be understated, 'Attâr's edifying narratives are perhaps not as modular as these scholars have assumed. A close analysis of his *maṣnavis* shows that adjoining anecdotes are usually formally and conceptually linked, and that the intervening exhortations facilitate the transitions between them. These linked anecdotes

1. Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 32.

2. Kermani, *Terror of God*.

then form larger thematic clusters—sometimes containing up to a dozen anecdotes—which are often cued as unitary discourses delivered by characters in the frame-tales. By rearranging the anecdotes, however, Ritter dismantles these clusters and thus obscures the key themes around which ‘Aṭṭār organized his poems. For example, one of the hoopoe’s major topics in the *Conference of the Birds* is the virtue of “spiritual manliness,” to which ‘Aṭṭār devotes a complete discourse. Only a handful of spiritual virtues receive such extended treatment in the *Conference of the Birds*, so this topic was clearly a critical point in ‘Aṭṭār’s homiletics. Nevertheless, it does not appear in Ritter’s typology, where the stories that comprise this cluster are categorized according to other, subsidiary themes; the importance of this virtue in ‘Aṭṭār’s mysticism is thereby effaced.³ Ritter’s atomizing approach also ignores the admonishments and exhortations that form the connective tissue between the anecdotes; such material, although often unappealing to modern aesthetic sensibilities, is critical for understanding how ‘Aṭṭār wanted his reader-listeners to understand these stories, and for elucidating the poem’s larger perlocutionary function.

This atomistic tendency may be considered the narrative analogue of the “orient pearls” approach to poetic structure that dominated scholarship on the Perso-Arabic lyric until the last half of the twentieth century, according to which each distich is a completely self-contained semiotic unit.⁴ In many ways such an approach represents a continuation of medieval exegetical practices, which focused on verse-by-verse glosses; it may have also been encouraged by the scarcity of enjambment in classical Persian and Arabic verse. In any case, in recent

3. Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 144, 329, 410.

4. See the critiques of Arberry, “Orient Pearls at Random Strung”; Michael C. Hillmann, *Unity in the Ghazals of Hafez* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1976); Julie Scott Meisami, *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Poetry: Orient Pearls* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 13-5; Clinton, “Esthetics by Implication.”

decades most scholars have come to accept that lyric *ghazals* and *qaşidas* cannot be reduced to a collection of completely independent lines, but that they usually participate in some larger disposition that is key to the poem's overall meaning. Most work on didactic *maşnavi*, however, continues to implicitly draw from this atomistic model and to understand edifying anecdotes as the self-contained, modular building-blocks of the genre, just as the distich was formerly assumed to be the fundamental unit of the *ghazal*.⁵

In the present chapter we challenge this approach by examining some of the hoopoe's discourses *in toto*, paying special attention to how they are bound together formally and conceptually, how they illustrate particular aspects of a specific mystical ethos, and how they urge reader-listeners to spiritual reform. After an introductory exploration of the general rhythm of the didactic *maşnavi*, we turn to three specific discourses, all of which bear on the sufi notion of the self as a barrier that must be transcended: first, we will consider a series of allegorical parables that clarify the nature of the Simorgh's ontological proximity to the birds and explore its ethical ramifications; next, we will treat a cluster of anecdotes that dwell on the inevitability of death and its implications for how life should be lived; finally, we will examine the hoopoe's discourse on the aforementioned virtue of "spiritual manliness." Our aim is not only to reconstruct 'Aṭṭâr's ethical and theological teachings on these issues, but also to examine the rhetorical strategies through which he seeks to motivate his reader-listeners to spiritual reform.

5. There are some exceptions, most notably the work of Safavi and Weightman, who argue that Rumi's *maşnavi* displays an elaborate chiasmic structure such that the entire six-volume work must have been composed according to a careful, pre-existing plan. This conclusion, however, is somewhat difficult to square with what we know of the oral, semi-improvised composition of the work. Seyed Ghahreman Safavi and Simon Weightman, *Rûmî's Mystical Design: Reading the "Mathnawî," Book One* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009); Simon Weightman, "Spiritual Progression in Books One and Two of the *Mathnawî*," in *The Philosophy of Ecstasy: Rumi and the Sufi Tradition*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2014).

Rhythm of a Maṣnavi

The structural foundation of ‘Aṭṭâr’s didactic *maṣnavis* is to be found in their continuous alternation of edifying anecdotes and interpretive exhortations. The vast majority of these anecdotes are constructed according to a simple pattern: they narrate a brief encounter between two characters in the past tense, in which one of them admonishes or instructs the other.⁶ This admonishment is then amplified in a direct address that generalizes the story’s religious significance and enjoins reader-listeners to act accordingly. For example, a rather typical example from the *Conference of the Birds* is the story Shaykh Abu Bakr-e Nayshâburi, who one day rode his donkey out of his *khânaqâh* accompanied by his numerous disciples. Suddenly, his mount let out a giant fart; the shaykh, in turn, cried out and fell into a violent ecstatic state. When he came to, his confused disciples asked why the donkey’s fart had had such an effect on him: the shaykh explains that he had been vainly thinking of his great numbers of disciples and the extent of his spiritual station, such that he had even dared to compare himself to the great Bâyezîd Beṣṭâmî, when the donkey had suddenly broke wind. He understood this as a rebuke of his spiritual vanity and sums up the lesson for his disciples thusly: “Whoever boasts falsely like this / The donkey gives him the answer; how much of this foolish posing!”⁷ The anecdote then dissolves into a direct homiletic address; as discussed in the previous chapter, the exact point of transition is not always immediately obvious, nor is the speaker of these exhortations always entirely clear—there is some slippage between the speaker in the anecdote (in this case Shaykh Abu Bakr), the hoopoe, and ‘Aṭṭâr’s narratorial voice. In any case, the ad-

6. ‘Aṭṭâr’s *maṣnavis* also includes longer tales, such as the stories of Shaykh Ṣan‘ân and Marḥuma, as well as shorter similitudes, often drawn from the natural world or activities of daily life and narrated in the present tense.

7. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 2943.

dress continues for a number of lines, admonishing the addressee to root out pride and self-satisfaction:

As long as you are stuck in pride and vainglory,
You remain far, far away from the truth!
Strike down your vainglory, burn your pride!
You are present to your carnal soul—burn your presence!
...
If you would be safe from I-ness,
You must take up enmity for the two worlds.
If, one day, you set out to efface your body—
If, every night, you are illuminated in darkness—
Don't say "I," you who are mired in a hundred catastrophes of I-ness,
Lest you be afflicted by the demonic.

از حقیقت دور دوری مانده‌ای
حاضر از نفسی حضورت را بسوز

...

با دو عالم دشمنی باشد تو را
گر همه شب در شبی روشن شوی
تا به ابلیسی نگردی مبتلا⁸

تا تو در عجب و غروری مانده‌ای
عجب بر هم زن غرورت را بسوز

...

از منی گر ایمنی باشد تو را
گر تو روزی در فنای تن شوی
من مگو ای از منی در صد بلا

Although such moralizing passages are not usually very appealing to modern sensibilities, this alternation of anecdote and interpretative exhortation is a common feature of didactic literature throughout the classical and medieval periods. For example, one finds this pattern in several instantiations of the Aesop corpus, in which the animal fables are followed by explanations of the intended moral.⁹ Some New Testament parables also accord with this structure, providing allegorical interpretations after the parable proper.¹⁰ Likewise, the Aggadah Midrash combines narrative with exegetical commentary under the rubric of *mashal* and *nimshal*, and medieval European preachers also illustrated moral points with exempla.¹¹ Although some

8. Ibid., 2945-51.

9. B. E. Perry, "The Origin of the Epimythium," *American Philological Association* 71 (1940): 391-419.

10. Inter alia, the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-23) and the Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat (Matthew 13:24-43).

11. David Stern, *Parables in Midrash* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 8-11.

modern critics complain that these interpretative sections constrain the narratives and instrumentalize them into “mere” teaching tools, they clearly fulfilled some need for medieval audiences.¹² For ‘Aṭṭâr and his reader-listeners, neither the narrative nor the interpretive homily renders the other dispensable; rather, their joint interaction gives rise to the poem’s meaning and rhetorical force. The narrative validates and “concretizes” the homily by rooting it in the world of lived human action, while the homily generalizes the narrative’s significance and translates it into a present ethical injunction.¹³

Many manuscripts of the *Conference of the Birds*, including the earliest ones, label each one of these anecdote-homily pairs “a story and illustration” (*hekâyat va tamṣil*).¹⁴ Although set off from each other paratextually, most of these anecdote-homily pairs maintain thematic and linguistic links to those that precede and follow them. For example, to return to the story of Shaykh Abu Bakr and the donkey’s fart, the accompanying homily ends with the warning to not say “I” lest you be “afflicted by the demonic (*eblisi*).” This closing line foreshadows the sub-

12. This has been a central issue in the scholarship on Jesus’ parables. Traditional exegetes tended to understand the parables as simple teaching allegories, in which their narrative elements corresponded, on a one-to-one basis, with specific conceptual referents. According to critics of the model, this renders the narratives themselves dispensable, mere stepping-stones to a more discursive mode of understanding. Scholars like Crossan, Funk, Via, and Ricoeur have argued that parables are not “mere” teaching tools to be discarded once their didactic point has been grasped, but that the narratives themselves constitute their message. Instead of allegories, these scholars discuss parables as “metaphors,” which they understand as an open-ended form of signification, irreducible to discursive statements, that gestures towards a meaning rather than presupposing it. John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 7-22; Paul Ricoeur, “Listening to the Parables of Jesus,” *Criterion* 13 (Spring 1974): 18-22; Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God: The Problem of Language in New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 133-62.

13. Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 9-13, 48-53; William Kirkwood, “Parables as Metaphors and Examples,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71 (1985): 422-40.

14. In classical Persian, the term *hekâyat* is applied to narrations of all sorts, whether entertaining, edifying, fictional, or historical. *Tamṣil*, on the other hand, is derived from the Arabic root *m-th-l*, the semantic field of which involves notions of likeness and similarity, and usually refers to allegories or other illustrative stories. In this sense, both *hekâyat* and *tamṣil* may refer to the narrative portion of the anecdote-homily pair. As a verbal noun, however, *tamṣil* also indicates the action of using allegories and parables within a discourse. It is thus possible to read *hekâyat* as referring to the narratives themselves, and *tamṣil* to the total package—the act of illustrating a homily with a story. *Farhang-e sokhan*, s.v. “*tamṣil*”; *Loghat-nâma-ye Dehkhodâ*, s.v. “*tamṣil*.”

sequent anecdote, in which the devil (*Eblis*) confers his secret wisdom on Moses: “Don’t say ‘I lest you become like me.” Such transitions are typical: most of ‘Aṭṭâr’s homilies close with some sort of thematic or lexical foreshadowing of the subsequent anecdote-homily pair. These linkages, in turn, produce chains or clusters of anecdotes and homilies related to specific themes. In most didactic *maṣnavis*, these thematic clusters correspond to paratextually marked thematic chapters (*maqâla*), and in Attar’s *maṣnavis* these chapters usually represent discourses delivered by characters in the frame-tale. For example, the anecdote of Shaykh Abu Bakr is narrated by the hoopoe as part of a larger discourse on spiritual vainglory. The anecdote is followed by other narratives that exemplify this theme from divergent perspectives and with slightly different points of emphasis. They are not tightly linked building blocks in a logical argument leading to a decisive conclusion, but neither are they completely separable units to be read and interpreted individually. The cluster’s multiple illustrative anecdotes and exhortations amplify and nuance each other in order to present the reader with a flexible sufi heuristic on spiritual pride and vainglory.

In the *Conference of the Birds*, and to a lesser extent in ‘Aṭṭâr’s other frame-tale *maṣnavis*, these discourses represent stages on the spiritual journey, and they are thus arranged in a specific sequential order. In the previous chapter, for instance, we saw how the ordering of the seven valleys encodes a particular conception of the seven stages of the sufi path. In the present chapter, however, instead of examining the structures that underlie the arrangement of these discourses relative to each other, we are interested in how the anecdotes and exhortations *within* each discourse interface to illustrate particular mystical topics and call reader-listeners to pious reform. We begin with a discourse devoted to the nature of the ontological relationship between God and human beings; we will see how the hoopoe presents a variety of interlocking anecdotes that variously explain the human heart as a special route of access to

the divine, and examine how he uses these anecdotes to call on his audience to turn inwards to activate that internal connection to God.

King Parables and the Divine-Human Relationship

Throughout Near Eastern religious literature, God is often metaphorically presented as a king; like his earthly counterparts, he judges and protects, ensures justice and order, and is characterized by glory and power while simultaneously displaying mercy and compassion. By the time the Hebrew Bible was written, the king-metaphor was well entrenched.¹⁵ Early Christian writings are also rife with the association, perhaps conditioned by the Roman imperial cult against which both Judaism and Christianity defined themselves, as are the parables of the Midrash.¹⁶ In general, Abrahamic cosmology is based on the notion of a divine court in heaven that mirrors the institutions and characters of terrestrial kingship in the ancient Near East: God sits on his throne in an inner court, often veiled by curtains, and surrounded by ranks of angels. Naturally, such associations permeate ‘Aṭṭâr’s works as well, where he presents stories of earthly kings and other courtly figures as allegorical parables that illustrate certain theological and metaphysical issues. In some anecdotes these kings remain unnamed, and their narratives have a generic or fictional quality. Others feature identifiable royal figures ranging from the distant past to only a few generations before ‘Aṭṭâr, and they likely would have been understood as laying some claim to historical truth. Such narratives enliven the hoopoe’s teachings as well as endowing them with a certain concreteness, rooting them in the social dynamics of the terrestrial world.

15. Marc Zvi Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989).

16. Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 19-21; Crossan, *In Parables*, 23-7.

Near the beginning of the *Conference of the Birds*, the hoopoe delivers a discourse that contains three such king-parables, two that feature historical kings—Alexander and Sultan Maḥmud—and one that centers on an unnamed king and is more mythological in tone. This discourse is formally unified by the fact that all three of its anecdotes rely on the same metaphorical association, but they are consistent on a more conceptual level as well, in that they all suggest God is somehow present within his creation. Two of the anecdotes specify further that God manifests himself through the human heart, the organ of spiritual sight; the exact manner in which God is present in the heart, however, is explained differently by each of them—in one the heart is a mirror, reflecting the image of God’s otherwise unbearable beauty, and in the other the heart is like a “secret passage” through which a royal lover arrives at his beloved’s bedchamber. The two anecdotes thus capture rather different valences of the divine-human relationship—one is more intimate, the other more distant and mediated—but they both suggest that God is, in some fashion, internally present to human beings. Moreover, this is not presented as an abstract fact, but as the basis for ethical action: the accompanying homilies urge listeners to cultivate this connection through an inward turn, to cleanse the heart of base attributes, and to seek out the traces of the divine manifest therein.

The hoopoe delivers this discourse just before the Shaykh Ṣan‘ân tale, after a group of birds confess that they consider themselves too weak to possibly reach the elevated heights of the Simorgh:

We’re all a weak (*ḡa‘if*) and powerless (*nâ-tavân*) lot,
 No feathers, no wings, no body, no strength.
 How could we ever arrive at the exalted Simorgh?
 If any one of use were to arrive there, it would be a wonder!

بی‌پر و بی‌بال نه تن نه توان
گر رسد از ما کسی باشد بدیع¹⁷

ما همه مشتی ضعیف و ناتوان
کی رسیم آخر به سیمرغ رفیع

The birds then proceed to question the hoopoe regarding the nature of their relationship (*nesbat*) to the Simorgh. They are skeptical that the kingly Simorgh would have anything to do with beggars such as themselves; the Simorgh is Solomon, and they are mere ants, trapped in a well like Joseph:

He is Solomon and we are beggar ants.
Look where he is, and where we are!
He has trapped an ant in the depths of a well—
How could it ever approach the lofty Simorgh?

در نگر کو از کجا ما از کجا
کی رسد در گردِ سیمرغ بلند¹⁸

او سلیمان است و ما موری گدا
کرده موری را میان چاه بند

With their allusions to the legend of Solomon and the story of Joseph, however, the birds simultaneously undercut the surface meaning of their own rhetorical questioning. They doubt that “ants” such as themselves could reach the “Solomon” of the Simorgh—but of course, according to stories of the prophets, Solomon *did* receive an ant and accept her gift, and attuned readers will likewise suspect that the Simorgh will also receive the birds.¹⁹ Similarly, Joseph *does* travel from the bottom of the well to the heights of kingship. Thus, even as the birds question their ability to attain to the Simorgh, ‘Aṭṭâr couches their objections in terms that subtly foreshadow their success.

17. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1073-4.

18. Ibid., 1077-8.

19. Abu Eshâq Ebrahim Nayshâburi, *Qeṣaṣ al-anbiâ*, ed. Ḥabib Yaghmâ’i (Tehran: Bongâh-e Tarjoma va Nashr-e Ketâb, 1340 [1961-62]), 287-91. Cf. Quran 27:18-19

In reply to these concerns, the hoopoe explains that there is a peculiar ontological connection between the Simorgh and the world: the latter and everything in it, including all the birds, are shadows cast by the former when he first “revealed his shining face”:²⁰

He scattered his own shadows on the world,
And multitudes of birds emerged at every moment.
The forms of all the world’s birds, every one,
Are his shadow—know this, you heedless one!
Consider this, and once you know it,
You’ll establish a firm connection with that presence.

گشت چندین مرغ هر دم آشکار	سایه خود کرد بر عالم نثار
سایه اوست این بدان ای بی‌خبر	صورتِ مرغانِ عالم سر به سر
سوی آن خضرت نسب کردی درست ²¹	این بدان چون این بدانستی نخست

The image of the world as the shadow of God suggests the ephemerality and insubstantiality of the world vis-à-vis the permanence of God, upon whom it depends for its existence. At the same time however, the world—as God’s shadow—is a natural extension of his being and a manifestation of his presence. This conceptualization of the world’s relationship to the divine carries clear resonances to the neoplatonic doctrine of emanation: shadows are not created through any particular willed action, but are natural “emanations” from an illuminated object, with which they are neither completely separable nor entirely coextensive. Like shadow from light, the world emanates from God, and it remains ontologically rooted in—and yet simultaneously differentiated from—its source.²²

20. ‘Attâr, *Manteq al-tayr*, 1083.

21. Ibid., 1085-7.

22. The metaphor of the world as the shadow of God also poses certain problems. For example, is God to be understood as light itself or the illuminated objects that produce the shadow? Or both at once? Ibn ‘Arabî and those who follow him tend to understand the world as a collection of shadows cast by the archetypal forms (*al-a’yân al-sâbeta*) when they are illuminated by the “light” of God’s creative ontological power. See the discussion in Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 89-98.

This metaphysics is not a disinterested set of objective facts, but is intimately bound up with human ethical and interpretive action. As the final verse of the above quotation makes clear, the birds must paradoxically “consider” their ontological connection to the Simorgh in order to “establish a firm connection with that presence.” The hoopoe demands a certain ethical posture from his audience in which they simultaneously interpret and perform their proximity to the divine. They are urged to “see” the Simorgh behind the shadows of the world:

Every guise that appears in this field of existence,
Is a shadow of the beautiful Simorgh.
When the Simorgh shows you his beauty,
You see the Simorgh through the shadow, without illusion.

...

Since the shadow cannot be divided from the Simorgh,
It's not permitted to say they're separate.
Since they are both found together, seek out both;
Having found the shadow, go beyond it to the source!

سایهٔ سیمرغ زیبا آمده‌ست	هر لباسی کان به صحرا آمده‌ست
سایه را سیمرغ بینی بی‌خیال	گر تو را سیمرغ بنماید جمال
...	...
گر جدا گویی از آن نبود روا	سایه از سیمرغ چون نبود جدا
در گذر از سایه وانگه راز جوی ²³	هر دو چون هستند با هم باز جوی

The Simorgh casts the shadows of the world, and the birds are exhorted to “go beyond” each shadow back to its divine source rather than remaining lost in its illusory surface. By correctly interpreting existence as a signifier pointing back towards God, the birds can anagogically secure their own relationship to the divine. The intertwining nature of hermeneutics, ontology, and experiential knowledge is encapsulated in a concluding summation from this section, “When you have understood (*bedânasti*), see (*bebin*), then be (*bebâsh*)!”; metaphysical knowl-

23. ‘Attâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1124-8.

edge is not acquired for its own sake but as a route for activating a new mode of being, and it is this onto-ethical transformation to which the reader-listener is enjoined.²⁴

The hoopoe then illustrates and elaborates on this relationship through the aforementioned cluster of king-parables. The first one we will treat here (which is in fact the second anecdote of the cluster), recounts how Alexander would travel throughout his realm in disguise; the narrative is presented as an allegorical explanation of how the Simorgh might remain present in the world even if he may not be immediately visible therein.²⁵

He [the hoopoe] said: “When Alexander, that legitimate king,
Wanted to send a messenger somewhere,
That king of the world would, in the manner of a messenger,
Don a disguise and go himself in secret.
He would utter what no one had yet heard,
He would say ‘Alexander has ordered such and such.’
In the whole world, no one knew
That the messenger there was Alexander himself.
Since no one was expecting Alexander,
Even if he had said ‘I’m Alexander,’ no one would have believed it.”

