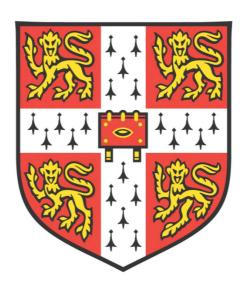# 'GOD DOES NOT REGARD YOUR FORMS': GENDER AND LITERARY REPRESENTATION IN THE WORKS OF FARĪD AL-DĪN ʿAṬṬĀR NĪSHĀPŪRĪ

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ABSTRACT

Title: 'God Does Not Regard Your Forms': Gender and Literary Representation in the Works of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nīshāpūrī

Author: Michelle Quay

Studies on gender in medieval and modern Sufism have tended to posit two extremes: Sufism as an oasis for women, away from the strictures of 'orthodoxy,' or Sufism as a haven for misogynistic views of women as temptations, distractions, and necessary evils. However, these simplistic characterisations cannot encompass the full range of the evidence, as we find many positive representations of women, and indeed female saints, alongside brutal anti-woman declarations. This study attempts to nuance these prevailing characterisations of medieval depictions of gender by providing further evidence of Sufi attitudes towards women and femininity. It does so via a comprehensive consideration of a prominent Persian Sufi poet, Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, in the context of select Persian and Arabic hagiographies, Qur'an commentaries, and *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*. Analysis of the material reviewed suggests that gender representations are not fixed, even within the work of a single author. I argue that these texts exhibit a striking disconnect between their conceptions of 'woman' as a category and the depiction of narrative women, especially Sufi women. I suggest that this tendency reflects a Sufi philosophy of gender-egalitarianism and that philosophy's inherent conflict with predominant social hierarchies of the medieval Islamicate context. This study shows the utility of engaging the classical Islamic tradition with contemporary theory surrounding gender and identity, including corporeality theory and intersectionality theory. It also employs more traditional formalist literary critiques using the lenses of defamiliarisation and paradox/apophasis. Ultimately, this research reveals the need for careful, critical studies of medieval views on gender, and contributes to the bodies of literature on Islamicate sexualities and the construction of sainthood in Islam.

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text. It has not been previously submitted, in part or whole, to any university of institution for any degree, diploma, or other qualification.

In accordance with the Faculty of Asian & Middle Eastern Studies guidelines, this thesis does not exceed 80,000 words.

Signed: _Michelle Quay_

Date: 22 January 2018

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Studies on gender in medieval and modern Sufism have tended to posit two extremes: Sufism as an oasis for women, away from the strictures of 'orthodoxy,' or Sufism as a haven for misogynistic views of women as temptations, distractions, and necessary evils. However, these simplistic characterisations cannot encompass the full range of the evidence, as we find many positive representations of women, and indeed female saints, alongside brutal anti-woman declarations. This study attempts to nuance these prevailing characterisations of medieval depictions of gender by providing further evidence of Sufi attitudes towards women and femininity. It does so via a comprehensive consideration of a prominent Persian Sufi poet, Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, in the context of select Persian and Arabic hagiographies, Qur'an commentaries, and *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*. Analysis of the material reviewed suggests that gender representations are not fixed, even within the work of a single author. I argue that these texts exhibit a striking disconnect between their conceptions of 'woman' as a category and the depiction of narrative women, especially Sufi women. I suggest that this tendency reflects a Sufi philosophy of gender-egalitarianism and that philosophy's inherent conflict with predominant social hierarchies of the medieval Islamicate context. This study shows the utility of engaging the classical Islamic tradition with contemporary theory surrounding gender and identity, including corporeality theory and intersectionality theory. It also employs more traditional formalist literary critiques using the lenses of defamiliarisation and paradox/apophasis. Ultimately, this research reveals the need for careful, critical studies of medieval views on gender, and contributes to the bodies of literature on Islamicate sexualities and the construction of sainthood in Islam.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Contents

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AN   Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, *Asrārnāmah-yi Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār Nīshābūrī*, ed. Ṣādiq Gawharīn (Tehran, 1959).

