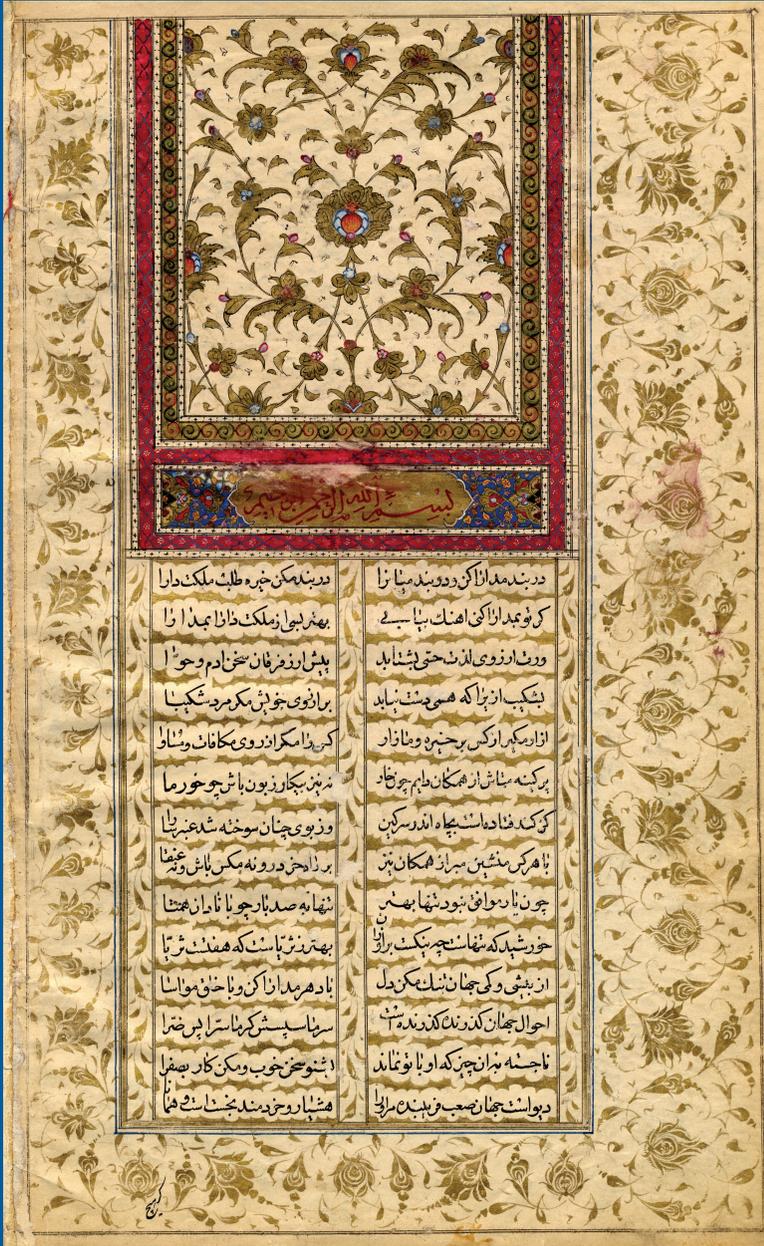


PEARLS OF PERSIA

THE PHILOSOPHICAL POETRY OF NĀSIR-I KHUSRAW



Edited by Alice C. Hunsberger



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The Institute of Ismaili Studies



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5. Works on Ismaili history and thought, and the relationship of the Ismailis to other traditions, communities and schools of thought in Islam.
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This book falls into category two listed above.

In facilitating these and other publications, the Institute's sole aim is to encourage original research and analysis of relevant issues. While every effort is made to ensure that the publications are of a high academic standard, there is naturally bound to be a diversity of views, ideas and interpretations. As such, the opinions expressed in these publications must be understood as belonging to their authors alone.

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Note on Transliteration and Abbreviations

The system of transliteration used in this book for the Arabic and Persian scripts is essentially the same as that adopted in the second edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, with certain modifications; for instance, *ch* for *č* and *j* for *dj* and *q* for *ķ*.

Abbreviations:

<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>EI</i>	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , ed. M. Th. Houtsma et al.
<i>EI2</i>	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. New edition.
<i>EIR</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i> , ed. E. Yarshater
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>SI</i>	<i>Studia Islamica</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischer Gesellschaft</i>



Editor's Introduction: Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Philosophical Poetry

ALICE C. HUNSBERGER

*Throughout this earth flows an ocean of meanings sublime:
Precious pearls, as well as Pure Water.¹*

For nearly a thousand years, Nāṣir-i Khusraw (that is, Nāṣir son of Khusraw) has ranked as a leading poet and intellectual in the Persian-speaking world. His verses have appeared in nearly every major anthology of Persian poetry compiled since his death in ca. AH 469/CE 1077, whether these anthologies were written in Iran, Central Asia, India, Czechoslovakia, England or America.² A hundred years ago in India, an MA examination on Persian Language and Literature included his works as required texts. His poem of the proud eagle who realises his role in his own destruction has been memorised by decades of Iranian elementary schoolchildren. In addition to his poetry, Nāṣir-i Khusraw's own account in prose of his seven-year journey (*Safar-nāma*) is also studied as a basic text in literature by Persian-speaking schoolchildren today in Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and wherever else Persian literature is taught. With its language praised as a shining example of elegant, early Persian prose, the *Safar-nāma*'s contents – that is, Nāṣir's descriptions of cities and towns and of the geography and social conditions of Egypt, Syria, Arabia, Iraq and Iran in the fifth/eleventh century, in addition to eastern countries – have been scoured for their informative detail (such as how many steps he counted when mounting to the Dome of the Rock) by European scholars since the 1800s. His philosophical prose works are acknowledged as treasuries of esoteric precepts.

In Western histories of Persian literature (including the *Cambridge History of Iran*), Nāṣir is frequently the only writer to receive an entire chapter to himself, while others are discussed as part of a group or as schools. When debate turns to the 'language of Islamic philosophy', after naming Ibn Sinā (Avicenna), who wrote only one work in Persian, Nāṣir-i Khusraw is always the first to be mentioned in



contradiction of the claim that all Islamic philosophy has been written in Arabic. His importance for the development of Persian as an intellectual language is hard to overestimate. Since the 1880s, leading scholars have recognised his significance and frequently collaborated to edit, analyse and translate his works. Not only as a poet has Nāṣir-i Khusraw been studied and revered, but also as a writer of philosophy.

But beyond these wide-ranging indications of lofty literary stature, other signs reveal a deeper, more personally felt, attachment to Nāṣir-i Khusraw's words. Most educated Persian-speakers of a certain age know entire passages of his poems by heart and will recite them readily, with no more encouragement than the mention of his name. In Kabul in recent years, a cultural centre was named after Nāṣir-i Khusraw; in Tehran there has long been an avenue in his name; and in Tajikistan his name and memory are central to a series of sacred funeral rites and ceremonies, a profound testament to the deep resonance of his religious thought. Citations of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry in *Amthāl wa hikam*, the Iranian scholar Dihkhudā's early twentieth-century compendium of memorable maxims and sayings in the Persian language, far outnumber those of more popular poets, including Ḥāfiẓ, Niẓāmī and 'Aṭṭār. Legends about Nāṣir-i Khusraw's piety, poetry and supernatural powers still enjoy active currency, with some people hailing him as a saint and others puzzling over the aesthetic, emotional or spiritual value of a poetry which extols the virtue of the intellect ('*aql*) rather than love ('*ishq*).

Who was Nāṣir-i Khusraw?

Abū Mu'īn Ḥamīd al-Dīn Nāṣir ibn Khusraw ibn Ḥārith-i Qubādiyānī Marwazī was born in the town of Qubādiyān, then located in the district of Marw (Merv) in the province of Khurāsān, in AH 394 (CE 1004), as he mentions in one of his poems.³ From a notable family, of which several individuals worked in the Saljūq court administration, Nāṣir was 32 years old in 428/1036 when the Saljūq sultan, Chaghri Beg, wrested Marw from Ghaznawid control. As a highly placed treasury official for Chaghri Beg in 437/1045–1046 (a year that he mentions specifically), we can be sure that he had already had experience working in at least one of the courts of the Ghaznawid empire, though probably not in Ghazna itself. The conquest and rule of Persian-speaking and Persian-cultural lands by a series of dynasties of Turkic military men was a bitter source of complaint in Nāṣir's verses, as were the worldly life at court and hypocritical clergy. His poetry is filled with calls for less hypocrisy and more spiritual grounding. His personal search for spiritual clarity led him to accept the teachings of the most vibrant form of Shi'i Islam in his time, now known in the West as Ismailism, and also to set off on 6 Jumada 437/19 December 1045 on his journey to Cairo, the political, spiritual and intellectual seat of the Ismailis, and the capital of the Fatimid imam-caliphs.⁴



While in his *Safar-nāma* he described events of his seven-year journey, the details of his later years are less clear. What we have been able to piece together is that he returned home to Khurāsān to lead the efforts to propagate the Ismaili faith throughout the eastern Persian-speaking provinces. In the Ismaili mission (*da'wa*), he was given the title *'hujjat* (proof) of the region of Khurāsān', Khurāsān being a vast expanse of the easternmost Persian-speaking lands, stretching far into Central Asia and Afghanistan. Nāṣir also took the title *'hujjat* as his poetic pen-name and utilised it in most of his *qaṣīdas*. His efforts to attract followers to Ismailism were so successful that his life was in danger from the anti-Ismaili authorities and Sunni persecution. He fled further east and lived out his last years in exile in the midst of the Pamir Mountains under the protection of a sympathetic prince who adhered to Ismailism, Abu'l-Ma'ālī 'Alī b. al-Asad. From his home in the remote village of Yumgān, he spent his time attracting more followers and writing poetry and philosophy, 'sending out a book a year'.⁵ His mausoleum in Yumgān can still be seen in Afghanistan today.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw's works – philosophy and poetry

Nāṣir-i Khusraw is the greatest philosophical poet in the Persian language partly because he had complete command of philosophy itself. In addition to his poetry, Nāṣir also wrote highly acclaimed prose works on philosophy. Many have been lost, including a book on mathematics which, he says elsewhere, he produced although he could not find a single scholar in Khurāsān, or all the eastern lands, who could solve the problems it contained. He wrote it instead, 'for those yet to come, in a time yet to come'.⁶

The seven philosophical texts which have been edited and published so far (others remain in manuscript) are evidence of a highly rational mind, rooted and trained in Greek philosophy, particularly the Neoplatonic forms that were taught in Arabic in his day. As varied in structure and format as they are in content, each of these seven published works illuminates Ismaili philosophy through Nāṣir-i Khusraw's unique combination of systematic didactic style, imaginative imagery and a personal sense of imperative. *Gushāyish wa rahāyish* (*Breaking the Bonds and Setting Free*), which has been translated into English as *Knowledge and Liberation* (London, 1998) by one of this volume's contributors, Faquir M. Hunzai, poses and answers thirty key theological questions, mostly concerning the salvation of the human soul, in a brief and accessible way. Another one, *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* (*Uniting the Two Wisdoms*), one of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's most important works, is his prose response to an Ismaili philosophical poem written by Abu'l-Haytham al-Jurjānī a few decades earlier.⁷ As the title suggests, Nāṣir aimed to show that the 'two wisdoms', specifically Greek philosophy and Islam, are in essence the same and lead to Truth. Responding to the poem allows him to address a wide variety of



topics, ranging from Aristotle's Four Causes to the existence of the divine Creator, the relationship between the body, the soul and the intellect, and the influence of heavenly bodies on human beings and souls.

A short prose work entitled *Risāla* (A Treatise), published as part of the Taqawī edition of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān* (Collected Poetry) is a summary form of *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, answering ninety-one points raised in the *qaṣīda*. *Khwān al-ikhwān* (The Feast of the Brethren) is comprised of 100 chapters on subjects such as the difference between spirit (*ruh*) and soul (*nafs*), how the incorporeal soul will be punished, the different ranks of intellect and Soul, the essence (*jān*) of the rational soul (*nafs-i natīqa*), the necessity of carrying out the precepts and recommendations of religious law, and how the one command of creation (Ar., *kun!*, Be!) resulted in the 'many' of the world. It is a slim volume, compared with Nāṣir's other works, and was perhaps designed for teaching purposes, given its succinct focus on the creation of the world and how the plan for human salvation was built into that act and the ongoing unfolding of creation. *Shish faṣl* (Six Chapters) is also known as the prose *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* (The Book of Illumination) but should not be confused with a *mathnawī* poem named *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, which has also been traditionally ascribed to Nāṣir-i Khusraw. Several authors in this volume weigh up this question of authenticity. However, the authenticity of the prose work *Shish faṣl* has not been questioned. In *Wajh-i dīn* (The Inner Significance of Religion), Nāṣir-i Khusraw explains the esoteric meanings underlying the exoteric aspects of religion, such as the inner meaning of verses of the Qur'an, rituals and laws. *Zād al-musāfirīn* (The Wayfarers' Provisions) lays out the purpose of, and the path and provisions necessary for, the soul's journey through this physical world to illumination and contentment in the spiritual world.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetic works consist primarily of odes (*qaṣīdas*), as well as very few quatrains, couplets and fragments. Two modest-length *mathnawīs* of didactic verse, the verse *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, just referred to above, and the *Sa'ādat-nāma* (Book of Eudaimonia-Fulfilled Happiness) have traditionally been ascribed to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, but these ascriptions have been subject to scholarly debate, a debate which continues in this volume. When we look at the content and style more carefully, the claim of those who reject the authenticity of these two *mathnawīs* appears justified. The collected poems, the *Dīwān*, of Nāṣir-i Khusraw have been critically edited twice in the twentieth century, a rather remarkable achievement. The first critical edition of the *Dīwān*, published during 1925–1928, was in fact laboriously achieved through the labours of three of Iran's most distinguished literary scholars of recent times. Edited by Naṣr Allāh Taqawī (1871–1947) from a collation of a number of manuscripts and lithograph editions, the *Dīwān* was given a masterful introduction by Sayyid Ḥasan Taqīzāda (1878–1970), while he was in exile in Berlin for his outspoken opposition to the then newly named shah, Reza Shah Pahlavi, in which he carefully considered centuries



of evidence and assertions for details of the poet's life and works; a second introduction was written by Muḡtabā Mīnuwī (1903–1977) in 1307 Sh./1928, describing the texts consulted. Then, at Taqīzāda's request, 'Alī Akbar Dihkhudā (1897–1956), the peerless scholar who has given his name to the greatest dictionary of the Persian language, went through each line of the *Dīwān*, *Sa'adat-nāma*, *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* and *Risāla* very carefully and made detailed notes of his recommended readings of lines, including comparisons of the usage of terms by other Persian poets and writers, notes which are appended at the back of the *Dīwān*. Dihkhudā's exacting attention to each word is shown by the large number of Nāṣir-i Khusraw citations in Dihkhudā's later publications, *Amthāl wa ḡikam* and the part of his dictionary (*Lughat-nāma*) that he wrote himself. The Taqawī edition was copy-edited and re-released under the direction of Mahdī Suhaylī in Tehran in 1335 Sh./1956. Even though both the *Sa'adat-nāma* and *Rawshanā'ī-nāma mathnawīs* were published with the *Dīwān*, Mīnuwī argued against the latter's authenticity in his introduction and in a later article.⁸ This edition of the *Dīwān* is arranged in classic style, in alphabetical order by the rhyme.

The second critical edition of the *Dīwān* was undertaken by Muḡtabā Mīnuwī and Mahdī Muḡaqqīq and published by the University of Tehran in 1974; the 'correct (revised)' edition was published in 1978 as part of the Wisdom of Persia Series published by The Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Tehran Branch. Mīnuwī's lifelong dedication to Nāṣir-i Khusraw and his connection with both editions has provided a crucial continuity for Nāṣir-i Khusraw scholarship. The Mīnuwī–Muḡaqqīq edition looks completely different from the Taqawī edition because of its non-alphabetical, numerical arrangement. In the course of a conversation with Professor Muḡaqqīq in 2008, I learned that this unusual format reflects the main manuscript on which the edition was based, one of the manuscripts utilised by Hermann Ethé in 1882 for his edition and German translation of the *Qaṣīda* I examine and translate into English in this volume (see notes on pp. 181–182). The Mīnuwī–Muḡaqqīq edition does not include the verse *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* or the *Sa'adat-nāma*, both of which Mīnuwī had already argued to be spurious. The critical apparatus in the second edition provides variant readings of lines and terms, as well as indices of places, personal names and titles, schools and communities, and titles of works that Nāṣir-i Khusraw referred to or made use of in his poems. These lists are extremely helpful for studying the poet's approach to, for example, other poets (Rūdakī has one mention; Kisā'ī, ten).

Leaving aside the two questionable *mathnawīs*, *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* and *Sa'adat-nāma*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān* (the Mīnuwī–Muḡaqqīq edition) today is filled with over 230 *qaṣīdas* and forty or sixty shorter poems and riddles, making up a total of nearly 11,000 lines (sing. *bayt*) of two hemistiches (sing. *miṣra'*) each.



Nāṣir-i Khusraw and the *qaṣīda* genre

The *qaṣīda*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw's favourite poetic format, is one of the classic forms of poetry. Originating in pre-Islamic Arabia, it was adopted and modified, with most of its rules intact, for Persian poetry. Each line (*bayt*) consists of two hemistiches or halves (*miṣrā'*), equally balanced in rhythm. Most characteristic of *qaṣīdas* is the final monorhyme of the second hemistich of *all* the *bayts* (meaning the entire poem has the same rhyme at the end of each line), while the first line of each poem is announced by the rhyming of both its hemistiches. *Qaṣīdas* can vary in length, from around ten *bayts* to several hundred. Nāṣir-i Khusraw keeps his to around forty to fifty *bayts*, although the longest is 131 *bayts*. Perhaps the rigour of needing to find a different rhyme word for each *bayt* serves to delimit the ultimate length of any particular *qaṣīda*. In contrast, for example, the *mathnawī* form rhymes both *miṣrā'*s within one *bayt*, but allows each *bayt* to have a different rhyme, thus making epic length poems possible, extending to thousands of verses.

The double-hemistich structure opens the way for a complex relationship between the two parts – that is, a conversation which can include, question and answer, contrast or opposition, repetition or synonymity, conditional clauses, or providing examples of the main idea. The choice of rhythm is also a critical component of a poem, particularly since Muslim critics understood that the purpose of the poem was to affect the individual soul. Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) wrote, 'the melodious intonation and the singing proper to every theme are the basis of moving the soul towards the meaning', and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) concurred: 'The function of tone in poetry is that it prepares the soul to accept the image (*khayāl*) of the thing being represented.'⁹

Additional rules of format and style adhere to the *qaṣīda*, such as having a series of thematic sections, which listeners would attentively critique, attending first to the surprising beauty and conception of the opening line, then the unfolding pace of themes, the unveiling of various meanings of particular vocabulary, and abrupt or subtle transitions between stages.

Persian poets did not retain all the themes from the Arabic tradition (such as opening the *qaṣīda* with a meditation on the traces of a recently abandoned Bedouin camp in order to reflect on the impermanence of this world), but did keep many others, such as the custom of the poet praising himself and his own tribe (*fakhr*, 'the vaunt'), while hurling invective at his enemy (*hija*), both in the most superlative manner. Since poets in the Islamic era found work primarily in royal courts, and were compensated by the king or ruler, or anyone else whose virtues they sang, many *qaṣīdas* were either entirely or partly panegyric, praising the ruler for humanity's highest virtues, such as justice, generosity, or wisdom. But praise also cloaked advice and admonition. In addition, poems were appreciated for concisely and elegantly stating universal truths revealed by the main actions



in the poem, or in the adages and gnomic verses that the poet inserted as illustration. This type of didacticism is evident in all the various genres, ranging from historical or heroic narratives, to quests for the beloved, or mystical reflections. It is hard to imagine any good poem that can be dismissed as simple ‘entertainment’ or ‘panegyric’.

The *qaṣīdas* of Nāṣir-i Khusraw show how deeply steeped in this tradition he was. His dramatic openings, which are frequently committed to memory, still carry their original punch (*Nikūhish makun charkh-i nīlūfarī rā*, ‘Blame not the azure wheel of heaven’; and *Āzurda kard kazhdum-i ghurbat jigar ma rā/gū’i zabūn nayāft zi gītī magar ma rā*, ‘The scorpion of exile has stung my heart so, You would think I was the only wretch in the world it could find’).¹⁰ He excoriates his enemies, mostly for ignorance and hypocrisy, and praises those he reveres for their fairness, knowledge and wisdom. The only rulers our poet will praise are the Fatimid Ismaili Caliph-Imam of the time, Muṣṭansir bi’llāh, and Nāṣir’s local patron and protector, the Amir of Badakhshān, and he rebukes other poets for wasting their talents on worldly, unworthy lords.

Philosophical poetry and Nāṣir-i Khusraw

The main purpose of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s poetry, he tells us, is to open the reader or listener’s inner eye to universal truths and thereby save their souls from the Hell of ignorance. He is the most important Persian poet to put specifically religious and philosophical ideas into poetry, and not simply universal adages and moral truths.

For his topics, Nāṣir selects from many fields. In some of the Persian language’s most beautiful lines, he describes the glories of evening or spring, but always to draw a lesson, either of the world’s mutability or of God’s power and knowledge. He warns against the seductions of fame, power and wealth, and urges exertion instead towards spiritual strength and riches. But going beyond moral admonition, Nāṣir turns again and again to philosophy to shape and anchor his arguments. He both brings in Qur’anic verses and *ḥadīths* (accounts of the Prophet Muḥammad’s sayings and actions) as evidence or proof, and also expounds Neoplatonic metaphysics. And his argumentative method is also philosophical. Indeed, his pen-name, *ḥujjat*, although usually translated as ‘proof’, meaning philosophical or mathematical proof, also means ‘argument’ in the field of logic. Nāṣir equally draws upon Persian history and literature, liberally referring to famous heroes, texts, poets, cities and kings, as well as pointing accusingly to his contemporaries at court and in the pulpit. His lexicon is refined, erudite and scientific; he does not shy away from technical words, in fact, he revels in brandishing them as proof of his credentials and reliability. But more than a technical virtuoso, Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s creative powers in language are evident in his rank through the centuries as one of



the leading poets in the Persian language. This was never held in question until the twentieth century.

In 1940, the Egyptian scholar Yahya El-Khachab, writing in French, produced the first full-length biography on Nāṣir-i Khusraw in any language. But after 270 pages on Nāṣir's life, travels and philosophy, he allots only twenty pages to analyse the poet's poetry. Perhaps this is enough, because he opens his first sentence with the judgement that Nāṣir 'is not a pure poet', explaining that, 'the subjects he includes are too political to give rise to flights of the imagination, and therefore there are no lyrical themes worth remembering'. When El-Khachab puts Nāṣir into a respectable genre, that too falls short: 'While Nāṣir is a panegyric poet, it is simply to produce propaganda for the Fatimids',¹¹ and we have to wonder if the entire enterprise of court poetry is no longer to be considered poetry. What would we do with Rūdakī's famous and beloved *būy-i jūy-i Mūliyān āyad hamī* poem, whose sole 'purpose' was to praise the king in such a way that he would simply take the army home? It is not clear whether El-Kachab's prejudice is against kings and politics, or faith and creed, or poetry that has purposes other than what he calls 'lyrical'. But he has raised the question of the 'subjects' (contents) and the 'purposes' of poetry, and has classified some as poetic and others not. More recently, Sayyid Ja'far Shahīdī mirrored this criticism of the poetry's purpose, saying Nāṣir's poetry is 'a means, not an end', and therefore does not really rank as poetry.¹²

Shibli Nu'mānī, another twentieth-century scholar of Persian literature, who wrote a history of poets and literature of Iran in Urdu, included a chapter on 'Philosophical Poetry' (*Shā'iri-yi filsūfāna*) in which he suggested that such a genre might be not only dry and analytical (*khushk wā qābil-i diqqat-i nazār*) but in fact merely 'verse' – not 'poetry' at all (*naẓm na shī'r*).¹³ After asserting that philosophy entered Persian poetry by way of Sufism, specifically naming Rūmī, Sa'dī and Sanā'ī (all poets later than Nāṣir-i Khusraw), he states, 'Before everyone else, Nāṣir-i Khusraw inserted philosophical ideas and concepts into poetry.' Despite this promising beginning for a chapter on philosophical poetry, he concludes, 'Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān* has been published even though there are many philosophical issues in it. However, we have not quoted any of his poems because the style is not poetical (*uslūb bayān-i shā'irāna nīst*).'²

When the eminent twentieth-century Iranian scholar of Persian literature Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar declares that, since Nāṣir-i Khusraw 'did not really care about being called a poet, and composed poetry to propagate the faith and to pass on his beliefs to others, his verses became a collection of religious and rational arguments, devoid of poetic fervour and thoughts',¹⁴ we know we have entered a new era, with a different set of criteria for excellence. Furūzānfar argues from both the 'purpose' and the 'content' of the poetry to conclude that Nāṣir's verses lack the essence of poetry. That is, he claims that since the poet's purpose was



‘to propagate the faith’, his compositions must necessarily become devoid of real poetry. Second, because the poetry’s content was a mere ‘collection of religious and rational arguments’, it was not poetry. Yet, to say that Nāṣir-i Khusraw did not ‘care about being called a poet’ is either to have not read the lines of his boasts of poetic prowess and praising his own poetic talents (so discomfoting to modern-day readers) or to equate Nāṣir’s criticisms of court poets selling their art for cash, composing poems that only drip with flattery of the patron and sentimental themes of love and gardens, with Nāṣir’s assessment of himself.

It will require another study to examine the variety of critical judgements on Nāṣir-i Khusraw over the past millennium. But we do need to briefly notice that something unusual happened in thinking of the purposes of poetry, and not just Persian poetry, in the past few centuries. For example (and far too briefly), I suggest we consider how the dualism of Descartes in the seventeenth century extended to science and poetry, positing them as such opposites that Descartes was accused by a contemporary of ‘cutting the throat of poetry’. The rise, in the eighteenth century, of the prestige of reason and the interpretation of Nature and the universe as a mechanical system led to a distrust of ‘enthusiasm’, ‘wit’, and ‘inspiration’, with Samuel Johnson calling for a poetry focusing on ‘abstracted’ or ‘general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same’.¹⁵ The Romantic reaction against such stifling rationalism was complex, especially in Germany and England, where many intellectuals affirmed the essential identification of poetry and philosophy, as in Shelley’s assertion that poets are ‘philosophers of the very loftiest power’.¹⁶ Then, perhaps falling under the influence of the nineteenth-century Romantics, a sentiment grew that poetry should be concerned only with emotions or feelings. Wordsworth’s famous dictum was that poetry must be ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’ and Keats wrote ‘we hate poetry that has a palpable design on us’. In the twentieth century, W. H. Auden’s assertion that ‘poetry makes nothing happen’ and Archibald MacLeish’s, ‘A poem should not mean but be’, challenged longstanding assumptions on the affective properties of poetry and even rendered no longer legitimate the reader’s question ‘What does it mean?’ Yet these exercises turn on themselves, contradicting their own call to drop didacticism. This rapid survey is meant to indicate not only that literature develops and changes with the passage of time, but to show that recent centuries have seen major upheavals in the expectations of poetry, and that we need to recognise our place in the timeline. Concomitantly, in order to fully understand and fairly judge a poem, we must employ the rules of the time in which it is written.

The essential question is whether or not poetry can be philosophical. Or, is what I am calling ‘philosophical poetry’ merely verse? There are two ways a poem may be philosophical, and Persian philosophical poetry exhibits examples of each way. It may simply carry a philosophical idea that could be restated separately from the poem; for example, Abu’l-Haytham al-Jurjānī’s philosophical poem that



occasioned Nāṣir-i Khusraw's prose response, the *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* (as well as his summary *Risāla*). We might also add the philosophical poem that was written in response to the original poem by al-Jurjānī's student, Muḥammad ibn Surkh al-Nishāpūri.¹⁷ Second, philosophy may be so intertwined with language, rhythm and other poetical devices that it could not be restated without dismantling the poem itself, as with Nāṣir-i Khusraw's 'On the Steed of Speech', analysed in my chapter in this volume.¹⁸ Other early examples of Persian philosophical poetry include *qaṣīdas* by Ḥakīm Maysarī (b. 324/986),¹⁹ Abu'l-'Abbās Lawkarī (seventh/thirteenth century),²⁰ and Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 606/1208),²¹ and quatrains by the philosopher Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī (seventh/thirteenth century).²² These are only a few of the examples of philosophical poetry in Persian, in the study of which this volume marks a beginning, by examining its leading representative. Of our two types of philosophical poetry, to say the first kind is not poetry is to make a value judgement, not a definition of category, and we cannot judge a category until we have defined it. The first way of putting philosophy into verse still counts as poetry; just as satire and comedy can be poetry, so can philosophy or history or science. Perhaps it is a question of language. English, while sometimes using the terms 'poetry' and 'verse' ambiguously, does not have a problem with calling all sorts of poems 'poetry'; even the phrase 'occasional verse' signifies poetry written for special occasions. As with sculptures or paintings, we may judge poems to be bad, but they are still poems. More recent Persian critics distinguished between verse (*naẓm*) and poetry (*shi'r*), and in Furūzānfar and Shibli (to take just two), we see a judgement that relegates Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poems to *naẓm*. Perhaps the problem arises because Nāṣir is Ismaili, or simply because he is a preacher and didactic. But Persian poetry celebrates its sermonisers and it is for its readers to try to follow their lessons. Perhaps, and perhaps most importantly, not only are such critical sentiments influenced by recent centuries, but by the oceans of mystical poetry that flowed through all the fields of Persian literature and culture. Perhaps only mystical poetry now counts as *shi'r* for some critics. Space will not allow further surmising, but we could look closer at some of the classical critics.

Muḥammad 'Awfi, the earliest Persian critic, in his anthology of Persian poets, *Lubāb al-Albāb* (composed in the seventh/thirteenth century), mentions a poet named Khusrawī Sarakhsī (d. before 383/1005), a veritable 'King of the Realms of Speech Itself' (*khusraw-i mamālik-i sukhan*), in service to the powerful and intellectual Buyid vizier, Ṣāḥib Ibn 'Abbād (d. 385/1007).²³ 'Awfi writes that 'while the verse (*naẓm*) of others can be good or bad, Khusrawī Sarakhsī's verse (*naẓm*) is filled with philosophy (*ḥikmat*)'. 'Awfi includes the title al-Ḥakīm as part of the poet's name (as is the case with Nāṣir-i Khusraw). Khusrawī Sarakhsī became famous and was placed in the highest ranks of Persian poets (*shu'arā'*) and included in the pages of the Arabic literary stylists (*fuḍalā'*). 'Awfi cites four lines that begin, 'Know God through the intellect ('*aql*)', a sentiment shared by Nāṣir-i Khusraw.



Furūzānfar, citing ‘Awfī and Abū Naṣr al-‘Utbī (d. 427 or 431/1036 or 1040s) whose Arabic work, *Tārīkh-i Yamīnī*, praises Khusrawī Sarakhsī, declares that he was the first poet (*shā‘ir*) who combined philosophical ideas and poetic images, and that after him this genre became a very important feature in Persian poetry.²⁴ Discussing Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Furūzānfar also asserts that ‘Nāṣir-i Khusraw is a master with a powerful poetic nature and a rare style. His poetry is profound and meaningful, and his manner of expression reaches the highest degree of solidity and strength. The versification of scientific laws and arguments that Khusrawī Sarakhsī initiated, Nāṣir-i Khusraw carried to its perfection.’²⁵ Such a multi-layered assessment (remembering his dismissal of Nāṣir’s poetry as ‘devoid of poetic fervour and thought’) by this major twentieth-century scholar of Persian literature illuminates the complex nature of appreciating the genre of philosophical poetry.

It did not dawn on the earlier generations of critics who included Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s philosophical poetry in their poetry anthologies that they needed to defend philosophical poetry as poetry. True, they discussed types of poetry, and what subjects were appropriate for which type and for which occasions, and they distinguished between versification (*naẓm*) and poetry (*shī‘r*). Since Nāṣir was a philosopher, this comes through in his poetry; there are verses that, without any knowledge of the Neoplatonic philosophy he espoused, are indecipherable. According to the classical critics, his poetry was never considered ‘verse’; Nāṣir composed poetry both as a philosopher and as a poet. He was not simply putting philosophy into verse. He produced a literary creation, using the language of poetry. For example, the phrase, ‘the steed of speech’ (*kumayt-i sukhan*) is not of the language of philosophy, but that of poetry. Literature does not propose facts that can be judged by the criterion of truth or falsehood. Literature is a product of the imagination and can only be judged by imaginative consistency.²⁶

Chapters in this volume

In his detailed biographical introduction to the first edition of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s *Dīwān*, Sayyid Ḥasan Taqīzāda wrote that he focused on the poet’s biography because he did not have enough time to write a chapter on the philosophical, scientific and literary aspects or on the philological use of words, grammar, metrics, and poetic criticism of the *Dīwān*. The chapters of this present volume begin to address the subject areas that Taqīzāda was not able to complete and are arranged into three main sections: (1) Speech and Intellect; (2) Philosophical Poetry: Enlightening the Soul; and (3) Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s Poetics; these are completed by an introduction by the Academic editor and a conclusion by Julie Scott Meisami, Lecturer in Persian at the University of Oxford, now retired.

The first section, ‘Speech and Intellect’, considers the very ‘stuff’ of poetry and its creation – human intellect, language and speech – and their connection to the



creative Word of God. The Intellect (Ar., 'aql; P., *khirad*), which is considered God's first creation, as well as the first Neoplatonic hypostasis, is one of the terms that appears most frequently in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry, along with the word 'speech' (Ar., *kalima*, *nuṭq*; P., *sukhan*, or *sakhun* as it was pronounced in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's time, or *guftār*). The highest activity of a human being's soul is that which occurs when the rational soul (*nafs-i nāṭiqā*, literally, 'the speaking soul') is functioning; and the highest activity of the rational soul, its actualisation, is that which occurs when it becomes one with the Intellect. Faquir Muhammad Hunzai's chapter, 'The Position of 'aql in the Prose and Poetry of Nāṣir-i Khusraw', first places Nāṣir in historical context and considers his relationship with the Ismaili Muslim faith and *da'wa*. Then, with abundant examples from a variety of Nāṣir's texts on the topic of intellect ('aql), Hunzai shows that Nāṣir follows neither the philosophers nor the theologians, but puts himself in another category. In fact, Nāṣir classifies all people 'with respect to the innate intellect vis-à-vis the *tanzīl* (revelation)'. But then after this description and analysis, Hunzai examines the consequences Nāṣir delineates for a person's acceptance or rejection of the edification by the perfect intellect. So central is the topic of intellect that a second chapter on the topic is included: M. J. Esmaeili's 'Ontological and Religious Aspects of the Intellect in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Poetry'. Driving straight to the point of this book, Esmaeili suggests that Nāṣir's *Dīwān* is so full of 'philosophical contemplation and exhortation' that one might ask if it is more a 'product of reason than of emotion'. Selecting a limited number of verses for analysis, Esmaeili explains key philosophical methods (such as truncated syllogism) and gives comparisons with Plato, Aristotle, Farābī, Ibn Sinā and other philosophers. Esmaeili also examines how the poet retains Ismaili views on religion and society, and shows how Nāṣir did not follow the philosophers or the theologians, especially on the topic of the rational soul, but rather forged his own view of human beings, their immortal rational souls. Daniel Rafinejad, in his "I am a Mine of Golden Speech": Poetic Language and Self-Reference in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Qaṣīdas*', sees Nāṣir's conception of the *qaṣīda* itself as an epitaph expressing his feelings and beliefs, or as a repository of language connecting the self to God through the doctrine of Oneness (*tawhīd*). Rafinejad identifies three major modes of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *qaṣīdas*: emotional/autobiographical, sententious, and reverential, drawing comparisons with the English poet Wordsworth's reflections on himself and the world, and showing how Nāṣir's poetic techniques blend passion and philosophy, with language serving as 'script, diction and structure'. Leonard Lewisohn's chapter, 'Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Ode to the Universal Soul and Intellect', is a complete literary translation of one of the poet's most important *qaṣīdas*, with extensive notes elucidating the poet's meanings and allusions to other texts, including the Qur'an, Ḥadīth, and other poets and philosophers. In addition, through comparisons with Nāṣir-i Khusraw's own prose philosophical works, Lewisohn shows



how his poetry relates to his prose works on the very central Ismaili philosophy of Universal Intellect and Universal Soul.

The second section of the volume, 'Philosophical Poetry: Enlightening the Soul', considers the effect of the poetry on the poet's and the reader's soul and life. In his chapter 'Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Imagination and the Poetics of Enlightenment', Muhammad Azadpur focuses on the two movements in a prophetic moment, *tanzīl* (revelation) and *ta'wīl* (esoteric interpretation), called 'movements' because first the message 'comes down' (from the Arabic root, *n-z-l*) for a wide audience and then through interpretation the audience gains enlightenment by returning (from the Arabic root *'-w-l*) to the spiritual source of the message. Going beyond the conclusion of the French scholar Henry Corbin that Islamic philosophy is primarily prophetic philosophy, Azadpur explains Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetics in relation to Ibn Sīnā's theory of the imagination (*al-mutakhayyila*) in the prophetic moment, showing that *ta'wīl*, for our poet, requires the cultivation of the imaginative capacity. But not only does Nāṣir require this training, Azadpur argues, he builds it into his poetry, so that the reader is prepared for illumination. Azadpur shows that Nasir utilises the process of poetry to open the reader's imagination, preparing the way for *ta'wīl*. Mehdi Aminrazavi argues that Nāṣir-i Khusraw uses poetic licence to construct an ethical paradigm complete with instructions for the journey of the soul. While his chapter, 'Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Poetics of the Moral Journey and the Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals', takes its title from the work of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, it is not strictly a Kantian reading of Nāṣir. Aminrazavi analyses the metaphysical foundations of two levels of morality (bodily and spiritual actions) which, he argues, constitute Nāṣir-i Khusraw's plan for the journey on which each individual soul is guided. As one of the most frequently quoted authors of verses of advice, Nāṣir's background in ethics merits special study. Mohsen Zakeri addresses Nāṣir-i Khusraw's extensive use of proverbs, contending that a great number of them derive from Pahlawi sources, such as the *Bundahishn*, *Denkart* and *Rawshan-nipik*, whose teachings had been absorbed into Arabo-Islamic traditions. In his chapter, 'The *Rawshanā'i-nāma* and the Older Iranian Cosmogony', Zakeri applies new documentary evidence, his recent discovery and analysis of an early Arabic translation of a Middle Persian text, to Nāṣir-i Khusraw's controversial verse *Rawshanā'i-nāma* and concludes that the poet made thorough and good use of this Arabic material in moralising epithets and his cosmogonic elaborations. Arguing against Iranian scholars such as Sajjadī and Mujtaba Mīnuwī (and Pourjavady in this volume), who assert the inauthenticity of the *mathnawī Rawshanā'i-nāma*, Zakeri uses this poem to show how Nāṣir's poetry constitutes a critical link between pre-Islamic and Islamicised Iranian ideas of morals and cosmogony.



The third section of this volume, 'Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Poetics', analyses the poetry as poetry. Michael Beard's chapter, 'Also a Poet', takes its title from a common clause tacked on to the end of many an English biographical notice of intellectuals, in order to challenge the assumption that philosophy and poetry must be considered as mutually exclusive. After showing a commonality between poetry and philosophy – both are based on linguistic precision – and drawing comparisons with other poets such as Spenser, Milton, 'Umar Khayyām and Esma'il Kho'i, Beard unpacks the poetic technique of one of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's best-known poems, about the eagle who learned the meaning of pride. But Beard suggests the poem is about more than this, about more than morality, it is about the dangers of *not* perceiving (no matter how sharp the eyes) one's own depths, one's own power. The chapter by Nasrollah Pourjavady, 'Hearing by Way of Seeing: *Zabān-i ḥāl* in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Poetry and the Question of Authorship . . .', presents this poetic technique as new evidence in a longstanding debate. Pourjavady traces the broad use of this literary device, *zabān-i ḥāl*, in which the poet has any animate or inanimate being 'speak' in what may be called 'fabulous language' or 'personification'. Against a backdrop of examples from Plotinus, 'Umar Khayyām and 'Aṭṭār, he proffers many verses from Nāṣir-i Khusraw in which things such as Nature, the World, Heaven and Time, as well as plants such as the sycamore and squash, speak. To be understood, this special speaking requires an intuitive perception, which the poet sometimes refers to as 'hearing' or 'seeing' with your heart. Then, through an examination of *zabān-i ḥāl* in *Rawshanā'i-nāma*, as well as arguments by others, he concludes that this *mathnawī* cannot be ascribed to Nāṣir-i Khusraw.

Each poem is a work of art, designed by the poet with a beginning, middle and an end. *Qaṣīdas* in particular are constructed according to an overall plan, not just line by line. Alice Hunsberger's chapter, "'On the Steed of Speech": A Philosophical Poem by Nāṣir-i Khusraw', analyses in its entirety a single *qaṣīda* in which the poet subjects his philosophy of Speech to his literary imagination. Using Ibn al-Mu'tazz's list of poetic devices, Hunsberger examines each line poetically and philosophically; she demonstrates how the poet structures his work and how the words relate to each other in image, meaning and sound, as well as explaining philosophical concepts and background. A second complete *qaṣīda* is analysed in Julie Scott Meisami's 'Symbolic Structure in a Poem by Nāṣir-i Khusraw', previously published in the journal *Iran* and reprinted here by kind permission of the author and publisher. In this chapter, Meisami methodically reveals that the inner structure Nāṣir has employed in his *qaṣīda* is a poetic structure mirroring, and even driving, the meaning of the poem. That is, the structure is not a lifeless shell in which meaning is carried, but an organic part of the meaning. For example, in this poem about changing the direction of one's life, the poet has chosen as the last word for each line (*radīf*) the first-person form of the Persian verb 'to make or do', thus *kunam*, 'I make, I do', and in this



way indicating that first-person action verbs will populate each and every line in the poem. Furthermore, with ample references to Nāṣir's philosophical works in prose, Meisami shows how the structure in the poem, as well as its meaning line by line, embodies his philosophy. One critical component of poetry is rhythm. Finn Thiesen's 'Rhythm in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Poems' is a watershed in Nāṣir-i Khusraw poetics, quantitatively assessing the use of poetic metres in the poet's *Dīwān*. Thiesen asserts that the poet 'liked to experiment and use rare metres', in contrast to Ḥāfiẓ, for example, who used the same metre for a quarter of his poems. Thiesen then conducts a statistical analysis of nine linguistic elements in forty poems of Nāṣir, providing the first such thorough grammatical study of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's rhythmical technique.

In keeping with the philosophical method of dialogue, the volume ends with a concluding chapter, 'Nāṣir-i Khusraw: A Poet Lost in thought?' by Julie Scott Meisami. Meisami discusses some of the problematics of Nāṣir's poetry (such as, whom was he addressing, who was the intended audience), as well as the outstanding features of his poetic style. But she goes beyond questioning the conventions of style and structure to highlight the imaginative power and verve of Nāṣir's poetry which grips the audience, such as the use of extended metaphors throughout an entire *qaṣīda*. Meisami also lays out suggestions for fruitful areas of research in the future.

* * *

The present volume is based on the conference 'The Philosophical Poetry of Nāṣir-i Khusraw', convened in 2005 by the editor of this volume in collaboration with Doris Behrens-Abouseif at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, as part of international commemorations of the 1,000th anniversary of the birth of Nāṣir-i Khusraw. Primarily funded and organised by the Iran Heritage Foundation (IHF), the conference was also generously supported by The Institute of Ismaili Studies, in association with SOAS, all London-based institutions. I thank Doris Behrens-Abouseif for vital institutional assistance with the venue. I am very grateful to all the supporters and members of the Board of Trustees of IHF for their dedication to Persian culture and their support of this conference, and especially to Farhad Hakimzadeh, former Managing Director of the IHF, for bringing my original idea to fruition. I would like to thank the other members of the Conference Advisory Committee, Mehdi Aminrazavi, Farhad Daftary, Leonard Lewisohn and Julie Scott Meisami, who helped shape the conference and solve many problems. I would also like to thank Sahar Rad for her very able administration during the conference itself. To all the conference participants who presented papers and served as advisers, panel chairs, and discussants, I would like to express my deep appreciation.



One of the first items we examine in poetry is words. In poetry, the economy of language, an almost ironic scarcity of words, means that each word sits poised in its fullness, each level of meaning vibrating in anticipation of possible relevance to the next word, next line or next page, or to previous ones. The reader must keep each possible meaning actively alive while waiting to see what the poet will do next. This is especially true in the *bayt* format of Persian poetry, where the second hemistich of a line (the second *mišrā'*) often responds to the first. Nāšir's use of a technical vocabulary further increases the power of the poetry because it keeps the reader's intellect highly challenged and engaged, thus providing some of the energy that propels meaning and sentiment through the progress of the poem. Given this centrality of vocabulary, the conference was fortunate to have the participation of Professor Maḥdī Muḥaqqiq, who has spent decades in minute study of Nāšir-i Khusraw's poetic vocabulary, publishing several works dealing with this topic, most recently the multi-volume *Comprehensive Commentary of the Dīwān of Nāšir-i Khusraw* (Tehran, 1386 Sh./2007). The paper he presented at the conference explained the meaning of a number of technical terms in Nāšir-i Khusraw's poetry. Since these definitions are useful for specialists who read the poetry in Persian and are available in other works he has published in Persian, we will list them here only briefly. Professor Muḥaqqiq spoke about five specific areas: Logic, Ismaili Terminology, Philosophical Terms, Theological Terms and Persian Translations of Arabic Originals. With Nāšir-i Khusraw liberally loading his verses with such technical terms, we are indebted to scholars such as Muḥaqqiq for clarifying key examples of the poet's vocabulary.

Far more than the proceedings of a conference, however, this volume contains several completely new works of scholarship resulting from subsequent discussions. I would like to express my thanks for everyone who has helped to bring this volume to publication. Foremost I would like to thank the contributors to this volume for their fine chapters, but also for the patience they have shown in the publication process, demonstrating a graciousness equal to their fine scholarship. I am very grateful to Farhad Daftary, Director of The Institute of Ismaili Studies and the Head of its Department of Academic Research and Publications, whose extensive knowledge of Ismaili thought and history has done so much for the field and for all of us, for agreeing to support the conference and for carefully overseeing the editing and publication of this current volume. Thanks are due to the editorial staff of The Institute of Ismaili Studies, including Marjan Afsharian for cross-checking details in the typescript, Rahim Gholami for typing out and proof-reading the Persian text of three *qašidas* in the appendix, Dagi Dagiev, Isabel Miller, and finally Tara Woolnough, the editorial co-ordinator, for her help in guiding the editorial process. Thanks are also due to Tom Milo at Decotype for typesetting the three *qašidas*. For reading parts of the book and offering abundant comments, I would like to thank Michael Beard. I would also like to warmly acknowledge my appreciation



to Nasrollah Pourjavady for his generous help with this volume; he meticulously reviewed many drafts of several articles and made many valuable suggestions which improved the book immensely. I would like to thank Julie Scott Meisami for giving permission for her article to be republished here; I am delighted to have her turn her attention once again to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, after her decades of study of the *qaṣīda*, and to write the concluding chapter. Finally (in the sense of fulfillment), I would like to say how grateful I am to The Institute of Ismaili Studies, including my former colleagues and the students I taught there, for the support and encouragement of this publication, for helping to bring to new readers the art and philosophy and spirituality of Nāṣir-i Khusraw. On a personal note, I would like to thank my daughter for her witty, intelligent support of her mother through this endeavour.

Although this volume takes us a step closer in bringing to light Nāṣir-i Khusraw's philosophical poetry, it still marks only a beginning. The entire field of philosophical poetry in Persian itself needs more study, along with Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry in particular. We need more understanding of his vocabulary and his philosophy in order to grasp the meaning of each line. But we must also develop a more learned appreciation of the uses of his poetry, what it was for, as well as of his poetic technique – with individual words, sounds, lines, conventions, and the structural sections within a particular *qaṣīda*. It is our hope that others will join in this endeavour. The quality and variety of topics of the chapters here bear testimony to Nāṣir-i Khusraw's continuing power to incite imagination and intellect, stringing pearls of wisdom into elegant creations.

Notes

1. *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, ed. M. Mīnuwī and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1353 Sh./1974; repr. 1357 Sh./1978), poem number 242:76: *daryā-i ma'īn ast dar īn khāk ma'nā / ham durr-i girānmāya u ham āb-i muṭahhar*.
2. For a review of some of the most important of these anthologies, see Alice C. Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw, The Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller and Philosopher* (London, 2001), pp. 17–32; published in Persian as *Nāṣir-i Khusraw, La'l-i Badakhshān* (Tehran, 1380 Sh./2001), pp. 49–62.
3. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, poem number 242:27.
4. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, poem numbers 26:31 (with the first hemistich reading *Fāṭimī-am, Fāṭimī-am, Fāṭimī-am* (I am Fāṭimid, I am Fāṭimid, I am Fāṭimid) and 43:47.
5. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, poem number 103:26. See also F. Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 205–207.
6. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn: Le livre réunissant les deux sagesse*, ed. H. Corbin and M. Mu'īn (Tehran and Paris, 1953), pp. 307–308. See also 'Azīz Allāh Juwaynī, "Ulūm wa riyaḍī dar kutub-i nazm wa naṣr-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw", in *Nāma-i ma'nā*, ed. Bihrūz



Imānī (Tehran, 1383 Sh./2004), pp. 355–363. See also F. Daftary, *Ismaili Literature* (London, 2004), pp. 134–140.

7. Now translated into English by Eric Ormsby as *Between Reason and Revelation: Twin Wisdoms Reconciled* (London, 2012).

8. Mujtaba Mīnuwī, 'Rawshanā'ī-nāma-yi naṣr-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw wa Rawshanā'ī-nāma-yi manẓūm mansūb bi ū', in the published proceedings of the Conference held in Mashhad (1976) for the Millenium of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's death, *Yādnāma-yi Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (Mashhad, 1355 Sh./1976), pp. 576–580.

9. Ismail M. Dahiyat, *Avicenna's Commentary on the 'Poetics' of Aristotle: A Critical Study with an Annotated Translation of the Text* (Leiden, 1974), p. 90. See also, for instance, Ibn Sīnā, *Poetics*, v. 8.

10. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, poem number 64:1.

11. Yahya El-Khachab, *Nāṣir è Hosrow: son voyage, sa pensée religieuse, sa philosophie et sa poesie* (Cairo, 1940), pp. 271, cf. 284.

12. Sayyid Ja'far Shahidī, 'Afkā' wa 'aqā'id-i kalām-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw', in *Yādnāma-yi Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (Mashhad, 1355 Sh./1976), p. 316, cited also in Raḥīm Musalmāniyān Qubādīyānī, *Pāra-yi Samarqand* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999), pp. 59–60.

13. Shibli Nu'mānī, *Shī'r al-'Ajām ya tārikh-i shī'r wa adabiyāt-i Irān*, tr. Muḥammad Taqī Fakhr Dā'ī Gilānī, vol. 5 (2nd ed., Tehran, 1363 Sh./1984), pp. 177–179.

14. Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, *Sukhan wa sukhanwarān* (4th ed., Tehran, 1369 Sh./1990), p. 154, note 1.

15. Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*, chapter 10, quoted in James Sutherland, *A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry* (London, 1948), p. 23.

16. Philip Wheelwright, 'Philosophy and Poetry', *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton, 1974), p. 616.

17. Both commentaries have been studied in H. Corbin and M. Mu'īn, eds., *Commentaire de la qasida ismaelienne d'Abu'l-Haitham Jorjani* (Tehran and Paris, 1955); see also F. Daftary, *Ismaili Literature*, pp. 106, 141.

18. Wheelwright, 'Philosophy and Poetry', p. 615. He presents Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* and Pope's *Essay on Man* as examples of the first, and Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Keats' *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, and Eliot's *Four Quartets* as examples of the second.

19. Ḥakīm Maysārī, *Dānish-nāma*, a scientific and medical poem written for a governor of Khurāsān under the Sāmānids. See Gilbert Lazard, *Les premiers poètes persans (IXe–Xe siècles)* (Tehran and Paris, 1964), pp. 36–40; partial French tr., pp. 163–180.

20. See Alice C. Hunsberger, 'Cosmos into Verse: Two Examples of Islamic Philosophical Poetry in Persian', in Omar Alī-de-Unzaga, ed., *Fortresses of the Intellect: Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary* (London, 2011), pp. 343–367, which compares a poem by Lawkarī with one by Nāṣir-i Khusraw. For detailed background on Lawkarī, see Roxanne D. Marcotte, 'Preliminary Notes on the Life and Work of Abū al-'Abbās al-Lawkarī (d. ca. 517/1123)', *Anaquel de Estudios Arabes*, 17 (2006), pp. 150–152.

21. Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, 'Manẓūma-yi manṭiq wa falsafa', in Nasrollah Pourjavady, *Du Mujaddad (Two Renewers of Faith: Studies on Muhammad-i Ghazzālī and Fakhruddīn-i Rāzī)* (Tehran, 2002), pp. 551–564.

22. William C. Chittick, *The Heart of Islamic Philosophy: The Quest for Self-Knowledge in the Teachings of Afdal al-din Kashani* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 127–131.



23. Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Khusrawī al-Sarakhsī al-Hakīm, entry with several poetry selections, in Muḥammad ‘Awfi, *Lubāb al-Albāb*, ed. Edward G. Browne (London and Leiden, 1903), Part II, pp. 18–19.
24. Fūrūzānfar, *Sukhan wa sukhanwarān*, p. 37.
25. Fūrūzānfar, *Sukhan wa sukhanwarān*, p. 154.
26. ‘Verse and Prose’, in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry*, p. 885.

The Institute of Ismaili Studies



I

Speech and Intellect

The Institute of Ismaili Studies



The Position of ‘*Aql* in the Prose and Poetry of Nāṣir-i Khusraw*

FAQUIR MUHAMMAD HUNZAI

In both his poetry and his prose, Nāṣir-i Khusraw extols the position of the intellect, using synonymously both the Arabic term (‘*aql*) and the Persian (*khirad*). In his approach to the intellect, his method follows neither that of the philosophers nor of the theologians. Although he has been included among the philosophers and also among the theologians,¹ he does not regard himself as of either group. He prefers to describe himself as a follower of the *ahl al-bayt* (the family of the Prophet Muḥammad), who are the *rāsikhūn fi’l-‘ilm* (those well-grounded in knowledge, Qur’an 3:7) and *muṭahharūn* (the ones purified by God, Qur’an 30:30; 56:79). He also includes himself among the people of *ta’wīl* (esoteric interpretation) and *ta’yīd* (divine help through the Holy Spirit²). Alluding to this position, he concludes his *Jāmi’ al-ḥikmatayn* thus:

Let every wise person who reads this book, in which we have mentioned the sayings of the sages of philosophy, quoting them to answer every question and then rectifying and strengthening them with the *ta’wīlī* explanation and demonstration from the discoveries (*mustanbaṭāt*) and deductions (*mustakhrajāt*) of the *rāsikhūn fi’l-‘ilm*, look at these with the inner eye and duly reflect upon every point. If he finds a word or a point in a religious allusion or in a *ta’wīlī* expression that is not well known among the so-called secular people of excellence (*fuḍalā’-nāmān-i dunyāwī*) from among the literati, poets and writers, let him not reject it, because the pearls of knowledge of true religion are strung on threads of allegories (*amthāl*) and concealed in jewel boxes of symbols (*rumūz*) that no one can touch except the *muṭahharūn*, namely those who have seen the concealed secrets of the knowledge of [God’s] mighty book and comprehended the writings of the splendid *sharī‘at*.³

* I would like to thank Professor Shafique N. Virani of the University of Toronto for reading the draft of this chapter and for his invaluable suggestions and editing.



Here, Nāṣir indicates that certain aspects of the teachings of the *ahl al-bayt* are neither known to philosophers nor to theologians. They are known only to the family of the Prophet and those who follow this illustrious lineage. In order to assess how Nāṣir arrives at and expresses his concept of intellect in prose and poetry, this chapter will briefly describe his background and the Ismaili *da'wa* (mission), then it will examine his classification of people with respect to the innate intellect (*'aql-i gharīzī*) vis-à-vis the *tanzīl* (revelation, namely the divine message sent down to human beings in allegories), and finally it will study the consequences he attributes to a human being's acceptance or rejection of edification by the perfect intellect.

Historical background

Nāṣir-i Khusraw was a member of the Ismaili *da'wa*. The Fatimid Imam al-Mustanṣir bi'llāh I (d. 487/1094), appointed him as the *ḥujjat-i Khurāsān*, the 'proof of Khurasan', or the *ṣāhib-i jazīra-yi Mashriq*, 'the lord of the eastern island'. In the *da'wa* terminology, a *ḥujjat* or *ṣāhib-i jazīra* is one of twelve dignitaries who oversee the world's twelve regions (*jazā'ir*, lit. 'islands', sing. *jazīra*⁴). Even today, centuries after his death, his memory is revered in Badakhshan, Afghanistan, western China, Chitral, and the Northern Areas of Pakistan, including Gilgit, Puniyal, western Ghizr, Yasin, Ishkoman and Hunza. In these areas he is known as Ḥaḍrat-i Pīr or Sayyid Shāh Nāṣir-i Khusraw.

His full name was Abū Mu'in Ḥamid al-Dīn Nāṣir b. Khusraw b. Ḥārith-i Qubādiyānī, Marwazī, Māzandarī, Yumgī (or Yumgānī). He was born into a family of landowners and officials in 394/1004 in Qubadiyan on the right bank of the Oxus river. There is no dearth of literature about the various aspects of his multi-faceted life. A number of scholars have elucidated the main episodes of his career, including his education, government service, the visionary experience that led him to change his life and resign from his government post, the ensuing journey lasting seven years, from 437/1045 to 444/1052, that was immortalised in his celebrated *Safar-nāma* (*Book of Travels*), his arrival in Cairo and discussions with the senior Ismaili luminary, al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078), his audience with the Imam al-Mustanṣir bi'llāh I, his appointment as *ḥujjat* of Khurāsān and return to his native land and the city of Balkh in 444/1052, the beginnings of his *da'wa* activities and initial successes, the opposition of his adversaries, his taking refuge in Yumgān, and spreading the Ismaili *da'wa* there and in the surrounding areas, his works and his death.⁵

Nāṣir-i Khusraw's writings show that he received a sound education in his youth, which afforded him entry into the Saljūq government bureaucracy, along with other members of his family. Despite his success in this coveted position, he felt a certain sense of hollowness. His ethical, spiritual and intellectual



dissatisfaction with this early part of his life rings clear in his *Dīwān*, in which he writes:

*Ān kardī az fasād ki gar yādat āyad ān
Rūyat siyāh gardad u tīra shawad ḡamīr⁶*

You once wrought such mischief that were you to call it to mind
Your face would be blackened [by dishonour], your heart darkened [by
disgrace]

Similarly, at the beginning of his *Safar-nāma*, citing the Prophetic saying ‘Speak the truth, though it be against yourself’,⁷ he ruefully admits to his former addiction to drink.

Nāṣir’s internal turmoil precipitated a crisis. One night, at the age of 43, he had a dream that was to transform his life forever. He writes:

One night I was approached in a dream by someone who chided me, ‘How long will you drink this brew that destroys human intellect? ’Tis better to be sober!’ I responded, ‘The sages have failed to find a better elixir to drive away the sorrows of the world.’ He said, ‘Never has drunkenness brought peace of mind. Can one who leads people to stupor be called a sage? Seek that which increases intellect and wisdom!’ I asked, ‘Where can I find such a thing?’ He replied, ‘Those who seek shall find.’ And then, pointing in the direction of the *qibla*, he fell silent.⁸

Nāṣir rose, the vision still vivid in his mind. He lamented to himself: ‘I have woken up from last night’s dream; but now I must awaken from a dream that has lasted forty years!’⁹ He resolved to forswear his self-harming ways, knowing that he would never attain true happiness until he did so. Resigning from government service, on Saturday 6 Jumādā II 437/19 December 1045¹⁰ he set out on his famous journey, returning only seven years later, on Tuesday 26 Jumādā II 444/23 October 1052.¹¹

The oracle had pointed him in the direction of the *qibla*, which was also the direction of Cairo, the capital of the Fatimid caliphate and centre of the Ismaili *da’wa*. After his arrival there on Sunday 1 Ṣafar 439/28 July 1047 he met many Ismaili *dā’īs*, including al-Mu’ayyad fi’l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, the *ḥujjat* of the *jazīra* of Fars and the head of the entire *da’wa* at the time. Nāṣir was duly impressed with al-Mu’ayyad, whom he regarded as *riḡwān*, the guardian of Paradise.

Nāṣir describes Cairo in glowing terms in his poetry, not only as a splendid metropolis, but even more so as the spiritual city *par excellence*, the city of knowledge and wisdom of the Imam. He writes, in the longest of his *qaṣīdas*, sometimes known as the ‘Confessional Ode’:



One day I reached a city to which the heavenly bodies and spheres themselves were subservient. Its plains were embroidered like brocade, its walls made of emerald and its water pure and sweet like the spring of *kawthar* in Paradise. In this city there are no mansions save excellence, no fir trees in its gardens save intellect. It is a city in which the sages wear brocade that is neither spun by women nor woven by men. Upon my arrival my intellect intimated to me, 'Go no further! Seek here what you need.' I went to the gatekeeper of the city and told him my tale. He said, 'Fear not, for your mine has now transformed into gems.' His discourse, so sweet and pregnant with meaning, convinced me that he was none other than *riḏwān*, the guardian of paradise. According to the *ta'wīl*, paradise is naught but the *da'wa* of the Prophet's progeny. I told him of my soul's grief and frailty, urging him not to be misled by the strength of my body, or the healthy redness of my cheeks. Never would I touch a medicine without proof and demonstration, said I. He reassured me that he was a physician of that city and encouraged me to describe my illness to him.¹²

I then posed all the questions that ailed me, causing my intellectual sickness. He said he would give me medicine with proof and demonstration, but first would place a mighty seal on my lips. I consented to this and so he sealed them. He presented two witnesses from the external and the internal worlds (*āfāq* and *anfus*) for my nourishment.¹³ Thus my treatment began gradually. Lo! My illness vanished. He removed the seal from my lips and allowed me to speak. Finally, he took me to the Imam of the time [al-Mustanṣir bi'llāh] to perform the oath of allegiance (*bay'a*).¹⁴

Further in the same poem Nāṣir evokes the imagery of the oath sworn by the Prophet's companions centuries earlier to describe his own experience:

Dastam ba kaf-i dast-i nabī dād ba bay'at
*Zīr-i shajar-i 'ālī-yi pur-sāya-yi muthmar*¹⁵

He placed my hand in the Prophet's palm
 A pledge made under the lofty tree, shady and fruitful

Nāṣir emphasises his inner transformation in another *qaṣīda*, employing metaphors of day and night, and heaven and earth, to signify his passage from ignorance to spiritual illumination. He expresses his overwhelming experience in the Imam's presence in the following verses:

Bar jān-i man chu nūr-i Imām-i Zamān bitāft
Laylu's-sarār būdam u shamsu'd-ḏuḥā shudam
Nām-i buzurg Imām-i Zamān-ast azīn qibal
*Man az zamīn chu zuhra badū bar samā shudam*¹⁶



When the light of the Imam of the time shone upon my soul,
 Even though I was dark as night, I became the glorious sun.
 The Supreme Name is the Imam of the time;
 By which I ascended, Venus-like, from the earth to heaven

The transformational effect of knowledge from the Imam is further echoed in another poem:

*Shifā-yi jān na-dīdam zi ich dānīsh
 Magar az da'wat-i āl-i payāambar¹⁷*

I did not witness spiritual healing from any knowledge
 Except from the *da'wa* of the Prophet's progeny

Here, it suffices to say that the course of his life changed forever. Henceforth he devoted himself to the service of the Imam of his time. He expresses his gratitude for the favours of the Imam in the following words:

*Har-jā ki buwam tā bi-ziyam man gah u bigāh
 Bar shukr-i tū rānam qalam u miḥbar u daftar¹⁸*

Wherever I may be, so long as I live, time and again
 My pen, inkpot and parchments will bespeak my gratitude to you

Nāṣir rapidly ascended the ladder of the religious hierarchy (*hudūd-i dīn*) until he was appointed the *hujjat* of Khurasan. He left Cairo on Tuesday, 14 Dhu'l-Ḥijja 441/9 May 1050,¹⁹ arriving back in Balkh in 444/1052. Here and in the surrounding regions he began to preach the Ismaili *da'wa*. Both his *Dīwān* and Abu'l-Ma'ālī's *Bayān al-adyān*²⁰ reveal his initial successes. However, this soon drew the attention of adversaries who instigated the mob against him. They persecuted him and burnt down his house. Fleeing Balkh he took refuge in Yumgān, which was then ruled by an Ismaili prince, 'Alī b. al-Asad.²¹ From his newfound home he actively and peacefully spread the Ismaili *da'wa*. As he says:

*Har sāl yakī kitāb-i da'wat
 Ba-aṭrāf-i jahān hamī firistam²²*

Every year a book of *da'wa* I send
 Out to the corners of the world



Nāṣir wrote most of his works in Yumgān and died there some time after 469/1076. In several *qaṣīdas* he lavishes praise on Yumgān for giving him refuge and for being the centre of the *da'wa*:

Garchi zindān-i Sulaymān-i nabī būda-ast
*Nīst zindān bal bāghīst marā Yumgān*²³

Even though Yumgān were Solomon's prison
 'Tis not so for me – 'tis a garden

Kān-i 'ilm u khīrad u hikmat Yumgān ast
*Tā man-i mard-i khīrad-mand ba Yumgānam*²⁴

So long as a sage like me is here
 Yumgān is a mine of knowledge, intellect and wisdom

Injāst ba Yumgān tu rā dabistān
*Dar Balkh majūysh na dar Bukhārā*²⁵

Here in Yumgān is your school [of wisdom]
 Seek it not in Balkh or Bukhārā

Salient characteristics of the Ismaili *da'wa* (mission) concerning intellect

Nāṣir, as mentioned earlier, was a member of the Ismaili *da'wa*. The Ismā'īliyya (anglicised as Ismailism), is a branch of Shi'i Islam,²⁶ which, in turn, is one of the two main branches of Islam, the other being Sunni Islam. Shi'i Islam, particularly the Ismaili branch, gives paramount importance to the intellect in religion, and considers that the entire *tanzīl*, or revealed form of the Qur'an, is based on intellect. This is true both of the univocal verses (*āyātun muḥkamāt*) and of the equivocal verses (*āyātun mutashābihāt*).²⁷ The univocal verses are based directly on the intellect, while the equivocal verses are based indirectly on it.

Intellect is of two types. At one pole is the '*aql-i mu'ayyad* (the 'divinely aided' or 'perfect' intellect), the intellect that is aided by the *rūḥ al-quḍus* or the Holy Spirit. The divinely aided intellect is the intellect of the Prophets, legatees and the Imams, whom God has appointed to teach humankind. Those who possess the '*aql-i mu'ayyad* see everything in the divine light without any distinction between the *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*. In their view, everything in the *tanzīl* is based on the intellect. At the other pole is the '*aql-i gharīzī* or innate intellect,²⁸ which is the intellect of ordinary people, whom God has put in the position of learning. Unlike the divinely aided or perfect intellect, the '*aql-i gharīzī* does not possess perfect knowledge. Though it only



has rudimentary knowledge, it is capable of receiving knowledge from the divinely aided (perfect) intellect and attaining perfection. The perfect intellect brings down the higher realities for the sake of the innate intellects, expressing these in physical terms to facilitate the understanding of ordinary human beings. This process is called both *tanzil* and *takthif*; that is, to bring down higher realities to the level of ordinary language and to clothe these realities in physical allegories or parables. However, the Ismailis believe that it would have been a great injustice on the part of God if the innate intellects were deprived of knowing the higher realities and restricted only to parables and allegories. Far be it from God to be ungenerous! He has provided the means of *ta'wil*, which literally means to cause something to return to its origin (*radd al-shay' ilā awwalihi*). When ordinary people respond to the divine message, the allegorical layers are removed gradually from the realities and the respondents progress step by step in the religious hierarchy (*hudūd-i dīn*), climbing the ladder of divine recognition from the knowledge of certainty (*'ilm al-yaqīn*) to the eye of certainty (*'ayn al-yaqīn*) and finally to the truth of certainty (*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*), ultimately arriving at the level of knowledge of Prophets and Imams and thus attaining perfection. Once they achieve this perfection, they too do not find any difference between the *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* verses, because everything in *tanzil* is based on the intellect, as Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī says: 'The *sharī'a* is embodied intellect (*al-sharī'atu 'aqlun mujassam*).'²⁹

According to Ismaili Shi'ism, the Prophet Muḥammad's *da'wa* (mission) was twofold. The first part of it was the *tanzilī da'wa*, which he completed in his own lifetime. The exoteric divine message (*tanzil*) that he brought is unchangeable. However, he appointed his *waṣī* (legatee) or *asās* (foundation) and his descendants to continue the *ta'wil* until the Day of Resurrection. Referring to this twofold *da'wa*, Nāṣir cites the Prophet's saying: 'The best among you is the one who will fight you for the sake of the *ta'wil* of the Qur'an as I fought you for the sake of its *tanzil*.'³⁰ And Kirmānī cites the Prophet's saying: 'I am the custodian of the *tanzil* (*ṣāḥib al-tanzil*) and 'Alī is the custodian of the *ta'wil* (*ṣāḥib al-ta'wil*).'³¹ In contrast to the *tanzil*, which is fixed and unchangeable, the *ta'wil* is fluid and progresses to ever-deeper levels as the adept ascends the ranks of the spiritual hierarchy. This is because there are numerous esoteric meanings or *bāṭins* in every exoteric statement or *zāhir* of the text of the Qur'an. These meanings, known as *bāṭins* or *ta'wils*, are imparted by the Imam of the time to the seekers according to their degree of obedience and receptivity until the time of the *qā'im*,³² when all the meanings or *ta'wils* of the Qur'an will be disclosed.

In this brief discussion of the Ismaili *da'wa*, the central point is to show the Ismaili approach that, in their entirety, the Qur'an and the *sharī'a* promulgated by the Prophet are based on the intellect. The Qur'an and the *sharī'a* therefore address those possessed of intellect. The Ismailis maintain it is for this reason that Islamic law holds that those who have not reached the age of majority or who



are otherwise not possessed of their senses are exempt from their injunctions. Secondly, those who are addressed have an innate intellect, which has rudimentary knowledge of the existence of a Creator, the necessity of an intermediary between Him and the creatures, the supremacy of humankind among created beings and the need for a code of conduct.³³ Therefore it is called the first messenger (*al-rasūl al-awwal*).³⁴ However, to attain complete knowledge and the second perfection, which is the actualisation of the innate intellect from its *potentia*, it needs a teacher whose intellect is actual and perfect. This teacher is called the last messenger (*al-rasūl al-ākhir*)³⁵ and is the counterpart or *mazhar* of the Universal Intellect in this world. His knowledge is therefore not acquired, but rather God-given and therefore perfect. As long as the innate intellects exist, by the very nature of their need to be edified through knowledge, the presence of such a teacher in each and every age is indispensable, as Nāṣir says:

*Har ki nūr-i āftāb-i dīn judā gasht-ast azū
Rūz-hā-yi ū hamīsha juz shabān-i tār nīst
Chashm-i sar bī āftāb-i āsmān bī-kār gasht
Chashm-i dil bī āftāb-i dīn chirā bī-kār nīst*³⁶

He who is separated from the light of religion's sun
His days are forever nothing but the dark nights
The head's eye is useless without the sky's sun
Why is the heart's eye not useless without religion's sun?

These are the fundamental and central teachings found in the works of all eminent *dā'īs*, including Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 921), Abū Ya'qūb Ishāq al-Sijistānī (d. after 970), Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. after 933–4), al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 973), Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. 975 or 990), Ḥamid al-Dīn Aḥmad Kirmānī (d. after 1021) and al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 1078). All these *dā'īs* had different approaches and modes of expression in their writings, according to their contexts. However, there is a consistent central theme that a divinely supported guide with perfect intellect and divinely bestowed knowledge free from any defect must exist for the nourishment and actualisation of the innate intellects. Nāṣir was impressed by their exposition of the intellect, accepted it and devoted the rest of his life to propagating it.

The exposition of the intellect by Nāṣir-i Khusraw

From the preceding observations, it is obvious that the bipolar position of the intellect necessitates a dual definition, which Nāṣir provides. He defines the innate or potential intellect as 'a simple substance (*jawhar-i basīṭ*) whereby people comprehend things'.³⁷ Meanwhile, the active or Universal Intellect is defined as 'the first



originated [thing] which God brought into existence through origination (*ibdāʿ*). It is a simple and luminous substance, which contains the forms of all things.’³⁸

In his exposition of the intellect, Nāṣir first of all establishes it as the First Existent (*hast-i nukhust*) on various grounds. In his *Khwān al-ikhwān* he argues on the basis of the Qur’anic verse (Qur’an 40:67): ‘It is He who created you from dust, then from a sperm drop, then from a blood clot, then He brings you forth as a child, then lets you reach your age of full strength, then lets you become old – though some of you die before – and then lets you reach the appointed term; and that haply you may find the intellect (*laʿallakum taʿqilūn*).’ Nāṣir concentrates on the implications of the last phrase and says: ‘God, after mentioning all these states, says that you may find/reach the intellect (*ki ʿaql rā biyābid/ba-ʿaql bi-rasīd*).’³⁹ He goes on to say that this is due to the fact that since creation originates with the intellect, inevitably it must return to its origin. He says in his *Dīwān*:

Khīrad āghāz-i jahān būd u tu anjām-i jahān
*Bāz-gard, ay sara-anjām, badān nīk-āghāz*⁴⁰

Intellect was the beginning of the world and you its end
 Return, O the one of happy end, to that good beginning

Thus, when God says that ‘you may find the intellect’, it signifies that the first originated existent was the intellect. Therefore, man, who is the end of the existents, should attain his origin, just as the perfection of a date palm, which originates from a date stone, lies in producing a date stone so that its end returns to its origin. Nāṣir concludes, ‘He who benefits from the intellect through the mediation of the *hudūd-i dīn*, the religious hierarchy, returns to it eventually.’⁴¹

Nāṣir further elaborates on this Qur’anic verse (40:67) with a saying by the Prophet Muḥammad that: ‘The first thing God created was the intellect (*ʿaql*). God said to it: Come forward! It came forward. Then He said to it: Go back. It went back. Then God said: By My might and glory! I have not created anything more revered by Me than you! Through you I shall reward and through you I shall punish!’⁴² Nāṣir writes that it is because of this divine decree that in the true religion (*dīn-i haqq*), those who use the intellect and worship God in the light of the intellect (*baṣīrat*), attain eternal happiness. Meanwhile, whoever ruins the intellect and acts without knowledge will suffer from eternal remorse.

Thus is it shown that this intellect, so revered and noble in the eyes of God, permeates the entirety of existence: the higher world, the lower world and the world of religion. With regard to the world of religion, which is like a ladder ascending from the lower to the higher world, Nāṣir says that the intellect basically appears at two levels: as the manifestation (*mazhar*) of the Universal Intellect,⁴³ which is actual, and as the manifestation of the innate intellect (*ʿaql-i gharizī*),⁴⁴ which is



potential. The latter, in its nature, has knowledge of a Creator, worshipping and expressing gratitude to Him for His bounties and the choice of good and avoidance of evil, but it does not know how to practise them. This is what is meant by stating that the innate intellect's knowledge is in a state of potentiality. That is, the innate intellect needs someone to teach it how to practise. Therefore, in the very first discourse of his *Wajh-i dīn*, 'On the Establishment of *Hujjat* (Proof) of God, the Imam of the Time', Nāṣir argues that God has to send someone to fulfil the need of the innate intellect for knowledge, just as He provides animals with the means of their sustenance by appointing the elements, stars and spheres. Otherwise God would be considered parsimonious, an attribute far from Him. In this sense, the innate intellect acts as the first messenger potentially, but it needs an actual intellect in order to be actualised. Nāṣir says:

Khīrad sū-yi har kas rasūli nihūfta
*Ki dar dil nishasta ba farmān-i Yazdān*⁴⁵

Intellect is a hidden messenger for everyone
 Sitting hidden in the heart by God's command

In order to fulfil the need to actualise the potential intellect, God chooses one of His servants to be the *mazhar* of the Universal Intellect in the material world, and endows him with all the virtues of the Universal Intellect. He gives His special knowledge and spiritual help (*ta'yīd*) to him. He breathes His Spirit into him (15:29) and illumines him with His light (Qur'an, 33:46). This chosen one is called the Messenger (*payghām-bar*) in his cycle, the legatee (*waṣī*) in his age and the Imam of the time (*imām-i rūzgār*) in every time.⁴⁶ As long as the world lasts, the human species cannot be without an individual of this rank. Thus, the world is never devoid of this manifestation of the Universal Intellect. Nāṣir says that were the world devoid of such an actual intellect, the innate intellects would perish, since they are potential, dependent on an actual intellect. This would be tantamount to God playing a frivolous game, which is something far from Him.⁴⁷ This actual intellect in the cycle in which Nāṣir lived was the Prophet Muḥammad, with 'Alī as his *asās* and al-Mustaṣfir bi'llāh I as the Imam of the time.

The classification of the possessors of the innate intellect and how they use it to understand the *tanzīl*

According to Nāṣir, in his *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, the possessors of the innate intellect are divided into four categories:



(1) The first group consists of the literalists who blindly accept the *tanzil* at face value, even when it comes to the Qur'an's anthropomorphic descriptions of God. While other Muslims sought to understand these passages by way of *ta'wil*, or esoteric interpretation, the literalists refused such explanations.⁴⁸ The famous Qur'anic verse on *ta'wil* (3:7), used by others to justify the practice, was understood by the literalists to condemn it, by a simple difference of opinion on where one of the sentences ends. In the literalist reading, the verse is rendered as follows:

He it is Who has sent down to you the Book, of which are unequivocal verses, they are the mother of the Book, and others are equivocal. As for those in whose hearts is perversity, they follow that [part of] it which is equivocal, seeking discord and seeking its *ta'wil*. But no one knows its *ta'wil* except God. And those who are well grounded in knowledge say: 'We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord.'

The literalists would end the pivotal sentence after the word God, 'Allāh', confining the *ta'wil* to Him alone, to the exclusion of even the Prophet himself who received the revelation 'on his heart' (26:192–94) and who taught both the Book and its wisdom (2:129, 151). However, the verse was read by Ibn Qutayba and many others as, 'But no one knows its *ta'wil* except God and those who are well grounded in knowledge. They say: "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord."⁴⁹ An example of the literalist approach is the famous statement of Mālik b. Anas concerning *al-Rahmānu 'ala'l-arshi istawā*, 'The Beneficent One sat⁵⁰ Himself on the throne' (20:5): *Al-istiwā'u ma'lūmun wa'l-kayfiyyatu majhūlatun wa'l-īmānu bihi wājibun wa's-su'ālu 'anhu bid'a* 'That His sitting is known, but how (He) sits is unknown; believing in it is incumbent but to question it is [damnable] innovation'.⁵¹ Nāṣir explicitly censures this kind of blind adherence in his *Dīwān*:

Guftand ki mawḍū'-i shari'at na ba-'aql ast
Zirā ki ba shamshīr shud Islām muqarrar
Guftam ki namāz az chi bar atfāl u majānīn
*Wājib na-shawad tā na-shawad 'aql mukhayyar*⁵²

They said, 'The *shari'a* does not depend on the intellect
 Because Islam was established by the sword.'

I replied, 'Why then is prayer not enjoined upon children and the insane
 Until their intellect becomes capable of choosing?'



(2) The second group is composed of the philosophers (*falāsifa*) who reject the *tanzīl* because of its allegorical and seemingly contradictory language. These philosophers claim to have attained an understanding of the intellectual sciences through the efforts of their own, unaided intellects. They therefore maintain that in recognising the signposts of salvation, they can dispense with the Prophets. In their view, the Prophets are needed only to govern worldly matters in order to protect life and property and to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak.⁵³

(3) The third group is composed of *mutakallims* (theologians) who accept the *tanzīl*, but unlike the literalists, seek the *ta'wīl* of the allegorical verses. In the famous verse (3:7) on *ta'wīl*, they do not stop after 'Allāh', but continue the sentence and include the *rāsikhūn fi'l-'ilm*, 'those who are well grounded in knowledge', with God in knowing the *ta'wīl* of the allegorical verses. However, they arrogate to themselves the distinction of being the *rāsikhūn fi'l-'ilm* and do not confine this distinction to the Prophets and the Imams from the *ahl al-bayt*. Unlike the philosophers, they accept the *tanzīl* as the source of ultimate or perfect knowledge, but in doing the *ta'wīl* of the *mutashābihāt*, use their own intellect to derive conclusions.⁵⁴

(4) The fourth group consists of the people of *ta'wīl* and *ta'yīd* who accept the *tanzīl* as the source of perfect knowledge, but maintain that *tanzīl* on its own does not provide perfect knowledge. Rather, it resides in the *ta'wīl*⁵⁵ of the perfect and actual intellect of the Prophets and the Imams. It can be sought from them, because they alone are the *rāsikhūn fi'l-'ilm* mentioned in the Qur'an. Those who uphold this view are the Shi'a of the Prophet's Family, particularly the Ismailis, as Nāṣir says:

Shī'at-i Fāṭimiyān yāfta-and āb-i ḥayāt
*Khiḍr-i in dawr shudastand ki hargiz na-marand*⁵⁶

The Shi'a of the Fāṭimids have received the Water of Life
 Drinking this elixir, they have become the Khiḍr of this age and never die.