خواستی جایی فرستادن رسول	گفت چون اسکندر آن صاحب قبول
جامه پوشیدی و خود رفتی نهان	چون رسول آخر خود آن شاه جهان
گفتی اسکندر چنین فرموده است	پس بگفتی آنچه کس نشنوده است
کین رسول اسکندر است آنجا و بس	در همه عالم نمی دانست کس
گرچه گفت اسکندر ماور نداشت ²⁶	هیچ کس چون چشم اسکندر نداشت

The story of Alexander posing as his own envoy is attested in a number of sources, part of a trope in which just kings are portrayed as being personally active in the running of affairs throughout their realms so that they can prevent corruption and root out injustice perpetrated by subordinates in their name.²⁷ Here, however, this historical anecdote allegorically illustrates

24. Ibid., 1088.

25. This anecdote is discussed by Sirus Shamsî as an example of an “explanatory allegory” (*tamşil*), Sirus Shamsî, *Anvâ-e adabi* (Tehran: Bâgh-e Âina, 1370 [1991-92]), 292-4.

26. ‘Atţâr, *Manţeq al-ţayr*, 1132-6.

27. Şan‘atiniâ, *Ma’âkhez*, 136-7.

God's ontological relationship to the world; God, the king of the universe, is hidden behind the facade of creation just as Alexander himself poses in the clothes of his messenger. A common trope is thus used to make a theological point; the historic and folkloric imaginary, with which 'Aṭṭâr assumes his readers would have been familiar, helps illustrate an abstract metaphysical concept in a concrete and readily accessible way. According to the hoopoe, Alexander is not recognized because no one expects to see him (literally, "they have not an eye for him"); even if Alexander directly revealed his identity to his interlocutors, they would not believe it. 'Aṭṭâr's audience, by contrast, is enjoined to develop an eye for God: to "see" not just the shadows of the world, but the divine source from which they spring.

The Alexander parable suggests that God suffuses the entire universe, but it is preceded by another narrative that focuses on God's unique presence in the human heart. This narrative tells of a beautiful king, "without equal or likeness," who, like Alexander, symbolically stands in for God. All of this king's subjects were afflicted by love for him and longed to gaze on his face. But to do so meant certain death, since no ordinary human could bear the sight of his excessive beauty: "If anyone would see his beauty manifest / He would give up his soul, pitifully."²⁸ When the king went out into the streets, he would cover his face with a burka, but to no avail—all those who saw him, even when veiled, would still give up the ghost:

Sometimes he would ride a night-black charger in the alleyways,
 He would hang a rose-colored burka over his face.
 Whoever cast a glance at that burka,
 Would, although innocent, lose his head at once.
 And whoever uttered his name,
 His tongue would be ripped out in an instant.
 And if anyone thought of union with him,
 They would surrender reason and soul to the wind for the impossible.

28. 'Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1109.

برقعی گلگون فروهشتی به روی
سر بریدندیش از تن بی‌گناه
قطع کردند ز فانش در زمان
عقل و جان بر باد دادی زان محال²⁹

گاه شب‌دیزی برون راندی به کوی
هر که کردی سوی آن برق‌نگاه
و آن که نام او براندی بر زفان
ور کسی اندیشه کردی زان وصال

The violent imagery of beheading and ripping out tongues is clearly grounded in the realm of imperial justice. But a passive construction is used here, and there is no mention of the king himself ordering these killings; on the contrary, his subjects' deaths seems to be an unintentional consequence of the king's excessive beauty and their relative weakness. Their inability to gaze on him also recalls the Quran's account of Moses on Mount Sinai, when the prophet begged God to reveal himself to him. According to the exegetes, God revealed only "something like the tip of his little finger," but the mountain was utterly obliterated, and Moses fainted from the force of the event without ever seeing God's face.³⁰ The king's subjects are likewise placed in an impossible position; they burn to see the king's face, but cannot withstand his beauty. Trapped in an intermediate state, they "have no repose, neither with him nor without him."³¹

To solve this conundrum, the king orders a mirror to be built, through which the population might safely gaze upon his reflection:

The king ordered that a mirror be built,
So that they could gaze therein.
A fine palace was decorated for the king,
And the mirror was set opposite it.
The king would ascend to the top of the palace,
And then look into the mirror.
His visage was reflected in the mirror,
And everyone found a trace (*neshâni*) of his countenance.

29. Ibid., 1104-7.

30. Quran 7:142; Brannon M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis* (London: Continuum, 2002), 201-2.

31. 'Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1113.

کاندر آینه توان کردن نگاه
و آینه اندر برابر داشتند
وانگهی در آینه کردی نگاه
هر کس از رویش نشانی یافتی³²

آینه فرمود حالی پادشاه
شاه را قصری نکو بنگاشتند
بر سر آن قصر رفتی پادشاه
روی او از آینه می تافتی

The parable hangs on the unusual signifying properties of the mirror and the peculiar ontological status of images. From one perspective, the mirror shows nothing other than the face of the king, manifest in all his glory. And yet from another perspective, the mirror presents not “the thing itself” but an iconic, imaginal representation that is necessarily other than the original. It is this peculiar mixture of mediation and revelation that allows the people to see the king’s beauty while paradoxically maintaining a distance that protects both their lives and the king’s transcendent incommensurability. As the final verse explains, the people of the city, by looking into the mirror, see neither the king’s face itself, nor a mere “likeness” (*maṣāl*), but a peculiarly signifying “trace” (*neshân*).³³

This anecdote-homily pair, like most in the poem, is independently labelled as a “story and its application,” but its main themes and didactic point were seeded before it began, in the closing lines of the hoopoe’s opening address. There, the hoopoe summarizes the coming narrative and makes the terms of its allegorical significance explicit—specifically, that the mirror stands for the human heart—although most literarily competent reader-listeners would have likely been able to map that identification on their own:

Because no one has an eye for that beauty,
And it’s impossible to patiently bear “No!” before it;
Because love can’t be devoted to his beauty,
Out of the perfection of his generosity, he built a mirror.
That mirror is the heart, look into it;
So that you might see his face in the the heart!

32. Ibid., 1116-9.

33. Cf. the story of the Simorgh’s feather, Chapter 3, p. 145.

وز جمالش هست صبر لا محال
از کمالِ لطفِ خود آئینه ساخت
تا ببینی روی او در دل مگر³⁴

چون کسی را نیست چشم آن جمال
با جمالش عشق نتوانست باخت
هست آن آئینه دل در دل نگر

Form at least the twelfth-century onwards, the heart was often cast as a mirror for envisaging the divine, and ‘Aṭṭâr’s audiences would certainly have been aware of this common sufi trope.³⁵ Mirrors in the medieval world were constructed from polished metal, which would easily oxidize; to maintain their reflective properties, they had to be routinely polished. The heart, according to the standard elaboration of this metaphor, must also be “polished” of the rust of sin through repentance, remembrance of God (*zeker*), and other forms of ethical work (*mojâhadat*), so that God’s light might be reflected therein. Furthermore, the surface of the mirror itself becomes “invisible” when polished, replaced by the image of the reflected object that appears within its frame.³⁶ Likewise, by polishing the heart, the sufi aims to burnish away all traces of egotistical selfhood and become a conduit for the manifestation of divine light. ‘Aṭṭâr is careful to clarify that God’s manifestation in the human heart is not a form of divine incarnation (*holul*), which was roundly considered a heretical belief in Islam. Rather, it is an “immersion” (*esteghrâq*) of the human in the divine:

Whoever is transformed in this way, is immersed (*mostaghraq*).
God forbid that you say he has become God!
If you’re transformed as I have described, you’re not God,
But in God you’re forever immersed (*mostaghraq*).

حاش لله گر تو گویی حق بود
لیک در حق دایماً مستغرقی³⁷

هر که او آن گشت مستغرق بود
گر تو گشتی آنچه گفتم نه حقی

34. Ibid., 1097-9.

35. Sohaylâ Şâremi, *Moştalahât-e ‘erfâni va mafâhim-e barjasta dar zabân-e ‘Aṭṭâr* (Tehran: Pazhuhesh-gâh-e ‘Olum-e Ensâni va Moṭâla‘ât-e Farhangi, 1373 [1994-95]), s.v. “*del*”; Ghazzâlî, *Iḥyâ’ ‘ulûm al-dîn*, 8:1364-66.

36. Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 63.

37. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1089-90.

This transformation, according to ‘Aṭṭâr, is not the union of human and divine, but the effacement of the former in the latter. Such an immersion is experienced by the birds at the poem’s climax when they are effaced in the Simorgh, who remains transcendent and incommensurable.³⁸

An extensive homily follows the mirror anecdote and attends to its subjective ramifications, enjoining the audience to turn inwards and contemplate not themselves, but the vision of God within:

If you value the beauty of the friend,
Consider the heart the mirror of his visage.
Bring your heart into your hand, and see his beauty;
Make your spirit a mirror, and see his majesty.
Your king is on the palace of majesty,
The palace is illuminated by the sun of that beauty.
See your king in the heart!
See the throne in an atom!

<p>دل بدان کآینه دیدارِ اوست آینه کن جانِ جلالِ او ببین قصر روشن ز آفتابِ آن جمال عرش را در ذره‌ای حاصل ببین³⁹</p>	<p>گر تو می داری جمالِ یارِ دوست دل به دست آر و جمالِ او ببین پادشاهِ توست بر قصرِ جلال پادشاهِ خویش را در دل ببین</p>
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Reader-listeners are enjoined to understand their hearts as “the mirror of his visage” and to gaze upon God’s beauty and majesty therein. Exactly what this might look like in practical terms is left unspecified, but other anecdotes in the poem suggest that it involves avoidance of pride, cutting attachments to the world, and consideration of one’s own sins. Here, however, the emphasis is placed not on specific ethical practices with which the reader would have likely already been familiar, but on a pithy epitome of a general mode of sufi subjectivity: namely, that human beings ought to relate to their inner selves as sites for the manifestation of an oth-

38. See the discussion in Chapter 3, p. 167-171; Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 608-10.

39. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1120-3.

erwise inaccessible God. Such a conception of the self privileges the individual as a conduit for the divine encounter, while paradoxically requiring the relinquishment of selfhood through “immersion” in the divine.

These metaphysical beliefs and subjective attitudes are validated by a well known hadith, referenced in the last verse of the homily as a proof text. The addressee is enjoined to see the “king in the heart,” and “the throne in an atom,” recalling the famous pseudo-prophetic saying, “The heart of the believer is the throne of God.” Although considered inauthentic by hadith critics, it was widely quoted by mystically minded theorists and preachers, for whom it carried great weight.⁴⁰ The hoopoe’s homily and narrative are thereby grounded in an (albeit contested) authoritative religious dictum, which they in turn interpret and explain: the heart functions as the link between microcosm and macrocosm and the site of divine manifestation in the world, and believing subjects should thus turn their intention inwards.⁴¹ Allusions to the Quran and hadith—and even quotations when metrically possible—are common in ‘Aṭṭār’s writings and highlight the broader hermeneutic and exegetical function of his works. His narratives and homilies offer a specific interpretation of a particular slice of Quranic and prophetic material, and thus represent one route for a Persian-speaking audience to access—and understand—the Arabic scriptures.

This internal connection to God is allegorically explained in a slightly different fashion by the cluster’s final anecdote, which tells of how Sultan Maḥmud would travel by a secret passageway to the bedchambers of his beloved, Ayâz.⁴² According to this particular narrative, Ayâz

40. Ibid., 558n1123.

41. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Heart of the Faithful is the Throne of the All-Merciful,” in *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2002).

42. J. Matini, “Ayâz, Abu’l-Najm,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 18 August 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ayaz-abul-najm-b>.

was once afflicted with a sickness and remained confined to his chambers. When word came to Maḥmud regarding his beloved's condition, he became extremely distraught and immediately ordered a servant to deliver the following message to Ayâz:

As long as you are ill, I'm so affected,
 I don't know if it's you who are ill or me!
 Although, in body, I may be far from my soul-mate,
 My desiring soul is exceedingly near.
 For you, my soul remains passionately desirous,
 Not for a moment am I absent from you.

تا تو رنجوری ندانم یا منم
 جان مشتاقم بدو نزدیک بس
 نیستم غایب زمانی از تو من⁴³

تا که رنجوری تو فکرت می کنم
 گر تنم دور اوفتاد از هم نفس
 مانده ام مشتاق جانی از تو من

Maḥmud commanded the courier to deliver this message to Ayâz posthaste, under the threat of death if he should tarry along the road. Despite his best efforts, however, when the messenger finally reached Ayâz's chambers, he found that Maḥmud had arrived there before him. With terror he swore that he carried out the king's orders as fast as he could and had no idea how Maḥmud could have possibly passed him on the road. In response, Maḥmud reassures the courier that his life is secure and explains the secret of his mysterious appearance in his beloved's chambers:

. . . You are not at fault in this,
 O servant; how could you win the race in this matter?
 I have a secret way to him,
 Since I cannot bear a moment without his face.
 I often come to him in secret by this route,
 So that no one in the world might know.
 The secret ways between us are many;
 The secrets contained in our souls are many.
 Although I might want for news of him externally,
 Within the curtain, I am aware of him.
 Although I conceal the secret from outsiders,
 Inside I am with him through my soul.

43. 'Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1144-6.

کی بری تو راه ای خادم درین
زانکه نشکیم دمی بی‌روی او
تا خبر نبود کسی را در جهان
رازها در ضمن جان ما بسی‌ست
در درون پرده آگاهم ازو
در درون با اوست جانم در میان⁴⁴

... نیستی مجرم درین
من رهی دزدیده دارم سوی او
هر زمان زان ره بدو آیم نهان
راه دزدیده میان ما بسی‌ست
از برون گرچه خبر خواهم ازو
راز اگر می‌پوشم از بیرونیان

The king's explanation of his "secret way" to Ayâz allegorically illustrates a larger issue of sufi metaphysics: namely, God's continued "contact" with humankind through the heart. The allegorical function of the anecdote is plainly indicated by its opening homiletic preamble, which exhorts the audience to take comfort in their interior relationship to God, if they are believers:

There is a way for the king towards every heart,
But there is no way for the wayward heart.
If outside of the chamber, the king is a stranger,
Don't despair; inside he's an intimate companion.

لیک ره نبود دل گمراه را
غم مخور چون در درون هم‌خانه بود⁴⁵

هست راهی سوی هر دل شاه را
گر برون حجره شه بیگانه بود

The anecdote is thus presented to the audience as a tool for conceptualizing their own relationship to the God, and a reason to remain hopeful even when the divine seems distant and inaccessible.

This specific allegorical parable is particularly noteworthy because it metaphorically casts the relationship between God and his creatures as that of a lover to a beloved, with the promise of an intimate encounter between them. An erotic idiom is common in much sufi literature, but it is usually God who is figured as beloved, and the human servant who is cast as lover.⁴⁶ The allegory of the king and the mirror, for example, follows this standard asymmetrical pattern. The king is portrayed in that narrative using tropes commonly associated with the

44. Ibid., 1158-63.

45. Ibid., 1137-8.

46. Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 520-92.

figure of the beloved in the *ghazal* tradition: he is an inaccessible “heart-caresser” (*del-navâz*), who has thrown the whole world into a tumult (*ghowghâ*) with his beauty.⁴⁷ His subjects, on the other hand, play the role of pining lovers: they are afflicted with passion (*sowdâ*), suffer daily from “the sorrows of love” (*gham-e ‘eshq*) and are robbed of patience (*ṣabr*) in their desire for union.⁴⁸ The king himself, however, remains serenely unaffected. He cares for his subjects, and mercifully constructs a mirror through which they can gaze upon his face, but he does not *love* them, remaining ensconced in his impenetrable palace. By contrast, in the final anecdote it is Maḥmud, the king, who plays the lover’s role: his soul is “passionately desirous” (*moshtâq*) for Ayâz, and he confesses that he cannot “bear a moment without his face.” Indeed, when Ayâz falls ill, Maḥmud claims to feel the pain so immediately that it were as if he himself were stricken: “As long as you are ill, I’m so affected / I don’t know if it’s you who are ill or me!” Allegorically elaborated, a very different picture of the divine-human relationship emerges from this narrative than from the parable of the king and the mirror. Here God is not only loved by his creatures, but he loves them in turn (Quran 5:54: “He loves them as they love him”): he feels their pains, desires to be with them, and moves towards them through the “hidden passages” of the heart.

When approaching the anecdotes’ seeming contradictions, it is important to keep in mind that the *Conference of the Birds* was never intended to transmit a formal theology, ethics, or metaphysics, but to reinforce a broad set of sufi beliefs and attitudes on the divine-human relationship. The Alexander anecdote explains how God is ontologically connected to his creation; the parable of the king and the mirror suggests that it is through the heart that humans can gaze upon the divine; and the story of the Maḥmud and Ayâz figures the heart as the site

47. ‘Attâr, *Manteq al-tayr*, 1103, 1110.

48. Ibid., 1103, 1108, 1111.

of an intimate encounter, accessible to God through “hidden” avenues. None of these anecdotes “cancels out” the others; rather, they work together to present a more nuanced and elaborated picture of God’s relationship to the world and humankind. Together, the stories explain how a transcendent God is immanent to this world and maintains a particularly special relationship with human beings, to whom he relates as both an intimate lover and a distant ruler. Although these are all common sufi attitudes, uniting them in a coherent formal theology would be a difficult task; through a set of illustrative stories, however, ‘Aṭṭâr provides an interlocking set of quick, flexible heuristics for conceptualizing these points. They function as nodes in what Ricoeur, in reference to Jesus’ parables, called a “network of inter-signification”; they are not to be read in isolation, but as a set, and through their multiple perspectives, a more nuanced portrayal of the topic at hand emerges.⁴⁹ Together, they triangulate a particularly sufi conception of God’s ontological connection to humankind and derive its ethical implications.

Death and Mortality

A second critical component of ‘Aṭṭâr’s mystically minded ethos is an acute sense of human mortality. Attention to the coming end figured prominently not only in sufi piety, but also in Islamic religiosity more broadly, from a very early period. A tendency towards pious fear and introspection dominated among many early Muslim ascetics, attitudes which were rooted in the Quran’s emphasis on impending judgement and eschatological reward and punishment. Meditation on mortality was emphasized by proto-sufi writers like Muḥāsibī, who advocated a probing of conscience for hidden hypocrisy, motivated by a pious fear of death and the final judgement.⁵⁰ In later periods, the remembrance of death and the afterlife was com-

49. “Listening to the Parables of Jesus,” 20.

50. Josef van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārīt al-Muḥāsibī* (Bonn: Selbstverlag des Orientalischen Seminars der Universität Bonn, 1961), 130-43; R. Arnaldez, “al-Muḥāsibī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted

monly extolled by preachers and religious scholars, who argued that a keen understanding of life's brevity coupled with a visceral appreciation of eschatological consequences would motivate piety and spiritual reform. The final section of Ghazzālī's *Revival (Iḥyā')*, for instance—with which 'Aṭṭār was likely familiar—is devoted to the cultivation of such an ethos, and Ibn al-Jawzī writes that the preacher's main duty is to direct his audience's attention to death and the subsequent judgement.⁵¹ Although these figures' eschatological concerns are specifically Islamic, exhortations to attend to one's own mortality can also be found in the "secular" tradition of wisdom literature that infuses much Persian literary writing. An inheritor of the Middle Persian and Hellenistic wisdom traditions, such poetry often advocates contemplation of mortality as an impetus to virtuous living, which it aims to actively encourage.⁵²

In the *Conference of the Birds*, numerous anecdotes and homilies touch on themes of death and eschatology. They embody a diverse array of attitudes towards human mortality, but they nevertheless exhibit certain family resemblances. Generally speaking, 'Aṭṭār can be said to display an attitude of fear and extreme distress in relation to the coming end, regarding both the moment of expiration itself and the potential eschatological torment that will follow.⁵³ Given this morbidity, 'Aṭṭār is often compared to his predecessor Khayyām, who so finely captured the temporality of human life in his quatrains. But whereas the threat of death provokes an epicurean response in the Khayyām corpus, 'Aṭṭār understands the mortal condition as a powerful motivation for pious living and spiritual transformation.⁵⁴ For 'Aṭṭār, mortality casts its shadow over the entirety of life, undercutting the validity of commonplace worldly valuations

2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5427.

51. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Quṣṣās*, 140/trans. 224; Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, 15-16:2845-3034.

52. See Chapter 3, p. 122.

53. Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 34-45; Kermani, *Terror of God*, 36-77.