DhN   Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn Sulamī and Rkia Elaroui Cornell, *Early Sufi Women: Dhikr an-Niswah al-Mutaʿabbidāt aṣ-Ṣūfiyyāt* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999).

IN   Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-Nāme*, ed. Hellmut Ritter, Nasharāt al-Islāmiyya (Istanbul: Staatsdruckerei, 1940).

MN   Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-Nāmah*, ed. Nūrānī Viṣāl (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-yi Zuvvār, 1959).

MṬ   Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr: Maqāmāt al-Ṭuyūr*, ed. Ṣādiq Gawharīn (Tehran, 1964).

NTA   Reynold A Nicholson, *The Tadhkiratu 'l-Awliya (Memoirs of the Saints)*, Persian Historical Texts (London: Luzac & Co., 1905).

NU   Nur al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-Uns Min Haḍarāt al-Quds*, ed. Mahdī Tawḥīdīpūr (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-yi Saʿdī, 1958).

ṢṢ   Abū al-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAlī Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, ed. Maḥmūd Fākhūrī, 3rd edition (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1984).

TA   Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Istiʿlāmī, 5th ed. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Zuvvār, 1366).

1 INTRODUCTION

حسین منصور را ـ رحمه الله ـ خواهری بود که در این راه دعوی رجولیت می کرد و جمالی داشت. در شهر بغداد می آمدی و یک نیمهٔ روی بچادر گرفته و یک نیمه گشاده. بزرگی بدو رسید، گفت: چرا روی تمام نپوشی؟
گفت: تو مردی بنمای تا من روی بپوشم. در همهٔ بغداد یک نیم مرد است و آن حسین است و اگر از بهر او نبودی این نیمهٔ روی هم نپوشیدمی.

Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr Ḥallāj had a sister who claimed manhood (*rajūliyyat*) upon the Sufi way, and who was also beautiful. Whenever she came to Baghdad, she covered half her face with a veil and left the other half unveiled. An eminent person encountered her and asked, 'Why don't you veil your entire face?'

'First show me a man so that I might veil my entire face,' she replied. 'There is only half a man in all Baghdad, and that's Ḥusayn. If it weren't for his sake, I wouldn't even cover this half.'[1]

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[1] Najm al-Dīn Rāzī Dāyah, *Marmūzāt-i Asadī Dar Mazmūrāt-i Dāvudī*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Shafīʿī-Kadkanī (Tehran, 1973), 34-35. The thesis follows the transliteration system of *Encyclopedia Islamica*,

Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 654 AH /1256 CE) relates here a story revolving around the sister of Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309 AH / 922 CE), himself a famous early saint (*valī*) from Baghdad who was a martyr and exemplified the more antinomian approach to Sufi practice.[2] Ḥallāj's sister, otherwise relatively unknown to us from the source material, plays with the language of masculine and feminine and its unstable relationship to biological sex.[3] She unshackles the concept of 'manhood,' which connotes the station of spiritual mastery, from maleness, and redefines it as a rank open to people of both genders. Using a memorable and humorous image, she implies that

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with the exception of *v* for و in Persian instead of *w*. Citations reproduce the transliteration style used by other authors. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

[2] I use the term 'Sufism' interchangeably with 'Islamic mysticism' throughout the text.

[3] Contemporary feminist theorists have not only deconstructed the category of gender, which is understood as the concatenation of social meanings attributed to a body of one sex. They have gone further to destabilise the very notion of biological sex itself. As Denise Riley writes, historians should not assume an 'underlying continuity of real women above whose constant bodies changing aerial descriptions dance.' As early as 1989 Gisela Bock pointed to the need to forgo all reference to 'biology' as a stable category, a position now championed by the likes of Judith Butler. These are all excellent theoretical developments for the field, but unfortunately, in practice, there is no way I can go this far. These sources, while at various times challenging and reinforcing prescribed gender roles, in no way (that I can see at least), meaningfully challenge the biological sex male/female binary. Possible areas to investigate this question further would be the gender ambiguity of the beloved in the *ghazal*, and perhaps the use of the *mukhannath* (catamite/hermaphrodite). Denise Riley, *"Am I That Name?" Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 7; Gisela Bock, "Women's History and Gender History: Aspects of an International Debate," *Gender & History* 1, no. 1 (March 1989): 7–30; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: London: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc., 1990), 6-7.