Thus, in the Ismaili *da'wa*, there is no fundamental difference between the intellect and the *sharī'a*. In fact, the *sharī'a* itself is the *ta'yīd* of the Universal Intellect. As Nāṣir writes: 'The Intellect [i.e. the Universal Intellect] is the *mu'ayyid* (giver of *ta'yīd*) of all the Messengers (*Wa mu'ayyid-i hama rasūlān 'aql ast*).⁵⁷ Thus, contrary to the literalist point of view, Nāṣir-i Khusraw considers intellect to be the very foundation of the *sharī'a*. This concept was elaborated by numerous Ismaili *dā'īs* including his predecessor, Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, who wrote: 'The *sharī'a* is embodied intellect (*al-sharī'atu 'aqlun mujassam*)';⁵⁸ and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, who devoted the seventh chapter of his *A'lām al-nubuwwa* to establish the fact that the Prophets were the true fountainheads of all knowledge who then bequeathed this



knowledge to the sages. According to al-Rāzī, knowledge and science spring from the first sage (*al-hakīm al-awwal*), Adam, to whom God taught the names directly. All worldly and spiritual knowledge was contained in these names. Through the ages God taught His Prophets everything that people needed to know, both in a worldly and a spiritual sense. He shared His knowledge of the external and internal worlds exclusively with the Prophets. As the Qur'an declares: 'He is the knower of the unseen (*ghayb*), and He does not reveal His unseen to anyone, except to a Messenger whom He chooses' (Qur'an 72:26–27). Al-Rāzī tries to demonstrate that some of those who are considered sages were in fact Prophets. To this end, he gives the example of the Prophet Idris, stating that he is known to the philosophers as Hermes and in the Old Testament as Akhnūkh (Enoch).⁵⁹ Similarly, al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī ridicules those who say that the *sharī'a* is not in accordance with the intellect. He writes:

Had they examined the matter closely, purifying their thoughts of fanaticism and passion, they would realise that they would fume with rage if someone were to upbraid them, saying, 'You said or did such and such, which was not in accord with the intellect'. In fact, they would not have hesitated to confront that person, calling him a liar and making him culpable. So if they detest such accusations about themselves, how can they allow them with regard to their Prophets, who are the chiefs of their religion and the intermediaries between them and their Lord, may He be purified? Don't they consider the fact that the entire Book of God is addressed to the people of intellect (*ulu'l-albāb*)?⁶⁰

Al-Mu'ayyad further argues:

There are only two possibilities with regard to these legal practices (*al-awdā' al-shar'iyya*): either the Prophet had no intellectual explanation for what he himself brought, which would be a monstrosity, or he had such an explanation, but did not inform people about it. In the former case, were someone to ask him why there were five *ṣalāts* and not six, he would have to reply that he did not know, which would suffice to discredit him for bringing something of which he himself was ignorant. If he did have an intellectual explanation for these practices, which adorns words and deeds, but did not reveal it, then he did not duly execute the duty of conveying the message. However, this can be disproved about the Prophet because he did convey the message and said in the congregation: O God! Bear witness that I have conveyed the message.⁶¹

Thus, to these Ismaili authors, there is nothing in the *sharī'as* that does not accord with the intellect. The innate intellect is considered God's first messenger (*al-rasūl al-awwal*) to humankind, while the Prophet is His second Messenger who nourishes the first messenger with knowledge.



In their emphasis on the intellect, the Ismailis are partially akin to the philosophers. However, without the upbringing of a divinely appointed teacher (*mu'allim*) or guide, they consider the innate intellect to be imperfect and incomplete. As Nāṣir writes: "The Intellect is the [first] *ḥujjat* (proof) of God over the people in their creation whereas His second *ḥujjat* to them is His Messenger, who comes and nurtures the innate intellect. The innate intellect in the creation of humankind is *in potentia*. The Messenger brings it into actuality".⁶² Nāṣir also says in his *Dīwān*:

Miyān-i 'ālam-i 'ulwiyy u suflī
Bi-istādan na kāri hast āsān
Ba-fi'l āwurdan az quwwat khirad rā
Ba-Aḥmad dād farmān Fard-i Raḥmān
Ba-yāri khwāst bar ḥaml-i nubuwwat
*'Alī rā sayyid-i sādāt-i dujhān*⁶³

To stand between the higher and lower worlds is no trivial matter!
 The Unique, Compassionate God commanded Aḥmad
 To bring the intellect forth from potentiality to actuality.
 To bear the burden of Prophethood
 The Chief of both the worlds sought the help of 'Alī.

In this respect, the Ismaili *dā'īs* differ profoundly from the philosophers. According to the latter, human beings can, on their own, acquire the knowledge of the realities of things as they are, whereas according to the Ismaili *dā'īs*, it is impossible to do so without *ta'līm* or teaching of the one appointed by God as the teacher or nourisher (*parwardagār*) of the innate intellects. Thus, Nāṣir devotes the very first discourse of *Wajh-i dīn* to explain the necessity for such a teacher who, with his fully realised intellect, actualises the potential intellects of human beings. He argues that just as human beings require physical upbringing and sustenance, without which they cannot survive, similarly they cannot grow and survive intellectually without intellectual upbringing and sustenance. Thus, the need for a divine teacher continues as long as human beings exist. Such a teacher, who is the Prophet or Imam in their respective time, is the main source of knowledge and, in fact, philosophers and others have borrowed from them. Al-Mu'ayyad writes:

As far as the belief of the people of truth (*al-muḥiqqīn*) is concerned, all sciences, including the intellectual ones (*al-'aqliyyāt*), which they (the philosophers) lay claim to, are gathered together in the sciences of the Prophets, from which they have branched out and ramified.⁶⁴



The preceding account shows that the Ismaili *dā'īs* can neither be included in the category of *mutakallims*, who use their own innate intellects to interpret the Qur'an and the *sharī'a* without recourse to the *rāsikhūn fi'l-'ilm*, nor in the category of those philosophers who claim to dispense with the Prophets. Ismaili works show that almost every Ismaili *dā'ī* has criticised both the *mutakallims* and the philosophers for their stances.⁶⁵

Nāṣir criticises the views of Mu'tazilī and Karramī *mutakallims* in his *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*.⁶⁶ But he accords the philosophers a higher status and says that there is indeed an iota of wisdom (*shammātī az ḥikmat*) in the works of the ancients.⁶⁷ By this he implies, as did Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, that originally they had attained wisdom from the Prophets, which they attributed to themselves and mingled with their own ideas and concepts. Therefore, except for the traces of the Prophetic wisdom that remain in their writings, their other views are erroneous. In *Zād al-musāfirīn*, Nāṣir explains that in the absence of Prophetic guidance, the faulty knowledge of one's own mind is like a spider's web in which the seeker becomes entangled.⁶⁸ Thus, in his *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, although he explains the problem from the point of view of the philosophers, he disagrees with them in most cases and finally presents the view of the people of *ta'wīl* and *ta'yīd*. This he explains in the light of knowledge received from those well grounded in knowledge (*rāsikhūn fi'l-'ilm*); that is, the Prophet Muḥammad as the *nāṭiq* (Speaker), 'Alī as the *asās* and their progeny as the Imams. He further writes: 'The treasure of wisdom is the heart of the inheritors of the Seal of the Prophets'.⁶⁹ This he also repeats in his *Dīwān*:

Ḥikmat az ḥaḍrat-i farzand-i nabī bāyad just
*Pāk u pākīza zi tashbīh u zi ta'tīl chu sīm*⁷⁰

You must seek wisdom from the presence of the Prophet's offspring
Pure and unsullied as silver, free from *tashbīh*⁷¹ and *ta'tīl*.⁷²

Such knowledge, according to Nāṣir and other Ismaili *dā'īs*, is not the product of the imperfect human intellect, but rather the product of an intellect that is illumined by the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-quḍus*). He writes in the *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* that knowledge of the true religion is one of the effects of the Holy Spirit (*natā'ij-i rūḥ al-quḍus*).⁷³ This means that the intellect of the Prophets and their successors, the Imams, is supported and illumined by the Holy Spirit, which according to the Qur'an (42:52), is in the form of light. Nāṣir therefore refers to it as the 'luminous intellect (*'aql-i nūrānī*)'.⁷⁴ It is the intellect of one from whose spiritual eyes the veil of negligence has been removed and whose sight has become sharp, as the Qur'an, addressing the Prophet, says: 'You were unaware of this. Thus We have removed from you your veil, so your sight is sharp today' (50:22).⁷⁵ Once the veil is removed,



everything, both in this world and the next, becomes clear to him.⁷⁶ It is on the basis of this inner vision (*bašīra*), not on hypothetical or conjectural knowledge, that the Prophet and his successor invite people to eternal life. As it says, addressed to the Prophet, in verse (12:108): 'Say: This is my way, I call unto God on the basis of *bašīra* (insight), and [also] those who follow me.'⁷⁷ Thus, the insight and intellect of the Prophet and those who follow him (the Imams), whom God has chosen for the guidance of the people and made intermediaries between Himself and His creatures, are superior to the insight and intellect of other human beings.

According to Nāšir and other Ismaili *dā'īs*, such knowledge is not confined to the Prophet and the Imam, but is granted to other people as well. However, this is conditional on *iṭā'a* (obedience and submission) or *istijāba* (responding) to the *da'wa*. He explains that when minerals submit to plants they attain the vegetative soul, when vegetative souls submit to animals they attain the animal soul and when the latter submit to human beings they attain a rational soul. Similarly, when human beings submit to the Prophet and his successors and accept their *da'wa*, they attain the Holy or Divine Spirit.⁷⁸ He quotes the Qur'anic verse (8:24) to substantiate this: 'O you who believe! Respond (*istajībū*) to God and the Messenger when he invites you (*da'ākum*) unto that which will give you life (*yuhyīkum*).' It is this real and higher life that enables one to be born twice and to enter the kingdom of heaven (*malakūt al-samā'*). Nāšir, alluding to his second birth and his witnessing the kingdom of heaven, writes:

Gar man darīn sarāy na-bīnam darān sarāy
*Imrūz jā-yi khwīsh chī bāyad bašar ma rā*⁷⁹

If in this world I cannot see
 What my place in that world is
 What need have I of sight?

Further, he says:

Khīrad rā ba-īmān u ḥikmat bi-parwar
Ki farzand-i khwud rā chunīn guft Luqmān
Chu jānat qawī shud ba īmān u ḥikmat
Biyāmūzī āngah zabān-hā-yi murghān
Bi-gūyand bā tu hamān mūr u murghān
*Ki guftand azīn pīshdar bā Sulaymān*⁸⁰

Nurture the intellect with faith and wisdom
 For as the Prophet Luqmān told his son
 When your soul is fortified by faith and wisdom



You will learn the languages of the birds
 The ants and birds will tell you
 What they once told Solomon!

This obedience comes in many degrees. Those who respond to this *da'wa* initially are called *mustajibs*. The *mustajibs* can ascend the ladder of the *da'wa* through the ranks of the religious hierarchy or *hudūd-i dīn*, up to the Imam or *asās* or *nāṭiq* in their respective time. After the time of the *nāṭiq*, the *asās* takes his place. Similarly, after the time of the *asās*, the Imam takes his place and therefore occupies the supreme position in the hierarchy. Further, at the rank of *hujjat* the believer experiences in all its fullness the Holy Spirit of the Prophet or the Imam in the form of light within himself. Thus, that light, which is in every human being *in potentia*, is brought into actuality by absolute submission to the Prophet, the *asās* and the Imam. Nāṣir, as the *hujjat* of Khurāsān, describes his own experience in his *Dīwān*, as mentioned earlier:

Bar jān-i man chu nūr-i Imām-i Zamān bi-tāft
Laylu's-sarār būdam u shamsu'd-ḍuhā shudam
Nām-i buzurg Imām-i Zamān-ast azīn qibal
Man az zamīn chu zuhra badū bar samā shudam

When the light of the Imam of the time shone upon my soul,
 Even though I was dark as night, I became the glorious sun.
 The Supreme Name is the Imam of the time;
 By him I ascended, Venus-like, from the earth to heaven.

Indeed, the Holy Spirit enhances the vision of he who is enabled to read the books of the *āfāq* and *anfus*, the physical and spiritual worlds (lit., horizons and souls). It elevates him above philosophy to where he can see the angels. Nāṣir writes:

Kār-kunān-i Khudāy-rā chu bi-bīnī
Dil na-kunī zān sipas ba falsafa marhūnx⁸¹

When you behold the personnel of God
 Never again will you pledge your heart to philosophy.

The Perpetual Presence of the Perfect Intellect as God's Proof on Earth

The necessity of the presence of God's Proof on the earth has been discussed earlier in the context of teaching the innate intellects. Nāṣir states this very emphatically in his *Dīwān*. In fact his personal quest begins when he becomes aware of this need, therefore it is pertinent to quote it here. He says:



*Yak rûz bi-khwāndam zi Qur’ān āyat-i bay’at
Kīzad ba-Qur’ān guft ki bud dast-i man az bar*

One day I read in the Qur’an the verse of *bay’at* (Qur’an, 48:10)
In which God says: ‘My hand is above [their hands]’.

*Ān qawm ki dar zīr-i shajar bay’at kardand
Chūn Ja’far u Miqdād u chu Salmān u chu Bū Dharr*

Those companions who had done *bay’at* under the tree,
The likes of Ja’far, Miqdād, Salmān and Abū Dharr.

*Guftam ki kunūn ān shajar u dast chigūnast
Ān dast kujā jūyam u ān bay’at u maḥḍar*

I asked: ‘What of that tree and that hand?
Where should I seek that hand, that *bay’at* and that group?’

*Guftand dar ānjā na shajar mānd u na ān dast
Kān jam’ parāganda shud ān dast musattar*

They replied: ‘Neither the tree nor that hand remains,
For that group has now dispersed and that hand concealed,

*Ān-hā hama yārān-i Rasūland u bihishtī
Makhšūš badān bay’at u az khalq mukhayyar*

All of them are the companions of the Prophet in Paradise,
Singled out by that *bay’at* and chosen from among the people.’

*Guftam ki ba-Qur’ān dar paydāst ki Aḥmad
Bashīr u nadhīrast u sirājast munawwar*

I said: ‘It is clear in the Qur’an that Aḥmad is a
Bearer of glad tidings, a warner and a luminous lamp’ (Qur’an 33:45–46)

*Gar khwāhad kushtan ba-dahan kāfir ū rā
Rawshan kunadash Īzad bar kāma-yi kāfar⁸²*

Even if the unbeliever intends to extinguish it with his mouth,
God will keep it shining despite his intent (Qur’an, 9:32)



*Chūnast ki imrūz na-māndast az ān qawm
Juz ḥaqq na-buwad qawl-i jahān-dāwar-i akbar*

How is it that today no one is left of that community;
As the speech of God, the Supreme Ruler of the world, cannot be other
than the truth?

*Mā dast-i ki girīm u kujā bay'at-i Yazdān
Tā hamchu muqaddam bi-dihad dād-i mu'akhhkar*

Whose hand should we take and where is God's bay'at?
That He may treat the later ones as justly as the earlier?

*Mā jurm chi kardīm na-zādīm badān waqt?
Maḥrūm chirā'im zi payghambar u muḍtarr*

What sin did we commit that we were not born at that time?
Why are we deprived of the Prophet and distressed?⁸³

Thus, Nāṣir emphasises the point that, since God has guaranteed the continuation, indeed, the perfection of His light in this world, it cannot be devoid of it as His word is perfect in truth and justice (cf. Qur'an 6:115). It is with this conviction that he started his search and ultimately he reached his desired goal, the Imam from the family of the holy Prophet. He says:

*Faryād yāftam zi jafā u dahā-yi dīw
Chūn dar ḥarīm u qaṣr-i Imāmu'l-warā shudam⁸⁴*

I found refuge from the oppression and cunning of the devil
When I entered the sanctuary and palace of the Imam of humankind

Elsewhere he says:

*Dastam ba kaf-i dast-i Nabī dād ba bay'at
Zīr-i shajar-i 'ālī-yi pur-sāya-yi muthmar⁸⁵*

He placed my hand in the Prophet's palm
A pledge made under the lofty tree, shady and fruitful

Thus, Nāṣir's ardent yearning to give the bay'a on a hand that represented God's hand was fulfilled. According to him, the purpose of creation cannot be achieved



without the presence of that hand. Comparing the Imam of the time to the sun and the innate intellect to eyesight, he declares in his *Dīwān*:

Chashm-i sar bī āftāb-i āsmān bī-kār gasht
*Chashm-i dil bī āftāb-i dīn chirā bī-kār nīst?*⁸⁶

The head's eye becomes useless without heaven's sun;
 Why not the heart's eye without religion's sun?

The consequences of the Innate Intellect's response to the Perfect Intellect's teaching

The paramount importance of using the intellect, which is a Divine gift to humankind, is clear from the Qur'an: 'Verily the vilest of beasts with God are the deaf and the dumb who do not use their intellect' (Qur'an 8:22). Also: 'And they said: "Had we but listened or used our intellect, we would not have been among the inmates of the Blaze"' (Qur'an 67:10). There are numerous such verses that show that those who do not use their innate intellect and its initial teaching as the first messenger or the first proof have to face grave consequences. On the other hand, those who follow its initial teaching and actualise it fully through nurturing true knowledge are praised highly as the '*ulu'l-albāb*' (the people of intellect) and are granted the abundant good (Qur'an 2:269).

Nāṣir alludes to this position of the innate intellect in his prose and poetry. In his *Jāmi'*, interpreting the *ḥadīth* 'Every human being has two devils who lead him astray', and comparing the two devils to the appetitive and irascible souls, he says that every individual is endowed with a rational soul (*nafs-i nāṭiqā*), an appetitive soul and an irascible soul. The rational soul is a potential angel whereas the appetitive and irascible souls are potential devils.⁸⁷ In his *Khwān*, Nāṣir says that the human innate intellect (meaning 'rational soul') in its essence chooses the good and avoids evil and befriends the one who does good and dislikes and flees from the one who does evil.⁸⁸ If the rational soul is able to subjugate the appetitive and irascible souls, the individual becomes an actual angel, but if the latter subjugate the former, he becomes in actuality a devil. This means that every individual who is endowed with the rational soul has the potential to be an actual angel. However, negligence in executing the innate intellect's teaching causes the person to become 'the vilest of beasts'. Such are the consequences of accepting or rejecting the Perfect Intellect's teaching or guidance in the form of true knowledge. These are also described in his poetry. For instance, in the case of failure:



*Har chand raḥmat ast khirad bar tu az Khudāy
Bar har ki bad kunad ba-khirad ham khirad balāst*⁸⁹

Although intellect is God's mercy to you
It also becomes a calamity to the one who abuses it

In the case of success, Nāṣir extols the intellect so profusely that it is extremely difficult to decide what to quote and what to leave out! He says:

*Khirad kīmiyā'-yi ṣalāḥast u ni'mat
Khirad ma'dan-i khayr u 'adl ast u iḥsān*⁹⁰

Intellect is the alchemy of well-being and munificence
Intellect is the mine of goodness, justice and favour

*Qadr u bahā-yi mard na az jism-i farbih ast
Bal mardum az nikū sukhan u 'ilm pur bahāst*⁹¹

Man's glory and worth is not because of his corpulent body
Rather, man's glory lies in his eloquence and knowledge

*'Adl ast u rāstī hama āthār-i 'aql-i pāk
'Aql ast āftāb-i dil u 'adl azū ḍiyāst*⁹²

Justice and rectitude are all traces of the pure intellect
Intellect is the sun of the heart and justice is its light

And finally:

*Gar khirad rā bar sar-i hush-yār-i khwīsh afsar kunī
Sakht zūd az charkh-i gardān, ay pīsar, sar bar kunī*⁹³

If you make intellect the crown upon your prudent head
Soon, O Son, you shall raise your head above the revolving sphere of the
heavens

To conclude, Nāṣir-i Khusraw simply and logically expounds his distinct bipolar concept of the intellect, the actual or perfect intellect and the potential or innate intellect, and their respective active and passive roles. He bases the foundation of his argument on examples from the physical world and gradually



and systematically proceeds to the spiritual or higher world. This makes it easy to understand his thought. His works are very effective in conveying the importance of higher and eternal realities and speak to human beings across time and space. They are therefore as relevant today as they were in his time and will no doubt inspire and motivate thinking people in the future. Nāṣir does not consider himself either a *mutakallim* or a philosopher, if philosophy is understood in the Greek sense. If, however, we take it in a broader sense and include other disciplines of thought, as Henry Corbin did in coining the term 'Prophetic philosophy' for *ta'wil*,⁹⁴ then Nāṣir is indeed one of the most outstanding Prophetic philosophers.

Notes

1. See, for instance, Sayyid Ja'far Shahīdī, 'Afkār u 'aqā'id-i kalāmī-yi Nāṣir Khusraw', in Dānishgāh-i Firdawsī, *Yādnāma-yi Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (Mashhad, 1355 Sh./1976), pp. 316–340, hereafter cited as *Yādnāma*.

2. The Muslim concept of the Holy Spirit must not be confused with the Christian idea of the third person of the Trinity. According to Islam it is the Spirit of the Prophets and Imams which is in the form of light. See Qur'an 42:52.

3. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, ed. H. Corbin and M. Mu'in (Tehran and Paris, 1953), pp. 315–316, hereafter cited as *Jāmi'*.

4. Islands symbolise the domains of *ḥujjats* of the Imam of the time, which are surrounded by the latter's ocean of knowledge and wisdom.

5. See Sayyid Ḥasan Taqīzāda, 'Introduction' to Nāṣir's *Dīwān*, ed. Sayyid Naṣr Allāh Taqawī (Tehran, 1304–1307 Sh./1925–1928), hereafter cited as ed. Taqawī; E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (London, 1977), vol. 2, pp. 160, 162, 169, 200–201, 211, 218–246; *Yādnāma*. Other sources for his life and works are given in I. K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature* (Malibu, CA, 1977), pp. 111–125, 430–436; Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlis: Their History and Doctrines* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 205–210, 588–589 n. 127; Alice C. Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw: The Ruby of Badakhshan* (London, 2000); 'Alī Mīr Anṣārī, *Kitāb-shināsī-yi Ḥakīm Nāṣir-i Khusraw-i Qubādiyānī* (Tehran, 1993); A. Nanji, 'Nāṣir-i Khusraw', *EI2*, vol. 6, pp. 1006–1007.

6. *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, ed. M. Mīnuwī and M. Muḥaqiq (Tehran, 1353 Sh./1974), p. 102; hereafter cited as ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqiq.

7. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Safar-nāma*, ed. Muḥammad Dabīr-i Siyāqī (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1984), p. 2.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

12. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqiq, pp. 511–512.

13. Literally food and water, which symbolise *tanzīl* and *ta'wil*, see Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, ed. Gh. R. Aavani (Tehran, 1977), p. 250; hereafter cited as *Wajh*.

14. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqiq, pp. 512–513.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 513. Here the rhyme requires 'muthmir' to be 'muthmar'.



16. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 139; F. M. Hunzai and K. Kassam, *Shimmering Light: An Anthology of Ismaili Poetry* (London, 1997), p. 61.
17. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 536.
18. *Dīwān*, ed. Taqawī, p. 515.
19. *Safar-nāma*, p. 109.
20. Abu'l-Ma'ālī Muḥammad b. 'Ubayd Allāh, *Bayān al-adyān*, ed. 'A. I. Āshtiyānī and M. T. Dānish-pazhūh (Tehran, 1997), pp. 55–56. There is a brief mention that he went as far as Ṭabaristān (Māzandarān), see also Daftary, *The Ismā'īlis: Their History and Doctrines*, p. 206.
21. *Jāmi'*, pp. 15–18, 100, 314–316.
22. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 221.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 412.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 196. Variant: *Kān-i 'ilm u sukhan-i ḥikmat Yumgān ast / Tā man, ay mard-i khiradmand, ba Yumgān-am* (A mine of learning and discourse and wisdom is Yumgān / As long as I, O wise man, am in Yumgān) (ed. Taqawī), p. 282.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 406.
26. The appellation Ismā'īliyya came into existence after Imam Ja'far al-Šādiq, when the Imāmī Shī'is split into many groups named after his children. Among them the two most important ones are those who followed Ismā'il al-Mubārak, his older son and came to be known as Ismailis (anglicised form of *Ismā'īliyya*) and those who followed Mūsā al-Kāzim, another of his sons, who came to be known as Mūsawiyya. Later on, when the twelfth Imam of the latter group went into occultation, they became known as the Ithnā 'ashariyya or Twelvers, meaning those who believe in twelve Imams.
- Ismailis are sometimes called Sab'iyya or Seveners – that is, those who believe in seven Imams – and are thereby juxtaposed to the Ithnā 'ashariyya or Twelvers, those who believe in twelve Imams. This is a grave misunderstanding. Ismailis do give importance to a set of seven Imams in the sense that they constitute a minor cycle (*dawr ṣaghīr*). However, they do not believe that there are only seven Imams. They do not confine the chain of Imams to a particular number. Their present Imam is the 49th in the line of Imam 'Alī in the cycle of the Prophet Muḥammad.
27. *Muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*: Although both these kinds of verses have a *ẓāhir* (exoteric meaning) and a *bāḥīn* (esoteric meaning), the *muḥkam* can be understood without an immediate *ta'wīl*, such as 'establish *ṣalāt* (prescribed prayer) and pay *zakāt* (religious due)' (2.43), whereas the *mutashābih* requires *ta'wīl*, such as 'Hold fast to the rope of God (*ḥabl Allāh*) all of you together' (3:103), since there is no such physical thing as the rope of God.
28. Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt al-nubu'āt*, ed. 'A. Tāmīr (Beirut, 1986), p. 51, hereafter cited as *Ithbāt*.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 125; *Wajh*, pp. 61–62, 281.
30. *Jāmi'*, p. 61; *Wajh*, p. 269; *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, pp. 34–35, 123, 189.
31. Ḥamid al-Dīn Kirmānī, *Majmū'at rasā'il al-Kirmānī*, ed. M. Ghālib (Beirut, 1983), p. 156.
32. By the *qā'im* in a special sense is meant an Imam who comes at the end of a major or minor cycle.
33. *Ithbāt*, pp. 50–51.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
36. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 313; Al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *Dīwān*, ed. Muḥammad K. Ḥusayn (Cairo, 1949), p. 191.



37. *Jāmi'*, p. 249.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
39. Nāṣir-i Khusrāw, *Khwān al-ikhwān*, ed. 'A. Qawīm (Tehran, 1338 Sh./1959), pp. 90–94, hereafter cited as *Khwān*.
40. *Dīwān*, ed. Taqawī, p. 202.
41. *Khwān*, pp. 90–91.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
43. *Wajh*, p. 61.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
45. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 84. Variant: *khīrad sū-yi insān rasūl-i nihānī-st/ ba-dil dar nishasta ba farmān-i yazdān* (Intellect is a hidden messenger for humankind/ Seated in the heart, by God's command), cf. *ibid.*, p. 582.
46. *Wajh*, pp. 11–13.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62.
48. *Jāmi'*, pp. 34–44.
49. Ibn Qutaybā, *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān*, ed. A. Baqr (Cairo, 1973), pp. 98–99.
50. Here the literalists translate '*istawā*' as 'sat Himself' or 'is established', whereas its lexical meaning is 'established equality'.
51. *Jāmi'*, pp. 32–33; 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-nihāl*, ed. Muḥammad b. Faṭḥ Allāh Badrān (Cairo, 1956), p. 85.
52. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 510. Here the rhyme requires '*mukhayyir*' to be '*mukhayyar*'.
53. Al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, ed. Ḥātim Ḥamīd al-Dīn (Bombay, 1975), I, 3; hereafter cited as *Majālis*; *Jāmi'*, p. 32.
54. *Jāmi'*, pp. 32–33.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
56. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 68; see also pp. 62, 272; *Jāmi'*, pp. 115–116; *Wajh*, p. 281.
57. *Jāmi'*, p. 116.
58. *Ithbāt*, p. 125.
59. Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *A'lām al-nubuwwa*, ed. Ṣ. al-Ṣāwī and Gh. R. Aavani (Tehran, 1977), pp. 273–318.
60. *Majālis*, I, 2–3.
61. *Ibid.*, I, 3.
62. *Khwān*, p. 29.
63. *Dīwān*, ed. Taqawī, p. 314. Here the rhyme requires '*du jahān*' to be read '*dujhān*'.
64. *Majālis*, vol. 1, pp. 3–4.
65. For instance, prior to Nāṣir, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1021) criticised the views of Mu'tazilī and Ash'arī *mutakallims* and philosophers in his *Tanbīh al-hādī wa'l-mustahdī*, Ms. 957, IIS, London, Chapters 15–17, fols 48–109.
66. *Jāmi'*, pp. 45–67.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
68. *Zād*, p. 151.
69. *Jāmi'*, p. 16. *Khātam-i waratha* in the text should read *waratha-yi khātam*.
70. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 356.



71. *Tashbih*: a concept which maintains that God possesses in a true sense all those human attributes mentioned in the Qur'an.

72. *Ta'fīl*: A concept that upholds the belief that the world is eternal (*qadīm*) and has no creator, rather the creator of its generated beings (*mawālīd*) are the heavens and the stars, which have always existed.

73. *Jāmi'*, p. 16.

74. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 535.

75. *Wajh*, p. 139.

76. *Zād*, pp. 214–216.

77. *Majālis*, vol. 1, pp. 217–218.

78. *Zād*, pp. 472–475.

79. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 12.

80. *Dīwān*, ed. Taqawī, p. 321.

81. *Dīwān*, ed. Taqawī, p. 355.

82. Here the rhyme requires '*kāfir*' to be '*kāfar*'.

83. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, pp. 508–509.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 139; ed. Taqawī, p. 273.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 513. Here the rhyme requires '*muthmīr*' to be '*muthmar*'.

86. *Dīwān*, ed. Taqawī, p. 78.

87. *Jāmi'*, pp. 143–144.

88. *Khwān*, p. 29.

89. *Dīwān*, ed. Taqawī, p. 81.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 320.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

92. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 394.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 452.

94. Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London, 1993), pp. 23–104.



Ontological and Religious Aspects of the Intellect in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Poetry*

M. J. ESMAEILI

Nāṣir-i Khusraw is an Iranian philosopher and poet of the fifth/eleventh century, whose poetry and prose, all surviving examples of which are in Persian,¹ established his fame among medieval Iranian thinkers. He was a prolific writer in both poetry and prose, with over 11,000 verses still extant and thousands of pages of prose to his name. His great pride in the Persian language led him to famously declare:

*Man ānam ki dar pāy-i khūkān narīzam
Mar-īn qaymatī durr-i lafz-i Dari rā²*

I am he who does not throw before swine
These precious pearls of the Persian language.

As an Ismaili, Nāṣir-i Khusraw shared the view of his co-religionist Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 277/890) that the language of revelation was not restricted to Hebrew, Syriac or Arabic, but that Persian was a holy language as well.³ This may explain why Nāṣir-i Khusraw felt free to break with the practice of writing in Arabic, as was customary at the time among Iranian intellectuals.

Reading his poetry, the depth and the extent of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's knowledge becomes apparent. Not only was he trained in the traditional Islamic sciences, such as Qur'an interpretation (*tafsīr*) and esoteric exegesis (*ta'wīl*), the Islamic traditions (*ḥadīth*) and theology (*kalām*), but, more importantly, his poetry bears testimony to the fact that he was well acquainted with the Graeco-Islamic philosophical tradition of his age. There is in fact so much philosophical contemplation and exhortation

* I would like to thank Dr Joep Lameer, an independent researcher in Leiden-Tehran, for his useful comments and suggestions during the preparation of this chapter and for helping me with the translations from Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān*.



in his *Dīwān* that one would almost say that it is more the product of reason than of emotion. A few examples of philosophical terms occurring in the *Dīwān* are the following: generation and corruption (*kawn wa fasād*), substance and accident (*jawhar wa 'araḍ*), form and matter (*ṣūrat wa māddat*), intellect ('*aql*), soul (*nafs*), quality and quantity (*kayf wa kamm*), and motion and time (*ḥarakat wa zamān*).⁴ Terms that occur with the highest frequency are: intellect, reason, wisdom and knowledge. In addition to his knowledge of the traditional Islamic sciences and Graeco-Islamic philosophy, Nāṣir-i Khusraw also gives evidence of his command of rhetoric. In the following example, he resorts to the rhetorical question:

*Mard rā dar dīn rawā bāshad ki dīn jūyad bi 'aql
Bāz-gūy ākhar ki bi-dīn rā 'alamat chīst pas?*⁵

In religion, it is permitted that man seek religion through reason;
Say then, what is the mark of the man without religion?

In another case, Nāṣir-i Khusraw makes use of what one might call an *enthymeme* or truncated syllogism:

*'Aql-i tu īdar zi bahr-i ṭā'at u 'ilm ast
Pas tu chirā'ī bad u munāfiq u ṭarrār?*⁶

Your intellect, therefore, is for the sake of obedience and learning,
So why then are you evil, a hypocrite, a thief?

In addition to his use of philosophical methods in this poetry, Nāṣir-i Khusraw also explored philosophical concepts and concerns. Since the word 'intellect' (using the Arabic '*aql* and the Persian *khirad* synonymously) is one of the most frequently occurring terms in his poetic oeuvre, this chapter examines this key concept from two aspects, the ontological and the religious. Where appropriate, I shall point out Nāṣir-i Khusraw's familiarity with the Greek philosophical tradition, mostly through his references to the works of Plato and Aristotle.

Ontological aspects of the intellect

The study of the intellect has a long history that goes back to ancient Greek philosophy. The first major, systematic treatment of the intellect (*nous*) as part of the faculties of the soul (*psyche*) can be found in Aristotle's *De Anima*, notably in Book III. Since then, many authors writing in Greek, Latin and Arabic, have concerned themselves with the subject, in direct commentaries on Aristotle or in their own independent works. In the Islamic world, the philosophical treatment of the



intellect along Aristotelian or Neoplatonic lines was carried out by thinkers such as Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) (d. 428/1037), Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (d. 595/1198) and Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640).⁷ According to these thinkers, the definition of concepts using the genus and the differentia to delimit the essence of a thing was an important tool of philosophical discourse. Accordingly, 'man' was defined as a 'rational animal', in which 'animal' is the genus and 'rational' the differentia through which man is distinguished from other members of the class of animals as a whole. Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān* provides evidence to show that he not only knew the Aristotelian definition of man but also endorsed and applied it:

*Wa aknūn ki 'aql u nafs-i sukhan-gūy, khud-i manam
Az khwīshān chi bāyad kardan ḥadhar ma rā?*

Now that I myself am reason and the speaking soul
Why then should I beware of my own self?⁸

This means that Nāṣir-i Khusraw, like Aristotle, considered rationality as constitutive of the essence of man. In other words, if rationality is destroyed, man is destroyed and, thus, it is impossible to disengage oneself from one's rationality in life.

In another poem, Nāṣir-i Khusraw situates the Divine Intellect in the context of the hierarchy of being:

*Khīrad rā awwalīn mawjūd dān, pas nafs u jism āngah
Nabāt u gūnagūn ḥaywān u āngah jānwar-i gūyā*⁹

Regard intellect's being as primary, then soul and body,
Next plants and varieties of animals, and then the rational animal.

We should keep in mind that what we are translating as 'rational' soul or animal is the 'speaking' soul or animal (Ar., *nāṭiq/nāṭīqa*, P., *gūyā*, *sukhan-gūy*, etc.). This derives from the Aristotelian premise that man is the only creature which speaks. Speech in the sense of 'reason' is the 'specific' difference of the human species, which differentiates man from other animals. From this, we can understand Nāṣir-i Khusraw's hierarchy of being as follows:

- 1) Intellect as the First Being
- 2) Soul
- 3) Solid, i.e. Body
- 4) Plants



- 5) Animals
- 6) Rational animal, i.e. Man

This scheme displays some interesting parallels with Aristotle. For Aristotle, the principle of the universe is the First Unmoved Mover, who is an Intellect in the form of pure thought ever-thinking itself.¹⁰ The First Unmoved Mover moves the ethereal¹¹ celestial sphere, which passes this movement on to the rest of the universe.¹² And in Aristotle's *De Caelo* the celestial sphere is said to be *empsuchos* or 'en-souled'.¹³ In other words, just like Aristotle, Nāṣir-i Khusraw considers Intellect to be the First Being, followed by the soul.¹⁴ However, there is a difference: in Aristotle, the First Unmoved Mover (who is identified by Aristotle with God),¹⁵ is Being itself, whereas for Nāṣir-i Khusraw God is *beyond* Being and therefore beyond Intellect.¹⁶ In this sense then, Nāṣir-i Khusraw's God seems to have more affinity with Plato's conception of Goodness itself as the *source* of being but which is not itself being.¹⁷ As for the remaining elements in the hierarchy of being as given by Nāṣir-i Khusraw, there is a distinct parallel with Aristotle's account of the *scala naturae* or the 'chain of being' in which a similar progression from inanimate body through plants and animals is given,¹⁸ a progression that finds its natural ending in man whose soul is the only one among the animals to possess the faculty of thought (which occurs in language, speech), by the exercise of which man becomes divine.¹⁹ So, all in all, and leaving aside the status of those beings intermediate between the celestial sphere and inanimate body, one can say that Nāṣir-i Khusraw's hierarchy of being has evident parallels in Aristotle, but that his conception of God as being beyond being comes closer to that of Plato and its continuation in the Neoplatonic tradition.²⁰

Elsewhere, Nāṣir-i Khusraw asserts that the reality of the intellect is not corporeal:

*Guftam ki nafs-i nāṭiqā rā mustaqarr kujāst?
Guftā, wa rā jahān-i laṭīf-ast mustaqarr.*²¹

I said: 'Where does the rational soul reside?'

He said: 'Beyond the subtle world it does reside.'

There are at least two possible interpretations of this verse. One is to explain it at the level of the *human* intellect. For Aristotle, the human soul, which includes the faculty of thought, is not corporeal in any way.²² Yet, according to most of the Islamic theologians up to Nāṣir-i Khusraw's era, on the other hand, the human soul, and therefore also the rational part of it, is a *jism-i laṭīf* ('subtle body'), along the lines of the wind, which is frequently cited as an example of such a body.²³ So if Nāṣir-i Khusraw, in this interpretation, is perceived to be taking a position against



the view current among the theologians of his time, the above verse means that the human intellect is beyond any corporality, even beyond that of a subtle body, possessing not even the flimsiness of the wind.

Another possible interpretation would be to understand this verse in the context of the Aristotelian hierarchy of being referred to earlier. In that connection it was stated that the Aristotelian God, the First Unmoved Mover, moves the celestial sphere which then passes this movement on to the rest of the universe. So, here we have two elements: (1) the First Unmoved Mover which is Intellect and Pure Thought, which moves (2) the celestial sphere which then passes this movement on to the rest of the universe. The Arabic word *latīf* (subtle), in one of its applications, also means ‘all-present’; that is, never being absent anywhere, all-pervading. Now since the celestial sphere, in its causal, moving activity, extends forever throughout the universe, it may certainly be called *latīf* in this latter sense. Thus Nāṣir-i Khusraw would, in this interpretation, express the view that the Divine Intellect lies beyond the celestial sphere. With the reservation mentioned earlier that Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s understanding of God is closer to that of Plato than to that of Aristotle, this second interpretation highlights his espousal of the Aristotelian hierarchy of being as described in the latter’s *Metaphysics*. In sum, in both interpretations Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s conception of the intellect would be Aristotelian: in the first, *nafs-i nāṭiqa* (‘rational soul’) would refer to the *human* intellect, while in the second it would be the *Divine* Intellect to which he alludes.

In a recent conversation, Dr Pourjavadi of Tehran University suggested that I read the lines with *wi rā* instead of *wa rā*. On this reading, the translation of the second hemistich would be: ‘He said: “The subtle world is its dwelling site”.’ As a result, the two alternative interpretations given above would have to be dropped and Nāṣir-i Khusraw would then be stating that the rational soul is aetherial.²⁴ In this interpretation, Nāṣir-i Khusraw would also differ from the theologians referred to earlier because the latter did not have a triple hierarchy of being but a simpler division: God and the creatures.

In the following verse, Nāṣir-i Khusraw not only refers to the place of the intellect in the Aristotelian hierarchy of being, but more importantly stresses the task that lies before us as human beings; that is, by exercising the faculty of thought we gain access to the divine and eternal part of our being:

Khīrad āghāz-i jahān būd u tu anjām-i jahān
*Bāz gard, ay sara-anjām bidān nīk-āghāz*²⁵

Intellect was the beginning of the world, and you its culmination,
 Return, O progeny of the culmination, to that great beginning!



While Aristotle's hierarchy of being starts at the highest level, with the First Intellect, his hierarchy of being in a biological context, found in his *History of Animals*, starts from the lowest level, moving up from inanimate objects through plants, then animals, and culminates in man. So, in this sense then, and connecting the narratives of the *Metaphysics* and the *History of Animals*, one might regard the Divine Intellect as coming first and the rational animal as coming last. In a similar fashion, Nāṣir-i Khusraw first mentions the Divine Intellect in the form of *khirad*, and then alludes to the human intellect, when he says 'and you its culmination'. In other words, 'you, in as much as you are a *rational animal*'.

The second hemistich quoted above underlines this meaning through a direct address, 'Return, O culmination,' in which 'culmination' (of all creation) refers to 'man' in his capacity as a *rational animal*. As for the 'return', we can consider it in two ways. In the first place Nāṣir-i Khusraw considers man's exercise of his faculty of reason as of the utmost importance. This activity of the rational faculty of man is symbolised by the turning back towards the Divine Intellect as his ultimate origin. This echoes Aristotle, who held that man, by exercising the faculty of thought, gains access to the divine and eternal part of his being.²⁶ In the second place, there might be a Platonic echo here as well. Plato, in his famous Allegory of the Cave in the *Republic*, describes man's ascent towards the truth in terms of one of the prisoners of the cave being released and turning his head around²⁷ to start his climb upwards from the darkness of the cave towards the light of truth.²⁸ In this sense, one can say that the whole task of philosophy is in a way a 'returning', a movement towards the source of being.

From this exposition of the mutual properties and activities of the Divine and the human intellect in the poetry of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, we see that he situates them in the hierarchy of being within the terms of a largely Aristotelian approach.

Religious aspects of the intellect

Nāṣir-i Khusraw's view of the intellect and its relationship to religion is one of the striking features of his poetry. What stands out most on reading his *Dīwān* is his insistence that the man of God must use his intellect rather than blindly surrender to his faith. For example:

Dar 'aql wājib ast yakī kunī
*Īn nafs-hā-yi khurda-yi ajzā' rā*²⁹

In your intellect you must unite
 These souls, these parts minute.



The context in which this verse occurs is religious and in the preceding lines Nāṣir-i Khusraw has made it clear that all the prophets are friends (*rafiqān*).³⁰ And since it is to the prophets that the word ‘souls’ here refers, this verse therefore is a call for the use of reason, rather than emotion, to understand that in spite of apparent differences all prophets had access to one and the same immutable truth which each of them revealed and conveyed in his own particular way. This, of course, ties in very well with the Ismaili view of prophecy in which the successive prophets are said to have all expressed one and the same inner truth, even though the outer form of their message may have taken different forms.³¹ Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s statements on the harmony between religion and philosophy accord with the larger Muslim philosophical tradition; the topic had earlier found a more comprehensive treatment in the works of al-Fārābī³² and was a subject later taken up by Ibn Rushd in his famous *Decisive Treatise*.³³

Nāṣir-i Khusraw addresses the religious question of immortality:

Zinda zi-mā ay pisār, na īn tan-i khākī-st
Sū-yi payambar na nīz sū-yi Falātūn

Balka zi-mā zinda wa sharīf u sukhan-gūy
*Nīst maḡar jān farr-i khujāsta u maymūn*³⁴

What is alive in us, O Son, is not this body made of dust
Neither in the Prophet’s view nor that of Plato.

Nay, for us, alive, noble and eloquent,
There is nothing but the soul of good-fortuned and happy glory.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw here links immortality with the intellect’s eloquence and the sublime happiness that is occasioned by human intellectual activity. The ancient Greek tradition contains at least two parallels in which the immortality of the soul or purely its rational part and its delight in contemplation is mentioned or implied. First, in Plato’s *Phaedo*, Socrates by means of an extended argument proves that only the soul is immortal, and that after physical death the soul rejoins the Divine in a state of pure and happy contemplation.³⁵ Second, Aristotle in various places in his *De Anima* and *Metaphysics* makes reference to the immortality of the rational soul alone and the happiness that it derives from mere contemplation.³⁶

A final example of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s grappling with the connection between religion and intellect:

Khīrad ān-ast ki chun hadīyya firistād bi tu
*Zū khudāwānd-i jahān bā tu sukhan guft bi rāz*³⁷



Intellect is that which He did send you as a gift
The Lord of the World spoke to you of it in symbols.

In the first hemistich, Nāṣir-i Khusraw once again emphasises the fact that man distinguishes himself from all other creatures because he has been endowed with the capacity for rational thought. The second hemistich may be looked at in two ways. In the first place there is the obvious reading that God speaking in riddles refers to the Ismaili understanding of Revelation as possessing two different levels of truth, the apparent and the hidden. On the one hand, the *apparent* meaning (*ẓāhir*) of the text of the Qur'an can be understood by a straightforward interpretation known as *tafsīr*. On the other hand, the hidden meaning (*bāṭin*) can only be elucidated by means of a process of esoteric exegesis (*ta'wīl*).³⁸ Thus, the second hemistich means that God has endowed man with the faculty of reason so that he is able, among other things, to grasp the hidden meaning of the Qur'an. But another interpretation is possible and may be preferable. According to Ismaili doctrine, creation springs forth from the word of God. The technical expression for this in Arabic is the *kun wujūdī*, the divine imperative 'Be!' (*kun*) from which all being originates.³⁹ On the basis of such an interpretation, Nāṣir-i Khusraw would not be referring to the hidden meaning of the Qur'an, but rather to creation. And it is with the God-given faculty of the intellect that man, and only man, can and therefore ought to strive to understand creation and by this means get as close as possible to God, because God Himself is beyond comprehension.⁴⁰

Conclusion

This brief survey of the ontological and religious aspects of the intellect in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān* has shown that the poet was more than familiar with Greek philosophy. He not only used its concepts but incorporated its methods to address the most profound questions of faith and reason. In his poetry, Nāṣir-i Khusraw actively follows the ideas of both Plato and Aristotle on the subject of the intellect, human and Divine, whilst at the same time retaining a strong Muslim faith and an Ismaili view of religion and its place in society. In this sense then, he is a worthy representative of the Ismaili intellectual tradition which has always advocated the study of philosophy in the quest for understanding Divine, Eternal Truth.

Notes

1. There is evidence in his poems that he composed also in Arabic, but no Arabic work is extant. As an example, see last line of the *qaṣīda* that begins *nikūhish makun charkh-i nilūfari rā / burun kun zi sar bād-i khīra sari rā*: last line is '*bi-khwān har du dīwān-i man tā bibīni/ yikī gashta bi 'Unṣuri Buhturi rā*'. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān*, ed., M. Mīnuwī and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran 1357 Sh./1978), *Qaṣīda* 64:46.



2. *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Ḥakīm Abū Mu'īn Ḥamid al-Dīn Nāṣir ibn Khusraw*, ed. N. Taqawī, introd., H. Taqizāda, re-ed. Sh. Arjumandī (Tehran, 1380 Sh./2001), p. 127, l. 267. The remainder of the verses cited in this article will be from this edition.

3. Gh. H. Ibrāhīmī Dīnāni, *Daftar-i 'Aql wa āyat-i 'ishq* (Tehran, 1380–1381 Sh./2001–2002), vol. 2, p. 70. In the Preface to his *Kīmīyā-yi Sa'adat*, the Iranian Ash'arī theologian Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) argues that the Persian language is for the common run of man (*'awāmm*), which explains why most of his works are in Arabic; see Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Kīmīyā-yi Sa'adat*, ed. A. Aram (Tehran, 1361 Sh./1982).

4. *Dīwān*, Index.

5. *Dīwān*, p. 285, l. 4597.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 251, l. 3672. The truncated syllogism is something like: *Minor premise*: You should exercise control over your intellect (not stated), *major premise*: it is the task of the intellect to come to know (what virtuous conduct is) and to pursue action in accordance with it (stated), *conclusion*: therefore, you should know and practise virtue (not stated).

7. Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr, *Risāla fi'l-aql*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut, 1983); Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Shifā'*; 1.5: *al-ṭabī'iyyat*; *kitāb al-naḥs*, ed. G. Anawati and S. Zayed (Cairo, 1975); Ibn Rushd, *Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros*, ed. F. Stuart Crawford (Cambridge, MA, 1953); Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikma al-muta'aliyya fi'l-asfār al-'aqliyya al-arba'a* (Tehran, 1383 Sh./2004), vols 3 and 8.

8. *Dīwān*, p. 122, l. 123.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 137, l. 557.

10. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, ed., W. Jaeger (Oxford, 1989), XII.7 1072b 10–30, XII.9 1074b 33–34.

11. Aristotle, *De Caelo*. ed. D. J. Allan (Oxford, 1973), I.3 270b 20–24.

12. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII.7 1072a 19 – 1072b 10.

13. Aristotle, *De Caelo*, II.2 285a 29.

14. See also Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, ed. H. Corbin and M. Mu'īn (Tehran and Paris, 1953), pp. 148–150, sections 150 and 151.

15. That the First Unmoved Mover is identified with God in Aristotle is clear from *Metaphysics*, XII.7.

16. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, ed. Gh. R. Aavani (Tehran, 1356 Sh./1977), p. 33. 11–12. Nāṣir-i Khusraw's views in this matter are analysed by Ibrāhīm Dīnāni, *Daftar-i 'aql*, vol. 1, pp. 371 ff.

17. See P. Friedlaender, *Plato: An Introduction*, Bollingen Series (New York and Princeton, 1983), p. 63.

18. Aristotle, *History of Animals*, ed. D. M. Balme and A. Gotthelf (Cambridge, 2002), VIII.1 588b 4–13; and Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, ed. and tr. P. Louis (Paris, 1990), IV.5 681a 12–16.

19. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII.7 1072b 20–24; *Generation of Animals*, ed. H. J. Drossaart Lulofs (Oxford, 1965), II.3 736b 27–29.

20. In the Neoplatonic tradition we find the concept of *hyperousios* or 'above being', for which see Proclus, *The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, by E. R. Dodds (Oxford, 1992), §§ 115.28–29 and 119.16–19 (see pp. 100 and 104 of the edition for the Greek text and pp. 101 and 105 for the English translation).

21. *Dīwān*, p. 271, l. 4201.

22. Aristotle, *De Anima*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford, 1963), II.1 412a 18–20.



23. Al-Ash'arī, A., *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. M. M. Abdulhamid (Cairo, 1950 and 1954), vol. 2, 27; G. Jehamy, *Muṣtalaḥāt al-falsafa 'inda'l-'arab* (Beirut, 1998), p. 323. The compound *jism-i laṭīf* has a parallel in the Arabic version of Themistius' commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*, where the soul is said to have been understood by some as a *jism-i laṭīf al-ajzā'* (leptomeresaton, 'most subtle' body) (M. C. Lyons, tr., *An Arabic Translation of Themistius' Commentary on Aristotle's de Anima* (Oxford, 1973), 27.1–2. In this connection, see also Aristotle, *De Anima*, I.5 409b 18 ff. Unfortunately, I do not have Badawi's edition of the ancient Arabic translation of *De Anima* available to me.

24. Aetherial refers in this context to what is neither corporeal nor entirely rational but intermediary between the two.

25. *Dīwān*, p. 282, l. 4514.

26. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII.7 1072b 20–24, *Generation of Animals*, II.3 736b 27–29.

27. Plato, *Republic*, ed. E. Chambry (Paris, 1932–1934) – the Greek reads *periagein ton auchena* in *Republic*, VII 515 C.

28. Plato, *Republic*, VII 514 A ff, esp. 515 C.

29. *Dīwān*, p. 129, l. 329.

30. For 'rafiqān', Cf. idem, p. 129, l. 326.

31. M. Soltani, 'Nubuwwat az didgāh-i Ismā'iliyān' in *Ismā'iliyya Majmū'a-yi maqālāt* (Qum, 1380 Sh./2001), pp. 75–109, esp. p. 85.

32. See J. Lameer, *al-Farabi & Aristotelian Syllogistics, Greek Theory and Islamic Practice* (Leiden, 1994), ch 9.

33. Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-maqāl fi-mā bayna ḥikma wa'l-sharī'a min al-itṭiṣāl*, ed. G. F. Hourani (Leiden, 1959).

34. *Dīwān*, p. 371, ll. 6941–6942.

35. Plato, *Phaedo*, ed. R. D. Archer-Hind (London and New York, 1894), 72a, 80b, 81a.

36. Aristotle, *De Anima*, III.5 430a 20–26, *Metaphysics* XII.7 1072b 13–24.

37. *Dīwān*, p. 282, l. 4516.

38. For an introduction to the Ismaili doctrine of *zāhir*, *bāṭin*, and *ta'wīl*, see A. Aghānūrī, 'Ismā'iliyya wa bāṭinī-gar' in *Ismā'iliyya: Majmū'a-yi maqālāt* (Qum, 1380 Sh./2001), pp. 249–307. See also Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, pp. 291.1–292.4. For his interpretation of the *zāhir* and the *bāṭin* of the concept of prayer, for example, cf. idem, p. 308. 15–18.

39. For this aspect of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's thought, see Ibrāhīm Dīnānī, *Daftar-i 'aql*, vol. 1, pp. 371 ff.

40. For God Himself being beyond comprehension, cf. e.g. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, p. 33. 11–12.



‘I Am a Mine of Golden Speech’:
Poetic Language and Self-Reference in
Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s *Qaṣīdas*

DANIEL RAFINEJAD

*In life you must be wise and
discreet
And when you speak
Let your word be laden as any
truth
Let it be worthy of mankind
Mak Dizdar, ‘Lullaby’¹*

*and I would give
While yet we may, as far as words can give
Substance and life to what I feel, enshrining,
Such is my hope, the spirit of the Past
For future restoration.*

William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1850), Book XII²

This chapter takes as its starting point the problem modern scholarship has had in positioning Nāṣir-i Khusraw within the pantheon of classical Persian poets. Certainly the mystique that has surrounded his persona and his biography, propagated by both his supporters and his detractors, has not helped readers, nor, likewise, have those writings scholars accept or allege to be spurious. Central to this study, furthermore, is the fact that Nāṣir reveals a depth of emotion and an awareness of self in his *qaṣīdas* that is absent in his prose writings: a voice that is querulous yet enraptured, sarcastic yet sincere.

In his *Safar-nāma* (*Travelogue*), for example, Nāṣir introduces us to Cairo in purely geographical terms (‘Coming south from Syria...’);³ however, in his so-called



Qaṣīda-yi i'tirāfiyya ('Confessional Ode'), Cairo is nothing less than heaven on Earth: *Rūzī birasīdam bi dar-i shahrī k'ān rā / ajrām-i falak banda buwad, aflāk musakhkhar* ('One day I reached a town before whose greatness / the heavens and horizons seemed like servants').⁴ Poetry affords Nāṣir a greater amount of freedom for emotive self-expression. That his poetry has a sententious, homiletic bent is indisputable; but is he merely a 'didactic poet'⁵ or a composer of versified philosophy lacking 'poetical feeling'?⁶

My aim in this chapter is to explore how Nāṣir-i Khusraw expresses the personal – his biography, his emotions, his beliefs – through verse. For a fourth/eleventh-century Persian of Nāṣir's lofty station and education, poetry was the highest form of expression. What is remarkable in Nāṣir's *qaṣīdas* is the pervasiveness of reflexive recognition; that is, the way in which this poet, who by all accounts wrote his *Dīwān* in isolation, inserts himself into a poetic word privileged by intuition and intellect and determines himself as an historical individual. At a time dominated by panegyric and court poetry, Nāṣir-i Khusraw held radical notions about composition and the composer. Thus I contend that Nāṣir's *qaṣīdas* are his collective *apologia*, an imaging of self as a complex imbrication of vindication and didactics, held together by the intensity of language and feeling that poetry necessarily provides.

Peter Lamborn Wilson asserts that the Word – Logos – is 'the key' to understanding Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān*: 'The reader must make a distinct effort of will to re-place himself imaginatively in a cosmos where the Logos is the Source, where the Name and thing named are, on the level of correspondences, identical.'⁷ While this may be true generally, we must remember that poetry, as a communicative mode and an artefact of beauty, draws attention to language as its medium. Nāṣir states in his prose philosophical work *Khwān al-Ikhwān* (*Feast of the Brethren*) that God 'elevated' (*sharaf...rāst*) poetry over prose.⁸ Poetry is the standard of wisdom for Nāṣir,⁹ a rare, 'sweet, fragrant and well-coloured' fruit of the speaking soul that many barren speakers cannot produce.¹⁰ Therefore, only the probing mind, that which understands the Intellect as the vehicle for transcendence, is capable of producing the 'sweet and virtuous words' (*khub wa khush sukhanhā*)¹¹ that can name the essential truth of all things.¹² Likewise, he does not intend to waste his words on ignorant listeners:

*Ki buwad hujjat bihuda sū-yi jāhil, pish-i gusāla na-shāyad ki Qur'ān khwānī;
Nakunad bā sufahā mard sukhan dāyī, nān-i jaw rā ki dīhad zīra-yi kirmānī?;
Ān hamī gūyad imrūz ma rā bad dīn, ki bi juz nām nadānad zi-musalmānī*¹³

A proof (*hujjat*) is nonsense to the ignorant –
You don't recite the Qur'an to a calf;
A man mustn't waste words (*sukhan*) on fools,
For who would put cumin in simple barley bread?



Today, this one says I am of bad religion,
Who knows nothing of Islam but its name

In his typical fashion of using a word in one line and repeating or alluding to it a few lines later, Nāṣir plays on his *nom-de-plume* and Ismaili title, ‘proof’ (*hujjat*), in the first line above, making way for the direct reference in the last line to himself and the ‘ignorant’ oppressors who forced him into seclusion. He thereby defines his readership and underscores the Ismaili world view that he embraces.

With the same disdain and self-awareness, in other poems Nāṣir denounces his earlier work as a court poet and parodies the titivated, conventional language of his contemporaries, just as he rails against religious hypocrisy.¹⁴ The poem that Wilson and Aavani call ‘The Anti-Ode to Spring’ would read like an archetypal *qaṣīda* were it not for the first hemistich (‘How long have you praised the Spring?’).¹⁵ It begins with a lyrical exordium (*nasīb*) evoking the stock images of the meadow, the rose and the nightingale, and the narcissus. The convention is shattered in line 10, however, with a jolting reversal in mood and a return to the self-awareness of the first opening: ‘Enough of such futile nonsense! Such blather merely embarrasses me!’¹⁶ Continuing his use of the metaphors of nature, the poem then addresses Nāṣir’s Saljūq oppressors and becomes an unapologetic defence of the poet’s faith. The *qaṣīda* (literally, ‘purposive poem’) is the form par excellence for panegyric in medieval Persian poetry,¹⁷ yet Nāṣir reserves his praise only for the sincerest expressions of devotion and gratitude to the Fatimids in Cairo, his protectors in the *da’wa* of Badakhshān, and the family of the Prophet.

The *qaṣīda* that Julie Scott Meisami has translated and analysed elsewhere in this volume (for the original Persian, see Appendix, *Qaṣīda* 112, verses 4, 5, 8, 10–12, 15–16) and Wilson and Aavani simply call ‘The Divan’ is in many ways Nāṣir’s most cogent pronouncement on his ideas about poetry and himself as a poet:

Fruits and flowers will I make from meanings (*ma’āni*),
out of pleasing words I shall make trees.
As the cloud makes the desert’s face a garden,
I’ll make my notebook’s face a garden too...
A palace of my poem I’ll make, in which
from its verses I’ll form flowerbeds and verandahs...
At its gate some rarity of metre
I’ll set, trusty and wise, to be its gateman.
Maf’ūlu fā’ilātu mafā’īlu fa’
I’ll make the foundation of this auspicious building.
Then people of merit from all regions
I’ll invite to my palace to feast...
In the body of discourse (*sukhan*), like the intellect itself,



I shall place beautiful and rare meanings as the soul.
 If you have not seen discourse in human form,
 I'll make for you, in discourse, the form of a man.¹⁸

The materiality of the Word (*sukhan*) in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's 'literary microcosm' above¹⁹ – as a thing that is revivable, palpable, incarnate – is that 'Primordial Wisdom',²⁰ as Wilson calls it, which lends Nāṣir's language such authenticity. From the Ismaili perspective, the primacy of the Word is also the means by which Nāṣir 'affirms his own creative power' as analogous to that of the Universal Intellect ('*aql-i kullī*') spawning the Universal Soul (*nafs-i kullī*):²¹ he posits himself as an animator and dresser of meaning.

In the verses cited above, the Word is simultaneously garden, building and human being. As the first of the three domains, nature takes its place structurally as the *nasīb* of the *qaṣīda* and symbolically as the site where language is born. In Nāṣir's *qaṣīdas*, the existence and function of the Universal Soul are explicable and reflected through the paradigms and processes of nature.²² The inner state of anything, its *bāṭin*, can be recognised and explained from its outward appearance, its *zāhir*.²³ There is, therefore, a continuity between the physical and the spiritual realms, and the 'fruits and flowers' of Nāṣir's words are beautiful because they are authentic and true. The palace, as a human artefact, is the most 'crafted' of the three symbols above, and Nāṣir uses it fittingly to refer to metre and the contrivances of verse. Julie Scott Meisami has noted that in this poem the palace is a 'mediatory figure'²⁴ between garden and human form; indeed, the scope of Nāṣir's metaphor narrows throughout the first part of the *qaṣīda*, as we move from the expansive view of language as that which can make a blank notebook bloom to language which can construct a building and its terraces to, finally, language which can craft the image of the human form. The latter notion, of language assuming a human life (a rarity Nāṣir himself admits) suggests an acknowledgment of the profound reflexivity and inwardness of his work, to be discussed later in this chapter.

At the same time, a garden, a palace and a human form represent divergent levels of temporality and creation. Perhaps, then, the palace is not so much a mediatory figure as it is evidence of the tension between the Name and the Named in Nāṣir's poetry. Flowers and trees, though planted by humans, fade with the seasons, just as the body decomposes and disappears. A building raised up high upon a strong foundation, embellished with parapets and courtyards is a far more lasting image than a garden. Indeed, in other *qaṣīdas*, the written word for Nāṣir is eternal and makes other things eternal: as he writes in the ode called 'Speech', the body decays in the 'deep, muddy' earth, while the Word has the power to raise the dead, as did the word of Jesus (line 29), and send the soul to the stars.²⁵ The Word – script, diction and structure, for all must be interpreted through the principles of Ismaili *ta'wīl*²⁶ – is the vehicle for apprehending



spiritual meanings (the *bāṭin*) that do not adhere to earthly perceptions of time and space. Nāṣir states outright in the ‘Speech’ *qaṣīda* that the transcendental potential of the Word is not towards literal heights (*bālā*), and is therefore not to be contrasted with the ‘deep’ ‘pit’ (*zharf, chāh*) that is the corporeal earth; rather, its potential is towards the sublimity (*wālā*) of the supernal zodiac (*jawzā*, Gemini): (*Jānat bi sukhan pāk shawad zānki khīradmand / az rāh-i sukhan bar shawad az chāh bi jawzā ... nīkū bi sukhan shu, na bidīn ṣūrat azīrāk / wālā bi sukhan gardad mardum na bi bālā*) ‘May your soul be purified by the Word/ The wise by the Word ascend from this pit to astral Gemini/... Acquire virtue from the Word, not by this appearance (*ṣūrat*)/ For man is made sublime (*wālā*) by the word, not hoisted up (*bālā*).’²⁷

With this conflict between the ephemeral presence in nature and the securing of an eternal representation, Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s *qaṣīdas* resemble the poetry of another like-minded naturalist who wrote seven centuries later in England, William Wordsworth. Wordsworth’s poetry and writing about poetry can serve as a useful critical lens through which we can understand Nāṣir’s goal in writing poetry as well as his concept of poetic language. Echoing Nāṣir’s gesture in the ‘Diwān’ *qaṣīda* of inserting meaning as the ‘soul’ of the Word, Wordsworth writes in his third ‘Essay upon Epitaphs’ that the Word is not ‘what the garb is to the body but what the body is to the soul, themselves a constituent part and power or function in the thought’.²⁸ In this essay, Wordsworth considers the implications of poetic language engraved in stone. He concludes that the Word as epitaph necessarily ‘points to the “otherness” and “elsewhere” of spirit’²⁹ while as body, it is mortal. I contend that Nāṣir, more than any other poet of his age, conceives of his *qaṣīdas* as a sort of collective epitaph for his tomb, a marker that simultaneously incarnates his life – his biography, his beliefs, his emotions – and is a permanent indication of his absence. Karen Mills-Courts’ analysis of Wordsworth’s language indeed applies to Nāṣir’s Word as well:

Wordsworth’s lifelong insistence that poetic language must be ‘natural’ is closely related to his sense that most poetic works, like ruins, must lie somewhere between humankind and nature. Like a ruin, they must mark consciousness, yet they must be recognised as always on the verge of being reabsorbed in to the natural world. Words must, therefore, mark a significance that escapes incarnation at the same time that they initiate incarnation. A word, like a crumbling column, stands on the brink of disembodiment; it is the mark of difference trembling on the reunification with the ‘one’ that nature is.³⁰

Thus the *qaṣīdas* collectively are like a literary cairn, piled with metre and diction as ‘rare’ and precisely crafted as palace stone, a mark of the unity between mind and matter, and in particular, a mark of Nāṣir’s own life.



Indeed, just as the Word can lead us to learning and teaching eternal truths through the Intellect, it also renders Nāṣir-i Khusraw himself eternal through poetry. In many of the instances in the *qaṣīdas* in which he praises his own accomplishments, Nāṣir also remarks that he will be forever remembered. In much the same manner by which he states he will shape the Word into human form – comparing himself to God creating the body of Man from clay – Nāṣir places himself directly in the poet/prophet tradition:

*Nāmdār u muftakhar shud buq'at-i Yumgān bi man
Chun bi faḍl-i Muṣṭafā shud muftakhar dasht-i 'Arab ...
Mūnis-i jān u dil-i man chīst? tasbīḥ u Qur'ān
Khāk-i pā-i khāṭir-i man chīst? ash'ār u khiṭab*³¹

The hovel of Yumgān has become famed and glorified because of me,
Just as the Arab desert became glorified by the excellence of the Prophet...
What is the foundation of my intellect? Poems and sermons.

'Foundation' (*khāk-i pā*) again connotes a monument that represents Nāṣir's mortal life and stands for his timeless beliefs. Thus Nāṣir frequently turns to telluric and lapidary motifs, often for contrast, in order to underscore the permanence of his thought: while his hovel in Yumgān is stained, sludgy land (the literal meaning of *buq'at*, hovel), his sermons and poems comprise a *terra firma*. Moreover, gold appears to be the supreme stone on which his words are symbolically inscribed:

*Gūsh-am shinawā shuda-ast azirā, 'ilm-ast hamīsha gūshwāram
Chashm-am binā shuda-ast azirāk, az ḥaqq u yaqīn bar intizāram
Zīn pas nakunad shikār hargiz, na bāz u na yūz-i rūzigār-am
Āngah bi tabār būd, pūrā, yiksar hama nāz u iftikhāram
W'imrūz bi man kunad hamī fakhr, ham ahl-i zamīn u ham taḅāram
Āngah bi mithal-i sufāl būdam, u aknūn bi yaqīn zar-'ayāram;
Barkhīz u biyāzmāy ar idūnk, bi qawl nadārī ustwāram*³²

My ear is sharp, for knowledge hangs from it like an earring;
My eye is clear, because I have gazed on Truth and Certainty
No more will I be prey in the hunt of the falcon and the cheetah of Time
(*rūzigār*).

O Son, then my only pride and joy were my ancestors,
But now my ancestors, along with all the world's inhabitants, take pride
in me.

Then, I was a shard of earthenware (*sufāl*),
But now I am, with certainty, the gold standard (*zar-'ayār*)



If you don't believe me now, try it yourself and test the worth of my poem
Read it and memorise it!

By means of the Intellect, as finely cut as an earring, Nāṣir was transformed at mid-life from friable, human clay to solid gold. The contrast of earthenware and gold again signifies this conflict between disembodiment and decay that the bodies of both the Word and the poet face, versus the incarnative, eternal qualities of his poetry and its message. The apostrophic arrangement of the lines to Nāṣir's real or spiritual progeny (a generic 'O Son', *pūrā*), countered by the reference to pleasing his ancestors (*tabār*), suggests that the poem stands, like an epitaph, at some sort of earthly transit point between the Islamic binary of time immemorial (*azal*) and time everlasting (*abad*). Honouring the souls of his predecessors and preserved through the memories of his 'sons', Nāṣir escapes 'the hunt' of Time. He aggrandises this metaphor in another ode, writing that even though he was once ore in the mine (*kān*) of the world, now (*zarr-i sukhan rā bi nafs-i nāṭīqa kān-am*) 'I myself am a mine of golden speech in the rational soul'.³³ He distinguishes between the finite quality of his physical life and the untarnishable gold of his words.

With natural images again giving him the allegorical means to tell his story, Nāṣir opens the long *Qaṣīda-yi i'tirāfiyya* by announcing his and his reader's place in the universe (*ay khwānda basī 'ilm u jahān gashta sarāsar, tu bar zamī u az barat īn charkh-i mudawwar*) 'still earth-bound, still caught beneath the sky'.³⁴ After giving the year of his birth, he describes the event as a planted seed (*binhād mārā mādar bar markaz-i aghbar*), 'When my mother dropped me in the dust, a voiceless creature' (p. 507, line 27), and then begins to relay his biography as the progress of the human form from seed to animal:

Az ḥāl-i nabātī birasīdam bi sutūrī
Yak chand hamī būdam chun murghak-i bī-par;
Dar ḥāl-i chahārum athar-i mardumi āmad
*Chun nāṭīqa rah yāft dar īn jism-i mukaddar.*³⁵

From this vegetative state I reached that of the beasts,
and floundered like a bird whose wings are clipped, till in the Fourth Age
I gained the stature of a man and felt
The soul of reason worm its way into my body.

The last line recalls the meaning/word dichotomy upon which Nāṣir further expounds several lines later: 'Now, existing as an individual of body and soul,/ I am both the negation (*naskha*) of the eternity/ and an eternity condensed (*mukaddar*).'³⁶ Now swathed in the specific details of his own life, the Word is the residue of Nāṣir's personal soul, imaged and called into perpetual being. He later returns



to the image of the gold mine, reiterating that the Intellect, unlike a mine, is inexhaustible and eternal:

*Dānā bi mithl-i mushk w'az-ū dānish chun būy
Yā ham bi mithl-i kūh w'az-ū dānish chun zar.
Chun būy u zar az mushk judā gardad w'az sang
Bī-qadr shawad sang u mushk muzawwar.
Īn zarr kujā dar shawad az mushk azān pas?
Khīzam khabarī pурсam az ān durj-i mukhabbir³⁷*

The learned one is like musk, his learning its fragrance,
Or, like a mountain in which knowledge is mined like gold.
When musk loses its aroma, or ore is emptied of its gold,
Musk becomes worthless, the ore contains only specks of gilt.
When the aroma and gold are symbols of knowledge, let me then
Get up and search for 'musk' where it can be found, that exalted scroll.

In all his *qaṣīdas*, and most saliently in the *I'tirāfiyya*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw struggles to unify the story of his life with his highly individuated code of beliefs and with the language of 'that exalted scroll': a language that is uniquely Iranian and uniquely his own. Nāṣir's goal in writing poetry is inherently the same as that of William Wordsworth, who says to his soul in Book VI of *The Prelude*: 'I recognise thy glory.'³⁸ In the case of Nāṣir, this recognition extends from the self to God through the doctrine of Oneness (*tawhīd*). For Wordsworth, it is less religious, though his engagement of 'a motion and spirit that impels all thinking things, all objects of thought and rolls through all things',³⁹ and a 'world created out of pure intelligence'⁴⁰ is remarkably similar to the Neoplatonic Ismaili world view.⁴¹ Paul de Man argues that Wordsworth's *Prelude*, as a poem, and Augustine's *Confessions*, as a pre-modern text, present a particular conundrum to historians and students of autobiography who consider the form 'a specifically pre-romantic and romantic phenomenon' that 'categorically' cannot be written in verse.⁴² He concludes that autobiography thus 'is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading' in which the reflexivity of the writer makes itself known to the reader.⁴³ De Man takes note of the inherent authenticity and intensity of poetry, with a comparison reminiscent of Wordsworth and Nāṣir-i Khusraw: 'The language of tropes is indeed like the body, which is like its garments, the veil of the soul as the garment is the sheltering veil of the body.' We can indeed approach the extraordinary autobiographical element of Nāṣir's poetry as a 'figure of reading' in a language suspended somewhere between body and soul.

In his influential 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*', Wordsworth defines poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'.⁴⁴ Nāṣir-i Khusraw's feelings in his



qaṣīdas are powerful indeed, sweeping from bitter derision to pious rapture; the authentic and monumental tenor of his poetic language gives him the freedom to express the pains of exile and of aging. Autobiography also has an essentially didactic force behind it, and Nāṣir's *qaṣīdas* are often an elegant admixture of private emotion, aphorism and devotion:

The scorpion of exile, he stung my heart – as if
 He found in all the world no one as low as me!
 I look into my state, intensely, deeply hurt –
 My bile comes up from grief to rise into my head.
 I ask: ‘Why did the sky, that cruel, stupid sphere
 Put me as target up for arrows of the Fate?’...
 ‘No! Neither Time nor Sphere do know what virtue is’ –
 That’s what my father said, when I was still a boy:
 ‘Knowledge is better, son, that household, money, rank!’
 Thus spoke to me the one with penetrating mind.
 Despite my radiant mind, more splendid than the moon,
 The station of the moon is of now use to me.
 My faith, my intellect suffice as shield and soldiers
 Against Fate’s cutting sword, against Time’s army strong!
 Were I a prisoner of wealth, as others are,
 My belly would be filled with envy’s poisoned food.
 But thought is like a tree that bears much fruit for me –
 Knowledge and abstinence, they shed much fruit for me!
 You need to see me, friend, complete and without fail?
 Then use your inner sight, as wise men look at me.
 My body may be frail – don’t look! because my word
 Has greater impact here than yonder starry sky!...
 A hospice is the world for those who wander, son!
 For me, a place to stay is better than all this.
 God guarded me against the needs that humans feel –
 I am without a wish here in this passageway.
 Thanks be to God who showed the way to His true faith,
 To knowledge, to His grace, and opened wide His gate!
 And in the world I gained fame like the radiant sun
 Because I deeply love the Family of Truth!⁴⁵

The opening lines leap back and forth between the personal and universal, from the poet’s heart to the world, from his head to the heavenly spheres, from his boyhood to perpetual Time. However, the balance is carefully constructed. For instance, the Persian word *jigar*, meaning ‘heart’ in the first line, has the literal



meaning of 'liver', which links it to the bile reference in the second line; Fate's arrow (*tīr*) in line 3 returns in line 9. The appearance of the poet's father establishes the didactic tone, which in turn develops with the introduction of a second person verb in line 12 (*bibīnī*, translated here with the addition of the word 'friend') and becomes straight admonishment in line 15, when the poet dons the role of 'father' himself and addresses a generic student 'son' (*ay pīsar*). Furthermore, Nāṣir uses standard tropes in this *qaṣīda* that are also found throughout the *Dīwān*, such as the 'tree of thought' and ecstatic praise for the family of the Prophet (the *ahl al-bayt*). Reflexivity, meanwhile, is reiterated through the refrain (*radīf*) that ends each line: 'me' (*mārā*). Thus as we move between the didactic and the devotional, the heavens and the heart, we are anchored by the repetition of the poet's continual self-reference. Indeed, this poem unites what are arguably the three major modes of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *qaṣīdas*: the emotional/autobiographical, the sententious and the reverential.

The sententious often comes out in shorter, fable-like poems about plants and animals, which compile a veritable sub-genre within Nāṣir's *Dīwān*. For example, the allegory of the eagle, one of Nāṣir's most famous and anthologised poems, is a lesson against selfish pride that plays on the symbolism of the exoteric and the esoteric. The boastful eagle, struck by a hunter, sees feathers surrounding the arrow in his wing and realises that he was the cause of his own demise: 'from me what came over me!' (*az mā-st ki bar mā-st*).⁴⁶ There are two ways in which the exclamation of the eagle can be read. One is that the eagle understands that his own blind pride caused his literal downfall. Another is that the eagle, noticing his feathers on the arrow, believes that by means of his own feathers, he produced the arrow *out of himself*. The latter reading, which supposes that the arrow is a creation of the eagle, maintains that consciousness of language and self. The Word, as noted earlier, is born out of nature for Nāṣir, as an arrow is 'born' out of wood and iron. Thus Nāṣir, by evoking his *nom-de-plume* in the conventional final line ('*hujjat*, cast out your pride from your head!'), may be reminding himself and his reader of the purpose, the *qaṣd*, of his *qaṣīdas*. They are not self-indulgent displays of linguistic decoration, but the means to a significant end, be it autobiographical, didactic or devotional.

Yet a sizeable number of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *qaṣīdas* begin with injunction, with the vocative particle *ay*, and even in these patently homiletic odes, Nāṣir carefully intertwines the personal and the emotional with the didactic. The following verse, for example, opens with a rebuke:

Ay yār-i surūd u āb-i angūr
Na yār-i manī bi-ḥaqq wa'l-ttūr.
Ma'zūl shuda-ast jān zi har chi
Dāda-ast bar ān't dahr manshūr.



Mīgūy muḥāl az ānki khufta
*Bāshad bi muḥāl u hazal ma‘dhūr.*⁴⁷

O friend of song and wine, I swear by God and Sinai that you're no friend
of mine!

Your soul has been dismissed of everything:
All that Fate assigned to you.
Blather and jest all you like,
For a sleeper is excused of his absurdities.

Like any good teacher, Nāṣir commands his student's attention with strictness – invoking the ultimate lesson, the Ten Commandments – yet is willing, in the third line, to give a compassionate reprieve. Not surprisingly, the shortcoming for which he excuses his student is inauthentic speech (*muḥāl*); as Nāṣir digresses, with touching sincerity, on the pangs of aging (comparing himself, in line 6, to a withered grape on the vine attracting the bee of Time), then moves to maxim (including one his favourites, 'make a shield from knowledge', line 16), and returns in the last distich to the initial personage of the wine imbiber, he draws attention to the poem itself as an exemplar of wise, intelligent *sukhan*.

Intelligent *sukhan* that is *not* 'devoid of poetry'.⁴⁸ The intensity of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's emotions fully befit the inherent intensity of poetry, and the absence of such confession in his prose work attests to this. Where the *Safar-nāma*, for example, is detached reportage or *Gushāyish wa Rahāyish* (*Knowledge and Liberation*) is meticulous explanation and exposition, poetry is a means by which Nāṣir incarnates his personal soul in the highest language. And just as Wordsworth argues that poetry must trace 'the essential passions of the heart',⁴⁹ Nāṣir-i Khusraw does not take the passions and the senses to be part of a lower, animalistic side of human nature. He is no Plato, who chose to banish the poets from the Republic, just as he is also no Sufi for whom poetry is a disappointing consolation for a severed love union. Nāṣir's physical world includes the emotional world; the timeless Intellect is revealed through the physical. His poetry, like the eagle's arrow, emerges *from him* at a monumental point between the eternal and the temporal. Poetry is the medium by which Nāṣir-i Khusraw simultaneously enshrines his feelings, his beliefs and his history – with golden words, laden with the truth, worthy of all humankind.

Notes

1. Mak Dizdar, quoted in Amila Butrović, *Stone Speaker: Medieval Tombstones, Landscape, and Bosnian Identity in the Poetry of Mak Dizdar*, tr. F. R. Jones (New York, 2002), p. 111.

2. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. J. Wordsworth (London, 1995), p. 483.



3. W. M. Thackston, tr., *Nāšir-e Khusraw's Book of Travels (Safarnama)* (Costa Mesa, CA, 2001), p. 56.
4. Tr. Annemarie Schimmel in *Make a Shield from Wisdom* (London, 1993), p. 47 (repr., with corrections, London, 2001). *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Nāšir-i Khusraw*, ed. M. Mīnuwī and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, repr. 1357 Sh./1978), p. 511. This is the edition I will use throughout this chapter; henceforth referenced as 'ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq' unless otherwise noted.
5. Peter Lamborn Wilson and Gholam Reza Aavani, *Nāšir-i Khusrau: Forty Poems from the Divan* (Tehran, 1977), p. 20
6. The critic Shibli Nu'mānī, quoted in Schimmel, *Make a Shield*, p. 13.
7. Wilson and Aavani, *Forty Poems*, p. 20.
8. Nāšir-i Khusraw, *Khwān al-ikhwān*, ed. 'A. Qawīm (Tehran, 1338 Sh./1959), p. 260.
9. In praising his teacher al-Mu'ayyad ('the helper') in the *Qašīda-yi i'tirāfīyya*, Nāšir distinguishes al-Mu'ayyad's poetry as the very 'standard of wisdom' while stating that his prose is simply 'pious wisdom encoded', again specifying poetry as a higher form of expression. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 514, line 113. Cf. W. Ivanow, tr., *Problems in Nasir-i Khusraw's Biography* (Bombay, 1956), pp. 21–40, quoted in Alice C. Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw, The Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller, and Philosopher* (London, 2nd rev. ed., 2001), p. 67, and Julie Scott Meisami, 'Symbolic Structure in a Poem by Nāšir-i Khusrau', *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 31 (1993), pp. 103–117, p. 109 (repr. in this volume, pp. 191–208).
10. Nāšir-i Khusraw, *Khwān al-ikhwān*, p. 260. See also Julie Scott Meisami, 'Symbolic Structure in a Poem by Nāšir-i Khusrau', p. 109 (also this volume, pp. 191–208).
11. Tr. Wilson and Aavani, *Forty Poems*, p. 97. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 81.
12. Hermann Landolt, review of *Nāšir-i Khusraw: Forty Poems from the Divan*, by P. L. Wilson and G. R. Aavani, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 102 (1982), pp. 214–216, p. 215.
13. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 436.
14. Jan Rypka notes that Nāšir-i Khusraw's *qašīdas* are famously 'devoid of encomium', J. Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, ed. K. Jahn, tr. P. van Popta-Hope (Dordrecht, 1968), p. 95. There are, of course, notable exceptions, namely those in praise of the Fatimid caliph al-Mustanšir and Abu'l-Ma'ālī 'Alī b. al-Asad, the amir who granted Nāšir refuge in Yumgān; see *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, pp. 505 and 425. He apparently also destroyed the eulogies that he wrote before his conversion to Ismailism, as a poet in the Ghaznawid and the Saljūq courts, Wilson and Aavani, *Forty Poems*, p. 2.
15. Wilson and Aavani, *Forty Poems*, p. 72. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 161.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Rypka, *History*, p. 94.
18. Tr. Meisami, 'Symbolic Structure', p. 110 (tr. repr. in this volume, pp. 191–208). *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 370.
19. Meisami, 'Symbolic Structure', p. 109 (also this volume, pp. 191–208).
20. Wilson and Aavani, *Forty Poems*, p. 20.
21. Meisami, 'Symbolic Structure', p. 109 (also this volume, pp. 191–208). In Ismaili theosophy, the First (or Universal) Intellect holds the rank of the divine Pen (*qalam*), which writes upon and thereby animates the Tablet (*lawḥ*), its 'offspring' (*farzand*) the Universal Soul. See Nāšir-i Khusraw, *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn/ Le Livre Réunissant Les Deux Sagesse*, ed. H. Corbin and M. Mu'īn (Tehran, 1953), p. 230.