54. Reżā Ashrafzāda, "'Aṭṭār, Khayyām-e digar," in *'Aṭṭār-shenākht*, ed. Moḥammad Reżā Rāshed Moḥassel (Mashhad: Dānesgāh-e Ferdowsi, 1385 [2006-7]); Zarrinkub, *Ṣedā-ye bāl-e simorgh*, 74-6, 121-22.

and desires, especially political power and material wealth. Its terror, however, can perhaps be partly transcended through the transformation described in the previous section; through immersion in God and the relinquishment of one's human attributes, one can rediscover a mode of being that exists beyond the mortal plane. But given the brevity of life and looming threat of death, there is a palpable urgency to 'Aṭṭâr's calls for onto-ethical metamorphosis; he enjoins his reader-listeners to sever their attachments to the material world *now* and follow the Prophet's maxim to "die before you die" before it is too late.

Such themes are interwoven throughout the totality of the *Conference of the Birds*. They are treated most directly, however, in a cluster of anecdotes and homilies delivered in response to a bird whose fear of death prevents him from setting out on the dangerous quest for the Simorgh (and whom we have already encountered in the previous chapter):⁵⁵

. . . I am frightened of death;
This is a wide valley, and I am without provisions or supplies.
My heart is terrified of death such that,
My soul would depart at the first stage.

وادی دور است و من بی زاد و برگ
جان بر آید در نخستین منزل⁵⁶

. . . می ترسم ز مرگ
این چنین کز مرگ می ترسد دلم

The objecting bird is, quite naturally, "frightened of death," and he invokes his fear in an attempt to recuse himself from the quest. The hoopoe, in response, excoriates him for his weakness and short-sightedness. A fear of death is not blameworthy in itself—on the contrary, it is the proper reaction of reflective, pious people to the human situation—but this fear should strengthen one's desire for spiritual progress, not weaken it. Death is inevitable, whether one embarks upon the spiritual path or not, but it is precisely through a journey towards the divine

55. See Chapter 3, p. 176.

56. 'Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 2319-20.

that one can, perhaps, mitigate death's terrors. An honest assessment of the mortal condition should, according to the hoopoe, motivate the journey, not prevent it:

The hoopoe said to him "O feeble weakling,
How long can a bag of bones last,
A handful of bones, propped together,
Their marrow melted in the bone.
Don't you know that of your life, give or take,
Only two breaths remain? how long with this pride?
Don't you know that whoever's been born has died?
He's turned to earth, and the wind's taken whatever he was.
You've been reared to die,
And you've been brought here only to be taken away.

...
Whether you're pure or sullied,
You're only only a drop of water mixed with dust.
A drop of water, in pain from head to toe—
How could it ever do battle with the ocean?"

چند خواهد ماند مشتی استخوان
مغز او در استخوان بگداخته
هست باقی از دو دم تا کی ز دم
شد به خاک و هرچه بودش باد برد
هم برای بردنت آورده‌اند

...
قطره‌ آبی که با خاک آمدی
کی تواند کرد با دریا نبرد⁵⁷

هددش گفت ای ضعیفِ ناتوان
استخوانی چند در هم ساخته
تو نمی دانی که عمرت بیش و کم
تو نمی دانی که هر که زاد مُرد
هم برای بردنت پرورده‌اند

...
تو اگر آلوده گر پاک آمدی
قطره‌ آب از قدم تا فرق درد

To impress on his avian audience a sense of their own contingency, the hoopoe repeatedly highlights the materiality and temporality of the body. He reminds the objecting bird that he is just a "handful of bones propped together," fused with marrow and flesh: "how long," he pointedly asks, can such a "bag of bones last?" This skeletal imagery then gives way to a pair of verses that comment on the ubiquity of death and the ephemerality of life, both of which are introduced by the rhetorical question, "Don't you know?" thereby casting the verses' thematic observations as generally accepted truths that the addressee is urged to appreciate anew. Life is

57. Ibid., 2324-32.

short—at any given moment, it is as if only two breaths remain—and death is inevitable, a terror to be faced by all. The harangue concludes with the image of the body as a “drop of water mixed with dust,” a formulation that echoes various Quranic descriptions of Adam’s creation, but which also underscores the contingency and fundamentally insignificant nature of individual existence.⁵⁸ A drop of water cannot resist the ocean, the hoopoe explains, just as every bird/human being—pious or impious—will eventually be overtaken by death. At the same time, however, this final image of the dissolving drop gestures towards another, more positive outcome. Specifically, the drop dissolving in the sea is also a common metaphor for the individual’s aforementioned effacement or immersion in God, both in ‘Aṭṭâr’s works and those of other mystically inclined poets.⁵⁹ The harangue can thus be read as concluding on a potentially hopeful note, in which physical death is preempted by a “spiritual death” in which worldly attachments are severed, individual agency is relinquished to the will of God, and a new existence emerges that subsists in and through the divine.

Following this introductory harangue, the hoopoe launches into a cluster of narratives and homilies that amplify, elaborate, and illustrate themes of mortality. We can distinguish these from the king-parables discussed above in that they consist of illustrative exempla that signify through synecdoche and extrapolation instead of allegorical mappings across domains. In other words, they do not seek to explain theological issues through allegorical narratives (in which, for example, Sultan Maḥmud might stand for God and his slave-beloved for humanity), but rather to provide specific examples of death and dying—often featuring spiritual heroes of past eras—to shape reader-listeners’ attitudes and affective responses towards human mortality

58. See, inter alia, Quran 26:15 and 35:11.

59. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moşibat-nâma*, 6906-26.

more generally.⁶⁰ But like the king-parables, the didactic “point” of the anecdote is then interpreted, generalized, and cast as a direct exhortation by the accompanying homilies. The discourse contains five anecdotes, three of which will be treated here: the anecdotes of the grieving son, Jesus and the water jug, and Socrates on his deathbed.⁶¹ Besides their thematic similarities, these anecdotes share a simple, yet significant dramatic structure: a scene is set, two characters meet, and one of them rebukes the other for his or her superficial understanding of death. Their rebukes, moreover, are often humorous or hyperbolic and can be read almost as didactic jokes. Nevertheless, they are far from frivolous; through their arresting, punning language, ‘Aṭṭâr confronts reader-listeners with unexpected emblems of their own mortality and thereby invites them to reassess their subjective relationship to death.

For example, in the first anecdote to be examined here, a grieving young man is castigated by a sufi against the backdrop of a funeral procession. The young man’s father has died, and he is walking in front of the coffin, likely leading the way to the burial site:

In front of the coffin went the son,
He was raining tears, and crying out: “O Father,
A day like this, wounding my soul,
Has never befallen me before, in all my life.

اشک می بارید و می گفت ای پدر
هرگز نامد به عمر خویش پیش⁶²

پیش تابوت پدر می شد پسر
این چنین زوری که جانم کرد ریش

Many of ‘Aṭṭâr’s anecdotes open in a similar fashion, with a single character behaving in a more or less expected manner in a specific setting taken from the rhythms of pre-modern life. The father of the young man has died, and he naturally laments his loss as he leads the funeral

60. New Testament scholarship often differentiates between illustrative anecdotes and allegorical (and/or metaphorical) parables; see James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 108.

61. It begins with the tale of the Qoqnos, which we have examined in Chapter 3, p. 173-177.

62. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 2368-9.

procession. After this scene has been set, however, a second character appears—introduced only as “a sufi”—who disrupts this common-sense state of affairs by calling the validity of the son’s exclamations into question:

A sufi said: “That which has befallen your father,
Has never befallen him before, either.
What’s happened to the son is not much—
The really difficult thing has happened to the father.”

هرگز این روز هم نامد به سر	صوفیی گفت آن که او بودت پدر
کار بس مشکل پدر را اوفتاد ⁶³	نیست کاری کان پسر را اوفتاد

The sufi rebukes the son for claiming unprecedented pain and grief when it is the father who has died, an event that, the sufi humorously points out, “has never befallen him before, either.” Not only is the moment of death itself terrible, but for Muslim audiences it is not the final end—then there is the ordeal of the Monker and Nâker, the questioning angels, and the threat of eschatological torment. In a homily delivered soon after this anecdote, ‘Aṭṭâr first describes the deceased as “sleeping,” but then immediately corrects himself, recalling their torment:

They are now all sleeping beneath the earth—
No, not sleeping, they are all in turmoil!
Look at death, see what a difficult path it is,
Since the grave is only the first step.

بل نخفته کاین همه آشفته‌اند	جمله در زیر زمین بر خفته‌اند
کاندین ره گورش اول منزل است ⁶⁴	مرگ بنگر تا چه راهی مشکل است

In other words, the father’s condition is far worse than the son’s; although the latter may feel bereaved, the former faces the terror of the grave and divine judgement.

Through the sufi’s unexpected and arresting rebuke, the anecdote disrupts standard, common-sense reactions to death in order to elicit a revitalized appreciation for the terrors of

63. Ibid., 2370-1.

64. Ibid., 2381-2.

the grave. The disruptive power of the sufi's utterance is intensified by his sudden narrative appearance and the social alterity of the character. During this period "sufi" was an ambiguous term, referring not only to practitioners of mystical piety, but also to charlatans and vagabonds, who, like 'Aṭṭār's famous "wise fools" (*'oqalâ-ye majânin*), nonetheless transmitted unconventional—and perhaps unintended—wise sayings.⁶⁵ Given his ambiguity as a character and the potential for hidden wisdom, readers are invited to scrutinize the sufi's seemingly inappropriate admonishment more carefully. His actual message—namely, that the condition of the dead is much worse than the condition of the living—is the standard fare of Islamic preachers, but through his "correction" of the young man's utterance, the sufi draws renewed attention to the terror of death in a particularly uncompromising and unexpected manner. The grieving son, who is more focused on his bereavement in the worldly present than the eschatological terrors that await both him and his father, exemplifies how the "fact" of eschatological turmoil is routinely veiled by more short-sighted concerns. The sufi's interjection, in this sense, can be read as an attempt to disrupt the social norms and rhythms of quotidian life that have obscured the terror of the grave, and thereby clear a space for a revitalized and intensified contemplation of death.⁶⁶

The anecdote's confrontational aims motivate its dramatic structure, which lacks any clear resolution; instead of a narrative denouement, its resolution lies in the spiritual change elicited from its audience. In the previous chapter, we discussed how 'Aṭṭār's anecdotes often

65. On 'Aṭṭār's wise fools, see Hellmut Ritter, "Muslim Mystics' Strife with God," *Oriens* 5, no. 1 (1952): 1-15; Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 165-87; Pourjavady, "Divânagân"; Kermani, *Terror of God*, 146-7.

66. The confrontational power of parables to "shock" the reader into new ways of thinking and being has been widely discussed in New Testament scholarship; see Ricoeur, "Listening to the Parables of Jesus"; William Kirkwood, "Storytelling and Self-Confrontation: Parables as Communication Strategies," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69 (1983): 58-74. The power of 'Aṭṭār's narratives to disrupt conceptual categories has also been pointed out by Maryam Mosharraf, "Shâluda-shakani-ye manteq-e vaḥshat dar âṣâr-e 'Aṭṭâr," in *'Aṭṭâr-shenâkht*, ed. Moḥammad Reẓâ Râshed Moḥassel (Mashhad: Dâneshgâh-e Ferdowsi, 1385 [2006-7]).

end with quoted paraenetic speech, which slowly and almost imperceptibly gives way to a direct homiletic address to the reader-listener; we have argued that this curious metalepsis suggests a continuity between the anecdotes' fictional addressees and 'Aṭṭâr's real-world audience as the targets of paraenetic discourse.⁶⁷ In the anecdote of the grieving son, for instance, reader-listeners never learn how the young man reacts to the sufi's disruptive intervention: we do not know if he yields to the latter's advice, contemplates his own death, or just ignores the offending spiritual vagabond. Instead of continuing the narration, 'Aṭṭâr addresses his readers directly, urging them to remember their own temporality and the concomitant vanity of material possessions and political power:

O You who've come to the world to bumble about,
 You've come for nothing but dust on your head, and to weigh the wind.
 Even if you sit on the throne of the kingdom,
 You'll leave with nothing but wind in your hands.

خاک بر سر بادپیمای آمده	ای به دنیا بی سر و پای آمده
هم نخواهی رفت جز بادی به دست ⁶⁸	گر به صدر مملکت خواهی نشست

The lack of a narrative conclusion, which is replaced by a shift to direct homiletic exhortation, suggests 'Aṭṭâr's broader rhetorical concern to "translate" narrative exempla into spiritual action among his flesh and blood reader-listeners. Once the sufi has made his paraenetic intervention at the climax of the anecdote, 'Aṭṭâr is more interested in amplifying its significance for his audience than tracing its effects in a fictional story-world; ultimately, the narrative's conclusion lies in the "real-world," in the spiritual change 'Aṭṭâr demands of his reader-listeners. This homiletic amplification, in particular the closing image of "wind in your hands" also serves to introduce the subsequent anecdote-homily pair, which features a flute player (*nâ'i*) on

67. See Chapter 3, p. 185-194

68. 'Aṭṭâr, *Manẓeq al-ṭayr*, 2372-3.

his death-bed; in his commentary, ‘Aṭṭâr plays with the opposition between the “wind” of the flute and the “earth” of the body. Such transitions bind almost every anecdote-homily pair, and they serve to formally unify the discourse.

Like the anecdote of the grieving young man, the other narratives in this discourse also feature unexpected paraenetic interventions, but they hinge more on humor and paronomasia for their disruptive effect. The second anecdote that we will examine in depth, located in the middle of the cluster, is adapted from the “stories of the prophets” genre: it narrates how the prophet Jesus was reminded of the “bitterness of death” (*talkhi-ye marg*) by a miraculously speaking water-jug.⁶⁹ According to ‘Aṭṭâr’s version of the story, Jesus came before a stream and drank some of its water, presumably from his own cupped hands, and found it “sweeter than rosewater.” After quenching his thirst, Jesus filled a jug with water from the sweet-tasting stream and continued on his way. But when he drank from the jug, he was surprised to find the water’s taste had changed: it had become quite bitter. Confused, he wondered out loud how this could be:

O Lord, the water in this jug and the water of the stream
Are the same water; explain this mystery.
Why is the water in the jug so bitter,
While the other is sweeter than honey?

هر دو یک آب است سرّ این بگوی
وین دگر شیرینتر است از انگبین⁷⁰

گفت یا رب آب این خم و آب جوی
تا چرا تلخ است آب خم چنین

In response, the jug itself miraculously began to speak:

. . . O Jesus, I am an ancient man.
Beneath these nine domes, over a thousand times,
I have been fashioned into flasks, urns, and vessels.
And if I am reworked a thousand times more,

69. Şan‘atiniâ, *Ma’âkhez*, 149-50; ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 652n2384.

70. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 2385-7.

There will still be nothing but the bitterness of death.
 For me, the bitterness of death is always so—
 That's why my water will never be sweet.

گفت ای عیسی منم مردی کهن
 گشته‌ام هم کوزه هم خم هم طغار
 نیست جز تلخی مرگم کار نیز
 آب من زان است ناشیرین چنین⁷¹

پیش عیسی آن خم آمد در سخن
 زیر این نه کاسه من باری هزار
 گر کنندم خم هزاران بار نیز
 دایم از تلخی مرگم این چنین

As the jug explains, it was fashioned from the clay of a once living human being, thus the bitter water: no matter how many times the clay is refashioned into a new vessel, the bitterness of death does not diminish, and it continues to pollute any water it holds.

The anecdote thus recounts Jesus' education in the "bitterness" of human mortality through the memento mori of the water-jug. The metaphorical association between water- or wine-jugs and human material remains is a longstanding poetic trope in Persian. It was especially well used by Khayyâm, who enjoins his addressees to hold the wine-jug tenderly and consider how its inanimate clay was once a human being who, like them, loved and drank; often these jugs are brought to speech through the poetic device of "language of state" (*zabân-e ḥâl*), in which inanimate objects are personified and reveal the secret of their essential being or emotional state.⁷² 'Aṭṭâr deploys a similar poetic logic in his quatrains, including one in which wine jugs are said to whisper "I was once like you" to those who drink from them, echoing the address to Jesus in the above narrative.⁷³ In all these instances, the jug functions as an emblem of the materiality of the human body and the temporality of life, which lasts only a brief moment against the aeons of the "nine domes," the slowly turning spheres. Lifeless clay, brought miraculously to speech, calls attention to the temporal mismatch between individual human

71. Ibid., 2389-92.

72. Nasrollah Pourjavady, *Zabân-e ḥâl dar 'erfân va adabiyât-e pârsi* (Tehran: Hermes, 1385 [2006-7]), 116-9.

73. 'Aṭṭâr, *Mokhtâr-nâma*, 936.

existence and the cosmos—including the elemental constituents of the body—highlighting the brevity of the former against the persistence of the latter. And as this anecdote demonstrates, even Jesus, who is known by the sobriquet “Breath of God” (*Ruh-Allah*) and is associated with spirit and life, is subject to death’s bitter taste: although he animated clay pigeons and brought the deceased back from the grave, he remains a temporal being and subject to death’s pain.⁷⁴

Although the themes are serious, the anecdote also has the metalinguistic hallmarks of a good joke. In essence, the short narrative is driven by an imaginative, overly-literal interpretation of the clichéd observation that “death is bitter.” In normal language, we understand death’s bitterness to mean that it is unpleasant and undesirable; not to suggest that death induces an actual gustatory sensation. The anecdote, however, explains the phenomenon of the mysterious bitter water by means of just such a category mistake, which is conveyed in the “punch line” spoken by the jug at its conclusion: “For me, the bitterness of death is always so— / That’s why my water will never be sweet.” Whether or not ‘Aṭṭâr’s readers would have understood the anecdote as recounting a historical truth is open for debate, but certainly they would have recognized that death’s bitterness cannot be transferred to a physical object as an actual taste sensation under normal conditions. By presenting death’s bitterness as an actual taste, however, the anecdote calls attention to the metaphorical nature of a common cliché, and thus clears a space for its revitalization. It invites reader-listeners to deduce where interpretation has, from a natural language perspective, “gone wrong,” which also involves a reconsideration of the manner in which such an identification is metaphorically valid. The metalinguistic humor is thus not only the spoonful of sugar that helps the bitter medicine of *memento mori* go down, but it is also key to the anecdote’s overall didactic effect. It provokes reader-listeners

74. Also see ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 1639-41, in which Jesus confesses the terror he feels when he thinks of death.

towards a more conscious consideration of ways in which bitterness, as a concrete gustatory experience, metaphorically maps onto death, and it thereby guides them towards a contemplation of its lingering effects, its power to contaminate sweetness and joy, and its lurking presence as the after-taste of life. Such humor also renders the anecdote more memorable; whenever one of ‘Aṭṭâr reader-listeners hears this phrase, he or she will likely recall the anecdote and its lesson.

The narrative’s function as a teaching tool is made explicit in the accompanying homily, in which ‘Aṭṭâr adds a touch of levity to his characteristic rebuke:⁷⁵

In the end, you ignorant one, drink the secret from a jug!
Leave off filling yourself with ignorance, like a jug!

بیش از این خود را ز غفلت خم مساز⁷⁶

آخر ای غافل ز خم بنیوش راز

‘Aṭṭâr’s narratorial persona directly addresses his reader-listeners, urging them to attend to the “secret” spoken by the jug and to leave off making themselves “jugs” for ignorance. The story is thus cast as a tool for spiritual guidance. Although his audience, unlike Jesus, probably has never had the good fortune to receive spiritual wisdom directly from miraculous speaking jugs, they are nevertheless privy to edifying narrative accounts of such happenings, and ‘Aṭṭâr urges them to seize this opportunity. Through humorous chastisement, the audience is called upon to heed the narrative’s lesson and approach the anecdote as a transformative parable of death’s bitterness and universality.

The remainder of this homily, however, refers not to the narrative of Jesus and the jug but to the following anecdote, the final anecdote of the discourse, in which Socrates, on his

75. Whichever “stories of the prophets” collection ‘Aṭṭâr used as his source would presumably have lacked such a homily; adding a homiletic interpolation is part of the creative adaptation necessary to integrate the anecdote into the didactic *maṣnavi* form.

76. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 2393.

deathbed, confesses his failure to “find himself.” The homily urges readers to “know themselves” while they are still alive, since they will have no opportunity to do so after they die:

You have lost yourself, you secret-seeker;
Before your soul is taken, seek the secret!
If you don't find yourself while you are alive,
When you are dead, how will you find the secret?
When you are alive, you don't know anything about yourself,
When you are dead there is no trace of your being!
Alive, having not walked the path, dead he's lost;
Born as a man, but became not-a-man.