'manhood' is an honour that is not automatically conferred upon just anyone of the male gender, nor is it exclusively available to men.[4] This anecdote, therefore, points to a slippage in the traditional categorisations of sex and gender in classical texts that needs to be more fully examined. Social theorist Michel de Certeau argues that this is exactly the kind of slippage in the sources that we should look for and interrogate. He writes that traditional historiography 'endlessly presupposes homogeneous unities (century, country, class, economic or social strata, etc.) and cannot give way to the vertigo that critical examination of these fragile boundaries might bring about: historiography does not want to know this.'[5]

In the course of this thesis I try to show that the category of gender – even in the premodern period – is delimited by one set of these very fragile boundaries. Though looking past the artificial boundaries between 'manhood' and 'womanhood' might prove vertiginous, this work argues that medieval Sufis in some cases do exactly that. In other contexts, they shrink back again from the edge of the abyss and retreat into familiar categories. As such this study aims to present the fundamental instability of the concept of 'woman' (and by extension, 'man') as it plays out in select texts of the premodern Persian and Arabic mystical tradition. As feminist historian Joan Scott contends, 'It is precisely the futile struggle to hold meaning in place that makes gender

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[4] Of course, she does so without dismantling the implied hierarchy of maleness as the higher rank to be attained. This phenomenon is also recorded by Michel Chodkiewicz in his analyses of Ibn 'Arabī. He writes that '*Rajuliyya* for Ibn 'Arabī is not linked to biological maleness: it expresses a general-neutral human perfection. There are women who are *rijāl* and men who are not.' Michel Chodkiewicz, "Feminine Sainthood in Islamic Hagiography," in *Saints orientaux. Hagiographies médiévales comparés*, ed. Aigle, Denise (Paris: De Boccard, 1995), 109.

[5] Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 343.

such an interesting historical object.'[6] Here we seek out the battlegrounds of that struggle and try to watch it in action.

When embarking on a literary-historical inquiry of this kind, it is tempting to assume we know what we will find – a blatant and unrelenting misogyny that is more disturbing than anything we would ever encounter in our supposedly enlightened age. But the picture is more complicated than that. By investigating the constructions of gender in a particular period, we can add to the literature that traces the contours of gender relations as they have changed through various historical contexts. This wide range of literature on gender history bolsters arguments against the immutability of gender relations in the present. As Scott remarks:

> There is no essence of womanhood (or of manhood) to provide a stable subject for our histories; there are only successive iterations of a word that doesn't have fixed referent and so doesn't always mean the same thing. If this is true of 'women,' it is also true of 'gender.' The relationship posited between male and female, masculine and feminine, is not predictable; we cannot assume that we know in advance what it is.[7]

Even within a given highly specific context, tradition, and period, the representation of gender norms and expectations is not static, monolithic or entirely predictable.

The thesis considers these questions about the representations of gender in medieval Sufi primarily by investigating the works of a prominent Persian poet, Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. ca. 1221). By closely examining the narrative and biographical treatment of women in ʿAṭṭār's texts, we discover that the author's attitude towards women in general statements diverges from the treatment they receive in detail. While it is relatively easy to find examples of Sufi writers denigrating women, describing male

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[6] Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 5.