22. See Henry Corbin, 'Nāṣir-i Khusrau and Iranian Ismā'īlism', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4, ed. R. N. Frye (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 520–542, p. 538.
23. See my "Evergreens of Reason": The Function and Treatment of Nature in the Qaṣīdas of Nāser-e Khosrow', *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 36 (2005), pp. 1–14.
24. Meisami, 'Symbolic Structure,' p. 104 (also this volume, pp. 191–208).
25. Wilson and Aavani, *Forty Poems*, p. 36. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 5.
26. See Hunsberger, *The Ruby*, pp. 131–134, and Meisami, 'Symbolic Structure,' p. 109 (also this volume, pp. 191–208).
27. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 5, lines 27 and 33. In Qaṣīda 54 of ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, Nāṣir likens the Word to a bird on the wing, p. 122.
28. William Wordsworth, *Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth*, ed. P. M. Zall (Lincoln, NE, 1966), p. 125.
29. Karen Mills-Courts, *Poetry as Epitaph: Representation and Poetic Language* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1990), p. 186.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
31. Tr. Hunsberger, *The Ruby*, p. 250. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 97, lines 28 and 31.
32. Tr. Wilson and Aavani, *Forty Poems*, interpolated with my own. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 173.
33. Tr. Wilson and Aavani, *Forty Poems*, p. 111. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 209.
34. Tr. Wilson and Aavani, *Forty Poems*, p. 4. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 505, line 1.
35. Tr. Wilson and Aavani, *Forty Poems*, p. 5. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 508, lines 29–30.
36. Tr. W. Ivanow, *Problems in Nasir-i Khusraw's Biography* (Bombay, 1956), pp. 21–40; quoted in Hunsberger, *The Ruby* (1st ed., 2000), p. 59; revised as 'Today this animate soul and corporeal body of mine are of the Elect/For I am both a simulacrum of Time itself as well as the darkening temporal realm' (*ibid.*, rev. ed., p. 59). *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 509. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq doubt the authenticity of this line. Naṣr Allāh Taqawī noted in his edition of the *Dīwān* that the final word of the word of the distich may be *mikwar*, a ruse or covering, *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Ḥakīm Abū Mu'in Ḥamid al-Dīn Nāṣir ibn Khusraw Qubādiyānī*, ed. N. Taqawī (Tehran, 1st ed., 1304–1307/1925–1928), p. 174. In both readings, this troublesome line nonetheless considers the essential contrast between the body and the soul, the eternal and the physical, and thus I have included it here.
37. Tr. W. Ivanow, *Problems in Nasir-i Khusraw's Biography*, quoted in Hunsberger, *The Ruby*, p. 60. *Dīwān-i ash'ār*, ed. N. Taqawī, p. 174. Cf. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, pp. 509–510, for a slightly different version.
38. Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, p. 241.
39. From 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', William Wordsworth, *The Oxford Authors: William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford, 1984), p. 134.
40. Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, p. 217.
41. Percy Bysshe Shelley, for instance, writes that 'a poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one': P. B. Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism*, ed. J. Shawcroft (Folcroft, PA, 1969), pp. 120–159, p. 124. The influence



of Neoplatonism on European Romanticism (in particular, on notions of the transcendent, the imagination and the absolute), from Blake, Shelley and Wordsworth in the English literary to Schelling in the German philosophical tradition, has, to my knowledge, been only haphazardly studied. That, followed by a thorough comparative examination of Romanticism with the Neoplatonic-inspired literature of the Near East, deserves further scholarly attention.

42. Paul De Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *Modern Language Notes*, 94, 5 (1979), pp. 919–930, p. 920.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 921.

44. Wordsworth, *Literary Criticism*, p. 27.

45. Tr. Schimmel, *Shield*, pp. 75–76. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, pp. 11–12.

46. Tr. Schimmel, *Shield*, p. 39. *Dīwān-i ash'ār*, ed. N. Taqawī, p. 499. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq omit the final *takhalluṣ* distich in their edition; see *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, pp. 523–524.

47. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 319. For a German translation, see Hermann Ethé, 'Auswahl aus Nāṣir Chusrau's Kāṣiden', *ZDMG*, 36 (1882), pp. 478–508, p. 503.

48. Wheeler M. Thackston, *A Millennium of Classical Persian Poetry* (Bethesda, MD, 1993), p. 22.

49. Wordsworth, *Literary Criticism*, p. 29.



Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Ode to the Universal Soul and Intellect*

LEONARD LEWISOHN

Prologue

Literary historians generally concur that the collected poems (*Dīwān*) of Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. ca. 470/1077) are a poetic and metaphysical tour de force containing some of the finest homiletic odes in classical Persian. His high-minded pithy maxims continue to inspire the imagination of the Persian literary soul and his moral *sententia* are still found today in school books used throughout Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Iran. In spite of this, he remains undoubtedly one of the most difficult poets to understand in Persian, his verse often seeming a maze of riddles and enigmas – the product of now obscure religious, cosmological, theological, psychological and philosophical theories and allusions that pervade the Ismaili metaphysical system he espoused. This system, which owes as much to Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus as to the Qur'an and Ḥadīth, was superseded in the Persianate culture and civilisation

* Nāṣir-i Khusraw, 'Qaṣīda 112', *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, ed. M. Mīnuwī and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1353 Sh./1974), pp. 242–244. While this is a much abbreviated, revised version of an essay entitled 'Hierocosmic Intellect and Universal Soul in a *Qaṣīda* by Nāṣir-i Khusraw', *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 25 (2007), pp. 1–34, the present chapter has many new features not found in the longer version, including a fresh poetic translation of Qaṣīda 112, comments on the poem's structure, and new notes. It is based on a lecture originally given at a conference on 'The Philosophical Poetry of Nāṣir Khusraw' convened by Dr Alice Hunsberger and held 17–18 September 2005 at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. I would like to acknowledge my debt to Dr Hunsberger's encouragement, without which I would never have completed this piece. I would also like to thank Professor Hermann Landolt for his help in interpretation of the philosophical nuances of some of the key verses in the poem, and express my gratitude to Terry Graham and Sholeh Johnston for their careful editorial assistance.



that dominated the Muslim world down to the nineteenth century by the allegories, symbolism, metaphysics and mysticism of the great Persian Sufi poets and masters. Although the Sufi system presented its own enigmas and demanded equal expertise, due to the enduring fascination of its transcendental eroticism and earthy love-symbolism, it became far more attractive to nearly all critics and connoisseurs of Persian verse, who from at least the fifth/twelfth century onwards, became thoroughly steeped in its legends and lore and came to know its lexicon and symbolism by heart. On the other hand, while a few Sufi poets later utilised Nāṣir-i Khusraw's vocabulary and symbolism for their own ends, only a handful of specialist philosophers ever possessed the faintest conception of the inner meanings of Ismaili esoteric terminology, much less the rich tradition of Ismaili philosophical thought and verse.¹ For this reason, it is almost impossible for the average Iranian or Afghan to pick up the *Dīwān* of Nāṣir-i Khusraw and comprehend most of the nuances and ideas in his major *qaṣīdas* without having studied in depth the poet's works of philosophy, such as *Zād al-musāfirīn*, *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, *Gushāyish wa rahāyish*, or his other prose philosophical works through which the lexicon of his philosophical imagery can be accessed and deciphered.

The stern sage of Yumgān was not only a *poeta doctus*, master of rhetoric, he was also a *ḥakīm*, an occult philosopher whose poetry and prose can appear enigmatic today, even to the most educated individuals. In this respect, he both is and is not comparable to the only other great philosopher among the eleven foremost poets in the Persian Canon, namely 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmi' (d. 1492).² For, while Jāmi' wrote prose philosophical works, his lyrical and *mathnawī* poetry can be apprehended and enjoyed by the average Persian-speaker without the need to study his *Lawā'ih*, *Lawāmi'*, *al-Durr al-fākhira* or other works of philosophy. By Jāmi's day, four centuries having elapsed since Nāṣir's death, Sufi poetry couched in the technical terminology of Ibn 'Arabī's school had completely infiltrated the Persian literary lexicon. Such poetry was known by heart by (the often illiterate) millions who memorised and sang *ghazals* from the *Dīwāns* of Ibn 'Arabī's poet-disciples such as 'Irāqī, Maghribī and Shāh Ni'matu'llāh without ever having scanned one page of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, or indeed, without ever realising that their favourite verses were elegant paraphrases of Ibn 'Arabī's convoluted theosophical teachings. On the other hand, the abstruse occultism of the esoteric system to which Nāṣir-i Khusraw adhered has tended to remain an uncharted territory – and that is the main reason why, over the last half century, study of his verse has remained 'still in its infancy'.³

One of the main stylistic factors that Nāṣir-i Khusraw shares with other *qaṣīda* poets of the generation immediately preceding him (particularly Kisā'i of Marw, b. ca. 941/953–d. after 991/1000–1⁴) is an emphasis on preaching and wise instruction (*mawā'iz wa ḥikam*). Known as homiletic and didactic poetry, these genres also contain resonances of what J. T. P. de Bruijn calls 'poems of abstinence'



(*zuhdiyyāt*).⁵ Since the genres in which Nāṣir-i Khusraw composed his verse bridge all sects and schools of Islamic theology, transcending the particular religious sect to which he adhered, it is a mistake to consider him simply as an *Ismaili* poet. Indeed, later literary critics, connoisseurs, scholars, philosophers and Sufis for this reason concur that his poetic inspiration transcends the confines of sectarian denomination.⁶ In the tradition of religio-ascetical verse, two main features distinguish Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān* from the contemporary writers of this genre or later Sufi mystical poets.

The first of these is Ismaili metaphysical esotericism. As Y. E. Bertel's pointed out, 'there are a large number of philosophical concepts which Nāṣir-i Khusraw was the first in Iranian history to express in Persian verse',⁷ and we may add to this observation that he was also the first great poet to espouse and expound the Ismaili cosmogonic vision of the world in Persian poetry. In this respect he has no rival in the canon, with the possible exception of Nizārī Quhistānī (d. 721/1321), although Nizārī was not his poetic equal and – unlike Nāṣir-i Khusraw – was as deeply influenced by Sufi as by Ismaili doctrine.⁸ As Browne pointed out long ago, Nāṣir-i Khusraw's religious and esoteric philosophical views constitute the main subject of his verse.⁹ Despite the existence of several valuable studies and selected translations of his poetry in English,¹⁰ few scholars have addressed the metaphysical, psychological and cosmological system animating his poetic genius. There are of course the classic studies of the poet, by 'Alī Dashtī¹¹ in Persian and Alice Hunsberger in English,¹² which successfully make use of his poetry to illustrate his philosophical world view, while the study of his poetry as a whole rests on the shoulders of a number of scholars¹³ who have devoted their lifetimes to exploring and elucidating the terminology of his poetry; foremost of all must be mentioned Mahdī Muḥaqqiq.¹⁴

The second feature is his incredible power of rhetorical expression. Out of ten or twelve 'Great Names' in the canon of Persian Classical poetry, he excels all of the previous or later *qaṣīda* writers – with the possible exception of Sanā'ī – in the art of writing religious exhortations in *qaṣīda* verse. The impact of his *Dīwān* upon Ismaili esotericism in Persian is best compared to the influence of Rūmī's *Mathnawī* and *Dīwān-i Shams* upon the ecstatic Persian Sufi tradition. Much more work remains to be done to show Nāṣir's influence on later generations of Persian poets.

Introduction to the Ode

Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Ode to the Universal Soul and Intellect (Qaṣīda 112 in the MM edition of his *Dīwān*; see the Appendix in this volume for the complete Persian text) was written as a philosophical allegory, almost each verse of which deliberately presents a challenge to the reader's theological and philosophical



understanding and expertise by demanding that one undertake a hermeneutic exegesis (*ta'wīl*) of its ideas and imagery to decode its allusions.¹⁵ The process of opening the layers of exegesis will have an impact on the reader's soul and lead it to enlightenment. Although parts of this poem have been translated twice before – once by Peter Wilson and G. R. Aavani,¹⁶ who together translated 31 out of its 46 couplets, and again by Faquir Hunzai and Kutub Kassam,¹⁷ who translated 27 out of 43 verses – neither of these pairs of translators provided anything but the barest notes and commentary on the *qaṣīda*. Consequently, my focus here has been both on providing a new poetic translation of the poem and placing the poem's complex and abstruse images in the wider philosophical context of the poet's thought. In pursuit of the second goal, I have tried to summarise in the notes much of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's metaphysics, cosmogony, psychological system, symbolic and religious terminology.

Structurally, the poem is divided into two parts, the first being from verses 1 to 30, and the second from 31 to 46. Part one is concerned with the hypostases of Intellect and Soul, their consistency in the context of Ismaili cosmology and the conditions of their interaction with mankind. Around lines 30 and 31, however, the theme of this *qaṣīda* shifts dramatically. The hypostases of Soul and Intellect exit from the stage of the poet's imagination as he returns to this earth of sorrows to lament his exile from Heaven, submitting to his descent from the imaginal realm to the vale of Yumgān. A large proportion of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *qaṣīdas* express the same bitter complaints and lamentations which these verses exhibit, purely metaphysical poems interspersed with spates of lamentation about the misery of his exile in the remote fastnesses of Khurāsān.

But despite his earthly travails, the adversities suffered by every sensitive soul undeceived by the world's gross ornaments, the poet understands that the only philosophically sound attitude to adopt regarding worldly mishaps and misfortunes, whether wreaked by the rod of God or suffered through the spite of man, is to recognise the essentially transitory nature of the world, which forms the subject of verses 36 to 39. The insubstantial nature of worldly pleasure expressed in these verses is another frequent motif in the *Dīwān*¹⁸ and constitutes an inseparable element of the homiletic and ascetic genres of Persian poetry.

Verses 40–43, which represent both the poem's envoi and the poet's farewell to both Sunni and Shi'i exoteric sectarianism, are composed in an ecumenical spirit in accordance with the esoteric, anti-formalist rhetoric of the whole *qaṣīda*. One of the things that often makes Nāṣir-i Khusraw's thought seem so refreshingly 'modern' and so in accord with enlightened ideals of religious tolerance and freedom is his vehement distaste for legalitarianism, voiced over and over again in his prose works on esoteric hermeneutics such as *The Face of Faith (Wajh-i dīn)*.¹⁹ His own lack of religious bias appears throughout the *Dīwān*. The following verses,



for instance, in which he rebukes the folly of his fellow Muslims' derogation of Christians, typify his cosmopolitan character:

Look, look – O Muslim – at the Christian
 And free your mind of bias,
 This rash and vain vehemence
 – What is your real pre-eminence?
 You pretend to be the true believer
 Following Muḥammad. The Christian, an “infidel”
 You call for following Jesus,
 Despite the fact both are prophets, friends of one another...
 Why, why – this stupid hatred of Christians?²⁰

The guilty passion of religious fanaticism is a poison that destroys the Islamic faith, declares Nāṣir – recalling Rūmī's remark that when the self-righteous, sanctimonious believer rails against the sinner whom he sees committing a sin, his emotions have been kindled by a fire from Hell, so that he mistakes the infernal blaze of his misplaced zeal for righteous indignation and genuine religious fervour.²¹

The reproach addressed to his unknown interlocutor in verse 45, enjoining him to be either ‘a heathen straight and plain, or faithful Muslim true in faith’, and his opinion that his own closest Muslim neighbours do not belong to either of these two groups, recalls those other famous verses of his:

You deck yourself in Muslim robes,
 Attempt to cover your infidel private parts
 And hide away your flaws of ignorance.
 Indeed, you look like a man, in semblance,
 And yet, in soul, I fear you are no man –
 Just a hollow form, a human likeness.²²

Identical sentiments appear in most of the Sufi poets of the succeeding generation, such as Sanā'ī; citations from Nāṣir-i Khusraw's verse are particularly prominent in the prose treatises of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadhānī (d. 526/131, the earliest Sufi to cite his poetry.²³

Nāṣir-i Khusraw repeatedly reminds us that the Intelligible Realm to which Intellect and Soul belong can only be apprehended through the *internal senses* and that these alone, *through an act of imagination*,²⁴ are capable of grasping its infinite nature. He also asserts that the true state of man is heavenly, for man is the source-spring and ultimate cause of the cosmos,²⁵ the rational soul (*naḥs-i nāṭīqa*) being essentially angelic, celestial in nature.²⁶ From the Ismaili sage's point



of view, the transcendental hypostases of Intellect and Soul are the origin of this empirical, physical cosmos. But apprehension of their heavenly nature and attaining access to that hierocosmos demands a kind of mystical unveiling (*kashf*) and direct vision (*shuhūd*) similar to the esoteric modes of sapience (*ma'rifāt*) found in Sufism.²⁷ Unfortunately the phenomenon of interior spiritual vision in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's epistemology, quite clearly expressed in many passages in the *Dīwān*,²⁸ cannot be explored or even articulated in this chapter,²⁹ the aim of which can only be to decode some of his metaphysical riddles, not to disclose the mystical realities underlying them. As he himself reminds us, the music of the spheres apprehended by visionaries and best related by poets cannot be heard but by the ear of the heart:

You could have heard how the seven orbs
Of heaven's circle burst into song
Had not the ear of your heart been so deaf.³⁰

Indeed, the nineteenth-century English poet Francis Thompson spoke the same truth in his famous verses:

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars! –
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors,

The angels keep their ancient places; –
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.³¹

Translation of the Ode to the Universal Soul and Intellect

1. Above the seven whirling wheels in orbiting in heaven are
Two jewel-like substances from which both man and cosmos take their light.³²
2. They both lie there like seeds or drops of sperm within the uterus
Of Nothingness, conceived and formed therein, yet both transcending form.³³
3. They are not things the senses can comprehend, beyond all sensible
Experience; to sight invisible, since they're not dark or light.³⁴
4. For all Eternity³⁵ the *Sanctum Sanctorum* had, like a Nurse,
Tended them. Substances in nature they appear, but substances³⁶
5. They're not. They're on Creation's leeward side, outside this worldly sphere,
They jostle up against what's temporal, both in and out of Time.³⁷



6. They can't be found within the world nor the world found in them;
Within our body they are not and yet they are its animus.
7. Of both of them it may be said that they're heaven and they're earth,³⁸
For both are in the seven climes yet not within the seven climes.³⁹
8. The Holy Spirit is the former,⁴⁰ and the latter Gabriel:
The former preens the plumes of angels and the latter moults their wings.⁴¹
9. In this coarse lair below⁴² they fledge and spread their wings, then wingless soar
Above to Heaven's perch and in that higher realm they make their nest.
10. Down on this earth that's damp and dry, this world with its sultry heat,
And biting cold, they're kith and kin with Water, Fire, Earth and Air.⁴³
11. Within the treasury of endless eternity and timeless⁴⁴
Antiquity, they're substances in name yet substances they're not.
12. They're both the cosmos and man, both heaven and hell at once,
They're absent and present at once, both a toxin and a sweet delight.
13. From blazing light to dismal shade, from apogee to perigree,
They rove the Orient and Occident and range through land and sea.
14. They are and they are not; they're manifest yet not in evidence;
They're you in selfless presence, dwelling there where you do not exist.⁴⁵
15. In this hand-me-down tawdry realm, they've set up shop and studio;
They're architects of edifices who wreck all that they construct.⁴⁶
16. They provide food and drink for all five senses⁴⁷ and the four humours;⁴⁸
They act as chefs and cooks for heaven's seven stars⁴⁹ and the nine spheres.⁵⁰
17. Around their court ten stewards⁵¹ attend, standing at the gate: from hence
Five wait within the court; from thence the other five abide outside.
18. Both act as Heaven's market traders, at the beck and call of all
The senses;⁵² all that Time would sell to them, they purchase right away.⁵³
19. How well they know that king⁵⁴ of seven eyes⁵⁵ and six faces⁵⁶ and ten
Odd heads,⁵⁷ whose four sworn foes⁵⁸ abide together in one house with him.
20. They are not substances, for substances are accidents compared
To them. They are the axial ground of every accident and yet
21. They're not an axis.⁵⁹ Mysterious epistles they recite to you
Without a word yet need not fix their gaze on you to know your deeds.⁶⁰
22. The reason why they're manifest is because they both are hid;
They're both inside your head and flesh: that's why they lack a frame and head.
23. They're not mundane in nature nor embraced by anything within
The universe, yet still they're latent in our body and our head.⁶¹
24. It's for your sake that in this base abode they make their dwelling place.
Else what is 'place' to them? Their locus is *utopos* – beyond all 'place'.
25. They have been sent to you from Yonder, hailing from a placeless place;
Up there they both were angels, but prophets⁶² here they are to you.
26. In rank and class they both surpass the orders of the seraphim;⁶³
Like God's own Essence they are neither substance nor yet an element.



27. All various realms of flesh or spirit⁶⁴ may belong to this to that,
And yet they can be conquered by your soul and mastered by your will.⁶⁵
28. So try to grasp all that they say and put in practice their discourse
Till God Himself vouchsafe from them to you direct revelation.⁶⁶
29. Look up and see the seven spheres that ornament the Zodiac:
That host up there is just one legion of the Lord of Heaven's Throne.⁶⁷
30. Although the ignorant poke fun and scoff at both of them, they are
The mighty rulers and governors of heaven's whirling spheres.
31. Those fools may have a thousand eyes or ears, and yet to what avail?
Speak not of them for all of them are blind of eye and deaf of ear.⁶⁸
32. The substance of the demon is, you say, combustible, and made
From fire, but the demons of this day are made of earth and clay.⁶⁹
33. Our father Adam, they tell you, begot all men and all women.
If they are Adam's kin, who are these asses that are sons of men?⁷⁰
34. They claim, 'we are the sons and kin of Abraham', but if you take
A deeper look, you'll see that like his sire they are pagans all.⁷¹
35. They claim to seek for Heaven's fount of bliss⁷² – these fools who serve the wine⁷³
For Satan's violent fiends carousing in the carnival of Hell!⁷⁴
36. What joy or cheer lies here below where brother is a foe of his
Own brother, fighting over crusts of bread and wrestling for some scraps?
37. A thousand years may come yet not a whit shall change – your end shall be
Like your debut – by hither gate you're brought, by thither gate depart.
38. All those who entered in this world, what have they beheld of it?
They've passed away and so shall we; they'll come again, then go their way.
39. What of these folk who dozed so many years upon this bowl of dust,
One moment sat atop each other like a father and a mother?
40. What of those folk who raised such hue and cry of love for 'Alī?⁷⁵ If,
As they profess, they're friends of his, whence comes their hatred of 'Umar?⁷⁶
41. What of these folk who claim with Abū Bakr⁷⁷ to have fraternity?
If they're confreres of him as they confess, why are they 'Alī's foes?
42. As for these 'Sunnis' who by nature hate 'Alī with such great spite,
In fact they're enemies of both 'Umar as well as Abū Bakr.⁷⁸
43. If you are wise forsake both troupes and cease to speak of either lot
But bunch them both as one: they neither bear the yoke nor rule themselves.⁷⁹
44. Take care, don't get involved in the world with that baseborn mob
Whose job it is to snatch like wolves, then gobble down their food like cows.⁸⁰
45. So be a heathen straight and plain, or faithful Muslim true in faith;
The neighbours that I have are neither infidels nor men of faith.
46. Hence Nāṣir is the servant and slave of him who said: "The Soul
And Intellect upon the emerald vault of Heaven run their rounds."⁸¹



Notes

1. Misunderstanding of the poet's thought is still rampant among scholars, as is evident, for instance, in 'Ali Dashti's *Taṣwīrī az Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, ed. M. Mākhūrī (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983), where time and time again he erroneously characterises the poet as having a 'metaphysically confused mind' and 'bewildered brain' (cf. ch. 11, p. 230).

2. These poets are: Firdawsī, our poet, Sanā'ī, Nizāmī, 'Aṭṭār, Rūmī, Sa'dī, Ḥāfiz, Jāmī, Bīdil and Ṣā'ib.

3. As Jan Rypka pointed out almost half a century ago in his *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht, 1968), p. 189.

4. See J. T. P. De Bruijn, 'Kisā'ī', *EL2*, vol. 5, pp. 175–176. On the references to Kisā'ī in his *Dīwān*, see E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge, 1906; repr. 1969), vol. 2, p. 162. In fact, the Ismaili preacher-poet composed poems as direct responses to many of Kisā'ī's religious odes, excelling in many instances his predecessor. See Dhabiḥallāh Ṣafā, *Tārikh-i adabiyāt-i Īrān* (13th ed., Tehran, 1373 Sh./1994), vol. 2, pp. 454–455; on Nāṣir-i Khusraw's imitation of Kisā'ī, see J. T. P. De Bruijn, *Of Poetry and Piety: the Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Ḥakīm Sanā'ī of Ghazna* (Leiden, 1983), pp. 27–28.

5. J. T. P. De Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Persian Poems* (Richmond, Surrey, 1997), ch. 2.

6. Thus Mahdī Muḥaqqiq has shown that one of his most famous odes (The 'Pilgrimage Poem') is actually a versified paraphrase of an anecdote that had been told about the leader of the Baghdad School of Sufism, Junayd; see Mahdī Muḥaqqiq, *Taḥlīl-i ash'ār-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (Tehran, 1344 Sh./1965). The anecdote in question was cited by Ali Hassan Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of Al-Junayd* (London, 1976), pp. 49–50. We also know that Sanā'ī adopted images and ideas and followed metrical and rhyme schemes that first appeared in the *Dīwān* of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, revealing that the Ismaili poet's literary legacy even in the first generation following his death had already come to be interpreted outside the narrow religious confines and cachet of faith and sect. On this see M. R. Shafī'i-Kadkanī, *Tāzyānahā-yi sulūk: Naqd wa taḥlīl-i chand qasīda az Ḥakīm Sanā'ī* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999), pp. 292, 293, 299, 306, 307–308, 317, 339, 340, 347, 362, 364, 369, 420, 478, 481. One of the leading Sufi shaykhs of the Timurid period, Shāh Ni'matu'llāh (d. 835/1431), also composed a Sufi *qasīda* in a line-by-line response (*jawāb*) to an ode by Nāṣir-i Khusraw (*Dīwān*, ed. Taqawī, pp. 188–190): see *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Shāh Ni'matu'llāh Walī*, ed. J. Nūrbakhsh (Tehran, 1361 Sh./1982), pp. 739–744, using Sufi symbolism in a brave attempt to solve Ismaili philosophical riddles!

7. Y. E. Bertel's, 'Arzish-i mīrāth-i adabī-yi Nāṣir-i Khusraw dar naẓar-i barkhī az 'urafā wa shī'ayān-i ithnā-'asharī', *Sophia Perennis*, 1, no. 1 (1975), p. 36.

8. See Leonard Lewisohn, 'Sufism and Ismā'īlī Doctrine in the Persian Poetry of Nizārī Quhistānī (645–721/ 1247–1321)', *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 41 (2003), pp. 229–251.

9. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, vol. 2, p. 231.

10. Among these must be mentioned Peter Lamborn Wilson and Gholam Reza Aavani's *Nāṣir-i Khusraw: Forty Poems from the Divan* (Tehran, 1977) and Annemarie Schimmel's *Make a Shield from Wisdom: Selected Verses from Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Dīwān* (London, 1993).

11. *Taṣwīrī az Nāṣir-i Khusraw*.



12. *Nasir Khusraw: The Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller and Philosopher* (London, 2000).

13. Three names in this respect stand out: 1. W. Ivanow, who wrote numerous works on his biography that (where not outdated) are still relevant to the poet; 2. Henry Corbin, who edited his *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, and also wrote extensively on his thought in essays; cf. his 'Nāṣir-i Khusrau and Iranian Ismā'īlism', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4: *The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljūqs*, ed. R. N. Frye (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 520–542; and 3. Y. E. Bertel's whose *Nāṣir-i Khusraw wa Ismā'īliyān*, tr. into Persian by Y. Āryānpūr (Tehran, 1346 Sh./1967) is a classic.

14. Attention should be drawn to the Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq edition of the *Dīwān* (see note 18 below), as well as to two other invaluable research tools by Professor Muḥaqqiq for the understanding of his poetry, namely: (1) *Taḥlīl-i ash'ār-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (Tehran, 1344 Sh./1965), and (2) *Sharḥ-i sī qaṣīda az Ḥakīm-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw Qubādiyānī* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999). Professor Muḥaqqiq is currently composing a multi-volume commentary on the entire *Dīwān*.

15. This *qaṣīda* should be closely compared with another one in his *Dīwān* (ed. MM, no. 201), written in the same meter and rhyme, whose opening hemistich of *jān u khīrad rawanda bar in charkh-i akhḍar-and / yā har du ān nihufṭa dar in güy-i aghbar-and* forms the closing hemistich of *Qaṣīda* 112. While both critical editions of the *Dīwān* include both *qaṣīdas*, the final line of 112 throws Nāṣir's authorship of 201 into doubt (stated in Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq ed., note) and shows 112 to be a response poem (*jawāb*) to 201. – Alice Hunsberger (ed.).

16. Wilson and Aavani, *Nāṣir-i Khusraw: Forty Poems*, pp. 53–54.

17. Faquir Hunzai and Kutub Kassam (ed. and tr.), *Shimmering Light: An Anthology of Ismaili Poetry* (London, 1996), pp. 65–66.

18. Cf. *Qaṣīda* 22:49ff. where the world is compared to a scab, whose pleasure lies in the pain of itching; or no. 23, where over half the poem is devoted to reviling the unfaithfulness of the world. Further discussion of this motif in his poetry is given by Hunsberger, *The Ruby*, pp. 243–245.

19. *Wajh-i dīn*, ed. Gholam Reza Aavani (Tehran, 1977), discourse nine, pp. 68–69 where he accepts the validity and authenticity of the Torah, Gospels and even the Hindu scriptures, putting them all on an equal par with the Qur'an, declaring (p. 68), that 'all these scriptures ("books of God") are themselves the Qur'an without any discord and conflict between them. There is nothing contradictory (in these holy scriptures) except in the apparent difference of their outer expressions (*lafz*), similes (*mathal*) and symbols (*ramz*). Therefore, among the Greeks there is the Gospels (*Injil*), among the Russians [i.e. the Rūs and Khazars] the Torah, and among the Indians (*Hinduwān*) the scripture (*ṣuhūf*) of Abraham'.

20. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 168, *Qaṣīda* 77:42–46.

21. *Mathnawī*, I: 3347–3349.

22. *Qaṣīda* 28:1–2, p. 58.

23. Hamadhānī, *Tamhīdāt*, ed. Afif Osseiran (Tehran, 1962), p. 299, n. 392; p. 300, n. 393–394; p. 320, n. 419.

24. He thus devotes a whole chapter to the infinite nature of internal senses that allow them access to the realm of the Intellect: 'Proofs that man by using his internal senses can apprehend things of an infinite nature', *Zād al-musāfirīn*, ed. Muḥammad Badhl al-Raḥmān (Berlin, 1341/1923), pp. 269–270.



25. Cf. Qaṣīda 213:3.

26. He even consecrates an entire chapter of his *Zād al-musāfirīn* (on ‘Exposition that when the rational soul reaches perfection it will become heavenly’) to expounding this doctrine, where he observes: ‘The rational soul is a substance, whose accidents are knowledge, wisdom, discrimination, understanding, discernment and the other virtues through which it can comprehend any of the interior realities of supersensible concepts (*ma’nā az ma’ānī*). When it fails or is prevented to acquire these ideas, then the soul falls into the contrary condition of corruption and decay’. *Zād al-musāfirīn*, p. 302.

27. For a good overview of which, see John Renard, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology* (New York, 2004). In this respect it should be underlined that Muslim philosophers usually discuss cosmology in terms of ontology and human psychology, as W. C. Chittick, ‘The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology’, in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam*, ed. T. Lawson (London, 2005), pp. 274–283, points out.

28. Cf. ‘The world’s Arcana can be seen by the inner eye/ But the outer eye can never see the arcane mystery’, Qaṣīda 5:1.

29. This aspect of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s epistemology has been examined in Leonard Lewisohn, *Esoteric Traditions in Islamic Thought: Texts on Gnosis & Hermeneutics in Ismā’īlism, Sufism, Muslim Philosophy, Twelver Shi’ism & Illuminationism* (London: forthcoming).

30. Qaṣīda 22:35.

31. ‘The Kingdom of God’, in Francis Thompson, *Collected Poems* (Sevenoaks, 1992), p. 287.

32. In the front of the poet’s mind are the two meanings of *gawhar* (Persian)/*jawhar* (Arabic): ‘gem’ and ‘substance’ in the philosophical sense. The Intellect (*‘aql*) and Soul (*naḥs*) are two of the five hypostases in Ismaili cosmology, both hypostatic and angelic beings, as well as the main causes of illumination and understanding for the human soul and intellect. They are both transcendental in origin – acting as controllers of the universe, directing and managing human affairs – and transcendental in nature, comprising two celestial substances.

33. In their non-generated condition, the seedlings of Intellect and Soul are mere conceptions, that is to say, they are ideas capable of being mentally formed or configured (*muṣawwar*). Insofar as the process of divine origination transcends reason and rational analysis, their conception is also beyond all mental configuration and rational illustration, and hence, their ‘supraformal’ nature.

34. In *The Wayfarers’ Provisions (Zād al-musāfirīn)* Nāṣir-i Khusraw explains that ‘reason can understand that God Almighty is the Creator of Intellect, Soul, Prima Materia and Form (*‘aql, naḥs, hayūlā wa ṣūrat*) “out of nothing” (ex nihilo), yet it cannot conceive precisely how the process of generation of “something out of nothing” should have ever occurred (*chīzī az nāchīzī chīgūna shāyad kardan*)’. Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s doctrine here echoes Plotinus’ description of the sensorily ineffable supersubstantial substance of the Intellect or Intellectual Principle which cannot be apprehended by sense-based intellection (see *Plotinus: The Enneads*, tr. Stephen MacKenna (New York, 1992), VI.6.13, p. 626. Also cf. *ibid.*, VI.7.6 (p. 640).

35. Referring to the co-eternity of Intellect and Soul with God.

36. Nāṣir-i Khusraw clarifies this paradox in *Zād al-musāfirīn* (pp. 306f.) where he describes the substance (*jawhar*) of the human soul as having descended from the ‘universal



frame (*kālbudī-yi kullī*) that is animated by God', adding that 'that other "body" [God] is not corporeal: rather that other body is the very substance of the heavenly orbs and the stars themselves (*ān jawhar kay fā'il bi-Haqq ast*)'. Therefore, the transcendental hypostasis of the Intellect and Soul of the Heavens constitutes a substance only in the figurative sense.

37. These successive paradoxes point to the spiritual influence and motion of their heavenly 'substance' of intellect and soul upon man in verse 6.

38. The phrase translated here as 'they're heaven and they're earth' reads literally: 'both microcosm and macrocosm' or 'both the worlds' (*har du jahān*). In his prose works this phrase usually refers to the interpenetration of the material and spiritual worlds and the contiguity of the gross material realm (*'ālam-i kathīf*) to the subtle realm (*'ālam-i laṭīf*) which in turn reflects a similar teaching in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Zād al-musāfirīn* that the human soul can only obtain perfection through the mediating intercession (*miyānji*) of the Heavens and Stars.

39. The seven planets of Avicennan cosmology: the Sun, Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus and Mercury.

40. The image of Intellect as an angel, even the Holy Spirit itself, is frequently sung in the *Diwān*. It is also an image prevalent in writings found in both the Islamic philosophical (Peripatetic) and the mystical (Sufi) tradition.

41. In the *Mathnawī* (III: 3194), Rūmī echoes expressions given by Nāṣir-i Khusraw: 'The Angel assumed plumage and pinions like a bird, yet this Intellect shunned wings and assumed immaterial splendour.'

42. Here Nāṣir-i Khusraw refers to certain gnostic souls who have transcended the multiplicity of created phenomena. He informs us in prose that the human rational soul (*naḥs-i nāṭiqa*), having realised and actualised within itself the potentials of its theoretical and practical faculties (*'ilm and 'amal*), does become itself 'angelic' (*Zād al-musāfirīn*, p. 309). This theme of the soul trapped in the nether realm (*nishīman-i suflā*) having hailed from its celestial perch on high (*āshiyāna-yi 'ulwī*), appears in nearly every school and sect of Islamic thought, harking back to the teachings of Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus* as well as Plotinus' interpretation of that dialogue in his *Enneads*, particularly the eighth tractate of the *Enneads* on the 'Soul's Descent into the Body' (Plotinus, *The Enneads*, IV.8.4, pp. 414–415).

43. It was a common notion in medieval Muslim scientific thought that the first 'imprint' of Form on the Matter of the world occurred by mediation of the four elements: fire, air, water and earth. According to this physical theory, each element possesses its own distinct nature (*tab'*) by which it is distinguished from its sister. Fire is considered to be dry and hot; air hot and moist; water moist and cold, while earth is cold and dry. The basic four natures of the elements are thus heat, coldness, wetness and dryness. In the Ismaili system of physics outlined by Nāṣir-i Khusraw, these four 'natures' interact with the four 'elements' in the sublunar realm of generation and corruption (*kawn wa fasād*), the 'forms' of matter altering, but the matter of the elements remaining unchanged. Matter (*hayūlā*) is the source of the four 'natures', but matter itself has no real existence outside these four 'natures', all of which in turn depend on the grace of the Universal Soul towards the Body (*jism*) in which matter is found. That is why the poet speaks in this verse (10) of Intellect and Soul as being 'kith and kin' (*ham-nafas*, lit. 'conspiring') with the natures.

44. Muslim philosophers typically discern two types of eternity: *azal* or 'headless' (*azal* being adopted from the Pahlavi *a-sar* meaning eternity *a parte ante*, without beginning), and *abad* or 'footless' (*abad* taken from the Pahlavi *a-pad*, 'without foot' to meaning eternity *a*



parte post, without end). Thus Intellect and Soul are sequestered in the repository of God's beginningless time and endless duration. Since time anterior and time posterior (*azal* and *abad*) are identical in God, Intellect and Soul can only be described as lying 'within the treasury of endless eternity and timeless antiquity' (*azal* and *abad*) in a metaphorical sense, insofar as Soul is ultimately the Originator of Time.

45. In *The Wayfarers' Provisions* (p. 178) he describes how the Universal Soul, Matter, or *anima mundi* permeates all creation, since 'all the substances (*jawāhir*) that are the seedlings of the vegetable world are but parts of Universal Soul'. Thus Intellect and Soul (as hypostases of the Universal Soul) just like the planets function as the commuting agents of eternity to mutability throughout the entire chain of being. Since Nāṣir-i Khusraw informs us that Intellect is the 'First Originated Being' (*mubdī' awwal 'aql ast*) all things are also necessarily steeped in, are dependent on, and ultimately tend towards it (*ibid.*, pp. 196–197).

46. This physical (lower) world is the realm of generation and corruption. In *Knowledge and Liberation* (§127), Nāṣir-i Khusraw attempts to explain the relationship of the Divine command (*kalīma*) to Intellect with the simile of the carpenter and the hammer. The divine Command or divine Word is likened to a carpenter, wielding his hammer in this world's atelier. Ultimately, the cause of both the material and spiritual worlds (§131) is Intellect and the divine Word or Command, which are nominally distinct but in reality one and inseparable from each other. Everything in the world is contained within the Intellect or divine Command in the same way that an effect is comprised within its cause (§133).

47. Psychologically, Intellect and Soul nurture the development of man's Five Senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, while at the same time, they manage the heavens.

48. The four humours (*akhlāt*) are the sanguineous, phlegmatic, bilious and atrabillious humours of Galenic psychology.

49. Sun, Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus and Mercury.

50. The 'nine spheres' (*nuh falak*) refers to the traditional Muslim (as well as Christian and Jewish) conception of the universe as a series of concentric spheres. These nine heavenly orbs (*aflāk = orbis coelestis*) are the nine planetary spheres of Avicennian cosmology, namely: (1) the Empyrean or Heavens of heavens (*falak al-aflāk*); (2) the Sphere of the Zodiac (*falak al-burūj*); followed by the Spheres of (3) Saturn; (4) Jupiter; (5) Mars; (6) Sun; (7) Venus; (8) Mercury; (9) Moon. See S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (London, revised ed. 1978), p. 204.

51. The reference to 'ten stewards (*musharrafān dah*)' are to the five external plus five internal senses of man. The former are touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing; the latter comprise common sense (*al-ḥiss al-mushtarik*), conception (*mutaṣawwira*), memory (*mutadhākkira*), imagination (*mutakhayyila*) and estimation (*mutawahhima*). While the external senses apprehend only sensible phenomena, the internal ones can grasp things of an infinite and unrestricted nature (*chīzhā'yi nā-mahdūd wa nā-muntāhī*) (*Zād al-musāfirin*, p. 268) and can perceive things that transcend man's finite sense perception. The human soul, which is an invisible substance beyond the perception or conception of the sense faculties, can only be apprehended by reason and intelligence (*Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, ed. H. Corbin and M. Mu'in [Tehran and Paris, 1953] pp. 246–247). Therefore, the poetic simile which depicts the ten external and internal senses in this verse emphasises the dependence of the human psyche and faculties upon the Universal Soul and Intellect.

52. Nāṣir-i Khusraw subverts the metaphor of line 17, describing Soul and Intellect as attending to the sensory faculties of man after the manner of merchants or shopkeepers,



who 'stand at the beck and call', waiting on their customers who are 'sold' items through the network of Time-in-the-World. Soul and Intellect are necessarily connected to the human body and mind through the activity of the senses, which is the why and wherefore of the Soul and Intellect 'buying up' (that is, intellectually and psychically 'acquiring') the motions and actions of the internal and external senses of Man – these faculties being their very emanations, so that they are obliged to act as a caterer (*khwālīgar*) to them in the temporal realm.

53. Two alternative versions of this couplet given in the notes to *the Diwān* make far more sense than the reading finally selected by the editors for the published text. I have followed this alternative version of the second couplet, which reads: *Istāda har chih dahr furūshand, mīkharand* as the text chosen for my translation.

54. The human body.

55. This is most likely a reference to the seven orifices of the head: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and one mouth. These also relate to the seven planets, or rather seven substances (*haft gawhar*): (i) Sun, corresponding to the Heart, the seat of the soul animating the body; (ii) Moon, corresponding to the Brain, seat of the rational soul governing the body; (iii) Mercury, corresponding to the eyes and the faculty of sight; (iv) Venus, corresponding to the ears and the faculty of hearing; (v) Mars, corresponding to the nose and the faculty of smell; (vi) Jupiter, corresponding to the mouth and the faculty of taste; and lastly, (vii) Saturn, corresponding to the hands and the faculty of touch (*Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, pp. 281–282). This could also refer to the following Ismaili heptads: (1) The seven prophets who are the seven pillars of the House of Wisdom. (2) The seven degrees of the Ismaili esoteric hierarchy: the Messenger (*rasūl*), the Executor (*waṣī*), the Leader (*īmām*), the Proof (*ḥujjat*), the Missionary (*dā'ī*), the Licentiate (*ma'dhūn*), the ordinary adept (*mustajīb*) (*Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, p. 110). (3) The seven creative substances (*jawhar-i ibdā'ī*) in the human microcosm: 'Life, Knowledge, Power, Apprehension, Action, Devotion, Subsistence' (*ibid.*, p. 110).

56. The six directions of geographical spatiality: up, down, north, south, east, west.

57. Ten (five internal and five external) senses of man.

58. This refers to the four *akhlāṭ* (the bodily humours: the sanguineous, phlegmatic, bilious and atrabillious), or to the four types of soul (*nafs*: lower domineering passionate, blaming, inspiring and peaceful souls).

59. In *Knowledge and Liberation*, Nāṣir explains that the soul is a substance (he uses the form *gawhar* as well as *jawhar*) that brings together four contrary humours into harmony without itself undergoing any change (§51). Repudiating the materialist theory that the soul is merely a harmonious combination of the four natural elements, which, he argues, implies that the soul must be merely an accident (*'araḍ*) (§48–49), he propounds his own distinctive theory that there are two types of substances: simple (*basīṭ*) and compound (*murakkab*). The human soul typifies the simple substance, while the whole world is a type of compound substance (§57), combining together the six opposing directions (*shish jahāt*) as well as the four elements (earth, fire, water, air) within itself. Vis-à-vis such transcendental entities as the Universal Intellect and Soul, all simple and compound substances are phenomena of a merely contingent, 'accidental' nature. It is Intellect and Soul alone which constitute the true transcendental metaphysical axis upon which all the contingencies and accidents of this world revolve, yet their pivotal nature is only a shadow of a poetic metaphor: one cannot describe them as being axes in any real substantial sense.

60. The paradoxes in this verse are typical of the language of ineffability found in the mystical discourse of apophatic theology in other mystical teachings. For instance, the



paradoxical topos of ‘silent speech’ and ‘deafening silence’ in Persian Sufi poetry, such as in the poetry of ‘Aṭṭār and Rūmī. Verse 21 also recalls the Qur’an’s description of God’s omniscient audition of all living creatures constantly hymning His praise throughout heaven and earth: ‘God is aware of their litanies and praise, and God is aware of what they do’ (24:40), their discourse being inaudible to the sensory ear. Milton’s description of the instantaneous nature of God’s creation through the divine Logos in *Paradise Lost* (Bk. VII, vv. 176–197) provides a perfect parallel in English literature of how the same doctrine enunciated in this verse by this fifth/eleventh-century Ismaili poet appears later in Protestant mystical theology:

Immediate are the acts of God, more swift
Than time or motion, but to human ears
Cannot without process of speech be told,
So told as earthly notion can conceive.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw maintains that the reality of God’s speech transcends all phonetic or linguistic expression, for sounds and syllables are both too weak for the glory they transfuse with fitting words to speak. Therefore, the true discourse of the Universal Intellect and Soul to the human mind and soul is beyond words.

61. The allusion to Intellect and Soul residing within the human indicates the Soul’s primary function: to be descending and ascending, ‘both as universal and as an individual portion. Without it there could be no benefit of intellect in the lower world. Soul bears the responsibility of conveying reason into the mundane realm’. Paul E. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism: the Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū Ya’qub al-Sijistāni* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 97.

62. A direct reference to the Ismaili theory of revelation as being ‘intellect incarnate’ (*‘aql mujassam*) that is found in Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s prose. His doctrine is consistent with (and probably derived from) that of Sijistāni, Walker’s summary of which is worth quoting:

‘The Holy Spirit is, in al-Sijistāni’s understanding, identical with perfect intellection. The capacity to penetrate the world of intellect, to rise there and see it in its entirety without having to fall back again, to comprehend without physical aids or distractions, that is “inspiration” ... The Holy Spirit is really intellect and intellect is the angel called the *rūh al-quds*. Prophets... see the sublime world... They converse with the angels and read the “book of the heavens” ... They are, in fact, the deputies of intellect in the mundane world’ (*Early Philosophical Shiism*, p. 117).

63. Although he maintains that the self-realised human rational soul has itself become ‘angelic’ (*Zād al-musāfirīn*, p. 309), the conjunction (*paywastagī*) of the Universal Soul (*naḥs-i kullī*) with the heavenly bodies – which are, by the grace of God’s continuous creative generation, actively moving agents – repels all attempts at a qualitative description of the process (*chigūnagī nīst*) for they are beyond both material substance (*mādda*) and time (*muddat*)’ (*Zād al-musāfirīn*, pp. 309–310).

64. A reference to the gross material realm (*‘alām-i kathīf*) vs. the subtle realm (*‘alām-i laṭīf*) (cf. *Knowledge and Liberation*, §88).

65. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, in *Knowledge and Liberation* comments that ‘God swears by the fact that that world Yonder is concealed like the night while this world here is revealed like the day. As for what has been created “male and female” by divine command, in reality, the “male” is the Intellect, and the “female” is in reality the Soul in the spiritual realm (*‘ālam-i rūhānī*). The male is in reality the *Nāṭiq* (“Speaker” [a term in the Ismaili esoteric hierarchy



referring to a prophet who brings a new religious law, *sharī'a*, by his discourse, abrogating the previous law]) and the female is in reality the *Asās* ("Foundation" [a term in the Ismaili esoteric hierarchy referring to the one who is executor, *waṣī*, of the will of the Speaker of the new faith]) in the world of religion ('*ālam-i dīn*') (§89). Thus, through devotion and obedience to the commands of religion as represented by the divine Intellect of the *Nāṭiq* and the holy Soul of the *Asās*, the human soul has a distinct possibility of subjugating the heavens to itself.

66. A reference to Universal Intellect as Heavenly 'Speaker', *Nāṭiq*, and Universal Soul as the Foundation, *Asās*, of God's work. Their injunctions must be heeded and put into practice (*kār kun!*) until they dispense to man revelation directly from God.

67. 'These Seven wandering Stars (*in haft sitāra-yi sayyāra*, i.e. *stellae errantes*) which are the administrators of the world (*mudabbirān-i 'ālam*) can all be likened to instruments of the Universal Soul (*nafs-i kullī*) which she utilises in order to construct the individualities of the [three] natural kingdoms (*mawālīd*) of the world through the grace of the Universal Intellect ('*aql-i kullī*). The culmination of this process of generation is the individual form of man, who possesses the fairest of forms' (*Jamī' al-ḥikmatayn*, p. 279).

68. There is no further purpose in life, Nāṣir-i Khusraw explains, but that the human soul should acquire knowledge ('*ilm*), and the pleasure which this knowledge generates is stronger and longer lasting than any sensual pleasure. Therefore, man only realises his humanity when he acquires knowledge, thus liberating himself from the grossness, murkiness and turbidity of the flesh (*Zād al-musāfirīn*, p. 273). But those who content themselves with sensual pleasures and fail to pursue intellectual delights – scorned in this verse as 'both blind and dumb' – are doomed to languish in a brute, sub-human condition. The ignorant masses who possess external organs of sight, vision and hearing and understanding, yet still assail and scoff at the transcendent Intellect and Soul ('the ignorant' of v. 30) are spiritually benighted and morally dumb, being ignorant of Intellect and Soul and their esoteric rank and extended role as *Nāṭiq* and *Asās*.

69. These demons (*dīwān*), or human devils, are stock characters in Nāṣir's *Dīwān* and closely resemble the characters of the ascetic (*zāhid*) and imposter (*mudda'ī*) who inspire such invective and satire in Ḥāfiẓ's *ghazals*, comparable as well to those spying courtiers known as *lauzengiers* who cause the separation of lovers and are rivals for the lady's affections in *fin'amors* troubadour poetry in France a century later.

70. This, and the previous line's 'demons of this day', are most likely a reference to Sunnis (*nāṣibī*) about whom our Ismaili missionary elsewhere quips: 'There's nothing strange that the Sunni is an infidel – it is not such a marvel that an ass acts asinine!' (*Qaṣīda* 26:4). Since it is by wit and intelligence ('*aql*) that brute man ascends to the level of humanity, it should be stressed that the term 'asses' (*khar*) in verse 33, and throughout Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān*, also connotes 'base, low': Muḥaqqiq, *Sharḥ-i sī qaṣīda az Ḥakīm-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw Qubādiyānī* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999), p. 55, n. 14; p. 147, n. 13.

71. Abraham, according to the Qur'an (2:135) was the founder of the true upright – *ḥanīfī* – faith. Here, Nāṣir-i Khusraw reproaches his fellow Muslims as being mere idolators no better than Abraham's pagan father Āzar.

72. Such devilish folk show their folly by claiming to be Muslims aspiring to 'Heaven's fount of bliss (*kawthar*)', which is a Qur'anic term referring to the wondrous pool in Paradise which the hypocrites of the age seek but will never find, and used elsewhere in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's writings to allude specifically to Shi'is, and in particular, to Ismaili esotericists



amongst them. Interpreting Qur'an 108:1 'We have given you the *kawthar*', in *Knowledge and Liberation* (p. 88) he states: 'The word *kawthar* means a man who has many children, thus indicating to Imam 'Alī that his children will stand to execute the command of God and the *ta'wil* [esoteric interpretation] of His book.' In *Qaṣīda* 22:71, the poet identified *kawthar* as the particular sobriquet (*laqab*) of Imām 'Alī.

73. He rebukes the Pharisees and hypocrites among his fellow Muslims for claiming to seek the cup of Kawthar's holy water while serving as wine-bearers to Satan's fiends who are the guardians of Hell (the angel Mālik and his assistants, the *zabāniyya*, referring to Qur'an 96:18; and 43:77. See 'Al-Zabāniyya', in *EI2*, vol. 11, p. 369, which could also well be an allusion to witty Sunni courtiers in collaboration with the murderous Saljūqs. See also Hunsberger, *The Ruby*, pp. 229–233, who quotes a number of similar passages in the *Dīwān* where he rails against his contemporaries – members of the Saljūq political elite as well as the clerical hierarchy – as being demons, dogs and calves in human form.

74. The poet's allusion here is to a verse of the Qur'an where the souls being tortured in hell cry out to the keeper of hell 'O Mālik!' (43:77). Cf. D. B. Macdonald, 'Malā'ika', *EI2*, vol. 6, p. 217.

75. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib was the fourth caliph and the first Shi'i Imam. He was the cousin and son-in-law of Muḥammad, one of his closest companions, known for his religious insight and learning as well as his chivalry and military prowess.

76. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, sometimes referred as 'Umar al-Farūq ('Umar the Distinguisher [between Truth and Falsehood]). He was a companion of Muḥammad and became the second caliph following the death of Abū Bakr, the first caliph.

77. Abū Bakr was a companion of Muḥammad and the first Muslim ruler after the Prophet's death. Sunnis regard him as his rightful successor and the first of four righteous caliphs.

78. The poet establishes his lack of religious bias by rebuking the foolish malignity of Muslim 'believers' who assail the faults or follies of certain other fellow Muslims, Shi'i and Sunni, causing them to break into stern speeches and accusations against all those who oppose their sect, and so pronounce them apostates.

79. The phrase of this verse which I have translated as 'they neither bear the yoke nor rule themselves literally' reads: 'they are neither Aflaḥ nor Qambar'. 'Qambar' (spelled 'Qanbar' in one variant reading of this verse) was the nickname of the special servant (*ghulām*) of Imam 'Alī. Qambar's full name was Abū al-Sha'athā' Mawlā b. Mu'ammār (see Dihkhudā, *Lughat-nāma*, ed. M. Mu'in and J. Shahīdī [Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993], vol. 11, p. 15668, s.v. 'Qanbar', where another verse by Nāṣir using this variant spelling of the name is also cited; see also *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 470, s.v. Abū al-Sha'athā) and Aflaḥ was a slave in the Prophet Muḥammad's household and milk-uncle of his wife A'īsha. On the one hand, the poet employs these two proper names as symbols to indicate the opposing Shi'i and Sunni sects, and on the other, by way of poetic *double entendre* to distinguish the state of vassalage from that of freedom. Aside from their literal meanings as proper names, *aflaḥ* (see Dihkhudā, *Lughat-nāma*, vol. II, pp. 2654–2655, s.v. 'aflaḥ') may connote salvation, freedom or emancipation, and *qambar* (or *qanbar*) can exemplify the state of servitude, bondage or vassalage. My translation is intended to convey the catholicity of these broader extra-Islamic poetic connotations of *aflaḥ* and *qambar/qanbar*, not their bare literal meaning or limited sectarian denotations. In *The Face of Faith*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw thus says:

'As the body is to the soul, so are good works to religion (*dīn*), for knowledge is to religion as the Spirit is to the body, so there can be no Spirit in the religion of anyone who



engages in good works without knowledge. Rather, his faith is merely a lifeless carcass, and God Almighty in His book has declared the consumption of carrion to be unlawful (*haram*), the esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*) of which is that works without knowledge are unacceptable, that is to say, illegitimate and profane, just as carrion is ceremonially unclean and profane. Therefore, he who acquires knowledge but does not apply it in works has no religion, since one cannot affirm the Spirit's existence apart from the body' (*Wajh-i din*, p. 71).

Therefore, exoteric Muslims who lack interior knowledge are little better than infidels, for no matter how abundant their good works, their appearance of faith merely masks their infidelity. At the same time, the interior knowledge acquired from religion requires good works.

80. Referring to men who are solely driven by worldly ambition and sensual pleasure. On the grander canvas of humanity, Nāṣir-i Khusraw elsewhere declares that 'any man whose whole state of mind is focused but on sleep and feed, though he have a fair face, is just an ass' (Qaṣīda 131:1).

81. See note 15, above.

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II

Philosophical Poetry:
Enlightening the Soul

The Institute of Ismaili Studies



Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Imagination, Prophecy and the Poetics of Enlightenment

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The work of Nāṣir-i Khusraw – the great Muslim philosopher, poet, traveller and Ismaili missionary of the fifth/eleventh century – has received considerable attention in Western scholarly studies.¹ However, the philosophical examination of his work has been rather meagre to date.² In this chapter, I want to contribute to the philosophical treatment of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's work by advancing the scholarship of the prominent twentieth-century philosopher and historian of Islamic philosophy Henry Corbin. Corbin shows that Nāṣir-i Khusraw's hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) relies on a distinction (and a movement) between the exoteric and the esoteric dimensions of the philosophical (and prophetic) texts. What he leaves unexplored is the way that Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetic work trains the reader's imagination in this hermeneutics. To demonstrate this, I will draw mostly from Nāṣir-i Khusraw's prophetology in his *Knowledge and Liberation (Gushāyish wa Rahāyish)*, as well as the poetics implicit in his *Dīwān* and in the philosophical tradition which he inherited.

To put it more precisely, in this chapter I am concerned with the status of poetic representation in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's account of the prophetic moment. My argument has the following structure: I begin by bringing into view a metaphilosophical assumption in Islamic philosophy, an assumption which has been left largely unexamined by the relevant scholars (including Henry Corbin). I argue that Muslims, like their Greek predecessors, considered philosophy as a way of life. For them, the definition of philosophy as charged with the goal of producing rational knowledge both presupposes the practice of philosophy and is secondary to the philosophical way of life.

I then proceed to explain Corbin's insight that Islamic philosophy is primarily prophetic philosophy by situating Islamic philosophy (especially the philosophy of Nāṣir-i Khusraw) in the context of the two movements contained within the prophetic moment. These movements are (1) *tanzīl* (the 'coming down' of



revelation and its condensation [*laṭīf gardānīdan*] into divine law) and (2) *ta'wīl* (esoteric interpretation as return to the spiritual source – '*awwal*').³ The first movement makes the spiritual accessible to a wide audience by rendering the divine message exoteric. The second lays down a course by which individuals can achieve enlightenment through approaching the fount of divine communication. Islamic philosophy, as prophetic philosophy (not revelation), is situated in the second movement of prophecy.

Finally, I go beyond the scope of the discussion provided by Corbin and consider the status of poetic representation in the prophetic philosophy of Nāṣir-i Khusraw. I explain Nāṣir-i Khusraw's views in the light of the philosophical poetry of his predecessors, especially Ibn Sinā, who accentuates the role of imagination in the movements of the prophetic moment. I show that, for Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *ta'wīl* requires cultivation of the imaginative capacity of all hearers of the *tanzīl*, and this refinement is attained by the imagination's engagement with the poetic meaning. I contrast the poetic cultivation of imagination with the training of discursive reason. It is my contention that this cultivation of imagination is a necessary condition for the philosophical enlightenment advocated by Nāṣir-i Khusraw. Moreover, I argue that this cultivated imagination also enables its possessor to produce poetic expressions that train the reader's imagination in preparation for the illumination referred to above.

Philosophy as a way of life

For the philosophers of the Islamic tradition, philosophy is not simply a self-contained academic discipline concerned with the production of rational knowledge. Philosophy is, rather, a way of life which aims to transform the self. The most concise formulation of this metaphilosophical stance is found in al-Fārābī's work *The Attainment of Happiness*. Al-Fārābī writes:

As for mutilated philosophy: the counterfeit philosopher, the vain philosopher, or the false philosopher is the one who sets out to study the theoretical sciences without being prepared for them. For he who sets out to enquire ought to be innately equipped for the theoretical sciences – that is, fulfill the conditions prescribed by Plato in the *Republic*: he should excel in comprehending and conceiving that which is essential He should by natural disposition disdain the appetites, the dinar, and like. He should be high-minded and avoid what is disgraceful in people. He should be pious, yield easily to goodness and justice, and be stubborn in yielding to evil and injustice. And he should be strongly determined in favour of the right thing.⁴

The cultivation of the self is the primary concern of 'true philosophy' and it paves the way for the intellectual labours of theoretical enquiry. It allows the philosopher to resist goals and distractions that are tangential to the problems of thought



and action, and the virtuous person – one who has cultivated the self – will excel ‘in comprehending and conceiving that which is essential’.⁵ This view of philosophy aligns it closely with religion, especially the religion of Islam, given the latter’s emphasis on self-transformative ascetic practices and the wisdom derived from a life conditioned by them.⁶

I submit that Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s approach to philosophy presupposes a metaphysical orientation as is found in al-Fārābī’s writings. This is evidenced by his insistence that knowledge presupposes the transformative practices prescribed by Islamic law, the *sharī‘a*. In *Knowledge and Liberation*, he writes:

When a man strives to put the *Sharī‘a* into practice, attains [understanding of] the science of *ta’wīl*, transforms the dense into the subtle, and uses both his organs, the body (*tan*) and the soul (*jān*), which are given to him [to attain knowledge], he becomes like the Universal Soul (*nafs-i kull*). The Universal Soul had the knowledge (*‘ilm*), then it worked (*kār bikard*); man works, then acquires the knowledge, thus becoming like the Universal Soul.⁷

Becoming like the Universal Soul consists of attaining knowledge or philosophical enlightenment and that, as we have seen in the passage from al-Fārābī’s *Attainment of Happiness*, presupposes the cultivation of virtue through practice. Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s variation on this theme involves embracing the constraints of the *sharī‘a*. The practice of the law, according to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, conditions the body and is necessary for the perfection (virtue) of a person as a combination of body and soul.⁸ The various legal constraints and prescriptions enable a person to avoid indulging in the satisfaction of the appetites and the passions, the desires associated with the body. Avoiding such indulgence allows a person to control bodily desires and this control results in the ability to attend to matters of the soul. More precisely, mastering the bodily appetites and the passions is necessary but not sufficient for the achievement of virtue and enlightenment. Once this mastery is attained, the person needs to cultivate the soul by further engaging in the activity of *ta’wīl*.

Ta’wīl, as I have suggested earlier, means going to the beginning (*‘awwal*) and the beginning is, according to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, knowledge as it is possessed by the Universal Soul. By ‘knowledge’, here, Nāṣir-i Khusraw does not mean the mere knowledge of appearances. That is not the *first* knowledge. *Ta’wīl* begins with appearances and returns to the source. The aim is to cultivate the self beyond its involvement with the bodily organs of the animal soul, so that one can apprehend the subtle (*latīf*) knowledge that falls within the purview of the Universal Soul. Corbin, in ‘Nasir Khusraw and Iranian Isma‘ilism’, identifies the cultivation of the soul as a ‘spiritual birth (*wilāda rūḥāniyya*)’,⁹ but he does not see its philosophical significance: ‘[this birth] is an inner event quite different from mere philosophical redemption’.¹⁰



Islamic philosophy as a way of life

In this section, I explore more systematically the philosophical and religious, specifically Islamic, aspects of the process of inner transformation mentioned above. Nāṣir-i Khusraw's description of 'spiritual birth' is Platonist in that it promotes activities that balance the soul in order to prepare it for intellectual labour. Like his Greek predecessors, he recommends an educational preparation that enables individuals to resist the monopoly of mundane interests in order to attend to the challenge of perfecting thought and action.¹¹ In Plato's works, the ideal individual prepares himself in a way that leads to statesmanship. Plato's philosopher emerges from the solitary, theoretical occupation of self-education to take up the work of ruling the city, since his education has been tailored to help him guide his fellow citizens along the paths by which they are most likely to realise their potential. For Nāṣir-i Khusraw the ideal person is a philosopher and a leader, like Plato's philosopher-king. But Nāṣir-i Khusraw's exemplary individual is also a prophet.

In Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the individual who is both just in practice and wise in theoretical wisdom is a model of *walāya*. In the Islamic tradition, *walāya*, an attribute of the Prophet Muḥammad, means friendship and intimacy with God. Truth is within the reach of the *walī Allāh* (one who has *walāya*). Having cultivated his body and soul, the *walī* becomes intimate with the (divine) truth. Prophecy also involves both *nubuwwa* (being able to see and foresee what is veiled – that is, the good – and the conditioning necessary for this vision) and *risāla* (being able to communicate what is nuanced or otherwise hard to articulate). The ideal in personal development, according to Muslim philosophers, is to combine theoretical and practical wisdom with the further ability to communicate this wisdom to others. This ideal is ascribed to the prophets of Abrahamic monotheism. It is this ascription that prompts Corbin, in his *History of Islamic Philosophy*, to declare that 'philosophy [in Islam] assumes the form of "prophetic philosophy"'.¹² He goes on to qualify prophetic philosophy as 'the wholly original form and the spontaneous product of Islamic consciousness'.¹³

Perhaps the earliest and the most influential philosophical synthesis of the Greek and Abrahamic traditions – that is, the earliest form of prophetic philosophy – occurs in the writings of al-Fārābī. Al-Fārābī's philosopher, as we have already seen, engages in the cultivation of the soul as a prelude to theoretical enquiry. This enquiry progresses as the philosopher subjects himself to a rigorous examination of his thoughts aided by the light of the active intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*). The active intellect is a transcendent divine intellect that impregnates the mundane world with forms – that is, intelligibility.¹⁴ Al-Fārābī identifies the active intellect with the Islamic angel of revelation, Gabriel. That is to say, al-Fārābī's Gabriel is the angelic manifestation of the last emanation of the divine intellect, before this emanation splinters into the multiplicity of the sublunar souls. The philosopher, when studying the forms of mundane objects, cultivates his intellect and thereby achieves



proximity to the active intellect. If this proximity is accompanied by a perfected imagination, then the philosopher is also a prophet, a philosopher-prophet, a person whose imagination acts upon (i.e. imitates) forms from the active intellect as well as those abstracted through the senses.¹⁵ The modification of the imagination through the contribution of the active intellect allows for the 'prophecy of present and future events and ... prophecy of things divine'.¹⁶ Finally, the philosopher-prophet cultivates the art of rhetoric and can mobilise the people. Drawing upon his genius, he promulgates laws in order to make perfection available to all the community. For al-Fārābī, the *sharī'a* is a consolidation of these laws.

This excursion into al-Fārābī's Islamic/Hellenic account of prophecy is important for understanding Nāṣir-i Khusraw's description of the prophetic moment. Nāṣir-i Khusraw's prophet is intimate with the divine revelator; however, this divine being, Gabriel, is not the active intellect, but rather, as we have seen, the Universal Soul. The Universal Soul (*nafs-i kull*) itself is the effect (*ma'lūl*) of the Universal Intellect (*'aql-i kull*), and the latter is caused by the Divine Word (*kalama-i bārī*)¹⁷ announced by the One. Nāṣir-i Khusraw's cosmology is thus more Plotinian than *mashhā'ī* (i.e. in the Peripatetic style of al-Fārābī or Ibn Sīnā).¹⁸ It is likely that he inherited Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī's cosmology, who, in turn, appropriated it from Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Nasafī.¹⁹ The Neoplatonic Universal Soul is the creator of the world²⁰ and inspires the prophets with its subtle knowledge.²¹ Nāṣir-i Khusraw's prophet is a philosopher in that he has intimacy with Universal Soul and a share in its subtle knowledge. However, there is no evidence that Khusraw's ideal philosopher-prophet has actually engaged in the relevant spiritual exercises, in the way prescribed by al-Fārābī, to attain intimacy with the Universal Soul. Khusraw's prophets are the delegates (*gumāshdigān*) of the Universal Soul.

This is not to say that Nāṣir-i Khusraw does not harbour an ideal of a philosopher who has trained his body and soul appropriately. The prophet trains himself appropriately through the guidance of the Universal Soul. Other people can then achieve excellence of the soul and intimacy with the divine (*walāya*) through training by the prophet and through his revelation. Nāṣir-i Khusraw's account of the prophet (P. *payghambar*) is in keeping with those reports about the life of the Prophet Muḥammad that say he was illiterate when he received his divine mission. Nāṣir-i Khusraw's view also expresses a Shi'ī tenet when he limits the subsequent acquisition of perfection (*walāya*) to the beneficiaries of the Prophet's spiritual inheritance. According to this, Muḥammad's first successor was his legatee (*waṣī*) – that is, the first Imam ('Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib) – who was followed by the other Imams, the legatee's successors.²² The Imams, in turn, initiate others in the path towards perfection, the stations along which constitute the hierarchies of the Ismaili order.²³

For Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the prophets supply the *tanzīl*, the translation of the subtle knowledge of the Universal Soul into the 'exoteric and general (*'āmm*) aspect



of the *sharī'at*.²⁴ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, in discussing the revelation of the law, does not explicitly mention the prophet's power of imagination, but this reference is there implicitly. The *tanzīl*, according to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, is produced by the Universal Soul. But if the Universal Soul is the subtle version of the human soul, then it may not be far-fetched to claim that revelation is a function of the subtle or refined imagination (*wahm*), a faculty of the Universal Soul.

Furthermore, there is no indication in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's writings that *tanzīl* is restricted to the prophets, and this absence suggests that the individuals who have made suitable progress in approaching the Universal Soul may also engage in *tanzīl*, the production of a discourse designed to communicate subtle knowledge to the uninitiated. The main difference between the two possessors of *tanzīl* is that the *tanzīl* of the prophets has universal significance.²⁵ The task of the prophets is set for them by the Universal Intellect and the Universal Soul in order to guide humanity in a particular historical epoch, whereas the *tanzīl* of those lower in station than the prophets has a more limited historical scope and addresses a narrower domain of individual souls. In the *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Corbin maintains that

[i]t is not the Quran alone, and in another context, the Bible, which confront us with the irrefutable fact that for so many readers who study their pages the text possesses meanings other than the sense apparent in the written word. These other meanings are not something artificially 'read into' the text by the spirit, but correspond to an initial perception as irrefutable as the perception of a sound or a colour. The same is true of a great deal of Persian literature, both mystical epics and lyric poetry, starting with the symbolic recitals of al-Suhrawardi, who himself developed the example given by Avicenna.²⁶

I submit that Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry, pre-dating al-Suhrawardī's recitals, is also an example of the *tanzīl* that Corbin finds abundant in Persian literature. More specifically, it is the *tanzīl* of an Ismaili philosopher-poet.

As to the involvement of the faculty of imagination in producing *tanzīl*, ancient Greek poetics does not explicitly consider the imagination's direct imitation (*mimesis*) of ideal forms. Plato's reluctance to make this move is infamous,²⁷ and Aristotle's view of poetry as cathartic avoids the issue by relegating to good poetry the role of preparing the reader for philosophical insight.²⁸ Plotinus allows for the direct imitation of ideal forms in works of art,²⁹ but does not recognise the role of the faculty of imagination in this. Richard Walzer, who is at best a stern critic of originality in Islamic philosophy, admits that al-Fārābī is the first to connect imagination to the direct imitation of the forms.³⁰ However, Nāṣir-i Khusraw's reticence on the subject of the imagination suggests an allegiance to Plotinus (especially in light of his commitment to Plotinian cosmology discussed above), despite the debt his philosophical prophetology owes to the Islamic Peripatetics.³¹ Moreover, his



description of *tanzīl* as a function of the Universal Soul presupposes a faculty which cannot be intellect. The activity of the intellect aims at the cognition of the real (Platonic forms) – the acquisition of subtle knowledge – while *tanzīl* is precisely a move in the opposite direction.³² Revelation, and to a lesser extent poetry, conveys the insight achieved through the direct intellectual perception of ideal forms to those unable to have that experience. As such, they both express subtle knowledge figuratively (read densely). Nāṣir-i Khusraw calls this an activity of the Universal Soul, but reference to the Peripatetics allows us to specify the particular faculty of the soul that is responsible for this densification (*tanzīl*); it is the imagination (i.e. imagination freed of its dependence on the senses). The question is: how can one cultivate the ability to densify – that is, to produce coarse expressions of subtle knowledge?

We should keep in mind that *tanzīl* is meant to bring divine insight down to the level of the common person, but is also charged with providing the means of ascent beyond the superficial to the level of subtle knowledge. The employment of these means, such as divine law and guidance, and the activity of returning to the divine source is *ta'wīl*. We have already seen that *ta'wīl* presupposes the cultivation of virtues through disciplining bodily desires and needs by means of the divine law, the most condensed portion of *tanzīl*. The cultivation of virtue is the also the cultivation of the soul. Controlling the appetites and the passions, as we have seen, is the first step in the ascent facilitated by the *tanzīl* of the prophet (that is to say the *sharī'a*). The second step concerns the soul and culminates in the development of the intellect and its ability to apprehend the subtle knowledge.³³ For the Peripatetic philosophers, this progressive *cultivation of the soul* begins with the soul first attending closely to the physical world and gaining knowledge of it. The more the soul knows of the physical world, the more it realises that the physical world is contingent – that is, dependent upon something that is not dependent on anything else, upon something necessary, not contingent. The soul apprehends that underlying the contingent appearances of the physical world is something necessary, and such apprehension distances the soul from the contingent, thereby preparing it for the direct intuition of forms through the active intellect. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, however, understands the process differently; for him, the cultivation of the soul required for divine insight derives from textual exegesis. This is what Corbin means when he says, 'In Ismaili gnosis, fulfillment of *ta'wīl* is inseparable from a spiritual rebirth (*wilāda rūḥāniyya*). Exegesis of a text goes hand in hand with the exegesis of the soul, a practice known in Ismaili gnosis as the science of the Balance (*mīzān*).'³⁴ Exegesis of the soul is the cultivation of the soul that accompanies textual exegesis; we have already seen how the prophetic text at its exoteric limit conditions the reader by means of the regulations of the *sharī'a*. Beyond that, cultivating knowledge of symbolic meaning brings about a higher form of education. Here this cultivation of the symbolic will be elucidated in a different way from that of Corbin; that



is, by scrutinising Islamic philosophical poetics and what is found of it in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's work. In conclusion, it will be argued that poetic cultivation – that is, the education and cultivation of imagination – not only prepares the individual for the return to the *'awwal*, it also facilitates the artistic expression of intellectual insight, which comprises the *tanzil* of the philosopher. This requires further examination.

Imagination and poetry: tools for philosophical refinement

To articulate Nāṣir-i Khusraw's view on the cultivation of imagination implicit in his poetry, one must first turn to Ibn Sīnā's poetics for a relevant description of imagination. In Ibn Sīnā's description, poetry is not merely a secondary mode of expression employed to convey philosophical insights in a popular manner.³⁵ Poetry is necessary for the cultivation of the philosophical ideal. That is, poetry is not simply a treasury of collected wisdom and concepts which can be learnt; poetry is a dialogic activity, an active exchange between the reader or listener and the poem and its author, and engaging with poetry through listening, reading and composing requires discipline of thoughts, feelings and imagination. While the realisation of our epistemic potential (tied to discursive reason) is a matter of directing our thoughts outwards in order to become aware of objective truths, realising our poetic potential requires us to turn our attention inwards. In so doing, we must discipline and order our thought process about our feelings, especially those of astonishment and delight. During this discipline, we must direct our attention to those 'imaginative-creative' representations (sing. *takhyil*) that do not represent 'true-to-life' empirical objects (*taṣdīq*). Ibn Sīnā:

Imaginative-creative representations and the true-to-life presentations are both a kind of acceptance, except that the imaginative representation is an acceptance of the astonishment [*al-ta'ajjub*] and delight [*al-iltidhād*h] in the discourse itself, while the objective presentation is an acceptance of the object as it is said to be. Thus, the imaginative representation is created by the locution itself, while the objective presentation is created by the objectivity of the locution's content.³⁶

Imaginative representations can indeed produce pleasure because they chime with the network of our particular worldly projects and interests. But according to Ibn Sīnā, the poet is not drawn to those pleasures that call us away from the imaginary space and towards worldly concerns. The poet is interested, but in a disinterested manner. Authentic poetic pleasure is engaged by the fact that the imagination's representation of forms can have an intrinsic interest, not by reference to something beyond it. These representations are of that which is good itself, i.e., the highest good. It is important to note that this pleasure is not idiosyncratic. Philosophi-



cal refinement of the imagination is achieved by discovering the criteria for this pleasure, and practising the process of experiencing it.

Astonishment is another feeling that can be produced by an image. From an Aristotelian perspective, astonishment is a feeling of wonder that initiates theoretical enquiry and makes theoretical contemplation intrinsically pleasurable.³⁷ But, on this Aristotelian reading, an image would be astonishing in relation to an interest that points beyond the image. The image merely launches a theoretical enquiry that satisfies an interest that is independent of it. For Ibn Sīnā, astonishment is felt when an image, by virtue of depicting the highest good, overwhelms our propensity for directing our thinking towards our mundane interests. The pain of rupturing our engagement with sources of interest that are extrinsic to the imagination is supplanted by the pleasure of appreciating the image because it evokes the divine goodness transcendent to the intellect and its forms, the Necessary Being. Thus Ibn Sīnā contends that, by cultivating the imagination in this manner, poetic discipline frees this faculty from being chained to personal, practical and theoretical interestedness. Pleasure and astonishment are then grounded in the strengths of the image itself, rather than in the image's instrumentality for furthering our personal, practical or theoretical concerns.

For Ibn Sīnā, poetic study is essentially hermeneutic; that is, the poetic text invites the reader to interpret it. By engaging him this way, the text exposes the untutored condition of his thoughts about feelings. As the text of poetry is expressive of the poet's refined expression of divine goodness, the novice's interpretation necessarily falls short of the ideal posed by the original text. This is because the reader-in-training endeavours to appreciate the poetic images in relation to his particular interests. These interests can be sensual, practical, or even theoretical, but they are tangential to what makes the image interesting. The reader then is invited to interpret again, this time overcoming the pressure of interests that led to his initial mis-reading. As a result, he transforms himself and moves closer to the *ideal* presented by the original poetic creator. This poetic creator can be the messenger-prophet (*rasūl*), and Ibn Sīnā requires that the latter communicate symbolically: 'It has been said that a condition the prophet must adhere to is that his words should be symbols (*rumūz*) and his expressions hints.'³⁸ Symbolic representation is poetic representation and can engage its audience in a transformative process of interpretation. It is a densification of subtle knowledge, to put it in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's terminology.

The prophet's *tanzil*, according to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, not only contains the laws of the *sharī'a* meant to curtail bodily appetites and passions, it also contains concrete parables (*mathal-hā-yi jismānī*).³⁹ The latter are the poetic symbols designed to cultivate the soul of the faithful, and their exegesis constitutes the process of *ta'wīl* – following the path of return to the Universal Soul and receiving the benefits of subtle knowledge. Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *ta'wīl*, like Ibn Sīnā's, aims at the transformation of the soul and the cultivation of disinterestedness. In his *Dīwān*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw writes:



*Daryā-yi sukhanhā sukhan-i khūb-i Khudāy-ast
 Pur gawhar bā qaymat u pur lu'lu'-i lālā.
 Shūr-ast chu daryā bi-mathal-i šurat-i tanzīl
 Ta'wīl chu lu'lu'-ast sūy-i mardum-i dānā.
 Andar bun-i daryā-st hama gawhar u lu'lu'
 Ghawwāš ṭalab kun, chi dawī bar lab-i daryā?
 Andar bun-i shūrāb zi bahr-i chi nahāda-ast
 Chandīn gawhar u lu'lu', dārandaḥ-yi dunyā?
 Az bahr-i payambar ki bidīn šun' wirā guft:
 'Ta'wīl bi dānā dīh u tanzīl bi ghughā.'⁴⁰*

The beautiful words of God are like an ocean
 Sparkling with gemstones, glowing with pearls.
 The *tanzīl*: bitter as a gulp of ocean brine –
 Sweet pearls its *ta'wīl* to the wise.
 If sunken treasure lies in ocean deeps
 Look for a diver – why run vainly on the sand?
 Why has the creator sunk these gems in salty depths?
 Tell me! for the Prophet's sake whom God addressed:
 'Entrust the *ta'wīl* to the wise, the *tanzīl* to the masses.'

The distinction between the people and the wise separates those who merely adhere to the exterior appearance of the divine revelation from those who go beyond the exterior to the interior. The distinction points directly to the cultivation of disinterestedness, a process in which the wise engage, while the people observe the law but do not understand the goal of the law which is virtue. At the beginning of the same poem, Nāṣir-i Khusraw sets out the ascetic demands of *ta'wīl*: avoidance of luxury, wealth, power, sexual lust and common acclaim. Nāṣir-i Khusraw is not advocating a monastic existence; rather, he is concerned about the domination of the soul by these worldly goods and the underlying desires that drive them. In their place, he advocates the cultivation of the soul through verbal expression (*sukhan*):⁴¹

*Jānat bi sukhan pāk shawad zānki khiradmand
 Az rāh-i sukhan bar shawad az chāh bi jawzā.*⁴²

Your soul is purified by *sukhan*, as the wise
 Through *sukhan* have flown from the bottom of the well to the constellations.

To achieve this flight, the soul needs to be delivered from its servitude to worldly goods by means of the verbal 'bitter' prohibitions and spiritual exercises outlined in the *sharī'a*. Then comes the further refinement of the soul through the hermeneutics



(*ta'wīl*) of poetry, especially the divine symbols (i.e. 'the beautiful words of God' – see above), the revelation's *mathal-hā-yi jismānī*). Poetic hermeneutics refines the freedom of the soul by removing the last vestiges of worldly interests still exercising their hold over the understanding of the individual. Engaging in this hermeneutics lets that which appears in perception and in words come forth of its own and not for the sake of something else (our interests). Possessing this awareness and expressive power places one in the vicinity of the divine.

Perfecting the soul's imagination, or more precisely (in the case of Nāṣir-i Khusraw) the power of *sukhan*, also enables the faithful to engage in the activity of knowing which deals with objective, epistemic representations (*taṣḍīq*) creatively, rather than conventionally, and with appreciation for the manifold aspects and nuances of the realities they denote. It is not an exaggeration to say that Ibn Sīnā and Nāṣir-i Khusraw see the highest form of poetic expression as revealing existents in their fullest particularities as well as the universals accessible only through divine intervention (revelation). For them and their successors,⁴³ cultivating poetic thinking (which includes poetic looking, listening, reading and composing) is a discipline that develops our potential for free, objective, thought. Poetic thinking is freely objective precisely because it goes beyond the novice's self-absorption. Thus, poetic thinking prepares the individual to reflect and examine the world as it is necessarily in itself. It also energises the individual through the power of images which human beings explicitly recognise as coming from beyond themselves. Thus poetic thinking paves the way for the individual's final apprehension of the subtle truth in the light of the divine.