پیش از آن کت جان بر آید راز جوی
چون بمیری کی شناسی راز تو
نه به مردن از وجودت هیچ اثر
زاده مردم لیک نامردم شده⁷⁷

خویش را گم کرده ای ای رازجوی
گر نیابی زنده خود را باز تو
نه به هشیاری تو را از خود خبر
زنده پی نابرده مرده گم شده

These verses display a gnostic sensibility, suggesting that a secret salvational knowledge must be acquired during one's lifetime to avoid annihilation after death. The secret in question, as in most varieties of gnosticism, is related to the nature of selfhood: 'Aṭṭâr exhorts his readers to “find” and “know” themselves, and thereby become true “men.” Such themes recall the Delphic injunction to “know thyself,” and themes of self-knowledge and self-care are also closely associated with Socrates, the protagonist of the subsequent anecdote. In an Islamic context, a concern for self-knowledge is famously evinced in the hadith “whoever knows himself knows his lord,” as well as in the frame-tales of 'Aṭṭâr's *Conference of the Birds* and *Book of Affliction*. For 'Aṭṭâr and like-minded mystical thinkers, this self-knowledge is the intellectual and experiential realization of one's inseparable ontological link to the creator-God, often coupled with an experience of effacement, as illustrated in the poem's frame-tale when the thirty birds finally encounter the Simorgh. Time, however, is limited: one can only come to “know oneself” during one's lifetime. 'Aṭṭâr thus urges his audience to “find themselves” now, before it is too late:

77. Ibid., 2394-7.

they must “realize” their secret connection to the divine before they die, not only in the sense of understanding an abstract proposition, but also in the sense of activating a latent potentiality and thereby bringing about its reality.

These exhortations are concretized and amplified in the subsequent account of Socrates’s deathbed exchange with a disciple. The disciple speaks first, inquiring of Socrates’ wishes regarding his burial:

... O Teacher,
When we have prepared the shroud and washed your body,
Where shall we inter you in the ground?

بود شاگردیش گفت ای اوستاد	گفت چون سقراط در نزع اوفتاد
در کدامین جای در خاکت کنیم ⁷⁸	چون کفن سازیم و تن پاکت کنیم

The question is an eminently reasonable one, aligning with readers’ expectations of a deathbed scene between a spiritual master and his disciple. Socrates’ response, however, completely disrupts the logic of the disciple’s request; according to Socrates, the disciple likely will not be able to “find him” after his death, much less bury him, since Socrates was not even able to find himself when he was alive:

If you can find me, boy,
Bury me wherever you like!
Since, while I was living a long life, I did not myself
Discover, how could you find me when I’m dead?

دفن کن هر جا که خواهی والسلام	گفت اگر تو باز یابیم ای غلام
پی نبردم مرده کی یابی تو باز ⁷⁹	من چو خود را زنده در عمر دراز

As readers, we do not learn how the disciple responds to this humorous proclamation. Consistent with the structure found in the majority of ‘Attâr’s anecdotes, it ends with the teacher-figure’s utterance.

78. Ibid., 2399-400.

79. Ibid., 2401-3.

This utterance, much like that attributed to the miraculous speaking jug, hinges on an overly literal understanding of the metaphorical injunction to “find oneself.” As discussed above, in this context the injunction to self-knowledge constitutes a call to activate the divine spark within the human soul, that ontological connection between the individual and God. Success or failure in “knowing oneself” in this sense obviously has nothing to do with the location of the physical body. Nevertheless, Socrates commits—perhaps intentionally—just such a category error, discussing “finding oneself” in terms of finding a physical object. Readers will quickly locate the root of this linguistic confusion, and they will likely take some humorous pleasure in it. Nevertheless, the anecdote does not offer Socrates as a target of derision or mockery. In the Islamic context, he is an exemplar of pre-Islamic wisdom and religiosity, so his “misunderstanding” is likely to be understood as a intentional didactic intervention.⁸⁰ Given the tradition of fool-speech in ‘Aṭṭār’s works, the audience expects to find wisdom articulated in unconventional forms; overly literal, unexpected, and seemingly simple-minded interpretations and dicta serve to engage readers, who are invited to contemplate odd paraenetic utterances for double meanings and hidden wisdom. Thus, in a general sense, the anecdote can be considered an attempt to indirectly draw readers into reflecting on the proper meaning of self-knowledge. More specifically, however, the anecdote provides a useful heuristic by concretizing the stakes of failure. According to Socrates, since he could not “find himself” in life, his body would not be found after death, and thus funeral arrangements are inconsequential. Although this logic is rooted in misunderstanding, there is a sense in which the ultimate conclusion is correct: if a connection to the divine is not activated during life, then a proper burial is of little

80. Alon, *Socrates in Mediaeval Arabic Literature*, 87-96.

importance. Socrates' odd response thus creatively guides readers towards reflection on the seriousness of the endeavor and its fleeting window of opportunity.

The anecdotes of this discourse all seek to convey the terror of death and thus impress upon the audience the importance of spiritual transformation in a rhetorically forceful manner. These would not have been unfamiliar themes for sufi reader-listeners; 'Aṭṭâr is not aiming to teach new concepts or inculcate novel attitudes, but rather to remind them of that which they already know, and thereby provoke the audience into renewing their commitment to a mystical mode of piety. 'Aṭṭâr's characters, bucking social norms with unexpected and uncompromising proclamations of piety, gesture towards the disruptive power of his own narratives, which likewise seek to break through the stagnant consciousness of his audience to clear a space for pious renewal. Their meta-linguistic and paronomastic plays, although humorous and entertaining, serve a didactic purpose, creatively transgressing ossified metaphors so as to re-energize them. They work together to guide their reader-listeners towards a revitalized cognizance of death and its ethical ramifications, and seek to thereby precipitate a "reconversion" to the sufi path.

Spiritual Manliness

For 'Aṭṭâr and other mystically minded poets, virtuous behavior and spiritual progress were highly gendered; broadly speaking, advanced spiritual rank and religious achievement were seen as somehow intrinsically masculine, whereas spiritual laxity was associated with femininity. For example, throughout 'Aṭṭâr's oeuvre, he repeatedly enjoins his addressee to "be a man" by moving forward on the spiritual path; this is a common refrain not only in the homiletic *masnavis*, but also in the *Choice Book* and the *Divân*, as in the following distich from one of his *ghazals*:

If you are of a feminine disposition, dally in the alley;
But if you are a man of the path, get to work!

ور مردِ رهی در آی درکار⁸¹

گر زن صفتی بکوی سر نه

The true man acts, setting out on the spiritual path with single-minded purpose. The woman, by contrast, dallies and delays, being fickle by nature and prone to distraction from the ultimate goal:

Take up the sword and don armor like the men;
You are not, after all, like a woman—leave aside the baubles!

نه‌ای آخر چو زن پیرایه بگذار⁸²

چو مردان جوشن و شمشیر بر گیر

The man plunges onwards with his sword, willing to sacrifice his life in martial activity, whereas the woman, given to self-satisfaction, is distracted by the instruments of her own beautification. To be sure, these verse are rhetorically motivated—‘Aṭṭâr seeks to cajole his readers (assumed to be male) to piety by underhandedly questioning their manhood—but the strategy nonetheless derives its rhetorical force from pre-existing cultural associations between masculinity, piety, strength, and commitment. These associations are pervasive throughout ‘Aṭṭâr’s works and Persian mystical literature more generally. In his *Memorial*, for example, the exemplars of the sufi path are collectively referred to as “the men of the path” (*mardân-e râh*) or just “the men.” This masculine gendering extends even to Râbe‘a, the sole woman to receive a biography in ‘Aṭṭâr’s *Memorial*; according to the preamble to her vita, she “cannot be considered a woman” because of her obvious spiritual gifts.⁸³

Our discussion here focuses on a discourse delivered by the hoopoe in response to an interlocutor who confesses his “effeminacy” in spiritual matters. More specifically, he confesses

81. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Divân-e ‘Aṭṭâr*, *ghazal* 398.

82. *Ibid.*, *ghazal* 395.

83. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 61. Also see the masculine gendering of Marḥûma, the spiritual heroine and protagonist of the longest tale in the *Elâhi-nâma*, 482-83.

that he cannot consistently maintain a pious mode of life; in his words, he suffers from the disposition of a *mokhannaṣ*. Biologically, the term *mokhannaṣ* refers to intersex individuals—those who possess ambiguous sex organs—but it was also metaphorically applied to men whose behavior was perceived as “weak” or “effeminate,” especially those who allowed themselves to be penetrated sexually.⁸⁴ In mystical works, the appellation usually denotes a person who is too weak, lazy, or distracted to progress along the spiritual path, as the fickle bird elaborates:⁸⁵

... I am of an effeminate disposition (*mokhannaṣ gowhar-am*);
 Every moment I'm a bird of a different branch.
 Sometimes a *rend*, sometimes an ascetic, sometimes a drunk,
 Sometimes this and not that, sometimes that and not this.
 Sometimes my *nafs* drags me into the tavern,
 Sometimes my spirit (*jân*) draws me into prayer.
 Sometimes a demon waylays me in a single moment,
 Sometimes an angel suddenly returns me to the path.
 I am trapped in between, confused;
 What should I do, captive in this pit and prison?

هر زمانی مرغ شاخ دیگرم
 گاه هست و نیست و گاهی نیست و هست
 گاه جانم در مناجات افکند
 گاه فرشته باره آرد ناگهم
 چون کنم در چاه و زندان مانده⁸⁶

دیگری گفتش مخنث گوهرم
 گاه رندم گاه زاهد گاه مست
 گاه نفسم در خرابات افکند
 گاه برد تا بنگرم دیو از رهم
 من میان هر دو حیران مانده

The bird vacillates between competing ways of life: occasionally an ascetic, other times an antinomian *rend*, and sometimes a drunk. He is unproductively and inextricably “caught in the middle.” He confesses that he is sometimes dragged to the tavern by his lower soul (*nafs*), other times propelled to supererogatory orisons by his spirit (*jân*). In other words, his person is torn between two competing aspects of human psychology, the lower soul that entices to evil and the higher spirit that represents the individual’s ontological connection to—and route of ascen-

84. *Loghat-nâma-ye Dehkhodâ*, s.v. “*mokhannaṣ*.”

85. Lewis, “Sexual Occidentation,” 694-5.

86. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1922-6.

sion towards—God. Sometimes waylaid by a demon, other times rescued by an angel, the bird is afflicted by constantly fluctuating inclinations towards impiety and differing modes of piety; he lacks focus and constancy in his effort to progress along the spiritual path.

In response, the hoopoe explains that this inconstancy is due to the overwhelming power of the *nafs*. This is a rather common problem, he reassures his interlocutor—a feminine disposition can be found to some extent in everyone—and there is hope for reform. Specifically, one must subdue the *nafs* and reduce its power in order to maintain a single-minded devotion towards God and pious life:

. . . This is a problem for everyone,
 Since there are not many single-minded (*yek şefat*) men.
 If everyone were pure from the beginning,
 What would be the purpose of the prophets' mission?
 Since you are devoted to obedience (*tâ'at*),
 You will eventually come to righteousness, even if slowly.
 Until the colt has spent its defiance,
 It won't easily or calmly submit,
 Your place is in the bakery of ignorance:
 All you desire is a round of bread!
 Cinnabar tears are the secrets of the heart;
 A full stomach is the rust of the heart.
 Since you continuously feed the dog of the soul,
 It produces nothing less than an effeminate disposition.

زانکه مردِ یک صفت نبود بسی
 انبیا را کی شدی بعثت درست
 با صلاح آیی به صد آهستگی
 تن فرو ندهد به آرام و خوشی
 گردهای مطلوبِ سر تا پای تو
 سیر خوردن چیست زنگار دل است
 کم نه آید از مخنث گوهری⁸⁷

گفت باری این بود در هر کسی
 گر همه کس پاک بودی از نخست
 چون بود در طاعتت دلبستگی
 تا که نکند کرّه عمری سرکشی
 ای تنورستانِ غفلت جای تو
 اشکِ چون شنگرف اسرار دل است
 چون تو دایم نفسِ سگ را پروری

This spiritual inconstancy results from the prodding of the *nafs*, embodied here in animal imagery. The reform of the *nafs* is likened to the breaking a colt: although the colt may resist—

87. Ibid., 1927-33.

this is to be expected—eventually, with time, its energy will wane, and it will then allow itself to be mounted.⁸⁸ Likewise, if one persists in obedience (*tâ‘at*) to the shariah, even if the *nafs* repeatedly leads one astray, its power will eventually weaken. The most effective means to subdue the *nafs*, however, seems to be supererogatory ascetic practice—particularly fasting. As we have seen, the heart is a mirror through which the light of God is manifested in the individual, and to function properly it must be burnished of rust through ascetic action. When one eats beyond the bare minimum, according to ‘Aṭṭâr, the mirror of the heart is obscured—“a full stomach is the rust of the heart,”—nourishing the *nafs* and leading to feminine fickleness, inconstancy, and self-pride. The hoopoe thus rebukes his addressee for setting his ambition solely on bread and residing in the “bakery of ignorance.” In addition to fasting, the reference to “cinnabar tears” also suggests the efficacy of weeping as a spiritual practice for subduing the *nafs*.⁸⁹

The hoopoe then launches into a series of parables and homilies that enjoin single-minded commitment to spiritual progress untainted by egoism or feminine self-pride. The cluster is composed of three stories: the first recounts how Shebli, a famous sufi of tenth-century Baghdad, took up residence in a “den of iniquity” (*mokhannaṣ-khâna*), despairing of any claim to be a “man.” The second anecdote relates how two sufis brought a dispute before a judge, who rebuked them for their “womanly” behavior. And the third tells of a dervish who boasts of being a lover, but whose love was less than total; he loses his head for his “feminine” posing. Together, the stories and their accompanying homilies illustrate some of the varied ways that the injunction to single-minded spiritual manliness can be elaborated and enacted.

88. The metaphor implies that the *nafs* is not to be destroyed, but contained and trained. See the discourse on this subject in Dâya, *Merṣâd al-‘ebâd*, 178-83.

89. William Chittick, “Weeping in Classical Islam,” in *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination*, ed. Kimberly Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

The first story centers on Shebli, a well-known sufi hero who figures prominently in ‘Aṭṭār’s oeuvre.⁹⁰ According to this particular anecdote, one day Shebli disappears from his usual Baghdad haunts—presumably the mosque—and no one knows where he has gone. The people search for him, and someone eventually finds him weeping in a *mokhannaṣ-khâna*—likely a house of male prostitution.⁹¹ A surprised questioner asks Shebli what could possibly have brought him, “the enlightened seeker of secrets,” to such a place. In response, Shebli confesses his own spiritual laxity. Because he is a *mokhannaṣ* on the path of God, he claims, his rightful place is in the *mokhannaṣ-khâna*:

This is a debauched group.
In the way of the world, they are neither men nor women.
And I am like them, except in the way of religion.
Neither a man nor a woman in religion; how much of this!
I am lost in my own lack of manly chivalry (*nâ-javâwardi*),
And I am ashamed of my manliness.

در ره دنیا نه مرد و نه زنی	گفت این قوم اند چون تردامنی
نه زنی در دین نه مردی چند ازین	من چو ایشانم ولی در راه دین
شرم می دارم من از مردی خویش ⁹²	گم شدم در ناجوامردی خویش

This anecdote, like many others, builds towards a climactic destabilization that clears a space for rethinking well-worn spiritual attitudes. Shebli, of course, is the very definition of a “man of the path,” not only in the minds of his students and disciples, but also for ‘Aṭṭār and his readers. Yet, according to this anecdote, he was so ashamed of his own piety, or lack thereof, that he took up residence in a *mokhannaṣ-khâna*, among those who are “neither man nor woman in the way of the world.” As Shebli explains in the *Memorial*’s prose version of the story,

90. Richard Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), 1:513-665. Shebli features in a number of stories in ‘Aṭṭār’s *maṣnavi*s; for a list, see Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 810. The chapter devoted to Shebli in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Memorial*, however, may be spurious. See Estelami, intro. to *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, xxxvi-xxxvii.

91. Sirus Shamsî, *Shâhed-bâzi dar adabiyât-e fârsi* (Tehran: Ferdows, 1381 [2002-3]), 93-4, 227-9.

92. ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭeq al-tayr*, 1938-40.

This is where I belong, since just as they [the inhabitants of the *mokhannaṣ-khâna*] are neither men nor women in the ways of the world, I am neither a man nor a woman in religion; thus, this is my place.

جای من این است که چنان که ایشان نه مردند و نه زن در دنیا من نیز نه مردم و نه زن در دین
پس جای من این است.⁹³

This is a rhetorically motivated performance, meant to shock his disciples; a definite Malâmati streak informs Shebli's actions.⁹⁴ Paradoxically, Shebli proves his spiritual worth by proclaiming his own spiritual bankruptcy. Because he eschewed the praise of others and was cognizant of his own spiritual inconstancy, 'Aṭṭâr presents him as a pious exemplar worthy of veneration. He is a true "man" precisely because he is ashamed of his own "manliness."⁹⁵

In the *Memorial*, the anecdote stands on its own as a testament to Shebli's sincerity and freedom from hypocritical pride. In the *Conference of the Birds*, however, Shebli is explicitly presented as a paradigmatic model for emulation. Not that 'Aṭṭâr's audience ought to take up residency in a *mokhannaṣ-khâna*, of course, but they should remain watchful for any sign of feminine self-aggrandizement or egotistical hypocrisy in their piety. The homily that follows the anecdote opens with an exhortation to dispose of any egotistical attachment to one's beard—that dual sign of masculinity and religiosity:

Whoever realized his own soul,
Used his beard for a napkin at the feast of the way.
Like the men (*mardân*), he chose his own debasement;
He has scattered his honor on the masters.
If you see yourself, even a hair's breadth,
You are worse for yourself than an idol.
If praise and blame make any difference to you,
Then you are an idolator who fashions idols.

93. 'Aṭṭâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 548.

94. Although this anecdote puts a Malâmati spin on Shebli's actions, he was not associated with the historical Malâmatiya in Khorâsân. See the discussion in Chapter 2, p. 107.

95. Cf. the story of al-Ḥiri, who claims to be too spiritually wayward to effectively preach, Chapter 3, p. 136.

ریشِ خود دستارِ خوانِ راه کرد
 کرد بر استادگان عزّت نثار
 خویشتن را از بتی باشی بتر
 بتگری باشی که او بت می کند⁹⁶

هر که جانِ خویش را آگاه کرد
 همچو مردانِ ذلّ خود کرد اختیار
 گر تو بیش آیی به مویی در نظر
 مدح و ذمّت گر تفاوت می کند

According to the homily, true men attend to their own “debasement” in Malâmati fashion, scattering any pretense of honour before the “masters”—the exemplary men of the path like Shebli, to whom ‘Aṭṭâr is wont to compare himself and find himself wanting. Any consideration of the self in pious action constitutes a form of idolatry, as when religious practice is motivated by the approbation or opprobrium of others. Shebli, by contrast, is presented as a paragon of selfless, manly spirituality: he rejected his contemporaries’ praise and demonstrated his own low opinion of himself by taking up residence in a *mokhannas-khâna*, where he confessed himself to be a “neither a man nor a woman in the way of religion.” Because he refused to acknowledge his own manliness, he became a model of sincerity, and ‘Aṭṭâr’s reader-listeners are invited to scrutinize their own motivations and self-idolizations against his pious example: if Shebli, the universally venerated spiritual hero, believed that his place was in a *mokhannas-khâna*, then where might ordinary believers belong?

In light of the above, it should be clear that ‘Aṭṭâr was not calling for tolerance or diversity for its own sake, as has occasionally been suggested.⁹⁷ Shebli does not enter the *mokhannas-khâna* to elevate its residents but to debase himself, thereby demonstrating his piety’s freedom from hypocrisy. The narrative’s didacticism therefore depends upon—and re-inscribes—a particularly negative understanding of those who are “neither men nor women in the way of the world.” The anecdote’s function is to celebrate Shebli’s Malâmati tendencies and admonish

96. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1941-4.

97. Kermani, *Terror of God*, 61-2. Cf. Yaghoobi, “Diverse Voices.”

reader-listeners against taking pride in piety, not to suggest that the residents of the *mokhannas-khâna* are intrinsically worthy of respect.

The imagery of idolatry continues in the second half of the homily where it is contrasted with servanthood, which is presented as a critical component of spiritual manliness:

If you are a servant (*banda*) of God, don't be a fashioner of idols!
 If you are a man of the divine, don't be an Âzar!⁹⁸
 It's not possible, among either the elect or the masses,
 To attain a higher station than that of servanthood (*bandegi*).
 Be a servant (*bandegi kon*) and don't seek conflict (*da'vâ*),
 Become a man of the truth, don't seek glory from 'Ozzâ!⁹⁹
 Since you have a hundred idols under your cloak (*dalq*),
 How can you present yourself to the people as a sufi?