[7] Ibid, 11.

weakness in feminine terms, or praising strong women as masculine, this paradigm is set up by the sources only to be upended again and again by actual women appearing in the texts. Women often function as a surprising reversal of expectation in these texts. In this way they can be shown to reverse the misogynist paradigm which associates women with the lower, exterior form and a lesser capacity to make spiritual progress on the Sufi path. This does not imply that 'Aṭṭār had a 'positive' view towards women in general. In order to feature in these texts, it seems that a woman had to be a successful spiritual aspirant in some form. The women of 'Aṭṭār's works ultimately tend to represent the exception that reinforces the norm, which assumes the ontological category of female is fundamentally incapable.

This disconnect between the general statements on women and their narrative representation is a reflection of conflicting influences which pervade 'Aṭṭār's and other Sufi writers' worldviews. The discrepancy arises from the clashing of the patriarchal context surrounding medieval writers with Sufism's theoretical egalitarianism, which places prime importance on the seeker's ability to purify the inner soul, not his or her external appearance, race, gender, class, able-bodiedness, etc. Sa'diyya Shaikh posits in this regard that 'core Sufi assumptions are inherently critical of power configurations that assert the superiority of particular human beings on any basis other than spiritual stature.'[8] Following in this vein, I hope to illuminate in the course of this study the ways in which woman is part of a much larger strategy in 'Aṭṭār's and other Sufis' writings. Using this strategy, Sufi writers destabilise the perceived spiritual hierarchy by systematic reference to the Other as the ultimate source of spiritual knowledge.

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[8] Sa'diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn 'Arabī, Gender, and Sexuality* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 13.

What is at stake in pointing out this discrepancy? This observation destabilises our entire understanding of medieval male authors' stated misogynistic views on women and does not allow us to assume we understand gender relations as they are represented in literature in this period without careful investigation. It posits a fundamental tension and inconsistency surrounding the author's efforts to delineate and maintain gender difference, while subverting it at the same time. One can hardly subvert a known paradigm without referencing it first. The thesis does not argue that the reader should discount what the authors say when they make gendered generalisations, which typically result in the denigration of femaleness, in favour of lauding them when they do subvert misogynistic gender norms. It does not aim to determine 'what Sufism says about women,' in the same way as studies that offer, for example, a definitive interpretation of 'what the Qur'an says about women' or 'what the hadith says about women.' These studies tend to establish a uniform position on gender by deciding which parts of the contradictory tradition are 'authoritative.' As Leila Ahmed observes, individual Muslim authors are often not monolithic in their gender positions, let alone the broad set of texts used as a basis for Islamic law.[9] Arguments regarding 'women's position in Islam' often represent 'a contestation over which among these various legal positions count as authoritative Islamic knowledge.'[10] Kecia Ali writes with some ferocity on this hunt for 'real Islam' and particularly its implications for the broader debates on 'women in Islam.' She writes, 'The so-called woman question is central to both anti-Muslim polemic and the apologetic counter-discourse that adopts a terminology of liberation to describe the way 'true' or 'real' Islam respects and protects

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[9] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: London: Yale University Press, 1993), 64-69.

[10] Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives*, 5-6.

women, despite the existence of potentially oppressive 'cultural' practices. The limitations of these dichotomous approaches are evident…'[11] Recognising these limitations, this study does not pursue 'real Islam' or 'real Sufism' at the expense of a 'false Sufism' that we may not like or that may not conform to our modern sensibilities.

Rather than reduce the conflicting representations of women to 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' categories, this study tries to accept the contradictory nature of these Sufi medieval authors' attitudes towards women. It points out fluctuations in their representations of gender, and explains them through reference to their own context and by making a distinction between the author's conception of the category of woman and the representations of women as individuals or as allegorical symbols. I argue that while in some instances 'Aṭṭār follows the gender-effacing premises of Sufi thought to their logical conclusions, in which women can be the locus of spiritual authority, in other cases, context, tradition, and convention intervene and lead 'Aṭṭār to describe spiritual progress in a typically gendered fashion with maleness firmly on top of the social hierarchy. As Shaikh has argued convincingly regarding the work of Ibn 'Arabī, not all Sufis have displayed a consistent commitment to the gender-egalitarian approach suggested by a mystical worldview. However, one can use their focus on the inner soul, to the effacement of outer characteristics, as a way to open up more women-friendly readings of these texts from within an authoritative and revered tradition of medieval Islamic thought.