For Nāṣir-i Khusraw, of course, this training of the soul also presupposes the guidance of the master of *ta'wīl*, the inheritor of the Prophet's *walāya*, the Imam of the time.⁴⁴ Now we can better understand the lines,

Andar bun-i daryā-st hama gawhar wa lu'lu'
*Ghawwāṣ ṭalab kun, chi dawī bar lab-i daryā?*⁴⁵

If sunken treasure lies in ocean deeps
Look for a diver – why run vainly on the sand?

According to both Imami and Ismaili approaches to Shi'ī Islam, every period of history must have an Imam.⁴⁶ The Imam is the guarantor of *ta'wīl* and the preserver of the truth.⁴⁷ He is the moral, intellectual and spiritual exemplar that has the endorsement of the Divine Intellect and assists the seeker in his quest to return to the divine intimacy. Ibn Sīnā's later and more mystical writings also contain references to persons who display characteristics similar to those of the Imam (e.g. Ibn Sīnā's Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān).⁴⁸ It is through the mediation of such exemplars that



divine grace spreads through all mankind and catapults people towards higher stations, allowing for their return home – that is, to the intimacy with the divine.⁴⁹

The art of poetry and spiritual enlightenment

I submit that Nāṣir-i Khusraw does not restrict the use of spiritually transformative symbols to the revelations of the prophets and their legateses. Philosophers who ascend the ladder of *ta'wīl* (with the help of the Imam of the time) are able to assist the faithful through the composition of carefully designed symbolic poems as well as by providing methods (alongside those offered by the Prophet) of mastering the needs and desires that distract the soul from its occupation with the divine. This ability is a function of their cultivated imaginations. An imagination freed of the tyranny of appetites and passions – a disinterested imagination – enables its possessor to enter into the attitudes of his interlocutors and to assist them in overcoming their spiritual obsessions and confusions. Carefully crafted symbols invite the reader to engage in interpretation and the process of interpretation brings into view problematic assumptions that stem from obsessive interestedness, and this enables their possessor to work towards freeing himself from them. The freedom thus attained brings him into the vicinity of the Universal Soul, where he can be the beneficiary of subtle knowledge and inspiration. Moreover, one can imagine grades of philosopher-poets, corresponding to their rank on the ladder of *ta'wīl*, with each rank concerning itself with those below it. And this thought is, of course, a thoroughly familiar one in the Ismaili initiatory tradition in which Nāṣir-i Khusraw occupies so noteworthy a position.⁵⁰

Notes

1. For a recent bibliography of studies on Nāṣir-i Khusraw, refer to Alice C. Hunsberger's *Nasir Khusraw, The Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller, and Philosopher* (London, 2000), pp. 275–280.

2. While there is a significant number of studies on philosophical aspects of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's writings, I refer to the paucity of such studies by philosophers trained in the Western academic tradition.

3. [Ed. note. For Nāṣir-i Khusraw on the descent of revelation from the subtle (*laṭīf*) realm to the dense (*kathīf*) realm of matter, and how the Prophet-Messengers then take the 'densified' revelation and 'condenses' it into the *sharī'a*, see his *Knowledge and Liberation*, English tr. by Faquir M. Hunzai of *Gushāyish wa Rahāyish* (London, 1998), pp. 102–103.] In his *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Corbin writes: 'The word *ta'wīl*, together with the word *tanzīl*, constitute a pair of terms and concepts which are complementary and contrasting. Properly speaking, *tanzīl* designates positive religion, the letter of the Revelation dictated by the Angel to the Prophet. It means *to cause this revelation to descend* from the higher world. Conversely, *ta'wīl* means *to cause to return*, to lead back to the origin, and thus to return to



the true and original meaning of a written text. 'It is to cause something to arrive at its origin. He who practices *ta'wil*, therefore, is someone who diverts what is proclaimed from its external appearance (its exoteric aspect, *zāhir*), and makes it revert back to its truth, *ḥaqīqah* (H. Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, tr. Liadain Sherrard with the assistance of P. Sherrard as *History of Islamic Philosophy* [London, 1993], p. 12).

4. Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, 'The Attainment of Happiness', in Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (eds.), *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (Ithaca, NY, 1961), p. 80.

5. Ibid.

6. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr's account of the primacy of practice in the Islamic tradition, in *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization* (San Francisco, 2003), p. 76.

7. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, English tr. Faquir M. Hunzai of *Gushāyish wa Rahāyish* (London, 1998), p. 103.

8. Nāṣir-i Khusraw is adamant about the combination of the observation of *sharī'a* and *ta'wil*. This is probably in response to the worry raised in the Qur'an, *sūra* 4, *āya* 7: 'He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord"; and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding' (*The Qur'an*, tr. Abdullah Yusuf Ali [New York, 2001], p. 123).

9. Henry Corbin, 'Nāṣir-i Khusrau and Iranian Ismā'ilism', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4: *The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljūqs*, ed. R. N. Frye (Cambridge, 1975), p. 540.

10. Ibid.

11. Here, I am drawing upon Pierre Hadot's important work on the notion of philosophical life in Ancient philosophy. See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, tr. Michael Chase (Oxford, 1995) and *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, tr. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA, 2004). Hadot argues that philosophy, for ancient Greek philosophers, was a way of life; it was not in the service of producing a work – a rational account of reality; rather 'the goal is to transform ourselves' (*Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 264) to become wise. Philosophers, as lovers of wisdom, are in training for wisdom, yet wisdom is not contained in a philosophical treatise, but is a condition of the human soul. Hadot's work can be supplemented by Michel Foucault later writings: *History of Sexuality*, vols 2 and 3, tr. Robert Hurley (New York, 1985–1986) and his 1980–1982 lectures titled *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, tr. Graham Burchell (New York, 2006). In 'Is "Islamic" Philosophy Islamic?', in *Voices of Islam* (London, 2007), pp. 23–41, I have explored the implications of Hadot's view for Islamic philosophy, maintaining that Islamic philosophy is an Islamic practice of philosophical spiritual exercises.

12. Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. xv. Later, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a prominent contemporary Islamic philosopher and a collaborator with Corbin, echoed his claim that 'Islamic philosophy is essentially "prophetic philosophy"', see *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization*, pp. 163–164.

13. Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 21.



14. In 'The Letter Concerning the Intellect', al-Fārābī writes: 'One must not intend from our statement that the agent [active] intellect is in its potentiality in such a way that it receives these forms, so that they come to be in it insofar as they are received; but we intend that it has potentiality for producing them in matter as forms and this is the potentiality insofar as it acts in something else and it is that which produces forms in the matters': see A. Hyman and J. Walsh, eds., *Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Indianapolis, IN, 1973), p. 219.

15. In regard to the functions of the faculty of imagination, Al-Fārābī maintains that 'in addition to the preservation of the imprints of the sensibles and their association with one another it displays a third activity, namely "reproductive imitation". This faculty is different from the other faculties of the soul, being capable of "imitating" the sensibles which have remained preserved in it. Sometimes it imitates the things sensed by the five senses by combining the sensibles preserved in it which are imitations of the things sensed. Sometimes it imitates the intelligibles; sometimes it imitates the nutritive faculty; and sometimes it imitates the appetitive faculty. It also imitates the "temperament" in which it happens to find the body; when it finds the temperament of the body to be moist, it imitates the moisture by combining the sensibles which imitate moisture, like water and swimming in it': see *On the Perfect State*, tr. Richard Walzer (Oxford, 1985), pp. 211–213.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 225. We should not overlook al-Fārābī's insistence that the philosopher-prophet is also a lawgiver, a skillful orator and knows how to guide people towards achievement of happiness. *Ibid.*, p. 247.

17. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, pp. 85–86.

18. 'Khusraw's philosophical works reveal a strong Neoplatonic structure and vocabulary. For example, his cosmogony closely follows Plotinus, moving from God and God's word (*logos*), to Intellect, Soul, and the world of Nature. In holding to this cosmogonic description, Khusraw follows his fellow Ismailīs (Nasafī and al-Sijistānī) and ignores the structure introduced by al-Farabī and picked up by Ibn Sina and the Ismaili philosopher al-Kirmani': Alice Hunsberger, 'Nasir Khusraw', *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/k/khusraw.htm#H2>.

19. S. M. Stern writes: 'al-Nasafi plays an important part in the history of Isma'ili philosophy. In effect, ... he founded Isma'ili philosophy by adopting a form of the current of Islamic Neoplatonism, and his system remained the standard Isma'ili doctrine in Persia in the fourth-tenth and fifth-eleventh centuries: it was at the base the systems of such authors as Abu Yaḡub al-Sijistani and even Nasir-i Khusraw', in 'Early Isma'ili Missionaries in North-West Persian and in Khurasan and Transoxania', *BSOAS*, 23, 1 (1960), p. 79. It is worth noting that the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' of Basra were also committed to a form of Islamic Neoplatonism, which is derived from the *Theology* attributed to Aristotle. The *Theology* is a paraphrase of Plotinus' last three *Enneads*. Another influential text (in the Islamic tradition) attributed to Aristotle is the Neoplatonic *Book on the Pure Good* (*Kalām fī maḥḍ al-khayr*). This text is actually an extract from Proclus' *Elementatio Theologica* (Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 18). Paul E. Walker, in *Early Philosophical Shiism*, refers to other Neoplatonic sources in Arabic; he mentions a longer *Theology* and also the pseudo-Ammonius *Fī āra' al-falāsifa bi ikhtilāf al-aqāwil fī'l-mabādī* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 39.

20. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, p. 27.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 104.



23. For an outline of the Ismaili hierarchy see Corbin's 'Divine Epiphany and Spiritual Birth in Ismailian Gnosis', tr. Ralph Manheim in Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London, 1983), p. 94.

24. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, p. 102.

25. Ibid., 93. For an account of the world-historical dimension of prophecy in Ismailism, see Henry Corbin's 'Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism', tr. Ralph Manheim, in *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London, 1983), pp. 1–58. Paul Walker has a brief account of it in *Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī: Intellectual Missionary* (London, 1996), pp. 45–58. Walker claims that the historical dimension of Ismailism is alien to Neoplatonism, *ibid.*, p. 47.

26. Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 13.

27. Plato, *Republic*, tr. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis, IN, 1992), 597e.

28. Aristotle considers tragedy, and perhaps by extension all art, as cathartic. They arouse our passions and prepare us for actual situations in which these passions may interfere with what we ought to do. See his *Poetics*, tr. James Hutton (New York, 1982), 1452a. Also refer to Martha Nussbaum's exploration of this theme in 'Interlude 2: Luck and the Tragic Emotions', in *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 379–394; see especially pp. 388–391.

29. Plotinus rejects Plato's account of the work of art in the *Republic* and maintains that the work of art can improve upon nature; *Enneads*, tr. Stephen McKeon (New York, 1957), p. 58.

30. Richard Walzer, *Greek into Arabic* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 213.

31. Walker, in *Early Philosophical Shiism*, maintains that Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Ismaili predecessor, al-Sijistānī (see note 9), was influenced by his contemporary, al-Fārābī, in the technical philosophical vocabulary for his prophethology, p. 115.

32. Of course, intellectual perception of the forms should be distinguished from discursive knowledge. The former is constitutive of subtle knowledge, and the latter is dense knowledge, the knowledge yielded by the intellect in its uninitiated (imperfect) mode. Dense knowledge is a reflection of the forms inserted in the mundane world.

33. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, 103.

34. Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 12.

35. This reading is advocated by Dimitri Gutas in *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works* (Leiden, 1988), p. 302.

36. Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Shifā': al-mantiq 9: al-shi'r*, ed. A. Badawī (Cairo, 1385/1966), pp. 24–25. Vicente Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age* (Leiden, 1975), p. 133.

37. Salim Kemal, *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna* (Leiden, 1991), p. 161.

38. Ibn Sīnā, 'On the Proof of Prophecies', p. 116.

39. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, p. 103.

40. My translation from *Diwān-i ash'ār-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, ed. M. Mīnuwī and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1353 Sh./1953; repr. 1357 Sh./1978), p. 5.

41. Herman Landolt's suggested rendition of 'Word' for *sukhan* ['Review of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Forty Poems from the Divan*', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 102, 1 (1982), p. 215] would be awkward in this context.

42. *Diwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 5, my translation.

43. Illuminationist Islamic philosophers (*ishrāqiyyūn*), led by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191), pushed this view further. They argued that the imagination is a cognitive faculty. The images of perfected imagination exist as objects in a realm (*'ālam*



al-mithāl) between the spiritual and the physical. See Fazlur Rahman, 'Dreams, Imagination, and 'Ālam al-Mithāl', *Islamic Studies*, 3 (1964), p. 169.

44. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, p. 88, pp. 104–105.

45. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 5, my translation.

46. In Sunni mysticism, the role of the guide is given to the *awliyā'* (plural of *walī*), the ones who have attained intimacy with God. For instance, the great Andalusian Sufi, Shaykh al-Akbar Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī, in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikām* (*Bezels of Wisdom*), writes: 'When you see a prophet expressing himself in words which do not arise from his legislative authority, it is because he is a *walī* and an *'arif*; and the station he occupies by virtue of being *'ālim* (wise) is more complete and more perfect than the station he occupies by virtue of being a messenger or a legislative prophet. Likewise when you hear a man of God saying – or when someone tells you that they have heard him say – that *walāyah* is superior *nubuwwah*, you must know that he means by this exactly what we have said' (Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, tr. Liadain Sherrard [Cambridge, 1993], pp. 51–52).

Of course, Ibn 'Arabī does not mean that the spiritual *awliyā'* are superior to the Prophet: 'If he said that the *walī* is superior to the *nabī* or the *rasūl*, he implies that this is so in the person of one and the same being' (Ibid.). In other words, the Prophet Muḥammad's *walāya* is a more important feature of him than his *nubuwwa* or *risāla*, for the first is the result of his full realisation as a spiritual person. 'So this does not mean that the *walī* who follows a prophet is superior to the latter, for he who follows can never catch up with him whom he follows, inasmuch as he is his follower. Therefore understand! The source of the *rasūl* and the *nabī* lies in *walāya* and in knowledge' (ibid.).

47. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi in *The Divine Guide in Early Shiism*, points to the following salient aspects of the early Imami doctrine: 'The exoteric side of Truth is manifested through lawgiving prophecy, bringing to the mass of humanity (*'amma*) a Sacred Book that descended from Heaven (*tanzīl*); [Prophet] Muhammad is both prototype and the end of this first aspect. The esoteric side of the Truth is revealed through the mission of the imams (*walāyah*), accompanying each prophetic mission, bringing to the elite believers (*khāṣṣa*) the only true interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the Holy Book; together the twelve imams, but in particular Ali, who is considered the father of the eleven others, are the plenary manifestation of this second aspect [of Truth]. Fatima, called the "Confluence of Two Lights" (*majma' al-nūrayn*), reflects the 'place' where the two aspects of intersect. Of course, the prophet also has knowledge of the esoteric side of religion; he is thus also *walī*, but he reserves his esoteric teachings for his imam(s) exclusively; on the other hand, the imam is never considered a prophet' (Albany, NY, 1994), p. 29.

48. It is interesting to note that Corbin traces this element in Ibn Sīnā's later work to hermetic influence; see his *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, tr. Willard R. Trask (London, 1960), p. 158. In 'Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism', he examines the doctrine of the guidance of the esoteric Imam: see also his *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, pp. 26–30. It should be kept in mind that Corbin is not a historicist; he is rather committed to the notion of perennial wisdom.

49. In the *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Corbin writes: 'Underlying the idea of exegesis [*ta'wīl*] is the idea of the Guide (the *exegete*, the Imam of Shiism), and in the idea of *exegesis* we may perceive the idea of an *exodus*, of a 'flight out of Egypt': an exodus out of metaphor and enslavement to the letter, out of *exile* and the *Occident* of the exoteric appearance, towards the *Orient* of the original, hidden idea' (p. 12).



50. Alice C. Hunsberger takes Nāṣir-i Khusraw at his own word that he was the chief *dā'ī* or *ḥujja* of Khurāsān, see her *Ruby*, p. 3. This, of course, is in disagreement with Ivanow's argument that Nāṣir-i Khusraw was a mere *dā'ī*, not a *ḥujja*, *Nasir-i Khusraw and Ismailism* (Leiden, 1948), pp. 43–45.

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Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Poetics of the Moral Journey and the Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals

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Throughout his poetry, Nāṣir-i Khusraw provides a long didactic and moralising commentary on virtually every facet of life and thought. Whether in his *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*,¹ *Sa'adat-nāma* or other poems, Nāṣir-i Khusraw treats of a variety of subjects pertaining to morality, here extolling the virtues of association with good friends, there criticising evil intentions, arrogance, ignorance and other base characteristics. Whereas it is virtually impossible to find a single principle around which Nāṣir-i Khusraw's thought revolves, surely it is the moralising and normative nature of his poetry that constitutes its salient feature. His poetry provides an unswerving guide for the moral journey each individual must undertake in his or her lifetime.

In contrast to Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetic treatment of moral and ethical principles, Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher of the eighteenth century, addressed the philosophical underpinning of ethics, which he refers to as 'practical reason', in systematic and analytical prose. Kant maintained that moral acts ought to be based on a rational foundation such that one would want these acts to be universalised. The incentive for any such act, Kant argued, ought to be respect and reverence for the moral law. Since the foundations of morality, for Kant, are based on reason in the practical domain, he chose the term 'practical reason' as opposed to 'pure reason', the term he used to refer to his epistemological discussions.

In my attempt to present Nāṣir-i Khusraw's didactic poetry, the philosophical foundations of which are implied but not elaborated upon, I have relied on Kant's analysis and interpretation of ethics to help provide a better understanding of Nāṣir-i Khusraw in this regard. Both philosophers are deeply concerned with the foundations of ethics and yet the analytical treatment of the one allows light to be shed on the complexity of the other, who chose poetry as a means of expression.



Even though morality – that is, the normative ethics and declarative propositions of a moral nature – constitute the heart and soul of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry, the normative nature of what Nāṣir-i Khusraw advocates in his poetry is very different from what is propounded by two other Persian poets known for pithy advice, Sa'dī and Sanā'ī, or even the gnomic advice attributed to the popular legendary figure Lughmān Ḥakīm. Whereas on the surface they all can be seen to be offering moral advice, Nāṣir-i Khusraw's didactic poetry is deeply rooted in metaphysical principles. He discusses these principles in his philosophical works such as *Jāmi' al-hikmatayn* and a short treatise (*Risāla*) he wrote in response to ninety-one philosophical problems.²

What follows elaborates on the metaphysical roots of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetics of the moral journey. The philosophical foundations of the didactic nature of his poetry will be investigated first in order to provide the context within which the kind of moral instruction he offers becomes logically coherent. While the normative aspect of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's moral instructions, which attaches a moral value such as good or bad to deeds, is clear, the meta-ethical and the metaphysical questions that pertain to 'why' something is good or bad are less clear and need to be explained since they are deeply embedded in his poetry.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetics of the moral journey begins and rests upon a Neoplatonic ontological framework. Nāṣir-i Khusraw adopts the Neoplatonic scheme of emanation which had been the salient feature of the Peripatetic (*mashshā'i*) philosophical tradition among Muslims since al-Fārābī. His systematic use of the scheme of emanation (*tashkīk*)³ allows him to explain a variety of philosophical themes, such as how multiplicity came from unity, the ontological roots of good and evil, and how the moral journey can proceed. In the *Rawshanā'i-nāma*, he asserts:

If the elements are contradictory,
 Why are the four [elements] intertwined?
 Are they unified like brothers through the extremity of love?
 If you say contradiction vanishes where meaning rises
 How does one account for the difference between earth and water?
 From the beginning, know existence well, and then,
 Turn from the wheel of fortune and this earthly game.
 Divine secrets you know not, for in you,
 Lucifer and Adam are in battle.
 What you see as meaning in the soul-nourishing garden
 Is what the blind see in the form and colour of a flower.⁴

The very act of creation not only turns unity into multiplicity, but introduces contradictions into every facet of creation, including the moral domain; with



creation came good and evil. According to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, only God, which he identified with the Supreme Good (*summum bonum*), existed at the beginning of creation, and so evil, which is the natural consequence of a corporeal creation, had to come into existence. For Nāṣir-i Khusraw, an individual's moral journey is the refinement of character which occurs in the journey from the world of multiplicity towards eventual unity with God. This spiritual and moral journey begins with an understanding of our corporeal condition and will end in unity with God alone – this much we can infer, according to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, by relying on pure reason. Nāṣir-i Khusraw's relentless emphasis on *'aql* (which we equate with reason, rationality and intellect and so uncharacteristic of most poetic genres), is his attempt to demonstrate that the spiritual journey towards unity is fundamentally a moral one that has to be pursued both discursively and in action.⁵

Arguing for the necessity of the moral journey on ontological grounds, and despite dedicating most of his poems to the didactic and practical aspects of the moral journey, Nāṣir-i Khusraw does not provide the philosophical underpinning of his complex ethical paradigm discursively.

When distinguishing 'practical reason' from 'pure reason' Kant states: 'It is quite different with the practical use of reason. In the latter, reason deals with the grounds determining the will.'⁶ That is, Kant holds the view that reason ought to be the sole basis upon which the will of the individual chooses what is morally imperative. In contrast, Nāṣir-i Khusraw provides moral advice, in response to which one may ask, 'Why should I follow your advice?' or 'Assuming I would want to accept your advice, what would be the determining factors of my will?' Nāṣir-i Khusraw answers these concerns:

If the intellect is the king of your heart,
 No king of the people is better than you.
 May God increase your intellect and intelligence
 Wonder not at this advice for it is not betrayal,
 The world deceives those with its trickery
 Who don't rely on the cane of wisdom,
 We have faith and reason, why fear?
 Even if governorship of the world is not ours.⁷

Nāṣir-i Khusraw emphasises the point that having an intellect necessitates following the moral journey since morality is an a priori part of the human soul, as is the intellect. This is especially clear in the next to last line where religion and reason are seen as intertwined. Thus religion and the moral journey are seen as the means, while a virtuous individual is the end. Immanuel Kant puts this dichotomy as follows: 'The practical rule is always a product of reason, because it prescribes action as a means to an effort which is its purpose.'⁸



Kant then examines how reason by itself may or may not be a sufficient basis for ‘practical reason’, in ethical decisions. The moral imperative, Kant tells us ‘is a rule characterised by an “ought” which expresses the objective necessity of the act and indicates that, if reason completely determined the will, the action would without exception take place according to the rule.’⁹ However, this rarely happens. Rarely do actions, especially of a moral nature occur according to the moral imperative; the problem with humans is not that we do not know the moral imperatives, the problem is that we cannot do what we consider to be right. This is where the concept of ‘willpower’ and the significance of its role emerges for both Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Immanuel Kant.

In a number of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s poems one finds a tripartite pattern.¹⁰ In the first part, he begins by belittling worldly desires, such as for wealth, fame or power. In the second part, he moves on to give moral advice and didactic aphorisms, and in the third part he questions the reader, often in an imperious manner, as to why he does not follow the advice given. In some of his shorter works of poetry such as the *Rawshanā’i-nāma*, this pattern becomes even more evident. In the beginning of *Rawshanā’i-nāma*, after a brief introduction, there follow twelve segments of poetry in which the reader is asked to adhere to a series of moral principles, culminating in the following verse:

You are not created for food or sleep like an animal,
You are made for wisdom and knowledge worthy only of a human.¹¹

In these lines, Nāṣir-i Khusraw is echoing Aristotle’s theory of virtue ethics. Aristotle argues that the fulfillment of the purpose for which something is made, brings about the perfection and happiness of the subject in question. The function of the human soul is to recognise the good in life and living a morally virtuous life helps us to understand what the good in life is.

In our enquiry concerning the underlying philosophical principles of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s call for a moral journey, we have to go one step further and ask what would make one able to have the will to follow moral imperatives? Nāṣir-i Khusraw does not explicitly offer a systematic treatment of these underlying philosophical principles, but Kant explains, ‘Thus all material principles, which place the determining ground of choice in the pleasure or displeasure to be received from the reality of any object whatsoever, are entirely of one kind. Without exception they belong under the principle of self-love or one’s own happiness.’¹²

Happiness, which for Kant is not to be understood in its hedonistic sense, but in the Greek sense of well-being, as well as duty (*deon*), is the incentive for a morally good action. In his constant resort to moral advice throughout his poetry, Nāṣir-i Khusraw is cognisant of why one would want to pursue this moral journey. The first and foremost reason is eschatological. Submission to Divine laws, which



Nāṣir-i Khusraw sees as natural laws, yields the attainment of the paradisiacal state and therefore of eternal happiness. Whereas, for Kant, moral imperatives are those that you would want to be universalised, for Nāṣir-i Khusraw, moral imperatives are the Divine commands deeply rooted in the concept of their naturalness because they are Divine. Religion, which at its root derives from the Latin verb *'religare'* meaning 'to fasten' and *'religio'* meaning 'to tie back', is fundamentally concerned with a moral journey in which one seeks to attain the purity of the original source by submitting to the moral laws stipulated in religion. Nāṣir-i Khusraw asserts in his *Dīwān*:

He [God] says, 'All is just' and we are to be obedient.
 The will is His and not ours
 One says, 'If the world has a just owner,
 His justice would appear in the world and creatures.
 Were there no differences, people would be the same.'
 But each creature in his own domain is unique and unrivalled.¹³

For Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the second and perhaps the more significant reason for pursuing the moral journey appears to be more Kantian: respect and reverence for the moral laws as being inherently and innately worthy. This Kantian concept, called deontological ethics, is a theme that reverberates through Nāṣir-i Khusraw's writings. This part of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetics of the moral journey, is much richer than the conventional dictum to be good so that you may be rewarded, as can best be seen in his *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*. While the relationship between theology and morality is often mentioned in this poem, Nāṣir-i Khusraw also offers a beautiful commentary on what Immanuel Kant calls 'self-love' as the foundation of morality. This is not selfishness or narcissism, as is commonly understood by the term 'self-love', but is a deep recognition that self-love necessitates utter respect for one's moral worth, and the moral law which Nāṣir-i Khusraw sees as ultimately Divine.

For Kant, self-love manifests itself in 'goodwill' towards all, as he explains in the *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*: 'I do not therefore need any penetrating acuteness in order to discern what I have to do in order that my volition may be morally good. Inexperienced in the course of the world, incapable of being prepared for all its contingencies, I ask myself only: Can I will it that my maxim becomes a universal law?'¹⁴

Kant holds that a morally conscientious person acts in such a way that he would want his moral conduct to become a universal law, a rendition of the concept of 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. This is where the poetic genius of Nāṣir-i Khusraw offers a pointed commentary. In the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* poem section titled, 'On Advice',¹⁵ Nāṣir-i Khusraw has a large number of didactic verses



dealing with virtually every aspect of moral conduct, including humility, faith, generosity, knowledge, submission and contentment, to mention just a few from a long list of virtues. What is noteworthy is that Nāṣir-i Khusraw regards these moral axioms as universal natural laws that correspond to the Divine Will, and therefore respect and reverence for the moral law is based not only on the natural and inherent validity of such moral imperatives but on the fact that they constitute the laws of the universe. Kantian self-love becomes a practical reality according to Nāṣir-i Khusraw if or when one submits to the higher moral order and lives the natural life. Therefore, reason by itself is not always sufficient to will to act in accordance with goodwill which is the necessary condition for pursuing the moral journey. According to Kant, goodwill, while necessary at the outset of the journey, grows as a result of moral activity. Character is refined and strengthened through good action. Just as from water comes wetness and from fire, heat, for Nāṣir-i Khusraw, goodwill can naturally emanate from a good person. From a morally conscientious person exudes goodwill.

In the section on 'Unity' in the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*,¹⁶ we see Nāṣir-i Khusraw's philosophical foundation for the metaphysics of morals. Here, having concluded that the ineffable and transcendental essence of God is beyond human comprehension, Nāṣir-i Khusraw sees moral principles as manifestations of Divine attributes, such as Justice, Mercy, Power, Life, which are eternal. He asserts:

His attributes and essence are both eternal,
Knowing their depth is a prodigious journey.¹⁷

For Nāṣir-i Khusraw, God's attributes such as goodness and justice are Divine by nature, and not added to His essence. In the section entitled 'The Attributes of the Intellect',¹⁸ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, similar to many other Muslim Peripatetics, regards creation as proceeding from the first intellect ('*aql-i awwal*'). God, in the beginning reflects upon Himself and it is from this reflection that the first intellect is born whose reflection upon itself produces the second intellect and so on until the tenth intellect. Therefore, while the sense in which '*aql*' is used by Nāṣir-i Khusraw is subject to debate, one can conclude that moral imperatives are also 'intellectual' in nature. The basis for the validity of moral imperatives therefore is not only that they are Divine in nature, but that they are intellectual, rational and reasonable. What is moral for Nāṣir-i Khusraw is reasonable and what is reasonable is perhaps moral. The following argument stated syllogistically may clarify our foregoing discussion:

1. God is all rational.
2. From an all rational being can only emanate rationality.
3. Creation has emanated from God.



Therefore:

4. Creation in its totality is rational.
5. Moral imperatives are part of creation.

Therefore:

6. Moral imperatives are rational.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw explains the above as follows:

At the beginning appeared the universal intellect,
 Divine throne it was called by the learned,
 Some called it the First Cause
 And yet others named it the spiritual world,
 For it was called the realm of *Jabarūt*
 Where the generous¹⁹ Gabriel resides,
 Thus they call it the pinhead of the Lord
 And the messenger tablet of God,
 In the beginning He chose it from creation
 For thy Lord created without intermediary,
 That which reflects an aspect of creation
 Is the intermediary in the world
 At first, once the universal intellect was unveiled
 Those two pearls were born from each other.²⁰

While Nāṣir-i Khusraw's reason-based moral imperatives are at the same time fundamentally rooted in a theocentric theological paradigm, this paradigm corresponds with that of Immanuel Kant who, although a faithful Christian, attempted to make morality stand independent of God. In the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* he states:

Everything in nature works according to laws. Only a rational being has the capacity of acting according to the conception of laws, i.e., according to principles. This capacity is will. Since reason is required for the derivation of actions from laws, will is nothing else than practical reason. If reason infallibly determines the will, the actions which such a being recognises as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary.²¹

Kant's analysis here provides us with the analytical tools we need to help us better understand the conceptual underpinnings of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's moralising instructions. While it is true, according to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, that moral imperatives are natural and thus reasonable because they are Divine, he finds it problematic

for humans to actually have the willpower to do what is right and natural. Kant asserts that 'reason infallibly determines the will', but in actuality this does not seem to be the case. Most smokers and addicts will admit that smoking and drug addiction are bad for you, but why is it that the smoker and the addict do not quit? One can only postulate that the cause is lack of willpower, which clearly shows that reason does not necessarily lead to action. Also, there are ample medical reasons against smoking and drug use, but, is an abundance of reasons against smoking and drug use sufficient to provide the smoker and the addict with the will to stop? Clearly, neither reason nor an abundance of evidence always translates into action in the way that Kant postulates. This is where Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetics of the moral journey comes in; his repeated emphasis on the necessity of cleansing the soul, asceticism and inner purification is completely missing from Kant's moral philosophy. Throughout his poetry, Nāṣir-i Khusraw calls for moral purification. This requires the exercise of willpower, but the will needs more than mere evidence to act, it requires inner strength and character to overcome temptation and base inclinations. Immanuel Kant holds that the will is able to act if or when it is presented with sufficient evidence. He says, 'The will is a faculty of choosing only that which reason, independently of inclination, recognises as practically necessary, i.e. as good.'²² Nāṣir-i Khusraw would agree with a qualified version of this, that a will that is spiritually strengthened can overcome a base inclination and choose what is good. In the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* section titled 'On the Elucidation of the External and Internal Senses',²³ Nāṣir-i Khusraw offers what can be construed as a critique of Kant's postulate of reason as the sole cause of will and provides a solution. Here he begins with a classical rationalist critique against the empiricist emphasis on sense perception, and explains:

Apprehension (*wahm*), comprehension and memory
senses communis you call it,
 Fallaciously see these five [senses]
 Can a true judgement be made between them?
 Practice asceticism and see the righteous path,
 For that turns your doubt to certainty.
 Once these (senses) see the truth, then
 You need no more in this world,
 Expand the eye of perception,
 For you will see what is beyond creation.²⁴

Once the will sees the good in things, and has the ability to choose and overcome temptation, only then can it act, as Kant says, 'independently of inclination' and can recognise what is practically necessary as good.²⁵ The will that has not been freed from the passions of the body cannot choose appropriately, which is why in

the verses above Nāṣir-i Khusraw advises us to practise asceticism. Neither the eye nor the ear, nor touch, nor even the faculty of apprehension leads to the realisation of the truth. Transcending the senses is precisely what is needed to see reality and it is only then that the will can act rationally and morally. In another poem, Nāṣir-i Khusraw writes:

See with the inner eye, the inner dimension of the world,
For the outward-looking eye cannot see the inward
What is the inward in the world, men who are free
Thou doest not see the inward, but seeth the outward.²⁶

Let us recapitulate Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetics of the moral journey and Kant's analysis in this regard. For Nāṣir-i Khusraw, living is a journey in which moral conduct for the sake of reward or fear of punishment should be replaced with a more sublime and exquisite goal. This journey is fundamentally rooted in an Islamic metaphysical doctrine with its own ontology and epistemology. The journey from the corporeal world to the incorporeal domain is undertaken by the soul and requires spiritual diligence and care. Whereas the moralising and instructional dimensions of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry are clear, they lack, as is often the case in poetry, a philosophical analysis of his proposed moral journey. We have relied upon Immanuel Kant's views on the philosophy of ethics as discussed in his *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* to bring the philosophical justification for Nāṣir-i Khusraw's normative poetry to our attention.

Kant realises that moral laws do not exist in a vacuum, and regardless of their nature, are deeply rooted in a metaphysical foundation. He explains:

For we know well that if we are not in possession of this kind of metaphysics, it is not merely futile to define accurately for the purposes of speculative judgement the moral element of duty in all actions which accord with duty, but impossible to base morals on legitimate principles for merely ordinary and practical use, especially in moral instruction; and it is only in this manner that pure moral dispositions can be produced and engrafted on men's minds for the purpose of the highest good in the world.²⁷

In this study, I have argued that although ethics and morality fall into the domain of practical wisdom, the inherent shortcoming in Kant's metaphysics of morals is precisely what Nāṣir-i Khusraw alludes to as the temptations of passion. He would argue in practical terms against Kant's call for a foundation for the metaphysics of morals, doubtless positing the question how one puts this kind of metaphysics into practice. This is where Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetics of the moral journey

turns normative, often in a very specific way. In the section titled 'Discourse on Positive and Negative Moral Virtues',²⁸ Nāṣir-i Khusraw describes man as a prisoner with cellmates. These cellmates include envy, greed, endless desire, trickery, sexual temptation and arrogance. He ends by saying:

If you become free from them, a master you are.
If not, this path is what you follow, a demon you are.²⁹

He who is the master of his desires and has transcended his passions is then in a position to make a rational decision. The notion of cleansing the soul in order to make a rational decision free from passion has no place in Kant's philosophy.

This brief comparison of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry and Kant's ethical theory reveals much about the rational process that underlies the moral journey, and how the spiritual and the rational come together in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetics of the moral journey. Whereas, as far as Kant is concerned, one ought to choose the moral imperative through respect and reverence for the moral law alone, Nāṣir-i Khusraw maintains that one ought to develop the wisdom and the strength of character through which not only are the morally right concepts *recognised* but, further, one becomes *able* to do what is right.

Notes

1. In recent years such scholars as M. Muḥaqqiq, H. Landolt and Alice C. Hunsberger have cast doubt on the authenticity of this work. This chapter is written with the assumption that this work does belong to Nāṣir-i Khusraw. Clearly, should the inauthenticity of this work be proven, the arguments put forward here will either have to be disregarded or supported on the basis of other works by Nāṣir-i Khusraw.
2. *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Nāṣir ibn Khusraw Qubādiyānī*, ed. M. Mīnuwī and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1353 Sh./1974; repr. 1380 Sh./2001), p. 581.
3. Even though his clear use of emanation is seen in the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, other examples can be seen in some of his other works such as *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*. See *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, ed. S. H. Nasr and M. Aminrazavi, *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, vol. 2 (New York, 2001), pp. 293 ff.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
5. See *ibid.*, pp. 156, 172, inter alia.
6. *The Critique of Practical Reason*, tr. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis, IN, 1956), p. 15.
7. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 165.
8. *The Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 18.
9. *Ibid.*
10. While examples are many, the following few poems are indicative of this pattern. See *Dīwān*, pp. 142, 149, 150, 153, 168, 206, 290, 302, 306, 377, 440, 451.
11. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, p. 535.
12. *The Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 21.
13. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 477.

14. *The Critique of Practical Reason*, tr. Beck, p. 19
15. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, p. 536.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 540.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 541.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 542.
19. Nāṣir-i Khusraw uses the word *mukarram* to literally mean 'generous' since Gabriel, who is the tenth intellect, is also identified as the giver of forms (*wāhib al-ṣuwar*).
20. *Ibid.*, p. 542. The second pearl refers to the Universal Soul (*nafs-i kull*), which the poet describes in the next section.
21. *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis W. Beck (Indiana, 1976), p. 29.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, p. 547.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 547.
25. *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 29.
26. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 119.
27. *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 28
28. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, p. 551.
29. *Ibid.*

The Institute of Ismaili Studies

The *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* and the Older Iranian Cosmogony

MOHSEN ZAKERI

Nāṣir-i Khusraw's (394–ca. 481/1003–1088) penchant for wise sayings is well known. He was very fond of using proverbial expressions and phrases of advice, and points out that his *Dīwān* abounds in precepts of wisdom (*pand*):

If you are willing to take this as advice, O Sir,
 His poetry book will be a Book of Advice for you.
Gar bi pand andar raghat kunī, ay khwāja
pand nāma-st tu rā daftar-i 'ash'ār-ash. (Dīwān, 212:2)¹

Thus it was entirely appropriate that at a conference about Nāṣir held at Mashhad over thirty years ago, a participant named him the Advice-Giving Poet (*Shā'ir-i andarz-gū*).² Indeed, Nāṣir's *Dīwān* fits perfectly within the field of gnomic literature, being a book replete with moral and ethical instruction. Five hundred years ago, the literary critic Dawlatshāh Samarqandī (d. ca. 900/1494), in a clearly exaggerated assessment estimating that Nāṣir's *Dīwān* contained 30,000 verses, called them all philosophy and preaching (*ḥikmat wa maw'īza*).³ From Taqawī's critical edition of the *Dīwān*, containing roughly 11,000 verses, the Persian encyclopaedist Dihkhudā found a treasure house of wise proverbs and was able to extract about 1,000 proverbs for his famous collection of wisdom advice in Persian, *Amthāl wa ḥikam*. This significant feature of Nāṣir's poetry was a subject of study for Mahdī Muḥaqqiq, who first identified some 250 aphorisms (*ḥikam*) and another 250 proverbs (*amthāl*).⁴ However, a cursory reading of the *Dīwān* shows that the amount of *amthāl* and *ḥikam* in it can easily exceed 2,000 items; that is to say, slightly less than one-fifth of the entire edited volume. This is sufficient to establish Nāṣir in the annals of Persian literature as a major contributor of proverbs, over and above Firdawsī, Asadī, Nizāmī, Sa'dī and Mawlānā Rūmī.

Nāṣir's mind was a storehouse of proverbial lore. In his poetry, he favoured quips, diatribe and satire next to philosophical argumentation as the means of

winning converts to his cause. He used *amthāl* and *ḥikam* to make his lessons palpable, and sweetened the bitter taste of moral propagation with bonbons of witticism and words of wisdom.

Whence did he obtain all the literary gems with which he interlaced his poems? As Muḥaqqiq has shown, Nāṣir exploited both Persian and Arabic sources, naturally exercising his own taste and erudition upon them. Nāṣir himself passionately encourages the reading of the *Book of Persian Kings*, also known as the *Shāhnāma* (*Nāma-yi Shāhān-i 'Ajam, Dīwān*, 317:9; 352:26; 363:15), and claims to have read all of Kasrā's *Apophthegms* (*Tawqī'āt*),⁵ as well as the *'Ahd-nāmas* of Kaykāvūs and Nawdhar (*Dīwān*, 185:6). Moreover, he often cites ancient Persian kings and heroes (*Dīwān*, 228:12; 263:14; 317:10–12; 330:10), the legendary vizier and clairvoyant Buzurjmihr (*Dīwān*, 455:6), the Avesta and its commentaries (*Zand wa Pāzand, Dīwān*, 85:3; 89:26; 90:1, 21; 110:22; 122:20; 143:16; 466:18), Zoroastrian priests (*mawbadān, Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 530:15; 534:18, and the lower-level *hīrbads, Dīwān*, 112:13), as well as Zoroaster himself (*Dīwān*, 90:1; 143:16), as great sources of wisdom. Despite all these hints, in many cases it is very difficult, if not virtually impossible, to determine whether the poet appropriated aphorisms already in circulation or coined a particular phrase himself.

In this chapter, I take a close look at the content and structure of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's verse *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* (*Book of Enlightenment*). Both the published critical edition and a few manuscripts for comparison, including the Gotha, the Istanbul, and the Lālā Ismā'īl manuscripts, will be used.⁶ This *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* is a sententious moralising sequence of rhyming couplets, a form of Persian poetry known as a *mathnawī*, with a total of 550 or 592 verses, depending on which version is used. As it stands, the verse *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* actually comprises two distinct sections which, I suggest, are not related to one another. These two sections are the *Naṣīhat-nāma* (*Admonitions*) and the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* proper.⁷

The first section of the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* is actually called *Naṣīhat-nāma* in the text itself (*Dīwān*, 512:2) and contains 162 verses (*Dīwān*, 511–517). It begins with an introduction (verses 1–34) in praise of God and a depiction of the present world as a temporary place of sojourn, good only for gathering provisions for the hereafter, along the lines of the motto 'what you sow in this world, you shall reap in the next'. The introduction is then followed by a long *naṣīhat* or admonitory section (verses 35–162), which consists mainly of *ḥikam* (maxims) exhorting readers to abandon their vain ways of life, with closing remarks clearly signifying its conclusion. Of the 162 verses at least 120 are adages. There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of this unit as a work by Nāṣir, given that the maxims it includes are commonplace and many of their parallels can be documented also in his *Dīwān*.⁸ Nonetheless, its attachment at this particular place as a proem to the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* still remains a puzzle, for in fact it is not present in most manuscripts.⁹

The second text, the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* proper, is an ethico-philosophical and cosmographical tractate, consisting of 430 verses, of which only some 80 verses are proverbs or proverbial sayings. The poet's intention in composing his work – which he explained as something like a revelation occurring to him in a dream during which he experienced a spiritual metamorphosis¹⁰ – was to help the reader to know himself and forsake the concerns of earthly life, the transient world of darkness, and concentrate instead on the requirements of the permanent residence, the heavenly world, the world of eternal light (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 540:6). Until man fathoms his own universe, he cannot understand God. 'Know thyself' was still as applicable in Nāṣir's day as when the famous, immortal and mystic utterance was inscribed on the portal of the temple at Delphi. According to the poem, knowing oneself is the golden key to true wisdom, which prepares the soul for its higher life and brighter destiny (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 528:7–18). It is the still, small voice of the awakened soul that purges the conscience from suffering, and the spiritual body from earthly dross. It is wisdom that treasures not the corrupting, delusive wealth of the world, nor the ephemeral powers of Mammon (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 535–536). Thence, *The Book of Enlightenment* presents itself as a means of finding the way of gradual purification of the soul, freeing it from its primordial defect; it shows the path to the city of light and Eternal Bliss (*dār-i mulk-i rawshanā'ī*) (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 528:1).¹¹

Contested authorship of the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*

As it stands, the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* generates further puzzles. Not only is there on this path of illumination no clear articulation of a doctrine of salvation or a theory of the creation of the universe, but neither has a scholarly consensus been reached on the date of compilation for the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, nor its relationship with a prose booklet of the same title and of similar content known also as *Shish faṣl* (*Six Chapters*).¹² These and several other unsolved issues have caused some critics to even throw doubt on Nāṣir's authorship, unreasonably I think. With the exception of a few evident interpolations, the poetry is definitely that of Nāṣir and there is little that contradicts his frame of thought. No doubt the text has been greatly tampered with, especially in its second section, where a number of inserted verses in the edited version are too striking to be missed by a conscientious reader (e.g. *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 523:16, which is visibly out of place and can be only a cynical commentary on the verses it follows).¹³ A few other lines require intimate familiarity with Nāṣir's cosmogony to be recognised as intruders (e.g. *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 520:15; 537:5–11; 542:16). To be sure, some verses are truly weak and, due to idiomatic and orthographic errors, completely confused (e.g. *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 524:5–7).

The reasons for these blunders and discrepancies should be looked for, first of all, in the popularity of the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, which has led it to be frequently and

uncritically copied, as the existing manuscripts testify.¹⁴ The frequent copying and variations may perhaps also be due to the compactness of the work and the elusiveness of its enigmatic content. The main section is a technical tract, and thus basically unsuitable for versification. Yet, nevertheless, it has been forced into a poetic structure, and so one cannot expect poetic excellence here. To these points should be added the fact of faulty copies and versions, which have left many verses void of any sense or poetic value. A text cannot be considered as properly established before every version of it that exists has been investigated.

Some modern commentators have interpreted the existence of a prose and a verse version of the *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* by the same author as cause for suspicion. Why should an author repeat himself twice in this way, they ask? The answer is provided by the poet himself. While explaining the circumstances leading to the writing of the verse *Rawshanāʾī-nāma*, Nāṣir speaks of his dreamlike journey to the eternal 'city of heart' where he woke up 'from the sleep of negligence'. Wishing to awaken others 'from the slumber of ignorance,' and ensure the success of his message, he decided to present the result of this experience both in prose and verse (*Rawshanāʾī-nāma* 541:1). In the Gotha manuscript edited by Ethé, the text of the verse *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* follows immediately that of the prose *Shish faṣl* and both are introduced as Nāṣir's works. The prose version is a slightly longer exposition of the same concept. Nāṣir himself calls this prose work *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* too and divides its contents into six chapters.¹⁵ Perhaps only at some later point was the title *Shish faṣl* adopted to make a distinction between the prose and verse versions. The two texts have been written independently and do not always correspond, but share the same title as well as subject matter. Nāṣir follows the same structure and line of argument in greater detail in his *Jāmiʿ al-ḥikmatayn* and its epitome, the *Risāla*.¹⁶ Unique content also connects these works: a reference to the return of Jesus to his Father recurs in all these. In the verse *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* (*Rawshanāʾī-nāma* 519:16–17) we are told that the simple announcement by Jesus of his return to his Father was taken literally and misunderstood by his followers who thought he claimed to be the Son of God.¹⁷ The poet-author is not only informed of the legend of the needle of Jesus (*sūzan-i ʿĪsā*; *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* 519:16–17; *Risāla* 570:12), but he is also familiar with the fabulous Simurgh (*Rawshanāʾī-nāma* 529:8–9; *Dīwān*, 318:14, *Jāmiʿ al-ḥikmatayn*, 180). In addition to all these textual consistencies and correspondences, Dawlatshāh Samarqandī includes the versified *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* among Nāṣir's works.¹⁸ Ḥamd Allāh Mustawfī Qazwīnī calls Nāṣir a *ghālī Shīʿī* and adds: 'The *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* in verse is one of his compositions.'¹⁹

The arguments *ex silencio*, focusing on the fact that this or that topic or concept is missing from the *Rawshanāʾī-nāma*, should carry little weight in this case, because the poet never claimed to have included everything that concerns his topic in this short tract. Thus Jalāl Badakhchānī's misgiving, expressed at the Conference, that the concept of Resurrection is not fully developed here, is unwarranted. Nasrollah

Pourjavady's speculation that the appearance of the phrase *zabān-i ḥāl* in the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* suggests a later date for its composition is also of no avail.²⁰ We find comparable similes in a variety of forms in Nāṣir's *Dīwān* (*zabān-i bī-zabānī*, *Dīwān*, 467:1; *sukhan-i bī-āwāz*, *Dīwān*, 424:9). Related to these are *chashm-i bīnā* (*Dīwān*, 440:2), *chashm-i nihānbīn* (*Dīwān*, 4:18), *chashm-i darūn*, *chashm-i dīl* (*Dīwān*, 188:7–8; 441:3; 454:1; 511:13), *chashm-i ma'nī* (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 523:9); *chashm-i jān* (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 517:20). Nāṣir's younger contemporary, 'Umar Khayyām, employs the phrase *zabān-i ḥāl* several times in his *rubā'īyyāt*. For Suhrawardī too, it is Love that speaks with *zabān-i ḥāl*.²¹ And already in the Avesta we read 'See with the flaming mind, *manah*' (*Yashts* 30.2).

To be sure, there are a few points in some versions of the poem which stand in categorical opposition to Nāṣir's beliefs, but these are lacking in several of our manuscripts. Some interpolated verses appear in contexts where they clearly do not belong. Perhaps this disparity has encouraged certain copyists to move them to other sections of the poem, without, however, succeeding in removing the problems caused by these displacements. Nāṣir's poetic name (*nomen professionis*) *Hujjat*, frequently used in his *Dīwān*, appears several times here (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 521:2, 522:1, 523:16, 538:9). Moreover, he composed this long *qaṣīda* in his place of refuge, Yumgān (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 521:2). To disqualify Nāṣir as the author of the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, one has to do more damage to the text by eliminating verses bearing his nickname and his distinctive ideas than by admitting his penmanship. The fact that about one-fifth of the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* consists of proverbs and aphorisms by itself lends good support to the argument for Nāṣir's authorship. The addition of the *Naṣīhat-nāma* here might have been a conscious effort by Nāṣir himself to frame his cosmogony in a more palpable guise.

Nāṣir's literary heritage is ideological, and hence exposed to attacks from hostile directions. From soon after his death, and perhaps even before, obscure verses were fathered on him to throw doubt on his intentions. Eliminating a few such disquieting verses from the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* and relying mainly on the structure of the poem and its numerous variants, it becomes consistent and fully in harmony with his teachings elsewhere. Some of the ideas expressed in the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* appear in Nāṣir's *Zād al-musāfirīn* and *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* (finished in 462/1075) almost word for word, suggesting perhaps that they were written not so far apart in time. The same ideas can be found also in his *Dīwān*. In terms of general concepts, the uses of nomenclature and rare poetic vocabulary, the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* and the *Dīwān* are very close. They share many proverbs and maxims. Some inconsistencies of thought in the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* appear also in his *Dīwān*. In the course of time he might have improved his ideas and reduced the weak points in them. 'Alī Dashtī has pointed out several such disturbing moments in his survey of Nāṣir's works.²² The points outlined above should together be more than sufficient to remove any remaining doubts about Nāṣir's authorship of the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*.

The content of the *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* and its sources

Writing about the prose *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* (*Shish faṣḥ*), Alice C. Hunsberger summarises its content thus: 'It presents a succinct version of the Fatimid Ismaili doctrine of creation, beginning with the concept of unity (*tawḥīd*), continuing through the succeeding Neoplatonic hypostases of Intellect, Soul and Nature, and ending with a discussion of human salvation and how it relates to the hypostases.'²³ This characterisation is true also of the verse *Rawshanāʾī-nāma*.

The *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* contains an exposition of a number of Ismaili doctrines about the nature of the world and creatures, from the primal creation until the end. It is a concise systematic treatise on the cosmogonic-philosophical doctrines of Ismailism. For Nāṣir, God is beyond estimation, intellection or understanding. The intellect (Ar. *ʿaql*, Pers. *khirad*), being phenomenal, is bewildered (*ḥayrān*) when contemplating Him (*Rawshanāʾī-nāma* 517–519). Intellect (*ʿaql-i kull*), residing in the highest sphere and being the highest part of the Soul, has charge of or emanates the Soul and through it puts everything in motion. Hence, it is the force behind the obligatory movement of all the spheres and stars. In other words, it is the innate Love of the Soul for The One and the desire to return to Him that has put the universe in motion. This idea, expressed frequently in Islamic mystic literature as 'desire' (*shawq*), is found here in the *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* (520:12). Thus, Ethé (p. 647) speaks of the Shiʿi-Sufi character of the poem. Nāṣir and the Sufis drew on the same fount of older Iranian-Muslim gnostic ideas.

The *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* presents an adumbration of the old Iranian cosmogonic views expounded in the late Sasanian Pahlavi books such as the *Bundahishn* (*The Primal Creation*).²⁴ Similarities between the two systems are neither superficial nor accidental; there are many word-for-word translations, to the extent that even the corrupted Persian text can be greatly improved by taking the Pahlavi versions of the Iranian cosmogonic doctrine into consideration.

We need only imagine an early Persian Muslim scholar happening upon a pre-Islamic text like the *Bundahishn*, which contains a detailed cosmogony and cosmography based on Mazdean scriptures as well as material compatible with the basics of a Muslim understanding to which he adheres, and then deciding to adopt it as part of his Islamic belief structure. What would he then do? It is clear that in order to adopt such a text he would obliterate obvious traces of the old religion as much as possible; then he would shorten the original, as being too detailed and cumbersome; and along the way he would add cosmetic touches to reflect his own personal morals and vision. With this in mind, it is noteworthy that the cosmogony outlined in the *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* matches the cosmogony in the early chapters of the *Bundahishn* (I, Ia, II, Va, Vb, VI).²⁵ This Mazdean cosmogony is also to be found in several other Pahlavi texts such as the *Dēnkart*,²⁶ *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* ('Selections of Zādspram'), *Ardā Wirāz nāmag*,²⁷ and *Mēnōg ī xrad* (= *Mainyo-i-khrad*, ed. E. W. West, London 1871, 8:1–30) among others, but the *Bundahishn*

provides the most extensive account. Whether Nāṣir had recourse to any of these Pahlavi texts directly is rather unlikely, for the maturity and sharpness of the Arabic-Persian technical jargon he uses for some complex cosmogonical concepts suggest that the underlying material had been long been taken up in Arabic. It is possible that Nāṣir had received this doctrine from the teachings of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (died soon after 361/971), though still older interpreters of the material are conceivable too.

In both Persian and Arabic literature prior to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the title *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* is found several times. In Persian, E. W. West introduced two people as authors of a *Roshan-nipik* (*Book of Light*) in Pahlavi literature. One is unidentified; the other is Roshnā or Roshan, son of the famous Zoroastrian priest Ādurfarnbag [= Ādur-Farrbay ī Farroxxādān], the first collector of the *Dēnkart* early in the third century AH (ninth century CE).²⁸ Nothing more specific is known about these authors and their works. An Arabic *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* was prepared by the prolific Persian author and translator from Middle Persian Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. 'Ubayda al-Rayḥānī (d. 219/834). A secretary of the first rank to the 'Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn, al-Rayḥānī followed the example of Ibn al-Muqaffa' in his literary pursuits, was accused of dualism (*zandaqa*), and posthumously became increasingly popular among the Dahrīs in Khurāsān throughout the fourth to fifth/tenth to eleventh centuries.²⁹ Recently I have discovered one of his many lost works entitled *Jawāhir al-kilam wa-farā'id al-ḥikam* (*The Jewels of Speech and the Pearls of Wisdom*), which I have edited, translated and written a commentary on.³⁰ *Jawāhir al-kilam* consists of over 2,000 proverbs and concise wise sayings compiled by the author towards the end of his life. He also incorporated into this work material derived from his own earlier publications including his own lost *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*. Interestingly enough, most of the combined 200 or so maxims of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, including its *Naṣīhat-nāma*, have Arabic parallels or equivalents in this collection, suggesting that Nāṣir might have made use of it in these as well as in his *Dīwān*. This apparent reliance of Nāṣir on al-Rayḥānī as a source for moral reflections lends support to the idea that he might have even utilised al-Rayḥānī's *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* for versifying his.

With regard to the suggested affinity between Nāṣir's *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* and the older Pahlavi sources it must be said that on the surface the disparities between them are such that one may at first sight not readily notice a connection between the two. One fruitful clue is found in the Zoroastrian doctrine of the Supreme Heptads (Septenary), the notion of the Ameshāspandās, the seven 'Holy Immortals', in Nāṣir's words: *haft nūr-i awwalī azalī* ('the seven primal eternal lights', *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, 109), who hypostatise aspects of God's own nature, and which are so central to Zoroastrian moral theology as well as to that of Nāṣir.³¹

Being formless and transcendent, the God of goodness, Ahura Mazdā (Avestan) or Ohrmazd (Pahlavi) is personified through His various 'Rays' or 'Manifestations',

called *Amesha-Spentas*, the 'Bounteous Eternals', who in later Zoroastrian theology, correspond roughly to the Archangels of Judaism and Christianity.³² In certain *Yashts* (13.82–83; 19.15–18), all seven are equal, speak the same, and act the same. They are God's *personae* and symbolise personified virtues. In the *Bundahishn* as well as in other Pahlavi texts (e.g. *Mēnōg ī xrad*, 42:10–12, 43.1–14) the evil Ahriman and the *Dēvs* are set in opposition to Ohrmazd and the Ameshāspands.³³

The changing number of the Amesha-Spentas/Ameshāspands and their counterparts the *Dēvs* from seven to six (as found in different sources) depends on whether Ahura and Ahriman are included or not (this of course having philosophical repercussions for the early Zoroastrian jurists). Ahura is occasionally represented by his Holy Spirit, Spenta Mainyu. The six Ameshāspands are then divided into two groups (*Yasna* 39.3), abstractions of the great Ahura: Vohu Manah (Av.) [= Wahman (Pah.), Bahman (NP)] 'Best Thought', Aša Vahištā [Arta Vahishta, Ardī- (urdi-)bīhisht] 'Best Truth', and Xšathra [Shahrivar] 'Best Deed' formed the masculine aspect;³⁴ and Spandārmadh [Isfand] 'Growth', Khurdād 'Health' and Amurdād 'Immortality', the feminine aspect.³⁵ In the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, the first group, the fatherly aspect of Ahura, becomes *Ādam-i ma'nī* (Spiritual Adam) or '*Aql-i kull* (Universal Intellect, which is also the omnipotent universe, from which Gabriel descends); and the motherly aspect becomes *Ḥawwā-yi ma'nī* (Spiritual Eve) or *Nafs-i kull* (the Universal Soul) (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 519:2–3, 10–11). Corresponding to *Ādam-i ma'nī* and *Ḥawwā-yi ma'nī*, the prose *Shish faṣl* (p. 21) says 'Aql-i kull is like a man, and Nafs-i kull is like a woman'.

Thus in the *Bundahishn* (*Greater Bundahishn*, I.59) Ohrmazd's role in creation is like that of father and mother. This notion is based on the *Yasna* text (45.4) where Ahura Mazdā is the 'Originator' of Vohu Manah and of Aša (*Yasna* 31.8), and the 'Father' of Vohu Manah (*Yasna* 31.8, 45.4) and of Aša (*Yasna* 44.3; 47.2). Nāšir says: 'Consider the Intellect as father, and the Soul as mother' (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 529:14). According to the *Bundahishn* and *Mēnōg ī xrad* (8:7–9) Ohrmazd emanated them 'from his own light (*az hān ī xwēš rōšnīh*),' whereas the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* (3.3–7) compares their emanation to the lighting of a torch from a torch.³⁶ In the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* (519:8) this becomes: 'One was born from the other.' Whereas in the *Bundahishn* (*Greater Bundahishn* I. 53) Bahman is the first of the great Ameshāspands, Nāšir's '*Aql-i kull* is the first of the emanated beings (*nukhust az āfarīnish bar guzīda*, *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 519:6),³⁷ and while Bahman is the agent through whom Ahura emanated the world (i.e. he is the true creative power of God), Nāšir makes him '*illat awlā* 'Primal Cause'.

In Islam and other monotheistic religions, Gabriel (Jibrīl = Jadd = Bakht) is the intermediary between Almighty God and his prophets (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 519:4); Bahman plays the same role for Zoroastrianism. The technical term for his function as the deputy to Ohrmazd in the creation of the world according to the *Bundahishn* (*Greater Bundahishn*, XXVI.12;) is *andīmāngar* (*handēmāngarih*),

which is rendered in the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* as God's Pen and Messenger-Prophet (*khāma wa rasūl-i yazdān*; *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 519:5; and in the *Risāla*, *Dīwān*, 566 as *qalam-i khudā'ī* (Divine Pen) and *Dīwān*, 567:5 as *nafs-i kull* as *khatt-i khudā'ī* (the Divine Line on which the Pen writes). Moreover, Bahman's dwelling *Vohumangāh* (*garōdmān*, *garzmān*, 'the highest heaven') has become the throne of God, 'arsh-i Ilāh (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 519:2).

Following this comparative procedure, we may be in a position to make better choices from the variants in the manuscripts of the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, and improve some of the readings in the poem: for example, read *ajrām-i mujassam* (corporeal bodies), not *arwāh-i mujassam* (incarnate spirits) (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 520:2) and *charkh-i falā'ik* (the wheel of the heavens), not *jam'-i malā'ik* (the angelic congregation) (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 519:12), and so on.

Emanation is a central component in the cosmology of certain religious or philosophical belief systems claiming that the supreme god did not create the physical universe, but rather *emanated* lower spiritual beings who carried out the actual work of creation. This is what we find in Nāšir's gnostic view of emanation (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 518:1–26), which observes a distinction between *mubdī'* 'Originator' and both *šāni'* 'Creator' (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 520:12; *Dīwān*, 189:16) and *khāliq* 'Creator' (*Dīwān*, 219:12).³⁸ That is, the Originator creates out of nothing, while the Creator 'makes' the world out of something. An interesting feature here is the relative abundance of Middle Persian technical terms. The Master Creator (*Šāni'*) is *Ustād*, the 'artisan', or the First Craftsman (as in Plato), the demiurge (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 519:10; 522:7), which is in fact equivalent with Bahman (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 519:5, 14; 520:10), as opposed to terms which signal the Originator: *Parwardgār* (= *mubdī'*; *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 518:26, 529:7) or *Kirdgār* (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 517:17; *Dīwān*, 12, 80, 154), and *Khudāwand* (*Dīwān*, 26, 416).³⁹

After his summary treatment of the Supreme Heptads in their combined masculine and feminine forms as well as the workings of the stars, zodiacal signs and the seven planets (*aflāk wa kawākib* = *rawshanān*, *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 520–521), Nāšir concentrates (*Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 526–528) on man, who combines all the heavenly elements in himself. Man and the planets are both products of the same essence. He is built of the elemental light and darkness, he is the microcosm (*Ar.*, 'ālam-i *ṣughrā*; MP, *gēhān kōdak*) and in himself reflects the macrocosm ('ālam-i *kubrā*, *gēhān wuzurg*, *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 527:3; *Dīwān*, 356, 377). Nāšir uses also 'ālam-i *khurd*, 'ālam-i *buzurg*; *Dīwān*, 330:22 for microcosm and macrocosm). Broadly speaking, in Zoroastrian mythological and cosmographical descriptions, the world is divided into three spheres: the abode of Ahura Mazdā, *asar rōšnēh* or *anagr-rōšnēh* 'the Endless Light' (*Denkart* 604. 21), which is the world of eternal light above (*rawshanī-i azalī*, *gēhān-i rawshanī*, *furūgh-i jāwīdān*); the home of Ahri-man, which is the world of eternal darkness below (*gēhān-i tārikī*, *tiragī*); and the vacuum or space in between (*tuhīgī* = *vayū*, or *vāy*), the material world in which the

struggle between light and dark, Good and Evil unfolds. Nāṣir's goal in *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* is to lead man through the material world to the everlasting city of light.

As in the antique Mithraic literature still in the *Bundahishn*, the souls of men descend from the realm of light, the empyrean heaven, to the material world, to the bodies prepared for them, in seven stages (*star pāyag*), passing through the seven planets, receiving from each one of them their passions and attributes. When a man dies after a righteous and 'good life', his soul ascends to its permanent abode passing again through the same seven stages in a reverse order, giving up its earthly passions, leaving at each planet a part of its lower humanity until, as pure spirit, it stands before the brilliant majesty of God. Sinners, after death, are dragged off to hell. Frequent references in classical Persian literature to the gates of heaven, mention both the gate from which the soul descends, that is the moon, and the gate through which it ascends, that is the sun. This heavenly passage is vividly described by the Zoroastrian priest Ardāvīrāf (Ardā Wirāz) in his surreal journey through hell and the afterlife (here the stations of the stars, the moon and the sun are linked to *humat*, 'the place of good thought'; *hūxt*, 'the place of good words'; and *huwašt*, 'the place of good deeds',⁴⁰ and each stage increases in light as he climbs all the way to the Ever Blissful Paradise (*rōšn garōdmān hamāg xwārīh*).⁴¹ Nāṣir seems to have been fascinated by this construction, not just because the sacred number seven lies behind it all. He details the individual soul's return stage by stage (*manzil bi-manzil*, *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* 523–524). Astronomical and astrological jargon related to the seven stages of descent and ascent is prevalent in the *Dīwān*. His main wish is to rise to the seventh heaven (*charkh-i haftum*, *Dīwān*, 6:20). This view of the universe functions as a uniting thread throughout Nāṣir's entire literary production, and understanding it would make the appreciation of many of his elusive poems easier and more enjoyable.

To this particular ancient vision of the universe just outlined, it can be argued we owe, among others, Ardā Wirāz' visit to the seven stations of heaven and hell, the Islamic legends about Muḥammad's Ascent to Heaven (*Mī'rāj*), the allegorical story known as Sūzan-i 'Īsā (the needle of Jesus),⁴² the seven stages of initiation of the *futuwwa* (chivalric circles), the seven trials of Rostam, and last but not least, 'Aṭṭār's Seven Valleys of Love in his tale of the thirty birds and their search for the Simurgh. It is exactly these seven stages that Nāṣir is alluding to with metaphors and allegories in his long biographical *qaṣīda* (*Dīwān*, 172–177), his spiritual journey to Cairo, the City of Light, which was translated, but not fully understood by W. Ivanow.⁴³ In that poem, Nāṣir's search for answers to the metaphysical and ethical questions tormenting his mind leads him to study the wisdom of seven nations (Pārsī [Persian], Tāzī [Arab], Hindu, Turk, Sindī, Roman [Christian], Hebrew),⁴⁴ to study seven schools of law and of thought (Shāfi'ī, Mālīkī, Ḥanafī, Manicheism, Ṣab'ism, Dahris, Philosophy) and, while listening to the 'Music of the Spheres', to travel by seven means in seven regions of the world (by water [*daryā*], air [*bālā*], by

stationary movement [*raftan-i bī-rāh*], through mountains, sand or desert, rivers, and valleys). In so doing, he leaves behind the seven stations of the ladder of the seven heavens (*haft āsmān*). On the way, he takes rest on or under: (1) the sky (*sang* which is *āsmān*), (2) clouds (*abr*), (3) water (next to the fish=Pisces, *māhī*, *māhīg*), (4) close to *du-paykar* (twins = Gemini), (5) a land where the water is like marble, i.e. the moon, (6) a world where the earth is like *akhgar*, i.e. the sun, until (7) he finally reaches the City of Light (*bihisht*, *riḍwān*, *Dīwān*, 173–174), which is identical to the seventh heaven (*charkh-i haftum*, *Dīwān*, 6:20).⁴⁵

Thus, it can be argued that, by drawing upon the older Iranian cosmogonies, Nāṣir-i Khusraw had traversed and successfully completed the Seven Valleys of Love much earlier than ‘Aṭṭār!

Notes

1. For this chapter, I use the Taqawī edition of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s *Dīwān*; with references indicated as: *Dīwān* or *Rawshanā’ī-nāma*, then page and line in this edition. *Dīwān-i ash’ār Ḥakīm Abū Mu’in Ḥamid al-Dīn Nāṣir ibn Khusraw Qubādiyānī* (including the *Rawshanā’ī-nāma*, *Sa’ādat-nāma* and the *Risāla*), ed. Sayyid Naṣr Allāh Taqawī, re-issued by Mahdi Suhaylī (1st ed., Tehran, 1335 Sh./1956).

2. Muḥammad Mahdī Ruknī, ‘Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Shā’ir-i andarz-gū’, in *Yād-nāma-yi Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (Mashhad, 1355 Sh./1976), pp. 215–233. Here I take the opportunity to thank Alice C. Hunsberger who first brought this paper to my attention and kindly sent me a copy of it.

3. Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tadhkira al-shu‘arā’*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abbāsī (Tehran, 1337 Sh./1958), p. 73.

4. Mahdī Muḥaqqiq, *Tahlīl-i ash’ār-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (Tehran, 1344 Sh./1965), pp. 29–118, 283–316.

5. On this see M. Zakeri, ‘Some Early Persian Apophthegmata (*tawqī’āt*) in Arabic Transmission’, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* (Studies in Honour of Shaul Shaked), 27 (2002), pp. 283–304.

6. The *Rawshanā’ī-nāma* is similar in composition to a spurious 300-verse *mathnawī* of inferior value called *Sa’ādat-nāma*, wrongly attributed to Nāṣir and included in Taqawī’s edition of his *Dīwān*. On this see Edmond Fagnan, ‘Le livre de la félicité, par Nāṣir ed-Din ben Khosrou’, *ZDMG*, 34 (1880), pp. 643–674; and a commentary on this by Franz Teufel, *ZDMG*, 36 (1882), pp. 106–114; G. M. Wickens, ‘Sa’adat-nameh Attributed to Nasir Khusraw’, *The Islamic Quarterly*, 2 (1955), pp. 117–132, 206–221. It has been established that the *Sa’ādat-nāma* is in fact by one Nāṣir-i Khusraw al-Iṣfahānī who died in 735/1334, or 753/1352.

7. Hermann Ethé, who first edited and translated these sections into German, considered both pieces as belonging to the same work. See his ‘Nāṣir Chusrau’s Rūṣānānāma oder Buch der Erleuchtung, in Text und Uebersetzung, nebst Noten und kritisch-biographischen Appendix’, *ZDMG*, 33 (1879), pp. 645–665; 34 (1880), pp. 428–464, 617–642. For comments on this see Franz Teufel, ‘Zu Nāṣir Chusrau’s Rūṣānānāma’, *ZDMG*, 36 (1882), pp. 96–106.

8. A dominant feature in Nāṣir’s work is his constant return to the same basic concepts to reiterate them in ever new forms. The beaten track was better for him than examining fresh fields (D. 192:16).

9. The first section is available in two versions, but is missing in most manuscripts. Only the Gotha Codex no. 6 ff. 104b–125 has it in full and from there it has found its way into other editions. In some ways it could be considered as a recast of the maxims in the body of the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*.

10. This apparently gives a hint of Nāṣir's spiritual evolution and active conversion to Ismailism, a spiritual event about which he speaks in several of his works. He wakes up from the lethargy of unconsciousness to learn the hidden significance of the exoteric religion.

11. On another poem of the same nature and title see Iftikhār al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Naṣr Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Dāmghānī's [d. 775/1373] '*Rawshanā'ī-nāma-i Dāmghānī, Nāmawārih Dr. Maḥmūd Afshār*, 8 (1373 Sh./1994), pp. 4300–4325. This consists of 516 verses composed clearly in imitation of Nāṣir, though it shows also some fundamental differences.

12. Wladimir Ivanow, *Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Ismailism* (Bombay, 1948), pp. 51–52, discusses the content of the *Shish faṣl* and the question of its authorship, and suggests that it is a prose version of the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*.

13. The edited verse reads: '*Aḡar da'wī kunam wa-Allāh ki jāyast / ḥaqīqat Nāṣir-i Khusraw khudā yast!*' This is so obviously out of place and foreign to Nāṣir that does not even deserve a comment, but by itself it is a good example of the kinds of interpolations we are facing. A devoted reader, impressed by what he had just read, saw fit to add this blasphemous comment on it. The Gotha, Istanbul, and Lālā Ismā'īl manuscripts do not have this line.

14. For a list of manuscripts, editions and translations, see Ismail K. Poonawala, *Bibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature* (Malibu, CA, 1977), pp. 117–118; and Wladimir Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey* (Tehran, 1963), n. 736.

15. Wladimir Ivanow, *Six Chapters, or Shish Faṣl, also called Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, Persian text, edited and translated into English (Leiden, 1949).

16. *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* [= JH], ed. H. Corbin and M. Mu'īn (Tehran and Paris, 1953).

17. Cf. D. 243, 414; JH, p. 282; *Risāla*, p. 570; *Shish faṣl*, pp. 25–26; Corbin and Mu'īn, ed., JH, p. 84. The two verses of *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* related to this episode are misplaced and belong probably to a later section after verse 529:13, or as in JH, somewhere on page 525.

18. *Tadhkira al-shu'arā'*, p. 73.

19. *Tārikh-i guzīda*, ed. E. Browne (London, 1910), p. 826.

20. See N. Pourjavady's chapter in this volume, pp. 133–145.

21. Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā, *Mū'nis al-'ushshāq*, ed. O. Spies (Delhi, 1934), pp. 7, 37.

22. *Taṣwīrī az Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983), esp. pp. 257–278. See also Muḡtabā Minuvī, '*Rawshanā'ī-nāma-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw wa Rawshanā'ī nāma-i manzūm-i mansūb bi-ū*', in *Yād-nāma-yi Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (Mashhad, 1355 Sh./1976); Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Sajjādī, '*Taḥqīq dar Rawshanā'ī-nāma-yi Nāṣir-i Khusraw*', *ibid.*, pp. 263–272.

23. *Nasir Khusraw, The Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller and Philosopher* (London, 2000), p. 15.

24. *Zand-Akasiḥ. Iranian or Greater Bundahishn*, translit. and tr. by Behramgore Tehmuras Anklesaria (Bombay, 1956). This is for the most part a late Sasanian work, edited by Farrbay with additional material in the beginning of the third/ninth century. D. Neil McKenzie, '*Bundahišn*', *Elr*, vol. 2, pp. 547–551. From here on, *Bundahishn* = *BD*.

25. For studies of these chapters consult: H. S. Nyberg, '*Questions de cosmogonie et de cosmologie mazdéennes*', *JA*, 214 (1927), pp. 193–310 (study of ch. I on pp. 207–237); W. B. Henning, '*An astronomical chapter of the Bundahishn*', *JRAS* (1942), pp. 229–248 (study of ch. 2); D. Neil MacKenzie, '*Zoroastrian astrology in the Bundahišn*', *BSOAS*, 27 (1964), pp.

511–529 (study of ch. 5); R. Reitzenstein and Hans Heinrich Schaeder, *Studien zum antiken Synkretismus aus Iran und Griechenland* (Leipzig, 1926), esp. pp. 214–233 (related texts from BD and Zādspram).

26. *The Complete Text of the Pahlavi Dinkard*, ed. D. M. Madan (Bombay, 1911), pp. 415–416; Pierre Jean de Menasce, ‘Un chapitre cosmogonique du Dēnkart’, *Pratidānam. Indian, Iranian, and Indo-European Studies Presented to Franciscus Bernardus Jacobus Kuiper on His Sixtieth Birthday* (The Hague, 1968), pp. 193–200.

27. *Ardā Wirāf Nāmag. The Iranian ‘Divine Commedia’*, ed. and tr. Fereyduṅ Vahman (London, 1986), pp. 96–101, 196–197.

28. E. W. West, *Sacred books of the East*, vol. 3 (Oxford, 1885), p. 169, and vol. 5, p. 244 n. 1. The term *rōsan* is frequently used in the Pahlavi translations of the Avesta.

29. See M. Zakeri, ‘Alī Ibn ‘Ubayda ar-Raiḥānī: A Forgotten Belletrist (*adīb*) and Pahlavi Translator’, *Oriens*, 34 (1994), pp. 76–102.

30. *Persian Wisdom in Arabic Garb. ‘Alī b. ‘Ubayda al-Rayḥānī (d. 219/834) and his Jawāhir al-kilam wa-farā’id al-ḥikam*, 2 vols (Leiden, 2007).

31. The literature on the Ameshāspandān is extensive. For a convenient overview and bibliography consult M. Boyce, ‘Ameša Spenta’, *EIr*, vol. 1, pp. 933–936.

32. The *haft sayyāriḥ* ‘seven planets’, which are the *haft khwān* ‘seven stations’ are rays or eternal lights of the *haft nūr-i awwalī azalī* = Ameshāspandān: *ibdā’*, *jawhar-i ‘aql*, and the pentarchic complex of ‘*aql, nafs, Jadd* (= *bakht* ‘personal fortune, Fortuna’ = Av. *xvarnah* > Pah. *xvarr*, NP *farr* for which the *huzwārish gaddēh*, Arabic *jadd*, is used), *Fath*, and *Khayāl* (*JH*, p. 109; Hāshim Raḡī, *Hikmat-i Khusrawānī*, Tehran, 1379 Sh./2000, p. 237).

33. This is already testified in the fourth century BCE, for it is reflected in Aristotle’s testimony, where he confronts Ariemānos with Oromazdes; see *EIr*, vol. 1, p. 670b.

34. In Hinduism, the concept of Trimurti (also called *the Hindu trinity*) holds that God has three aspects, which are only different forms of the same one God. The three aspects of God, or ‘Parabrahman’, or God’s *personae* are as Brahma (the Source/Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver/Indwelling-life) and Shiva (the Transformer – Destroyer/Creator).

35. Cf. H. Corbin, *Corps spirituel et terre céleste de l’Iran mazdéen à l’Iran shi’ite* (Paris, 1960), p. 30. A relatively detailed exposition of the Amesha Spentas, with their division to feminine and masculine deities, is given in the *Denkart* (DKM IV, pp. 415–416).

36. M. Boyce, ‘Ameša Spenta’, *EIr*, vol. 1, p. 934. The simile ‘like a torch from a torch’ reappears in Suhrawardī; see Ishkiwarī, *Mahbūb al-qulūb* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999), p. 358. It was Plotinus who first compared the process of emanation to the generation of light by the sun.

37. For this we are provided with the *ḥadīth*: ‘The first that God has created is Reason.’ (Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Shish faṣl*, p. 15; Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, ed. H. Corbin [Tehran and Paris, 1949], p. 22; Ibn Sinā, *Risāla dar ḥaqīqat wa kayfiyyat silsila-i mawjūdāt* [Tehran, 1331 Sh./1952], p. 13; Sh. Yahyā Suhrawardī, *Majmū‘a āthār-i Fārsī* [Tehran, 1349 Sh./1970], pp. 148, 268, 381. Here it is through Bahman that God rewards or punishes [cf. Y. 31.8].)

38. A similar distinction was made also by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’: ‘The Ikhwān carefully distinguish between the similar verbs *khalaqa* and *ṣana‘a* on the one hand and *abda‘a* and *ikh tara‘a* on the other. They reserve the first to indicate creation out of something else while the second merely referred to the presence of form in matter. The third and fourth, however, bore the connotation of creation *ex nihilo*.’ I. R. Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An*

Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity (Edinburgh, 1991), p. 118 n. 48; cites Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, pp. 472–473.

39. *Ustād* is also the term Nāṣir uses to speak of his spiritual leader, the Fatimid Imam at Cairo (D. 177:5).

40. See Philippe Gignoux, 'Thought, Word, and Deed. A Topic of Comparative Religion', *International Congress Proceedings* (Bombay, 1991), pp. 41–51. The three Commandments of the Zoroastrian Faith are: True conceived Thought (*Hu-mata*), True-spoken Word (*Hu-ukhta*), and true-performed Action (*Hu-varshata*). These three Commandments embody the aspects of the 'Father of the earth', represented by the heart (reflecting the duty of Vohu Manah), the head (Aša Vahišt), and the hand (hard work, the duty of Shahrivar 'the Lord of the Mineral Kingdom').

41. *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag*, pp. 96–101, 196–197; *Mēnōg ī xrad*, 2:145–149, 182; 7:9–12.

42. For a study of this motif in Persian literature see Mīr Jalāl al-Dīn Kazzāzī, 'Suzan-i 'Īsā', *Ayandah*, 13 (1987), pp. 46–53.

43. *Nāṣir-e Khosraw and Ismailism* (Bombay and Leiden, 1948), pp. 17–35; see also Corbin's introduction to *JH*, pp. 31–33.

44. Al-Mas'ūdi speaks of 'Seven ancient nations' (Persians, Chaldeans, Greeks, Egyptians, Turks, Indians, Chinese) who kept a certain body of wisdom in common. Seven sages from the seven great nations of antiquity, each excellent in a particular branch of science, met from time to time to discuss the transient character of states and religions, the nature of the world, the creation of mankind, and the end to which this life is directed (*al-Tanbīh wa'l-ishrāf*, Cairo, 1357/1938, pp. 84–85). The legend of the Seven Sages is old and of Mesopotamian origin. For a detailed discussion of this legend, see O. Barkowski, 'Sieben Weise', *Pauly-Wissowa Real-Encyclopädie*, tier 2, vol. 4, pp. 2242–2246; Erica Reiner, 'The Etiological myth of the 'Seven Sages'', *Orientalia*, 30 (1961), pp. 1–11.

45. References to zodiacal signs are poetic similes, and not always precise. These signs were divided, in harmony with qualities assigned to them on the basis of the four basic elements, into four groups: (1) Fire signs (*ātashī*): Aries, Leo, Sagittarius (*barra, shīr, kamān*), (2) Earth signs (*khākī*): Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn (*gāw, khūsha, buz*), (3) Air signs (*bādī*): Gemini, Libra, Aquarius (*du paykar, tarāzū, dalw = dul*), and (4) Water signs (*ābī*): Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces (*kharchang, kazhdum, māhī*).

III

Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Poetics

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Also a Poet

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There may be some advantage to looking at our subject from a great distance. In my case it comes easily, since I am a visitor among specialists.