<p>ور تو مردِ ایزدی آزر مباحش از مقام بندگی برتر مقام مردِ حق شو عزّت از عِزّی مجوی چون نمایی خویش را صوفی به خلق¹⁰⁰</p>	<p>گر تو حق را بنده‌ای بتگر مباحش نیست ممکن درمیان خاص و عام بندگی کن بیش ازین دعوی مجوی چون تو را صد بت بود در زیرِ دلّ</p>
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The homily is structured around a set of oppositions in which servanthood and submission are associated with manliness, while conflict, self-assertion, and idolatry are associated with effeminacy. Significantly, the addressee is castigated not just for being an idol-worshipper, but a fashioner of idols, and thus compared to Âzar, Abraham's father and a sculptor of graven images. More specifically, the addressee is rebuked for fashioning an idol out of the self—when piety is motivated by pride and self-aggrandizement, instead of sincere devotion to God, then “you are worse for yourself than an idol,” and “a hundred idols [are] under your [sufi] cloak.” For 'Aṭṭâr, an idolatry of self is also associated with conflict or strife (*da'vâ*), which he admonishes his readers to avoid; the term also carries the specific meaning of “lawsuit,” which alludes

98. According to Quran 6:74, Âzar was the father of Abraham and an idol worshipper—later tradition makes him a sculptor of idols as well.

99. 'Ozzâ was one of the chief goddesses of pre-Islamic Arabian paganism.

100. 'Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1945-8.

to the subsequent anecdote and may explain its rather forced presence here. Nevertheless, ‘Attâr’s point seems to be that an aggressive posture involves a measure of self-assertion, and thus constitutes a form of self-idolatry. In contrast to such self-assertion, he exhorts his audience to relinquish their agency, and even their very selves, to the divine. Servanthood (*bandegi*) is the mark of the true men who are worthy of the sufi cloak; those who aggrandize themselves are idolators, worshippers of the false goddess ‘Ozzá, and spiritual *mokhannaş*.

The homily easily transitions into the discourse’s next anecdote, which also emphasizes themes of hypocrisy and manliness, along with the signifying power of clothing. It recounts how two sufis, “wearers of patched frocks” (*moraqqa’-push*), brought a dispute before a judge. Like many of ‘Attâr’s anecdotes, it narrates what would presumably have been a common situation, although the exact nature of the sufis’ dispute is never specified. Instead of issuing a ruling, however, the judge excoriates the sufis for their animosity and spiritual weakness. Bringing a legal claim, according to his rebuke, is antithetical to the spiritual ethos to which these so-called sufis pretend:

The judge pulled them aside.
 He said: “Sufis ought not to stir up conflict.
 You have taken your cloak of submission (*jâma-ye taslim*),
 So why have you taken up this antagonism (*khoşumat*)?
 If you are people of conflict and rancor,
 Take these clothes (*lebâs*) off at once!
 And if you are people of these cloaks (*jâma*),
 Then you have entered into enmity (*khoşumat*) out of ignorance.
 I am a judge, and not a man of meaning,
 But I have shame before those cloaks (*moraqqa’*)!
 For both of you, wearing women’s veils (*meqna’*),
 Would be better than wearing wearing patched frocks (*moraqqa’*) like this!”

گفت صوفی خوش نباشد جنگ‌ساز
 این خصومت از چه در سر کرده‌اید
 این لباس از سر براندازید هین
 در خصومت از سر جهل آمدید

قاضی ایشان را به کنجی برد باز
 جامه تسلیم در بر کرده‌اید
 گر شما هستنید اهل جنگ و کین
 و شما این جامه را اهل آمدید

زین مرقع شرم می دارم قوی
به بود زینسان مرقع داشتن¹⁰¹

من که قاضی‌ام نه مرد معنوی
هر دو را بر فرق مقنع داشتن

The anecdote opposes the “submission” (*taslim*) expected of sufis with the acrimonious behavior of these two, described in a network of terms including “antagonism” (*khoşumat*), “treachery” (*jafâ*), “conflict” (*jang*), and “rancor” (*kin*). Aggressive posturing, when motivated by selfish desires, is incompatible with the sufistic goal of complete submission to the divine will; the judge thus rebukes these two sufis for failing to live up to their ideals. His critique focuses especially on the hypocritical discrepancy between their actions and their mode of dress, through which they insincerely claim to be practitioners of sufism. Their patched frocks mark them as individuals who eschew self-aggrandizement as servants of God, an ethos belied by their dispute. The judge’s emphasis on dress and clothing is, in turn, highly gendered. The sufi cloak (*moraqqaʿ*) is, according to him, a “robe of submission” and thus the provenance of the “men of meaning.” Because the sufis fail to live up to the ideals it signifies, he calls on them to remove their cloaks; to add further sting, he suggests headscarfs (*meqnaʿ*) would more accurately reflect their shamefully effeminate behavior.

The insult is didactically calculated to instigate spiritual reform—not only in the two sufis, whose reaction to this dressing-down is left un-narrated—but in ‘Aṭṭâr’s reader-listeners, who must be considered the didactic targets of the anecdote as a whole. Most reader-listeners probably identified with these sufis, not only because they too likely aspired to sufistic forms of piety, but also because they occupy an analogous position on the receiving end of ‘Aṭṭâr’s own paraenetic discourse. Indeed, as I have argued in the previous chapter, there is a sense in which the text’s reader-listeners, the hoopoe’s audience, and the recipients of myriad harangues in

101. Ibid., 1951-6.

the various anecdotes—like these two would-be sufis—all elide as targets of didactic speech.¹⁰²

And in the transitional line at the close of the previous homily, ‘Attâr foreshadows the judge’s rebuke by directly castigating his reader-listeners for spiritual laxity in similar terms:

O *mokhannaṣ*, don’t wear the clothes (*jâma*) of men;
Don’t confuse yourself more than this.

حویش را زین بیش سرگردان مدار¹⁰³

ای مخنث جامه مردان مدار

‘Attâr assumes his audience to be male and resistant to any effort to undermine that privileged position; the charge of effeminacy is intended to sting, and thus spur reader-listeners to reaffirm their masculinity by rededicating themselves to the sufi path.¹⁰⁴ Didacticism proceeds not only through rational argumentation, but also appeals to emotion and pride, and gendered insults were apparently understood as a particularly effective paraenetic tactic.

The judge’s rebuke also recalls sufism’s emphasis on fraternity (*fotovvat/javanmardi*), a social virtue that took many forms, but which was generally interpreted by the sufism of ‘Attâr’s day as encompassing generosity, etiquette, and group loyalty.¹⁰⁵ As sufi corporate groups coalesced over the course of the eleventh century, such attributes were highly encouraged. At Abu Sa‘id’s *khânaqâh*, for instance, all meals were to be taken in common, and food was to be shared among the resident dervishes and any poor or needy who would join them.¹⁰⁶ Hojviri relates how he received a poor reception at a *khânaqâh* while traveling despite wearing

102. Chapter 3, 185-194.

103. ‘Attâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1949.

104. Lewis, “Sexual Occidentation,” 694-5.

105. C. Cahen and F. Taeschner, “Futuwwa,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0228; Mohsen Zakeri, “Javānmardi,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 13 April 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/javanmardi>; Lloyd Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism: A History of Sufi-Futuwwat in Iran* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2010), 28-60; Muhammad Jafar Mahjub, “Chivalry and Early Persian Sufism,” in Lewisohn, *Classical Persian Sufism*, 549-81.

106. Ebn Monavvar, *Asrâr al-towḥid*, 1:317.

a sufi cloak; he makes it clear that he considered this a grave violation of social norms.¹⁰⁷ According to Abū Najīb Suhrawardī, the novice is obliged to “serve his brothers and companions, secure provisions for them, bear their abuse, and refrain from rebuking them unless they transgress the law.”¹⁰⁸ Qushayrī writes that “if the aspirant’s duty is service to the dervishes, he should bear their harshness with patience.”¹⁰⁹ The judge’s condemnation of the two sufis’ antagonism echoes such attitudes; those who choose the sufi path are expected to be generous and selfless, especially with each other.

Following the anecdote of the two litigious sufis, reader-listeners encounter one final anecdote-homily pair, which extends the notion of manly sincerity to the love of God. The introductory homily again focuses on *da‘vā/da‘vi*, which here signifies not conflict or lawsuit, but pretension, insincerity, and vain boast.¹¹⁰ Love, according to the homily, demands a full commitment: the true man welcomes love’s pains and travails, and gladly lays down his life for his beloved. Those who love insincerely or inconstantly, however, will perish; such pretenders cannot be reckoned true men:

Because you are neither man nor woman in the work of love,
How can you ever solve love’s secrets?
If you are afflicted with the secret of the way of love,
Out of affliction, remove the horse-barding (*bargostovân*).
If you go onto this battlefield (*maydân*) in pretension (*da‘vi*),
You will lose your head and your soul.
Don’t raise your head up so much in pretension (*da‘vi*),
Lest you be cast down in ignominy.

کی توانی کرد حل اسرار عشق
برفکن برگستوانی از بلا

چون تو نه مردی نه زن در کارِ عشق
گر به سرِّ راهِ عشقی مبتلا

107. Hojviri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 94.

108. Abū Najīb Suhrawardī, *Ādāb al-murīdīn*, ed. Menahem Milson (Jerusalem: Institute of Asian and African Studies, Hebrew University, 1978), 35.

109. Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-qushayriyya*, 2:749.

110. Şāremi, *Moşṭalahât*, s.v. “*da‘vi*.”

سر دهی بر باد و ترکِ جان کنی
تا به رسوایی نمائی باز تو¹¹¹

گر به دعوی عزمِ این میدان کنی
سر به دعوی بیش ازین مفراز تو

The sermon is infused with martial imagery and continues the gendered opposition between masculine spiritual strength and effeminate spiritual weakness. It opens with the familiar rebuke of the addressee as one who is “neither man nor woman in the work of love.” The charge of effeminacy again carries notions of waffling, insincerity, and half-hearted commitment. The manly lover removes the barding from his mount before entering onto the love’s battlefield; he welcomes catastrophe and pain in love’s way, expecting death. Despite his willingness to die, it is not the true lover who perishes on love’s battlefield, but the false lover who enters the arena with specious boasts and pretensions.

This conception of sincere love is not only illustrated in the following anecdote, but concretized in a such a way to show its radical demands, upending readers’ previous understandings of sincerity and demonstrating the inadequacy of their love of God. The anecdote opens by explaining that a pauper (*mofles*) once fell in love with the king of Egypt; for any competent reader, this already suggests a specific allegorical mapping, in which the king stands in for God, and the pauper for the human mystic. As discussed previously, God is often represented as a king on the basis of his complete power over the universe; the beggar, on the other hand, is marked by impoverishment and impotence, and represents human dependency and weakness vis-à-vis the divine. The anecdote reinscribes these well known associations—as well as the trope of the beggar falling in love with the king—but its real conceptual work lies in its abbreviated but dramatically charged allegorical plot.

In short, when the king learns of the pauper’s passion for him, he summons that “misled lover” (*‘âsheq-e gomrâh*) and delivers the following ultimatum:

111. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, 1957-60.

... Since you are a lover of the sovereign,
 You now must choose between two options.
 Either commit to leave this city and this country,
 Or, out of love for me, choose to lose your head!
 I've told you what's in store, now quickly,
 What will it be, death or exile?

از دو کار اکنون یکی کن اختیار
 یا نه در عشقم به ترکِ سر بگویی
 سر بریدن خواهی یا آوارگی¹¹²

گفت چون عاشق شدی بر شهریار
 یا به ترکِ شهر وین کشور بگویی
 با تو گفتم کارِ تو یکبارگی

Faced with this choice, the pauper chooses exile over death, since he was not, according to 'Atṭâr, "a man for the task" (*mard-e kâr*). When the pauper begins to depart, however, the king suddenly orders his head to be struck off. A chamberlain, who, like the audience, seeks to make sense of this seemingly capricious reversal, gives voice to our surprise:

A chamberlain said, "he is innocent;
 Why would the king order his destruction?"

از چه سر بریدنش فرمود شاه¹¹³

حاجبی گفتا که هست او بی گناه

Indeed, the poor pauper seems to have committed no transgression beyond loving the king, and the latter had offered him exile instead of death: what then is the reason for this brutal treatment? In response to the inquiring chamberlain, the king explains that the beggar was an insincere pretender to love:

... "Because he was no lover;
 He was not sincere (*ṣâdeq*) in the path of loving me.
 If he really were a man for the task (*mard-e kâr*),
 Certainly he would have chosen to have his head cut off.
 For whoever values his head more than his beloved,
 Is deficient in his loving.
 If he had chosen to lose his head,
 He would have risen up the sovereign of a kingdom."
 (If he would have girded his loins in front of him,
 The Caesar of the World would have become his beggar.)
 "But because he was a poser (*da'vi-dâr*) in love,

112. Ibid., 1963-5.

113. Ibid., 1968.

He certainly deserved his speedy decapitation.
 Whoever, in separation from me, minds his own head,
 Is a pretender (*moddaʿi*) and sullied.
 I've commanded this so those who lack illumination,
 Might not boast so much of false love."

شاه گفتا زان که او عاشق نبود	در طریقِ عشقِ من صادق نبود
گر چنان بودی که بودی مردِ کار	سر بریدن کردی اینجا اختیار
هر که سر بر وی به از جانان بود	عشق ورزیدن برو تاوان بود
گر ز من او سر بریدن خواستی	شهریار از مملکت بر خاستی
بر میان بستی کمر در پیش او	خسرو عالم شدی درویش او
لیک چون در عشق دعوی دار بود	سر بریدن سازدش نهمار زود
هر که در هجرم سرِ سر دارد او	مدعیست و دامنِ تر دارد او
این بدان گفتم که تا هر بی فروغ	کم زند در عشقِ ما لافِ دروغ ¹¹⁴

By choosing his own life, the pauper demonstrated that he was no lover. His love was not sincere (*ṣâdeq*): he was a pretender (*moddaʿi*), a poser (*daʿvi-dâr*), and boasted of a false love (*lâf-e dorugh*). But if the pauper had willingly chosen death, "girded his loins" for love (again with the martial/masculine terminology) and chosen to lose his head, he would have become "sovereign of the kingdom" and the king his "beggar." A true, sincere love demands submission to death at the hands of the beloved.

The anecdote concretizes the homily, demonstrating what a "man for the task of love" might look like—and what the consequences of insincerity might be—on the field of human action. The generalities of the homily thus take on an immediacy that was not previously felt. Its final injunction, "Don't raise your head up so much in pretension / Lest you be cast down in ignominy," takes on new meaning in the context of the pauper's beheading, as does the verse "If you go onto this battlefield in pretension / You will lose your head and your soul." Given that a virtue like sincerity only exists in the context of human attitude and action, a concrete—albeit mythological and allegorized—exemplum is perhaps phenomenologically more appropriate

114. Ibid., 1969-76.

than a generalized homily; in any case, the story certainly clarifies the radical demands of such a love.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the anecdote sets the the reader-listener up to be surprised by the king's sudden reversal, and thus proves that he or she has not "gotten the point" of the previous homily. Like the surprised chamberlain, the audience is cued to be shocked and mystified, and it is only when the king explains his actions that the implications of the previous homily fall into place. The anecdote thus disrupts the audience's previous understandings of sincerity and love, suggesting they are inadequate, self motivated, and fundamentally hypocritical. It not only cautions the audience—don't boast lightly of love!—but upends their spiritual paradigms and notions of self-worth, thereby opening a space for a new or renewed commitment to a manly, selfless love of God.

The three discourses discussed in this chapter are only a small portion of the poem's total content, but they are typical of the heuristic homiletics that 'Aṭṭâr deploys throughout his *maṣnavis*. Although often approached in isolation, the anecdotes and accompanying exhortations comprise larger structures linked by thematic concerns, formal parallelisms, and explicit transitions, as well as their narratological status as unitary homilies delivered by the hoopoe. Their structuring is not particularly tight—they retain the paratactic, degressive quality of an oral discourse—but analyzing them *in toto* is critical for understanding 'Aṭṭâr's thematics and homiletics. These are not systematic treatises of dogma or comprehensive rules for praxis, but collections of illustrative models and heuristic rules of thumb. By approaching the anecdotes and exhortations as a set of mutual informing signposts to the pious life—none of which can claim unqualified precedence over the others—the reader-listener can triangulate his or her own spiritual state and guide future action. Given their flexible, ad hoc nature, these discourses

115. Kirkwood, "Metaphors and Examples," 432-3.

can comfortably encompass a wide variety of sufi attitudes and beliefs on particular topics, and these attitudes and beliefs are not only presented to the audience, but urged upon them. The *Conference of the Birds* is more than a source of information: it is a perlocutionary attempt to elicit a recommitment to mystical piety.

Chapter V

Reading Allegory as Symbolic Ascent

In the previous chapter, we saw how the *Conference of the Birds*' anecdotes and exhortations perform a perlocutionary function, calling the poem's reader-listeners to a life of piety. According to this understanding of homiletic communication, illustrative stories and direct admonishments manipulate the audience's values and aspirations, so that repeated encounters with the text result in altered attitudes and behaviors, ideally leading to a more pious way of life. In this respect, the poem fulfills a larger religious aim outside of the aesthetic experience of the literary encounter. In the present chapter, by contrast, we will examine how the literary encounter itself constitutes a meaningful spiritual performance. More specifically, we will show how a committed reader's forward progress through the *Book of Affliction* is conceptualized as a symbolic traversal of the sufi path.

Like the frame-tales of the *Divine Book* and the *Conference of the Birds*, the frame-tale of the *Book of Affliction* is a mystical allegory: its characters and plot points are mapped onto an archetypal spiritual journey, and 'Aṭṭār thereby explicates certain aspects of sufi praxis, ontology, and psychology.¹ The poem recounts the cosmic journey of a sufi adept (*sâlek*) who, seeking a cure for his spiritual pain, travels from the outer reaches of the cosmos into his own soul where he is effaced in God. This visionary journey is reminiscent of the Prophet's own ascent (*me'arâj*), but instead of traveling externally upward and outward, the adept moves down-

1. On allegory as a general literary mode in the European context, see Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964); Michael Murrin, *The Veil of Allegory: Some Notes Toward a Theory of Allegorical Rhetoric in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 89-92. On Islamicate allegory, see Peter Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna (Ibn Sînâ): With a Translation of the Book of the Prophet Muhammad's Ascent to Heaven* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Peter Heath, "Allegory in Islamic Literatures," in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

wards and into himself. The narrative thus encodes certain metaphysical and psychological theories according to which human beings are internally linked to the divine through the soul or heart. The adept's forty-part journey is also mapped onto the sufi practice of a forty-day ritual retreat (*chella*), which itself functions as a sort of synecdoche of the sufi path (*ṭariqa*): the frame-tale thus presents a paradigm of sufi spiritual progress, conceived of as a progressive, inward journey towards God. The little work that has been done on the *Book of Affliction* tends to be concerned primarily with these aspects of the poem: it aims to elucidate allegorical mappings and thereby explicate the poem's underlying metaphysics and psychology.²

But in addition to being mapped onto the archetypal sufi journey, the adept's quest is also reflexively projected onto an imagined reader-listener's progress through the text. In an authorial commentary at the beginning of the work, 'Aṭṭâr suggests that his audience's experience of the poem, if not exactly identical with that of the poem's protagonist, parallels it in important ways. If this is so, then the poem not only informs its audience, but becomes what Kenneth Burke would call a form of "symbolic action."³ It provides its readers with a script so that they can enact, through the literary encounter, a particular vision of mystical piety. This may help guide them in the future, but the performance is also valuable in and of itself—the literary text, in Burke's estimation, provides audiences a way to work through inner attitudes in the "symbolic" realm of linguistic signification. By reading, they vicariously tread the archetypal sufi path and participate in the adept's transformation, reaffirming their own commitment to spiritual progress and shaping themselves in his image.

2. Purnâmdârîân, "Negâhi be dâstân-pardâzi-ye 'Aṭṭâr"; Baldick, "Medieval *Şūfî* Literature," 121-3. Also see Kermani's *Terror of God*, which focuses more on the embedded anecdotes than the allegorical frame-tale.

3. Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 1-12.

In the present chapter, we will first examine how the poem allegorically encodes its particular conception of spiritual progress; then, drawing on authorial commentary, implied metaphorical mappings, and the unique formal features of the frame-tale, we will show how this conception of spiritual progress is symbolically enacted by committed reader-listeners as they work their way through the poem. In doing so, we hope to show that the *Book of Affliction* functions as a site of spiritual transformation not only by virtue of its perlocutionary power, but also because of the symbolic significance accorded to the literary encounter itself.