One of the first things one notices, looking from a distance at Nāṣir-i Khusraw's career, is that famous dual role as poet and philosopher. In the Western world nowadays, we think of philosophy and poetry as separate skills, and indeed philosophers who write poetry are rare in our tradition. We visualise the way a poet thinks as fundamentally unlike the style of the philosopher. The focus on patterns of sound and organisation by emotive effects, a thematics of the subjective, is seen traditionally as the heart of the poetic process. The conceptual framework of philosophy, on the other hand, has no alternative but to trace a consistent series of ideas, in which each position can be connected with previous logical steps. Philosophy in every culture requires linguistic precision, and the same is true of poetry, but they are different kinds of precision. Proceeding from that starting place we might assume that the two are always at odds, that our philosopher-poets are bound to be exceptions. And it is commonly as exceptions that we encounter the overlap of genres. The tradition that Socrates began to compose poetry in prison, in the last days of his life, may or may not be true, but it expresses the antagonism of forms we expect. Thomas Aquinas is believed to be the author of at least one example of lyric poetry, 'Pange lingua gloriosi', a popular hymn which is still sung as part of the Catholic liturgy, but his reputation does not rest on it. One might make a better case for the importance of *Tarjumān al-ashwāq*, Ibn al-'Arabi's collection of mystical love poetry, if only because these poems set traditions in place which moulded the future of subsequent Sufi poetry, though not in Persian.

The most prominent counter-example is Lao-zi's *Dǎo dé jīng*, philosophy so concentrated and elegant it hardly seems like prose at all. Reading it, we are likely to ask what is peculiar about the society from which it emerged that allowed one person to perform philosophy so poetically, to play both roles, combining the two forms of discourse so completely. The great European example of generic overlap

is Lucretius' *De Rerum Naturae*, famous both as a substantial work of philosophy, one of the most thorough manifestos of scepticism, and as a poem of epic scope.

But as the exceptions crowd in on us, in the careers of major philosophers, we may begin to feel that poetry and philosophy are not necessarily antagonistic after all. There may be cultures in which the two appear together, where they grow out of the same training. Perhaps we should think of poetry as a skill which was once widespread and has since shrunk to a specialised discourse, a victim of that evolving division of labour which has afflicted the European world from the Renaissance onwards. With Dante as the towering European example – the greatest poet of the Christian Middle Ages and also a rigorous, consistent and intellectually powerful spokesman for the moral philosophy of Aquinas – we could trace a whole series of later poets whose commitment to philosophy was less than his but still formidable. In the Anglophone tradition we might start with the unrelenting conceptual intelligence of Edmund Spenser in the late 1500s and continue with his successor John Milton in the next century. I would even prolong that tradition into the late eighteenth century with the poetry of William Blake, tracing a dissenting tradition of great poets whose peculiarity is their philosophical intensity. Spenser and Milton will never appear in histories of philosophy, but they are both consistent spokesmen for logical positions, both deeply immersed in the philosophy of their day. And since rhetoric is classed as a branch of philosophy among the Muslims, studies of the medieval, Metaphysical and Elizabethan poets can shed light on the poetics of Nāṣir-i Khusraw as well.¹

If I were setting up explicit, extended comparisons between Nāṣir-i Khusraw and a western poet it is Spenser I would suggest. This chapter is not about that comparison, but I would like to suggest why Spenser and Nāṣir-i Khusraw might mutually illuminate one another. Though Spenser is best known for a long narrative poem, his *Faerie Queene*, there are numerous incidental poems and poetic experiments that exemplify the aesthetic exuberance of his historical moment, early in the Elizabethan period (1558–1603). There is a sense of persistence as a poet, of variation around familiar forms (as in his sonnet sequences and pastorals), of constant invention, which reminds one of leafing through Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān*. And above all there is a repertoire of themes and tropes which allow comparison of specific lines.

There is a trope in which the poet opens a poem by looking at the sky, and it is so nearly universal that we could find examples in poets of every tradition. In Persian it is widely distributed. There is a well-known quatrain attributed to 'Umar Khayyām which opens with it, though it is changed enough in FitzGerald's translation to be unrecognisable. FitzGerald: 'We are no other than a moving row/of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go'. In Persian it begins

Īn charkh-i falak ki mā dar ū ḥayrānīm
*Fānūs-i khiyāl az ū mithālī dānīm...*²

This wheel of the sky, inside of which we are amazed,
think of it as a magic lantern ...

It is the word *ḥayrān* that makes the first half-line distinctive. That we are underneath or inside the sky and that it turns like a wheel is a commonplace, but to add that it amazes us is both logical (the cosmos is a bit surprising) and not frequently acknowledged. The second half-line, with its reversal of the notion of size, suggests of course that we might have more cause for amazement still. We are already amazed by the sky, since it is mysterious, and the sequel, in which the universe is reduced in size (it is just a magic lantern), makes the scene more mysterious still because we are among the illusions reflected in it.

I have never seen a concordance to the poems of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, but it is my suspicion that the words *charkh* ('wheel [of the sky]') and *gunbad* ('dome [of the sky]') will be well represented there. It seems to me a favoured image. In a poem that rhymes in the long vowel *ā* it opens his entire collection, which is arranged alphabetically:

*Ay gunbad-i gardanda-yi bī-rawzan-i khadrā'
Bā qāmat-i fartūti bā quwwat-i barnā*

Oh green, turning, windowless dome /
Bent over like an old man are you, but with
A young man's strength.³

And it recurs with predictable variations:

*Nikūhish makun charkh-i nīlūfarī rā
Burūn kun zi-sar bād u khīra-sarī rā.
Barī dān az afāl-i charkh-i barī rā.
Nashāyad zi-dānā nikūhish barī rā.*

Blame not the azure wheel of Heaven;
Away with such balmy notions!
Note well that this wheel is above all actions
And it suits not the wise to blame the good.⁴

As for Spenser, in poems like 'An Hymne of Heavenly Beavtie' he sketches a vision of the universe that concentrates particularly on the barrier of vision between the sublunary and higher worlds:

Looke thou no further, but affixe thine eye
On that bright shynie round still mouing Masse,

The house of blessed Gods, which men call Skye,
 All sowed with glistring stars more thicke then grasse,
 Whereof each other doth in brightnesses passe ...⁵

For farre above these heauens which here we see,
 Be others farre exceeding these in light,
 Not bounded, not corrupt, as these same bee,
 But infinite in largenesse and in hight,
 Vnmouing, vncorrupt, and spotlesse bright,
 That need no Sunne t'illuminate their spheres,
 But their owne natiue lights farre passing theirs.⁶

Spenser's point of view as he looks at the sky is perhaps most distinctive when his imagination rises into it. Where it is Nāṣir-i Khusraw's habit to show the visible sky as a barrier past which we would like to look but cannot, Spenser likes to imagine surpassing it. In that beautiful narrative called the *Mutability Cantos* the allegorical creature called Mutability launches a revolution by rising up into it:

Thence, to the Circle of the Moone she clambe,
 Where Cynthia raignes in euerlasting glory,
 To whose bright shining palace straight she came,
 All fairely deckt with heauens goodly story;
 Whose siluer gates (by which there sate an hory
 Old aged Sire, with hower-glasse in hand,
 Hight Tyme) she entred ...⁷

Perhaps we can attribute the distinction between the two styles, Spenser's relatively detailed scene and Nāṣir-i Khusraw's more efficient presentation, to Spenser's persistent allegory. In any event, allegory licenses Spenser to imagine himself in the sky, whereas Nāṣir-i Khusraw's habit is to portray the sky from the point of view of the earthly observer.

Milton's 'Lycidas' demonstrates a comparable image in English, when he describes two shepherds out for a long day, and the day is described as a wheel: 'Oft till the Star that rose, at Ev'ning, bright / Toward Heav'n's descent had slop'd his westering wheel.'⁸ The appeal of Milton's image is the moment when the sky looms into our vision as a rudimentary machine. A wheel has much in common with a *charkh*; what makes the image striking is a pair of verbal structures which make the wheel seem smaller than the one in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poems – the verb 'to slope', suggesting a circular structure at an angle to the horizontal, and the use of that verb for going west – that is, towards the sunset – accentuates a feeling of asymmetry. In both Spenser and Milton one is more likely to see a poetry which

thinks in metonymic rather than metaphoric terms. Nāṣir-i Khusraw is more likely to think in terms of metaphors that colour the entire vision: thus the sky becomes, in poem after poem, a hawk whose prey is the world below, as in: *Bāz-i jahān rā juz az shikār chi kār ast?* ("The hawk of the world, except for hunting what does it do?")⁹

To read comparatively also means to direct our attention to voices within Nāṣir-i Khusraw's tradition, among poets who allude to him from across great stylistic distances. A contemporary Iranian poet trained in philosophy, Esmail Kho'i, has no particular stylistic links with Nāṣir-i Khusraw, and yet clearly sees him as a model. Images of the sky are not rare in Kho'i's poetry, and they would make an interesting point of comparison, but he engages in a dialogue with his philosophical predecessor most explicitly in a poem which takes the form of a reverie in an enclosed setting, his 'Return to Borgio Verezzi' (*Bāz-gasht bi 'Burjū Virizzī'*) (Borgio Verezzi, a town in northern Italy). Writing in the United Kingdom (he is often described with that term 'poet in exile'), Kho'i remembers a journey by train through northern Italy, noting the resemblance of a woman on the train to his grandmother, to whom he describes the changes in Iran which have troubled him so deeply. It is a complaint in which political and personal realms overlap, about the country he has lost and his own divorce, and at one point he concludes that he is not without responsibility:

Az dīgarān nabāyad nālīd
Kaz zharfa-yi nahānī-i jān nīz hast
Ki bū-yi marg mī-āyad.
Na!
Az īn u ān nashāyad nālīd,
Kīn bār
Ān par ki tīr-i dushman rā parwāz dād
Wa tīsha-yi tawānā-yash
Az rīsha
Sāqa-yi nu-damīda-yi parwāz-i 'āshiqāna-yi mā rā shikast,
Khvud
Az bāl-i mā bar āmad u dar bāl-i mā nishast.¹⁰

This time –
 it's no use blaming others –
 this time
 it is from the deepest crevice of the soul
 that the stench of death arises.
 No.
 No use bewailing this or that.

The feather that guides the enemy's arrow
 the axe that severs at the root
 the newly grown trunk of our lovers' flight
 came from our own plumage;
 it once fledged our wings.

Iranian readers will recognise that this is a reference to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, and in fact it requires very few indicators – simply the references to the feather in the arrow, the verb *nālid*, ‘to complain’, and the familiar concept that we cannot disclaim responsibility when bad fortune happens, whether it is a marriage falling apart or a political upheaval.

The poem Kho'i refers to is so familiar, so famous, it hardly needs my commentary. But as we begin to examine it, we should consider what makes poems familiar. Is it their intrinsic virtue or is it simply the fact that they have appealed to the people who write textbooks? Whatever the reason, Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poem about the eagle has become very famous indeed, perhaps his best-known work. There are two main versions of the poem, a short narrative of four *bayts* in Mujtabā Mīnuwī and Mahdī Muḥaqqiq's 1978 edition of the *Dīwān* and a longer one (of eleven *bayts*) in Taqīzāda's 1925–1928 edition.¹¹ The short one begins ‘*Gūyand 'uqābī bi dar-i shahrī bar khāst*’, the longer one ‘*Rūzī zi-sar-i sang 'uqābī bi-hawā khāst*’.

It may be that one poem is a variant that has evolved from the other by a folkloric process – whether an original longer poem has been summed up briefly, whether a shorter poem has accreted extra verses, or whether Nāṣir-i Khusraw simply wrote two versions. The longer version is more interesting because it dwells on the psychology of the eagle in more detail. This may explain why several generations of Iranians have learned it from their high school textbooks, and why it is discussed in ‘Alī Dashti's lengthy study on Nāṣir-i Khusraw, and why it is reprinted for students of Persian language in Thackston's reader.¹² For this analysis, I will use the Thackston version, which opens with the following line:

Rūzī zi-sar-i sang 'uqābī bi hawā khāst
Wandar ṭalab-i ṭu'ma par u bāl biyārāst

One day from the top of a boulder an eagle rose into the air
 And in his search for food he opened wide his wings.

The opening ‘one day’ is worth a comment simply because it may be the smallest example of irony in the rhetorical lexicon. All narratives that begin with *Rūzī*, ‘one day’, ‘one arbitrarily chosen day’, have the built-in paradox that a term which suggests ‘just another day’ will turn out to be the occasion when something notable

or extraordinary occurs. By the time we are at the end of the poem and look back we will see it was not just another day at all. It was the day of the eagle's death, the day in which a fundamental truth was exemplified. This may be philosophy in its simplest form, the understated opening which creates the anticipation of a generic (thus wise) comment.

But the irony of *rūzī* is hardly peculiar to Nāṣir-i Khusraw. We are closer to a detail characteristic of his poetry in the balance of *sang* ('rock') and *hawā* ('air'). Narratively it is not necessary to know the eagle's starting point, but the balance of rock and air reminds us that we are in a discourse of fundamental things: it locates the individual character in a grid of the four elements with their hierarchical implications. This mythologising of the eagle sets the initial tone so strongly that I consider Annemarie Schimmel's translation of the opening a misreading:

One day an eagle rose up from his rock
and, full of greed, spread all his plumage out ...¹³

The phrase 'full of greed' sets the tone of criticism in the first line of the poem and gives a rather different effect right at the outset. Schimmel is translating from another edition that has the phrase *az bahr-i ṭama'* ('for the sake of greed') rather than Thackston's *ṭalab-i ṭu'ma* ('in search of food').¹⁴

A level of artfulness intervenes here that seems to me characteristic of Nāṣir-i Khusraw: the eagle looks out admiringly at his wing and as he begins his soliloquy we take on his point of view. Indeed, to my perception, the pleasure of this poem is independent of the moral, which emerges later, because the poet expends so much skill in allowing us the aerial view. Here, as if in reply to all the poems with the *charkh* and *gunbad* ('[heaven's] wheel and dome') trope, is what it might look like from up there. Those five *miṣrā'*s – the eagle's soliloquy describing the ecstatic beauty of an aerial view – are in fact what most differentiates the long and short versions of the poem:

... *Imrūz hama rū-yi jahān zīr-i par-i mā-st.*
Bar awj chu parwāz kunam az naẓar-i tīz
mībīnam agar dharra'ī andar tak-i daryā-st.
Gar bar sar-i khāshāk yakī pashsha bijunbīd
junbīdan-i ān pashsha, 'ayān dar naẓar-i mā-st.

Today everything on the earth is underneath my feathers.
When at the zenith I fly, with my sharp eyesight,
I see even a speck at the bottom of the sea.
If even a tiny insect even squirms upon a chip of wood
The *junbīdan* [squirming] of that insect is clear to my vision.

It seems to me hard to imagine a reader not identifying with this point of view. We all imagine ourselves to be perceptive. Indeed, part of its power is that it prolongs that moment of imagining the sky which is such a prominent brief trope elsewhere in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry. It is part of being human to think of ourselves as eagles. In what follows I am going to be pointing out ways in which it seems to me the narrator's voice drifts further and further from the eagle's, and one must question where this leaves us as readers, whether our sympathies are free and disengaged or whether the poem enlists us in a moral vision, which it seems to me can be determined only by the details of rhetoric and point of view.

This is probably the point in the argument when I must confess to a minority position. I suffer from a deep aversion to homiletic poetry. If the function of a poem is to make me a better person I lose patience with it. If I like a homiletic poem it is unlikely to be the homiletic part, and indeed I would argue this on aesthetic principles. There is no guarantee that the poets we admire will express the moral outlook that appeals to us. If this aversion puts me at a disadvantage, which I hope is not the case, I will still hold to it because I consider it imperative to separate the poem from its moral meaning, at least long enough to ask whether the moral meaning really grows out of the text. And certainly if I do not like homilies I must still acknowledge their power, because homiletic phrases so frequently enter common language and shape the poetry of later generations, as with Kho'i's 'Borgio Verrezzi'.

The eagle's speech has importance through the fact that it forces us to identify with him. The *imrūz*, 'today', with which the quoted speech begins (*imrūz hama rū-yi jahān zīr-i par-i mā-st* – 'Today the whole surface of the earth is beneath my wings') has much the same ironic force as the *rūzī*, 'one day', with which the poem begins, since presumably the eagle flies like this every day. (It may encourage us to hear the speech as a microcosm of the poem.) The two examples of the eagle's sharp-sightedness are artful in numerous ways. Forgive me for belabouring them. It is one thing to say of a character that he or she is observant, *tiz-bin*; it is another to exemplify the attribute with specifics. Seeing a speck, a *dharra'i*, at the bottom of the sea seems a more intense, superlative act of vision across the space of opposites, *awj* and *tak*, the zenith from which he looks and the depth where the small object of vision is located. In fact, it may be accurate to say that zenith and depths (*awj* and *tak*) restate in superlative terms the opposition of rock and air (*sang* and *hawā*) in the opening line. The parallel example that follows it, like a musical variation, says the same thing working the other way – focusing first on a more specific, complex object of vision, the insect, and then on the general act of seeing (*'ayān dar nazar-i mā ...*). The intensity is established this time by doubling the diminutive – first focusing on the twig or chip of wood then on the even smaller insect wriggling on it – with the result that in the second example we feel the eagle's sharp-sightedness more keenly. The repetition of the verb in a sentence is a standard poetic trope

(here, *junbīdan*), and we might add that the chiasmus of the phrase ‘the insect moves/the movement of the insect’ (*pashsha bi-junbīd / junbīdan-i ān pashsha*) passes so quickly and so conversationally that we may not notice its symmetry. But beyond its status as a trope it has additional usefulness. We see not only the inert shape of the insect but its motion. One feels that in the repeated form, *junbīdan-i ān pashsha* ‘*ayān dar naẓar-i mā-st*, the insect is magnified, as if we are seeing it through the eagle’s eye.

If in fact we are drawn into the eagle’s point of view, there is more than one way to read it. One might say, for instance, that our identification with the eagle undermines the moral effect because it makes us feel his pride. There is also a tradition in recent criticism to point out that some moral writers like to identify with the negative character in order to fool us, to lead us on, to turn to us later and say, ‘Look how weak you were’ – thus the powerful rhetoric of the most negative character in the first book of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, the allegorical figure of Despair. It is sometimes pointed out that Despair has the most convincing speech in the narrative (Book One, Canto ix), just as Satan is granted famously persuasive rhetoric in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. We should certainly leave open the possibility that the eagle is given a role like that of Despair or Satan, convincing, forcing the reader into a distanced response.

The narrator’s point of view, intervening in the fifth *bayt*, establishes a very traditional shift: the narrator questions the character’s claim to independence, first by asserting explicitly that the quotation of the eagle was a boast (*manī kard*) and that the eagle refused to fear his fate. Then, the imperative directed at us (*b-angar ki az īn charkh-i jafāpīsha chi bar khāst* / Look at what the tyrant sky has brought about), by turning the act of speech in the direction of the reader, establishes an authority beyond the eagle’s speech. And of course the moment we see the word *charkh* we feel we are in familiar *hujjatī* diction. The sky is always the central referent in Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s world. And of course the repetition of the verb *khāstan*, connecting back to the eagle’s action in the very first hemistich, and now attributed to the revolving sky – that is, to fate – replaces the eagle’s power with a higher one. Strictly speaking there have been two voices in the poem already, the narrator’s and the eagle’s, but this is the moment at which the two voices really diverge.

And this divergence prepares us for the sequel, the arrow which will come to bring him down, announced by the word *nāgah*, ‘all at once’ (sixth *bayt*), which traditionally introduces new events in narrative. It happens *nāgah*, unexpectedly, but this does not suggest an acceleration in the story. I would read *nāgah* in this passage as a connective with moral force – something unanticipated occurs here, though the events that follow will unfold in a deliberate, leisurely pace. Most important for my perspective is that we glimpse the hunter, but it is only a glimpse. In other words Nāṣir-i Khusraw has passed up one narrative option, the temptation to personalise the force that shoots the arrow. In fact, the reference

to fate as a bad or evil agent, *qaḍā-yi bad*, is as prominent as the (unspecified) and hidden hunter. It is characteristic of Nāṣir-i Khusraw that the next pair of opposites, *abr* and *khāk*, clouds and earth, as elsewhere, function as part of the narrative (*waz abr mar ū rā bisū-yi khāk furū kāst*) rather than as simple ornamental overlays. To my taste the most beautiful *bayt*, the next, in this sequence is narratively speaking unnecessary, a moment when the camera pans in on the eagle and simply watches him fluttering helplessly, in mute symmetry with the image of his prior control in the scene of him flying:

Bar khāk biyuftād u bighaltīd chu māhī
Wāngāh par-i khwīsh gushād az chap u az rāst.

He fell to earth and flipped around like a fish
 And then he opened out his wings to left and right

The verb *ghaltīdan* echoes the previous verb *junbīdan*, which described the insect's wriggling as seen from the eagle in flight. The image of a fish, still alive, rolling in panic on the deck of a boat or on the shore where it has been laid out, is appropriate visually but also conceptually, since a bird plucked out of the air establishes such a logical symmetry with the fish plucked from a lower element. And of course the fact that his wings are still moving without achieving any aerial traction ties us in a melancholy way with the opening lines, where the eagle's mastery was so prominent.

One of the oddest things about the narrative is the way a non-narrative element provides its sense of closure, how incomplete it would be without the eagle's concluding speech. It may not be unusual for central figures to pronounce the moral of their own experience, but more commonly such a speech takes the form of a coda, a commentary, and more commonly the summation feels added on. I would like to suggest that in the case of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's eagle the spoken resolution and the narrative events are in an unusual relation. At first its response is precisely what ours would be – how surprising it is that the inanimate (arrow) should threaten the living (eagle). In fact, since then the trope of the inanimate world as a threat has become a commonplace; one feels that in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's time, the fifth/eleventh century, as we see it in *bayt* nine, it may have been a new idea:

Guftā 'ajībast inka zi-chūbī u az āhan
Īn tīzī u tundī u parīdan zi-kujā khāst?

Saying 'How strange that from wood and from iron
 this precision, this speed and this flight should burst forth.'

The explanation of course is what the eagle sees next: ‘*zī-tīr naḡah kard u par-i khwīsh bar-ū dīd*’ (‘He looked at the arrow and saw his own feather on it’). And seeing that a feather from his own wing has guided the arrow to destroy him, he concludes with the phrase (from *bayt* ten) which all readers remember from this poem: ‘*zi-ki nālīm? ki az mā-st ki bar mā-st*’ (‘Why am I complaining? It comes from us and comes back to us.’)

At this point the rhetoric of this individual phrase is not really sufficient to explain the effect of the poem, and I think we need to discuss character, as we might in a narrative proper – a *maqāma*, a *ḡikāya* or a novel. The eagle’s three speeches cannot help but generate the sense of a complex personality – first the triumphant soliloquy enjoying his flight (a boastful but presumably accurate description) and then the two brief ones he speaks in response to his fall (one mystified, and one reconciled to his fate). I would argue that over the course of the second two brief quotations a personality builds up which is magnanimous and in its way admirable. When the eagle is brought down we never hear it complain. Instead we hear an intellectual probing – a resigned enquiry asking how this could have happened. (It would have been easy to show the eagle complaining, blaming someone else, demonstrating the weakness of the character who considers himself in control.) But the first reaction is simply ‘*ajīb-ast*’, his expression of surprise. Is it clear what a surprising reaction that is – a neutral perception at a point when we are more likely to expect rage? If we could read it as a companion piece to the aerial soliloquy in which he described his flight it is just one more observation, another example of clear vision. It is as if his reactions become more precise and more admirable as his luck declines.

This means that the poem ends with an act of detective work. In some ways the eagle’s last words have a kind of triumph in them, a triumph of discovery in a moment of loss. The sequence of ideas in the next-to-last *bayt* (ten) is particularly striking, where we see him first looking towards the arrow, then recognising the feather in what seems a separate act. To present perception in two stages – ‘he looked ... he saw’ – is not unusual, but in this context it suggests not a tired cliché but a subtle way of showing the stages of cognition. To be responsible for one’s own downfall is one thing; to be aware of one’s responsibility for it is another thing altogether.

This poem is traditionally taken to be a parable against pride, though the term *manī* may have other implications. Remember that the terms *fakhr*, *ḡhurūr* or *takabbur* do not occur in the text of the poem. A noun made out of the first-person pronoun could logically suggest pride, or it could suggest other weaknesses of the self.

I wonder if it might be more accurate to take this magnificent parable as an argument against self-sufficiency, a statement about the limits of conscious perception. In other words, the issue is not that the eagle is an example to be avoided, an allegorical exemplification of a sin, but device through which we can see that even

the most complete perception, from the creature with the sharpest eyes, misses something. And the irony that what it misses has an intimate connection with its own being, the eagle's feather now guiding an arrow, is unnecessary to the narrative. The point would have been made if the arrow's feather was from a chicken, but the added coincidence is useful in enlarging the scope of the eagle's lapse. An omission, a negative, his failure to see the arrow, has been reframed as a positive – that the arrow is linked to him.

It is, I would argue, a message more fundamental than morality, a lesson about the layers of consciousness that underlie morality – something more like the parable which teaches levels of perception which Lacan found in Poe's short story 'The Purloined Letter'. It is in the nature of perception to be incomplete. Awareness is never total, and perhaps the ability to mistrust perception is the beginning of wisdom. Or so I would argue from the evidence of this poem. One concomitant of this is that the eagle becomes in his way a heroic figure, who accepts his own downfall when he realises its cause. We see it through his eyes; we feel it through his perception.

There are two possible conclusions. One might conclude that when we read a text for its philosophy or when we read for poetic, aesthetic power we see a different work. Reading for its philosophy we might see it as a moral parable about the eagle's pride. Reading for its poetic power we cannot help but see through the eagle's eyes, perceiving the same lesson the eagle does, accepting his own responsibility, dying with a kind of resignation.

The second potential conclusion, which I prefer, would suggest that this disconnection between philosophy and poetry is unnecessary. Can we not read the text both for its philosophy and for its poetic power? A critical reading grounded in a literary point of view, examining the rhetorical devices which organise the text and taking into close account the formal elements – its style and its rhetorical power – is also, I would argue, a logical first step in examining philosophical writing. Such a step in no way conflicts with analysis of its logic and content. Similarly, it seems to me a peculiarity of our culture that poetry and philosophy are considered to be such separate enterprises. We might wish for a world in which the languages of art and the languages of philosophy overlapped in our education as well, so that we might expect our poets to deal in ideas and our philosophers to write in terms we consider artistic.

That is a conclusion for the long term. In the short term my goal is to have presented an argument fully fledged, even if that means arming the reader with arrows to shoot back towards me.

Notes

1. An excellent example of this is Rosamund Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery: Renaissance Poetic and Twentieth-Century Critics* (Chicago, 1947).

2. Edward Heron-Allen, *Edward FitzGerald's Rubā'iyāt of Omar Khayyam with their Original Persian Sources Collated from his own mss., and literally translated* (London and Boston, 1899) no., 68, p. 103.
3. *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Ḥakīm Abū Mu'īn Ḥamid al-Dīn Nāṣir ibn Khusraw Qubādiyānī*, ed. Sayyid Naṣr Allāh Taqawī (Tehran, 1304–1307 Sh./1925–1928; repr. Tehran, 1373 Sh./1994–1995), #1, p. 53. The Niḡāh reprint is used in this chapter.
4. *Dīwān*, ed. Taqawī, #6, p. 62; trans. Alice C. Hunsberger, in *Nasir Khusraw, The Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller and Philosopher* (London, 2000, rev. ed., 2003), p. 39.
5. Spenser, Edmund, *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. J. C. Smith and E. De Selincourt (London, 1965), lines 50–54, p. 597.
6. *Ibid.*, lines 64–70.
7. Spenser, 'Two Cantos of Mutabilitie', vi. 8; *Poetical Works*, p. 395.
8. Milton, John, 'Lycidas', *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957), lines 30–31, p. 121.
9. *Dīwān*, ed. Taqawī, #28, p. 106.
10. Kho'i, Esmail, *Outlandia: Songs of Exile*, English trans. Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak and Michael Beard (Vancouver, 1999), pp. 11–12.
11. *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, ed. M. Mīnuwī and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1353 Sh./1974; repr. 1357 Sh./1978), no. 260, p. 523.
12. 'Alī Dashtī, *Taṣwīrī az Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983; repr. 1383 Sh./2004–2005), pp. 337–338; Wheeler M. Thackston, *A Millennium of Classical Persian Poetry: A Guide to the Reading & Understanding of Persian Poetry from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Bethesda, 1994), p. 22.
13. Annemarie Schimmel, *Make a Shield from Wisdom: Selected Verses from Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Dīwān* (London, 2001), p. 92.
14. Schimmel does not indicate which edition she is using, but both the Taqawī and Mīnuwī/Muḥaqqiq editions have *ṭama'* ('greed').

Hearing by Way of Seeing:
Zabān-i ḥāl in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Poetry and the Question
 of Authorship of the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*

NASROLLAH POURJAVADY

In the *Enneads*, where Plotinus discusses his idea of Nature and its ability to contemplate and make things, he presents an imaginary scene in which Nature speaks to us, telling us how it brings things into being by its very act of contemplation:

And if anyone were to ask nature why it makes, if it cared to hear and answer the questioner it would say: 'You ought not to ask, but to understand in silence, you, too, just as I am silent and not in the habit of talking. Understand what, then? That what comes into being is what I see in my silence, an object of contemplation which comes to be naturally, and that I, originating from this sort of contemplation have a contemplative nature. And my act of contemplation makes what it contemplates, as the geometers draw their figures while they contemplate. But I do not draw, but as I contemplate, the lines which bound bodies come to be as if they fell from my contemplation. What happens to me is what happens to my mother and the beings that generated me, for they, too, derive from contemplation, and it is no action of theirs which brings about my birth; they are greater rational principles, and as they contemplate themselves I come to be.'¹

In this passage, as we can observe, Plotinus is presenting Nature not as something inanimate but as a living being with a soul. In fact, in a statement following the above passage, he clearly states that what Nature is supposed to be, saying here is that it is a soul itself, because it is 'the offspring of a prior soul with a stronger life'. Though Nature is a living being, a soul, and like its mother, the Universal Soul, has a power of contemplation, it cannot speak. Nature is silent. The words attributed here to Nature are not something that it has uttered itself; they are rather something that our philosopher has to say about Nature. By putting words into the

mouth, as it were, of a mute being, Plotinus is actually using a literary device, one that was also commonly used in Persian literature, where it was generally referred to as *zabān-i ḥāl*.

The term '*zabān-i ḥāl*' literally means 'the language of the state', and this language can be attributed to any being or concept. All beings, whether human, animal, vegetable or inanimate, have states, dispositions, characteristics or attributes. When a particular disposition or attribute within an animate or inanimate entity motivates the imagination of a writer or poet to express an idea by making that entity speak for itself, then he or she is employing *zabān-i ḥāl*. Plotinus was doing exactly this when he spoke 'from the mouth' of Nature in order to reveal Nature's state or attribute. In a fable where an animal or a tree speaks with other beings or has a debate with them, that speech also may be considered as an instance of *zabān-i ḥāl*. For this reason the term *zabān-i ḥāl* may be translated as 'fabulous language'.

Persian poets and writers have made a wide range of different beings speak in this language. In the quatrains of 'Umar Khayyām, for example, the pot, clay and the nightingale speak. In the following quatrain Khayyām uses the word *zabān-i ḥāl*.

Dar kārgah-i kūza-garī raftam dūsh
Dīdam du-hazār kūza gūyā-yi khmūsh²
Har yak bi zabān-i ḥāl bā man guftand:
'Kū kūza-gar u kūza-khar u kūza-furūsh?'

I went to a potter's shop last night,
 And saw two thousand pots, speaking silently;
 Each telling me in the language of its state,
 'Where is the potter, where the buyer and where the seller of pots?'

In the famous *mathnawī* of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* (*The Conference of the Birds*), different birds speak of their states, while in another of his *mathnawīs*, the *Muṣibat-nāma*, a great number of beings speak, including celestial beings, such as the sun and moon, the angels, heaven, the divine Throne, the Pen and the Tablet; terrestrial beings, such as the four elements fire, air, water and earth, things that are on the earth, such as the mountain, the oceans, plants and animals; also the prophets, Satan and, finally, different faculties or powers of the human soul, such as the senses, the imagination, the intellect, the heart and the universal Spirit (the Neoplatonic *Nous*). All these speak in a way that 'Aṭṭār himself defines as *zabān-i ḥāl*.

Another Persian poet, before 'Aṭṭār and Khayyām, who made use of this literary device and spoke from the mouth of different natural objects, particularly celestial beings, was Nāṣir-i Khusraw of Qubādiyān. In his *Dīwān*, Nāṣir has the wheel of heaven, the stars, the world, and Time speak in the language of their state. The idea

that these beings express is basically the fact that everything in the world passes away and nothing remains. In one *qaṣīda* he says:³

Charkh mī-gūyad bi gashtan-hā ki: 'Man mī-bigdharam.'
Juz hamīn chīzī naḡufī gar chu mā guyāstī. (Dīwān, p. 226)

The wheel of heaven, by its turning is telling us: 'I will pass.'
 Even if it could speak the way we do, it would not have said anything
 different.

Though, like Plotinus' Nature, silent, the wheel of heaven speaks to us by its revolution, which is its state or attribute, and warns us that it will not stay in one position. In another of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *qaṣīdas*, a similar idea is conveyed by this world (*gītī*). Unlike the wheel of heaven, the world is at rest. But this does not mean that things in the world are permanent. The world tells us in its own way that nothing abides, and that we come to this world not to stay but to move on and leave, to die. Sometimes in Persian, *zabān-i ḥāl* is also called '*zabān-i bī-zabānī*', which literally means 'tongue-less speech', and Nāṣir-i Khusraw alludes to this idea here by saying that the world speaks to us without a tongue and a mouth. The quality or state of the world that speaks to us and warns us of our mortality is the fact that the world existed before we were born and will continue after we die.

Gītī bishnaw ki mī chi gūyad
Bā bī-dahanī u bī-zabānī
Gūyad ki: 'Makhusp azīrā
Man manzīlam u tu kāriwānī' (Ibid., p. 343)

Listen to what this world is telling us,
 Without a tongue or mouth.
 It says: 'Sleep not,
 For I am just the caravanserai, and you the caravan.'

The transient nature of things can best be seen in the passage of time (*zamāna*).⁴

Bar lafz-i zamāna har shabānrūzī
Bisyār shunūda'ī kalāmash rā.
Gufta'st tu rā ki: 'Bī muqāmam man.'
Tā chand kunī ṭalab muqāmash rā? (Ibid., p. 492)

Every day and night, Time speaks to you.
 Its words you must have often heard.

It has been telling you: 'I have no abode.'
How long will you seek its abode?

As can be observed in the poems cited above, every time that Nāsir-i Khusraw employs *zabān-i ḥāl*, he makes it clear that the speakers do not really speak in an ordinary fashion, and that speaking here has only a figurative meaning. There are certain qualities, characteristics or signs in things that convey those ideas to us. To be able to perceive these signs and understand their messages, one has to be able to see. That is why the hearing of the *zabān-i ḥāl* is in fact seeing, as is said in the following line:

Bingar ki chi gūyadat hamī gunbad-i gardān
Guftār-i jahān rā bi rah-i chashmat biniyūsh. (Ibid., p. 413)

Look and see what this whirling dome, the heaven, tells you.
Listen to the words of the world with your eyes.

Since the speech of the world, or the whirling dome, is heard through the eyes, Nāsir-i Khusraw calls it 'visible speech' (*qawl-i mubaṣṣar*) in the following line:

Man qawl-i jahān rā bi rāh-i chashm shinūdam
Nashgift, ki bisyār buwad qawl-i mubaṣṣar. (Ibid., p. 131)

I have heard the speech of the world with my eyes,
No reason to wonder, for there is much 'visible speech'.

Though there are plenty of instances of 'visible speech' in the world, not everyone can actually see them. To be able to see, or hear, this speech, one has to be contemplative and perceive things intuitively. That is why Nāsir-i Khusraw introduces the intellect (*'aql*) as the agent who brings the heavenly message down and interprets it for us.

'Aql chi āward zi gardūn payām?
Khāṣṣa su-yi khāṣṣ nihānī zi 'ām.
Guft: 'Chu khud nīst falak rā qarār
Nīst dar ū nīz shumā rā muqām.' (Ibid., p. 390)

What was the message that the intellect brought us from the wheel of
heaven?
Especially to those of us who are elite, hiding it from the common people.
It said, 'Since the heaven itself has no rest,
You will not remain permanently beneath it either.'

The wisdom that the intellect conveys to us is achieved through an intuitive perception, an experience that is called by Nāṣir-i Khusraw, 'seeing with the heart'.

*Bi dil bibin ki na didan hama bi chashm buwad
Bi dast binad qaṣṣāb lāghar az farbī.* (Ibid., p. 468)

See with your heart, for not all seeing is done by the eye:
With his hand the butcher discerns the lean from fat.

In another poem, this experience is referred to as 'hearing with the heart'.

*Man rāz-i falak rā bi dil shinūdam
Hushyār bi dil kūr u kar nabāshad.* (Ibid., p. 359)

I heard the secret of heaven with my heart.
A perceptive person is not deaf and blind in his heart.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw is claiming here that he himself has the ability to perceive signs in the universe, or to hear the *zabān-i ḥāl* of Heaven and the world beneath it. This ability is, in fact, the prerogative of a wise man, a man of intellection who is a true philosopher (*ḥakīm*).

*Bi rāh-i chashm shinaw qawl-i in jahān, ki ḥakīm
Bi rāh-i chashm shinūda'st gufta-i dunyā.* (Ibid., p. 468)

Listen to the words uttered by this world with your eyes,
For a philosopher hears the saying of the world with his eyes.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw's claim to be a philosopher, a *ḥakīm*, and thus being able to hear or see the words of heaven, Time and the world is similar to the claim of Plotinus who made silent Nature speak and inform us about its creative contemplation. However, the words that each philosopher was hearing, one from things in Nature or the temporal world and the other from Nature itself, are different. Plotinus was interested in the metaphysical question of how Nature acts and how other beings proceed from it, while Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who was a religious thinker and poet, engaged in work for the Ismaili *da'wa* and its preaching, is essentially interested in practical philosophy and in the matters that lead to human salvation. Since the essence of preaching (*wa'z*) lies in man's disappointment and despair with worldly life and dedication to the life hereafter, a preacher must remind his audience, over and over again, that this world is temporal and human life on earth is but ephemeral. This was the essence of preaching among Muslim preachers and Persian poets

such as Sanā'ī and Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who composed homiletic *qaṣīdas*. The image of the world as a temporary, rented house (*sarāy-i sipanj*), or a caravanserai with two gates, one for entering and the other for leaving, is quite common in Persian homiletic poetry. And this is precisely the idea that Nāṣir-i Khusraw sees in the rotation of the heavens, or the alternation of day and night, and this is the message they convey to him in their 'language of state'.

Apart from the wheel of heaven and the temporal world there are other beings, according to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who speak to human beings in their 'language of state'. The intellect, aside from bringing the message of heaven down to us, also has a piece of advice for those who listen.

*Khīradmand rā mi chī gūyad khīrad?
Chī gūyadsh? Gūyad: 'Ḥadhar kun zi bad!'* (Ibid., p. 273)

What does the intellect say to the wise?
What does it say? It says: 'Keep away from evil!'

In another *qaṣīda*, the intellect urges the poet to have care for the well-being of his soul.

*Khīrad chun bi jān u tanam bingarīst
Az īn har du bīchāra bar jān girīst.
Ma rā guft k-īnjā gharīb-ast jānat
Bidū kun 'ināyat ki tanat īdarīst.
'Ināyat nīmūdan bi kār-i gharīb
Sar-i faṣl u aṣl-i nikū maḥzarīst.* (Ibid., p. 109)

When the intellect looked at my soul and body,
Of these two helpless ones, it wept for the soul.
Then it told me: 'While your body belongs to this world,
Your soul is a stranger here.
So have mercy upon it.
For to have mercy upon a stranger
Is the root of kindness and good behaviour.'

Good advice is given not only by the intellect, but by everything in nature that moves, such as the earth, the waters and the stars, all of which speak to us by their very motion and the work that they do.

*Hamī-t gūyad har yik ki: 'Kār-i khwīsh bikun!'
Agar-t chashm durust-ast dar-nigar bārī.* (Ibid., p. 468)

Each one of them is telling you: 'You, too, do your own work!
If your eyes are functioning, then look (and see this message).

Another being which has *zabān-i ḥāl* in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān* is the tree which, according to the Qur'an, spoke to Moses and said: 'I am God, the Lord of the worlds' (Qur'an 28:31).⁵

Bi rāh-i chashm shinaw az dirakht qawl-i khudāy
Ki: 'Man Khudāy-i jahānam', bi Tūr bar Mūsā. (Ibid., p. 468)

Listen with your eyes to the words of God coming from the tree,
Saying to Moses, on the mountain: 'I am the Lord of the world'.

In saying that the words of God are heard by seeing them, Nāṣir-i Khusraw is indicating that these words are simply *zabān-i ḥāl*. In other words, the tree did not actually utter words, nor did God speak through the tree. God only manifested Himself in the tree and allowed Moses to see the manifestation, and realise that it was divine. This is obviously a rationalistic interpretation of the Qur'anic verse which is in keeping with Nāṣir-i Khusraw's philosophical thinking. We may note in passing that the famous theologian and late contemporary of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), who considered understanding of *zabān-i ḥāl* a condition for Qur'anic interpretation,⁶ viewed similar Qur'anic verses as instances of *zabān-i ḥāl*; for instance, the ones in which the earth and the sky are said to speak (Qur'an 11:41), or where God says 'Be' and then everything comes into existence (Qur'an 40:16), or when God made the covenant with the seeds of the children of Adam and asked them 'Am I not your Lord?', and they replied 'Yes' (Qur'an 7:172). In fact, Ghazālī was the first theologian to use the expression *zabān-i ḥāl* (Ar. *lisān al-ḥāl*) for this type of imaginative speech attributed to other beings, particularly those who are 'tongueless' (*bī-zabān*) or, like Plotinus' Nature, silent (*khāmūsh*).⁷

Nāṣir-i Khusraw also composed short fables in which the characters speak in the language of their states. One such fable is the story of a pumpkin plant which claims to be better than a plane tree because it grows faster. To this claim the plane tree replies that now is not the time to make this judgement; rather, they should wait until the autumn comes and then it will be clear who can survive its devastating wind (*Dīwān*, p. 522).

Another fable is the story of an eagle who is hit by an arrow while flying, and when it looks at the arrow it notices its own feather on it. The moral of the fable is what the eagle itself says in its *zabān-i ḥāl*: 'What works against us comes from within us'; in other words, we reap what we sow (ibid., p. 524).⁸

Zabān-i Ḥāl and the Rawshanāʾī-nāma

The different examples of *zabān-i ḥāl* we have cited here are not exhaustive in terms of the use of this device in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān*, but they do show how he employed it for homiletic purposes in order to make his teachings more effective. It is interesting to note that in none of these cases, and in fact in nowhere in the *Dīwān*, does Nāṣir-i Khusraw use the term *zabān-i ḥāl*. But there is a didactic *mathnawī* attributed to him, at the end of which the poet narrates a dramatic scene in which he listens to purified souls who speak to him each in their *zabān-i ḥāl*. This *mathnawī* is entitled, like another prose work by Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* (*The Book of Light*). There are, however, serious doubts concerning the authenticity of this *mathnawī*. If it were authentic, it could be claimed that Nāṣir-i Khusraw was the first Persian poet to have used the term *zabān-i ḥāl* for this kind of speech. However, there are scholars who have argued against its authenticity and I am inclined to agree with them, for reasons connected with the poet's use of *zabān-i ḥāl*.

The *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* poem is a philosophical-mystical work in which the poet attempts first to sketch out his metaphysical system, which is mainly borrowed, directly or indirectly, from Muslim Neoplatonists, particularly the Ikhwān al-ṣafā' (Brethren of Purity). The ultimate goal of man, according to this philosophy, is to know God, a knowledge that is attained through the knowledge of the self. How can man know himself? Being a microcosm, man can come to know himself first through knowledge of the macrocosm. In the *Rawshanāʾī-nāma* the poet begins to explain his cosmology, relating how the Universal Intellect issued from the one God, and the Universal Soul from the Intellect, followed by the emanation of the spheres and the physical world, and finally human beings, from the Universal Soul. In mystical forms of philosophy, true understanding or gnosis of the soul involves its return to its Origin – that is, the one God – a task that is accomplished by knowing the world, the Universal Soul, and the Universal Intellect. That is why the practical or the moral aspect of the poet's mysticism, as well as the need to follow religious law (*sharī'a*), is discussed after an explanation of his approach to cosmology and psychology. Towards the end of the *mathnawī*, the poet speaks of what motivated him to compose the poem and this is where he narrates the following experience in which he hears the purified souls or the spirits of saints speaking to him, as it were, in the 'language of their state'.

The whirling heaven gave me enough time
 To pierce through this fine, auspicious pearl.
 A night, dark as a sinner's heart,
 When eyes could see nothing of the world
 For the world-illuminating sun had hidden behind the western veil
 And night had prepared an ambush for the day,

While everyone was sound asleep save me
 My mind busy, but my body at rest
 Contemplating the nature of darkness and light
 My soul intoxicated by the cup of thought,
 To the east a while, and then the west,
 Then up and up, beyond the heavenly bodies I went.
 Though it was utter dark,
 My soul could see a subtle point.
 I saw a world, luxuriant and fair
 Peopled by a group of noble spirits,
 A group who had abandoned this house of clay
 Turning the face of their souls to the world of the Heart,
 A group who had broken off the chain of the four elements,
 Who had freed themselves from their fetters and escaped the prison.
 Addressing these intelligent spirits,
 I said: 'O you, holy ones, who have cast off the burden from your
 shoulders.
 You who have attained immortality,
 After detaching yourselves from the perishable world,
 You who have given up worldly existence for enlightenment
 Who have left night behind to enter the Dawn,
 Tell me, why you not speak to me of your situation
 Of how you are and the states you are in?'
 Then, suddenly in the 'language of their state' they spoke to me
 Answering all my questions from the beginning to the end,
 Saying: 'We have reached the world of Eternity
 Detached as we are from the perishable world,
 Once we realised that this world is worthless
 It deserved not love from us.
 For every step we took there (in our ignorance)
 We were punished with years spent in darkness.
 Now we warn you – but we know you are heedless,
 For you are asleep in your forgetfulness.'
 Having heard these words, my mind returned to its normal state
 With all my uncertainties changed into certainty.
 Then the intellect (*khirad*) came to dwell in my mind,
 A hundred springs of ideas opened in my heart.
 I began to reflect,
 And in that reflection, I made a decision,
 A decision to put down these ideas for posterity,
 That I might be remembered by them.⁹

The poet's encounter with the spirits of the saints, despite having the semblance of a mystical experience, is an imaginary and poetic creation which has other parallels in the history of Persian mystical literature. A case in point is the scene that is described in some detail in the anonymous Sufi-Ishrāqī *mathnawī* entitled *Ṭarīq al-tahqīq* (*The Way of Realisation [of the Truth]*).¹⁰ This treatise was commonly attributed to Ḥakīm Sanā'ī of Ghazna until the Swedish scholar Bo Utas, in his study of different manuscripts of the text, showed that it was not by the poet of Ghazna but was probably by an otherwise unknown poet by the name of Aḥmad Nakhjawānī who lived at some time around the eighth/fourteenth century.¹¹ Another example is an imaginary scene in the *Rawḍat al-muḥibbīn* (*Garden of the Lovers*) by Ibn 'Imād of Shīrāz (d. 800/1397–1398) in which the poet has an encounter with a mysterious advisor (*munḥī-i rāz*) and has a conversation with it as well as with his own heart.¹² Examples are also found in mystical *ghazals*.¹³ This type of scene, where the poet or author claims to have visited the gathering of spiritual beings, usually at night, and heard their words in the language of state (*bi-zabān-i ḥāl*), seems to have been developed and used by Persian poets particularly during the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods. Thus it is highly unlikely that Nāṣir-i Khusraw should have composed the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*.

There is another 'character' in this imaginary scene whose role makes the attribution of this poem to Nāṣir-i Khusraw dubious, and that is the personified intellect (*khīrad*). As we have seen, Nāṣir-i Khusraw has the intellect speak to us in some of his poems in the *Dīwān*. In the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, however, the intellect does not speak, but acts as the source of all knowledge, and a teacher or a mentor, and inspires the poet so that he can write his book. Thus the cause of this composition is the poet's visit to the intellect and what he learns from it. The intellect was regarded as the source and transmitter of knowledge, or as a mentor, in Iranian philosophical literature long before Nāṣir-i Khusraw's time. Ibn Sīnā (d. 429/1037), in his treatise *Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān*, gave this role to the active intellect, and before Ibn Sīnā, in the Pahlavi text *Dādestān-i mēnōg-i xrad*, it was given to the heavenly or the universal intellect (*khīrad*).¹⁴ However, the first mention of intellect as the source and the cause of a composition in didactic *mathnawīs*, so far as we know, was by Sanā'ī in the *Ḥadīqa* and this precedent was used by later mystical poets. Although it is not impossible that Nāṣir-i Khusraw preceded Sanā'ī in giving this role to the intellect, it is unlikely.

One can find in the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* other indications that it was composed more than a century after Nāṣir-i Khusraw. One such indication is the verse in which the poet mentions the name of the Sufi Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (executed 309/922). The poet warns his reader not to reveal the secrets of the path, or else he will lose his life on the gallows, just as Ḥallāj did. A similar warning to wayfarers of the mystical path that if they do not keep the secrets of the path they might even be executed like Ḥallāj is found also in one of the *ghazals* of the

eighth/fourteenth-century poet Ḥāfīz. This was a poetic way to tell initiates to keep a discreet silence about the esoteric teachings, for fear they might be persecuted by the enemies of the Sufis. The idea in poetic contexts of Ḥallāj someone who was punished (by God) because he revealed secrets, was not in circulation among Sufis before the sixth/twelfth century. Since some Sufi contemporaries of Nāṣir-i Khusraw still did not approve of Ḥallāj, it would be quite unexpected for an Ismaili *dā'ī* like Nāṣir-i Khusraw to mention his name with approval.

The problem of the authenticity of *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* has long been discussed both by European and Iranian scholars. While the first editor of the text and its translator into German, Hermann Ethé, as along with E. G. Browne,¹⁵ Ḥasan Taqīzāda and Jan Rypka,¹⁶ believed that this *mathnawī* was by Nāṣir-i Khusraw, two Iranian scholars, Ziyā' al-Dīn Sajjādī and Mujtabā Mīnuwī, both argued to the contrary.¹⁷ Those who have maintained that the work is by Nāṣir-i Khusraw have not presented a really strong argument. They appear to have relied on certain the lines where the poet mentions the name or the pen-name of Nāṣir-i Khusraw. In one of the lines, the poet in fact claims on behalf of Nāṣir-i Khusraw to have been identified with God, a claim that Nāṣir-i Khusraw himself could not have made.

Agar da'wī kunam wa'LLāh ki jāy-ast
Ḥaḡīqāt Nāṣir-i Khusraw khudāy-ast. (Ibid., p. 523)

By God, I have all the right to claim,
 That Nāṣir-i Khusraw is indeed God.

In another place, the poet states that he is the *ḥujjat* (literally meaning Proof, a title that was applied by the Ismailis to a chief *dā'ī* and Nāṣir-i Khusraw used it as his pen-name) and sitting in Yumgān, where Nāṣir-i Khusraw was exiled for some years.

Zi ḥujjat īn sukhan-hā yād mīdār
Ki dar Yumgān nishasta pādshah-wār. (Ibid., p. 521)

Remember these words from the Proof,
 Who is sitting like a king in Yumgān.

This line also appears to have been written by someone other than Nāṣir-i Khusraw, apparently an Ismaili poet who respected Nāṣir and sought to have his composition associated with him. Seeking to give the impression that this work was composed by Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the poet attempts to forge the date of his composition so that it would match Nāṣir-i Khusraw's dates. There is, however, a discrepancy in the readings of the manuscripts, and so far the scholars of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's life and works have not agreed on a definite date. Two of the years, given

in two manuscripts (323/935 and 343/954), pre-date Nāṣir-i Khusraw's birth, and one (420/1029) is before he became an Ismaili *dā'ī*. So these dates cannot be correct. Ethé arbitrarily chose the date 440/1047–1048 and Taqizāda the year 460/1068 (*bi-sāl-i chār-ṣad sih biṣt bar sar*).¹⁸ Mīnuwī disagreed with these dates, and said that, after having checked other manuscripts of this work in different libraries in Turkey, he came to the conclusion that the correct date of the composition of the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* must be 643/1245–1246). Though Mīnuwī does not introduce his source(s) for this date, I believe that he may well be correct in placing the date of its composition about two centuries after Nāṣir-i Khusraw.

Sajjādī's argument against the authenticity of this work is based on the weakness of the poem and the incorrectness of some of the rhyming words, a fault that is not to be expected from a poet such as Nāṣir-i Khusraw. The lines where the name of Nāṣir-i Khusraw or his pen-name Ḥujjat appears could not, according to Sajjādī, and also Mīnuwī, have been composed by a poet like Nāṣir-i Khusraw.

Sajjādī and Mīnuwī's arguments are endorsed by the conclusion I have reached through examining the story of the poet's meeting with the souls of the saints and hearing them speak in *zabān-i ḥāl*. As I have shown, although Nāṣir-i Khusraw did use the language of state in his *Dīwān*, he did not use the name of *zabān-i ḥāl* to refer to it. This term seems to have been used in Persian poetry in Khurāsān a generation later. So far as we know, 'Umar Khayyām was the first poet and Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī the first theologian and writer to have used it. The idea of the intellect being the source of the poet's inspiration and the repository of all philosophical knowledge is also something that was developed after Sanā'ī of Ghazna. I am aware that my arguments by themselves are not sufficient to prove that the *mathnawī* called *Rawshanā'ī-nāma* is a forgery, but, when they are placed alongside the other arguments presented by Mīnuwī and Sajjādī, they bring us closer to the conclusion that this work was not written by Nāṣir-i Khusraw.

Notes

1. Plotinus, *Enneads*, III, tr. A. H. Armstrong (London and Cambridge, MA, 1967), *Enn.* III.8, section 4.

2. In some manuscripts it is *gūyā u khāmūsh* (speaking and dumb) which is self-contradictory. The correct reading, as found in other manuscripts, is *gūyā-yi khmūsh*, which means silent but speaking in the language of state.

3. For the *qaṣīdas* of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, I have used *Dīwān-i ashār-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, ed. M. Mīnuwī and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1353 Sh./1974).

4. The poet Rūdakī also has Time (*zamāna*) speak to us in one of his poems, though its admonition is different. *Zamāna* warns Rūdakī not to feel sorrow or be envious of those who are more fortunate, for there are many who wish they were as fortunate as he: *Zamāna pandī āzādwar dād ma rā / Zamāna rā chu nikū bingari hama pand ast; 'Bi rūz-i nik-i kasān', guft, 'tā tu gham nakhuri / Basā kasā ki bi rūz-i tu ārizūmand ast'* (Rūdakī, 'Shi'r', in M. 'Awfi, *Lubāb al-albāb*, ed. E. G. Browne (Leiden 1903; repr. Tehran, 1361 Sh./1982), vol. 2, p. 9).

5. [Ed. note: This is the 'Burning Bush' of the Bible.]
6. See my *Zabān-i ḥāl* (Tehran, 1385 Sh./2006), pp. 120–121.
7. Ghazālī uses this expression in several places in the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (e.g. Book one, *shatr* 1, ch. 3, *bayān* 2), as well as in his Persian treatise on *Ahd-i Alast* (Primordial Covenant). For a full discussion, see my *Zabān-i ḥāl*, pp. 132–134.
8. [Editor's note: Michael Beard's chapter in this volume discusses this poem.]
9. For this poem I have basically used the text of the *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, edited by Sayyid Naṣr Allāh Taqawī and included in *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Ḥakīm Abū Mu'īn Ḥamīd al-Dīn Nāṣir ibn Khusraw Qubādiyānī*, introd. Sayyid Ḥasan Taqīzāda (Tehran, 1304–1307 Sh./1925–1928; 4th ed. 1355 Sh./1976), pp. 539–540. I have also consulted variant readings in two other manuscripts and made some corrections to Taqawī's text.
10. Bo Utas, ed., *Tarīq ut-taḥqīq: A Sufi mathnavi ascribed to Hakim Sana'i of Ghazna. A Critical Edition, with a History of the Text and a Commentary* (Lund, 1973), p. 22.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 115–134.
12. Ibn 'Imād, *Rawḍat al-muḥibbīn* (Tehran, 1314 Sh./1936), pp. 9–10.
13. See, for instance, Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī, *Kulliyāt*, ed. S. Nafīsī (Tehran, 1338 Sh./1959), p. 300.
14. For the study of this idea in Persian philosophical and mystical literature, see my article 'Pīr', *Dānishnāma-i Jahān-i Islām*, vol. 5 (Tehran, 2000), pp. 892–898.
15. Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1906; repr., 1969), pp. 244–245.
16. Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht, 1968), pp. 188–189. Rypka thinks this is one of the earlier works of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, giving 444/1053 as the date of its composition but I have no idea where this date is taken from.
17. For Mīnuwī and Sajjādī's articles, see *Yād-nāma-yi Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (Mashhad, 1355 Sh./1976), pp. 263–272 and 574–580.
18. See Taqawī's edition of the *Dīwān*, p. 541, and Taqīzāda's introduction.

‘On the Steed of Speech’: A Philosophical Poem by Nāṣir-i Khusraw

ALICE C. HUNSBERGER

Nāṣir-i Khusraw: exemplar of the philosophical poet

Nāṣir-i Khusraw was, and still is, celebrated for both his prose and his poetry. His prose works include several important philosophical and doctrinal treatises,¹ as well as a record of his seven-year journey to Egypt (see Chapter 1 in this volume by F. Hunzai).² He also composed poetry in both the *qaṣīda* and the *mathnawī* form (see the Editor’s introduction to this volume), the content and quality of which have ensured his standing as one of the masters of Persian classical poetry.

In this chapter, I will attempt to show how a poet-philosopher practises his poetic craft to draw philosophy up, into and through the poem – or, employing another metaphor, to show how the poet weaves philosophy into the very fabric of the poem, so that one cannot lift it out without unravelling the poetry itself and, with it, the poem. The methodology pursued here will be to examine one *qaṣīda* in its entirety,³ analysing how philosophical content is hidden in the structure of the poem and how poetic techniques are employed to expose and accentuate philosophical points. The goal is to show how this *qaṣīda* is a work of art, and not merely philosophy in verse.

Before going further in this discussion of Nāṣir-i Khusraw as a ‘philosophical poet’, we should address two questions. The first asks, is not all poetry essentially philosophical? The answer is yes if we take the word ‘philosophical’ in its broadest sense; in that case, even the most radical twentieth-century poets who simply depict objects or feelings (as did the Imagists) purposefully display their various forms of philosophy. In the medieval Persian context other examples can be found; Ḥāfīz’s mystical poems, for instance, also reveal a basic philosophy. The second asks, if the poet is really expounding a philosophy or trying to convince the reader of a certain point, is the result really poetry? This question displays a suspicion of the purpose

of any poem that contains more than the expressed emotions of the poet. But the answer to this question, also, is yes. A number of critics have specifically disparaged Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry for urging the listener to accept certain religious values.⁴ Yet no one complains when Rūmī or Ḥāfīz use verbs in the imperative when promulgating their own spiritual and moral values. This second question reminds us that we, today, are products of the twentieth century, a century that consciously strove to break down the traditional rules and constructs of art, politics and society, and in many ways succeeded, so that many old assumptions are no longer acceptable or even remembered. Moreover, we also come after European poetic movements, such as the Romantics of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, and the Symbolists, Impressionists and Expressionists (of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), who championed a view of poetry as being true only if it did nothing more than express (literally, 'press out') the individual poet's feelings, particularly as flashes of insight. Wordsworth (1770–1850) encapsulated the Romantic judgement that poetry is 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings',⁵ which later theorists took further, saying that any attempt to affect the audience invalidates the poem as art.⁶ But these are recent theories and, over the previous centuries, poetry was expected to do, and loved for doing, far more than that.

Affecting an audience emotionally has been one of the primary purposes of poetry for thousands of years. When Aristotle discussed the virtues of poetry he was primarily thinking of stage plays, particularly tragedies, as the highest form, but also of epic, and some lyric, poetry. He declared its effect on an audience was a primary criterion for judging the quality of a poetic work. The Neoplatonists and their followers in the Italian Renaissance, as well as English poets such as Sir Philip Sidney and John Milton, or later, the Romantic poet Shelley, held poetry to be the highest kind of illumination, because it imitated the eternal Ideas of Plato. The intimate connection between illumination, poetry and moral guidance can be seen in most of the poetic traditions of the world.⁷

Audience response was also critical for pre-Islamic Arabic poets whose poems, and especially their *qaṣīdas*, had two important purposes: to praise and boast of the glory of their own tribe (*fakhr*) and ridicule their enemies (*hijā'*), while also weaving in love stories, tales of battles and lamentations. Poets were also expected to vaunt their own superior poetic talents and to denigrate other poets. Many people today find these aims distasteful and alien to poetry, yet they can be seen as similar to publishing an author's credentials on a book's dust jacket. The word *qaṣīda* itself, deriving from the Arabic root, *q-ṣ-d*, meaning 'to go towards a goal or direction', underlines the use of the *qaṣīda* to make a point, to teach a lesson, in a series of steps laid out as evidence, similar to a philosophical argument. Poets writing *qaṣīdas* in Arabic and Persian in the Islamic era continued to appeal to the audience in this way, as well as developing other purposes for the *qaṣīda*, including

expressing an ascetic disdain for this world (*zuhdiyyat*), praising the Prophet Muḥammad (*naʿt*), praising the actual, or hoped-for, patron (*madīh*), the conveyance of spiritual, religious and mystical ideas, and as mnemonic teaching devices for scientific and philosophical ideas.⁸

Expounding higher truths as a form of guidance was such an exalted part of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry that, when Muḥammad started receiving revelations from God, he had to address the criticism that he was ‘merely’ a poet, and not a prophet.⁹ Ibn Rashīq (fifth/eleventh century), an Arabic poet who served for many years in the court at the North African city of Qayrawān while it was under Fatimid control, reviewed this topic in his highly influential study of the art of poetry, and concluded from the root of the word: ‘a poet (*shāʿir*) is so-called because he perceives (*shaʿara*) what others do not.’¹⁰ The use of poetry for didactic purposes and moral instruction was taken to be part of the very definition of poetry.¹¹ Long considered to be in touch with the highest truths, the poet was viewed as not only seer and singer of tales, but as teacher and spiritual guide. Poetry itself was seen as the most effective way of transmitting moral and spiritual truths to others because of its use of imaginative creativity (*takhyīl*). Al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), one of the earliest Aristotelian philosophers in the Islamic world, argued that through the poet’s *takhyīl*, the listener would accept opinions or feelings that he might reject when they were presented through logical ways of thinking:

When we hear poetic discourses, something happens to us; I mean, through imaginative creation (*takhyīl*) which takes place in our souls through them...Poetic discourses do influence our imagination, even though we know the object not to be thus... And quite often man’s actions follow what he imagines more than what he knows or believes... For this reason, these poetic discourses are the only ones that are adorned, beautified, magnificently presented, and offered with all the splendour and brilliancy of the resources mentioned in the science of logic.¹²

Nearly a century later, Ibn Sinā (d. 428/1037), arguably the most important Muslim philosopher, wrote that poetry can influence the soul to the point that it will rejoice or be anguished by something never before seen, thought of, or chosen. In short, the soul will be affected psychically, not intellectually, whether or not what is said corresponds to reality (*muṣaddiq*).¹³ Not only philosophers, but Persian poets also wrote on the affective aims of poetry.¹⁴ Thus, the criticism that Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s poetry is somehow poor, or unpoetic, because it aims to move the reader to improve morally or to accept a particular philosophy, is invalid.

There are two ways a poem may be philosophical.¹⁵ First, the poem may simply be a vehicle for carrying ideas, so that one could quite simply restate the philosophy in abbreviated prose form without changing the meaning. Second, idea and poetry may be so complexly intertwined, the full repertoire of literary devices having been

called into play, that the poem would fall apart if the philosophy were removed.¹⁶ Nāṣir-i Khusraw exhibits both: sometimes it is easy to see his philosophy (if you know it already) and pluck it out of its casings of metre and rhyme and words, and sometimes he reaches the highest levels of art, where content cannot be stripped from its medium. But both instances should be counted as poetry.

While remaining true to the requirements of the form of the classical *qaṣīda*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw created a new artistic territory for himself and for Persian poetry; he was the first major Persian poet to base his art on a thoroughly religious, spiritual and philosophical grounding and goal.¹⁷ Indeed, at least two studies of his *philosophy*, primarily cite his poetry.¹⁸ Critical of poets who, in his opinion, had sullied the Persian language and wasted their poetic talent by composing panegyrics in praise of unworthy rulers¹⁹ or by crafting foolish love lyrics, he called for, and composed, a poetry that aimed at leading people to focus on eternal truths, to acquire spiritual knowledge, to find ultimate purpose in their daily activities, and thereby to save their souls. While Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry is moralistic and sermonising, based on Neoplatonic philosophy, with frequent references to the Qur'an, Ḥadīth and Iranian history, most of his *qaṣīdas*, following conventional format, do include a panegyric segment (*madiḥ*). The difference is that they are dedicated to praising persons whose spiritual life he feels is worthy of praise and of his poetic talent, such as the Prophet Muḥammad, his cousin and son-in-law 'Alī, Jesus, Abraham and Solomon, and not least Nāṣir-i Khusraw's spiritual leader, the Fatimid Ismaili Imam-caliph in Egypt, al-Mustanṣir bi'llāh (d. 487/1094), and his mentor, al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī. These *qaṣīdas* are not simply versified philosophy,²⁰ they are indisputably poetry.

A poem, like any work of art, is not natural. It is a construction of the human mind, of one individual human mind, one which has consciously gathered together various thoughts, feelings, imaginative powers, facility with language, familiarity with previous and present poems, as well as theories of poetic usage, style and excellence, and which then makes conscious choices to order and arrange these elements into a final product, the poem. The success or excellence of the poem is judged on its art (*ṣan'a*) – that is, its 'artificial' application of external order to a small portion of the poet's interior landscape of emotions and thoughts, an order and arrangement that lets later readers or listeners feel and understand not only the final purpose or cause (including the 'theme') of the poem, but also the imaginative and rational processes of arriving there. More than just the expression of momentary feelings (however beautiful and heart-grabbing), each poem observes rules of form and content in order to bring out, to press out, the poet's emotional message. Thus when we want to look at a poem we must take this poetic art, this choice of arrangement and material, into consideration. We need to understand the decisions that the poet has made.

Analysis of the poem 'On the Steed of Speech'

A century before Nāṣir-i Khusraw's lifetime, the Arabic literary critic Ibn Ṭabāṭabā (d. 322/934) advised that to achieve excellence a *qaṣīda* should be 'like a single utterance in respect to the resemblance of its beginning to its conclusion, its closely-knit texture (*naṣj*), beauty and eloquence, lucidity of wording, precision of meanings, and correctness of composition'.²¹ In order to understand Nāṣir-i Khusraw better as a poet, it will be most enlightening to examine the closely knit and beautiful texture of one *qaṣīda* in its entirety.²² If we simply look at independent lines from a variety of his *qaṣīdas* it is possible for us to gain some appreciation of his artistic talents and strengths, as well as of some of his philosophical ideas; but we will not understand how he created a poem as a whole.²³ While highly focused studies, on poetic technique or image, or on one philosophical term, for example, are valuable in themselves for shedding light on whole poems, what is proposed here is to begin to unravel the weaving in order to understand the many threads that make his fabric hold together so beautifully. Few of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *qaṣīdas* have been analysed in their entirety, much less analysed in both philosophical and literary terms – that is, both for meaning and expression.²⁴

The *qaṣīda* under analysis in the present study, entitled here, 'On the Steed of Speech',²⁵ is both richly poetic and heavily philosophical. It is an excellent example of how Nāṣir-i Khusraw deftly brings together his various artistic talents. In fact, in the very first line, themes and terms of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's cosmology, philosophy of the soul, ethics, aesthetics, religious philosophy and prominence of knowledge spring into view, with the dramatic opening image of a rider astride a steed of speech. And philosophical themes continue to parade through the progression of the poem to its equally meaningful finale. With its close interweaving of method and meaning, I see this *qaṣīda* as one in which dramatic imagery and poetic technique are successfully integrated with its philosophical message. As will be shown, the poet has integrated many aspects of the poetics of the Islamic era into the very warp and woof of the poem. 'On the Steed of Speech' consists of eighty lines,²⁶ composed in the *mutaqārib* metre. This heroic metre, in which each hemistich (*miṣrā'*) is comprised of four feet of short-long-long syllables each, is used by our poet in its complete (*salīm*) form (*fa'ūlun fa'ūlun fa'ūlun fa'ūlun*), one of his favourites.

In my reading and analysis of this *qaṣīda*, I have consulted all three editions (Ethé, Taqawī, and Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, from now on referred to, respectively, as E, T, and MM), and their variants, to make the most meaningful reading possible (see footnote 4). Slight discrepancies have been noted where necessary.

This analysis of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poem 'On the Steed of Speech' uses Julie Scott Meisami's study of the eighteen rhetorical devices (five 'figures' of literary style, *badī'* and thirteen 'ornaments of discourse and poetry', *maḥāsin al-kalām wa al-shī'r*) listed by one of the earliest rhetoricians of the 'Abbasid era, Ibn al-Mu'tazz,

in his *Kitāb al-Badī'* (274/887).²⁷ Some of these are figures of expression or wording (*lafẓī*), some of meaning or concept (*ma'nawī*).²⁸ The five figures of *badī'*, according to Ibn al-Mu'tazz, are: *isti'āra* ('metaphor'), *tajnīs* (*paronomasia* – words similar in root or meaning expressing either related or dissimilar things), *muṭābaqa* (antithesis), *radd al-a'jāz 'alā mā taqaddamahā* (a type of repetition, 'returning the end of a statement to what preceded it', also called *taṣḍīr* and *radd 'alā ṣadr*), and *al-madhhab al-kalāmī* ('theological style', signifying a method of dialectical argument).²⁹ The thirteen ornaments are: 'iltifāt ('change from statement to address and vice versa'), *i'tirād* ('interjection'), *rujū'* (retraction or exception), *ḥusn al-khurūj* ('excellent transition'), *ta'kid al-madh bi-mā yushbihu al-dhamm* ('affirming praise with what resembles blame'), *tajāhul al-'arīf* ('rhetorical question'), *hazl yurād bihi al-jidd* ('humour with serious intent'), *ḥusn al-tadmīn* ('excellent allusion, quotation'), *ta'rīd and kināya* ('indirection, euphemism, metonymy'), *al-ifrāt fī al-ṣifa* ('exaggerated description'), *ḥusn al-tashbih* ('excellent comparison'), *i'nāt* ('a device of the rhyme') and *ḥusn al-ibtidā'āt* ('excellent beginnings').³⁰

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate each of these rhetorical devices in depth, or to compare them to other lists,³¹ I will attempt to identify as many of them as possible (as well as some others, such as repetition, that is *takrār*, and parallel structure), in order to show how the poetic art conveys the poet's philosophical meaning.

Besides these rhetorical devices suitable for all types of writing, this analysis also considers particularities of the *qaṣīda* form, including especially rhyme, structure and imagery. Briefly, we can state that the rhyme used in this poem, *ān*, is one of the most frequent in Persian poetry, a final syllable of a great number of types of words, including (but not limited to) plurals, adjectives and adverbs. For poetic purposes, however, the fact that the 'n' does not necessarily carry the metric weight of a consonant means that the syllable can vary between a metric count of 'extra long' (long vowel + consonant) or simply 'long' (long vowel). This metrical flexibility compounds the abundance of possible choices of vocabulary and thereby allows the poet considerable room to manoeuvre.

Formal analysis requires that we look at the poem's structure, the first step of which is to determine the outer boundaries of the work, much as an architect designs a house, a painter chooses a canvas, or a gardener lays out a plot of land. 'On the Steed of Speech', with eighty verses, is one of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's longer ones. A lengthy poem will not only allow him to include more topics, but also give room to expand on his explanations and dwell on certain ideas. After length, we need to see if there is a centre. Eighty lines are easily divided in half. If we do so, we can then see if the two halves relate to each other symmetrically.³² This would mean the poet has deliberately crafted the structure of his poem with reference to its meaning. With Nāṣir-i Khusraw as an Ismaili philosopher strongly espousing the dichotomy of outer (*zāhir*) and inner (*bāṭin*), exoteric and esoteric, such symmetry

is a strong possibility. It also embodies the technique of ‘ring composition’, which does not require the reflecting of Ismaili, or any, philosophy at all. One may ask whether this is too mechanistic and unnatural: are we imposing too much of a structure on the poem? The question forgets that all artistic production is partly craft, that the artist must also control technique. Our next step is to look at line 40 and see if it offers any clues of meaning:

40 *Khudā-yi jahān ānki nābuda dānad*
*Khudāwand-i īn ‘ālam ābād u wīrān*³³

40 God of the world, Who knows the non-existent;
 God of this world of cultivation and ruin,

We observe that God is placed here at the cap of the first half, a high point in the poem. A glance at the lines immediately before and after shows them both to be questions, yielding a symmetrical structure. Moreover, the poet has repeated two forms of the word for God (*khudā* and *khudāwand*) as the first and therefore most prominent word of each hemistich, thus doubling the power of the line. Both hemistiches refer to God’s relation to the world, but the poet chooses to use two different words for the word ‘world’ (*jahān* and ‘*ālam*’), the first Persian and the second, Arabic. From at least the second/eighth century, when the New Persian language absorbed Arabic vocabulary, Persian poets were able to make liberal use of this linguistic richness to add variety and depth to their phrasing. Even more important is the placement and meaning of the two halves of the line (*miṣrā’s*). The first refers to God’s knowledge before creation, an absolute knowledge of even that which does not yet exist, while the second refers to this physical world. Thus the first points above, or beyond, and the second down below, forming a pivotal point of meaning for the centre of the poem. In the phrase ‘world of cultivation and ruin’ (*ābād u wīrān*), the first term (*ābād*) literally means ‘inhabited, a place full of buildings’, ‘cultivated, a place full of water and plants’, or ‘full, peopled, functioning’, and the second term (*wīrān*) means ‘ruined or ruins’. While I have translated it rather literally, it could be translated as ‘this world of generation and corruption’, using a technical philosophical expression from Aristotle, meaning ‘coming to be and passing away’, which was translated into Arabic science as *kawn wa fasad*.

Discussion of the poem’s structure has naturally raised the issues of ornamentation and meaning. The devices of ornamentation the poet is using in line 40 include repetition (*takrār*), especially anaphora, which is repetition of parallel words or phrases at the beginning of several sequential lines, and also antithesis (*muṭābaqa*), with the contrast of the opposition (*taḍādd*) of cultivation and ruin, and the (repeated) contrast between God and the world. We can also view the two versions of the word God (*khudā* and *khudāwand*) as the form of *tajnīs* based on

etymology, known as *ishtiqaq* – that is, words with the same roots and with the same meaning. While *tajnīs* (words similar in root) is especially vivid in Arabic, in which every word is based on a three-letter root, the Persian poet would also look for such affinities in his own language, and the semantic power gained by layering words with slight differences. But a larger antithesis stands between the two hemistiches (*miṣrāʿs*) themselves, one treating of non-existence and the other of existence, two realms separated here by the *qaṣīda*'s caesura, the pause, the space, the void built in between the two *miṣrāʿs*.

Beginning at the beginning of the poem

Since we have just seen how structure and meaning are intertwined in one line, helped by the use of ornamental poetic devices, let us turn to the beginning of the poem and observe the strategies used by the poet to establish and organise his meaning. The first line of a poem, called the *maṭlaʿ* (a word related to the dawn, the rising of the sun or the stars), is expected by the audience to be especially refined and gripping in imagery, vividness, sound, and balance of words, and ideas. Indeed, critics paid such particular attention to how skilfully the first line of a poem was composed that there are at least two terms for its criterion of excellence: *ḥusn al-maṭlaʿ* ('beauty of the opening') and *ḥusn al-ibtidāʿ* ('beauty of the beginning'). In meaning, the first line should indicate the poem's main theme and, according to Ibn Hazm (d. 456/1064), should also 'arouse a sense of wonder and expectation in the audience'.³⁴ Shams-i Qays Rāzī (fl. early seventh/thirteenth century) added that it should be appropriate in style and vocabulary to the poet's purpose.³⁵ In the opening line of this *qaṣīda*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw launches his poem with a declarative sentence containing the magnificent image of a lively horse in a broad field, as well as a question and answer about the rider. But the listener knows immediately from the first phrase that the horse is a metaphor, 'the steed of speech'.

The second line follows with an imperative directed to the audience, and deepens the metaphor. Once the reader has accepted the poet's opening image of horse and rider and field as metaphor, the logic of the second line is difficult to question.

1 *Kumayt-i sukhan rā ḍamīr ast maydān*
Sawārash chi chīz ast? Jān-i sukhandān.

2 *Khīrad rā 'inān sāz u andīsha rā zīn*
Bar asp-i zabān andar in pahn maydān.

1 The steed of speech has the mind as spacious field.
Who, what, is its rider? The eloquent soul.

- 2 Craft reins out of reason and saddle from thought,
On this horse of the tongue, in its wide open field.

The poem bursts open with the explosive sound of the consonant 'k', the first letter of the poem's powerful first word *kumayt* ('horse, steed, mount, charger; bay').³⁶ This sound, combined with the known but infrequently used word for horse, and further combined with the striking image of speech itself as a steed enjoying the full run of the mind in all its complex beauty, creates a bold visual, aural and imaginative landscape. The word *maydān* means the field, as in playing field (such as for polo) or a battlefield or arena, all of these having in common the sense of a place of vigorous action. Nāṣir-i Khusraw thus expresses the dictum of *ḥusn-i maṭla'* in dramatic terms; he presses four nouns, each vibrating with layers of associations, *kumayt*, *sukhan*, *ḍamīr*, *maydān* ('horse,' 'speech,' 'mind,' 'field') into a muscular, imaginative vision, and into its meaning he pours a knightly challenge. In his bravado opening, this first half of his first line, wielding language as a lance, Nāṣir-i Khusraw throws down the gauntlet announcing the beginning of a discourse on the power and significance of speech itself.

'Speech' (Ar. *kalīma*, *qawl*, *luḡhat*; P. *guftār*, *sukhan*) holds enormous import for Nāṣir-i Khusraw. It is one of his key terms, referring at once or variously to God's speech, especially in the command, '*kun!* ('Be!'),³⁷ and also the Living Word of God, the Logos that proceeds both eternally from His essence, as well as to human physical speech and also to language as a whole. In some verses there is an ambiguity as to which he means, but in these two considered here, he points the finger at humans, first by identifying the rider as the human, rational soul, second by giving commands of *how* to speak, and third by situating the word *zabān*, which (as in English) literally means 'tongue' but has extended its meaning to 'language', in its own 'wide space', the physical palate of the mouth. In speaking, human beings thus participate in God's creative medium, the living essence which pervades all creation, all that exists in thought, in spirit, in materiality.

In the second half of the first line, he asks who this rider is who sits astride speech, of what is this rider made? He answers his own question: 'the eloquent soul' – that is, the soul which speaks, the soul with full command of language. Asking a rhetorical question, pretending to be ignorant, is a poetic device known as *tajāḥul al-ʿarīf*. But note what else he has done poetically. The question and answer format, familiar from philosophy and religious teaching, is a method included by Ibn al-Muʿtazz as *al-madhhab al-kalāmī* (theology school style) in his list of five poetic devices. And, while the first hemistich is declarative, presenting an image, setting a scene to which the reader (or listener) assents, the second hemistich of the first line asks a question. This shift in mode of address is a poetic device known as *iltifāt*. Not content with mere description, no matter how imaginatively vivid, the poet insists that the reader participate, he forces the reader's intellect to be

attentive. He asks a basic question, 'Who is the rider?' Now, what is the effect of a question? It jolts the reader out of passive receptivity into the role of a creative partner with the poet. The reader must try to answer. In a poem on speech, the poet demands that the reader speak.

The question 'who is the rider?' immediately clarifies the image of the first hemistich; this is no wild horse, running free and alone. We now see a rider. There will be, there is, a back and forth, a dialogue within speech itself. The poet answers his own question as to who the rider is, with, literally, 'the soul which can speak' – that is, 'the eloquent soul'. What is the 'eloquent soul'? It is the human soul, the only soul in this world (among all the animals) with the power of speech. In fact, the ability to form rational language and to speak is *the* defining difference between humankind and the other animals.³⁸ For speech to be speech, and not just sounds, it must be rational; but it cannot simply *be* rational, it must come forth from reason into the world. This is the task of the human soul. For Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the poet, the teacher, the Ismaili preacher, all readers and listeners are students, and all are in need of the lesson, the lesson that their very soul, the definition of their very humanity, is both the subject of the poem and the instrument by which it will be delivered and understood. This is his first line. But consider whether one more structural feature is accidental: the message of the first line is enveloped between its first and last letters, 'kaf' and 'nūn', which together form the Arabic of God's command of creation, 'kun' ('Be!'). This is the very first speech, or Word, the primordial couple, from which all being comes into existence,³⁹ cascading down from the highest spiritual and intellectual level basking in God's knowledge to the lowest level of dark ignorance. Thus has the poet almost invisibly woven his philosophical concepts into his poetry.

The second line continues both the metaphorical image (*isti'āra*) and the lesson, insisting with an imperative verb (another *iltifāt* immediately following the first, piling speed and urgency on to his message) that the reins of this horse must be made of the intellect (or reason) and the saddle of deep contemplation. With these verbal devices, the poet draws the reader further into his message, using a direct command, asserting his authority even beyond the direct statement of the first line. He thus insists not only on the reader's assent to a poetic metaphor, that horse and rider stand for language and human soul, but also that the reader accept this vision in his own life. With the imperative, the metaphor is not allowed to stand as a mere piece of literary decoration. The poet insists both on the moral rectitude of his metaphor and on the necessity of its universal application to each reader. For the imperative commands of the second verse to work, the reader must have already agreed to the metaphor of the first. That is, in the dialogue between the poem and the reader, the poem first asserts a proposition (here, that a horse is Speech) which the reader must absorb and agree to. With his vigorous images immediately followed by imperatives, Nāṣir-i Khusraw inserts an energetic demand for reader assent.⁴⁰

We should note here the term *khirad* (Persian for the Arabic 'aql), which in both languages sometimes indicates a substantial entity, 'intellect' or 'reason', and sometimes the function of 'intellecting' or 'reasoning' (*ta'aqqul*). As the entity, sometimes Nāṣir uses these terms to mean the Universal Intellect and sometimes the individual, human intellect and rationality.⁴¹ *Andisha* usually would be translated as 'thought', but we must guard against the idea that it might mean 'random thoughts' or 'musings'. Nāṣir is calling for purposeful thinking, conscious contemplation, rational meditation. In so doing, he is using the word *khirad* in a philosophical sense. That is, there is more depth in what he calls intellection or activity of the mind than in mere 'rationality', a depth that brings it closer to the actions of the heart (*dil*), which Nāṣir also regards as the organ that can grasp inner, true knowledge.