The Adept's Ascent

The poem's protagonist is a sufi adept afflicted by an acute psychic pain, brought on by his cognizance of ontological separation from the divine. The narrative commences with a description of his gestation and birth in which special attention is paid to the raw biological materials of the body as emblems of mortality, suffering, and moral failing. This description is intended as an allegorical comment on the spiritual situation of all human beings, and its significance is not limited to the adept as a specific individual:

In three darknesses, a drop—no heart, no religion—
Emerged from the muck and the polluted fluid (*mâ'-e mahin*).⁴
First, it became round, like a ball,
So it could spin in confusion.
In the middle of blood, for nine whole months,
It made the blood of the womb its food.
Finally something shined on it—don't ask!
This is the body I've told you about; don't ask about the soul (*jân*)!
Head first, it tumbled from the womb,
Landing like a clod of earth in a pool of blood.
Polluted fluid began this affair,
Meaning don't hope for much purity!
In three darknesses it moved and sat,
Meaning the light will not reach you!

4. Allusions to Quran 39:6, "He creates you in the wombs of your mothers, one after another, in three darknesses," and 77:20, "Did we not create you out of a polluted fluid?"

It grew accustomed to being round, like a ball,
 Meaning spin your head, like a ball, in confusion!
 Over nine months its body formed from blood,
 Meaning everything starts with affliction [lit. eating blood]!
 It came head first into the world, drenched in blood,
 Meaning make a foot of your head, inverted!

...
 After that, unstable, it entered childhood,
 Meaning don't expect anything from children!
 He entered youth as a stranger,
 Meaning this is just a type of madness!
 After that, his intellect was destroyed by old age,
 Meaning don't seek fortune from a dotard!
 After that, ignorant, he went below the ground,
 Meaning he didn't catch a whiff of the pure soul (*jân*)!
 Whoever, in such twisted bonds,
 Doesn't find the soul again, dies into nothing!

از لوشن شد جمع و ز ماء مهین
 تا کند سرگشتگی بر خود درست
 ساخت از خون رحم خود را طعام
 جسم این بودت که گفتم جان می‌پرس
 همچو خاکی در میان خون فتاد
 یعنی او مید چنان پاکی مدار
 یعنی آن نورت نخواهد داد دست
 یعنی از سرگشتگی چون گوی گرد
 یعنی از خون خوردن آغاز افتاد
 یعنی از فرقت قدم کن سرنگون

...
 یعنی از طفلان نیاید هیچ کار
 یعنی این شاخی‌ست از دیوانگی
 یعنی از مرد خرف دولت خواه
 یعنی او بویی نیافت از جان پاک
 جان نیابد باز میرد هیچ هیچ⁵

در سه ظلمت نطفه‌ای نه دل نه دین
 گرد گشت آنگاه چون گویی نخست
 در میان خون به نه ماه تمام
 عاقبت چیزی برو تافت آن می‌پرس
 سرنگون‌سار از رحم بیرون فتاد
 شد پدید آب مهین آغاز کار
 در سه ظلمت می دوید و می نشست
 همچو گویی گرد بودن خوی کرد
 نه مه اندر خون تنش باز افتاد
 سرنگون آمد به دنیا غرق خون

...
 بعد از آن در شد به طفلی بی‌قرار
 در جوانی رفت از بیگانگی
 بعد از آن عقلش شد از پیری تباه
 بعد از آن غافل فرو شد زیر خاک
 هر که او در قید چندین پیچ پیچ

The passage traces the various stages of human life from birth through old age and death, each one of which is characterized as a further elaboration of suffering, misunderstanding, and pain. Suffering is thus an essential characteristic of human existence, found in every stage of life

5. 'Atṭār, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 922-38.

from the moment of conception onwards. Life begins with pollution, a mingling of blood and seminal fluid that gives rise to the undifferentiated fleshly mass of the human embryo. The materiality and pain of gestation and birth are emblematic of life as a whole: the fetus is generated from polluted fluid, rendering true purity unreachable; the darkness of the womb presages the darkness of human life; and the newborn emerges from the womb bloody and inverted, inaugurating an existence of confusion and pain. Such poetic syllogisms are not just creative descriptions of a specific individual's state, but prescriptive "proof" of, and injunctions for, certain attitudes towards human life, and they therefore often conclude not just with indicative statements, but direct, second-person admonishments to 'Aṭṭâr's addressee.

The situation is not entirely hopeless, however; the soul (*jân*), which according to 'Aṭṭâr "shined" on the embryo during gestation, provides a potential route of salvation. 'Aṭṭâr seems almost reluctant to speak about the soul at first ("Don't ask about the soul!"), as if the glimmer of hope it presents might be a mirage and the resulting disappointment too much to bear. Nevertheless, after overviewing the stages of human development, he suggests that attaining to the soul is the solution to the adept's archetypal existential suffering, but he cautions that this is itself a painful, difficult path:

If you haven't found the far-thinking soul,
How can you call yourself a man (*mardom*)?
A man is not a drop of dirt and water,
A man is a holy secret and pure soul (*jân*).
Why would a hundred worlds full of angels,
Ever prostrate before a drop?
Doesn't the desire tear at you, you clump of dirt,
That your clump of dirt would become pure soul?
But for one to find proximity of the soul from a drop,
One must experience much pain, without a cure.
Confusion is the way out of this difficulty,
The incurable is the medicine for this pain.
From the beginnings of a drop to this stage,
Look how much road lies ahead!

Any heart that fulfills this quest (*ṭalab*),
Will be knocked-out drunk until the resurrection.

کی توانی خواند مردم خویش را
هست مردم سرّ قدس و جان پاک
نطفه‌ای را کی کنند آخر سجود
تا شود این مشّت خاکت جان پاک
درد باید برد بی‌درمان بسی
داروی این درد بی‌درمانی است
در نگر تا چند در پیش است راه
تا قیامت مست لایعقل بود⁶

تا نیابی جان دور اندیش را
نیست مردم نطفه‌ای از آب و خاک
صد جهان پر فرشته در وجود
آرزو می‌نگذدت ای مشّت خاک
تا ز نطفه قرب جان یابد کسی
چاره این کار سرگردانی است
ز ابتدای نطفه تا این جایگاه
هردلی را کاین طلب حاصل بود

According to ‘Atṭār, the angels would have never bowed down to Adam if he were really nothing more than a drop of sperm: the essence of a human being is not to be found in the physical body, but in the pure soul that transcends the material. While everyone “has” a soul—it is the organizing principle and animating force of the body—it nevertheless remains deficient in most individuals, with its promise of transcendence only a latent possibility. In this sense, the soul is not just a metaphysical fact, but a state of being that must be *achieved*. Anyone who does not “catch a whiff” of the soul, ‘Atṭār explains, “dies into nothing.” Attaining to the soul is a long road full of pain and suffering, but it represents the final cause of human existence: “If you haven’t found the far-thinking soul / How can you call yourself a man (*mardom*)?”

Thus begins the adept’s cosmic journey, undertaken beneath the watchful eye of his spiritual guide, to “reconnect” with the transcendent soul—even though he does not yet seem to consciously realize that this is his ultimate destination. Seeking a cure for his pain, he implores forty beings from different levels of creation for help, but they all turn him away empty-handed. After each encounter, he returns to his guide who briefly comments on that particular interlocutor’s metaphorical station and launches into a homiletic discourse on a related theme, much like the hoopoe in the *Conference of the Birds*.

6. Ibid., 939-46.

Table 4: *The Adept's Itinerary and the Guide's Discourses*⁷

<i>Interlocutor</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Interlocutor</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Gabriel	The Name of God	Inanimates	Death's Inevitability, Seize the Moment
Esrâfil	Bewilderment	Plants	Fools' Impudence with God
Michael	Mercy and Sustenance	Wild Animals	Everything is from God
‘Azrâ’il	Death	Birds	Contentment and Spiritual Fortune
Bearers of the Throne	Human Superiority over Angels	Tame Animals	The Carnal Soul (<i>nafs</i>)
Throne	Compassion	The Devil	The Devil's Relationship to God
Footstool	Justice (‘ <i>adl</i>), Worldly Power	Jinn	Fools' Impudence Excused
Tablet	Predestination	A Human	God and the Human Soul
Pen	Sincerity in Striving (<i>ṭalab</i>)	Adam	Union
Paradise	Beatific Vision	Noah	Pain and Affliction
Hell	Condemnation of the World	Abraham	Intimacy (<i>khellat</i>) with God
Sky	Pain in Striving	Moses	All-Consuming Love (‘ <i>eshq</i>)
Sun	Spiritual Ambition (<i>ḥemmat</i>)	David	Loving Friendship (<i>mavaddat</i>)
Moon	Weakness in Love	Jesus	Kindness and Mercy
Fire	Wealth and Power	Muhammad	Spiritual Poverty (<i>faqr</i>)
Wind	Temporality of the World	Sense	Multiplicity
Water	Impurity, the Carnal Soul (<i>nafs</i>)	Imagination	Love and Union
Earth	Humility and Forbearance	Intellect	Reason's Limitations
Mountain	Seeking God in Truth (<i>ḥaqiqat</i>)	Heart	Heart as Isthmus to the Soul, Love
Ocean	Moderation, Effacement in Love	Spirit	Inward Turn; Effacement (<i>fanâ</i>) in God

7. Also see the summaries in Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 18-30; Foruzânfâr, *Sharḥ-e aḥvâl-e ‘Aṭṭâr*, 321-409.

His first interlocutors are the archangels—Gabriel, Michael, Esrâfil, and ‘Azrâ’il—often identified with the intelligences of neoplatonic ontology;⁸ he then journeys to other metaphysically elevated entities, like the throne, pen, and tablet; from there the adept passes by paradise and hell, before visiting the sun, moon, and heavens; and he then descends to the individual elements that comprise the sub-lunar world. His itinerary thus retraces the ontological hierarchy of beings as ranked by the Neoplatonism of the day, according to which ontological power flows from a series of higher hypostases down through the spheres to the individual elements that form the building blocks of the material world.

The adept then turns upwards, visiting realms of compound beings in order of increasing complexity and ontological rank: he first speaks with the mountains and the sea, then inanimate objects and plants, followed by the wild beasts, birds, and domesticated animals. Following this, the adept meets and converses with the devil, the jinn, and an archetypal human (*âdami*), who, like all his previous interlocutors, fails to provide him with any relief. The next leg of his journey consists of a series of prophets arranged in chronological order: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad. The first six of these prophets are unable to cure the adept’s pain themselves, but they urge him onward through their ranks and towards Muhammad; their cognizance of their relative positions in the prophetic (and cosmic) hierarchy underscores Muhammad’s role as prophetic telos.

As foretold by his forerunners, Muhammad is able to finally provide the adept with some solid guidance. Although he cannot directly cure his pain, the Prophet explains that the adept must turn inwards and pass through various inner faculties of his own self. According to Muhammad, the adept’s journey will end once he reaches the soul (*jân*):

8. Corbin, *Visionary Recital*, 46-56.

You have five stages in your being,
 Truly a difficult route, full of swerves and curves.
 The first is sense, and its second is imagination,
 Third is the intellect, the site of disputation.
 Its fourth station is the place of the heart,
 And the fifth is the soul (*jân*)—the route there is difficult.

راستی تو بر تو است از چپ و راست
 پس سیم عقل است جای قیل و قال
 پنجمین جان است راه مشکل است⁹

پنج منزل در نهاد تو تراست
 اولش حس و دوم از وی خیال
 منزل چارم ازو جای دل است

So go now, and take the path of self;
 Set out through the five valleys within.

پنج وادی در درون در پیش گیر¹⁰

پس برو اکنون و راه خویش گیر

This leg of the quest is clearly informed by an Avicennian psychological paradigm, which identifies five internal senses corresponding with the five external ones.¹¹ But whereas Avicenna's enumeration of the internal senses is intended to explain the abstraction of knowledge from the external senses, 'Aṭṭâr's is noticeably less technical and traffics in broader terms, including such general faculties such as the intellect, the heart, and the soul. And by ranking the soul and heart higher than the intellect, 'Aṭṭâr sets himself off from the philosopher and marks this as a particularly sufistic psychology.¹²

Following the path laid out by the Prophet, the adept travels through sense, imagination, intellect, and the heart before finally arriving at the "ocean of the soul."¹³ The adept praises the soul in the highest terms; he eulogizes it as the first created being, eternal, free from essence and attribute, and "the breath of the merciful" (*dam-e raḥmân*).¹⁴ In return, the ocean of

9. 'Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 6031-3.

10. Ibid., 6047.

11. Fazlur Rahman, "Avicenna vi. Psychology," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, updated 17 August 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/avicenna-vi>.

12. Foruzânfar, *Sharḥ-e aḥvâl-e 'Aṭṭâr*, 35-8.

13. 'Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 6941.

14. Ibid., 6891.

the soul enjoins the adept to “dive in” and lose himself in its depths.¹⁵ Perhaps we can see in this dialogical exchange a sign of the soul’s alterity, which, in this ontological scheme, is not coextensive with the individual self but extends far beyond it. Although the soul is, in a sense, the adept’s “own,” it transcends his being and individuality, similar to the hypostatic Universal Soul of the neoplatonic philosophers. In ‘Aṭṭâr’s striking image, the soul is a boundless, unitary ocean, but one which nonetheless somehow has “inlets” penetrating into individual beings.¹⁶ By submerging himself in its waters, the adept thus renounces individual existence and attains a supra-personal proximity to God; as ‘Aṭṭâr puts it, “he wash[es] his hands of self.”¹⁷ Through individual effacement, the adept becomes the pinnacle of the metaphysical order and a pure servant of God:

He found the the two worlds to be a reflection of his soul,
 And he found his own soul to be greater than them.
 When he became sighted with the secret of his own soul,
 He was brought to life, and became a servant of the Lord.
 Now, after this, lies the true foundation of servanthood—
 Every breath, a hundred lives in life.

وز دو عالم جانِ خود را بیش یافت
 زنده‌ای گشت و خدا را بنده شد
 هر نفس صد زندگی در زندگیت¹⁸

هر دو عالم عکسِ جانِ خویش یافت
 چون به سرّ جانِ خود بیننده شد
 بعد ازین اکنون اساسِ بندگیت

This existential dissolution of the individual is the most exalted position in the cosmos: the soul, as effaced servant of God, transcends and exceeds all other created beings. It is at this point that ‘Aṭṭâr tells us he can narrate no more; he has described the adept’s “journey to God” but now begins the latter’s “journey in God,” which he cannot reveal without divine consent.¹⁹

15. Ibid., 6903.

16. Ibid., 6893, 6902.

17. Ibid., 6946.

18. Ibid., 7075-7.

19. Ibid., 7078-86.

The adept's story ends here, and after some brief concluding material, including passages of poetic self-praise and self-abasement, as well as an enumeration of the virtues of silence, the poem comes to a close as well.

Saintly Ascent and the Inward Turn

The adept's quest recalls other narratives of heavenly journeys that circulated throughout the Irano-Mediterranean region from late antiquity onwards.²⁰ In an Islamic context, the ascent par excellence is, of course, that of the prophet Muhammad, who was brought from Mecca to Jerusalem on a miraculous "night journey" (*esrâ*) before undertaking an ascent (*me'râj*) through the spheres, visiting heaven and hell, and finally attaining to the divine presence and speaking directly with God.²¹ Versions of this *me'râj* narrative are found in hadith collections, histories, Quranic exegeses, as well as independent monographs devoted to the topic, all of which were informed by (and reacting to) the lively oral preaching tradition in which this miraculous journey figured heavily.²² Nor are such ascents limited to the Prophet; saintly figures, such as the ninth-century Beṣṭâmi, were reported to have ascended as well, although their journeys are usually said to have been made in spirit only, whereas the Prophet's ascension was bodily.

20. See, inter alia, John J. Collins, "Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1-20; Ioan P. Culianu, *Psychanodia I: A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance* (Leiden: Brill, 1983); Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane, eds., *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

21. There is an extensive literature on the Prophet's ascent and those of his saintly imitators. See, inter alia, Frederick Stephen Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's Night Journey: Tracing the Development of the Ibn 'Abbās Ascension Discourse* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008); Christiane J. Gruber and Frederick Stephen Colby, eds., *The Prophet's Ascension: Cross-Cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi'rāj Tales* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Brooke Olson Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys, Earthly Concerns: The Legacy of the Mi'rāj in the Formation of Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, ed., *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'Islam: Ascensions céleste et itinéraires spirituels* (Louvain: Peeters, 1996).

22. Colby, *Night Journey*, 29-49.

For a mystically minded audience, the *Book of Affliction* would immediately recall the ascensions of the Prophet and Beṣṭâmi, both of which were well known and treated by ‘Aṭṭâr at length in other contexts. Most of his *maṣnavis*, including the *Book of Affliction*, recount the Prophet’s ascension in their doxological openings, and the *Memorial* also contains an extended section devoted to the ascent of the famous saint of Beṣṭâm.²³ But even without any knowledge of ‘Aṭṭâr’s personal propensity for these stories, the adept’s quest shares so many narremes with the standard version of the Prophet’s ascent (and those of his saintly imitators) that such a comparison would be difficult for any competent Muslim reader *not* to make: both the Prophet and the adept undertake visionary, cosmic journeys; they are both guided by a third party (Gabriel in the Prophet’s case, the spiritual guide in the adept’s); they both converse with prophets and angels; and they both experience a transformative encounter with God at the conclusion of the quest.

But the adept’s quest also diverges from Muhammad’s ascent in significant ways, reworking the story so it encodes a particularly sufi understanding of human beings’ relationship to God. Visionary ascent, as the *Book of Affliction* tells it, is not restricted to the Prophet or even saintly figures like Beṣṭâmi. The adept, an allegorical everyman, is also capable of ascent, at least in a metaphorical sense—he must make such a journey to cure his pain, rediscover the soul, and arrive at the final cause of human existence. The narrative thus entails a democratization of the intimacy that the Prophet enjoyed with God at the apex of his *me‘râj*; mystically minded individuals are subject to analogous, if not exactly identical, experiences. Whereas the Prophet was led upwards through the heavens, however, the adept’s visionary journey begins at the outer reaches of the universe before moving downwards and inwards into the soul. For

23. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 175-9.

‘Aṭṭâr, God is not to be encountered in the far-away celestial heights, but internally, within the self. Every ensouled individual can theoretically enjoy direct proximity with the divine, even though most people will never reach this exalted state. The interior connection to the divine becomes apparent after the travails of an external quest: only after passing through all the realms of creation could the adept perform his “inward turn” and contemplate the soul as the divinely infused source of the external world.

This is not to imply that the adept’s journey in any way supersedes the Prophet’s *me’râj*; on the contrary, the adept’s visionary quest and subsequent inward turn are always presented as derivative of the Prophet’s ascent, which sets the basic paradigm for all other Islamic heavenly journeys. According to most sufis, non-prophetic individuals could journey through the heavens, even in a post-prophetic age. Certain spiritual heroes, most especially the aforementioned Beṣṭâmi, were celebrated for ascensions of their own, and by the thirteenth century specific spiritual techniques (like the forty-day retreat) were used to induce visionary ascents.²⁴ According to most interpretations, however, these ascents did not encroach upon Prophetic exceptionalism because they were made in spirit only, whereas the Prophet’s *me’râj* was made in body. According to Hojviri,

The ascension of the prophets is made externally, in body and person, whereas that of saints is made inwardly and in spirit. The bodies of the prophets resemble the hearts and souls of the saints in purity and proximity. This is a clear superiority. . . . There is a great difference between the one who is brought there in person and the one who is brought there only in thought.²⁵

Whereas saints ascend in spirit only, the Prophet ascended in body as well—for him the duality between body and spirit was wiped away. The adept’s quest, like a saintly ascension, is explic-

24. Muhammad Isa Waley, “Aziz al-Din Nasafi on Spiritual Retreat,” *Sufi* 17 (1993): 5-9.

25. Hojviri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 355. Some others claim, however, on the basis of a hadith from Aisha, that the Prophet’s ascent was also made only in spirit, Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 79.

itly visionary and spiritual, and not an actual bodily journey; as we discuss below, it is described by ‘Aṭṭâr as an apocalyptic vision (*kashf*) experienced over the course of a forty-day retreat. According to Hojviri’s criteria, then, it should be considered inferior to Muhammad’s bodily ascent.

But even without Hojviri’s theoretical treatment of the matter, the poem makes it clear that the adept in no way bests the Prophet. As is typical in sufi literature, an ethos of prophetic veneration pervades the entire text, and it is especially apparent in the doxology and the adept’s eulogy of Muhammad.²⁶ Significantly, the adept turns inwards towards the soul only after he encounters the Prophet and receives his guidance. Muhammad already knows the way: he has completed his own *me‘râj* and achieved an exemplary state of spiritual poverty (*faqr*)—mystically understood as the effacement of individual self—so he can direct the adept on the proper course. Although the adept must pass by Muhammad and continue his journey to the soul on his own, he follows a path that has been blazed by the Prophet. His inward turn is only possible because the Prophet, through his own ascension and effacement in the divine, has set a paradigm that can be imitated and creatively reworked by later mystics.²⁷

Nor does the inward direction of the adept’s quest imply that ‘Aṭṭâr’s sufism was a private, anti-social mode of piety; on the contrary, the adept’s journey to the soul depends on various ethical practices and social relations, the most important of which is that of master and disciple. The adept can only make spiritual progress within the confines of this relationship; he cannot even begin his quest until he has identified a suitable guide, who then accompanies him on the entirety of his journey. This spiritual master interprets all of his visions—even his final dissolution into the ocean of the soul—demonstrating the institution’s significance and the

26. *Moṣibat-nâma*, 325-525, 5995-6020.

27. Steven Katz, “Models, Modeling, and Mystical Training,” *Religion* 12 (1982): 247-75.

inextricably social nature of sufi mystical experience. It also reflects the historical practice of spiritual guides during their disciples' forty-day ritual retreats, which 'Aṭṭâr allusively suggests to be the setting of the adept's visions. Ritual retreat and its implications for the *Book of Affliction* will be discussed in more detail below, but here it suffices to note that the poem, taken as an entirety, presents the adept's inward turn not as a private affair, but as a transformative process that plays out within the master-disciple relationship. The final experience of annihilation (*fanâ*), as related in the fortieth chapter of the *Book of Affliction*, ought not to be interpreted in phenomenological isolation: the events that lead up to that point, including their social and ethical dimensions, are inseparable aspects of the narrative's total significance.

The poem thus presents a particular vision of normative spiritual development; the adept's visionary ascent allegorically elucidates the contours and conditions of the spiritual path writ large. According to its portrayal, spiritual progress consists of an inward journey, into the self, in order to rediscover and activate the soul's latent internal connection to the divine. This is, in fact, the only means to escape from the pain and suffering that infuses human existence. Although the path leads inwards, this is not an anti-social piety; the support of a spiritual guide is a prerequisite to success. Nor is this a journey to uncover one's hidden personal self; the ultimate goal is effacement of the individual in the divine, which clears a space for a new form of being that transcends the material world.

The Reader's Ascent

Not only is this allegorical narrative a tool for the audience to conceptualize their own spiritual development, but the process of moving through the narrative is itself presented as a spiritually transformative experience. Through their identification with the adept, the text becomes a symbolic performance in which the audience ritualistically activates their internal

connection to God. ‘Aṭṭâr explicitly seeds this identification in the final passage of the introductory doxology:

Forty stages (*maqâm*) will come before you,
 And they will also come within you.
 If you undertake this retreat (*chela*)²⁸ according to the way (*tariqat*),
 And complete it in truth (*ḥaqiqat*), then peace will come.
 When you search for yourself in forty stages,
 You will be, in the end, everything.

جمله هم در خویش خواهد آمدن با حقیقت کرده آمد آشتی جمله در آخر تو باشی و السلام ²⁹	چل مقامت پیش خواهد آمدن این چله چون در طریقت داشتی چون بجویی خویش را در چل مقام
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As we saw in Chapter Two, introductions are effective spaces for authorial control; they often contain meta-poetic reflections that presume and promote certain understandings of poetics and language, and they guide the audience towards a specific reception stance for the work. In this case, ‘Aṭṭâr urges his readers to understand their own encounter with the text as the symbolic, linguistic analogue of the adept’s quest. The forty chapters of the work constitute an internal journey for the readers, who, like the adept, will move through those stages seeking themselves, until, at the end of the reading process, they realize that they internally contain and transcends the macrocosm. The text is not an explanation but a structured experience through which the audience symbolically participates in a version of the protagonist’s transformation. In the sections that follow, we will explore some of the vectors of identification between the reader and the adept—including the poem’s visionary nature and its structural similarities to the practice of ritual retreat and the sufi way—through which the *Book of Affliction* becomes as a site for symbolic action.

28. Here we must read *chela* instead of *chella* for the meter.

29. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 881-3.

‘Aṭṭâr’s *Apologia: Vision, Symbol, and Language*

According to ‘Aṭṭâr’s opening apologia, found immediately after the above quotation, the poem itself is composed of a particular kind of symbolic speech reminiscent of the adept’s visionary experience.³⁰ Several dozen verses are devoted to explaining “the basis of this book” (*asâs-e in ketâb*);³¹ they lay out hermeneutical principles for the proper interpretation of the poem and seek to preempt readers’ possible objections. This explicit authorial instruction is motivated by anxiety over the fantastic nature of the adept’s journey, which ‘Aṭṭâr worries may lead some readers to dismiss it as a product of his individual poetic fancy and thus judge it “a lie” (*kazb*).³² To preclude this potential criticism, ‘Aṭṭâr calls on his readers to understand the poem symbolically as a veridical dream or inspired vision, and not as an account of an actual cosmic journey. The passage is rather long and dense, so rather than quoting it in its entirety, we will analyze it in sections: first, we will see how the poem is cast as a divine unveiling; next, we will explore ‘Aṭṭâr’s distinction between exoteric and esoteric meaning; and, finally, we will examine his use of the concept of the “language of state” (*zabân-e ḥâl*).

At the core of ‘Aṭṭâr’s apologia is the claim that the poem represents not an actual bodily journey, but a visionary experience of unveiling (*kashf*). This explains its fantastic nature, differentiates it from the bodily journey of the Prophet, and provides reader-listeners with a way to think of the journey as an event that could actually take place, albeit of an imaginary and psychic nature. Its status as an inspired vision, as we shall see, also entails certain epistemological privileges:

Since it is permitted to see anything in dreams,
Don’t turn your head if someone sees something in unveiling (*kashf*).
Although there are satanic unveilings along the way,

30. Ibid., 884-915.

31. Ibid., 884.

32. Ibid., 905.

There are also those of God's dominion and spiritual beings.
Taste and piety are needed, and passion for God,
To separate these two paths.
If, one day, you are brought in to this arena,
If you are fated to be one of the men,
Then one hundred thousand of these sorts of meanings,
You will see, know, and believe.

...
I'm establishing this ground for you first,
I'm laying this firm foundation for you,
So that when you see this type of speech,
You will not sit in denial.
Since this beautiful book, for the elite and the masses,
Is this sort of speech that I have described.

گر کسی در کشف بیند سر متاب
لیک هم ملکوت و روحانی بود
تا کند دو نوع شرع این را جدا
آن رقم بینی که بر مردان کشند
بینی و دانی و داری استوار

...
با تو این بنیاد محکم می نهم
بر سر انکار ننشینی بسی
هست این شیوه سخن که گفتم و السلام³³

چون روا باشد همه دیدن به خواب
گر چه در ره کشفِ شیطانی بود
ذوق و تقوی باید و شوقِ خدا
گر ترا روزی درین میدان کشند
آنگهی زین شیوه معنی صد هزار

...
اَوَلْت این اصل بر هم می نهم
تا چو زین شیوه سخن بینی بسی
زانکه این زیبا کتابِ خاص و عام

‘Attâr points out that visions seen in sleep are commonly accepted as meaningful, and he enjoins the reader to not turn away from visions seen while awake—“unveilings” (*kashf*) in technical sufi terminology. The implication, of course, is that the adept's journey ought to be understood as just such an unveiling: a waking, visionary experience, similar to the saintly ascent of Beṣṭâmi. Granted, such visions can sometimes be demonic in origin, but as ‘Attâr explains above, the pious can, through their passion for God, distinguish the satanic from the divine. In contrast to the modern notion of visions as mental images that exist only “inside one's head,” unveilings (and dreams for that matter) are understood in philosophical Islamicate cosmology to have a real existence outside of the mind in a realm known as “the imaginal world” (*‘âlam-e*

33. Ibid., 895-908.

meşâl).³⁴ This plane functions as a liminal space between the intelligible and the sensible, where significations are clothed in concrete forms so that they can be seen, heard, and grasped. The spiritually exalted “men” of the path perceive veridical dreams and divinely inspired visions in this realm through the faculty of imagination (*takhayyol*), and it is here, according to ‘Aṭṭâr, that the adept’s quest also takes place. According to medieval Persian and Arabic philosophy, poetic speech also acts through the imaginative faculty to create pleasing or distressing forms, so in this respect the poetic experience is not unlike a dream or vision.³⁵ The *Book of Affliction*, as the site of such an imaginative literary experience, is thus not unrelated to the visionary experience it describes.

The text does not just describe the content of the adept’s purported unveiling, but offers itself to its reader-listeners as a related form of visionary experience. This is never stated directly by ‘Aṭṭâr, but there are certain slippages throughout the passage that conflate the worlds of the story and the text. For example, although it seems logical that the adept is the subject of this much-discussed unveiling, it is the reader who is consistently described as “seeing” and “encountering” visionary significations. ‘Aṭṭâr explains that piety and passion are needed to distinguish between divine and satanic inspirations, but this seems less a description of the adept’s qualifications than an imperative to his own addressee. According to ‘Aṭṭâr, readers will “see” in the poem “this kind of speech.” More than a mere *account* of a fictitious vision, the *Book of Affliction* itself simulates the authority and signifying mode of a visionary experience.

34. Henry Corbin, “The Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality,” in *The Dream and Human Societies*, ed. G. E. von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 406-8.

35. Justine Landau, “Naṣîr al-Dîn Ṭusi and the Poetic Imagination in the Arabic and Persian Philosophical Tradition,” in *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, ed. Ali Asghar Seyed-Ghorab (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

Visions require interpretation, and ‘Aṭṭâr suggests that the *Book of Affliction*, too, must be interpreted; a reader-listener should move from its exoteric surface (*ẓâher*) to its esoteric core (*bâten*):

If someone opines, based on appearances,
That these words run crooked like a bow,
He sees only the exoteric (*ẓâher*), but,
In the esoteric (*bâten*), they are exceedingly excellent.

کین سخن کژ می رود همچون کمان
هست در باطن بغایت نیک³⁶

گر کسی را هست در ظاهر گمان
آن ز ظاهر کژ می بیند ولیک

Those who would criticize the narrative, according to ‘Aṭṭâr, have only considered its exterior aspect and thus fundamentally misunderstand its message. The poem is not a mimetic representation of a bodily journey, but a symbol—the outer expression of an experiential spiritual truth conveyed through divine unveiling. The audience should seek that inner meaning instead of remaining fixated on the surface narrative of the text. This does not mean, however, that the exoteric aspect of the poem is an expendable shell to be decoded and discarded. For ‘Aṭṭâr and other mystical allegorists, the exoteric is the concrete manifestation of the esoteric—the two are inextricably and ontologically intertwined.³⁷ Symbols therefore provide access to esoteric meaning in a more total, immediate, and experiential way than direct discursive treatments ever could. By suggesting that the *Book of Affliction* be read for its esoteric meaning, ‘Aṭṭâr does not imply that the surface level of the narrative is expendable; on the contrary, the audience is led to the poem’s esoteric truth all the more effectively by virtue of the poem’s concrete exoteric dimension.

36. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 886-7.

37. Corbin, *Visionary Recital*, 30-1; Peter T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of Their Texts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 162-203.

Finally, the passage draws a distinction between two modes of communication: the ordinary “language of speech” (*zafân-e qâl*) and the more esoteric “language of state” (*zafân-e hâl*).³⁸ Whereas “language of speech” represents routine, referential, verbal communication, the “language of state” is miraculous, literary, often symbolic, and paradoxically non-verbal:

... If the adept speaks with the angels,
And seeks out discourse with the earth and the sky,
Or passes by the throne and the footstool,
Or asks questions of this and that,
Seeks assistance from the prophets,
Listens to the happenings of the atoms,
That is all the “language of state,”
None of it is the “language of speech.”
In the “language of speech,” it’s a lie (*kazb*), but
In the “language of state,” it’s sincere and excellent.
If you don’t recognize “language of state,”
Just call it “language of intellect.”
Because he spoke all of this in “state” and not “speech,”
Believe it, and don’t call it clap-trap.

...
My goal from this explanation is just this:
That if I speak with you about the adept,
Saying he went before Gabriel and above the throne,
Or from above the throne, descended to the carpet,
Or went above the spheres before the angels,
Or descended below the earth to the Fish,
That you won’t count this all a lie (*kazb*); listen:
Take it not as “speech” but as “state.”

وز زمین و آسمان جوید سخن
یا ازین و آن سخن پرسى کند
بشنود از ذره ذره ماجرا
نه زفانِ قال باشد آن همه
در زفانِ حال بر صدق است و نیک
تو زفانِ فکر تش خوان والسلام
باورش دار و مگو این را محال
...
تا گر از سالک زنم با تو نفس

آن که سالک با ملک گوید سخن
یا گذر بر عرش و بر کرسی کند
استفادت گیرد او از انبیا
از زفانِ حال باشد آن همه
در زفانِ قال کذب است آن و لیک
گر زفانِ حال نشناسی تمام
او چو این از حال گوید و نه ز قال
...
زین بیان مقصود من آن است و بس

38. For a history of the concept, see Pourjavady, *Zabân-e hâl*.

یا ز فوق العرش آمد تا به فرش
یا به زیر خاک شد سوی سمک
نه ز قال از حال آن را بگروی³⁹

کو بر جبریل رفت و فوق عرش
یا بر افلاک شد پیش ملک
این همه بر کذب ننهی بشنوی

The “language of state” is a form of personification in which inanimate objects are endowed with speech. Many poets explicitly use the term in their verses, thereby authorizing imaginative dialogue and acknowledging the fantasy, as in the following quatrain of Khayyâm:

Yesterday, I saw a potter in the market,
Wedging a bit of clay beneath his feet.
That clay was speaking to him in the “language of state”:
“I was once like you—treat me gently.”

بر پاره گلی لگد همی زد بسیار
من هم چو تو بوده‌ام مرا نیکودار⁴⁰

دی کوزه گری بدیدم اندر بازار
و آن گل به زبان حال با او می گفت

But more is at work here than just a fanciful literary device. The “language of state” is reserved for the disclosure of essential truths regarding the speaker’s—or recipient’s—experiential “state.” The poet, by making inanimate objects speak, reveals something essential and significant that is otherwise hidden: in Khayyâm’s case, this is the clay’s status as the material remains of a living creature, by virtue of which it functions as a symbol for the universality of death. Nor is this mode of speech confined to the literary realm. The “language of state” also refers to miraculous, telepathic communication that was believed to occur between inanimate objects, animals, and human beings, as in the famous story of Beṣṭâmi and the dog.⁴¹ Likewise, in many sufi stories God communicates with human beings non-verbally in manner that recalls the language of state.⁴² In these senses, the term also suggests the sufi’s mystical states (*ḥâl*), or moments of ecstatic inspiration.

39. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 888-905.

40. Quoted in Pourjavady, *Zabân-e ḥâl*, 117.

41. Ibid., 235-7; ‘Aṭṭâr, *Tazkerat al-owleyâ*, 148.

42. Pourjavady, *Zabân-e ḥâl*, 707-9.

The literary and miraculous valences of the term are both operative in the above-quoted passage, in which ‘Aṭṭâr suggests that the adept’s “conversations” with the earth, sky, throne, footstool, etc., are all conducted via the “language of state.” Although these beings do not speak in routine, everyday situations, most reader-listeners would allow that they might be endowed with speech in certain visionary contexts, and that the poet is therefore justified in personifying them. Much like the explanation of the poem as an unveiling, ‘Aṭṭâr’s characterization of the poem as “language of state” helps explain its fantastic nature for an audience that was not accustomed to fictionality in the modern sense; it allows them to think the adept’s journey as an event that could possibly take place given certain extraordinary, miraculous circumstances.

The term also bestows a certain revelatory quality on the poem and endows it with a special claim to truth. Once the adept’s discourses are cued as examples of the “language of state” and not as routine conversations, reader-listeners will expect them to be imbued with some sort of inner spiritual meaning—which, ‘Aṭṭâr assures them, is not only present, but “sincere” and “excellent.” They are invited to “take it all as state, not as speech,” and thus approach the poem as an instance of a peculiarly truthful, inspired, and symbolic mode of discourse.

Textual Encounter as Ritual Retreat

After emphasizing the symbolic nature of the adept’s ascent, ‘Aṭṭâr elaborates on its setting and non-intellectual origin, stressing the superiority of the heart and the adept’s practice of *zehr*:

The adept’s traveller is his thought;
 A thought that’s produced by *zehr*.
Zehr must be repeated until it brings forth thought—
 Brings forth one hundred thousand fresh meanings.
 A thought that arises from the delusions of intellect,
 Arrives not from the unseen realm (*ghayb*), but from human speech (*naql*).
 Intellectual thought is for infidels,
 Heart-thought is for men of action.

When thought's traveller comes into play,
It appears not from the intellect, but from the heart.

فکرتی کان مستفاد از ذکر اوست
صد هزاران معنی بکر آورد
آن نه غیب است آن ز نقل آید پدید
فکرت قلبیست مرد کار را
نه ز عقل از دل پدیدار آمده است⁴³

رامرو را سالک ره فکر اوست
ذکر باید گفت تا فکر آورد
فکرتی کز وهم عقل آید پدید
فکرت عقلی بود کفار را
سالک فکرت که در کار آمده است

The adept makes his journey in thought: not “thought of the intellect,” but the “thought of the heart.” By privileging the heart over the intellect, ‘Aṭṭâr distinguishes himself from the philosophers, many of whom were also interested in allegorical narratives of ascent but would characterize them as intellectual in nature. For ‘Aṭṭâr, however, the intellect was bound by human weakness and the pre-existing assumptions upon which syllogistic procedures rely. New knowledge cannot be intellectually generated; the products of the mind are just elaborations of what has been previously transmitted (*naql*). The heart, on the other hand, is capable of receiving visions from outside of itself in the divine realm of the unseen (*ghayb*); it can therefore perceive “fresh meanings” endowed with a certainty that intellectual knowledge lacks.

The adept's heart perceives these visions only after it has been purified through *zêkr*, a procedure that involves the repetition of a single word or phrase in order to direct one's attention towards God. Although this Quranic term is found in early sufi sources, detailed accounts of *zêkr* as a spiritual practice do not appear until the sufi manuals of the thirteenth century, such as those by Abū Ḥaṣṣ Suhrawardī and Najm al-Din Dâya. According to both of these writers, the most efficacious *zêkr* is the first part of the testament of faith, “There is no god but God” (*lâ elâha ellâ allâh*). It is to be repeated with an intentionality that involves the entire body, provoking a total existential reorientation towards the divine.⁴⁴ “When the tree of *zêkr* is

43. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 909-13.

44. Dâya, *Merṣâd al-‘ebâd*, 271-4; Abu Ḥaṣṣ ‘Umar Suhrawardī, *‘Awârif al-ma‘ârif* (Beirut: Dâr al-Kitâb al-‘Arabî,

continually nurtured,” writes Dâya, “Its roots reach out from the heart to all the members and limbs of the body, in such a manner that from the crown of the head to the toenails, not a particle remains untouched by the roots of the tree of *zêkr*.”⁴⁵

Zêkr is the engine of the adept’s visionary experience: through it, he brings forth the “thought of the heart” and “one hundred thousand fresh meanings.” In sufi praxis *zêkr* is often associated with visions and unveilings, especially in the context of the forty-day ritual retreat (*chella*), which seems to be the implied setting of the adept’s visions in the *Book of Affliction*. Ritual retreat became a discrete, rule-based practice during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, around the time ‘Aṭṭâr was writing; it was especially important within the increasingly institutionalized Kobraṭi and Sohrawardi circles, with whom ‘Aṭṭâr displays some intellectual affinity.⁴⁶ According to these traditions’ manuals, the retreat should be performed in a small, darkened room; the outer senses must be deprived, they explain, so that the inner senses might be activated.⁴⁷ While in seclusion, the practitioner is to perform a variety of ascetic activities, the most important of which is *zêkr*: “Until the mirror of the heart has been cleansed and purified of all impressions [through *zêkr*],” writes Najm al-Dīn Dâya, “It cannot receive the impressions of the unseen or God-given knowledge, or the lights of spiritual witnessing and unveiling.”⁴⁸

That *zêkr* performed in seclusion may produce visions has been long noted: some authorities stress the danger of these visions, and some present them in a more favorable light, but there is near universal agreement that they ought to be referred to a spiritual guide for in-

1966), 215-6.

45. Dâya, *Merṣād al-‘ebād*, 277; translation from *Bondsmen*, 276.

46. Landolt, “‘Aṭṭâr, Sufism, and Ismailism,” 10; Waley, “Najm al-Dīn Kubrā,” 89.

47. Dâya, *Merṣād al-‘ebād*, 282-3.

48. *Ibid.*, 283-4; translation from *Bondsmen*, 281.

terpretation. For example, according to the relatively early manual of Qushayrī, visual and auditory phenomena are an ever present danger in retreat, since they may distract the novice from God. The best means of countering their temptations is to disclose them to one's shaykh.⁴⁹ Najm al-Din Dāya also urges the novice wayfarer "to take refuge in the authority of the shaykh" whenever he sees any terrifying visions—which may be of satanic, human, or divine origin—"and to inwardly seek help from the shaykh's heart, so that the succor of his zeal and the gaze of his authority might repel any misfortune."⁵⁰ Even though such visions are potentially dangerous, they can also convey valuable information regarding one's spiritual state and provide a sense of spiritual joy.⁵¹ Dāya sets out some general principles for their interpretation, but ultimate hermeneutical authority rests with the spiritual guide, who is to periodically visit his disciples in seclusion to discuss any problems or spiritual unveilings.⁵² These practices help elucidate the interaction between the adept and his spiritual guide in the *Book of Affliction*: their conversations, repeated after every visionary encounter, conform to the normative procedures of the ritual retreat.