What of this image of the soul and its horse? Though it is somewhat reminiscent of Plato's *Phaedrus*, with its image of the soul as a charioteer controlling two strong horses (one white, representing the 'spirited' passions, such as anger necessary to fight injustice, and one black, representing the physical appetites), the image of the rider has its own tradition in the religious literature of Islam. For example, Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī says, 'the body is the horse and soul is the rider'. This idea can even be traced to a saying of the Prophet Muḥammad.⁴² Nāṣir-i Khusraw himself reflects this tradition; the image of the soul as the rider controlling the human body appears in more than one *qaṣīda*.⁴³

But here Nāṣir is using the image in a different way. His vision is of human rationality controlling speech and language. Both the reins and the saddle are equipment for controlling the horse. The human soul, says the poet, must be in control of rationality and thought in order to guide the tongue. When we think of the fields over which the horse and rider gallop together, literally 'having the run of' the mind, able to move wherever the rider wants, to be master over the entire expanse, we see the power Nāṣir gives this rider. The rider controls his or her mount. While the brute power and force of the horse is much greater than that of any human being, the thinking and planning and decision-making of where to go, when and how fast, belong to the rider. In this image are three main characters – the horse, the rider and the field (Speech, the Soul and the Mind) – each one in itself a powerhouse of philosophical thought, and the combined result is an original poetic vision.

The horse and rider image continues in lines 3 to 5, with the connection between lines 3 and 4 strengthened by the anaphora construction of their first two words repeating. Language construction further supports poetic meaning in each of the first four lines when the poet uses a parallel *idāfa* construction ('horse of ...') to keep the focus on the 'steed'; the first three lines are each variant ways of saying 'the steed of speech' (*kumayt-i sukhun*,⁴⁴ *asp-i zabān*, *asp-i sukhun*); with the fourth he adds surprise and a new possibility by injecting a new descriptor (*asp-i kurra*; 'foal'); and by the fifth line he has shifted the focus onto the other riders, and other

types of mounts. The word 'maydān' itself occurs once in each of the poem's first five lines (an important example of *tikrār*); and not only is the word (*lafz*) the same, but the meaning (*ma'nā*) is basically the same (displaying only differences of 'types' of fields), which means that the two main divisions of the entire science of rhetoric are merged in this extended poetic opening.⁴⁵ This links the first five lines together into one whole segment with the poet describing, questioning, answering.

- 3 *Bi maydān-i dīn*⁴⁶ *andar asp-i sukhun rā*
Agar khūb u chābuk suwārī bigardān.
- 4 *Bi maydān-i tang andarūn asp-i kurra*
Nigar tā natāzī bi pīsh-i sawārān.
- 5 *Sawārān-i tāzanda rā nīk bingar*
Dar īn pahn maydān zi tāzī u dīhqān.
- 3 Turn the horse of speech into the arena of Faith
If you are a skilful rider.
- 4 Do not rush onto the narrow field on a foal,
Beware, before the other skilful riders.
- 5 Behold the swift riders gathering in the broad field,
Arabs and Persians⁴⁷ alike.

Line 5, though loaded with the vocabulary of the previous lines, in fact points towards the lines that are coming. Whereas 3 and 4 form a clear pair with their anaphora, distinguishing between the 'arena of faith' and a 'narrow field', both requiring the rider and horse to be thoroughly trained and mature, line 5 commands the rider to size up the competition, the other champions and warriors. With the antithesis (*muṭābaqa*) of 'Arabs and Persians', verse 5 establishes a contest between the highest ranked competitors. Keeping his vocabulary restricted: the verb *nigar* in both 4 and 5; *suwār*, *suwārān* (in 1, 3, 4, 5, 6); forms of *tāzī*, *tāzanda* (4 and 5) meaning 'to rush, run, gallop', and *tāzī* meaning 'Arab' (5); and repetition (*takrār*) in 5 of the complete phrase of 2, *dar īn pahn maydān*), Nāṣir-i Khusraw keeps the meaning clear and builds tension, while at the same time letting his reader survey the fields of meaning.

The next five lines in terms of structure form another poetic segment, a sort of catalogue of the other riders with a description of their special skills that need to be respected. A semantic organising device is the focus on the word *rah* (*here with a short vowel*), 'road, way', keeping with the image of movement and arrival

onto a great (or narrow) field of contest. In this exposition of the excellences of the peoples of the world, the poet lets the images dominate, with only one overt case of *mutābaqa* ('antithesis') in line 9.

- 6 *'Arab bar rah-i shi'r dārad sawāri*
Pizishgī guzīdand mardān-i Yūnān
- 7 *Rah-i Hinduwān sūy-i nīrang u afsūn*
Rah-i Rūmīyān zi ḥisāb ast u alḥān
- 8 *Musakhkhar nigār ast mar Chīniyān rā*
Chu Baghdādiyān rā ṣinā'āt-i alwān
- 9 *Yikī bāz jūyad nihān rā zi paydā*
Yikī bāz dānad girān rā zi arzān
- 10 *Ṭalab kardan-i jāy u tadbīr-i maskan*
Ṭarāzīdan-i āb u taqdīr-i bunyān
- 11 *Dar īn har ṭarīqī ki bar tū shimurdam*
Sawārān-i jalādand u mardān farāwān

- 6 Arabs ride forth on the highways of poetry,
While Greeks chose the science of medicine;
- 7 The path of the Indians was toward magic and charms
The path of the Byzantines was music and maths.
- 8 Painting images is the Chinese way,
While Baghdadis excel in the treatment of colours.
- 9 One seeks the hidden within the manifest,
One distinguishes precious from cheap,
- 10 Seeking a place to live and running a household,
Supplying water and laying foundations.
- 11 In each of these ways I have listed for you,
The riders are tough and the men of great number.

The content of these lines reflects the widespread idea, in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's time, that God sent down special talents to three peoples: rationality to the hearts of

the Greeks, artistic talent to the hands of the Chinese, and eloquence to the tongues of the Arabs.⁴⁸ Line 10 points out the idea of practical types of philosophy: household management (*tadbīr* in Peripatetic philosophy) – that is, the need to manage expenses reasonably, educate children, treat wives and slaves fairly. The goal of these practical ethics is the improvement of the soul (*eudaemonia*, 'happiness', *sa'ādat*). Line 10 is a good example of how the poet ends the list in his catalogue. By amplifying the previous line, he underscores it and draws it to a close. In line 11 he explicitly points out what he has done, summarising his catalogue of talents. This includes the implicit challenge to the reader, 'you are going to be competing with these masters, what is your art?' In poetic art, Line 11 is also an example of *iltifāt*, changing the mode from what had just preceded it, and marking the transition to another long segment of eleven lines with an insistent anaphora of unrelenting questioning. The repeated beginning of each line, '*ki dānist?*' 'Who knew?' gathers strength as the lines move on, with the explosive and dental letters clattering (much sharper than the English) through the lines, sometimes veering to another question, '*ki kard, ki farmūd, ki būd?*' 'Who made, who ordered, who was?', each gaining in momentum, galloping like the very horse of speech. The field in which this horse gallops is the broad expanse of creative innovation and scientific knowledge.

- 12 *Ki dānist az awwal, chi gū'ī, ki aydūn*
Zamān rā bi-paymūd shāyad bi pangān?
- 13 *Ki dānist k'az nūr-i khurshīd gīrad*
Hamī rawshanī māh u birjīs u kaywān?
- 14 *Ki dānist k'andar hawā bī-sutūnī*
Sitāda-st daryā u kūh u biyābān?
- 15 *Ki dānist chandīn zamīn rā masāhat*
Šad u shašt chand ū-st khurshīd-i tābān?
- 16 *Ki kard awwal āhangarī? Chūn nabūda-st*
Az awwal na anbar na khāyasak u sindān?
- 17 *Ki dānist k'īn talkh u nā-khwush halīla*
Harārat bi-rānad zi tarkīb-i insān?
- 18 *Ki farmūd az awwal ki dard-i shikam rā*
Puruz bāyad az Chīn u az Rūm wālān?
- 19 *Ki būd ānki ū sākht shangarf-i Rūmī*
Zi gūgird-i khushk u zi sīmāb-i larzān?

- 20 *Ki dānist k'afzūn shawad rawshanā'ī*
Bi chasm andar az sang-i kūh-i sipāhān?
- 21 *Ki būd ānki bar sīm faql ū nihāda-st*
Mar īn zarr k'ān rā chunīn gard-i gīhān?
- 22 *Ki būd ānki kamtar bi guftār-i ū shud*
'Aqīq-i Yamānī zi la'l-i Badakhshān?
- 12 Who knew at the beginning, what do you think of it?
That time could be measured in a waterclock?
- 13 Who knew that Jupiter, Saturn, the Moon,
All take their light from the light of the Sun?
- 14 Who knew that the mountains, the oceans and deserts
Stand up in the air without any support?
- 15 Who knew that the area of the sun is 160 times larger,
Bigger by far than this whole earth of ours?
- 16 Who first began the blacksmith's art,
When in the beginning there were no tongs, no hammer, no anvil?
- 17 Who knew that this bitter, foul medicine, myrobalan,
Could chase away fever from the human form?⁴⁹
- 18 Who first prescribed for stomach aches and upsets,
'Take rhubarb from China and fennel from Byzantium'?⁵⁰
- 19 Who was it invented red Turkish ink
From powdery red sulfur and aqueous mercury?⁵¹
- 20 Who knew that a stone from the mountains of Iṣfahān
Would increase the light that comes from the eyes?⁵²
- 21 Who was it who esteemed gold more precious
Than silver, all over the world?⁵³
- 22 Who was it whose words made the Yemen carnelian
To be valued less than the Badakhshan ruby?

Each of these eleven questions asks about the initiatory moments of the workings of the world, and their content sheds light (and raises more questions) on contemporary technology, medicine, science and philosophy. Beginning from the question of how time could be measured by a mechanical device, a waterclock, Nāṣir then wonders how science has discovered astronomical facts such as that the planets shining in the sky have no light of their own but reflect the light of the sun, and that the sun, whose circumference we can sometimes see as a disk in the sky, has been measured and found to be significantly larger than the earth, whose expanse we can never see, and that this earth, with all its mountains and deserts and oceans, is actually a planet itself, hanging suspended in the sky? From astronomy, his next questions refer to human discoveries in medicine and technology. The last two (21, 22) want to know not only by whom, but on what basis, a hierarchy of value was established for material things? Why is one metal more prized than another, and one gemstone more favoured? What ties this entire section together and makes us want to go on to the next line is the anaphora, the deliberate repetition of the same word at the beginning of a stream of successive verses. The subject matter seems rather random yet urgency is achieved by the clattering on of the 'k' sound and the piling on of rhetorical questions about the beginnings of intellectual knowledge.

The next two verses form an intriguing transition, though some may think them hardly poetry. Yet while the poet shifts from the extended interrogation format to a two-line declaration, in meaning he still keeps to the question of value raised in the previous two verses.

23 *Agar jāniwar z-ān 'azīz ast bar mā*
Ki bisyār nafī-st mā rā zi ḥaywān (T)

24 *Hamī khwishtan rā nabīnim nafī*
Na dar sīm u zar u na dar durr u marjān (T)

23 If animals are dear to us
Because we derive tremendous benefits from animals,

24 Yet we see no practical benefit for us
From silver or gold, nor from pearls or coral.

Structurally, these two lines (23 and 24) can be seen as a cap on the eleven questions, since they, too, though not technically questions, point to an implicit question: how is it that we place a value on things which have little practical use? What is more, they are different from the lines which follow them. In meaning as well, they stay with the previous topic on relative value, with Nāṣir observing that it may be reasonable for us to value animals for their practical use, yet, who can

see any practical value in either precious metals or gems that in any way approximates the value we place on them? By grouping together animals, metals, gems (and implicitly, human beings), the poet is referring to the medieval philosophy of the ‘chain of being’ in which all parts of creation are connected.⁵⁴ Because the idea of this cosmic connection was so pervasive, the poet knew he had merely to name several items from creation for the audience to draw the connections themselves. In the last hemistich, we see an example of the ‘catalogue’ device, in which the poet strings like objects together. This close clustering is also a good summarising technique, before he moves to the next topic or section. We can also see the Persian poet’s ability to add richness to his language by using both the Persian (*jāniwar*) and the Arabic (*haywān*) terms synonymously for ‘animals’. Since both terms more literally mean ‘endowed with life’, they contrast with the lifeless metals and gems. The two lines are held together through meaning; one sets up a situation and the second responds with a contrast, and also through the repetition of the key word *nafī* (‘benefit’).

But it is not only through to their form and placing these two verses serve as a transition. They help to make the transition because the problem Nāṣir presents holds the key to its own solution. The problem and solution is echoed in Aristotle’s discussion of value which opens Book Alpha of the *Metaphysics*, in which he declares that the most common reason something is dear to us is not for its practical use, but rather for the enjoyment we derive from it because of our knowledge and understanding. Here is Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s key. Simple practical advantage cannot be the source of value, otherwise we would value beasts of burden more than gold.

Now he turns the topic towards the proper way of answering his questions. In a four-line segment, he declares that the answer to the problem of the value of jewels lies with understanding – that is, with seeing with your heart and not your head.

25 *Dar inhā bi chashm-i dil-at zharf bingar*
Ki in rā bi chashm-i sar-at dīd na-twān

26 *Bi darmān-i chashm-i sar andar bi-māndī*
Bukun chashm-i dīl rā yikī nīz darmān

27 *Zi chashm-i sar-at gar nahān-ast chīzī*
Na-mānd zi chashm-i dīl ān chīz-i pinhān

28 *Nahān nīst chīzī zi chashm-i sar u dīl*
Magar kirdigār-i jahān fard u subhān

25 Now look deep into these with the eyes of your heart
For the eyes of your head cannot see them.

- 26 You've been obsessed with a cure for the eyes of your head
Now, make a cure also for the eyes of your heart.
- 27 Though something be veiled from the eyes of your head
It will not remain concealed from the eyes of the heart.
- 28 Nothing is hidden from both the eyes of head and eyes of heart,
Save the Creator of the World, the unique and glorious.⁵⁵

Here, our poet has embarked on the Ismaili philosophy to which he adheres, with its clear distinction between the physical and spiritual realms. In these four lines, he has moved from the metaphorical language of the imagination to the metaphorical language of faith and spirituality. After the eleven questions, which take the listener back to the very beginning, and after two lines pondering relative value, he now provides the method for answering the questions. In these four lines, he says that human beings, who occupy a pivotal point in the chain of being, have a capacity to see and understand inner truths that do not, at face value, make sense (like the value of lifeless jewels). He distinguishes between the physical eyes ('eyes of the head') and spiritual eyes ('eyes of the heart'), two ways of perceiving and understanding that human beings are capable of. The perception of the inner eye being on a much higher intellectual level, he naturally encourages the reader to see with the inner eye and search for meaning beyond what the physical eye comprehends. We should note that his use of the phrase 'eyes of the heart' cannot be taken as being used in the same way the Sufis used it, as a mystical vision of the heart, but to distinguish two types of perception. Nāṣir-i Khusraw is using 'eyes of the heart' to denote a means of intellection, and that, for him, is indeed a very high level of understanding and knowing, not mere rationality.

These four lines contain their own progression. First, he begins with an imperative verb (shifting from the previous declarations), and then proceeds to explain. In structure, the first three use the hemistiches to contrast the two types of eyes; each sits separate in its own hemistich. But in line 28, the poet brings together (in an example of the ornament of *jam'*, 'joining', as described by Rashīd al-Dīn Waṭwāt)⁵⁶ both head and heart into one hemistich for the first time in the series of four verses, resolving the dichotomy he himself had first set up. By employing both types of seeing, he says, we can see and understand everything. But he then qualifies that assertion with *magar* ('except', 'but', 'save'), reminding us that even in the full power of both kinds of seeing, we still cannot see or comprehend God. As a poetic device, this line is an example of *i'tirāḍ*, 'interjection', in which the poet qualifies in some way what he has just claimed. In these four lines, the poet has made repeated use of *muṭābaqa* for didactic purposes.

Taken as a series of six lines (23–28) we can see another structure. The poet begins with a contrast of the mineral and animal kingdoms (and coral is seen as a transitional creature between mineral and plant since it exhibits characteristics of each, such as growth) and then moves on to state the two types of human perception and of acquiring knowledge. He ends with an affirmation of the unknowability of God.⁵⁷ In line 28, Nāṣir-i Khusraw is expressing the Ismaili position he adheres to regarding the question of *ru'yat* ('seeing God'). Like the Mu'tazilīs and the philosophers, he held that God is invisible to the internal as well as the external eye.⁵⁸ By ending one segment with God in his unknowable essence, the poet provides a contrast to the next segment, God's generous gift to human beings of *khirad*, 'Intellect'.

Intellect is the first hypostasis which emerges from God's command, the word *Kun* (Be!) Nāṣir-i Khusraw uses synonymously the Persian *khirad* and the Arabic 'aql, and when he uses those terms with no qualifiers, it is not always clear whether he means the Universal Intellect ('aql-i kull) or a human being's individual intellect ('aql-i juz'i). But even for an individual, *khirad* is much more than just 'reason' or 'rationality', and can be considered along the lines of 'mind', with all its capacities, including 'common sense' and inspiration or intuiting. Indeed, for Nāṣir-i Khusraw, discursive, step-by-step reasoning is the activity of the second hypostasis, the Universal Soul (*nafs-i kull*) and the human soul (*nafs-i juz'i*).⁵⁹ For 'soul', in his poetry he uses the Persian *jān* synonymously with the Arabic *nafs*.

In this next segment, leading up to the middle of the poem and its central line with two mentions of God, the poet focuses on *khirad*, its characteristics and its relation to the soul and to the listeners he is trying to attract. Line 29 refers to the intimate connection between the intellect and soul that the poet had established in the poem's opening lines, and the following six lines (30–35) expand on their roles.

- 29 *Khirad hadya-yi ū-st mā rā ki dar mā*
Bi farmān-i ū shud khirad juft bā jān.
- 30 *Khirad gawhar ast u dil u jānash kān ast,*
Balī, mar khirad rā dil u jān sizad kān.
- 31 *Khirad kīmiyā-yi ṣalāḥ ast u nī'mat*
Khirad ma'dan-i khayr u 'adl ast u ihsān.
- 32 *Bi farmān-i kasī rā shawad nīk baktī*
Bi dū-jhān ki bāshad khirad rā bi farmān
- 33 *Nigahbān-i tan jān-i pāk ast līkan*
Dil-at rā khirad kard bar jān nigahbān

- 34 *Bi zindān-i dunyā darūn-ast jān-at,*
Khīrad khwāhad-ash kard bīrūn zi zindān
- 35 *Khīrad sū-yi har kas rasūlī nihūfta*
Ki dar dil nishasta bi farmān-i yazdān⁶⁰
- 29 The intellect is a gift from Him to us, that within us,
Has become paired with the soul, by His command.⁶¹
- 30 Intellect is a jewel, our heart and soul the mine.
Truly, heart and soul are a fitting mine for intellect.
- 31 Intellect is the alchemy of bounty and blessing,
Intellect is the mine of goodness, justice and beneficence.
- 32 By divine command, he is made happy
In both worlds, who obeys the command of the Intellect.
- 33 The pure soul is guardian of the body⁶²
But Intellect made your heart the guardian of the soul.
- 34 Your soul is locked in the prison of this world,
Intellect shall set it free from this prison.
- 35 Intellect is a hidden messenger to everyone,
Dwelling in the heart by God's command.

In these seven lines (29–35), Nāṣir's focus on the intellect shows in repetition and word placement; not only does the word 'intellect' (*khīrad*) occur in each line, it is often the first word in either or both *miṣrā'*s. Most notably, 'intellect' is the first word of both *miṣrā'*s of line 29, and of the first *miṣrā'* of line 35, thus opening and closing this entire segment. As for meaning, the poet chooses to emphasise the intellect's relation to what comes after it, the soul and the physical world. Thus, the poet progresses through the stages of his Neoplatonic cosmogony, whereby God's command 'Be!' resulted in the creation of all Being, beginning with the Intellect, then the Soul, then the physical world. In this segment, Nāṣir-i Khusraw begins by announcing the intellect's exalted place ('a gift from God' to us) and purpose (that God has paired it with our soul). The intellect resides like a jewel within the human heart and soul, which are fitting abodes for it. Therefore, the intellect is not functioning abstractly or in a void. By 'alchemy', Nāṣir means that the intellect has the power to transform substances, at the elemental level, into more perfect substances such as bounty, goodness, justice and generous beneficence. Notice

that he does not assert that the intellect *uses* the method of alchemy, but *is* in fact alchemy itself. The intellect is the chemistry of transubstantiation whereby virtues are materialised. Using this vocabulary derived from one of the most lively sciences and philosophies of his time,⁶³ but in a figurative manner, is one stylistic method through which the poet explicitly asserts the philosophical basis of his poem. But it has more than stylistic purposes. For Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the intellect is intimately connected with human life and the perfection of humanity. Soul is one substance that can be perfected. He asserts that the 'pure soul', an incorporeal substance, is the guardian of the body but, at the same time, is imprisoned in this corporeal world, and the intellect is what will release the soul from this prison. The notion of the soul being imprisoned in the world has a long philosophical pedigree (predating Plato's allegory of the prisoners chained in the cave, and developed more solidly by the Neoplatonists) which was known to Muslim philosophers⁶⁴ and used frequently by Nāṣir-i Khusraw.⁶⁵ Exactly how, and with what knowledge, the intellect helps to free the soul from its captivity is the subject of his psychology, epistemology and soteriology.

But let us look more closely at line 32, which highlights the intellect's connection to the word 'command' (*farmān*), by using it once in each hemistich and echoing its use in line 29. From God's command of creation (Ar., *amr*; P., *farmān*), Muslim intellectuals divided the whole of creation into the spiritual world (*'ālam-i amr* lit., 'the world of command') and the physical world (*'ālam-i khalq*). What Nāṣir is pointing to here is the intellect's role in perfecting humans for both this world and the next. Poetically, the line is a perfect example of Ibn al-Mu'tazz's fourth rhetorical device, *radd al-a'jāz 'alā ma taqaddamahā* (elsewhere known as *'alā al-ṣadr*), in which the final word or phrase of the line repeats the beginning, in this case, *bi farmān*. The next two lines (33 and 34) also employ this device with the repetition of 'guardian' (*nigahbān*) and 'prison' (*zindān*). Line 35 repeats 'command' and makes it explicitly the command of God, not in the context of creation, but rather in that of God's communication with mankind. Through the metaphorical likening of the individual intellect to a messenger (*rasūl*, also 'prophet'), sent by God to dwell in the heart of each human being, Nāṣir accomplishes several things. He Islamicises his philosophy by calling the intellect *rasūl*, the term used for the Prophet Muḥammad and for other prophets who bring a message from God, such as the Torah and the Gospel, legitimising the intellect's superior role by equating it with a divinely appointed messenger from God; he also establishes the beginning of a spiritual hierarchy ordained and initiated by God's command.⁶⁶ For while we may think it merely poetic to have the intellect 'dwelling in the heart', this image reflects the natural philosophy of the time, which posited that the seat of the intellect was not the brain, as we think today, but the heart. In Nāṣir's *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, the brain is the seat of the 'eloquent soul,' the soul with language, whose task, he writes, is to govern the body.⁶⁷

The next set of six lines (36–41) expands this notion of an interior messenger (*rasūl*), someone chosen by God to bring a new message, establish a new rhetoric, and shine new meaning onto old words. How is this done? By the messenger asking questions about why the world is one way and not the other, challenging basic assumptions and overturning cherished truths. Our poet allows this foundational questioning role of the intellect to blossom in the next segment. Why is this done? These are more than rhetorical questions, they are the poet wielding form to embody the content of the message.

36 *Hamī gūyad andar nihān har kasī rā*
Ki chūn ān chunīn ast u īn nīst chūnān (MM)

37 *Az ghz chūn būd tarkīb-i 'lam*
Chi chīz ast bīrūn az īn charkh-i gardān?

38 *Agar gird-i īn charkh-i gardān tu gū'ī* (MM)
Tuhī jāyghī-st bī add u pāyn (T)

39 *Chi gū'ī dar ān jāy gardanda gardūn*
Rawān-āst yā īstāda-ast az īn sān? (MM)

36 He keeps on asking, inside everyone:
Why is that like this, and this not like that?

37 What was the world composed of, in the beginning?
What is there, outside of this turning dome?

38 If you say, around this turning sphere,
All is empty space, infinite and boundless,⁶⁸

39 Then what would you say about the turning heaven,
Would you say it is moving or standing still?⁶⁹

Questioning is the very mode by which Nāṣir introduces his topic, which is not simply the subject matter – that is, the nature of the revolving sphere (repeating 'turning') and where it ends, what is moving and what is still – but which is also the act of asking theological questions. The intellect, which dwells within each of us, poses questions concerning what is beyond the phenomenal world. These meta-physical questions culminate in the declaration in the middle of the poem, line 40, when it speaks of God's knowledge of both worlds (discussed above).

40 *Khudā-yi jahān ānki nābūda dānad*
Khudāwand-i īn 'ālam ābād u wīrān

- 41 *Chirā āfarīd īn jahān rā chu dānist*
Ki kam būd khwāhad zi kāfir musalmān?
- 40 God of the world, Who knows the non-existent,
 God of this world of cultivation and ruin,
- 41 Why did He create this world when He knew
 That the Muslims would be fewer than the infidels?

Structurally, the poet frames his poem's centre with two deep questions about creation and purpose, the first (39; above 40) about the heavens, the second (41; below 40) about the earth, creating a cosmological balance with God at the centre. Line 41 continues the didactic challenge with a rhetorical question, asking why God would create the world, since in it Muslims are outnumbered by non-believers.⁷⁰

Up to this point in the poem, in relation to content, Nāṣir has been speaking about the heavens and earth. Now he looks at God Himself, asking why he created this world the way he did, and what was his purpose. Of all the questions one could ask about God, the poet chooses one, about the creation of the world, where evil exists next to good. This is a potent pivot, pointing from the world of creation to the nature of God Himself and His divine knowledge and wisdom. Why did God create the world in this way? This is His world, and yet it contains so much evil. Why would he create it knowing that non-believers would outnumber believers? Why could it not be all good, and we all angels? Why could it not be paradise? These questions about God's wisdom mark a notable change from questions about what humans knew and discovered.

Nāṣir now turns the poem to focus more closely on God's first created being, intellect, and its relation to soul, and on how each human being should understand the intellect, with the surprising declaration that the intellect is like a messenger from God.

- 42 *Khīrad kū rasūl-i khudāy-ast zi tu*
Chi khwāndast az īn bāb bar tu? furū khwān! (T)
- 43 *Az īn dar bi burhān sukhan gūy bā man*
Na-khwāham ki gū'ī fulān guft u bahmān
- 44 *Gar īn 'ilm-hā rā bidānand qawmī*
Tu nīz ay pīsar, mardumī hamchu īshān
- 45 *Biyāmūz agar chand dushwārat āyad*
Ki dushwār az āmūkhtan gasht āsān

- 46 *Biyāmūz az ān-k'ash biyāmūkht īzad*
Sar az gard-i ghiflat bi dānish biyafshān
- 47 *Biyāmūz tā hamchu Salmān bibāshī*
Ki Salmān az āmūkhtan gasht Salmān
- 42 Intellect, which is God's messenger to you,
 What has it recited to you of this matter? Recite it!
- 43 On this matter, speak to me with proof;
 I don't want to hear you say, so-and-so or so-and-so said it.
- 44 If some people know these sciences, you, too, my son
 Are still a real human being like them.
- 45 Learn, however difficult it may be for you,
 Because through learning, the difficult becomes easy.
- 46 Learn that which God taught!
 Shake the dust of negligence from your head with knowledge.
- 47 Learn, so you may become like Salmān,
 For it was through learning that Salmān became Salmān.⁷¹

The equation of the Intellect with the Messenger (*rasūl*) of God (line 42) includes a Persian equivalent (*furū khwān*) for God's command to Muḥammad, in the Qur'an (96:1) 'Recite' (*iqra*). Thus the unidentified messenger is implicitly associated with Muḥammad. Nāṣir's twist is to place God's command on every individual. Everyone must hear and declare the message of the intellect. Line 43 is equally uncompromising. First, by enquiring what the intellect says about the soul, Nāṣir continues to underline their close connection. But his purpose is a moral one. In the second hemistich, he clarifies what he demands from his readers and followers: no easy answers, no simple following of tradition, like the chain of authorities of a *ḥadīth* ('so-and-so related it from so-and-so'). He has shown his antipathy to *taqlīd* ('blind following of authority') elsewhere: 'I never accepted *taqlīd*, nor ever opened the ear of my heart or the cap of my inkwell to all the traditional, "He related to us."⁷² In verse 44 he softens, moving from the imperative to a declarative, that all human beings (even you) have this power and capability because of their internal constitution, the combination of the intellect and soul. Knowledge is the innate capacity of all human beings. In its meaning, this statement harks back to the poem's opening lines, which define the power of speech as inherently human. In structure, a brief declaration precedes a series of three verses, each of which begins

sharply with the same imperative, ‘Learn!’ While the anaphora of those three lines (45–47) joins them together as a set, each line has its own inner structure. The first and third exhibit parallel syntax and advance the argument of why one should learn. The second forms their core, describing what to learn and what to do with the knowledge acquired. Thus, the first makes the proposition, the second tells one what to do, and the third repeats the proposition. The opposition (*muṭābaqa*) between the difficult and easy is resolved in line 47 by the example of Salmān the Persian who converted to Islam and became a famous companion of the Prophet, and the promise that an ordinary person might attain such knowledge.

In line 48, we return to the poem’s opening allusion to martial competition with a return to the word and imagery of horses, of the ‘field’ and necessary battle dress. And by selecting words of direction, the parallel but opposite prepositions ‘to’ and ‘from’, to open both lines 48 and 49, the poet suggests a scene of dynamic physical action.

48 *Zi burhān-u ḥujjat sipar sāz-u jawshan*
Bi maydān-i mardān burūn māy ‘uryān

49 *Bi maydān-i ḥikmat bar asp-i faṣāḥat*
Makun juz bi tanzil u ta’wīl jāwlān

48 From proof and argument forge your shield and mail;
 Do not go naked onto the field of men.

49 And on the field of Wisdom, upon the horse of eloquence,
 Do not make your attack, save with the Qur’an and its meanings.

Lines 48 and 49 should be read as a pair, both describing the armour needed for battle, the armour to be gained from learning. Nāṣir contrasts the battle of philosophy and theology with the battle of, or over, higher Wisdom. Both require specific weapons: the first, logical proof (*burhān*) and argument (*ḥujjat*), while the second requires the holy text (*tanzīl*, the Qur’an, which has ‘come down’) and hermeneutical procedures (*ta’wīl*, lit., ‘returning the word to its original meaning’). The first is God’s exoteric message sent down to Muḥammad, the second, the interpretation of the text by the Shi’i Imam. With these images, and the phrase ‘horse of eloquence’ (*asp-i faṣāḥat*), the poet has looped back to his main image, inserting an important stitch in his tapestry. ‘The horse of eloquence’ here clearly establishes his point, that the human ability to weave speech into meaning and image is the only steed we can ride towards understanding God’s message, the divine Word. The poet has achieved a cohesion of content through his repetition of the familiar words ‘field’ (*maydān*) and horses, yet builds drama by contrasting two types of fields and battle

(‘men’ and ‘wisdom’), and threatening that without the requisite tools, one enters the fields naked. He has brought together imagery already accepted by the reader with subsequent arguments for Islam, the intellect and Ismaili hermeneutics, to set the scene for the next section.

Nāṣir now begins an extended segment on the Universal Soul (*nafs-i kullī*) and the characteristic traits of this second hypostasis. Note that his first word in Persian is *madad* (support), which the true believer will receive from the Universal Soul. *Madad* is a frequent attribute among the Shi‘a for ‘Alī, the cousin of the Prophet Muḥammad and the first Shi‘i Imam.⁷³ In this way the poet weaves his philosophy in structurally, as, having linked the Intellect with the Prophet in earlier lines, he now associates the Universal Soul with ‘Alī. In line 49 he talked of the need for both the Qur’an and the interpretation of the text; exoteric text and esoteric understanding. In line 50 he declares that such understanding will come via the act of intellect, called *hujjat*, which helps convey support from the Universal Soul. Here, the term *hujjat* operates on several levels.⁷⁴ Literally, *hujjat* means ‘proof’ or ‘adducing arguments’; religiously, it is a Qur’anic term (2:145; 6:84; 6:150) with the same meaning. For Shi‘is in general, *hujjat* means the *walī* of God, the vicegerent of God on Earth, the Imam. For Ismaili Shi‘is, *hujjat* carries an additional meaning – it is a title of an advanced teaching rank, for a missionary leader of a large area with authority to teach the *ta’wīl* of the Imam. This title was bestowed on Nāṣir (see the chapter by F. Hunzai in this volume) and he has taken *hujjat* as his signature, his pen-name (*takhalluṣ*), thus asserting his authority to teach the *ta’wīl* of the Imam.

50 *Madad yābī az nafs-i kullī bi hujjat*
Chu jū’ī bi-dil nuṣrat-i ahl-i imān

51 *Nabīni ki pūlād rā chūn bi-burrad*
Chu ṣan‘at padhīrad zi ḥaddād sawhān

52 *Tu rā nafs-i kullī chu bi-shināsī ū rā*
Nigah dārad az jahl u ‘uṣyān u nisyān

50 You will receive support from the Universal Soul through the *hujjat*,
When, with your heart, you seek the victory of the people of faith.

51 Don’t you see how steel cuts
When it accepts the blacksmith’s art that makes it?

52 When you really know the Universal Soul
It will protect you from ignorance, disobedience and forgetfulness.

Here we have another three lines to be read as a set: each is laid out in parallel grammatical structures; each is a conditional (when-then) sentence. The two outer lines (50 and 52) directly speak of what the Universal Soul can do for believers, framing the central line (51), which stands as illustrative truth, that the craftsman's knowledge and skill can transform a piece of metal into a superior tool. Further, just as the steel must actively accept the blacksmith's art in order to become a proper cutting tool, the human being must actively seek the victory of the people of faith in order to receive support from the Universal Soul. With what Hamori has called 'hoops of poetic form – internal references that cut across the linear sequence',⁷⁵ we have in line 52 a throwback to the idea in line 46, where ignorance is contrasted with knowledge, an idea expanded here, in that knowledge of the Universal Soul will ward off ignorance.

Far from being haphazard, the order of topics in this *qaṣīda* is highly purposeful. Under an overarching theme of the philosophical significance of language, the poet has spoken of the immaterial world of the intellect and the soul, both of which came into being through the original command of God, and also of human participation in this immaterial world with our individual intellects and souls. Now Nāṣir is moving towards the physical world, from macrocosm to microcosm. His placement of these entities in his poem – word, intellect, soul, physical world – corresponds to the order of beings in his metaphysics, and is discussed in his philosophical prose treatises⁷⁶ as well as in the works of many other writers of philosophical texts (for example, the works of the Ikhwān al-ṣafā').⁷⁷

A lush garden theme introduces the next segment and further illustrates the Universal Soul's attributes; then the poem returns to the previous topic of the intrinsic value of gold and gems. In Greek philosophy, which was adopted by the Muslims, each kingdom of creation had its own particular soul (mineral soul, vegetative soul and animal soul), with increasing abilities. Here, our poet puts forward an argument in verse to the effect that human beings enjoy flowers, and metals have certain values because the human soul somehow 'connects' with the souls of plants and minerals, and is gladdened by the recognition.⁷⁸

53 *Bar ān sān ki rangīn gul u yāsamīn rā*
Nashānda-st dihqān bar aṭrāf-i bustān

54 *Gul az nafs-i kull yāfta-st ān 'ināyat*
Ki tu khwash-manish gashta'ī z-ān u shādān

55 *Zar u sīm u gawhar shud arkān-i 'ālam*
Chu paywasta shud nafs-i kullī bi arkān

- 56 *Agar jān nabūdī bi sīm u zar andar*
Bi šad man dīram kas nadādī yikī nān
- 57 *W'agar jān nabūdī bi sīm u zar andar*
Bidū jān-i tu chūn shudī shād u khandān?
- 53 Just as roses of many colours and jasmine
 Were planted by the gardener around the garden,
- 54 So has the rose received from the Universal Soul that favour
 Which has made your heart gladden and thrill at it.
- 55 Gold and silver and gems became the pillars of the world
 When the Universal Soul became attached to those pillars.
- 56 If gold and silver had no soul within themselves,
 No one would give a crumb for a hundred pounds of coins.
- 57 And if gold and silver had no soul within themselves,
 Why would your soul rejoice with a smile at seeing them?

Using rich internal assonance (*rangīn/yāsamīn*, *gul/kull*) and repetition of words in the same line (*arkān/arkān*, *jān/jān*), and then dramatic repetition of an entire first hemistich in a following line, the poet produces two arguments, one from flowers and one from gems, to show the connection between minerals, plants and humans (animal), and to argue that this sympathetic connection of souls is the source of happiness. Let us dwell on line 54 and the word, here translated as 'favour' (*'ināyat*), which refers to the beauty of the rose, as a favour bestowed by the Universal Soul. Beauty is in the constitution of the blossom, it is not optional. It is a reflection of the Universal Soul within the rose. If the rose is beautiful, it is because the Universal Soul has made it so. Nāṣir is not looking at beauty as a harmony of the parts, but rather beauty as an ineffable part of the essence of the rose, which has come from the Universal Soul. Beyond the existence of beauty in the rose, for Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the fact that we are gladdened by its beauty is proof that all beings are connected on the level of the soul.

Line 57 is problematic (it appears only in MM, and its first *mišrā'* is a repetition of the first *mišrā'* of line 56), yet it may hold a key to the poem's structure and meaning. If we discard it as spurious (and keep line 78, following T and MM, leaving a 79-line poem), we can build an elegant argument that line 40 is the central, pivotal line, surrounded by two symmetrical halves of thirty-nine lines each. Yet, as attractive as that is, there are still reasons for retaining 57, for its meaning and rhetorical format. Together, lines 56 and 57 are a striking example of anaphora,

for the entire first hemistich of each line is identical. This heavy repetition makes an important point. The poet's question, 'If gold and silver had no soul within themselves,' is answered: without 'soul' in common, the things of this world would have no value, nor would they thrill our hearts. Furthermore, the word 'happy' (*shād*) in line 57 echoes the rhyme word happy (*shādān*) of line 54, poetically linking together the threads of the argument. Structurally, if we retain line 57, we have an eighty-line poem in which line 40 is the powerful culmination of the first half.

Line 58 (accepting MM's reading of the poem) begins a new six-line passage in which the poet seems to shift gears, turning to direct address (*iltifāt*).

- 58 *Bi narmī-yi zafar jūy bar khaṣm-i jāhil*
Ki kuh rā bi narmī kunad past bārān
- 59 *Sukhun⁷⁹ chūn ḥakīmān nikū gūy u kūtah*
Ki Saḥbān bi kūtah sukhun gasht Saḥbān
- 60 *Nabīnī ki bidarīd ṣad man zar rā*
Bidān kūtahī yik diram sang paykan?
- 61 *Khīrad rā bi imān u ḥikmat bi parwar*
Ki farzand-i khud rā chunīn guft Luqmān
- 62 *Chu jānat qawwī shud bi imān u ḥikmat*
Biyāmūzī āngah zabānhā-yi murghān
- 63 *Bigūyand bā tu hamān mūr u murghān*
Ki guftand azīn pīshtar bā Sulaymān
- 58 Be gentle in seeking victory over an ignorant enemy
For rain gently brings down a mountain, drop by drop.
- 59 Like the wise, speak words eloquent and concise,
For through concise words, Saḥbān became Saḥbān.
- 60 Don't you see how the tiny, ounce-weight tip of the arrow
Can rip up a hundred-pound coat of mail?
- 61 'Nourish your intellect with faith and wisdom;'
This is what Luqmān told to his son.
- 62 When your soul has been strengthened by faith and wisdom
Then you will learn the language of the birds,

- 63 And they will tell you, these ants and birds,
The same thing that they told Solomon before.

In line 58, the poet returns to the military theme, the contest against the ignorant opponent. He also returns to imperative verbs. The battle takes place in the field of words, a return to his original conceit; but Nāṣir's military metaphor turns paradoxical, by his insistence on gentleness, specifically on using words as weapons. To prepare his warriors for the battle against ignorance, the poet gives them advice: 'Seek victory gently', 'Speak with beauty and with concision, like the celebrated Arab poet Saḥbān.⁸⁰ Delicacy and brevity can still be powerful: witness the effect of the tip of a spear. Develop both your intellect and your soul with faith and wisdom, and you would be following the advice of Luqmān⁸¹ and becoming as fluent as Solomon (Sulayman).'⁸² Nāṣir brings forward three legendary individuals to add weight to his argument. Each is famous in a different way for wielding language with wisdom; Saḥbān was an early Arab Muslim poet whose name became a byword for graceful brevity; Luqmān, when asked by God if he wanted to be a prophet or a sage chose wisdom, and his fame blossomed into a great body of wisdom tales much like Aesop's fables; Solomon is revered as a prophet in Islam, known for his knowledge of esoteric wisdom, which extended to the ability to communicate with animals, especially the ants and the birds. Notice the repetition, in lines 61 and 62, of *īmān wa ḥikmat* ('faith and wisdom', indicating that both the intellect and soul are nourished by faith and wisdom; the result will be powers of speech equal to those of poets, prophets and legendary sages. The important thing is to speak, not merely to understand, and with speech comes victory.

What would be the purpose of the entire creation that the poet has just delineated, from God the Creator, to the Universal Intellect, the Universal Soul, the heavens and earth, the minerals, plants and animals, and ultimately, the human being, the only created being with a 'speaking soul'? In the next passage, he answers his question: this entire glorious creation was created for human beings to take care of, to have governorship of, during the short period of time they are here 'as guests'. The responsibility this implies he will take up in the final segment.

- 64 *Darīn qubba-yi gawhar nā-murakkab*
Zi bahr-i chi kard-ast yazdān't mihmān?
- 65 *Tu rā bar diḡar zindigān-i zamīnī*
Chi gū'ī, zi bahr-i chi dād-ast sulṭān?
- 66 *Ḥakīmā! zi bahr-i tu shud dar ṭabāyi'*
Jawāhir na az bahr-i ishān parīshān

- 67 *Zi bahr-i tu shud mushk u kāfūr u ‘anbar*
Siyah khāk dar zīr-i zingāri aywān
- 68 *Tu rā bar jahānī juzīn pur ‘ajā’ib*
Ki paydāst injā dalīl ast u burhān
- 64 Within this dome of simple elements,
 Why did God bring you here as a guest?
- 65 Over all the other living creatures on the earth,
 Why did He give you ownership?
- 66 O Sage! For your sake it was that among all the earthly elements
 Were scattered jewels and gems, not for animals.
- 67 For your sake it was that the black earth became
 Musk and amber and camphor, beneath the ruddy vault of heaven.
- 68 For you, this world full of wonders visible here
 Is proof and demonstration of a world other than this.⁸³

Using the question-and-answer method of the *madhhab al-kalāmī* dialectical tradition, in these five lines Nāṣir also employs repetition (why, to you, for you, *zi bahr-i tu*), contrast (heaven’s dome/earthly elements; guest [*mihmān*]/governor [*sulṭān*]; elements/jewels and gems; black earth/fragrant musk, camphor and amber; black earth/ruddy sky); apostrophe (direct address to the Ḥakīm, the Sage⁸⁴), and rhetorical questioning. The apostrophe shows us that in this poem, Nasir is not always speaking to the same person: sometimes O Sage, sometimes O Son, sometimes O Brother. We must remember that this was performance poetry; it was read aloud in a court setting, and the reciter (who was not the poet) would move about, addressing different members of the audience. Four of the five lines contain the phrase ‘for the sake of’ or ‘for what/why?’ (*bahr-i chi*), either as a question or an answer. Lines 65 and 68 are linked by the repetition of the initial ‘for you’ (*tu rā*). He combines all the kingdoms of creation, including heaven and earth (words of one semantic field placed together), with the reminder that we are only in this world temporarily. These are all brought together by the poet to build his argument of responsibility. In line 64, the poet asks why humans were brought here as guests and immediately in the next line (65) he asks why human beings were made owner and overlord (*sulṭān*) of all other animals, creating a sharp contrast. It is almost an oxymoron that human beings could be both guest and governor. In lines 66–68, he provides the answer: all this was created for human beings. Human responsibility

for the physical creation is part of the divine plan. To be a guest and, at the same time, governor involves a great responsibility. Yet this responsibility is only part of the message. This world with all its wonders (line 68) is demonstrable proof of the other world; this is a sign that there is another world beyond this visible world and temporary abode. Here we see both Nāṣir-i Khusraw's ethical philosophy and his philosophy of salvation, both of them based on his cosmogony and his philosophy of knowledge.

As the poem moves towards its end, both its termination and its goal, the ethical grounding of the poet's understanding of eschatology unfolds. In this poem, he has travelled (rider and journey [*riḥla*] are both classical *qaṣīda* tropes), and has taken the reader along, on what must be the ultimate poetic journey – through all the stages of creation. To come to what? To bring the prophetic message, news of the other world, and warnings not to be 'happy and laughing' foolishly in this one. The next segment of five lines amplifies the previous idea, by moving back and forth to show reflections and connections between that world and this one. By this technique known as amplification (*bast*), the poet uses not only his words to state that 'x' reflects 'y', but his arrangement of phrases embodies this reflection.

69 *Jahānist ān pāk u pur nūr u rāḥat*
Tamām u muhayyā u bī 'ayb u nuqṣān

70 *Atharhā-yi ān 'ālam-ast inki gardī*
Darīn tang zindān tu shādān u khandān

71 *Agar nīstī ān jahān khāk-i tīra*
Shikar kay shudī hargiz u 'anbar u bān?

72 *Bī umīd-i ān 'ālam-ast ay barādar*
Shab u rūz bī khwāb u bā ruza rahbān

73 *Makān-i na'im ast u jāy-i salāmat*
Chunīn guft yazdān furū khwān zi furqān

69 That world is a pure one, luminous, restful and peaceful,
Perfect, where all is prepared, faultless and lacking nothing.

70 It is the traces of that world, this which you have traversed
In this narrow prison, with you happy and laughing

71 If that world did not exist, how could this dark earth
Ever become sugar or ambergris or balsam?

72 It is in hope of that world, O Brother,
That, night and day, the monk keeps his vigils and fasts.

73 'It is the abode of bounties and the home of peace,'⁸⁵
Thus spoke the Lord; go, read it in the Qur'an.⁸⁶

In a further amplification of what went before, lines 69–73 dwell for a moment on the connection between the physical and spiritual worlds, looking back to the perfection and illumination of that spiritual world from the vantage point of this world, which is full of signs ('traces', 'indications': *athar-hā*) of its source, the other world. For Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the wonders of this world point to the spiritual world, a shining world far better than this dark narrow prison. Drawing on a common idea, similar to ideas held in Manichaeism, Gnostic, and especially Neoplatonic traditions, he states that this world is a prison and reminds his audience that the happiness and pleasures here are due to the perfection of that world, yet are but a dim reflection of what will be experienced by the followers of God in that world. But more than this, line 71 shows the dependence of this world on that one; how the energising Soul (like Plato's World Soul) that governs the physics of this world to produce sugar or amber or balsam resides outside it. And he repeats the earlier command to read, now referring directly to the Qur'an, paraphrasing a specific verse.

The next five lines of the poem focus on warnings about this world, and the last two serve as finale with instructions of how to rise up from its darkness and ignorance, which he had likened above to a prison and now here to a dark well.

74 *Gar ān rā nabīnī hamī hamchu 'amma*
Sazā-yi fisār u nawāri u pālān

75 *Nigar tāt nafaribad īn dīw-i dunyā*
Hadhar dār az-īn dīw, hān, ay pīsar, hān.

76 *Az-īn dīw ta'wīdh kun khwīshān rā*
Sukhūnhā-yi šāhib-i jazīra-yī Khurāsān

77 *Chunīn chand gardī darīn gūy-i gardān*
K-az īn gūy-i gardān shudat pusht chawgān

78 *Bi changāl u dandān jahān rā giriftī*
Walīkan shudat kund changāl u dandān

79 *Kunūn z-ānki kardī u khwurdī bi-tawba*
Hamī kun istighfār u mīkhūr pashīmān

- 80 *Az in chāh bar shu! Bi-shawlān-i dānish*
Bi yik sū shu az jūy u az jarr-i 'uṣyān
- 74 If you still do not see this, then like the common masses
 You are only fit to wear a bridle, pack saddle and girth strap.
- 75 Watch out, lest this demon world deceive you.
 Beware of this demon, O Son, beware!
- 76 Against this demon, make yourself an amulet
 From the words of the chief of the region of Khurāsān.
- 77 How long will you roam about this turning ball like this?
 This turning ball has rounded your back like a polo stick.
- 78 With claws and teeth, you seized the world.
 But how dull they've turned, your claws and teeth.
- 79 Now, from all you've done, and gorged upon,
 Ask for forgiveness and eat repentance.
- 80 Climb out of this well, with the rope of knowledge⁸⁷
 Step out of the currents which pull towards sin.

Line 74 returns to the metaphor of the steed or mount, but here the mount is a pack animal, not a warrior steed. The poet is saying that if you do not understand the difference between the two worlds and their close relationship, you are an ass, good only for carrying loads. The physical world is likened to a demon who must be guarded against, a danger which the poet emphasises with four different locutions for 'Beware': *nigar* (75), *hadhar dār* (75), *hān* (75, repeated), and *ta'widh kun* (76). In line 76, Nāṣir identifies himself as *Ṣāḥib-i jazīra-yi Khurāsān* ('chief of the region of Khurāsān'). Line 79 calls for a 'turning away' from this world, particularly from one's sinful actions. The last line takes full advantage of its two halves, the first urging one to grasp the rope of knowledge to pull oneself up out of the well of ignorance, the second warning against the currents of this world which pull a person down towards sin ('*uṣyān*, literally, 'disobedience to God'). The last word of the poem indicates the lowest depths to which one could go.

Thus, from beginning to end, as it progresses from line to line, this poem has revealed the order of creation from highest to lowest and, as a finished product, it embodies this order. Moving from the Word to the Intellect, all the way down to the physical world, the Divine action is paralleled by that of the poet, namely to release the human soul from its imprisonment in the physical world. Within the

poetic structure and terms of the *qaṣīda* the poet-preacher has merged his purpose with that of the Divine. Therefore the philosophical aspect of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry is not simply a matter of using philosophical vocabulary. Indeed, in his poetry, he rarely uses philosophical vocabulary, in stark contrast to his philosophical prose style, but his poetry still reflects his philosophical thinking. As a poet, Nāṣir restrains himself from the urge to pile on technical vocabulary, and instead artfully employs philosophical ideas and terms, while using poetic structure, metaphor and other literary devices to convey his philosophical meaning. The world, in the last verse, is shown to be a deep well from which the soul must escape to take flight back up to its origin, back to the luminous realm of Knowledge. For Nāṣir-i Khusraw, eloquence and faith together show the way to escape from this well. Many of these themes would be taken up by later poets in other mystical-religious contexts. Their debt to Nāṣir-i Khusraw cannot be determined; but it is certain that he was the first major Persian poet to incorporate a substantial and specific body of philosophy into his poetry.

Notes

1. Alice C. Hunsberger, *Nāṣir Khusraw, The Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller, and Philosopher* (London, 2nd rev. printing 2001), 13–16, from here on referred to as *The Ruby*.

2. Though the prose style of Nāṣir-i Khusraw is considered one of the most simple and fluent, Malik al-Shu'arā Bahār does not consider the *Safar-nāma* to be a literary work per se, but rather a technical or scientific one, implying dry, descriptive prose, and adds that 'without a doubt,' if Nāṣir-i Khusraw had chosen to write a literary work, such as *Tārīkh-i Bayhāqī*, *Siyāsat-nāma* or *Qabūs-nāma*, 'it would not have fallen short of them, for this talent is abundantly evident in his *qaṣīdas*, lyrical preludes, and short poetic pieces. Indeed the *Safar-nāma*'s minute and lucid detailed descriptions are the source of surprise and delight for the reader'. Malik al-Shu'arā Bahār, *Sabk-Shināsī*, vol. 2 (Tehran, 1321 Sh./1942), p. 158. However, Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Safar-nāma*, which chronicles his seven-year journey from Khurāsān across northern Iran and Armenia, to Jerusalem, Cairo, Mecca, Başra, Işfahān, and back to Khurāsān, may possess additional literary qualities, such as its opening and closing verses of poetry. This framing device surely embodies Nāṣir's belief in the power of poetry to mark the most significant entrances and exits of our lives; but it also highlights the need for further study of the literary qualities of Nāṣir's travelogue (English trans., W. M. Thackston, Jr., *Naser-e Khosraw's Book of Travels (Safarnama)*, Albany, NY, 1986; repr. with English and Persian original, Costa Mesa, CA, 2001).

3. The *qaṣīda* under examination here, aside from the lithograph editions (Tabriz, 1280/1863; Tehran, 1314/1896) has been edited and published three times: first, by Hermann Ethé, based on three manuscripts, and with a German translation and some notes, 'Auswahl aus Nasir Chusrāw's Kasiden', *ZDMG*, 36 (1882), pp. 478–508. (I am grateful to Professor Hermann Landolt for kindly sending me the article); second, in *Diwān-i ash'ār-i Ḥakīm Abū Mu'in Ḥamid al-Dīn Nāṣir ibn Khusraw Qubādiyāni*, ed. Sayyid Naşr Allāh Taqawī, introduction by Sayyid Ḥasan Taqīzāda (Tehran, 1304–1307 Sh./1925–1928), re-issued by

Mahdī Suhaylī (Tehran, 1335 Sh./1956; 4th repr., 1355 Sh./1976), pp. 318–322; and third, in *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, ed. M. Mīnuwī and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1353 Sh./1974; repr., 1357 Sh./1978), no. 39 (this edition is based on the oldest extant manuscript, copied two centuries after the poet's death, the same manuscript Ethé had utilised, and includes an appendix of variant readings found in three other manuscripts). In this chapter, these three editions will be referred to as Ethé, Taqawī, and Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq.

4. See Yahya El-Khachab's statements that Nāṣir is 'not a pure poet. The subjects he includes are too political to give rise to flights of the imagination. Therefore, there are no lyrical themes worth remembering. While Nāṣir is a panegyric poet, it is simply to produce propaganda for the Fatimids.' Yahya El-Khachab, *Nasir è Hosraw: Son Voyage, Sa Pensée religieuse, sa philosophie et sa poésie* (Cairo, 1359/1940), p. 271, cf. 284. Another example is Sayyid Ja'far Shahīdī, who holds that before Nāṣir is a poet, he is a theologian (*mutakallim*) and that his poetry is 'a means, not an end', in *Afkār wa aqā'id-i kalām-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, p. 316, cited in Rahīm Musalmāniyān Qubādiyānī, *Pāra-yi Samarqand* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999), pp. 59–60.

5. See Wordsworth's 1802 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Cited in 'Poetry, Theories Of,' in Princeton *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, enlarged edition, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton, NJ, 1974), which also points out that this idea of poetry as primarily the emotion of the poet, the expression of his or her *ekstasis*, or transport, can be traced to Longinus' essay *On the Sublime*, written at some time in the first to third centuries CE, but which became increasingly influential in Europe after the seventeenth century. Longinus held that the point of 'sublime' writing was to lead the listener to emotional ecstasy (equal to the Persian and Arabic *wajd*), not persuasion.

6. Even the utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill in his essay *What is Poetry?*, which was published in the 1830s, entered the argument on the 'feelings' side, writing that 'poetry is feeling, confessing itself to itself' and when the utterance 'is not itself the end, but a means to an end...of making an impression upon another mind, then it ceases to be poetry, and becomes eloquence' (ibid.).

7. On the connection between illumination and moral guidance, see, for example, Robert L. Montgomery, *The Reader's Eye: Studies in Didactic Literary Theory from Dante to Tasso* (Berkeley, CA, 1979).

8. For more on the variety of *uses* of the *qaṣīda*, and not solely its structure or rhetorical devices, see: A. Ayātī, *Shukūh-i qaṣīda* (Tehran, 1364 Sh./1985), intro., pp. 2–6; S. Sperl and C. Shackle, eds, *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, 2 vols (Leiden, 1996); Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, 'Pre-Islamic Panegyric and the Poetics of Redemption', in *Reorientations: Arabic and Persian Poetry*, ed. Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych (Bloomington, IN, 1994); Andras Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton, NJ, 1974), pp. 3–30; Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton, NJ, 1987), pp. 40–76.

9. The Qur'an answered these criticisms in 21:5; 26:221–227; 36:69–70; 52:29–31.

10. Ibn Rashīq, *Kitāb al-'umda fī maḥāsin al-shī'r wa ādābih*, vol. 1, p. 116, translated in Vicente Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age: Selection of Texts Accompanied by a Preliminary Study* (Leiden, 1975), p. 148; cf. pp. 143–144; 84.

11. On the similarities between medieval Islamic and Renaissance theories of poetry, such as that poetry instructs by moving rather than by teaching, see Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 16, n. 32.

12. Al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*, trans. Vicente Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, pp. 116–117; cf. p. 83.

13. Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-shi'r*, trans. Vicente Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, p. 132; cf. p. 85.

14. See Nasrollah Pourjavady, *Shi'r wa shar': Baḥthī darbāra-yi falsafa-yi shi'r az nazār-i 'Aṭṭār* (Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995), pp. 57–60.

15. This two-part scheme is developed in 'Philosophy and Poetry' by Philip Wheelwright, *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetic*,. Examples given of the first type are Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* and Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*, of the second type are Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Keats, *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, and T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*.

16. Indeed, according to Ibn Sīnā, 'if [poetry] loses its metre, the imaginative representation becomes incomplete': Ismail M. Dahiyat, *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle: A Critical Study with an Annotated Translation of the Text* (Leiden, 1974), p. 100.

17. See entries on Khusrawī Sarakhsī in 'Awfī, *Lubāb al-albāb* and Furūzanfar, *Sukhan wa sukhanwarān*, pp. 37, 154.

18. See Tājmāh Aṣafī Maḥdawī Dāmghānī, *Āsimān wa khāk, ilāhiyat-i shi'r-i Fārsī az Rūdaki tā 'Aṭṭār* (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997), pp. 71–182; and Shir Zamān Firūzī, *Falsafa-yi akhlāqī-yi Nāṣir-i Khusraw wa rīsha-hā-yi ān* (Islamabad, 1371/1992).

19. For an extended segment on Sultan Maḥmūd as an example of transitory power and glory, and the foolishness of courtiers deceived by such earthly glory ('You deceived ones stood before him shouting, "Long live the Sultan! A thousand years more!"), see ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, No. 52, lines 9–19, translated and discussed in *The Ruby*, p. 237; for additional verses about panegyrists, see ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, Nos 19:20; 213:14, and *The Ruby*, pp. 169–171; 236.

20. An apt example of philosophy in verse is the *qaṣīda* by Abu'l-Haytham al-Gurganī which serves as the inspiration of Nāṣir's prose work, *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

22. The most sustained work on the structure of the *qaṣīda* in general, and especially on the structures of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *qaṣīdas*, has been undertaken by Julie Scott Meisami. See 'Symbolic Structure in a Poem by Nasir-i Khusrau', *Iran*, 31 (1993), pp. 103–117 (reprinted in this volume, pp. 191–208); and her 'Poetic Microcosms: The Persian Qasida to the End of the Twelfth Century', in Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, ed., *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, vol. 1: *Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings* (Leiden, 1996), pp. 137–182.

23. Arguing against a longstanding Western scholarly convention that Arabic and Persian poetry consisted of unconnected verses, American and European scholars have extensively discussed the topic of the artistic unity of the Arabic and Persian poem since the 1970s. For the most current bibliography see Julie Scott Meisami's *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Poetry: Orient Pearls* (London, 2003), of which a few examples: Bashiri, Iraj, 'Hafiz's Shirazi Turk: A Structuralist's Point of View', *Muslim World*, 69 (1979), pp. 178–197, 248–268; A. Bausani, 'The Development of Form in Persian Lyrics: A Way to a Better Understanding of the Structure of Western Poetry', *East and West*, n.s., 9 (1958), pp. 145–153; Jerome W. Clinton, 'Esthetics by Implication: What Metaphors of Craft Tell Us About the "Unity" of the Persian Qasida', *Edebiyat*, 4 (1979), pp. 73–96; Andras Hamori, 'Form and Logic in Some Medieval Arabic Poems', *Edebiyat*, 2 (1977), pp. 163–172; Andras Hamori, *The Composition of Mutanabbi's Panegyrics to Sayf al-Dawla* (Leiden,

1992); Michael Hillmann, *Unity in the Ghazals of Hafez*, Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures (Minneapolis and Chicago, 1976); Robert Rehder, 'The Unity of the Ghazals of Hafiz', *Der Islam*, 52 (1974), pp. 55–96; Amidu Sanni, 'On *Tadmīn* (Enjambment) and Structural Coherence in Classical Arabic Poetry', *BSOAS*, 52 (1989), pp. 463–466; Raymond P. Scheindlin, *Form and Structure in the Poetry of al-Ma'tamid ibn 'Abbād* (Leiden, 1974); S. M. Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry: A Structural Analysis of Selected Texts (3rd century AH/9th century AD – 5th century AH/11th century AD)* (Cambridge, 1989); Suzanne P. Stetkevych, 'Structuralist Interpretations of Pre-Islamic Poetry: Critique and New Directions', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 42 (1983), pp. 85–107; Amjad Trabulsi, *La critique poétique des Arabes jusqu'au Ve siècle de l'hégire/XIe siècle de J.C.* (Damascus, 1955); J. G. H. van Gelder, *Beyond the Line: Classical Arabic Literary Critics on the Coherence and Unity of the Poem* (Leiden, 1982); G. M. Wickens, 'The Persian Conception of Artistic Unity in Poetry and Its Implications in Other Fields', *BSOAS*, 14 (1952), pp. 239–243.

24. See note 25, above. Annemarie Schimmel's *Make a Shield from Wisdom: Selected Verses from Nasir-i Khusraw's Diwan* (London, 1993, 2001), while discussing many verses, does not contain an entire *qaṣīda*. Hunsberger, *The Ruby*, contains several, but they are primarily examined for meaning, rather than poetic expression.

25. For the sources of this *qaṣīda*, see note 3, above.

26. *Dīwān*, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq has 80 lines; ed. Taqawī, has 79 (missing Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq's line 57); ed. Ethé has 78 (missing Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq's lines 57 and 71).

27. For Ibn al-Mu'tazz's rhetorical devices, see Meisami's *Structure and Meaning*, pp. 246–302. In this book (p. 246), Meisami points out that the Persian critics do not show any significant differences in approach to Arabic and Persian uses of these devices.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 459, n. 1. Mahdī Muḥaqqiq's analysis of this *qaṣīda* in *Sharḥ-i buzurg-i Dīwān-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (Tehran, 1386 Sh./2007), pp. 473–487, provides background to vocabulary items, as well as related uses of certain terms by other poets; Abū Riḍā Sayf includes this *qaṣīda* in his *Wujūh-i balāghat dar bist qaṣīda-yi Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (Tehran, 1383 Sh./2004), pp. 104–108, providing a brief list of rhetorical aspects of this as well as nineteen other *qaṣīdas* by Nāṣir-i Khusraw.

29. Other critics distinguished other figures, and criticised each other's categories. For example, Ibn al-Mu'tazz's *al-madḥḥab al-kalāmī* 'quickly disappears from the lists of rhetorical figures', Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, p. 460, n. 4.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

31. For a discussion of Ibn Sinā's five poetic forms or devices, see Salim Kemal, *The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna* (Leiden, 1991), pp. 323–324, with note 62.

32. Cf. note 29, above. All three editions concur on the location of line 40; but in ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq's 80 lines, line 40 caps the first half, and is followed by another 40 lines; while in ed. Taqawī's 79 lines, it forms a separate centre surrounded by two symmetrical halves of 39 lines each; in ed. Ethé's 78 lines, line 40 also caps the first half, but is followed by an asymmetrical 38 lines. These structural considerations suggest agreeing that ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq's line 57 is spurious and keeping their line 71, though they are not final arguments in themselves. As we will see, line 57 conveys a key meaning.

33. This transliteration, following modern pronunciation and orthography, disregards the 'dot' of the *dh* that is used in such words as *khudhā* and *nābudha*. Ethé, apparently following the manuscript, retained the diacritic mark.

34. Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, p. 67.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

36. Choosing Taqawī's *kumayt*, instead of ed. Ethé and Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq's *suwār* (rider) (Ethé, and Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, based their reading on one MS) as the first word. *Suwār* (in modern pronunciation: *sawār*) cannot work because, when the second hemistich asks, 'Who is its rider?' to what can the pronoun 'its' refer but the horse? Therefore, for meaning, the horse, *kumayt*, needs to be the first word. Technically, *kumayt* does not mean just 'horse', but a 'bay' horse – that is, one whose coat is dark or reddish brown, while the mane and tail and lower legs are black. I do not see any significance, in this poem, for this colouring, and have not brought it into the translation, since the poet never brings it up as an issue (as he does in ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, *Qaṣīda* No. 19, where a piebald horse (*ablaq*) represents the body/soul, physical/spiritual dichotomy), and in the next line the poet uses 'asp' (horse) as synonym (*asp-i zabān* for *kumayt-i sukhun*), and similarly in line 49 (*asp-i faṣāḥat*) 'the horse of eloquence'.

37. Qur'an 2:117; 3:47; 6:73; 36:82.

38. The logicians call it the 'specific difference', indicating what differentiates each species from other species within the same genus. Within the genus 'animal (Ar. *ḥayawān*; P. *jāniwar*)' are many species, of which humans are one. In English, after the Greeks, we say, 'Man is a rational animal'; in Arabic, *al-insān ḥayawān wa'l-nātiq*; in Persian, *insān jāniwar-i gūyā-st*. The poet's use of the Persian word *jān* (soul) follows the Aristotelian vocabulary on which Islamic philosophy largely based its psychology, with the progressive series of the vegetative soul, animal soul and the human, rational soul (*jān* is the Persian, and *nafs* the Arabic, for the Greek *psyche*). But to translate *jān-i sukhun gūy* (or as Nāṣir sometimes calls it, *nafs-i sukhun gūy*; see the prose *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, p. 58) as simply 'the rational soul' leaves a far more passive impression (and a silent soul too, one which is merely 'thinking rationally') than what Nāṣir has in mind with a poem on speech and agency.

39. Nāṣir-i Khusraw's theological outlook holds that God is beyond being; see, for example, *Gushāyish wa rahāyish*, pp. 6–7, where creation has no connection to the essence (*huwwiyat*) of God; and *Zād al-musāfirīn*, p. 193, where the Intellect is the first being (*mawjūd*).

40. For an analysis of Ibn Sīnā's philosophy of 'imaginative asset' on the part of poetry's reader or listener, see Ismail M. Dahiyat, *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle* (Leiden, 1974), pp. 35–37.

41. This is obviously not the 'aql' that the Sufis condemn; in fact, as the first word of the second line, the poet gives *khīrad* the most exalted position of the *bayt*. The Sufi controversy of love (*ishq*) against 'aql, it has been argued, begins to predominate towards the end of the 6th/12th century, at least a century after Nāṣir-i Khusraw. See N. Pourjavady, *Zabān-i ḥāl* (Tehran, 1385 Sh./2006), pp. 605–608.

42. For the Prophetic Tradition and its interpretations in Persian Sufi literature, see N. Pourjavady's note to line 146 of Mubarakshāh Marwarūdī's *Raḥīq al-taḥqīq* (*The Pure Wine of Divine Realisation*) (Tehran, 1381 Sh./2002), p. 110.

43. Equestrian verses appear metaphorically throughout Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān*; e.g. ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, No. 7:42: *jān-t suwār ast u tan-t asp-i ū/ juz bi sūy-i khayr u ṣalāḥash marān* ('Your soul is the rider and your body its mount/ Rein it in only towards virtue and prudence'); in another *qaṣīda*, he has the horse symbolise thinking while the rider symbolises the intellect (ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, No. 196: 1–2). See also ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, No. 9: 19; 19: 1–4; and 25: 21.

44. Employing early vocalisation, *sukhun*, for the modern *sukhan*.

45. The Arabo-Persian *lafz/ma'nā* ('word/meaning') division is similar to the later European rhetorical division into semantics (words, figures of speech) and syntactics (thoughts, meanings, figures of thought). Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, pp. 244–245.

46. Ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq and ed. Ethé have *maydān-i khwīsh*; ed. Taqawī has *maydān-i dīn*, which makes more sense.

47. *Dihqān* signifies everyone other than the Arabs, but primarily Iranians. For the two other main meanings of the word, 'farmer' and 'landowner', see *EIR*, 'Dehqan'; cf. Muḥaqqiq, *Sharḥ-i buzurg*, pp. 474–475, with citations to other verses by Nāṣir-i Khusraw, as well as ones by Firdawsi; and also Dihkhuda's glossary at the end of ed. Taqawī.

48. Many arguments were developed on the superiority of the Arabic language over all others, including the claim (by Ibn Sinān al-Khafāji, d. 465/1073) that writings in other languages (such as Syriac) improve on being translated into Arabic, and that it is impossible to translate out of Arabic (al-Jāḥiẓ, d. 255/869), cited in Vicente Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age: Selection of Texts accompanied by a Preliminary Study* (Leiden, 1975), p. 15. It was generally accepted that the most elevated form of language is poetry: *ibid.*, pp. 41–44.

49. While Nāṣir-i Khusraw here describes myrobalan (*halīla*) as a cure for fever, Rūmī prescribes it as a laxative (*Mathnawī*, Bk. 1, line 54).

50. Reading ed. Taqawī, *furuzh*, with a footnote saying that *furuzh* is a bitter plant used for an upset stomach; F. Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary* has both *fūrzh* and *farzh* as the 'root of galangale or rhubarb'; the usual word for rhubarb is *riwand*, especially *riwand-i chīn* (of China) used as a laxative; *wālān* is fennel; *bādyān* is the term used today in southern cities such as Kirmān, while in other places, including Tehran, they say *rāzyāna*.

51. Red sulfur and mercury were the two basic elements of alchemy (see note 61, below). In this line, however, Nāṣir seems to be reporting that they were also the main ingredients in the production of the most important form of red ink used for transcribing titles or entries in manuscripts.

52. This is based on the 'emission' theory of perception that was current among some Muslim philosophers (as well as some Greeks) that sight was the result of how much and how clearly light was coming *out* from the eyes to encompass the object. Here, a particular stone from Iṣfahān was ground into a powder, *surmih*, to make the eyes healthier. See Muḥaqqiq, *Sharḥ-i buzurg*, p. 479, for a similar verse from Khāqānī and a line in Arabic from Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf's *Thamar al-qulūb*.

53. Choosing Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq's version.

54. The still unsurpassed text on this topic is Alfred Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: The Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA, 1936); see also, E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London, 1942; repr. New York, 1959).

55. '*Fard-u subhān*', coming immediately after the name of God, is redolent of the Arabic phrase, *subhānahu wa-ta'ālā* ('may He be glorified and exalted'), which is frequently placed after the Arabic name of God, Allāh. The poet has Persianised the phrase.

56. Rashīd al-Dīn Waṭwāt, *Dīwān* (including his *Ḥadā'iq al-siḥr fi daqā'iq al-shi'r*), ed. Sa'īd Nafīsī (Tehran, 1339 Sh./1960), discussed in Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, pp. 282–285.

57. For an ecumenical enquiry into language about God, see David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN, 1986), pp. 35–50.

58. This meaning was brought to my attention by Nasrollah Pourjavady, see his book on the idea of the vision of God in Muslim theology and mysticism, *Ru'yat-i māh dar āsimān* (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996).

59. See Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Khwān al-ikhwān*, on three faculties of the human soul, p. 110; the prose *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*, p. 43 English, 'Aql is able to know by its own substance and not through any acquired knowledge; *Knowledge and Liberation*, Section 27, p. 35, where Soul produces things with the use of the body, as a carpenter uses tools.

60. Choosing the Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq reading. Taqawī's *namānist* does not make sense; it seems to be an orthographic error (*tashīf*) and should be *nahānist* which equals Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq's *nihufta*.

61. For this pairing of the Intellect and the Soul in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's prose philosophical texts, see *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, p. 94, where the dyad 'aql-nafs is equated with heaven-earth; and *Khwān al-ikhwān*, p. 89, which discusses their 'difference' (*duwwumī*), and pp. 219–221, for Intellect's address (*khiṭāb*) to Soul.

62. The word *pāk* ('pure'), frequently contrasted with *khāk* ('earth'), means physical as well as spiritual purity. It is sometimes used as an attribute of the angelic world or the heavenly beings, and even of God's hallowed essence. Here, the poet is using *pāk* in the sense of the soul's spiritual, immaterial nature, connoting the word's deeper sense of purity.

63. *Kīmiyā* can mean either the science of alchemy (usually, *kīmiyāgarī*) or the ingredient (elixir or philosopher's stone) which transmutes base elements to sublime, such as copper to gold. See Dihkhudā, *Lughat-nāma*, 'kīmiyā'.

64. Plato's teaching, in the words of Socrates just before he took poison, that the human soul is a prisoner in the body, 'chained hand and foot in the body', until, when released by death, it will be able to perceive Truth and persist eternally (*Phaedo*, 77a–84b), was taken up by many religions in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world, including Manichaeism and Christianity.

65. For example, see ed. Taqawī, p. 452 (ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, p. 223) and ed. Taqawī, p. 427, lines 3 and 4.

66. For a discussion of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's cosmic hierarchies in two chapters of his *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, see Alice C. Hunsberger, 'The Esoteric World Vision of Nāṣir-i Khusraw', *Sacred Web*, 9 (2002), pp. 89–100.

67. Hunsberger, 'The Esoteric Word Vision', p. 96, though Nāṣir-i Khusraw is not always consistent through all his texts.

68. Choosing ed. Taqawī, and ed. Ethé, *bi ḥadd-u pāyān*; not ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, *bi ḥadd-i sāmān*.

69. Choosing ed. Taqawī, *bidīn-sān*, not ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq: *az īn sān*.

70. An unusual argument, reminding us that, for a long time, the Muslims used to be the minority in the lands they ruled.

71. Salmān the Persian, a companion of the Prophet Muḥammad, is famous for, amongst other things, the success of his advice to the Muslim community in Medina to dig a defensive trench. See *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden, 1961), p. 500.

72. 'Taqīd napadhīruftam u bar "akhbaranā" hich / nagshād dilam gūsh u na dastam sar-i maḥbar (I never accepted taqīd, nor ever opened the ear of my heart or the cap of my inkwell to all the traditional, 'He related to us.'). ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, No. 59:66; this verse and the term *taqīd* are discussed in Hunsberger, *The Ruby*, pp. 128–130.

73. The phrase *Ya 'Alī Madad!* is a common greeting among Shi'is today, particularly Ismailis, used in place of *Salām 'alaykum* (on the telephone, for instance) and is also a form of farewell.

74. On the different meanings of the word *ḥujjat*, see the article, 'Ḥujjat', in the Persian *Encyclopedia of the World of Islam (Dānish-nāma-yi jahān-i Islām)* (Tehran, 1387 Sh./2008), especially the section on Ismaili uses and specifically those of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, written by Farhad Daftary, pp. 647–653.

75. Andras Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton, 1974), p. 112.

76. On the order of creation, see Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Gushāyish wa rahāyish*, pp. 6–8; *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, pp. 109, 122–134, 258; *Khwān al-ikhwān*, pp. 89–90; *Shish faṣl* (prose *Rawshanā'ī-nāma*), trans. pp. 47–50; *Zād al-musāfirin*, pp. 175–179.

77. According to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the Intellect, as the first created being, enjoys an everlasting intimacy with God's Word; it is perfect and complete in both potentiality and actuality; it is self-sufficient, lacking and desiring nothing, and contains all other beings within itself, 'as the number one contains all subsequent numbers'. The Soul, as the second created being, is perfect and complete only in potentiality; in actuality, it carries a deficiency due to its separation from God's Word. The Soul, aware of this deficiency, consequently experiences desire. That desire is to achieve the same intimacy with the One which the Intellect enjoys, a desire which leads to a movement towards God, the first real motion in the unfolding of God's creation. Motion creates time. With time, begins the revolving of the heavens, which initiates the opposites of hot, cold, wet and dry, combinations of which lead to the four elements earth, air, fire and water, out of which the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms come into being. All of nature and the material world, then, is dependent on and sustained by the Soul's eternal desire to complete itself in God's Oneness.

78. While Nāṣir-i Khusraw, in *Khwān al-ikhwān*, pp. 148–150, outlines seven reasons (against Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī) that the human individual soul (*naḥs-i juz'ī*) is a 'particular' (*juz'*) and not an 'impression' or 'imprint' (*athar*) of the Universal Soul (*naḥs-i kullī*), in pp. 231–235 he qualifies it by arguing that, in a general (*'amm*) sense of the word 'imprint', the 'power' (*quwwat*) from the Universal Soul was showered upon everything through its lower faculties, and therefore everything in the world shares an essential commonality, in varying degrees.

79. See note 52 (on *sukhun*).

80. Saḥbān b. Wā'il, an early Arab Muslim who lived in Damascus, known for his eloquence, 'with no repetition or stumbling in his speech', such that if someone were to be praised for elegance in speech, he would be said to be 'more eloquent than Saḥbān' (*akhtab min Saḥbān*). Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāma*, 'Saḥbān ibn Wā'il', with citations of verses by Rūdakī, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Khāqānī and Sa'dī.

81. 'Luqmān', a Qur'anic persona known for his wisdom (Qur'an 31:11), 'a man having wisdom'; also known in Arab legend. See A. H. M. Zahniser, 'Luqmān', in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (Leiden and Boston, 2003), vol. 3, pp. 242–243.

82. One of the distinguishing characteristics of Solomon (Sulaymān) (acknowledged as a prophet in Islam) was that God taught him the language of the birds and ants. See Qur'an 38:35–36, and Priscilla Soucek, 'Solomon', *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 5, pp. 76–78.

83. For more on the topos of how the 'wonders' (*'ajā'ib*) of this world point to that world and its treatment in literature, see Alice C. Hunsberger, 'Marvels', in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 3, pp. 287–288.

84. Nāṣir-i Khusraw is one of only a handful of Persian poets given the title of Ḥakīm, acknowledging the poet's sober, intellectual relationship with wisdom, *ḥikmat*. See Raḥīm Musalmāniyān Qubādiyānī, *Pāra-yi Samarqand*, pp. 57–60.

85. The poet is paraphrasing: no Qur'anic verse is an exact translation of Nāṣir's phrases, with the words *na'im* and *salām*.

86. The term '*furqān*' (divider) is used as an epithet to refer to the Qur'an. Since the two words are equal in metric weight and rhyme, the poet could easily have chosen to use the word Qur'an, so we might consider consonance as one reason for the choice: the *miṣrā'* contains two other words with the letter 'f'.

87. Following ed. Taqawī, *bar shaw bi shawlān-i dānish*, not ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq (*bi sawlān-i dānish*, 'to the Mount of Knowledge'). Taqawī has a footnote for *shawlān* (p. 322), saying that the *Farhang Jahāngīrī* entry for this word defines it as *kamand*, 'lasso', and cites this verse as proof. Although ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq has no note, M. Muḥaqqiq in *Sharḥ-i buzurg-i Dīwān-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, pp. 486–487 (with some corrections of his original glossary in *Tahlīl-i ash'ār-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (Tehran, 1344 Sh./1965, p. 200), provides a lengthy explanation for the term *sawlān*, with an alternate pronunciation of *sablān*, citing *Burhān-i Qāṭī'*. In either form, he says, it is the name of a mountain three farsangs from Ardabīl, which Nāṣir-i Khusraw used in two other *qaṣīdas*: ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, *Qaṣīda* 111/line 31; ed. Taqawī, p. 337, and ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, *Qaṣīda* 194/line 48; ed. Taqawī, p. 379, where both of these verses have *sar* (top), as in *az sar-i sawlān* and *bar sar-i sawlān*, which mean, respectively, 'from the top of Sawlān' and 'to the top of Sawlān'; yet while in both cases Nāṣir is describing rising from ignorance to knowledge, neither has the phrase *bi sawlān-i dānish*, the form in this poem, ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq, No. 39. Muḥaqqiq also cites Pūr-Dāwūd (*Yasnā*, p. 157) whose extensive section on *sawlān* includes historians and geographers reporting that this mountain was sacred to the Zoroastrians, and quotes four lines from Khāqānī describing *Sablān* as the '*qibla*' of the ancients. Taqawī, in another poem (p. 337), gives a footnote for one of the instances of *sawlān*, giving the two possible forms (*sawlān* and *sablān*) and the distance from Ardabīl, adding that it is an abode of saints (*maqām-i awliyā'*), and that both before and after Islam ascetics and holy men and women had houses there. The verses before and after this mention 'a ladder in this prison', and therefore, Taqawī adds, 'it has been said that climbing this mountain is very difficult, like climbing stairs, and this meaning is not insignificant, God knows'. Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, vocalises it as *sawalān*, mentions it as a mountain near Ardabīl which was 'in every age, the abode of pious men', showing that its semantic field encompasses both 'eminences' and 'heights', which would make it an intriguing choice for the final line of the poem. But I have chosen to go with the rope translation, an image the poet uses elsewhere to pull oneself out of darkness and ignorance.

Symbolic Structure in a Poem by Nāṣir-i Khusraw*

JULIE SCOTT MEISAMI

Every art work rests upon cosmological assumptions, and ... we as critics must discover those assumptions before we presume to interpret the work ... Without specifying a cosmological framework it is fatuous to discuss any theory of symbol or of language or of style or of structure or of anything else that we as critics talk about.