Although personal accounts are rare, instructional sufi treatises from this period often characterize the visions witnessed in retreat as ascent experiences. According to Ibn 'Arabī's *Treatise of Lights* (*Risālat al-anwār*), for instance, over the course of a retreat a practitioner can expect to ascend through the realms of mineral, vegetable, and animal life; pass through various celestial and divine realms; gaze on paradise, hell, the throne, and the pen; and finally experience effacement and subsistence in the divine.⁵³ This stylized account of a visionary ascent

49. Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-qushayriyya*, 2:741-42.

50. Dāya, *Merṣād al-'ebād*, 285.

51. Ibid., 294-8.

52. Ibid., 294-96, 375-78; Suhrawardī, *Awārif al-ma'ārif*, 217; Elias, *Throne Carrier of God*, 137; Waley, "Aziz al-Din Nasafi on Spiritual Retreat," 7.

53. Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī, *Risālat al-anwār*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥīm Mārdīnī (Damascus: Dār al Maḥabba, 2003).

witnessed in retreat maps very well onto the adept's cosmic itinerary in the *Book of Affliction*. It seems no large leap to suppose that mystically inclined readers, familiar with these sorts of representations, would easily make sense of the adept's forty-fold ascent as a vision witnessed over the course of a *chella*.

This setting, however, is never explicitly stated. Numerous hints are dropped that the adept's quest indeed takes place in a ritual retreat—its forty-fold division and cosmic nature, the importance of *zêkr* and the role of the shaykh—but the term *chella* is never directly applied to the context of the adept's visions. As we have already seen, however, the term does appear in the doxology's meta-poetic address, where it characterizes the reader's encounter with the poem:

Forty stages (*maqâm*) will come before you,
 And they will also come within you.
 If you undertake this retreat (*chela*) according to the way (*tariqat*),
 And complete it in truth (*ḥaqiqat*), then peace will come.
 When you search for yourself in forty stages,
 You will be, in the end, everything.

جمله هم در خویش خواهد آمدن
 با حقیقت کرده آمد آشتی
 جمله در آخر تو باشی و السلام⁵⁴

چل مقامت پیش خواهد آمدن
 این چله چون در طریقت داشتی
 چون بجویی خویش را در چل مقام

We have seen how this passage suggests a convergence between the experiences of the reader-listener and the adept, casting the textual encounter as an internal journey that parallels the protagonist's ascent. The reference to the *chella* adds another layer to this identification as the experience of the text's consumption is metaphorically elided with the presumed setting of the adept's visions. This elision is formally justified by the forty chapters of the text, which map onto the forty days of the adept's *chella*, but this metaphorical identification is more than a for-

54. 'Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 881-3.

mal, rhetorical flourish: it also carries significant implications for how the text should be read. When the *Book of Affliction* is understood metaphorically as a retreat, it becomes an experiential process instead of a static vessel, and its transformative potential is heightened and endowed with ritual force: an encounter with the poem becomes a symbolic performance aimed at recovery of the supra-personal soul.

Of course, this passage is not a description of an actual reader's experience, but a prescriptive tool of authorial control. Nonetheless, committed reader-listeners would likely allow themselves to be guided by such strategically placed authorial commentary, and attending to these metaphors helps us understand how 'Aṭṭâr imagined his audience would have read, understood, and reacted to the poem.

One especially intriguing possibility is that 'Aṭṭâr may have intended the *Book of Affliction* to be read liturgically over a forty-day period. Its forty chapters are all approximately the same length (usually around 150 distichs), a feature that would lend itself to a consistent reading practice. The manuscript tradition labels each chapter (*maqâla*) with a number, and the opening line of each chapter begins with the same formulaic phrase ("the adept came. . ."[*sâlek âmad . . .*]), which further emphasizes the poem's episodic structure. 'Aṭṭâr's textual community never coalesced institutionally, so we have no record of any sort of scheduled, liturgical reading, but the preface's characterization of the text as a ritual retreat tantalizingly suggests such a possibility. Over the course of forty days, the audience would perform a symbolic *chella* as they worked through the text, accompanying the adept in his visionary quest for the divine presence.

Walking the Path

By using terms like “path” (*ṭariqat*), “stage” (*maqâm*), and “truth” (*ḥaqiqat*), this meta-poetic passage also likens the reader’s progress through the poem to a sufi’s movement along the spiritual path, illuminating another vector for the reader’s identification with the adept. At the root of this metaphorical mapping is the poem’s frame-tale structure, which lends itself to an episodic, sequential mode of consumption that recalls the temporal rhythm of sufi conceptions of spiritual progress.

For ‘Aṭṭâr and others inclined to sufi spirituality, religious life is most often conceptualized as a journey along a road or path. The prominent features of sufi praxis are all conceptualized through this metaphor, and sufism’s technical terminology is derived from it. For example, the most common term for sufi praxis is *ṭariqat*, which refers to a route or way, both in the concrete sense of a physical path and more abstractly as a particular method or way of doing something.⁵⁵ Likewise, a sufi adept is often referred to as a *sâlek*, or wayfarer; this is the term used to refer to the adept in the *Book of Affliction*.⁵⁶ The shaykh is also fitted into the metaphor of the journey: he is the guide (*râh-nomâ*) who, having already travelled the path himself, leads the spiritual wayfarer to his or her destination.

Such terms are intended metaphorically, of course, but like all living metaphors, they have not lost their connection to their source domain, through which they emphasize certain characteristics of the target;⁵⁷ in this case, they characterize sufism as a concrete, embodied, and most importantly *directional* movement. Movement along the path begins when a sufi

55. E. Geoffroy, “Ṭarîqa,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1183.

56. Leonard Lewisohn, “Sulûk,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, posted 2012, doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1119.

57. George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

novice undertakes a “conversion” (*towba*) before an experienced spiritual guide, a term that, as classic sufi authorities point out, connotes a bodily turning towards a new direction.⁵⁸ The sufi then journeys, under the direction of the shaykh, towards a specific goal (*hadaf*) or destination (*maqṣud*). This goal is often referred to as “truth” (*ḥaqīqat*), which, along with *ṭarīqat* and *shar-iʿat*, forms a frequently invoked triad; the exact nature of this “truth,” however, is rarely defined. The ambiguity surrounding the path’s endpoint, and the diversity of opinions regarding it, is nicely summed up by Ghazzālī:

On the whole, it [i.e., the sufi path] concludes with a kind of proximity to God, which one group represents imaginatively almost as a transfiguration, while another group represents it as union, and yet a third group as attainment. But all of these are erroneous representations . . .⁵⁹

Ghazzālī goes on to offer his own views on the inherent ineffability of this proximity, but underneath these disagreements lies a consensus that the sufi way does indeed lead towards some sort of final goal. This destination is not necessarily fixed or static, however; many mystics have written of the dynamic interplay between God and the seeker at the end of the path. According to the Kobravis, for example, the sufi path is a “journey to God” that terminates in an endless “journey in God,” and this terminology is also adopted by ʿAṭṭār at the conclusion of the *Book of Affliction*.⁶⁰

The confused, bewildered adept made
Such a “journey to God.”
After this comes his “journey in God”;
All that I’ve said befell him again, more than before.

58. Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-qushayriyya*, 1:253-54.

59. Abū Ḥāmid Ghazzālī, “The Rescuer from Error,” in *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Muhammad Ali Khalidi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 81.

60. Landolt, “ʿAṭṭār, Sufism, and Ismailism,” 10.

تا به حق بوده‌ست چندینی سفر
هر چه گویم بیش از پیش آیدش⁶¹

سالک سر گشته را زیر و زبر
بعد ازین در حق سفر پیش آیدش

But despite its dynamic nature, the “journey in God” still functions as a demarcated destination: the adept has arrived, and his journey in the world outside of God has ended.

This purposeful directionality is further manifested in the sequential “stages” (*maqâmât*) or “way-points” (*manâzel*) that populate the sufi path; these are the ethical modalities through which the sufi wayfarer must pass on his or her way towards that final goal of proximity with God. They are traversed by virtue of the wayfarer’s own ethical exertion, and they are therefore often contrasted with the temporary “states” (*aḥvâl*) that are said to issue from God unbidden and unexpected. In keeping with the journey metaphor, the stages must be traversed in sequence. Spiritual movement is measured between stages and not within the stages themselves: they are the “stopping-points” that together mark the course and direction of the way. Sufi authorities do not agree on the number of stages or their exact order: Hojviri names seven, Qushayrî a few dozen, and Anṣârî one hundred; variant sequences can even be found in different works by the same author.⁶² What is never disputed, however, is that a sufi must pass through the stages sequentially, even if there is little agreement about what the correct sequence might be. Hojviri’s explanation is typical:

“Stage” (*maqâm*) means the servant’s resting place on the path of God, and his obedience and fulfillment of it until he attains its perfection, in so far as it can be imprinted on a human being. It is not permitted that he should leave a stage without fulfilling it. In this way the beginning of the stages is conversion (*towba*), then penitence (*inâbat*), then renunciation (*zohd*), then trust in God (*tavakkol*), and so on. It is not permissible for him to pretend to penitence

61. ‘Aṭṭâr, *Moṣibat-nâma*, 7078-9.

62. ‘Aṭṭâr, for instance, provides different sequences in different works, as does Anṣârî. See A. G. Ravân-Farhādî, “The Hundred Grounds of ‘Abdullāh Anṣârî (d. 448/1056) of Herāt: The Earliest Mnemonic Sufi Manual in Persian,” in Lewisohn, *Classical Persian Sufism*, 387.

without conversion, or renunciation without penitence, or trust in God without renunciation.⁶³

Similar statements can be found in the works of other theorists. They rarely take each other to task regarding the exact ordering of the stages, allowing for a plurality of sequences as long as the notion of sequentiality itself is maintained. The adept must reside in each particular stage until it has been perfected; only then is he or she free to progress onwards.

‘Aṭṭâr, who wishes to comment on the nature of the sufi spirituality, naturally chooses the figure of the journey as the armature for his allegory and thus exploits metaphorical mappings that are already present within the tradition. His writings are not particularly difficult to decode—a mystically minded audience, accustomed to conceptualizing spirituality as a journey, would easily understand the adept’s cosmic ascent as an allegorization of the path. Each of the adept’s forty interlocutors represents a mystical stage, and together they form a sequence that the adept must traverse in order to attain a state of proximity with God. The themes associated with each interlocutor, elaborated by the spiritual guide in his corresponding discourses, do not, as far as I have been able to determine, correspond with any preexisting sequence of mystical stages. Some of them also focus more on points of belief than the ethical modalities one expects in such a scheme. Nevertheless, when considered in the context of the adept’s journey, where they are embedded in a clear neoplatonic hierarchy, these thematic discourses exhibit a directionality and sequentiality that immediately evokes the temporal dynamics of the sufi path.

It is through his innovative use of the frame-tale device that ‘Aṭṭâr cultivates this unique rhythm. Whereas the frame-tales of the *One Thousand and One Nights* and *Canterbury Tales* remain incomplete in most manuscripts, Aṭṭâr’s frame-tales are always directed towards a

63. Hojviri, *Kashf al-mahjub*, 274.

final allegorical conclusion; they always reach for a discernible “destination.” This forward motion is powered not by a complex plot, but by a hierarchical sequence of intra-diegetic discourses that are themselves marked by an internal atemporality. Although these discourses, as a group, are arranged in a carefully ordered sequence, each individual discourse is composed of loosely linked anecdotes and exhortations that are paratactic and digressive, not argumentative or tightly structured. Unlike the frame-tale, these didactic interludes remain open and unbounded, and they could be easily expanded or contracted without violating any sort of internal structure. Yet, like the stages of the way, these internally static units are fitted together into a clearly progressive, sequential whole. The abstracted form of the ‘Aṭṭārian frame-tale thereby evokes the temporal characteristics of sufi spirituality: a goal-oriented, progressive motion through a sequence of discrete stopping-points.

With their closed, progressive frame-narratives, ‘Aṭṭār’s *maṣnavis* lend themselves to a course of reading in which the text is consumed sequentially and in its entirety. Such a style of text-consumption is taken for granted in modern phenomenologies of reading, but medieval texts were likely approached in a more non-linear fashion.⁶⁴ Mystical *maṣnavis* that lack frame-tales (including ‘Aṭṭār’s *Book of Secrets*) often exhibit the same atemporal quality as the individual intra-diegetic discourses in the *Book of Affliction*. Although they may contain chapters devoted to specific themes, these are not usually arranged according to any immediately obvious hierarchy, and the poems therefore do not demand a sequential course of reading in the same way as the *Book of Affliction* or the *Conference of the Birds*. The freedom with which readers likely approached most didactic *maṣnavis* is evidenced in scribal practices. For example, later manuscripts of Sanā’i’s *Garden of Truth* (*Hadiqat al-ḥaqiqa*), in many ways the archetypal di-

64. Julie Orlemanski, “Genre,” in *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*, ed. Marion Turner (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 216-7.

dactic *maṣnavi*, often deviate in significant ways from earlier versions. The proportion of narrative to homiletic material is much greater, and their contents have often been significantly rearranged; this instability suggests that scribes felt a measure of flexibility in their copying and reworking of the text, a flexibility that non-scribal readers would have likely shared in their own reading practices, choosing to consume those sections that interested them in the order they felt appropriate.⁶⁵ In contrast to Sanâ'i's rather malleable *maṣnavi*, however, the manuscripts of 'Aṭṭâr's works display a striking stability, a phenomenon which may be attributed to the controlling influence of the sequential frame-tale structure. In any case, the *Book of Affliction*'s frame-narrative endows the poem with a structural progression and unity that most other didactic *maṣnavis* lack. This shapes and constrains the reader's encounter with the work, encouraging a purposefully linear mode of reading that reduplicates the iterative progressivity of the sufi path.

We have examined a number of ways in which the reader's literary encounter is reflexively characterized in terms of the adept's allegorical quest: the text is cast as a forty-part, internal journey, leading to the discovery of a supra-personal self; its forty chapters recall the forty days of the adept's *chella* and carry ritualistic overtones; and the temporal rhythm of the reading process, conditioned by the frame-tale, mimics the flow of the sufi path. Such similarities, explicitly highlighted by 'Aṭṭâr at the beginning of the poem, suggest an imaginative affinity, if not exact equivalence, between the experience of the reader and that of the adept. The poem is not just a source of information, but—in the hands of a committed reader—a performative enactment of the ideal course of sufi progress. One might never be subject to a visionary experience like the adept, nor attain to that ambiguous goal to which sufis direct their spiritual

65. De Bruijn, *Piety and Poetry*, 218-26.

energies, but at least the *Book of Affliction* offers a chance to imaginatively and ritualistically insert oneself into such a narrative. By indwelling within it, committed readers vicariously perform the sufi journey, fulfilling—and thereby maintaining and supporting—the narrative frameworks that buttress sufistic conceptions of self and modes of life.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation we have attempted to show, through a multi-pronged investigation, how ‘Aṭṭâr’s speech is self-consciously perlocutionary, performative, and audience directed. He was not a mystic recluse, as he has sometimes been imagined, but a preacher and informal teacher, and his poetry incorporates this social orientation. Implicit in his verse is a model of speech as something that affects and changes its recipients, bringing about their ethical and ontological purification. ‘Aṭṭâr did not invent these ideas—his audiences were likely already familiar with them—but he rhetorically activates these conceptualizations through meta-poetic statements and the self-reflexive potential of the frame-tale structure. His ultimate aim, like that of a preacher, is not to deliver dogmatic information in a coherent or systematic manner, but to provoke his audience to pious reform. In ‘Aṭṭâr’s case, however, this call is delivered through poetic text, and the textual encounter becomes a spiritual exercise through which readers can symbolically tread the sufi path.

Armed with this understanding of ‘Aṭṭâr’s poetics, we can see that the relationship between religious life and literary texts is much more complicated than has often been assumed. Persian mystical literature has generally been viewed as a sort of mirror—with varying degrees of distortion—for sufi beliefs, practices, and experiences. For example, homiletic *maṣnavis* have most often been approached as encyclopedias of sufi dogma. Likewise, hagiographical texts have been used as sources for popular spiritual practices and social life. And particularly effusive passages in mystical poems are often assumed by a brand of phenomenological scholarship to reflect their authors’ personal ecstatic experiences. In all of these cases, literary texts are used as sources to illuminate some aspect of the religious, social, or experiential world. We, on the other hand, have seen how poetry, at least in the mind of ‘Aṭṭâr and his imagined audi-

ence, not only reflects social and spiritual realities but forms them. Through the perlocutionary and symbolic power of his verse, ‘Aṭṭâr aims to affect people’s souls; by reading his poems, they can symbolically progress along the sufi path and mold their ethical selves. Poetry does not just reflect spiritual life from a distance, but is an active constituent of it.

Because ‘Aṭṭâr places so much emphasis on the transformative effects of the textual encounter, we have carefully attended to the act of reading as a temporal and embodied act. The scholarship on ‘Aṭṭâr has generally surveyed his didactic *maṣnavis* from a bird’s-eye view, all at once, instead of considering how readers (or listeners) would have wound their way through the poem in time. Didactic *maṣnavis*, to be sure, may not have always been read in a completely linear fashion—but individual chapters would likely have been read as complete units, and ‘Aṭṭâr’s *maṣnavis* possess an unusual progressive unity by virtue of the frame-tale structure. When scholars like Ritter dissect these individual chapters and then rearrange the anecdotes into more systematic forms, they obscure the poem’s thematics as they would have been understood by premodern reader-listeners. They also disrupt the fluid interplay between the anecdotes, such that the *maṣnavis* become a collection of trite, often contradictory observations instead of a progression of multi-perspectival treatments of particular mystical themes. Such atemporal analyses also miss the performativity of the frame-tale, itself the site of a temporal experience in which the reader-listeners vicariously tread the sufi path.

These conclusions open up a number of avenues for the further study of not just ‘Aṭṭâr, but the Persian poetic tradition more generally. For example, our analysis of the *Conference of the Birds*’ evocation of contemporary preaching practices could be fruitfully expanded to include later poets: Sa‘di would be an especially interesting case because he wrote several sermons, presenting the possibility of a rhetorical comparison between those texts and his *Orchard* (*Bustân*). Rumi, too, has a set of sermons in addition to a collection of more informal

mystical sessions, an exploration of which, in conjunction with a rhetorical study of his *maṣnavi*, could further nuance our understanding of the divergences and convergences between different forms of homiletic speech. Such analyses could incorporate other discursive practices as well, such as the influence of philosophical or theological disputation on the form and rhetoric on Nāṣer-e Khosrow's homiletic poetry.¹

‘Aṭṭār's works presume a certain model of poetic-homiletic communication, which we partially reconstructed on the basis of the poet's many meta-poetic statements. Such statements—really a form of self-commentary—are an invaluable source for thinking about how this mode of speech was conceived, experienced, and approached by mystical poets and their readers. They are especially crucial for anyone interested in the rhetorical functioning of longer poems, since Perso-Arabic rhetorical manuals do not generally concern themselves with structures larger than the distich; any attempt to reconstruct a narratology, a homiletics, or a poetics that considers larger literary structures must, therefore, take into account how practitioners themselves obliquely described their art. Such a method, exemplified in Chapter Two of this dissertation, could be easily adapted for a wider-ranging exploration of sufi attitudes towards poetry and their changes over time.

For ‘Aṭṭār, and certainly for other poets as well, this implied poetic-homiletics does real rhetorical work: through it, ‘Aṭṭār calls his imagined audiences to a certain subject position from which to consume and interpret his verse. His perlocutionary poetry posits a receptive, mystically minded reader-listener, whom it seeks to shape, guide, and actively engage. This has significant implications for how we read ‘Aṭṭār, and it suggests that we need to reassess how we read the didactic *maṣnavis* of later poets as well. Further studies of their rhetorical strate-

1. This topic of inquiry has been proposed in Meisami, “Nāṣir-i Khusraw: A Poet Lost in Thought?,” 251.

gies, assumed audiences, and sociological contexts will bring us closer to an audience-centered history of Persian mystical literature, which will help illuminate the rise of Persian as a vehicle for Islamic thought, the spread of mysticism as a dominant mode of piety in Persianate lands, and the role of literary practices in the formation of religious subjectivities.

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