Thus S. K. Heninger Jr., discussing the relationship between Renaissance poetics and Pythagorean cosmology, calls attention to the need to understand the larger assumptions which inform works of art.¹ He posits the notion of the poem as a literary microcosm, in which the poet recreates the pattern of the cosmos: 'When the analogy between God's universe and the poem as microcosm is carried to its logical extreme, the poem is expected to reproduce the geometrical proportions of the macrocosm.'²

The concept of the literary microcosm can be traced back to ancient sources in Pythagorean and Neoplatonic thought.³ Belief in the primacy of number as the ordering principle of the created universe and the key to its understanding, and of geometry, music and astronomy, and related practical disciplines, such as astrology and architecture, as reflecting this principle, informs much European thought and writing from the Classical period to the Renaissance and beyond.⁴ It is also fundamental to the various esoteric traditions of Islam, not least to Ismailism.⁵ It is scarcely surprising, therefore, to find that number forms the basis for many poetic compositions by the Ismaili poet Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. ca. 464/1072).

The majority of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *qaṣīdas* present themselves either as homiletic sermons in verse exhorting self-purification and the pursuit of spiritual rather

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than material riches, or meditations, often bitter, on the falsity of this world or on the poet's unhappy state of exile. The *qaṣīdas* have received little study with respect either to their style and structure or their relationship to Ismaili thought. Jan Rypka noted that 'Veiled Ismaili expressions, only familiar to members of the sects, and numerous references to religious and other questions are such serious obstacles to comprehension that a deeper interpretation and evaluation of the *dīwān* is still in its infancy';⁶ while Evgeny Bertels observed that 'if those poems of Nāṣir-i Khusraw which have numerous allusions to a specific philosophical subject cannot be properly understood without dissecting and analysing the philosophical treatises, by contrast, individual verses and sections of the *qaṣīdas* generally illustrate well the thoughts which are expressed in the treatises,' and further, 'The ideas which Nāṣir presented in his philosophical treatises, and proved in various ways, in his *dīwān* always take the form of advice, homily, and words of wisdom, and have a close relationship to points and details of his personal life'.⁷

In his introduction to the English translation of a selection of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poems Peter Lamborn Wilson states:

If we search the Diwan for evidence of [esoteric] Ismā'īli philosophy, we shall for the most part come away disappointed. Here the doctrine of ta'wīl ... is mostly confined to a type of allegorisation whereby certain verses of the Quran or certain dogmas and traditions of Islam are shown to refer to *people*—to the Family of the Prophet, and especially to the Imams. If these figures 'refer' again to cosmic principles in certain Ismā'īli works, there is little evidence that Nāṣir-i Khusraw shared such ideas ... True, we find verses on the 'emanationist' cosmology of Ismā'īlism ... but dealt with in a philosophical or theological rather than a 'mystical' way ... He is 'metaphysical', but not 'mystical' ... above all ... he is a moralist.⁸

Much of this moralising, Wilson continues, 'is not at all the sort of message one expects from a Persian "esoterist" ... but it is certainly not inconsistent with an esoteric point of view'. Wilson finds the 'key' to Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān* to be his concern with speech – with the Word, the Logos – and concludes: 'The reader must make a distinct effort of will to re-place himself imaginatively in a cosmos where the Logos is the Source, where the Name and the thing named are, on the level of *correspondences*, identical.'⁹

While logocentrism is indeed an important principle in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poems, number, in particular as related to Ismaili numerical symbolism expressive of doctrines of cosmology and hierarchy, provides an important basis for their structural organisation. This numerological and spatial aspect of his poetics, which extends the system of correspondences between word and thing to the pattern according to which 'things' are ordered, has not, to my knowledge, been remarked upon, although it is a particularly important means of conveying esoteric beliefs,

one which encompasses the whole poem and not merely its 'ideas' or thematic content. Nāṣir-i Khusraw himself underlines the importance of number in Chapter 12 of his *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, where, quoting Pythagoras, he observes, 'The sensible world is *mutaṣawwar*, and the order of the world is through number (*bi tartīb-i ḥisāb*).'¹⁰ A striking example of number as an organising principle is found in a well-known poem of his in which he defines his goal in writing poetry.¹¹

The body of the poem comprises fifty-six lines, to which are added two lines of 'personal' observation which function as a cap. (This type of structure is extremely common in Persian poetry.) These fifty-six lines are divided into eight seven-line segments assembled into larger groups of three, two, and three arranged chiastically around the poem's centre (l. 28). The *qaṣīda*'s overall structure may be analysed as follows.

The first three segments deal with the topic of poetry. Following the statement of his intent to change, and specifically to 'strive towards that which is best', the poet treats of discourse in general, and of poetry (and this specific poem) in particular, through three analogies: those of a garden, a palace and the human form. These metaphors are not chosen at random, nor is their disposition accidental: all are time-honoured commonplaces (a fact which should inspire caution); all have specific implications for this particular poem; and their sequence is carefully and deliberately designed, as we move from garden to human form through the mediatory figure of the building. The disposition of these three segments is echoed in the structure of the individual segments, the central line of each of which refers to a specific aspect of composition: in segments one and three to the complementary relationship of form, or 'words', and content, or 'meaning', and in segment two to the metre which identifies this discourse as poetry rather than prose (both are encompassed by the first, most general, segment). This pattern is also repeated in that of the poem as a whole: each segment is ordered around a crucial central line, and the eight segments themselves, as stated before, are arranged chiastically around the centre. We may note in passing the topics of illumination (l. 8), of the poem as a feast for the wise (ll. 12–14), incorporating an allusion to the poet's treatise the *Khwān al-ikhwān*, described as a feast 'adorned with a hundred kinds of pleasant, pure and licit food and drink ... from which may the hands of those who eat illicit things, the wine-drinkers and the impure remain remote',¹² and the notion of distinction (of true from false, esoteric from exoteric) alluded to in the final rhyme-word of this group, *furqān*, a term used metonymically for the Qur'an, whose root meaning 'to separate'¹³ suggests not only a need to distinguish the true (or esoteric) sense of the poem from its surface meaning, but the separation of this group of verses from what follows.

Segments four and five, framing the poem's centre, develop the notion of purification, a topic which logically follows upon mention of the body. Their movement is one of descent and ascent: the first (central to which is the topic of sacrifice,

stated in the rhyme-word *qurbān* in l. 25) follows a descending trajectory: the poet proposes to slay his impure body 'with the blade of piety' in order to enable himself to distinguish between good and evil; the second treats the same topic on an ascending trajectory (reflected in the central rhyme, *Sulaymān*, suggesting mastery): the poet will increase goodness and decrease evil in his soul so as to make himself worthy of divine forgiveness (expressed in the final rhyme of this group, *al-Raḥmān*). The notion of moral equilibrium is reinforced by the central rhyme *mīzān* 'balance' (l. 28), which in turn calls attention to the balanced, carefully equilibrated structure of the poem itself. The final lines of segment five introduce an explicit contrast between material and spiritual values as the poet contrasts his own quest for divine grace with the agitated journey of his unidentified interlocutor (a convention establishing the homiletic character of the poem) to the court of the ruler of Gilān in search of material gain.¹⁴

The final group of three segments (six-eight) develops this contrast between material and spiritual. The first corresponds, in a general manner, with the third segment of the first group: the poet desires to make *his* body the 'servant' of the Prophet's family (i.e. to devote himself to their service); the 'garment' he is exhorted to throw off recalls the 'veil' with which the poem's meaning was said to be concealed, and suggests not only the impossibility but the undesirability of such an action. The transition between segments six and seven is effected by the rhyme *Amīr-i Khurāsān*, which stands in antithesis to *Salmān*, the initial rhyme of this segment, exemplifying spiritual purity: the court of this prince (in contrast with the palace of segment two) is an emblem of material rather than spiritual values. The centrality of 'evil council' (l. 46) to this group is further contrasted (after the patterning of the first group) with both the 'Sun of Knowledge' (l. 39) in the preceding segment and the poet's 'books' (l. 53) in that which follows, in which the poet returns to the general topic of discourse (in prose and poetry) to specify the subject to which these books are dedicated (praise of the Prophet's family), the manner in which this subject is dealt with (in prose, by means of logic; in poetry, by making the 'sensible' represent the 'intellectual'), and providing evidence by means of two examples: the prose treatise *Zād al-musāfir* (*The Wayfarers' Provisions*), and the present poem. The specification of the chosen subject serves to define the 'whatever is best' of the first line, as the statement of poetic method clarifies the nature of the 'new roads' to be followed by the poet; while the final line (in which the rhyme *īnsān* 'like this' echoes the twice-repeated *Nīsān* 'April' of the first line) provides proof of the poet's success in his endeavour. In the final cap (ll. 57–58) the poet turns away from his poem to contemplate his own state: a prisoner both in this world and in his exile in Yumgān, he nevertheless pursues his purpose, the end of which is not merely literary but the achievement of real punishment, in the next world, for enemies of the true faith.

This analysis provides a satisfactory reading of the poem – at least one which satisfied its English translators, who took it as a description of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s poetic purpose. Yet the precise nature of that purpose, and the precise role of the poet in fulfilling it, are not fully elucidated by this reading, nor is the sense in which it constitutes a literary microcosm. In order to accomplish this, some reference to Ismaili cosmology and symbolism is necessary; as this is itself a complex subject, I will touch only briefly on some specific aspects reflected in the poem.

The number seven holds, in addition to its more general symbolic associations, a special significance for the Ismailis. In their cosmology created time is made up of seven prophetic cycles, beginning with Adam; the sixth cycle is that of Muḥammad, to whom the Qur’an (the final revelation) was revealed, the seventh will be that of the Mahdī, the Imam, holder of the esoteric revelation embodied in the Qur’an, who will manifest himself and announce the *qiyāmat*, the Resurrection. Descended from the Prophet through his son-in-law ‘Ali are the seven ‘Speakers’ (*nāṭiq*); that is, the seven Imams, or spiritual leaders, recognised by the Ismailis, to whom correspond the seven ‘Completers’ (*mutimm*) of the law revealed to the prophets. (The distinction is one of function and not of person.) ‘The Seventh *Nāṭiq*’, writes an early Ismaili teacher, ‘is the tenth after Muḥammad, ‘Ali and the seven Imams, the *Mutimms* from their progeny. He is also the Seventh of the *Nāṭiqs*, and, at the same time, the *eighth* ... after ... the *Mutimm* Imams’, and is identified with the Mahdī or saviour who will complete the *ta’wīl* of revelation and whose appearance will usher in the Resurrection.¹⁵ The Prophet ‘is accompanied by twelve *naqībs* (deputies) who call humanity to [follow] his plain teaching (the *zāhir*), i.e. the revelation ... while the *Mutimm* [completing] Imam is followed by twelve *ḥujjats* who call humanity to (follow) [his] esoteric teaching (the *bāṭin*), i.e. *ta’wīl*’, communicated by the Prophet to his deputy and spiritual heir.¹⁶ These numerically symbolic hierarchies are supported by Ismaili exegesis; thus Scripture becomes – in its quality of *furqān* – that which separates believer from unbeliever, the knowers of esoteric meaning from those who see only the exoteric.¹⁷

Further, as the sun symbolises at one and the same time revelation itself, the sixth *nāṭiq* (the Prophet Muḥammad) who conveyed it, and the Imam who possesses its esoteric knowledge, the poet’s prayer to be illumined by the ‘Sun of Knowledge’ (l. 39) may be read as a wish that his work take inspiration from the Imam, whose knowledge of *ta’wīl* illumines the *ḥujjat* (a title by which the poet often refers to himself) as the sun does the moon (a symbol both for the *ḥujjat* and for *ta’wīl*). The moon, which reaches the height of its powers in its own house, Cancer (*Saraṭān*, the rhyme-word of l. 39), has other analogues as well, including speech (the moon’s twenty-eight mansions correspond to the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet, ‘which is the basis of every kind of speech’, and to the twenty-eight chapters of the Qur’an which prove the truth of the ‘Speakers’ and the ‘Completers’)¹⁸ and to

the source of speech, the Universal Intellect.¹⁹ Thus the central rhyme-word *mīzān*, at l. 28, connotes not only equilibrium, but speech, prophecy and true belief.

Mīzān has further implications for the interpretation of the poem as well as for its arrangement. As Henri Corbin observes, the 'science of the balance', early adumbrated in the works of Jābir b. Ḥayyān (an important source for Ismaili thought), 'is intended to discover, in each form, the relationship which exists between the manifest and the hidden, the outward and the inward, the exoteric and the esoteric';²⁰ in other words, the science of the balance is the science of correspondences.²¹ The balance is a fundamental eschatological symbol (cf. Qur'an 21:49, 'We shall set up just scales for the Day of Judgement so that no one will be wronged at all'); it is also a metonymy for Scripture (cf. Qur'an 42:18, 'God it is Who has sent down the Book with truth, and also the Balance', which in Ismaili terms may be interpreted as referring to the *zāhir* and *bāṭin* of revelation).²²

As Corbin notes further:

In Ismaili gnosis, for example in the writings of Ḥamīduddin Kirmānī (d. c. 408/1017), the Balance of things religious (*mīzān al-diyānah*) makes it possible to specify the correspondence between the earthly esoteric hierarchy and the celestial angelic hierarchy and, more generally, the correspondences between the spiritual and corporeal worlds. The visible aspect of a being presupposes its equilibration by an invisible and celestial counterpart; the apparent and exoteric (*zāhir*) is equilibrated by the occulted and esoteric (*bāṭin*).²³

This aspect of the science of the balance illuminates the esoteric nature of the self-purification referred to in this central section. Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (tenth century), an important precursor of Nāṣir-i Khusraw and one to whom he is particularly indebted (especially in the *Khwān al-ikhwān*), emphasised in his *Kitāb al-Yanābī'* the necessity for the adept to purify himself before embarking on the study of gnostic wisdom; in Corbin's words, 'The adept, the gnostic, must first of all reform himself; it is thus that he brings assistance, comes to the aid of, 'lends' to the World-Soul, to the Angel of humanity ... Let each realise this victory in himself, reconcile himself first of all with himself ('convert his own Satan'), and only then, and at the same time, reconcile himself with his brother.'²⁴ In the chapter on repentance (*tawba*) in his *Khwān al-ikhwān*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw compares repentance to a spiritual balm (*marham*): just as a physical balm cures physical wounds, 'so sincere repentance becomes a balm for the sinful soul; and the light of the (divine) Word in this world, through the medium of repentance, consumes his sins and purifies his soul.'²⁵ In the same work he speaks repeatedly of freeing the soul from the 'demons' (*dīwān*) of false belief;²⁶ and the ultimate 'demons' which must be mastered through divine wisdom are those who deny the truth of the Imam. 'Men [must] know', he states, 'that the Imam is from the Prophet's family, and that he

is the house of divine knowledge: and when the people of the world have become such [that is, so purified] that they are released from the rule of demons, and the Imam of the age no longer needs to remain concealed, and people submit to him and obey his commands, then it will become necessary for the house of the body to be effaced, which is a symbol of the Imam.²⁷ If the poet is unable to master these ‘demons’ – who, like Satan himself, are equated ‘with those who fix themselves to the *zāhir*, and who become without explication, truth or guidance’²⁸ – he can at least tame the ‘demon in his own body’ and become receptive, and able to disseminate, the truth of the Imam, through the inspiring light of the Universal Soul; for, as he notes in the *Khwān al-ikhwān*, ‘When a relationship of equilibrium is established between man and the Universal Soul he partakes of its essence, and because of this the Universal Soul takes man as its friend and calls him to itself, by the power of God’s command, and expends on him of its own essence (in the form of) knowledge, so that he, like it, may become eternal, knowing, luminous and receptive of benefit.’²⁹

The second aspect of the science of the balance further illuminates the symbolic structure of the poem. Fundamental to this science is number, which has not merely a practical but a symbolic application. The *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*, another important source of Ismaili thought, distinguish three categories of ‘balances’ or measures (for each art has its principle, its measure and its balance):

- (1) those which are utilised by the hand: scales and weights (for traders); astrolabes and other instruments of observation (for astrologers); instruments for measuring surfaces (for geometers and map-makers); compass, rule, square, plumb-line (for artisans), and so on ...;
- (2) those which are utilised by language: prosody (for poets, musicians, orators, grammarians); and
- (3) those which are used by the mind; that is, demonstrative syllogisms (which permit the deduction of rational things from sensible, as well as of those demonstrable things which escape the senses).

‘All of these balances and measures’, concludes Yves Marquet, from whom I have taken this analysis, ‘are symbols which allude to the archetypal balances mentioned by God.’³⁰

The applicability of these principles to Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s *qaṣīda* is evident, particularly in regard to segment two, in which all these ‘balances’ – architectural, prosodic, syllogistic (the last implicit in the ‘feast for the wise’) – appear, and to segment eight. But they have further implications for the structure of the poem as a whole, and particularly for its chiasmic or circular arrangement around the central line. The ‘science of the balance’ is expressed imagistically by the figure of the circle, as for example in a later work of Twelver Shi’i gnosis, Ḥaydar Āmulī’s *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ*, concerning whose twenty-eight diagrams Corbin observes:

Their circular form invites us, particularly where sacred history is concerned, to an apprehension of things by means of an Image ... This image is of circles, cycles or ‘cupolas’, as they are called in certain Nusayri texts, which not only show us temporal succession finally stabilized in the order of spatial simultaneity, but are also unique in their capacity to make possible and illustrate an application of the science of the Balance to sacred history.³¹

This application of the science of the balance formulates ‘arithmological relationships, which alone are able to “measure” the place and function of these homologous figures.’³² The diagrams include ‘the ‘Balance of the Seven and the Twelve’ (the correspondences between the astronomy of the visible Heaven and that of the spiritual Heaven, between the esoteric hierarchy and its cosmic correspondences); the ‘Balance of the Nineteen’, which ‘measures’ the epic of divine Mercy descending and ascending from world to world; and the ‘Balance of the Twenty-Eight’, which is an aspect of the balance of sacred history.³³

The figure of the circle is also utilised by Nāṣir-i Khusraw in his treatises – notably the *Khwān al-ikhwān* and the *Jāmi’ al-ḥikmatayn* – to illustrate the science of correspondences. In the Neoplatonic thought which underlies so much Ismaili symbolism, ‘the universe, both in its intelligible and visible forms, is conceived of as a vast array of “chains” or “series” radiating from a central, unified core’;³⁴ this underlying principle is seen clearly in Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s own diagrams, and provides an invitation to read his poem both in a linear fashion – that is, from beginning to end – and as radiating outwards from its central symbol, the *mīzān*. Such a reading is in keeping with the divine geometry which informs the plan of the cosmos; for in Islam, as in the West, the Pythagorean notion of God as geometer led to the attempt ‘to understand the deity through analysing his handiwork’;³⁵ and Ismaili thought in particular joined to the notion of an ineffable deity that of a comprehensively ordered universe generated by the agent of that deity, the Universal Intellect.

In his *Jāmi’ al-ḥikmatayn*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw likens the Universal (or First) Intellect to the divine Pen which writes upon the Tablet of the Universal Soul, the sustainer of the created universe;³⁶ this comparison sheds light retrospectively on the poet’s view of his craft as expressed in segment three, and more generally throughout the poem. As *ḥujjat*, illumined by the Imam’s esoteric knowledge, his act in infusing the ‘body’ of his poem with the ‘soul’ of rare meanings is analogous to that of the First Intelligence which, through the Logos, infuses the body of the material universe with the animating World Soul. Like the First Intelligence, the divine Pen which writes upon the Tablet of the World Soul, and like the Prophet, the human embodiment of that Pen who writes upon the physical Tablet of Scripture,³⁷ the poet, as *ḥujjat*, sets down in prose and verse the knowledge conveyed to him by the Imam.

Moreover, just as he describes the physical world (the macrocosm) elsewhere as the ‘palace of the World Soul’,³⁸ so Nāṣir-i Khusraw constructs in his poem a palace in which the knowledge infused into that soul is the indweller (segment two), an artefact which links macrocosmic garden with microcosmic body. I shall return to the garden in a moment; first I would like to dwell briefly on the significance of this artefact, the palace, in terms of Ismaili thought. In the *Khwān al-ikhwān*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw refers to *ta’wīl* as ‘the strong fortress of the souls [of the believers, protecting them] against perdition.’³⁹ Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s palace, in which he shall invite ‘the virtuous from all regions to sup’ and spread ‘such a feast for the wise man that he shall be bewildered from eating it’, is the physical embodiment of *ta’wīl*, the esoteric knowledge transmitted from the Imam.

In al-Sijistānī’s *Kitāb al-Yanābī’* the hierocosmos, or mesocosm – the intermediary world of archetypes which lies between the material and transcendental worlds – is likened to the ‘temple of light’ of the Imamate.⁴⁰ The image recalls that of the Sabian Temple (the doctrines and symbolism of the Sabians of Ḥarrān contributed significantly to Ismaili symbolism), described by al-Mas’ūdī as ‘divided into seven oratories and lit by seven large windows, before each of which stands an Image, or statue. These represent, respectively, the forms of the five planets and of the two major luminaries, and each statue is made out of a substance and a colour ... that correspond to the action of the planet represented’.⁴¹ While Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s palace contains no statues, it is perhaps not too farfetched to see the seven lines of the segment in which it figures as reflecting the architecture of this temple, its ‘ideal configuration ... into whose architectural form the soul projects her *imago mundi*, and thence proceeds to interiorise its every detail, assimilating it to her own substance through a mediation which thus enables her to construct her own microcosm. In this sense the Sabian Temple is above all a Temple-archetype.’⁴²

This temple-archetype, embodied in Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s palace, evokes further significations of the number seven. Seven is the number of the cosmos (comprising three, the number of the soul, and four, the number of the material universe); for the Ismailis it represented the sum of the two major luminaries (the Sun, equated with the *sābiq*, the first emanated principle, and the First Intelligence; and the Moon, equated with the *tālī*, the second principle, and the World Soul) and the five planets, hierarchies responsible for the governing of the world. As al-Shahrastānī remarked in his work on Muslim sects in connection with the Ismailis:

Just as the heavenly bodies and elements move by motion received from the Soul and Intelligence, so, too, souls and individuals are moved by religious laws under an impulse received from the Prophet and the *wasī* of every age. These are always in a series of sevens till the last phase is reached and the time of the resurrection has come, when obligations shall cease and *sunna* and laws disappear. These movements of the heavens and religious laws are intended as a means for the Soul to reach

its state of perfection, which lies in its reaching the level of Intelligence, becoming one with it and attaining the same actuality.⁴³

Embodying *ta'wīl*, with its explication of the numerical principles of the cosmos and of Ismaili gnosis, Nāṣir-i Khusraw's palace, like the temple of the World Soul, mediates between the microcosm – the ideal human form, bearer of that gnosis – of segment three and the macrocosm, the garden of segment one.

Thus the act of poetic creation is analogous to that of renewal in the natural cycle of the macrocosm, and the poet's efforts will bring joy to the believer just as spring brings joy to nature. But this is not merely a pleasant metaphor; it too has precise implications in Ismaili symbolism. As the author of the *Kitāb al-Rushd wa'l-hidāya* observes (commenting on the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'anic *sūra* 7, which recounts God's creation of the world as a sign for true believers):

The words (vii, 55): 'And We sent down thereon water' means the sending down of religious knowledge ... symbolised by water. 'And We brought forth with it every kind of fruit' refers to those believers who answer the *da'wa* anywhere. The descendants of the Prophet ... are the 'fruits' owing to their knowledge. 'Thus do We bring forth the dead' means that the ignorant are in this way saved from the death of ignorance. 'Perhaps you may remember' means that perhaps you may see the vegetation of the trees grown through the water in the *zāhir*, and will through this remember the explanations of the *mu'min* based on the knowledge of religion ... Their deliverance from ignorance is similar to the growth of the plants and fruits from the soil. The 'glad tidings' are the *waṣī*, and it is he who sends the *dā'īs*, in whose hands is (spiritual) life, as God says (ii, 159): 'in the clouds that are pressed into service betwixt heaven and earth'. This refers to the Imam and *ḥujja*, serving and obedient, well trained ... who calls (humanity to follow) the plain doctrine of the Imam ... and the esoteric teaching of the *ḥujja* ... The fall of the shower from the cloud symbolises the (reception of the) knowledge ... which is heard from the *dā'īs*. (From the shower) plants begin to grow, just as the *mu'min* (spiritually) grows by religious education.⁴⁴

In the *Khwān al-ikhwān*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw compares speech to water, 'whose benefit is greater when concealed ... just as that of the wisdom of the Prophet's laws within the mind and (the power of) distinction is greater than in the *zāhir* of the *sharī'a*'.⁴⁵ The 'illuminating rain' which the poet will pour upon his poetic garden, 'should the dust of error settle on its flowers,' thus represents that illuminating wisdom of *ta'wīl* which will explicate the errors of those who follow only the *zāhir*, so that the garden itself will become a spiritual Paradise in which true believers can contemplate divine wisdom.

Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī observes (presenting the *ta'wīl* of the concept of Paradise):

the sublime knowledge and the gifts infused by the (First) Intelligence and (World) Soul are the garden of clear interior perception, a garden which receives its adornment from the *nuṭāqā'* (prophets), the *asās*, the Imams and the *lawāḥiq*, through that sublime gnosis which spreads from their hearts and through their exquisite and desirable doctrines of wisdom in which the hidden Form (that is, the soul, the inner man) find consolation, contentment, quietude, familiarity and gentleness.⁴⁶

In the *Khwān al-ikhwān*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw terms Paradise the 'garden of the speaking soul' (*bustān-i nafs-i sukhan-gūy*) in which the wise man reaps his intellectual reward in the Hereafter:

Since we have established previously that reward (in the next world) is intellectual (*'ilmī*), not sensible (*ḥissī*), one must know that intellectual benefits, which are the knowledge of subtle truths, all of which provide adornment, rest and pleasure in this world, come from that [world]; this is the garden of the speaking soul, which cannot be obtained except by speech and thought. It is adorned by the foremost in religion, who are the trees of that garden. Wandering in that garden, and contemplating it with the eye of vision, produces for the speaking soul pleasure in [its] ease, happiness and comfort.⁴⁷

In that garden, the soul will be free from the 'skin' the 'darkness', of words and symbols, and will contemplate pure intellectual beauty: 'And this [state] is like Paradise, which God calls a garden, for its benefits in the spiritual sense have been equated, one by one, with the benefits of a garden in the physical sense.'⁴⁸ The garden is also 'a symbol of *ta'wīl*'⁴⁹ and it is no doubt as such a garden that Nāṣir-i Khusraw envisions his poetry as functioning.

Thus garden, palace and human form are analogues of one another, all infused with the wisdom and illumination transmitted from the World Soul through the Imam to the *ḥujja*, and together they illustrate a fundamental principle of *ta'wīl*, enunciated in segment eight of this *qaṣīda* and expressed throughout the *Khwān al-ikhwān* and other treatises: 'Know that God most high has made the visible world the sign of the invisible world, and physical creation the sign of spiritual creation'; 'The wise man is he who can take the sensible as an indication of the intelligible.'⁵⁰ This further illustrates Nāṣir-i Khusraw's reference to his own written works in the final section, and the relationship between writing and wisdom, between the written artefact and the cosmic order itself.

As al-Sijistānī explains, discussing the correspondences between the letters of the divine Word (the *kalima*) and the tetradic existence of things – *dhawāt*, essences, projects, the spoken word and the written word, which represent the four principles of *ta'yīd* ('the inspiration or spiritual energy dispensed by the first Intelligence'), *tarkīb* ('the creative activity of the Soul'), *ta'līf* ('the codification of the religious law by the *nāṭiq*'), and *ta'wīl* ('the hermeneutics [dispensed by] the Imam'):

As for the written word (the book, writing), it exists on the level of *ta'wīl*, because the hermeneutic of symbols (*ta'wīl*) consists in explicating the pure spiritual forms and inscribing them in the hearts of seekers. There is nothing in the world that cannot be considered as a text: wood, clay, all the natural species: minerals, (plants), animals, given that the esoteric sense must be extracted from everything, and that there is an indication to be drawn from everything.⁵¹

Nāṣir-i Khusraw takes up this notion in the *Khwān al-ikhwān* (in a chapter which reproduces much of al-Sijistānī's text),⁵² and asserts further that 'The book is equivalent to *ta'wīl*, and to the plants; *ta'wīl* is the soul of reason's images in the hearts of the seekers (after divine wisdom), and there is nothing in the world which does not accept (the status of) a book, such as flowers, plants, and minerals.' Elsewhere, in a lengthy section on how *ta'yīd* (divinely supported knowledge) is transmitted to the seeker after wisdom, he explains the function of discourse, and especially of poetry, in this process:

Thus we say that the goal of the speaking soul is to utter meaningful speech in polished words, free from superficial excess (*hashw*), either in rhymed discourse, like the orations of the Arabs, or rhymed and metrical, as in poetry, which is weighed in the scales of the intellect, at the end of each verse of which a word is brought which resembles that at the end of [every] other verse, each of which has a different meaning. All but those who possess a speaking soul (i.e., other animals) are incapable of (producing) such speech ... Because of the elevation (*sharaf*) which discourse in verse possesses over discourse in prose, those who compose poetry seek to separate themselves from those who compose prose ... But (the writer) cannot always express himself in meaningful poetry, because poetry is to the speaking soul like the fruit of a fruit-tree, and a tree does not always produce fruits which are sweet, fragrant, and well-coloured.⁵³

While those with true spiritual perception have no need of written or spoken discourse, 'because of men's inability to perceive (spiritual meanings) without intermediary, (the writer) composes (his discourse) in rhythmical words, constructs symbols based on sensible things, and (thus) conveys it to men'. 'God's speech', he continues, 'is, symbolically, to the soul of the prophet as poetry is to the speaking soul; and prophetic Tradition (*khobar*) is, symbolically, to the soul of the *nāṭiq*, as other kinds of discourse are to the speaking soul.'⁵⁴

Poetry and prose, then, are inspired by divine illumination; and like the divine Word itself, take the visible and sensible – the *zāhir* – as a means of conveying the invisible and intelligible – the *bāṭin*, emulating the work of nature and exemplifying the distinction between the 'natural' – the work of the universal soul – and the 'crafted' (*ṣinā'ī*), the work of the 'partial', human soul.⁵⁵

In the literary microcosm of his *qaṣīda*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw recreates all these forms of ‘writing’, all these ‘texts’ which provide signs and indications of esoteric wisdom; he thus affirms his own creative power as analogous to that of the First Intelligence. His literary microcosm is built upon the solid numerical foundation of the Ismaili cosmos, ordered by the number of the Imams (seven), testifying to the manifestation of the Mahdī (eight), and embodying the esoteric wisdom of the Logos (twenty-eight) within the exoteric framework of the poem’s ethical meaning. Its total of fifty-six lines (excluding the two final, ‘capping’ lines) may further be read as an allusion to the turn of the symbolic ‘wheel’ by which the Ismaili cosmos is frequently represented, and which is constituted by eight heptads of the imams of a ‘millennium’.⁵⁶ The letter *nūn* selected for the rhyme is interpreted by Ismaili *ta’wīl* as a symbol of esoteric wisdom (and we may take the *radīf*, *kunam*, as alluding to the *kāf-nūn* of the divine fiat, *kun*),⁵⁷ further emphasising the necessity of applying the principles of *ta’wīl* to the poem itself, whose symbolic structures – and especially that of the circle, which imparts unity and meaning to the whole – is non-verbal and thus cannot be apprehended by an approach based in language alone. Hence also the importance of the poet’s comparison of his craft to others in which the spatial element is primary, or to artefacts to the construction of which order and proportion are crucial, as a means of signalling the presence of such structures in his verbal discourse. The presence of such symbolic structures in the poem is, however, reinforced by other, specifically verbal devices, ranging from word-play to complex networks of symbols and motifs; while the analogous relationships posited by the poem establish it as attempting to recreate an underlying model of reality which is (in Coulter’s words) ‘in some sense both arbitrary ... and figurative or symbolic. There may ... be no other way to talk about metaphysical reality than to construct a model, in some irreducible way still concrete, which expresses in a figurative way ... the “true” nature of that reality’.⁵⁸ Thus while the poem may be read, by uninitiate and initiate alike, in a meaningful way – by the former as an exhortation to spiritual purification and the rejection of material values (the *zāhir*), by the latter as an affirmation of the mission of the Imam (the *bāṭin*) – it exemplifies, in microcosm, both the distinction between the two and the overwhelming superiority, in Ismaili thought, of the *bāṭin* itself, which is posited by every *zāhir* and which must be extracted from it by the true believer, the seeker after wisdom.

Translation of the text

- [1] 1 Now it is fitting that I change the state of things,
and strive to attain that which is best.
2 The world in April becomes fresh and green:
through contemplation I’ll make my mind like April.

- 3 In the gardens and villas of my books of prose and verse,
out of verse and prose I'll make hyacinths and basil.
- 4 Fruits and flowers will I make from meanings,
and out of pleasing words I shall make trees.
- 5 As the cloud makes the desert's face a garden,
I'll make my notebook's face a garden too.
- 6 In sessions of debate, upon the wise
I'll scatter flowers of beautiful conceits.
- 7 If on these flowers the dust of error settles,
I'll rain thereon clear light of explication.
- [2] 8 A palace of my poem I'll make, in which
from its verses I'll form flower beds and verandas.
- 9 One spot I'll raise up like a lofty prospect,
another make wide and spacious like a courtyard.
- 10 At its gate some rarity of metre
I'll set, trusty and wise, to be its gateman.
- 11 *Maf'ulu fā'ilātu mafā'ilu fā'*
I'll make the foundation of this auspicious building.
- 12 Then people of merit from all regions
I'll invite into my palace to feast.
- 13 Let no ignorant person enter it, for I
did not build such a mansion for the ignorant.
- 14 I shall lay such a feast for the wise man
that from eating I'll render him helpless and amazed.
- [3] 15 In the body of discourse, like the intellect itself,
I shall place beautiful and rare meanings as the soul.
- 16 If you have not seen discourse in human form,
I'll make for you, in discourse, the form of a man.
- 17 For him, from pleasing descriptions and pleasant tales,
I shall form twisting locks and smiling lips.
- 18 His meaning I'll make a lovely face, and then,
within the veil of wording I'll conceal it.
- 19 When I set my face towards speech, by force
I'll bend its back before me like a polo-stick.
- 20 If my mind, in some part, be dull,
with the hand of thought I'll file it sharp;
- 21 And should my soul display the rust of ignorance,
like a mirror I'll make it, through reading Scripture.
- [4] 22 The troubles of this evildoing age
I'll ease through renunciation and obedience to God.

- 23 I'll wash my hands clean of desire and then,
no longer sleeping, raise my hand above Saturn.
- 24 If, in the garment of ignorance, my heart once slept,
now from that garment let me strip it naked.
- 25 And as for this unhappy, sleeping body:
let me rise and sacrifice it with the blade of piety.
- 26 For if my faults come from my self,
to whom can I cry out against myself?
- 27 I shall rise, and by the True God's grace and mercy
lighten Time's heavy load upon my heart,
- 28 And make my own person, between good and evil,
poised like the tongue of a balance.
- [5] 29 Each moment to it a grain of goodness
I'll add, and diminish its evil,
- 30 Until those fetters, collar and chains he placed on me
I'll put back on the hands, feet and neck of Satan.
- 31 If the devil doesn't repent what he has done,
I'll make my own soul repent its deeds.
- 32 If I'm not able to make my body,
over the demons' train, a Solomon,
- 33 the demon within my body and my soul,
in any case, with Reason's blade I'll make a Muslim.
- 34 Of speech and deed I'll place on it saddle and bridle,
and make its reins from the wisdom of Luqmān.
- 35 Though you may hasten towards the court of Gilan,
I'm headed for the court of the All-Merciful.
- [6] 36 Towards the True Guide let me set my face,
and make myself, in conduct, like Salmān:
- 37 Go towards the kin of the Apostle, Aḥmad,
and make my body their slave and servant,
- 38 So that my name, by glory of the Imam,
I may inscribe upon the book of meanings;
- 39 And, from that Sun of Knowledge, make my heart
shine forth as brightly as the Moon in Cancer,
- 40 And from the blessed fortune of his sea
make of my heart a casket of pearls and coral.
- 41 O you who tell me constantly, advising,
"Throw off this garment, that I may give the word
- 42 so that at once, like So-and-so, you may be
introduced into the assembly of the Amir of Khurāsān."

- [7] 43 Within your head the mists of ignorance are strong;
 how can I treat the affliction of ignorance?
 44 How should I throwaway my honour like you, fool,
 wishing only to fill my pouch with bread?
 45 The Turks were once my slaves and servants;
 how should I enslave my body to the Turks?
 46 O you who've given me the bad advice
 to do like this or that base fellow:
 47 Your world is a cat that devours her kittens;
 why should I worship such a one?
 48 Who would be baser than I in this world,
 should I pledge my body, like a cat, for bread.
 49 Religion, perfection, knowledge: where should I cast them,
 so as to make myself like a desert-wandering ghoul,
- [8] 50 And empty of merit, like the ghoul:
 how should I be the servant of demons?
 51 It's enough for me to boast, that in both tongues
 I order wisdom in prose and verse.
 52 My soul (to praise the Prophet's family)
 I make now a Rūdaki, now a Ḥassān.
 53 My books, with their plentiful beauties of discourse,
 are fuller than China, Greece, and Isfahan.
 54 In treatises, with logical discussion,
 I produce proofs as brilliant as the sun;
 55 Over intellectual problems I place sensibilia
 in charge, as shepherd and guardian.
 56 The *Zād al-musāfir* is one of my treasures:
 I write prose like that, and poetry like this.
 57 A prison for the believer is this base world;
 and so I dwell forever in Yumgān,
 58 Till, on the Day of Judgement, burning fire
 for the party of Mu'āwiya I'll kindle.

Notes

1. *Touches of Sweet Harmony: Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Poetics* (San Marino, CA, 1974), p. 11.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 382, and see pp. 365–397.
3. See James A. Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm: Theories of Interpretation of the Later Neoplatonists* (Leiden, 1976), especially pp. 39–72, 120–130. Although Coulter's study applies chiefly to Neoplatonic exegesis of literary and philosophical texts, much of what he

says is applicable to poetic composition as well, especially that strongly influenced by the philosophical tradition.

4. See, for example, Caroline D. Eckhardt, ed., *Essays in the Numerical Criticism of Medieval Literature* (Lewisburg, PA, 1980), especially the articles by Russell A. Peck, 'Number as Cosmic Language', pp. 15–64, and Elaine Scarry, 'The Well-Rounded Sphere: The Metaphysical Structure of the Consolation of Philosophy', pp. 91–140.

5. Studies on Ismaili Shi'i Islam (too numerous to cite) make passing references to the importance of numerical symbolism and of specific numbers; but there is, to the best of my knowledge, no comprehensive study of the subject.

6. Jan Rypka et al., *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht, 1968), p. 189.

7. *Nāšir-i Khusraw wa Ismā'īliyān*, tr. Y. Āryanpūr (Tehran, 1967), pp. 199, 225.

8. Peter Lamborn Wilson and Gholam Reza Aavani, *Nāšir-i Khusrau: Forty Poems from the Divan* (Tehran, 1977), p. 19.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

10. *Kitāb Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn, Le livre réunissant les deux sagesse*, ed. H. Corbin and M. Mu'in (Tehran, 1953), p. 145.

11. *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Ḥakīm Abū Mu'in Ḥamid al-Dīn Nāšir ibn Khusraw Qubādiyānī*, re-issued by M. Suhayli (Tehran, 1335 Sh./1956), pp. 303–305; I have preferred this edition to the later one of Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1353 Sh./1978). The poem's first section is discussed by Jerome W. Clinton, 'Esthetics by Implication: What Metaphors of Craft Tell Us about the "Unity" of the Persian Qasida', *Edebiyat*, 4 (1979), pp. 84–89. There is a free English rendering in Wilson and Aavani, *Forty Poems*, pp. 25–27.

12. Nāšir-i Khusraw, *Khwan al-ikhwān*, ed. 'Alī Qawīm (Tehran, 1957), p. 290.

13. See R. Paret, 'Furqān', *El2*.

14. The abundance of similar 'homiletic' poems in Nāšir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān* suggests a poetic correspondence with a specific individual: however, there is insufficient evidence to establish the identity of this person.

15. The *Kitāb al-Rushd wa'l-hidāyat* (attributed to Ibn Hawshab), tr. W. Ivanow, *Studies in Early Persian Ismailism* (Leiden, 1948), pp. 66–68.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

17. Cf. the opening verse of the sura *al-Furqān* (25): 'Blessed is He Who has sent down the Discriminating Book to His servant, that he may be a Warner to all the peoples.' Cf. also, in the light of the central rhyme *mīzān*, verse 25: 'He has created everything and has determined its measure (*wa qaddarahu taqdīran*).'

18. *Kitāb al-Rushd wa'l-hidāyat*, p. 65.

19. See S. H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Boulder, CO, 1978), p. 101.

20. Henri Corbin, 'Etude préliminaire', *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, p. 71.

21. *Idem*, 'The Science of the Balance and the Correspondences between Worlds in Islamic Gnosis', in his *Temple and Contemplation*, tr. Philip Sherrard (London, 1986), p. 55.

22. Cf. also Qur'an 55:8–10: 'He has raised the heaven high and set up the measure, that you may not transgress the measure. So weigh all things in justice and fall not short of the measure;' 57:26: 'We have sent Our Messengers with manifest Signs and have sent down with them the Book and the Balance, that people may act with justice.'

23. 'Science,' p. 57.

24. Tr. H. Corbin, in *Trilogie Ismaélienne* (Tehran, 1961), p. 116.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 281–283.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
30. Marquet, Yves, *La philosophie des Ihwān al-safā'* (Algiers, 1973), p. 259.
31. Corbin, 'Science,' pp. 58–59.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
33. *Ibid.*
34. See Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm*, pp. 51–52, discussing Proclus' 'scheme of reality'.
35. Heninger, *Touches of Sweet Harmony*, pp. 209–210.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
40. al-Sijistānī, in *Trilogie Ismaélienne*, p. 32 n. 58.
41. See Corbin, 'Sabian Temple and Ismailism', in his *Temple and Contemplation*, tr. p. 133.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
43. *Muslim Sects and Divisions: The Section on Muslim Sects in the Kitāb al-milal wa'l-niḥal*, tr. A. K. Kazi and J. C. Flynn (London, 1984), p. 166.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 157.
51. al-Sijistānī, p. 121.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
56. Marquet, 'Quelques remarques à propos de *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismā'iliyya* de Heinz Halm', *SI*, 51 (1982), p. 115.
57. *Kitāb al-Rushd wa'l-hidāyat*, p. 57.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

Rhythm in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Poems

FINN THIESEN

Some people have an instinctive feel for verse-rhythm. The Persians call it *ṭabʿ-i shāʿirī*, ‘poetic temperament’. I know one elderly Iranian in Oslo who will immediately complain that the line is halting – *miṣrāʿ saqṭa dārad* – if he hears or reads a line of Persian poetry that is not in complete agreement with the rules of *ʿilm-i ʿarūḍ*, ‘the science of prosody’. Now, he is not a poet and no more well read in Classical Persian poetry than other well-educated Iranians. He has certainly not studied the *ʿilm-i ʿarūḍ*, but nevertheless his feel for rhythm is such that even the slightest transgression against the rules is unlikely to escape his notice. All Classical Persian poets must have had this feel for verse-rhythm.¹ In addition, I believe, most of them knew the formal rules as well. As for Nāṣir-i Khusraw, there can be no doubt that he had both the *ṭabʿ-i shāʿirī* and a thorough knowledge of the *ʿilm*. In 164.38 he says:

Shiʿr-i ḥujjat bāyad-at khwāndan hamī gar-t ārzū-st
Nazm-i khūb u wazn-i ʿaẓb u lafz-i khwushsh u maʿnawī

If you are looking for good poetry, sweet metres and words spiritual and deep, you ought to read Ḥujjat’s verses.²

And in 232.89, after quoting a *miṣrāʿ* by the poet Kasāʿī, he says:

Bar baḥr-i hazaj guftī u taqṭīʿ-ash kardī
mafʿūlu mafāʿīlu mafāʿīlu faʿūlān

You have written (this *qaṣīda*) in the *hazaj* metre and scanned it:

--- u --- u --- u ---

Nāṣir-i Khusraw has correctly identified and scanned the metre used in this *ghazal*. This is a humorous and quite elegant way of ending a *qaṣīda*.

In 177.3–5, 10–11 he says that he will transform his book of poetry into a garden:

*Dar bāgh u rāgh-i daftar-i dīwān-i khwīsh
Az nathr u nazm sunbul u rayhān kunam*

*Mīwaw³ gul az ma'ānī sāzam hama
Waz lafz-hā-yi khūb darakhtān kunam*

*Chun abr rūy-i ṣaḥrā bustān kunad
Man nīz rūy-i daftar bustān kunam*

*Bar dargah-ash zi-nādīra baḥr-i 'arūḍ
Yakkī amīn-i dānā darbān kunam*

*Maf'ūlu fā'ilātu maf'īlu fa'
Bunyād-i īn mubārak bunyān kunam*

In the glade and garden of my poetry book
I shall create hyacinths and fragrant herbs of poetry and prose.

Of mystic sayings I shall make flowers and fruit,
And trees out of fine words.

As the cloud creates a garden on the face of the desert,
So shall I create a garden on the face of my book.

At its gateway I shall create a learned faithful doorkeeper
Out of rarefied metres from the science of prosody.

--- -- -- -- --

I shall make the foundation of this blessed structure.

Mawlānā or Rūmī, by whichever name we call him, also inserts *afā'il*⁴ in his poems:

*Chun 'Arab gardī bigūyi: 'fā'ilātun fā'ilāt
'Abṣarū al-dunyā jamī'an fī qamīṣi takhtabī*⁵

When you turn Arab, you say: 'fā'ilātun fā'ilāt
See the whole world hidden inside my shirt.'

This is not particularly impressive. One suspects that Rūmī has used *fā'ilātun fā'ilāt* as padding, but that is certainly not the case in the following *bayt* which has a wordplay on *baḥr* 'sea/metre' and felicitously compares the poet of love to a fish swimming in the *baḥr-i wafāyī* 'sea/metre of faithfulness':

fā'ilātun fā'ilātun fā'ilātun fā'ilātun
*Khamush u āb furū raw samak-i baḥr-i wafāyī*⁶

.....
 Hold your peace and go down the water,
 fish of the sea of faithfulness/metre of faithfulness.

In one poem Rūmī seems to mock the prosodists, gleefully closing a *ghazal* with correct and fake *afā'il*:

mufta'ilun mufta'ilun mufta'il
*fa'lalalan fa'lalalan fa'lalan*⁷

The effect is not unpleasing, but it cannot match the elegance of the *maqta'* by Nāṣir-i Khusraw quoted above.

I have not come across other examples of *afā'il* inserted into Persian poems, probably because I have not read enough. There must be many more.

The table below shows the metrical distribution of the 278 poems, numbered *qaṣīda* 1 to *qaṣīda* 278, in Minuwī and Muḥaqqiq's critical text.⁸ We may note in passing that they clearly belong to two distinct categories. (The first 242 poems have an average length of forty-one *abyāt* and fit the classification *qaṣīda*, the following thirty-six poems, nos 243 to 278, have an average length of five *abyāt* and though a few of them follow the *ghazal/qaṣīda* rhyme pattern, they are, with the exception of no. 254,⁹ probably better classified as *qit'a*, since they are very short.) For the sake of comparison I have added below each item its percentage proportion in *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*¹⁰ and in Elwell-Sutton's survey of metres.¹¹ For convenience of presentation, I have numbered the metres used by Nāṣir-i Khusraw from 1 to 26.

Baḥr-i rajaz:

1.

.....
 1¹² poem: 110
 0.36 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0.40 % – Elwell-Sutton 1.23 %]

Bahr-i hazaj:

2.

.....

10 poems: 1, 19, 38, 57, 93, 108, 136, 158, 211, 230

3.60 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0.40 % – Elwell-Sutton 5.97 %]

3.

.....

22¹³ poems: 2, 21, 40, 59, 76, 95, 114, 119, 138, 160, 180, 195, 213, 232, 242,
246, 250, 251, 260, 265, 267, 276

7.91 % [Ḥāfiẓ 3.83 % – Elwell-Sutton 5.75 %]

4.

.....

1 poem: 178

0.36 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0 – Elwell-Sutton 0.01 %]

5.

.....

15¹⁴ poems: 9, 29, 48, 65, 84, 101, 127, 146, 168, 188, 202, 221, 240, 247,
273

5.40 % [Ḥāfiẓ 4.85 % – Elwell-Sutton 4.91 %]

6.

.....

12 poems: 18, 28, 47, 75, 83, 117, 126, 155, 167, 187, 220, 235

4.32 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0 – Elwell-Sutton 0.70 %]

7.

.....

14 poems: 11, 24, 43, 67, 79, 103, 113, 122, 150, 163, 183, 198, 216, 244

5.15 % [Ḥāfiẓ 1.01 % – Elwell-Sutton 3.18 %]

Bahr-i ramal:

8.

.....

13¹⁵ poems: 12, 25, 44, 68, 80, 106, 123, 147, 164, 184, 199, 217, 236

4.68 % [Ḥāfiẓ 6.27 % – Elwell-Sutton 12.17 %]

9.

.....

1 poem: 66

0.36 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0 – Elwell-Sutton 0.28 %]

10.

.....

12 poems: 10, 31, 50, 86, 102, 129, 148, 170, 190, 204, 223, 254

4.32 % [Ḥāfiẓ 27.48 % – Elwell-Sutton 9.75 %]

11.

.....

11 poems: 17, 35, 54, 74, 90, 133, 154, 175, 194, 208, 227

3.96 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0 – Elwell-Sutton 0.09 %]

12.

.....

13 poems: 16, 34, 53, 73, 89, 132, 153, 173, 193, 207, 226, 257, 261

4.68 % [Ḥāfiẓ 1.62 % – Elwell-Sutton 3.22 %]

Baḥr-i muḍārīʿ:

13.

.....

3 poems: 109, 156, 174

1.08 % [Ḥāfiẓ 3.83 % – Elwell-Sutton 2.03 %]

14.

.....

(printed as if it were)

1 poem: 70

0.36 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0 – Elwell-Sutton 0.005 %]

15.

.....

17 poems: 6, 27, 46, 62, 82, 96, 112, 125, 140, 166, 186, 201,¹⁶ 219, 238,
244, 249, 256

6.12 % [Ḥāfiẓ 14.39 % – Elwell-Sutton 13.21 %]

16.

- - - - -

3 poems: 177, 209, 229

1.08 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0 – Elwell-Sutton 0.45 %]

17.

- - - - -

18 poems: 3, 22, 41, 60, 77, 98, 120, 139, 143, 149, 161, 181, 196, 214, 233,
263, 268, 272

6.47 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0 – Elwell-Sutton 0.35 %]

Baḥr-i munsariḥ:

18.

- - - - -

16 poems: 4, 23, 42, 61, 78, 97, 121, 142, 162, 182, 197, 215, 234, 253, 270,
277

5.76 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0.40 – Elwell-Sutton 1.51 %]

19.

- - - - -

6 poems: 37, 56, 92, 135, 239, 252

2.16 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0 – Elwell-Sutton 0.15 %]

Baḥr-i mujtathth:

20.

- - - - -

13¹⁷ poems: 15, 33, 52, 72, 88, 104, 131, 151, 172, 192, 206, 225, 262

4.68 % [Ḥāfiẓ 21.62 % – Elwell-Sutton 15.04 %]

Baḥr-i muqtaḍab:

21.

- - - - -

1 poem: 269

0.36 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0.20 % – Elwell-Sutton 0.07 %]

Baħr-i khafīf:

22.

.....

15 poems: 13, 36, 55, 69, 91, 105, 111, 134, 141, 176, 209, 228, 264, 266, 275
 5.40 % [Ḥāfiẓ 1.61 % – Elwell-Sutton 8.88 %]

Baħr-i sarī:

23.

.....

16 poems: 7, 26, 45, 63, 81, 99, 115, 124, 144, 165, 185, 200, 218, 237, 243,
 245
 5.76 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0.20 % – Elwell-Sutton 1.10 %]

Baħr-i qarīb:

24.

.....

14 poems: 14, 32, 51, 71, 87, 107, 130, 152, 171, 191, 205, 224, 259, 274
 5.15 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0 – Elwell-Sutton 0.18 %]

Baħr-i mutaqārib:

25.

.....

17 poems: 5, 8, 20, 39, 58, 64, 94, 100, 137, 145, 159, 179, 212, 231, 258,
 271, 278
 6.12 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0.20 % – Elwell-Sutton 1.28 %]

26.

.....

14 poems: 30, 49, 85, 116, 118, 128, 157, 169, 189, 203, 222, 241, 248, 255
 5.15 % [Ḥāfiẓ 0¹⁸ – Elwell-Sutton 1.90 %]

It is evident from this inventory that Nāṣir-i Khusraw likes to vary his metres and no metre can truly be said to be his favourite. The one most used, No. 3, occurs twenty-two times and thus accounts for only one-twelfth of the whole. We may

contrast this with Ḥāfiẓ who uses one single metre for more than a quarter of his *ghazals*, No. 10 above. Nos 15 and 20 are two other favourites of Ḥāfiẓ. Taken together these three metres account for almost two-thirds of the poetry of Ḥāfiẓ.

Apparently, Nāṣir-i Khusraw liked to experiment and use rare metres, as he himself told us in the passage quoted above. Thus No. 24, the rare *baḥr-i qarīb-i musaddas-i akhrab*¹⁹ (which occurs only twice in the extensive material surveyed by me for my *Manual of Classical Persian Prosody*, accounts for only 0.18 per cent of the poems examined by Elwell-Sutton in his *Persian Metres* and is used neither by Ḥāfiẓ nor by Rūmī), has been used by Nāṣir-i Khusraw in fourteen of his poems. Metre No. 17 is an even less common one,²⁰ but Nāṣir-i Khusraw has used it in no fewer than eighteen poems and with him it is thus No. 2 in terms of frequency. Nos 6 and 11, which are both used in twelve *ghazals*, are two more examples of very rare metres²¹ used by Nāṣir-i Khusraw.

Comparing the metres used by Ḥāfiẓ and Nāṣir-i Khusraw we note that Ḥāfiẓ tends to avoid 'slow metres', where one short syllable alternates with two or three long syllables, whereas Nāṣir-i Khusraw seems to like them. These account for 17.25 per cent of Ḥāfiẓ' and 38.13 per cent of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry. On the other hand, both poets seem share a liking for 'fast metres', where two short syllables alternate with two long syllables. Both the favourite metre of Ḥāfiẓ (No. 10) and the metre used most frequently by Nāṣir-i Khusraw (No. 3) belong to this category. But this apparently shared preference is deceptive, since they handle these 'fast metres' very differently as I have shown below. Metre No. 20, *baḥr-i mujtathth* is almost five times as common in the work of Ḥāfiẓ as in that of Nāṣir-i Khusraw. These conflicting preferences seem to reflect a different attitude of the two poets towards their poetry, but before proceeding to substantiate this, we have to look at the way they handle those elements of the Persian language which are prosodically ambivalent.²²

In my work in progress, *Rhythm and Rhyme in Ḥāfiẓ*, I have made a complete statistical analysis of the prosodically ambiguous elements in all those verses in the *ghazals* of Ḥāfiẓ where there can be no doubt as to the genuineness of transmission. As for Nāṣir-i Khusraw, we must for the time being content ourselves with a partial analysis of his *Dīwān*, examining only forty poems, namely Nos 1, 2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28, 30, 37, 44, 52, 60, 64, 66, 70, 74, 78, 82, 90, 110, 141, 145, 153, 154, 155, 164, 173, 174, 177, 178, 204, 205, 208, 213, 242, 260, and we have to assume that the text in the critical edition is exactly what Nāṣir-i Khusraw wrote.²³ The *qaṣā'id* have been selected so as to represent all metres employed by him.

The following elements were examined:

- A. Short *kasra-yi idāfa* versus lengthened *kasra-yi idāfa*. 1528 short ~ 787 long [Ḥāfiẓ 2752 short ~ 961 long]

- B. Final short *-i* (today pronounced *-e*) versus lengthened final *-i*. 739 short ~ 21 long [Ḥāfiẓ 1094 short ~ 2 long]
- C. Final short *-a* (today pronounced *-e*) versus lengthened final *-a*. 712 short ~ 219 long [Ḥāfiẓ short 1182 ~ 15 long]
- D. Short *wāw-i* ‘*atf*’ (i.e. *-u* ‘og’) versus lengthened *wāw-i* ‘*atf*’. 932 short ~ 398 long [Ḥāfiẓ short 560 ~ long 134]
- E. Initial vowel pronounced in liaison with final consonant of preceding word versus hiatus (*hamza*). 1075 liaison ~ 151 hiatus [Ḥāfiẓ 894 liaison ~ 118 hiatus]
- F. Substitution of one long syllable for two short syllables within a metre.
Two short syllables: 3887 ~ one long syllable: 360 [Ḥāfiẓ two short syllables: 3131 ~ one long syllable 0]
- G. Contraction of final *-a* with *kasra-yi idāfa* to one long syllable, the diphthong *-ay*. 25 occurrences [Not employed by Ḥāfiẓ]
- H. Contraction of final *-ī* with *kasra-yi idāfa* to one long syllable, the diphthong *-iyy*. 6 occurrences [Not employed by Ḥāfiẓ]
- I. Contraction of final *-ā* with *wāw-i* ‘*atf*’ to one long syllable, the diphthong *aw*, 7 occurrences [Not employed by Ḥāfiẓ]

Now, while reciting a line containing lengthened final vowels (see A–D above), one may either pronounce those lengthened final vowels as long or disregard the lengthening and pronounce them as short vowel sounds. In the first case the effect will strike the listener as slightly artificial, especially if there are several lengthened vowels in one distich. In the second case the rhythm will be somewhat blurred. Similarly, in a line with many *hamzas* (see E above), observing the *hamzas* will make the line sound staccato, while not observing them will blur the rhythm. Therefore, the less lengthened final vowels and the less *hamzas* there are, the more clear and natural the rhythm will be, and it is evident from the statistics presented above that both Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Ḥāfiẓ try to avoid them, but it is equally clear that the various lengthenings are not all equally undesirable. Lengthened *kasra-yi idāfa* (A), though better avoided, is quite acceptable. Ḥāfiẓ lengthens roughly every fourth, Nāṣir-i Khusraw every third. Lengthening a final short *-i* originally (B) is much less acceptable. Nāṣir-i Khusraw lengthens it in only 2.75 per cent of instances while Ḥāfiẓ almost never does it – in only 0.18 per cent instances. Ḥāfiẓ also rarely allows himself to lengthen final short *-a* (C), namely in only 1.27 per cent of instances, whereas Nāṣir-i Khusraw lengthens it in no less than 30 per cent of instances. This avoidance of lengthened final *-a* is something that distinguishes Ḥāfiẓ from Nāṣir-i Khusraw and, I believe, from all other Persian poets as well, and it is one of the reasons that his *Dīwān* is felt to be *shīrīn* ‘sweet’ by native language listeners. Does this mean that Ḥāfiẓ is ‘cleverer’ than, for example, Nāṣir-i Khusraw? Not necessarily so. If we look at the occurrences of *hamza* or hiatus

versus liaison (E), we see that Ḥāfiẓ has a *hamza* in 11.32 per cent instances and Nāṣir Khusraw in 12.32 per cent instances. There is practically no difference here and they are equally 'clever'. Therefore the differences noted above seem rather to reflect divergent choices made by the two poets. Nāṣir-i Khusraw's ear disliked the *hamza* and he and Ḥāfiẓ take equal pains to avoid it, whereas they obviously had very different feelings about lengthening a final *-a*. When it comes to substituting one long for two shorts (F), Nāṣir-i Khusraw makes this substitution in 8.5 per cent of instances. Ḥāfiẓ never does it. This again probably reflects a conscious choice on the part of the two poets. To Ḥāfiẓ' ear this substitution was unacceptable. To Nāṣir-i Khusraw it must have been acceptable, though not particularly elegant. This again means that 'fast metres' (Nos 3, 9, 10 and 11) in the hands of Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Ḥāfiẓ can turn out to be quite different rhythmically. Compare the scanning of the first and second *miṣrā'* in 242.62:

Gah daryā gah bālā gah raftan bīrāh
Gah kūh wa gahī rig u gahī jūy u gahī jarr

Sometimes the sea, sometime mountains, sometimes lost,
 Now mountains and now sands, now a stream, then a ravine.

The second *miṣrā'* has a fast rhythm. The first *miṣrā'*, though formally a variety of the second, has a very slow rhythm.²⁴ Ḥāfiẓ has nineteen *ghazals* in this metre (No. 3) and each and every *miṣrā'* scans

It stands to reason that the conflicting preferences of the two poets reflect their divergent attitudes to poetry. Ḥāfiẓ is the great master of the *ghazal* whereas Nāṣir-i Khusraw repeatedly states that he hates *ghazals*.²⁵ Ḥāfiẓ no doubt wanted a beautiful content in an immaculate mould. He would therefore strive to say what he wanted with the absolute minimum of metrical lengthenings and go on reworking a *ghazal* until it was perfect in both form and content. We may even suspect that he would sometimes give preference to form. Even though Nāṣir-i Khusraw strove to write *nāẓm-i khūb u wāzn-i 'azb* 'good poetry in sweet metres', the ideological message to be conveyed remained his foremost concern. If the message came through and the form was good he would see no need continue polishing. This theory can explain their different choice of metres. Both preferred those metres that best fitted their purpose. (In addition to that, Nāṣir-i Khusraw had a penchant for experimenting

with rare metres.²⁶) Now, if a poet wants to avoid metrical lengthenings, he will avoid 'slow metres' and prefer rhythms with many short syllables. In accordance with this Ḥāfiẓ' favourite metres (Nos 10, 15 and 20) all contain many short syllables. On the other hand, for a poet who is not averse to metrical lengthenings, slow metres will be easier to wield because so many of the short syllables can be metrically lengthened. Not surprisingly, we find that 'slow metres' are two and a half times more common in Nāṣir-i Khusraw than in Ḥāfiẓ. As for those metres that seem to appeal equally to both poets (Nos 3 and 10 in the table) they are convenient for Ḥāfiẓ on account of the many short syllables, and to Nāṣir-i Khusraw because those short syllables, occurring in pairs, can be replaced by long syllables.

In Classical Persian prosody final short *-a* (today pronounced *-e*) can be contracted with *kasra-yi iḏāfa* to a single long syllable, the diphthong *-ay*.²⁷ Most poets avoid it, but in Nāṣir-i Khusraw it is rather common, and he also contracts final *-ī* with *kasra-yi iḏāfa* to the diphthong *-iyy*. In the forty poems examined by me there are twenty-five instances of *-ay* and six instances of *-iyy*. Analogically, it should be possible to contract *-a* with *wāw-i 'atf* to *-aw*. The existence of such forms has been pointed out by Hubert Darke,²⁸ but I had not come across any myself until I met with seven instances of this contraction in Nāṣir Khusraw (10.46b, 25.29b, 62.14b, 90.56a, 155.5a, 164.36b, 177.4a²⁹). In the critical edition, contractions of *-a* and *-ī* with *kasra-yi iḏāfa* are indicated with *yā'* and *sukūn*. Contractions of *-a* with *wāw-i 'atf* to *-aw* are left unmarked, but could conveniently have been indicated with *wāw* and *sukūn*. Another peculiarity that may be noted is that Nāṣir-i Khusraw scans *Qur'ān* as short long. Where the metre requires two long syllables he uses the synonym *furqān*. (Ḥāfiẓ always reads *Qur'ān* as two long syllables.)

Some grammarians state without adducing any examples that the suffix *-ī* may be substituted for the durative particle (*ha*)*mī* in the second person singular of the preterite.³⁰ I was gratified to find two examples of this form in Nāṣir-i Khusraw, namely 154.17a *yāftiī* and 173.8a *guftiī*.

The passages quoted in the beginning of this paper leave no doubt that Nāṣir-i Khusraw knew his *'ilm-i 'arūḏ* thoroughly and all his poetry should therefore be in accordance with its rules. Consequently, a verse that disagrees with the *'arūḏ* must be considered either corrupt or, less likely, unfinished and awaiting its author's finishing touch: I have noticed the following instances:

1. 1.22b *u yā gardīdan az ḥāl-ī bi ḥālī dūn yā wālā*. Read *dūn vayā bālā*.
2. 37.22b *najm-i Khurāsān naḥs u makhbūn shud*. Read *najm-i Khurāsān chi naḥs u*.
3. 44.1a *bar man-i bīchāra gasht sāl u māh u rūz u shab*. Metrically impossible. Must be emended to either *bar man-i bīchāra gashta sāl u māh u rūz u shab* or preferably *bar man-i bīchāra sāl u māh gasht u rūz u shab*.
4. 64.17a *ki īn pīsha-hā-ast nīkū nihāda*. Read *pīshahā hast*.
5. 74.7a *gul tabār u āl dārad hama mahrūyān*. Read *tabār u āl ārad*.

6. 105.2a *zān ki ū būda nīst u sarmadī-ast* is unmetrical. The critical apparatus has *būd nī-wu*, which is metrical. Perhaps a scribe misunderstood *būd nī* as *būdanī* and corrected to *būda nīst*.
7. 204.7b *az hawā khīzam bugrīzam waz āz-u khuw-am*. This is metrical, but to my mind meaningless. The variant in the apparatus gives good meaning: *az hawā khīzam bugrīzam az āz-u khuw-am*.³¹
8. 244.11 *maghz-at tuhī zi -ilm u mi'da-t az ta'āma pur*. Unmetrical. Should no doubt be emended to *zi-'ilm u shikam-t az ta'ām pur*.
I feel certain that the readings suggested by me for 3, and 5–8 are preferable to those of the critical text. About 1, 2 and 4 I feel less certain, but even so the suggestions should be seriously considered.

Postscript

A parallel version of this chapter, 'Nāṣer Xosrou's rhythm technique compared with that of Ḥāfez', was published in *Acta Orientalia*, vol. 67, Oslo 2006, pp. 95–113. It employs a different transcription that some readers may find convey the argument more clearly.

Notes

1. See Finn Thiesen, *A Manual of Classical Persian Prosody with Chapters on Urdu, Karakhanidic and Ottoman Prosody* (Wiesbaden, 1982), §9.
2. I.e. *qaṣīda* No. 164, *bayt* 38 in *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, ed. Mujtabā Mīnuwī and Mahdī Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1353 Sh./1974). All text references to Nāṣir-i Khusraw follow this pattern. When necessary, the first and second *miṣrā'*'s of a *bayt* are indicated with 'a' and 'b'.
3. *Mīwa* u contracted to *mīwaw*, See the discussion below.
4. The term *afā'il* is explained in Thiesen, *A Manual of Classical Persian Prosody*, §32 and §189.
5. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Kulliyāt-i Shams yā dīwān-i kabīr az guftār-i mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad mashhūr bi Mawlawī, bā taṣhīḥāt wa ḥawāshī-yi Badī' al-Zamān-i Furūzānfar I–X*. (Tehran, 2535/1975–1976), vol. 7, p. 62, verse 34253.
6. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 126, verse 29996.
7. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 9, verse 22518.
8. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān-i Nāṣir Khusraw*, ed. Mujtabā Mīnuwī and Mahdī Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1353/1974), pp. 1–549.
9. 254 is a *qaṣīda*. 243–251, 255, 259–260, 262, 264–265, 267, 269, 272, 276 and 277 have the *ghazal* rhyme schema, but only 243–246, 255, 264 and 265 have *ghazal* length.
10. I have used my own statistics, which will appear in my forthcoming *Rhythm and Rhyme in dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*.
11. I have calculated the percentage from the statistics in Lawrence Paul Elwell-Sutton, *The Persian Metres* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 147–160.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw: A Poet Lost in Thought?

JULIE SCOTT MEISAMI

Most of the chapters in the present book deal with Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry as a vehicle for his thought. With a few exceptions, little attention is paid to Nāṣir's poetic style; his poetry is seen primarily as a means to an end: the promulgation of his philosophical, ethical, and (on occasion) political views. In writing this conclusion, I do not intend to respond to all the chapters; nor do I intend to address the question of whether Nāṣir's poetry can, or should, be termed 'philosophical' (for even though Plato banned poets from his ideal republic, in both Western and Eastern traditions philosophy and poetry have always enjoyed a close relationship – so close that Aristotle, and his Arabic followers, treated poetics as a branch of philosophy). Instead, I will focus on Nāṣir's poetic style in the form in which he excelled: the *qaṣīda*.¹

Nāṣir's *qaṣīdas* present many problems, both literary and contextual. Leonard Lewisohn identifies the predominant 'genre' of the *qaṣīdas* as homiletic: that is, the poet's intention is to provide advice and guidance to his audience. But as any reader of the poems quickly realises, the poet has not only a philosophical and ethical agenda, but a religious and political one as well: his commitment to Ismaili philosophy and doctrine is also a commitment to Ismaili politics, to the descendants ('family') of the Prophet Muḥammad, and to the Imam of the Age, the Fatimid caliph al-Mustanṣir bi'llāh (427–487/1036–1094).

This provides some of the contextual background against which Nāṣir's poems should be read. In a more literary connection, we return to the question of how to classify his poems. Are they philosophical? Homiletic? Didactic? Religious? Personal? Are they to be considered as belonging to one specific genre, or as combining several? In Western criticism, 'genre' is a highly flexible term, although in general we tend to think of genre as the overriding 'mode' of a poem (or other work), or as a particular combination of form and content. Thus a poem is classified as philosophical, homiletic, mystical; or as epic, dramatic, narrative, lyric; or as a sonnet, a ballad, a limerick. In Arabo-Persian poetics, 'genres' (*aghrād*,

sg. *gharaḍ*, is the most widely used term, although there are others) are content-oriented.² They include *madḥ* (praise), *hijā* or *hajw* (invective), *wasf* (description), *ghazal* or *taghazzul* (love poetry), *zuhd* ('ascetic poetry'), *ḥikmat* ('wisdom'), *wa'z* or *maw'iza* ('sermon'), and various others.³ Nāṣir himself terms his poetry *shī'r-i zuhd*, 'ascetic poetry' (whose basic theme is renunciation of worldly desires and preparation for Judgement through faith and piety), *shī'r-i ḥikmat*, 'poetry of wisdom' (which includes various aspects of Ismaili thought and doctrine), or *shī'r-i pand*, 'poetry of advice'. Nāṣir would have been the last person to designate his poetry as 'philosophical', in the sense current in his time; in fact, he is generally contemptuous of 'philosophy' (*falsafa*) and 'philosophers', and makes a clear distinction between philosophy and 'religious speech' or the 'way of the prophets'.⁴ However, as we shall see, Nāṣir's poems include much more than *zuhd*, *ḥikmat*, or *pand*, even though these may have been the poet's chief concerns in composing them. It would be desirable to construct a typology of Nāṣir's poems; but this cannot be attempted here.

One further question arises, which involves both literary and larger socio-religious and political issues: who was the intended audience, or audiences, for Nāṣir's poems? Did they address a general audience? A more specifically Ismaili audience? Specific individuals? Were they meant to be read, or to be performed? These are questions which cannot really be answered here; they involve taking each and every poem individually, before attempting to classify them more generally. Some *qaṣīdas* appear to be personal, addressed to specific individuals, particularly relatives of the poet: perhaps his brother(s), or his son(s), as is suggested by such frequently recurring apostrophes as *ay barādar*, 'O Brother,' or *ay pīsar*, 'O Son' (or youth). Taqīzāda speculated on such possibilities in his biographical essay on Nāṣir-i Khusraw.⁵ However, such apostrophes, as well as others found throughout the *Dīwān* (e.g. *ay khwāja*, 'O Lord' (honorific of an official), *ay khiradmand*, 'O Wise Man'), or even more vague locutions ('O you who have...': travelled the world, experienced hardships, searched for knowledge, are dedicated to pleasure, etc.) are standard features of homiletic poetry; thus their recurrence is to be expected.

Were Nāṣir's poems meant to be read, or recited? Although some appear to take the form of letters, when we recall that, in the poet's time, almost all poems were composed to be recited or sung, we cannot rule out a performance context for many, at least, of Nāṣir's *qaṣīdas*.⁶ There is internal evidence in the poems themselves to support this contention. On several occasions, Nāṣir mentions his *rāwī*, the transmitter/performer of his poems, once, in fact, by name (Abū Ya'qūb; var. Abū Ayyūb; *Dīwān*, 177:4); elsewhere he refers to those who know his poetry as being his '*rāwīs* and scribes' (*Dīwān*, 294:2). Other indications of performance (other than the fairly ubiquitous phrase *bar khwān*, 'read, recite') occur in poems which feature a multiplicity of addressees, designated by apostrophes; one can picture a *rāwī* pointing to different members of the audience as he performs the

poem.⁷ Performance is also suggested by Nāṣir's choice of metres: predominant among these are the so-called 'musical' metres, Hazaj (in its various forms) and Ramal, both of which are associated with singing.⁸ Of course, Nāṣir also speaks of writing down his poems, whether this was done by himself or by others (e.g. the 'scribes' mentioned above). In the famous 'Confessional Ode' (*qaṣīda i'tirāfiyya*, *Dīwān*, 172–177; probably dedicated to the chief Ismaili *dā'ī*, al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī) he states: 'Wherever I am, as long as I live, at all times, in gratitude to you, I will employ pen, inkwell and notebook.'⁹ In another poem he addresses himself, saying, 'O prolific Ḥujjat, bring forth your book, and rain down the pearls of your speech from the tip of your pen.'¹⁰ Elsewhere, he warns a potential copyist (or perhaps his addressee): 'Copy this poem with a pure heart, for it is as pure as royal pearls.'¹¹

As for audiences: there are many possibilities, some of which may overlap. First and foremost, we must recall that the poet was under the protection of the Ismaili Amir of Badakhshān, and some poems were undoubtedly intended for the Amir and his court; indeed, there are several which appear to consist of, or include praise of, this prince.¹² Since the Amir was a supporter of Ismailism, it is natural to suppose that his court, as well as other Ismaili gathering places, provided an audience for Nāṣir's 'teaching poems', those which expound Ismaili thought and doctrine. Other poems were undoubtedly sent further afield, to Ismaili centres throughout the Islamic world, and might have been used for teaching in these centres. Still others, in particular those addressed to, and/or praising, the Fatimid Caliph-Imam al-Mustaṣfir and his chief *dā'ī*, al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, would have been destined for Cairo, for the Imam, the Fatimid court and its officials, and for Ismaili teaching centres in the Egyptian capital.¹³ Finally, still others seem to be, at least in part, intensely personal, as when the poet appears to address a brother, or a son, complains of having been rejected by and/or forcibly separated from his home, family and friends, begs for assistance, criticises the worldliness of those whom he addresses, and proffers advice, both ethical and religious. As mentioned above, it is difficult to tell whether such locutions as *ay barādar*, *ay pīsar*, *ay khwāja*, and so on, should be read as merely generic markers of the homiletic mode, or as intended for specific individuals.

Moreover, we should not forget that in his *qaṣīdas* Nāṣir has created for himself (as poets are wont to do) a carefully crafted persona, which is relatively consistent throughout his work: that of the poet-in-exile, persecuted by his foes, separated from all that was dear to him, who nevertheless dispenses wisdom and advice, praises the Imam, urges his addressee(s) to follow the path of true religion, boasts of his widespread fame, and hopes for reward in the next life for his piety and his devotion to the family of the Prophet.¹⁴ In short, Nāṣir's poems present many problems, in historical as well as literary terms. One cannot generalise about them,

not even in terms of calling the entire oeuvre of *qaṣīdas* 'homiletic', although this is certainly a dominant feature of most of them. What can only be attempted here is to see how the poems work, as poems, in terms of their form and their style.

Although Nāṣir wrote several poems in the *mathnawī* form (a form based on rhyming couplets, e.g. aa, bb, etc.), his preferred form of expression was the *qaṣīda*. Though this form first appeared as a fully mature means of poetic expression in pre-Islamic Arabia around the fifth century,¹⁵ it underwent both formal and stylistic changes at the hands of Arabic poets in the Islamic period and, later, of Persian poets, who adapted its conventions to their own poetic needs. The characteristics of this form are: monometre (i.e. each line, *bayt*, observes the same metre), identical rhyme in the first two hemistichs or half-lines (*miṣrā'*) of the poem, and monorhyme (end rhyme) throughout; thus: aa, ba, ca, and so on. Persian poets often add to the rhyme a *radīf*, or refrain, a word or phrase repeated at the end of each line. For example, in the *qaṣīda* discussed in my article 'Symbolic Structure' (reprinted in this volume, pp. 191–208) the rhyme is *-ān* and the *radīf*, *kunam*.

Contrary to what has often been thought, the *bayt* is not an independent unit, but is closely connected to what precedes and/or follows.¹⁶ Nor (as has also been argued) is the *qaṣīda* form restrictive; as Alice Hunsberger points out, the form lends itself to various strategies. The half-lines may respond to, expand upon, complement or contradict each other; paired lines are frequent, especially when a statement is followed by a supporting example; moreover, various strategies may be used to link not only paired lines but entire, often lengthy, segments of the poem. Many of these strategies will be seen when we begin to look at the poetry in more detail. I will divide this study into three major groupings, or categories (bearing in mind that these may complement each other and often overlap): (1) Figures of speech; (2) Figures of thought; and (3) Overall structure. The first two categories reflect the common distinction, in Arabo-Persian poetics, between *lafz* (wording) and *ma'nā* ('idea' or 'meaning', including themes, motifs, and topics, the last being the most literal sense of *ma'nā*, pl. *ma'ānī*, as is made clear by the many books on this particular subject.)¹⁷ Since Alice Hunsberger has discussed one of Nāṣir's *qaṣīdas* (*Kumayt-i sukhan rā ḡamīr ast maydān*) in terms of Ibn al-Mu'tazz's (d. 296/908) list of rhetorical figures in his *Kitāb al-Badī'*, I will not repeat this discussion; nor will I mention other figures added by later critics, writing in both Arabic and Persian, except as may be relevant to the poems discussed. The third category is one less often treated by medieval critics, but which nevertheless was not ignored by them, and is often implicit in their writings.¹⁸

Figures of speech

Many, if not most, of the figures of speech employed by Nāṣir-i Khusraw are based on some form of repetition, generally termed *takrār*, but extending to other figures

such as anaphora, *tajnīs* (paranomasia, the play or punning on words derived from the same [Arabic] root, on homonyms or on similar words), *radd al-‘ajūz ilā al-ṣadr* (repeating a word from the beginning of a line at the end), repetition of the rhyme-word (often to mark the conclusion of a segment and/or the beginning of a new one, or to call attention to a repeated motif), and so on. Nāṣir uses these figures both singly, to unify a passage, and in combination; the first example here demonstrates the most basic form of *takrār*, in a passage in which the poet extolls the pre-eminence of reason (*khirad*) in the affairs of men:

‘*Adl bunyād-i jahān ast biyandīsh ki ‘adl*
Juz ba-ḥukm-i khirad az jūr ba-ḥukm-i ki jidā-st
Khirad ast ānki chu mardum sipās-i ū birawad
Gar guhar rūyad zīr-i pay-ash az khāk sazā-st
Khirad ān-ast ki mardum zi bahā u sharaf-ash
Az khudāwand-i jahān ahl-i khiṭāb-ast u thanā-st
Khirad az har khalālī bast wa-z har gham faraj-ast
Khirad az bīm amān-ast w-az har dard shafā-st
Khirad andar rah-i dūnyā sara yār ast u silāḥ
Khirad andar rah-i dīn nīk silāḥ-ast u ‘aṣā-st
Bī-khirad gar chi rahā bāshad dar band buwad
Bā khirad gar chi buwad basta chunān dān ki rahā-st
Ay khiradmand nigāh kun bi-rah az chashm-i khirad
Tā bibīnī ki bar-īn ummat-i nādān chi riyā-st (Dīwān, 47:3–9)

Justice is the world’s foundation; consider this: by whose law,
 Save by the law of reason, is justice separated from injustice?
 Reason is that which, when mankind follow after it,
 Should a jewel sprout from the ground beneath its feet, it’s proper.
 Reason is that which, because of its value and nobility,
 People become worthy of discourse and praise from the Lord of the world.
 Reason is a dam for every breach, a comfort for every sorrow
 Reason is safety from fear, and a cure for every ill.
 On the path of this world, reason is a true friend and weapon;
 On the path of religion, reason is a fine weapon and staff.
 The man without reason, though he be free, is yet in chains;
 The man with reason, though he be in chains: know that he is free.
 O wise man, regard your path with the eye of reason
 That you may see what hypocrisy afflicts this ignorant community.

The repetition of *khirad* over five lines is prepared for by the initial *khirad* in the second hemistich of the line which precedes and introduces this passage; while

the compounds *bīkhirad*, *bā khirad*, and *khiradmand* (the first two of which give an instance of antithesis, *muṭābaqa*, a figure of thought, and all three of which represent the additive type of *tajnīs*; see further below) sum up the passage by distinguishing wise and rational men from those without reason, and especially, in the second hemistich of the last line, from the ‘ignorant community’ (*ummat*; i.e. the ‘community of believers’) at large – that is, the Sunni Muslim community, who for Nāṣir were unbelievers. Thus the entire passage is linked by repetition, as the poet introduces his topic, *khirad*, expands upon it to describe its attributes and desirability, and concludes with an exhortation to his audience to follow the path of reason.

Another example, offered here because it illuminates Nāṣir’s views on speech in general and on his poetry in particular, opens with the poet’s self-address (*Dīwān*, 192:13–20):

Ay Hujjat-i bisyār sukhan daftar pish ār
W-az nūk-i qalam durr-i sukhanhāt furū bār
Har chand ki bisyār u dirāz ast sukhanhāt
Chun khūb u khush ast ān na dirāz ast u na bisyār
Shāhī ki ‘aṭāhāsh girānast sutūd ast
Har chand shawī zir-i ‘aṭāhāsh girānbār
Naw kun sukhanirā ki kuhan shud ba-ma‘ānī
Chun khāk-i kuhan rā ba-bahār abr-i guharbār
Shud khūb ba-nikū sukhanat daftar-i nākhūb
Daftar ba-sukhan-i khūb shawad jāma ba-āhār
Az khāṭir-i pur ‘ilm sukhan nāyad juz khūb
Az pāk sabū pāk birūn āyad āghār
Āchār-i sukhan chīst ma‘ānī u ‘ibārat
Naw naw sukhan āri chu farāz āmadat āchār
Dar shi‘r zi takrār-i sukhan bāk nabāshad
Zirā ki khush āyad sukhan-i naghz ba-takrār

O Hujjat of many words, bring forth your notebook
 And from the tip of your pen rain down the pearls of your words
 However many and long your words may be,
 Since they are good and beautiful, they are not long nor many.
 The king whose gifts are weighty and valuable is praised,
 However heavily burdened you may be beneath his gifts.
 Make new that speech which, in meanings, has grown old,
 As does the pearl-raining cloud renew old earth in spring.
 Your unworthy notebook has become lovely through your beautiful words;
 With beautiful words a notebook becomes like a starched robe.

From a mind filled with learning comes nothing but beautiful speech;
 Nothing but clean moisture comes from a clean pitcher.
 What are the ingredients of speech? Meanings, and expressions;
 Bring forth the newest speech, since the ingredients have come to hand.
 In poetry, there is no fault from the repetition of words,
 For elegant speech becomes beautiful with repetition.

In the previous example, the pre-eminent element designated and emphasised by repetition was *khirad*, reason; here it is *sukhan*: speech, discourse, words and, especially, poetry. The poet exhorts himself to ‘renew speech’ (that is, poetry), whose ‘meanings’ (*ma’ānī*) have grown old; those familiar with his poetry know that by ‘new speech’ he intends no less than the creation of an entire new field of ‘meanings’ or ‘ideas’: the field of expression of Ismaili thought, and of his own beliefs. Moreover, in the final line of this passage he calls attention to his own usage of *takrār*, declaring that there is no fault in the repetition of words, or of topics, which only serves to beautify the poem. This introductory passage also prepares the audience for the further repetition of ‘speech’ (*sukhan*) at various points throughout the remainder of the poem. In lines which combine speech, reason (*khirad*), and the Prophet’s message, he states:

Zi ahl-i khirad tukhm-i sukhan hikmat u ‘ilmast
Dar khāk-i dil ay mard-i khirad tukhm-i sukhan kār (Dīwān, 192:23)

For people of reason, wisdom and learning are the seeds of speech;
 O Man of Reason, sow the seeds of speech in the soil of your heart.

‘You will become most excellent (*mukhtār*),’ he says, ‘when your beautiful words remain;’ for this was the case with the ‘chosen (*mukhtār*) Prophet’, whose words endured, and whose religion, through speech, became famed throughout the world, and rose up to the ‘turning dome’ (*Dīwān*, 192: 24–25).¹⁹

These examples employ a relatively simple type of repetition, based on a single figure, *takrār*, and on a single word and several related constructs. More complex types involve not merely *takrār*, but also *tajnīs* (paranomasia), in a variety of forms, as seen in this introductory passage to one of Nāṣir’s *qaṣīdas*:

Zi ahl-i mulk dar-īn qubba-yi kabūd ki būd
Ki mulk az-ū narubūd īn buland charkh-i kabūd
Har ānki bar ṭalab-i māl u ‘umr māya girift
Chu rūzgār bar āmad na māya mānad u na sūd
Chu ‘umr sūda shud u māya-yi ‘umr buwad tu rā
Tu rā zi māl ki sūd ast agar nasūd chi sūd

Fuzūdgānrā farsūda gir pāk hama

Khudāy ‘azz wa jall na fuzūd u na farsūd (Dīwān, 91:3–6).²⁰

Of men of power, who has there been within this sky-blue dome,
 Whose power’s not been stolen by this lofty sky-blue sphere?
 Whoever laid up capital in seeking wealth and life:
 When time has run its course, not capital nor gain remains.
 When life’s become worn out – and you had capital for life –
 What gain had you from wealth? And if it’s not worn out, what gain?
 And those who’ve found increase: believe it, they’re all worn out too;
 (Only) God – Mighty, Exalted! – does not increase or diminish.

Simple *takrār* is seen here in the repetition of *mulk*, ‘power, dominion, wealth’, *kabūd*, ‘blue’, and so on; such words, however, function to convey the surface meaning of the poem, its ‘message’ (worldly power, wealth and life are transient; only God is permanent, neither increasing nor decreasing). What attracts the audience to this message, however, what commands their attention in this opening passage, is its insistent word-play, its deliberate punning, achieved by the use of different types of *tajnīs*: whole (homonyms with different meanings, such as *sūd*, ‘gain’ and ‘wore out’, ‘[was] worn out’ [from the verb *sūdan*], both in the simple past and as a participle [*sūda*]); and additive, such as *farsūd*, *farsūda*, also ‘wore out’, ‘worn out’ (from the verb *farsūdan*). He who hopes for profit, *sūd*, in this world, it is implied, will ultimately gain nothing, and will end up *farsūda*, ‘worn out’ – old, fatigued, diminished – the fate of all mankind. Finally, this entire segment, which is unified by words either ending in, or containing, the syllable *-ūd*, resonates with the rhyme-words, both here (*kabūd*, *sūd*, *sūd*, *farsūd*), and throughout the poem. The echoing effect of all of these long, drawn-out syllables, with their heavy final consonant, was clearly intended by the poet to resound loudly in the ears of the listeners, and to hammer home the poet’s message.

A common form of repetition is anaphora, the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of a line. Several excellent examples are found in the *qaṣīda* discussed by Alice Hunsberger in this volume. Here I shall present only one or two examples, in order to demonstrate how this figure may be used. The first is from a *qaṣīda* in which Nāṣir combines anaphora with a description of the heavens:

Bi-shnaw ki chigūyad hamiyat dawrān

Payghām az-īn charkh-i tiz gardān

Z-īn qubba-yi pur chashmhā-yi bīdār

Z-īn ṭāram pur sham‘-hā-yi rakhshān

Z-īn sabz biyābān ki chun shab āyad

Pur lālah shawad hamchu bāgh-i Nīsān
Z-īn baḥr-i bī ārāmish nigūnsār
Ārāsta qa‘rash ba-durr u marjān
Z-īn killa-yi nīlī k-az ū nimāyand
Rakhshanda chu jān-i dukhtarān-i pariyān
Payghām-i falak bar zabān-i dawrān
Ānast ba-sū-yi nabāt u ḥaywān... (Dīwān, 330:13–18)

Listen to what the age constantly tells you,
 A message from this wheel that swiftly turns:
 From this dome, full of wakeful eyes;
 From this vault, full of brilliant candles;
 From this green plain which, when night arrives,
 Becomes filled with tulips, like a spring garden;
 From this restless, inverted sea
 Whose depths are adorned with pearls and coral;
 From this indigo canopy from which shine forth,
 Brilliant as the soul, the daughters of the Bear:
 The message of the sphere, on the tongue of the age,
 To plants and to animals, is this...²¹

The anaphora introduces, and unifies, a passage of description (*waṣf*) of the sphere (*charkh*, literally ‘wheel’), envisioned as the night sky, which further provides an example of amplification (*bast*).²² The audience is undoubtedly waiting to learn what the sphere’s ‘message’ is; their expectations are, however, delayed by this apparent digression, in which the poet displays his descriptive talents.

One interesting type of *takrār* consists in the repetition of the first hemistich of the *qaṣīda* elsewhere in the poem. Repetitions of the rhyme-word itself are quite common, and often serve to mark the completion of a sentence, or a thought, or to mark a transition from one topic to another. For example, the rhyme of the poem’s first hemistich may be repeated in the end-rhyme of the second line; an example is seen in the *qaṣīda* analysed by Hunsberger, with the repetition of the rhyme-word *maydān*. Another example involves homonyms with different meanings:

Dūsh tā hangām-i ṣubḥ az waqt-i shām
Bar kaf-i dastam zi fikrat būd jān
Āmad az mashriq sipāh-i shāh-i zang
Chun shah-i rūmī furū shud zīr-i shām (Dīwān, 298:9–10)

Last night till dawn, from evening time,
 I held a cup of thought in the palm of my hand.

From the East arose the army of the King of the Blacks,
As the Byzantine king descended beneath Syria.

Here the word *shām* is used in two different and contrasting senses: of time ('evening') and of place ('Syria'). The opposition between night as 'King of Blacks' and the setting sun as the 'Byzantine king' is a commonplace in Persian poetry.²³ (On this poem see further below.)

More complicated than this type of rhyme repetition, which serves to unify the opening lines of the poem, is that in which the first hemistich of the *qaṣīda* is repeated, in full, as the second hemistich of a line occurring later in the poem. The function of such repetition is generally to mark the end of a segment or to introduce a new one, containing a new topic; thus it properly belongs to the class of transitions (Ar. *takhalluṣ*, P. *gurīzgāh*).²⁴ In one of his *qaṣīdas* Nāṣir addresses someone with supposed experience of the world; he begins thus:

Ay gashta jahān u dāda dāmish rā
Ṣad bār kharīda mar dilāmish rā (Dīwān, 21:21)

You, who've travelled the world, and seen its snare;
A hundred times have suffered its spears...

After elaborating on the treacherous nature of this world, which does not fulfil its promises, and takes away all that it gives, he turns to advice:

Parhīz kun az jahān-i bī-hāṣil
Ay gashta jahān u dāda dāmish rā (Dīwān, 22:9)

Keep your distance from this profitless world,
You, who've travelled the world, and seen its snare.

Whereas in the first portion of the poem the poet delivered a series of statements describing a general situation – the world's falseness and trickery – here, with the use of the imperative followed by the repetition of the poem's first *miṣrā'*, he turns to the specific, admonishing his addressee to avoid this profitless world. The line which follows, beginning with another imperative (*Dīwān*, 22:10) –

W-āgāh kun ay barādar az ghadrash
Dūr u nazdīk u khāṣṣ u 'āmash rā

And warn of its treachery, O brother,
Both far and near, elite and populace

– moves back again from the specific to the general: not only should the ‘brother’ abstain from embracing the world, he should inform all others (near and far, elite and masses alike) to do the same – in effect, to carry on the task with which Nāṣir, the poet of *zuhd* and *ḥikmat*, has assigned himself.

A final example of this type of repetition has a different sort of twist to it:

Tamyīz u hush u fikrat u bidārī
Chun dād khayr khayr tu rā bārī (Dīwān, 437:9)

Discrimination, judgement, thought and wakefulness:
 Why did – in vain – God give them to you?

The answer is given in the line which follows:

Tā kār bandī in hama ālat rā
Dar makr u ḡadr u ḥīla u ṭarrārī (Dīwān, 437:10)

So that you might employ all of these tools
 In deceit and treachery, fraud and thievery.

All these fine ‘tools’ given by God to man are misused by him in order to further his ambition and greed – surely not the purpose for which they were bestowed; hence, they are wasted on the self-seeking, ignorant man – given in vain. Man, in turn, wastes his life if he does not use these tools for the purposes for which they were intended: the pursuit of learning (*‘ilm*) and the practice of pious obedience (*ṭā‘at*):

Az bahr-i ‘ilm dād tu rā Īzād
Tamyīz u hush u fikrat u bidārī (Dīwān, 437:21)

For the sake of learning, God gave to you
 Discrimination, judgement, thought and wakefulness.

‘Ilm, ‘learning’ – specifically religious learning – is the opposite of *makr*, ‘deceit, trickery’ (usually with malignant intent), and all of its associated evils. God’s gifts to man may be used to either purpose; but there is no doubt which purpose, for Nāṣir, is the correct one.

These examples demonstrate not only some ways in which Nāṣir-i Khusraw uses various types of repetition, but the important role that repetition plays in the structure of his *qaṣīdas*, in unifying individual passages and in linking passages in different sections of the poem. We shall come across examples of other types of

repetition as we look further at the *qaṣīdas*; but it is time now to turn our attention to the second major topic of this chapter, that of figures of thought.

Figures of thought

Figures of thought are those devices, or strategies, which affect the audience most directly through the ways in which they convey meaning. They include a wide array of techniques; most important to us here, in discussing Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *qaṣīdas*, are those involving metaphor (used in its broadest sense). Metaphor (*isti'āra*) lies at the heart of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetic style. Metaphor may be simple ('X is Y', 'X is a Y') or extended (that is, sustained throughout a lengthy passage, or indeed throughout an entire poem), allegorical or/and topical, and so on. It includes personification (*zabān-i ḥāl*, discussed by Nasrollah Pourjavady in his chapter in this volume), as well as description (*waṣf*), although this is, technically speaking, a genre (*gharaḥ*). Nāṣir's poetry would be incomprehensible to us were we unable to grasp, and to understand, the central role played in it by metaphor.

Let me explain, first of all, what I mean by 'allegorical metaphor'. Allegory is a stylistic device, a mode of expression, a deliberate principle of construction.²⁵ As such, the poet directs us to the meaning of his allegorical metaphors; we are not allowed to interpret them at will.²⁶ Readers of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry will be familiar with such 'closed pairs' of metaphors (in which the two elements of the metaphor are linked for purposes of comparison) as *kumayt-i sukhan*, 'the steed of speech', *kazhdum-i ghurbat*, 'the scorpion of exile', *tīgh-i āftāb*, 'the sword of the sun', *bāz-i jahān*, 'the falcon of the world', *dirakht-i jahān*, 'the tree of the world', *nardabān-i 'ilm*, 'the ladder of learning', and so on. Such pairs are common in Persian poetry; they lead the audience/reader to ask, 'Why is speech like a running steed? Why is the world like a hunting falcon?' and thus grasps their attention when confronted by the poem. They are, perhaps, most powerful when combined with other elements, in a phrase, a line, a passage, and even as unifying features recurring throughout an entire *qaṣīda*.

Nāṣir has a number of favourite metaphors, or metaphorical clusters, which often occur in narrative or descriptive passages. These types of metaphors are not necessarily treated in the same way, nor do they necessarily convey the same meaning. We have already seen his use of the 'horse and rider' metaphor in the *qaṣīda* analysed by Hunsberger in this volume. Other examples of this metaphor also involve the connection with speech.²⁷ For example, he states:

Speech is like a mount (*markab*) for your soul;
Upon it, you can ride to the city of right guidance (*shahr-i hudā*) (*Dīwān*,
454:20)

that city being, of course, Cairo, the city of the Imam, but also the ‘promised land’, the *shahr-i amīn*, of the Qur’an (see further below). But not everyone can be a true horseman:

Ānki buwad bar sukhan sawār sawār ū-st
Ān na sawār ast ki bar asb sawār ast (Dīwān, 51:11)

He who rides upon speech is the true horseman;
 He is not a horseman who rides a mere horse,

says the poet, emphasising his point with the fourfold repetition of *sawār*. Elsewhere, he identifies himself as that true horseman:

Bar asb-i ma‘ānī u ma‘ālī
Dar dash-i munāzara sawāram
Chun ḥamla baram ba-jumla-yi khaṣmān
Gumrah shawand dar ghubār-am (Dīwān, 286: 13–14)

Upon the steed of meanings and sublime matters,
 I am the horseman in the field of debate.
 When I attack all of my opponents
 They become lost in the clouds of my dust.

The poet identifies the ‘field’ or ‘arena’ of debate – ‘the Qur’an is God’s arena’ – and challenges his opponents: ‘Tell every horseman, “Rise, come forward, enter this arena.”’ (*Dīwān*, 352:10).²⁸ The arena of debate is also likened to a polo-field:

Your arena is empty of me and of those of true religion:
 Throw away the ball, put aside the polo-stick. (*Dīwān*, 326:2)²⁹

Cast aside your anger: here am I, and here are you;
 If you are a horseman (*sawār*), then come forth into my arena. (*Dīwān*, 283:12)³⁰

Most of these examples occur in the context of the poet’s lament over the decline of Khurāsān, and his castigation of those whom he sees as ‘collaborators’ with the Saljūq regime. While their greed drives them to the service of this regime, and while they are devoted to pleasure, he is devoted to serving the true religion through speech, as he proclaims in an example which strikes a more personal note:

If you, who seek the world’s pleasures, are a horseman, I
 Am mounted on the steed of beautiful speech.

Though you may be ruler of a court, I am,
 Through speech, like precious royal pearls.
 Though you may be a prince in Balkh, I am,
 In my own house, a true prince indeed. (*Dīwān*, 276:17–19)³¹

The poet stresses his purity of soul, and of speech, which he contrasts with the material desires of his addressee; the reference to Balkh suggests that the poem, replete with criticism, is addressed to a particular individual, perhaps one of his brothers, or another relative, who was given a high position under the Saljūqs. While this is speculation, the personal tone of this passage cannot be denied.

The poet, mounted on the steed of speech, contends with his opponents on the polo-field of argument, the battlefield of debate. Sometimes, however, the metaphor of the ‘steed’ becomes more abstract, and more negative: for example, the world is a death-dealing mount (*asb-i kushanda*) which must be drawn towards religion by its bridle (*ligām*), lest it get out of control (*Dīwān*, 306:16–18), the sphere is a tireless piebald (*ablaq*) horse, without soul or body, which goes where it will, no matter how tired and worn out its riders become (*Dīwān*, 92:15–18). Limitations of space prohibit further discussion of Nāṣir’s use of this figure; so let us move to another metaphorical cluster: that of the sea, and the ships that sail upon it.

How, one might ask, does a landlocked Persian poet create images involving the sea? We must remember that the words for ‘sea’ (Ar. *baḥr*, P. *daryā*) refer not only to seas but also to rivers, and especially to large rivers. One such great river was the Oxus (Jayḥūn), so close to Nāṣir’s home city of Balkh that it was known as ‘the river of Balkh’, and which swung a wide path, as it made its southward turn, around the province of Badakhshān, where Nāṣir lived in exile in the valley of Yumgān.³² Such ‘sea metaphors’ would not have appeared at all strange to the poet’s audience. A simple example is seen in this line:

The ship is Reason; hang on to it firmly,
 That you be not drowned within this sea. (*Dīwān*, 19:4)³³

The poet warns his addressee (*ay khwāja*, ‘O noble lord’) of the approaching end of life, and the dangers of the ‘sea’ of this world; similarly, elsewhere he advises his audience not to waste life’s brief voyage:

The world is a sea, and your body a ship;
 Your life is the wind, and you a merchant.
 All this capital, of which I’ve told you:
 Why throw your capital to the wind for nothing? (*Dīwān*, 318:11–12)³⁴

Sometimes the 'sea' is that of inspiration, which may overcome the poet, while at other times he sails it, or dives into it, in order to find the precious gems of speech:

When the sea of my knowledge boiled up waves of speech,
My tongue, through speech, became a pearl-raining cloud. (*Dīwān*, 177:18)³⁵

When I sail in the sea of speech, I draw out Adam's essence;
When I enter the mine of reason, I show forth the essence of man.
(*Dīwān*, 356:10–11)³⁶

The sea and its surroundings, including all of creation, provide him with the tools to write his poetry:

The cloud is the pen, the sea is ink, and the rest, like earth, is paper:
The four humours are the scribes, and 'man' the title of the book.
(*Dīwān*, 362:1–2)³⁷

Sometimes the metaphor may be extended, as in these lines, in which the sea is both speech and the source of speech: the Word of God.

The sea of all speech is the beautiful speech of God,
Full of precious gems and beautiful, lustrous pearls.
External revelation (*tanzīl*) is bitter, like the sea;
But for the learned man, its inner meaning (*ta'wīl*) is like pearls.
(*Dīwān*, 3:16–17)³⁸

The sea's depths are filled with precious pearls and gems; he who ventures on its shore must seek a diver (*ghawwāṣ*) in order to find them. Why have all these gems been placed in the sea's salt water? For the sake of the Prophet, who was told, through this created beauty, 'Give *ta'wīl* to the learned, and *tanzīl* to the rabble' (*Dīwān*, 3:18–19, 4:1). The repetition of the motif of the precious gems (*gawhar*, *lu'u*) hidden in the depths of the sea reinforce the notion that man must strive for learning, must be worthy of accepting the *ta'wīl*; at the same time, the gems are those of speech itself, both the words of God, and those of the poet.

In another passage featuring allegorical 'paired' metaphors the poet announces their meaning clearly, leaving no doubt as to interpretation:

By analogy, the sublime world is a mighty sea;

One of the most important metaphorical images in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry is that of the tree. The resonances of this image encompass the long-standing importance of trees in Iranian culture in general; the Qur'anic verses which state, 'A goodly saying [is] as a goodly tree, its root set firm, its branches reaching into heaven, giving its fruit at every season by [God's] permission,' whereas a bad saying is like a bad tree, unstable and barren;⁴² and, finally, the oath sworn under the tree at al-Hudaybiyya appointing 'Alī as the Prophet's successor.⁴³ Nāṣir recalls, in his 'Confessional Ode' (*Dīwān*, 172–177), that it was learning of this pact which set him upon his quest for knowledge that finally ended in Cairo.

Trees are everywhere in Nāṣir's poetry, and not least in the garden, as we shall see later. To catalogue all their occurrences would require a book in itself. Trees are the marvels of God's creation; but not all of them are gifted with fruit, however lofty they may be. After describing a flower-filled spring garden, the poet moves to its trees:

The orange tree, with its colourful fruit and leaves,
Tells tales of Caesar's many-hued pavilions.
But the white poplar tree remains with nothing
To show, for it has chosen haughtiness...
They burn the wood of fruitless trees;
This is a worthy fate for those without fruit.
But if your tree gives forth the fruit of learning,
You will indeed subdue the azure sphere. (*Dīwān*, 13:16–17, 19–20)⁴⁴

The contrast between fruitful and fruitless trees, a constant feature of Nāṣir's tree imagery, expresses the rhetorical figure of thought, antithesis (*muṭābaqa*, *ṭibāq*) which informs much of his poetry. *Muṭābaqa*, along with the image of the tree and the extensive use of anaphora, informs and unifies another lengthy passage, which begins:

The tree of humankind bears no greenery but old age;
Reason is its fruit, with taste like sugar, scent like ambergris.
The tree's bent over with its fruit; but upon your own tree
Are blossoms, but no fruit; fruitless, why are you then bent over?
Look, with the eye of your heart, upon God's garden, filled
With trees of various sorts, that were planted by Adam. (*Dīwān*, 268:15–17)⁴⁵

This is followed by a lengthy catalogue of kinds of 'trees', introduced by anaphora (*Yakī...yakī*), featuring frequent internal rhyme, and based on the figure of *muṭābaqa*, antithesis, whose thematic content is anticipated by the next line:

*Girifta bar yakī khanjar yakī marham yakī nishtar
Yakī hapyūn yakī ‘anbar yakī shakkar yakī ‘alqam...*

One grasps a dagger, one a balm, another one a lancet sharp,
One opium, one ambergris, one sugar, one a bitter fruit,
One like a soaring bird, with wings, however, made of thought,
One like a scorpion, whose sting, however, is in its mouth.
One’s head, from fortune and glory, scrapes the sphere of Saturn,
Another’s head should only hide beneath a stone, like a venomous snake.
(*Dīwān*, 268:18–20)⁴⁶

The catalogue continues for another four lines (*Dīwān*, 268:21–24), with further contrasts and criticisms; the passage is tightly structured, especially by the unifying anaphora, which begins emphatically and then decreases in intensity. The *qaṣīda* as a whole is unified by the topic of speech, and especially of good, true speech as the product of the acquisition of knowledge and of virtue; the effect of this passage is to emphasise the contrasting qualities of men, their true and virtuous speech as against their seductive but false speech, and to set the scene for what is to come: a warning to the addressee/audience of approaching mortality – ‘Your worldly pride will do you no good tomorrow’, ‘pursue wisdom and piety, subdue the demon in your nature’, and so on. In other words: do not be one of the ‘bad trees’ planted (presumably without malevolent intent) by Adam.

The image of the tree further links reason, wisdom and speech:

Reason is a branch, and speech its fruit and leaves;
Reason is a seed, and speech its fruit.
Intellect is concealed beneath speech:
Intellect is the bride, and speech its veil. (*Dīwān*, 153:20–21)⁴⁷

Nāṣir’s poetry is itself a tree:

*Shuhra dirakhtī ast shi’r-i man ki khirad rā
Nukta u ma’nā bar ū shukūfa u bār ast (Dīwān, 51:12)*
My poetry is a celebrated tree of which
Eloquent points and meanings are the blossoms and fruit of reason.

In the same poem, he compares the Fatimid Caliph-Imam al-Mustansir’s banner to a tree, in a line the first hemistich of which repeats the beginning of the first hemistich of 51:12:

Rāyat-i ū rūz-i jang shuhra dirakhtī ast
K-ash zafar u fath barghā u thimār ast (Dīwān, 51:22)

His banner, on the day of battle, is a celebrated tree
 Whose leaves and fruit are victory and conquest.

Poet and Imam are linked through the image of the tree; as the Imam's banner soars high on the day of battle, giving fruition to his victories, so does the poet's verse soar through all the regions, announcing the triumph of reason.

A final example puts a twist on that image, in a passage which describes the poet's ascent from the world's dark, deep well to the sphere of the moon. There he sees a date-palm (*khurmā-bun*) whose branches reach to heaven, upon whom God has scattered (*nithār karda*) reason, as if in divine largesse. He approaches this palm tree 'with fear and with hope'; and anticipates the consequences of this encounter for the sake of the audience: *Z-ū bakhtyār gashtam u shud bakht yār-i man*, 'From him I became fortunate, and fortune became my friend'. (Note the pun on *bakhtyār*, 'fortunate', and *bakht yār*, literally 'supported by, befriended by fortune', the derivation of the word *bakhtyār*.) A dialogue between the poet and the date-palm (translated here as 'he', as the exchange makes clear) ensues:

Guftam bi-rāh-i jahl hamī tūsha bāyadam
Guftā tu rā bas-ast yakī shākhsār-i man
Junbīd narm narm u bi-bārīd bar dīlam
Bārī k-az ū pasanda bi-shud kār u bār-i man
Bī bār chinār būdam u khurmā bunī shudam
Khurmā-st bār u barg kunūn bar chinār-i man (Dīwān, 346:19–22)

I said, in ignorance, 'I must have provisions;
 He said, 'Enough for you is a single branch of mine.'
 Softly, softly, he went, and rained upon my heart
 Fruit from which all my affairs became worthy of praise.
 I was a barren plane tree; I became a date-bearing palm:
 Now dates are fruit and leaves on my once barren plane.

We may note the pun (*tajnīs*) on *bār*, 'fruit', and *kār u bār*, 'affairs' (literally, 'works and burdens'), which also provides an example of *radd al-'ajuz ilā al-ṣadr* ('returning the end to the beginning'), and which unifies the line. The 'sphere of the moon' is both a symbol for the Ḥujjat himself, and for *ta'wīl*; the moon's light comes, ultimately, from the sun, the Imam; but here, both the 'moon' and the 'date-palm' (a favourite amongst Nāṣir's trees) must refer to his mentor and

teacher in Cairo, al-Mu'ayyad, who transmitted the Imam's knowledge to the poet. Nāṣir concludes this passage by saying that, were it not for the 'demon' who ruined (literally, 'cut down', 'cut off') his seed and fruit, his homeland (*diyār*) would have been a fruitful palm grove; but although the demon's offspring turned his dates to poison, he is yet the remedy (*pāzahr*) for that poison (*Dīwān*, 346:23–347:1).

Nāṣir-i Khusraw is a master of description; but his descriptive passages are not mere 'ornamentation' (as has been assumed, incorrectly, by some Western critics in connection with other Persian poets), but are fraught with allegorical meaning, and often prefigure the poem's main theme. Two of his favourite descriptive topics are the night sky and the garden; both are used with considerable flexibility, and may be positive, negative, or ambivalent. His descriptions of the night sky may be utterly striking in their brilliance, as in this passage which begins one of his *qaṣīdas*:

Chīst īn khayma ki gū'ī pur guhar daryāstī
Bā hazārān sham' dar pangān az mīnāstī (*Dīwān*, 439:16)

What is this tent, which you'd say is a sea filled with pearls,
 With thousands of candles in a lapis bowl?

If there were a garden upon the sphere, he says, the tulip would be its Jupiter; or if the sphere were in a garden, its rosebush would be Gemini. One would not know Capella from the red rose, the one fragrant, the other shining brightly. Look at the dawn! Following upon the Pleiades, it seems like an amber Phoenix following a silver pheasant. The sphere's body is dark, but within it are the signs (*āyāt*) of dawn, like a thought of knowledge in the mind of the ignorant. Iridescent dawn has adorned the face of the East; you'd say it was like the throne of Darius. The new moon is like a golden boat sailing on the indigo sea; nay, not a sea, but the veil over Paradise. But, in the words of the logician (*manṭiqī*), all this is 'artificial', or simply 'created' (*maṣnū'ī*), for were it perfect, it would never diminish. There follow a number of arguments, and refutations thereof. The point of this passage would seem to be: a testimony to the wonders of creation, and of the sphere, and of the correspondences between the sphere and the created world. We might note, especially, the reference to the East as the 'throne of Darius', at dawn, suggesting the restoration of Persian rule over the East.

A lengthy passage describing the sky at night begins with the sleepless poet in despair:

Dūsh tā hangām-i ṣubḥ az waqt-i shām
Bar kaf-i dastam zi fikrat būd jām
Āmad az mashriq sipāh-i shāh-i zang
Chun shah-i Rūmī furū shud zīr-i Shām...

Last night till dawn, from evening time,
 I held a cup of thought in the palm of my hand.
 From the East arose the army of the King of the Blacks,
 As the Byzantine king descended beneath Syria.
 They are like the two sons of Noah: how amazing!
 The day is like Shem, the black night like Ham.
 The night threaded thousands of pearls through her locks;
 Red and gold, ordered and not ordered.
 No one ever saw such a bride in this world:
 Her locks full of light, her face full of shadow.
 No one was awake save evildoers;
 No one has seen such a state; Alas! Alas!
 The face of these lights of the world towards us
 Are like eyes which never sleep.
 You'd have said that each is a messenger from God
 To us, and their lights like a message.
 O son! These are the tongues of God,
 And beings are like words from these tongues.
 No one has heard their speech save he
 Who, through reason, has completely opened his heart's ears. (*Dīwān*,
 298:9–18)⁴⁸

We noted earlier the rhyme link and *tajnis* between the two senses of *shām*, 'evening' and 'Syria': as the evening sun sets in the West, the 'army of blacks' attacks from the East, a battle between light and darkness. Might this be an allusion to al-Mustaṣṣir's loss of Syria to the Saljūqs in 452/1060?⁴⁹ The reference to the 'two sons of Noah', Shem and Ham, furthers the contrast between light and darkness: 'white' Shem (*Sām*) was his father's supporter, while Ham, the disloyal son, laughed at his father's privates, exposed while Noah was asleep, and was cursed by his father to be condemned with blackness. The motif of disobedience, ever present in Nāṣir's poetry, looms large here.

The night, like a bride, weaves brilliant gems through her hair – another sign that there is yet light in darkness, although this too is qualified: her dark locks are in fact light, while her face, which should be light, is in shadow. In this dark night, none but evildoers are abroad – and yet, and yet, the stars, the lights of the world, are no less than messengers, the 'tongues of God'; but only he who has opened the 'ears of his heart' can hear their message. Curiously, the poet seems to have retained his optimism in the face of the Fatimid defeat (if my topical reading is correct). The motif of the battle between light and darkness is taken up again later in the poem: the poet remains sleepless from 'the time of evening' (*az gāh-i shām*; note the repetition of *shām*, with its possible double meaning) until dawn:

When dawn's breath, with wisdom, drew
 Its golden sword from the indigo sheath,
 The face of the earth shone like the mind of the wise;
 The pitch-black locks departed from the world.
 You'd have said that now, the Fatimid
 Drew from its scabbard the sword of truth. (*Dīwān*, 299:4–6)

The image of the sky as a bride weaving stars through her black locks is echoed in that of the withdrawal of pitch-black locks from the world, the relief of darkness by light, the anticipation of the eventual triumph of the Fatimid cause. Here it is primarily imagery, rather than rhetorical devices, which unifies the poem and works to convey its message.

The following passage combines a description of the night sky and the garden, likening each to each, and provides a transition to our final topic of discussion in this section: that of the garden itself. The poet begins with a lengthy description of the night sky (*Dīwān*, 149:12–150:1–4: *shabī mishk rang u dirāz u mujāwar/chu zulfayn u mī'ād-i hijrān-i dilbar*). As in the passage quoted above, this night sky is also full of contrasts, and conflicts: the night sky evokes both the absence of, and reunion with, the beloved; night adorns the sphere's crown with pearls, but tars the world's face pitch-black. The black tents of night's army are drawn up against the Pleiades, while its skirt is lowered over the moon's golden ball (a gesture of protection). Night is likened to Moses' hand spread over Pharaoh's face (a positive allusion to Moses' triumph over Pharaoh's magicians), but it spreads darkness over the face of the heavens, and the brilliant Pleiades. This series of antitheses is summed up in a telling line:

Hawā chun ḡamīr-i sitamḡāra tīra
Sitāra chu rukhsār-i mu'min ba-maḡshar (*Dīwān*, 149:16)

The sky is dark as the mind of the oppressor,
 The stars (bright) like the believer's face at Resurrection.

This sets the scene for what will, eventually, be made clear: the 'oppressor', and his armies, are identified with darkness, the 'true believer' with light and, ultimately, with triumph. Until that triumph draws near, however, everything in the world is in confusion: the north wind, should it stir, would not know up from down, mountain from plain; the courageous lion takes on the nature of the cowardly and deceitful fox. Although the Milky Way, like a gulf, overflows 'with milk (as if) in a green sea', the demon ('*ifrīt*') has arrayed an army against Venus (*zuhra*), its spears and knives drawn from the stars. The horizons are dark as the enemy's oath, but the face of Mars glows red as the sword of heroes. The contrast between light and

darkness, oppression and heroism, continues, until the final consummation, when into the world (like a heart gone astray) faith found its way, and

Night fled from the sun's brandished sword
 Like cursed 'Amr from the master of Qanbar.
 There arose from the mountain that to which Almighty God
 Had given, in (the realm of) time, both rest and movement. (*Dīwān*, 150:1–2)

The first allusion is to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib; Qanbar was his faithful servant; 'Amr is 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ, an early opponent of 'Alī.⁵⁰ The second is to the Universal Soul, ('that to which') the source of both motion and rest.⁵¹

The Soul's appearance, or intervention, produces a change which is celebrated in the next passage, in which the poet turns to the garden (*Dīwān*, 150:3–17). The 'heart of the turning sphere' and the 'eye of time' became 'like a disturbed sea, its waters dyed with saffron'; from it (the Soul) came decrease and increase, rest and movement, 'gold (*zar*) upon the earth, and ornaments (*zīwar*) upon the sphere' (note the additive *tajnis* between *zar* and *zīwar*, linking the earth and the sphere). The earth is sometimes clothed, sometimes naked; the tree is sometimes impoverished, sometimes rich. These lines, with their important mention of the tree, form a gradual transition to the image of the garden: the Soul sometimes covers the plain with a well-designed carpet, gives the garden ornamented silks, decorates the mountain partridge in emerald, makes the wild ass of the plain a bed of silk:

You would not know the breeze from a Tibetan perfumer;
 You would not know the earth from Shūshtar silks. (*Dīwān*, 150:9)

This line leads into a full description of the spring garden, a passage which, although somewhat shorter, balances the description of the night sky with which the poem opened. Now all is beauty and celebration: the breeze (*Ṣabā*) is redolent of perfumes, the earth seems covered by Shūshtar brocades. The red rose has blossomed forth like a *houri* formerly clad in a green veil; the plain is rosy-coloured, the garden full of flowers, the rose's face sprinkled with saffron (the rhyming words here – *mu'asfar*, *muza'far* – with the same sense – that is, dyed or tintured with saffron – convey both the colour of the rose and the association of saffron with good fortune):

The red rose is like the face of blushing beauties;
 The violet is perfumed like the locks of the beloveds (*Dīwān*, 150:12)

says the poet, repeating the red-gold image of the rose and evoking the dark colour of the violet, whose locks (*zulfayn*) provide a verbal echo of the beloved's dark locks in the opening line. The nightingale's song, as it perches on the fir-tree branch, is

reminiscent of the beautiful voice of the *rāwī* singing from within a green canopy.⁵² Sometimes the dark cloud and the brilliant sun seem like 'Alī's sword smiting the unbeliever (*Dīwān*, 150:14). In sum: the 'world-seeker' (*jahān-jūy*, generally meaning 'ambitious') is bewildered by all this beauty; the poet (*sukhan-gūy*) is at a loss to describe it (*Dīwān*, 150:17).

The ensuing passage dwells on another series of contrasts: between the spring of youth and the winter of old age. Youth is worthy of praise, says Nāṣir, for chief among the youths of Paradise are (as the Prophet said) Shubbayr and Shabbar (i.e. Husayn and Ḥasan, the Prophet's grandsons).⁵³ 'Alas for youth!' the poet exclaims; its result is nothing but white hair and a blackened notebook (*mūy chun shīr u chun qīr daftar*; *Dīwān*, 150:22). Old age has brought him nothing except – except! – closeness to the Prophet's family: whoever follows them, though he may grow old, has nevertheless followed the right path. And so, Nāṣir concludes, the bustling vicissitudes of time have brought him to dedicate himself to one goal (*gharaḍ*): praise of the Prophet and his family.

The two descriptive passages – night sky and garden – balance each other, to encompass the two major aspects of the created world: the heavens, and the earth. The pivot between these passages is the Universal Soul, whose creative powers are expressed in both the heavens and the earth. Both heaven and earth are signs (*āyāt*) pointing to this creativity and, ultimately, to God.

The garden looms large in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetry. For, despite his seeming disparagement of poets who go on endlessly describing spring gardens:

How long have you praised the Spring, 'when the dry stems
Shall blossom, and the almond bear fruit...'⁵⁴

the garden is a major presence throughout his poems. Sometimes it is plainly and patently allegorical, as in Nāṣir's frequent references to the 'garden of the *sharī'at*'. For example: he proclaims himself 'religion's Ḥujjat for the people of Khurāsān'; with his religious discourse, he is, 'in the garden of the *sharī'at*, the brilliant sapling (bearing) the leaves and fruit of learning':

A celebrated sapling, grown on Kawthar's edge,
Drinking Kawthar's water: why should I not grow great? (*Dīwān*, 296:24–26)

There are many occurrences of this metaphor throughout Nāṣir's *Dīwān* (far too many to be quoted here). In one instance, he describes the garden and its guardians:⁵⁵

Dar bāgh-i sharī'at-i payāambar
Kasī nīst juz Āl-i ū dahāqīn...

In the garden of the Prophet's *sharī'at*
 No one but his Family are the gardeners.

The gardeners, or trustees, of the garden give only dry leaves and rubbish to 'these madmen' – that is, the 'demons' who have taken over Khurāsān – for they 'do not know ambergris and aloes from dung'. He exhorts his addressee to hasten to find the road to this garden, however far off it may be, for it boasts both figs and olives, the 'safe land' (*shahr-i amīn*), and Mount Sinai.⁵⁶ His addressee, adorned by both learning and good works, will find refreshing fruits and herbs in the garden; he should enjoy them, and leave the rubbish and thorns to the donkeys. Similarly, elsewhere he announces that the *sharī'at* is 'God's garden,' filled with grain and cultivation and abundant trees' – especially trees, of all sorts, planted both by God (Raḥmān) and by Satan (Shayṭān). He warns the traveller: should you desire this rare garden's fruits and blessings, know that its gardener/owner (*dihqān*) is one who is virtuous, noble, and famous; no one should attempt to enter the garden without his permission (*Dīwān*, 351:15–18).⁵⁷

In a poem in which Nāṣir expresses his hatred and disgust for what he views as the 'ungodly' regime that has taken over his homeland, and in response to an addressee who has criticised the poet for his curses upon those who show disrespect for the Prophet and his family, he inserts an allegorical narrative about the garden to prove his point:

Bāgh-i nikū biyārāst az bahr-i khalq Yazdān
Firdaws gūy khwāhī khwāhīsh nām kun dīn... (*Dīwān*, 373:16)

God has arrayed a beautiful garden for the sake of His creation;
 You might call it Paradise, or you might call it religion.

Its gates are fruit-bearing sages, its walls are made of wisdom, its hedges of Dhu'l-Fiḡār (the famous sword of 'Alī). God installed four persons in this garden (the four elements), who are its gardeners/guardians (*dahāqīn*); these gardeners ordered our forms ('If you don't know this,' says the poet, 'recite the beginning of the *sūra* Wa-al-Tīn', which appears to be a favourite of Nāṣir's). But a pig entered this garden, disguised as a mouse, having fled from lions, wretched and miserable. As long as the gardener (*bāghbān*) was there, the pig did not overstep its bounds; but when the gardener left, the pig returned to its piggish nature, uprooted the flowers, installed crows where there had been parrots, spread thorns and rubbish where there had been sweet, fresh herbs. When this rubbish had taken over the garden, there came forth an accursed people; and so, 'In the world's garden, after the pig gave birth, all that was fragrant, delicious and sweet is now bitter, sour, and rotten' (*Dīwān*, 373:17–24, 374:1). There is no doubt that the 'pig' represents the

Saljūqs, the invaders of Khurāsān, who have destroyed the ‘garden of religion’ and turned it to rot and rubbish.

The garden undergoes many changes, throughout the seasons. The seasons are significant for Nāṣir: while spring brings promises of rebirth, autumn and winter seem to deny or negate these promises. Often these changes seem to reflect the political situation, of which Nāṣir is constantly aware; at other times, they testify to the cycle of nature, which is itself interpreted allegorically. For example, Nawrūz ‘repents to the world’ for winter’s evil deeds (*Dīwān*, 52:12), whereas autumn is equated with ignorance (see e.g. *Dīwān*, 274: 10–11), or, sometimes, with old age (*Dīwān*, 113:12; *Dīwān*, 442:13–14). Autumn’s arrival (which, of course, presages the bitterness of winter) is treated almost like a rape:

Chi būd īn charkh-i gardān rā ki dīgar gasht sāmānash
Ba-būstān jāma-yi zar baft badarīdand khūbānash (*Dīwān*, 216:13)

What’s the matter with this turning wheel, that its state has all changed?
 The garden’s beauties have torn up their lovely gold-weave robes.

The brocades in which spring (Farwardīn) had clothed the garden’s beauties have been destroyed by the months of autumn (Mihr and Ābān). Autumn has broken the pact it made with the garden, which has been invaded by cold and snow. It is as though a giant mountain, like a whale, has risen from the sea to drown the world in snow, like a roaring dragon spitting fire and smoke.

The topic of autumn destroying the beauty of the spring landscape is a commonplace in Persian poetry; however, the association of autumn with ignorance, and with the depredations of the Saljūq invading usurpers, along with (for Nāṣir) the religio-political connotations (reinforced by the conflict between darkness and light, as we have seen in examples quoted above) provides a new semantic field, in the light of which the imagery must be read. Thus, for example, when Nāṣir asks:

Is it Solomon’s throne which rose from the sea at dawn
 And travels only on the wind towards mountain and plain,

and questions that throne as to why it has suddenly turned dark –

O blessed, brilliant throne, why are you now so dark;
 It’s as if the demons had stolen you from Solomon (*Dīwān*, 217:2–3)

he is alluding not merely to a well-known legend, but to the Saljūq defeat of the Ghaznawids and their takeover of Khurāsān. (The pun on the plural of *dīw*,

‘demon’, *dīwān*, occurs frequently in Nāṣir’s poems, and reminds us that *dīwān*, in the singular, refers to an administrative bureau – such as that, or those, in which Nāṣir himself had been employed, and in which his brother(s) continued to work under the Saljūq regime.) By an act of God, (a) Solomon has become veiled, and demons are his doormen (*Dīwān*, 218:8).

This line marks a turn to the next topic: that beauty lies not in form and fine adornment, but in a good disposition and in knowledge. This may seem unrelated to the first topic, but, in fact, it is not, as the following lines make clear:

Agar bā mīr ṣuḥbat kard mīrānand mīrash rā
Wa-gar bā khān barādar shud khiyānat dīd az khānash (*Dīwān*, 217:10)

If he’s companion to a prince, his prince will be driven out;
 If he becomes brother to a khān, he’ll be betrayed by the khān.

The *tajnis* in this line – *mīr*, ‘prince’, *mīrānand*, ‘drive out’; *khān* (a Turkish title), *khiyānat*, ‘treachery, betrayal’ – both underscores the dangers of association with the court, and marks Nāṣir’s move to the homiletic mode, as he dispenses advice based on his own experience. Thus the descriptive passage with which the *qaṣīda* begins, and which accounts for almost half its length, establishes a background of contrast – between fertility and destruction, between light and dark and, implicitly, between good and evil – which will inform the remainder of the poem. In a *qaṣīda* which begins:

Ay karda qāl u qīl tu rā shaydā
Hīch az khabar shudat ba-‘ayān paydā (*Dīwān*, 28:16)

You who’ve been driven mad by all this talk:
 Have you ever seen any report visible, with your own eyes?

Nāṣir addresses one who has become bewildered, and deceived, by the unverified statements of the Ḥadīth scholars about religion. (*Qāl u qīl*, literally ‘he said that, and it is said that...’ refers to one of the formulae of transmission; *khabar* is a report about the Prophet’s sayings and/or actions.) Nāṣir is consistently critical of transmitted learning, as opposed to learning acquired through the use of reason (*khīrad*) and intellect (*‘aql*). ‘When you’ve found eyes and ears,’ he continues, ‘consider whether there is a visible witness to what you’ve heard.’ He mentions a variety of conflicting opinions about religion, not only within Islam, but between faiths: Christians, for example, worship on Sunday,⁵⁸ ‘Don’t be deceived by what so-and-so says (as narrated by) some learned person,’ he warns; ‘you need a witness from the eye as to what is heard’ (*Dīwān*, 29:9–10). And he proceeds to furnish an example:

They say that there exists a beautiful, fresh world
 Without limits or end, filled with blessings and comforts.
 Its plain is a garden, pearls concealed beneath,
 Upon its couches the resting-place of hours.
 That is our never-perishing palace,
 Lofty, beautiful, full of comforts and kindness.
 There is a witness to this saying, in this world,
 As resplendent as Jupiter over Gemini.
 For in Farwardīn, the dark earth
 Places lapis-blue gems over its Byzantine veil.
 And from dry wood pearls rain down,
 Pearls which scent the plain with musk,
 And beautiful faces, in whose brilliance
 The sun becomes helpless, and smitten with love (*shaydā*) (*Dīwān*, 29:11–17)

These ‘beautiful and rare ideas (*ma‘nī-hā*)’ are neither present nor achieved by the four elements (‘earth and water, fire and wind’), Nāṣir asserts; they must, without doubt, come from Paradise; and all bear living witness to God’s own words about His creation. ‘You will find the interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of all this,’ he says, ‘in the treasury of he who has no peer among mankind’ (*Dīwān*, 29:25; meaning the Caliph-Imam al-Mustaṣṣir, whom he proceeds to praise). For Nāṣir-i Khusraw, all of creation provides signs testifying to that ‘other world’, the spiritual world. The book, the text, the poem, is itself a sign, which exists on the level of *ta’wīl*, guiding the reader/audience towards the perception of those other signs in the text of creation.

The poem as a whole; and some concluding words

Medieval Arabic and Persian poets alike were prone to divide their poems into segments – not only segments of meaning, but segments identified by certain markers, words or phrases, which would both assist the singer/reciter (*rāwī*) in his performance of the poem, and would also help the audience to know where they were during this performance.⁵⁹ One can imagine the *rāwī* placing emphasis on such words or phrases during his performance. Nāṣir-i Khusraw is no exception: his poems are carefully and deliberately structured, and employ such devices as linear sequence and ring composition. Where he is different is that his ‘segments’ are largely based on the significance of certain numbers in Ismaili numerology.⁶⁰

We can only refer to a few examples here. Looking back at the poems discussed in some detail in this volume, we see that the *qaṣīda* analysed by Alice Hunsberger (*Dīwān*, 318–322; eighty lines) is divisible into sixteen segments

of five lines each, with its centre at line 40, containing the double reference to God (*khudā, khudāwand*). The poem discussed by Leonard Lewisohn (*Dīwān*, 120–122; forty-five lines) consists of six seven-line segments plus a three-line cap. ('Caps', which are lines of summation or of comments not structurally related to what precedes them, are a common feature of both Arabic and Persian poetry.) The *qaṣīda* in my article, 'Symbolic Structure', reprinted in this volume (fifty-eight lines), which is one of the most perfect examples of Nāṣir's attention to composition, is divided into eight segments of seven lines, plus a two-line cap, and represents an impressive example of ring composition, with the centre at line 28, with the rhyme-word *mīzān*, 'scales', both balancing the poem and declaring its significance in terms of Ismaili symbology. Another *qaṣīda* which I have discussed elsewhere (*Dīwān*, 139–141: *Āmad bahār u nawbat-i sarmā shud...*; forty-three lines) has five seven-line segments and a final one of eight, the final octave signifying both the triumph of spring over winter and alluding to al-Mustaṣfir, the eighth Fatimid Caliph-Imam.⁶¹

Other examples might be cited; and this clearly provides a fertile field for future research on Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poetics. Nāṣir's poetry has only recently begun to be studied as poetry, and not merely as a vehicle for his exposition of Ismaili thought or philosophy; and it is high time that his superior poetic talent (of which he himself was not loath to boast) was given its due right. Composition is only one aspect of this talent. A detailed study of his use of imagery (in which respect he is virtually second to none among Persian poets) is one desideratum; as is his use of personification (which, unfortunately, could not be discussed in detail here, but which has been well dealt with by Nasrollah Pourjavady). Prosodic studies (the poet's use of metre and rhyme, and especially of the *radīf*, and the possible relationship of rhyme-words with letter symbolism) would be of much value. Nāṣir's use of argument might be analysed with reference both to contemporary Islamic dialectics and by comparison with, for example, Rosamund Tuve's study of the English Renaissance poets, a venture somewhat tentatively embarked upon by Michael Beard in his chapter in this book,⁶² and his literary persona might be considered less as a 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' (see the discussion by Daniel Rafinejad) than as a deliberate construct.

Such investigations should be combined with adjunct studies, which, at the present time, are few and far between: on Ismaili numerology; on the imagery used in Ismaili prose writings as well as in poetry (a rich source of which is found in Nāṣir's own *Khwān al-ikhwān* and *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*). In short, there is much to be done; and it is to be hoped that younger and more energetic scholars will proceed along these and other lines of inquiry, with the goal of increasing our understanding, and appreciation, of that most consummate of Persian poets: Nāṣir-i Khusraw.

Notes

1. I am grateful to the Institute for Ismaili Studies, to its Co-Director Dr Farhad Daftary, and, in particular, to Alice C. Hunsberger, for inviting me to contribute this concluding chapter. In what follows, unless otherwise noted, all references to Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Dīwān* are to: *Dīwān-i ash'ār-i Ḥakīm Abū Mu'īn Ḥamīd al-Dīn Nāṣir-i Khusraw Qubādiyānī*, ed. by Mujtabā Mīnūvī (3rd ed., Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993). Hereinafter: *Dīwān*; numbers refer to page and line in this edition. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

2. See Julie Scott Meisami, *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Poetry: Orient Pearls* (London, 2003), pp. 26–54; compare Francis Cairns, *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry* (Edinburgh, 1972).

3. Nāṣir-i Khusraw uses the term *gharaḍ* in a punning sense, when he states that the goal (*gharaḍ*) of creation was the Prophet, and that he himself has said 'what is best and most abundant' on this *gharaḍ*; *Dīwān*, 151: 3–4.

4. See e.g. *Dīwān*, 65:18: *Ān falsafa ast u īn sukhan-i dīnī/īn shakar ast u falsafa hapūn ast*, 'That is philosophy and this religious speech; this is sugar and that is opium'; *Dīwān*, 80:25: *Īnast ān 'afā ki khudā kard filusūf/w-ān falsafa ast u īn rah-i āthār-i anbiyā-st*, 'This is that gift which God gave the philosopher: that is philosophy, and this the path of the prophets' deeds'.

5. See *Dīwān*, biographical essay, 49–50. Nāṣir's prose work, the *Kitāb-i Wajh-i Dīn*, was written for his brothers and other relatives (*ibid.*, 50).

6. On performance, especially in the period in question, see F. D. Lewis, 'Reading, Writing, and Recitation: Sanā'ī and the Origins of the Persian Ghazal' (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1995).

7. For multiple addressees see, for example, *Dīwān*, 162–165, and especially *Dīwān*, 377–379.

8. Here I part company with Finn Thiesen's conclusion that Nāṣir was particularly fond of using 'heavy' metres, and of experimenting with the so-called 'rare' metres (*buhūr muhmala*), such as Muḍāri', Munsariḥ, Mujtathth, Qarīb; except for Muḍāri', these are used infrequently.

9. *Dīwān*, 177:10: *Har jā ki buvam tā ba-ziyam man gah u bigāh/bar shukr-i tu rānam qalam u miḥbar u daftar*.

10. *Dīwān*, 192:13: *Ay Ḥujjat-i bisyār sukhan daftar pīsh ār/w-az nūk-i qalam durr-i sukhānḥāt furū bār*.

11. *Dīwān*, 70:20: *Ba-dil-i pāk bar niwis īn shī'r/ ki ba-pākī chu durr-i shahwār ast*.

12. See e.g. *Dīwān*, 88–89, 377–379, and especially 170–172, which praises not only the Amir but his vizier and *dabīr* for bringing about the stabilisation of the realm.

13. The Fatimids were famous for their system of teaching centres (*majālis al-ḥikma*), in Cairo and elsewhere, which addressed various audiences, from the uninitiated to initiates, and included separate sessions for women. While no written records exist of Persian-language sessions in Cairo, we have no reason to assume that they did not exist, parallel to those conducted in Arabic. Excellent examples of the type of teaching sessions conducted in Arabic may be found in al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, vols 1 and 3, ed. M. Ghālib (Beirut, 1974–1984); vols 1–3, ed. Ḥātim Ḥamīd al-Dīn (Oxford and Bombay, 1375–1426/1975–2005). We should also remember the sessions of debate, on religious, philosophical and other issues, held at the Fatimid court and, presumably,

at those of other important personages; see Alice C. Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw, The Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller, and Philosopher* (London, 2003), pp. 155–157; and see *ibid.*, p. 25, on the ninth-/fifteenth-century writer Jāmi's reference to Nāṣir's 'conversations in verse'.

14. That this is indeed a persona would seem evident: Nāṣir enjoyed the support of the Amir of Badakhshān, and must have had a presence both in court circles and in Ismaili centres, as well as a reputation abroad, as his poetry attests. This should warn us against taking many of his statements too literally – in a Romantic sense, as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' – and to judge them with respect both to Nāṣir's persona and to the poems in which they occur.

15. On the history and development of the Arabic *qaṣīda* see the article, 'Qaṣīda', in Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey, eds, *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature* (London, 1998), vol. 2, pp. 630–632.

16. For a brief summary of arguments on this issue, see Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, pp. 13–15, and the references cited.

17. For a further discussion of *ma'ānī* see Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, pp. 23–26, and the index, s.v. The division between, or rather combination of, *lafẓ* and *ma'nā* is virtually a commonplace. Nāṣir-i Khusraw refers to it frequently; see e.g. *Dīwān*, 92:20: *Zamāna-yi nā mus'īd rā azīngūna ba-juz Ḥujjat/ba-zarr u gawhar-i alfāz u ma'nā kas nayārāyad*, 'No one but the Ḥujjat adorns this unfavourable age with the gold and gems of words and meanings.'

18. Such observations generally occur under the critics' discussions of transitions, *takhalluṣ*; see *ibid.*, pp. 75, 90, and the index.

19. For other translations, of part of this passage and of the whole poem, see Hunsberger, *The Ruby*, p. 34 (Hunsberger translates *āchār* as 'stew'; literally, it means any kind of pickled meats, vegetables or fruits, or the liquor in which they are preserved; I have used 'ingredients' as the word also means things mixed or collected together); Peter Lamborn Wilson and Ghulam Reza Aavani, *Nāṣir-i Khusraw: Forty Poems from the Divan* (Tehran, 1977), pp. 74–76 (where *āchār* is translated as 'spice').

20. I prefer the variant *mulk* ('kingdom', 'power') in the first hemistich of the first line, to *jins* ('goods', 'possessions'), as it completes the figure of *takrār*.

21. I read *dukhtarān-i pariṯān*, literally 'daughters of the fairies', as the stars in the constellation Ursus Major, the Great Bear. *Killa* is a canopy, or tent, erected for a wedding or other celebration.

22. On amplification, and its converse, abbreviation (*ijāz*, literally 'concision'), see Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, pp. 130–138.

23. *Zang*, Arabic *zanj* or *zinj*, refers to blacks generally, more specifically to the Zangids, a group of black slaves in southern Iraq whose revolt against the 'Abbasids in 255/869 was finally put down in 269/883. Rūm refers not to Rome but to Byzantium, and to Anatolia in general.

24. Both terms literally mean 'freeing oneself' or 'escape'; that is, the poet frees himself from one topic to move on to another. On transitions, see Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, pp. 75–90.

25. For a more detailed discussion of allegorical modes, see Julie Scott Meisami, 'Allegorical Techniques in the Ghazals of Hāfēz', *Edebiyat*, 4 (1979), pp. 1–40, and the references cited.

26. The practice of imposing allegory on something not intended as such, or of interpreting a poem or other work according to our own preconceptions, is known as allegoresis;

see *ibid.*, pp. 1–2. It may be exemplified by certain readings, especially in popular traditions, of Nāṣir-i Khusraw as a mystical poet.

27. In considering figures of thought, where wording may not play a significant role, transcription of passages will be minimalised, and only provided when necessary.

28. See *Dīwān*, 350–354: *Īn gunbad-i pīrūza bī rawzan-i gardān ...*

29. See *Dīwān*, 324–326: *Zi-man ma'zūl shud sulṭān-i shayṭān ...*

30. See *Dīwān*, 281–284: *Pānzdah sāl bar āmad ki ba-Yumgānam ...*

31. See *Dīwān*, 275–278: *Ay bār-i khudāy kardgāram ...*

32. See Guy LeStrange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate* (London, 1966), pp. 433–437. Nāṣir's birthplace, Qubādiyān, also lay on an important river of the same name; see *ibid.*, pp. 439–450. Nāṣir himself often mentions the Oxus, Jayḥūn, in his poetry; see *Dīwān*, index, p. 591, and cf. *Dīwān*, 66:2a: *Dar baḥr-i 'ilm imām chu Jayḥūn ast*, 'In the sea of knowledge, the Imam is like the Oxus'.

33. See *Dīwān*, 17–19: *Nikūy chīst u khūsh chi ay barnā ...*

34. See *Dīwān*, 316–318: *Ay shuda mashghūl ba-kār-i jahān ...*

35. See *Dīwān*, 177–179: *Ma rā ba-khwāb andar āganda būd sar zi-khumār ...*

36. See *Dīwān*, 356–363: *Alā ay zāda-yi gardūn alā ay zubda-yi imkān ...*

37. Preferring the variant *ḥibr*, 'ink', for the text's *ḥarz*, 'talisman, amulet'.

38. See *Dīwān*, 2–4: *Ay gunbad-i gardanda-yi bi rawzan-i khadrā ...*

39. See *Dīwān*, 243–245: *gunbad-i pīrūzgūn-i pur zi mash'āl ...* Compare *Dīwān*, 180:13–17: *'Ālam chu yakī rawanda daryā/sayyāra safīna ṭab' langar*, 'The universe is like a rolling sea, the planet a little boat, with nature as the anchor ...'; translated in Hunsberger, *The Ruby*, p. 162.

40. See *Dīwān*, 236–237: *Īn gunbad-i bī qarār-i azraq ...*

41. Translation by Annemarie Schimmel, *Make a Shield From Wisdom: Selected Verses from Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Dīwān* (London, 2001), p. 25. I would prefer, 'The people of Khurāsān are drowned, and unaware/that I am sitting here, head on knees, in mourning'.

42. See Qur'an 14: 24–26; I have used M. M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York, n.d.), p. 188.

43. See Hunsberger, *The Ruby*, p. 57.

44. Preferring the variant reading, in line 19, *Sazā khud hamīn ast* for the text's *sazā khwāhī īn ast ...* For another translation see Hunsberger, *The Ruby*, pp. 40–41.

45. See *Dīwān*, 268–270: *Basī raftam pas-i āz andarīn pīrūzgūn pishkam ...*

46. For a translation of these and further verses from this poem, see Schimmel, *Shield*, pp. 71–72.

47. See *Dīwān*, 153–55: *Ay gashta jahān u khwānda daftar ...*

48. For two other, more complete translations see Schimmel, *Shield*, pp. 64–65, and Hunsberger, *Ruby*, pp. 251–254.

49. See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs, Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 204.

50. See further Julie Scott Meisami, 'The Persian Qasida to the End of the 12th Century', in S. Sperl and C. Shackleton, ed., *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, vol. 1: *Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings* (Leiden, 1996), p. 170.

51. Cf. Hunsberger, *The Ruby*, pp. 212–213.

52. *Dīwān*, 150:13: *Chu dar sabz killa khūsh āwāz rāwī/sarāyanda bulbul zi shākh-i sanawbar*. Here we have yet another reference to the *rāwī*, the transmitter/reciter/singer of the poem, and a strong indication that this poem was meant to be performed.

53. Shabbar and Shubbayr, or Shabīr, were the sons of Moses' brother Aaron (Hārūn); the Prophet is said to have called his grandsons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, by these names. We may see here an allusion to the Ismaili Imamate.

54. *Dīwān*, 108:22: *Chand gū'ī ki chu hangām-i bahār āyad/gul biyārāyad u bādām ba-bār āyad*; translation from Wilson and Aavani, *Forty Poems*, p. 72.

55. *Dīwān*, 312:19–25, 313:1; cf. Schimmel, *Shield*, p. 73; and Hunsberger, *Ruby*, p. 143.

56. An allusion to Qur'an xcv:1–3: 'By the fig and the olive, By Mount Sinai, And by this land made safe' ...; Pickthall, *Meaning*, p. 444.

57. Is this a possible reference to al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, the poet's mentor in Cairo?

58. *Dīwān*, 29:1; the text has *du shanba*, 'Monday', but this must be an error.

59. On segmentation, see Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, pp. 111–143. There are of course problems in determining segmentation accurately: variations in manuscripts, order of lines, interpolations, omissions, etc. These are beyond our consideration here. This tendency towards segmentation is where thematic analysis breaks down; 'themes', or motifs, or topics (*ma'ānī*) can be carried on over segments, which have linguistic markers to show where a segment begins or ends, or where there is a transition between them.

60. To the best of my knowledge, there is as yet no study of Ismaili numerology, although number is an essential element of Ismaili thought. On numerology in general, see e.g. Caroline D. Eckhardt, ed., *Essays in the Numerical Criticism of Medieval Literature* (Lewisburg, 1980); John MacQueen, *Numerology: Theory and Outline History of a Literary Mode* (Edinburgh, 1985). Islamic numerology is discussed in S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Boulder, CO, 1978).

61. See Meisami, 'The Persian Qasida to the End of the 12th Century', pp. 164–172.

62. See Rosamund Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (Chicago, 1947, 9th ed. 1972).

قصیده ۳۹

- ۱ سوار سخن را ضمیر است میدان سوارش چه چیز است جان سخندان
- ۲ خرد را عیان سازد اندیشه را زین براسب زبان اندر این پن میدان
- ۳ به میدان خویش اندر اسب سخن را اگر خوب و چابک سواری بگردان
- ۴ به میدان تنگ اندرون اسب کرّه نگر تا تازی به پیش سواران
- ۵ سواران تازنده را نیک بنگر در این پن میدان ز تازی و دهبان
- ۶ عرب بر ره شعر دارد سواری پزشکی گزیند مردان یونان
- ۷ ره هندوان سوی نیزنگ و افسون ره رومیان زی حسابست و الحان
- ۸ مستخرنگار است مرچینیان را چو بغدادیان را صناعات الوان
- ۹ یکی باز جوید نهفته ز پیدا یکی باز داند گران راز ارزان
- ۱۰ طلب کردن جای و تدبیر مسکن طرازیدن آب و تقویر بنیان
- ۱۱ در این هر طریقی که بر تو شمر دم سواران جلدند و مردان فراوان
- ۱۲ که دانست از اوّل چگونگی که ایدون زمان را بمیود شاید به پنگان

- ۱۳ که دانست کز نور خورشید گیرد
همی روشنی ماه و چرخس و کیوان
- ۱۴ که دانست کاند ره‌بوابی ستونی
ستاده‌ست دریا و کوه و سیابان
- ۱۵ که دانست چندین زمین را مساحت
صد و شصت چنداوست خورشید تابان
- ۱۶ که کرد اول آهنگری چون بوده‌ست
از اول نه انبر نه خایسک و سندان
- ۱۷ که دانست کاین تلخ و ناخوش بلیله
حرارت براندز ترکیب انسان
- ۱۸ که فرمود از اول که در شکم را
پُر زباید از چین و از روم و والان
- ۱۹ که بود آنکه او ساخت شگرف رومی
ز گوگرد خشک و ز سیما ب لرزان
- ۲۰ که دانست کافزون شود روشنائی
به چشم اندر از سنگ کوه سپاهان
- ۲۱ که بود آنکه بر سیم فضل او نهاده‌ست
مرا این زر کان را چنین کرد کیهان
- ۲۲ که بود آنکه کمتر به گفتار او شد
عقیق یمانی ز لعل بدخشان
- ۲۳ اگر جانور کان عزیز است بر ما
که بسیار نفعست ما از حیوان
- ۲۴ همی خویشش را مینیمیم نفعی
نه در سیم و ز رونه در دود و مرجان

- ۲۵ در اینها به چشم دولت ز رف بنگر
که این را به چشم سرت دیدتوان
- ۲۶ به در مان چشم سر اندر بماندی
بکن چشم دل را یکی نیز در مان
- ۲۷ ز چشم سرت گز نهانست چیزی
نماند ز چشم دل آن چیز پنهان
- ۲۸ نهان نیست چیزی ز چشم سر و دل
مگر کردگار جهان فرد و سبحان
- ۲۹ خرد هدیهٔ اوست ما را که در ما
به فرمان او شد خرد جفت با جان
- ۳۰ خرد گوهر است و دل و جانش کان است
بلی مرخرد را دل و جان سرزدگان
- ۳۱ خرد و کیمیای صلاحست و نعمت
خرد معدن خیر و عدلست و احسان
- ۳۲ به فرمان کسی را شود نیک بختی
به دو جهان که باشد خرد را به فرمان
- ۳۳ نگهبان تن جان پاک است لیکن
دولت را خرد کرد بر جان نگهبان
- ۳۴ به زندان دنیا درون است جانست
خرد خواهدش کرد بیرون ز زندان
- ۳۵ خرد سوی هر کس رسولی نهفته
که در دل نشسته به فرمان یزدان
- ۳۶ همی گوید اندر نهان هر کسی را
که چون آن چنین است و این نیست چو نهان

- ۳۷ از آغاز چون بود ترکیب عالم چه چیز است بیرون از این چرخ گردان
- ۳۸ اگر گرد این چرخ گردان تو کوئی تسی جایگایست بی حد سامان
- ۳۹ چه کوئی در آن جای گردنده گردون روان است یا ایستاده ست ازین سان
- ۴۰ خدای جهان آنکه نبوده داند خداوند این عالم آباد و ویران
- ۴۱ چرا آفرید این جهان را چو دانست که کم بود خواهد ز کافر مسلمان
- ۴۲ خرد کو رسول خدا یست زی تو چه خوانده ست بر تو از این باب بر خوان
- ۴۳ از این در بهر بان سخن گوی با من نخواهم که کوئی فلان گفت و بهمان
- ۴۴ گر این علم را بداند قومی تو نیز ای پسر مردمی همچو ایشان
- ۴۵ پیاموز اگر چند دشوارت آید که دشوار از آموختن کرد و آسان
- ۴۶ پیاموز از آن که ش پیاموخت ایزد سراز کرد و غفلت به دانش بیفشان
- ۴۷ پیاموز تا همچو سلمان پباشی که سلمان از آموختن گشت سلمان
- ۴۸ ز برهان و تجت پسر ساز و جوشن به میدان مردان برون مای عریان

- ۴۹ به میدان حکمت براسب فصاحت مکن جز به تنزیل و تأویل جولان
- ۵۰ مددیابی از نفس کلی به حجت چو جوئی به دل نصرت اهل ایمان
- ۵۱ نینیی که پولاد را چون برود چو صنعت پذیرد ز حد آد سو همان
- ۵۲ تورانفس کلی چو بشناسی او را نگه دارد از جهل و عصیان و نسیان
- ۵۳ بر آن سان که زنگین گل و یاسمین را نشاند هست و سقانش بر طرف بستان
- ۵۴ گل از نفس کل یافته است آن عنایت که تو خوش نش گشته ای زان و شادان
- ۵۵ زر و سیم و گوهر شدار کان عالم چو پیوسته شد نفس کلی به ارکان
- ۵۶ اگر جان بودی به سیم و زر اندر به صدمن درم کس ندادی یکی نان
- ۵۷ و اگر جان بودی به سیم و زر اندر بدو جان تو چون شادی شاد و خندان
- ۵۸ به زرمی ظفر جوی بر خصم جاہل که که ز ربه زرمی کند پست باران
- ۵۹ سخن چون حکیمان نگوگوی و کوته که سبحان به کوته سخن گشت سبحان
- ۶۰ نینیی که بدرید صدمن زره را بدان کوتهی یک دم سنگ پیکان

- ۶۱ خرد را به ایمان و حکمت پرور
که فرزند خود را چنین گفت لقمان
- ۶۲ چو جانت قوی شد به ایمان و حکمت
پیا موزی آنکه ز بانهای مرغان
- ۶۳ بگویند با تو همان مور و مرغان
که گفتند ازین پیشتر با سلیمان
- ۶۴ در این قبه که هر نام کرب
ز بهر چه کرده ست یزدانت مهمان
- ۶۵ ترا بر دگر زندگان زمینی
چه گوئی ز بهر چه داده ست سلطان
- ۶۶ حکیمان ز بهر تو شد در طبایع
جواهر نه از بهر ایشان پریشان
- ۶۷ ز بهر تو شد مشک و کافور و عنبر
سیه خاک در زیر زنگاری ایوان
- ۶۸ ترا بر جهانی جزین این عجایب
که پیدا است اینجا دلایست و برهان
- ۶۹ جهانیست آن پاک و پر نور و راحت
تمام و مہیا و بی عیب و نقصان
- ۷۰ اثرهای آن عالمست این کز وئی
در این تنگ زندان تو شادان و خندان
- ۷۱ اگر نیستی آن جهان خاک تیره
شکر کی شدی هرگز و عنبر و بان
- ۷۲ به امید آن عالمست امی برادر
شب و روز بی خواب و بار و زهره رهبان

- ۷۳ مکان نعیمست و جای سلامت
چنین گفت یزدان فروخوان ز فرقان
- ۷۴ گر آن را نبینی همی همچو عامه
سزای فسار و نواری و پالان
- ۷۵ نکرتمات نفری بداین دیو دنیا
حذر دار از این دیو بان ای پسر بان
- ۷۶ از این دیو تعویذ کن خویشتن را
سخنمای صاحب جزیره ی خراسان
- ۷۷ چنین چند کردی در این گوی گردان
کز این گوی گردان شدت پشت چو گان
- ۷۸ به چنگال و دندان جهان را کرفتی
ولیکن شدت کند چنگال و دندان
- ۷۹ کنون زانکه کردی و خوردی به توبه
همی کن استغفار و می خور پشیمان
- ۸۰ از این چاه بر شو به سولان دانش
به یک سو شو از جوی و از جر عصیان

قصیده ۱۱۲

- ۱ بالایی بهفت چرخ مدور دو گوهرند / کز نور هر دو عالم و آدم منورند
- ۲ اندر شیمهٔ عدم از نطفهٔ وجود / هر دو مصورند ولی نامصورند
- ۳ محسوس نیستند و نکلنجند در حواس / نایند در نظر که نه مظلم نه انوارند
- ۴ پروردگان دایهٔ قدسند در قدم / گوهر نیند اگر چه به اوصاف گوهرند
- ۵ زین سوی آفرینش وزان سوی کاینات / بیرون و اندرون زمانهٔ مجاورند
- ۶ اندر جهان نیند هم ایشان و هم جهان / در مایند و در تن مار و روح پرورند
- ۷ گویند هر دو هر دو جهانند از این قبیل / در هفت کشورند و نه در هفت کشورند
- ۸ این روح قدس آمد و آن ذات چیریل / یعنی فرشتگان پرانند و بی پرند
- ۹ بی بال در شیمین سفلی گشاد و پر / بے پر بر آشیانهٔ علوی همی پرند
- ۱۰ با گرم و سرد عالم و خشک و تر جهان / چون خاک و باد هم نفس آب و آذند
- ۱۱ در گنج خانهٔ ازل و مخزن ابد / هر دو نه جوهرند ولی نام جوهرند
- ۱۲ هم عالم اند و آدم و هم دوزخ و بهشت / هم حاضرند و غایب و هم زهر و شکرند

- ۱۳ وز نورتابه ظلمت وز اوج تا حضيض
وز باختر به خاور و ز بحر تا برند
- ۱۴ هستند و نیستند و نه مانند و آشکار
زان بی تواند و با تو به یک خانه اندرند
- ۱۵ در عالم دوم که بود کارگاهشان
ویران کنندگان بنا و بناگرند
- ۱۶ روزی دهان پنج حواس و چهار طبع
خوایگران نه فلک و هفت اخترند
- ۱۷ وز مشرفان ده اند به کرد سرایشان
زان پنج اندرون و از آن پنج بردند
- ۱۸ در پیش هر دو هر دو دکان دار آسمان
استاده هر چه دهر فرو شد می خرنند
- ۱۹ وان پادشاه ده سر و شش روی و هفت چشم
با چار خصمشان به یکی خانه اندرند
- ۲۰ جوهر نیند و جوهرشان بود عرض
محور نگاهه عرضند و نه محورند
- ۲۱ خوانند بر تو نامه اسرار بی حروف
دانند کرده های تو بے آنکه بنگرند
- ۲۲ پیدا از ان شدند که گشتند ناپدید
زان بی تن و سرند که اندر تن و سرند
- ۲۳ وین از صفت بود که ننگبند در جهان
وانگاه در تن و سر ما هر دو مضمزند
- ۲۴ آن جایگاه بجز ترا ساختند جای
ورنه کدام جای که از جای برترند

- ۲۵ سوی تو آمدند ز جانی که جای نیست آنجا فرشته اند و بدین جا پیمبرند
- ۲۶ بالای مدرج ملکوت اند در صفات چون ذات ذوالجلال نه عنصرتی جوهرند
- ۲۷ با آنکه هست هر دو جهان ملک این و آن نفس ترا اگر تو بخوای مسخرند
- ۲۸ گفتارشان بدان و به گفتار کارکن تا از خدای عزوجل وحیت آورند
- ۲۹ بنگر به سایر ات فلک را که بر فلک ایشان ز حضرت ملک العرش لشکرند
- ۳۰ بی دانشان اگر چه نیکو پیش کنندشان آخر مدبران سپهر مدورند
- ۳۱ چندین هزار دیده و گوش از برای چیست زیشان سخن مگوی که هم کور و هم کردند
- ۳۲ کوئی مرا که گوهر دیوان ز آتش است دیوان این زمان همه از گل مخمزند
- ۳۳ جز آدمی نزاود آدم در این جهان وینها از آدم اند چرا بملکه خزند
- ۳۴ دعوی کنند چه که بر اہیم زاده ایم چون ژرف بنگری همه شاکر و آزرند
- ۳۵ در بزم گاه مالک ساتی می زبانیند این ابلهان که در طلب جام کوثرند
- ۳۶ خوشی کجاست اینجا کجا خبر ادران از بهر لقمه ای بهم خصم برادند

- ۳۷ بعد از بهر ارسال بهانی که اولت
زین در آورند و از آن دبرون برند
- ۳۸ اینها که آمدند چه دیدند از این جهان
رفتند و ما رویم و بسایند و بگذرند
- ۳۹ وینها که خفته اند در این خاک سالها
از یک نشستن پدرانند و مادرند
- ۴۰ وینها که دم زدند به حب علی بیبه
گر زانکه دوستند چرا خصم عمرند
- ۴۱ وینها که هستشان به ابوبکر دوسته
گر دوستند چونکه همه حیدرند
- ۴۲ وین سنیان که سیرشان بغض حیدر است
حقا که دشمنان ابوبکر و عمرند
- ۴۳ گر عاقلی زهر و جماعت سخن مگوی
بگذارشان بهم که نه افلح نه قمبرند
- ۴۴ بان تا از آن گروه نباشی که در جهان
چون گاو میخورند و چون گرگان همی درند
- ۴۵ یا کافری به قاعده یا مؤمنی به حق
همسایگان من نه مسلمان نه کافرند
- ۴۶ ناصر غلام و چاکر آن کس که این بگفت
جان و خرد و رنده بر این چرخ اخضرند

قصیده ۱۷۷

بحر مضارع مثنی مطموس

مَفْعُولُ فَاعِلَاتُ مَفَاعِيلُ فَعَّ

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|----|------------------------------|
| شاید که حال و کار و گرسان کنم | ۱ | هرچ آن بهست قصد سوی آن کنم |
| عالم بماه نیسان خرم شود | ۲ | من خاطر از تفکر نیسان کنم |
| در باغ و ریح و فقر و دیوان خویش | ۳ | از نظم و شر سنبل و یحان کنم |
| میوه و گل از معانی سازم همه | ۴ | وز لفظهای خوب درختان کنم |
| چون ابر روی صحراستان کند | ۵ | من نیز روی و فقرستان کنم |
| در مجلس مناظره بر عاقلان | ۶ | از نکتتهای خوب گل افشان کنم |
| گر بر گلش کرد خطا بگذرد | ۷ | آنجا شرح روشن باران کنم |
| قصری کنم قصیده خود را درو | ۸ | از بیتهاش گلشن و ایوان کنم |
| جانی در او چو منظر عالی کنم | ۹ | جانی فراخ و پهن چو میدان کنم |
| بر درکش زناده بحر عروض | ۱۰ | یکی امین دانا در بان کنم |

- ۱۱ مَفْعُولُ فَاعِلَاتُ مَفَاعِيلُ فَعَّ بنیادِ این مبارک بنیانِ کنم
- ۱۲ وانگه مرا به فضلِ اَقالیمِ را دقصرِ خویش یکسر هممانِ کنم
- ۱۳ تا آن درو نیاید نادان که من خانه‌ی همی نواز نادانِ کنم
- ۱۴ خوانی نهم که مرد خردمند را از خورِ دیش عاجز و حیرانِ کنم
- ۱۵ اندر تن سخنِ بمشالِ خرد معنی خوب و نادره را جانِ کنم
- ۱۶ گرتون دیده‌ای ز سخنِ مردمی من بر سخنت صورت انسانِ کنم
- ۱۷ اوراز و صفِ خوب و حکایاتِ خوش زلفِ خمیده و لب خندانِ کنم
- ۱۸ مغشیش روی خوبِ کنم و انگه اندر تقابلِ فطشِ پنهانِ کنم
- ۱۹ چون روی خویش ز می سخنِ آرم بقهر پششش پیش خویش چو چوگانِ کنم
- ۲۰ در خاطر م بجائی کندی کند او را به دستِ فکرت سوهانِ کنم
- ۲۱ جان را چو زنگِ جهل پیدا آورد چون آینه خواندنِ فرقانِ کنم
- ۲۲ دشوار این زمانهٔ بد فعل را آسان برهد و طاعتِ یزدانِ کنم

- دست از طمع بشویم پاک آنکسی از خفته دست بر سر کیوان کنم ۲۳
- گرد لباسِ جهل و لم خفته بود اکنون از آن لباسش عریان کنم ۲۴
- وین جسمِ بی فلاحستِ آسوده را خیزم بتبعِ طاعتِ قربان کنم ۲۵
- و عیب من ز خوشتن آمد همه از خوشتن پیش که افغان کنم ۲۶
- خیزم بفضل و رحمتِ یزدانِ حق دشوار دهر بر دم آسان کنم ۲۷
- اندر میان نیک و بد خوشتن مانده ز بانئ میزان کنم ۲۸
- هر ساعتی بنخیزد و نپاره بفزایم و ز شرش نقصان کنم ۲۹
- تا غلّ و طوق و بند که بر من نهاد در دست و پا و گردن شیطان کنم ۳۰
- گردیو از آنچه کرد پشیمان نشد من نفس راز کرده پشیمان کنم ۳۱
- گر نیست طاقتم که تن خویش را بر کاروانِ دیوسلیمان کنم ۳۲
- آن دیورا که در تن و جان نیست باری بتبع عقل مسلمان کنم ۳۳
- از قول و فعل زین و لکامش نهم افسار او ز حکمتِ لقمان کنم ۳۴

- ۳۵ گرتونشاط در که جیلان کنی من قصد سوی در که رحمان کنم
- ۳۶ سوی لیلِ حق بنهم روی خویش تا خویشتن بسیرت سلمان کنم
- ۳۷ زنی اهل بیت احمد مُسل شوم تن را رهی و بنده ایشان کنم
- ۳۸ تا نام خویش را بجلالِ امام بر نامه مُعانی عنوان کنم
- ۳۹ زان آفتابِ علم دل خویش را روشن بسانِ ماهِ سلطان کنم
- ۴۰ و ز بکتِ مبارک دریای او دل را چو درج گوهر و مرجان کنم
- ۴۱ ای آنکه گوئیم نصیحتِ همی کلین پیرن بیفکن و فرمان کنم
- ۴۲ تا سخت زود من چو فلان مرزا در مجلس امیر خراسان کنم
- ۴۳ اندر سرت بخارِ جهالت قویست من در دجل را بچپه در مان کنم
- ۴۴ کی ریزم آبروی چو تو بیخرد بر طمع آنکه تو بره پر نان کنم
- ۴۵ ترکانِ رهی و بنده‌ن بوده اند من تن چکونه بنده ترکان کنم
- ۴۶ ای بد نصیحتی که تو کردی مرا تا چون فلان خسیس و چو بهمان کنم

- کیستت گریه ایست که بچه خورد من کرد او ز بهر چه دوران کنم ۴۷
- از من خسیستر که بود در جهان گرتن بنان چو گریه گروگان کنم ۴۸
- دین و کمال و علم کجا افکنم تا خویشتن چو غول بیابان کنم ۴۹
- از فضل تا چو غول بمانم تے پس من چگونه خدمت دیوان کنم ۵۰
- این فخر بس مرا که بهر دوزبان حکمت همی مرتب و دیوان کنم ۵۱
- جان را ز بهر مدحت آل رسول که رود کی و گاهی حسان کنم ۵۲
- دقیر ز بس نگار ز نقش سخن پر ز چین و روم و سپاهان کنم ۵۳
- وند کتاب سخن منطقی چون آفتاب روشن برهان کنم ۵۴
- بر مشکلات عقلی محسوس را بگرم و شبان و نگهبان کنم ۵۵
- زاد المسافر است یکی گنج من نشر آنچنان و نظم این نسان کنم ۵۶
- زندان مؤنسست جهان دون زان من همی قرار بیمگان کنم ۵۷
- تار و زحر آتش سوزنده را بر شیعت معاویه زندان کنم ۵۸

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