Indeed, in the course of an in-depth study of the role of gender in 'Aṭṭār's writings, I have come to reject the validity of demanding internal consistency from our

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[11] Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith and Jurisprudence* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2006), xii.

authors on this and many other matters. Despite the care and consideration with which these texts were composed, it is simply not possible to imagine that 'Aṭṭār consistently provides us with the same angle on every theme or motif. To do so would be quite uninspiring for both composer and audience. Rather, he provides different and even seemingly contradictory angles on the same themes in different contexts. A good example of this would be the differing views on marriage and having children that arise, just within the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* alone. At some junctures, wives and children are presented as unbearable burdens distracting the mystic from the path. In the biography of Ibrāhīm b. Adham, he pithily explains why he does not marry:

گفتند: چرا زنی نمی‌خواهی؟
گفت: هیچ زن شویی کند تا شوهر گرسنه و برهنه داردش؟
گفتند: نه.
گفت: من از آن زن نمی‌کنم که هر زنی که من کنم گرسنه و برهنه ماند. اگر توانمی خود را طلاق دهمی! دیگری بر فتراک با خویشتن غره چون کنم؟ پس از درویشی که حاضر بود پرسید: زن داری؟
گفت: نی.
گفت: فرزند داری؟
گفت: نی.
گفت: نیک نیک است.
درویش گفت: چگونه؟
گفت: آن درویش که زن کرد در کشتی نشست و چون فرزند آمد غرق شد.

    'Why do you not want a wife?' he was asked.
    'Does any woman take a husband so he may keep her hungry and naked?' he countered.
    'No,' they replied.
    'That's why I don't marry,' he explained. 'Any woman I married would remain hungry and naked. If I only could, I would divorce my very self (*khud*). How could I bind another to my saddle?'
    Then turning to a dervish who was present, Ibrāhīm asked him, 'Do you have a wife?'
    'No,' he replied.

'Do you have a child?'
'No.'
'Excellent, excellent,' Ibrāhīm said.
'Why do you say that?' asked the dervish.
'The dervish who marries embarks on a ship. When the children come, he drowns.'[12]

Yet in other places in the *Tadhkirat*, marriage and children are portrayed not as impediments to spiritual progress on the Path, but rather as means to secure one's salvation. Having a child – even a child that dies – guarantees the aspirant's place in Paradise. Ibn Khafīf, for example, marries a woman and has a child with her after having a dream in which a mother and father, waiting for judgement on Resurrection Day, are immediately pulled with ease over the narrow bridge to paradise by their child. Even though Ibn Khafīf's child dies almost immediately, his goal is still attained, and his place in paradise confirmed by following the *sunna* of the Prophet. Just from these brief examples, we can see that 'Aṭṭār does not necessarily present a unified vision revealing his attitude towards the question of the role of family or a seeker on the Path.

Not only are there variable attitudes presented, different prescriptions are also applied for seekers at different stages along the Path. Often we find stories of disciples imitating their masters, attempting to follow a prescription which is beyond their level. This could be another way in which seemingly contradictory directives are in fact compatible and can coexist. Additionally, one of the main aims of 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat* in

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[12] NTA #11, 92-93. For 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* and the *Dīvān*, I cite entry number as well as page. For the *mathnavīs*, I cite discourse/anecdote and page. Translation adapted from Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Awliya' (Memorial of the Saints)*, trans. AJ Arberry (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1966), 77-78.

particular is to collect all the various strands of Sufism that had developed by his time and compile them under one roof. In this way, he would be able to codify Sufi history, thought, and practice, and legitimate the entire mystical project in the eyes of skeptics and more partisan Sufi practitioners alike. It is not surprising, then, that such a broad unification effort would lead to the almost inevitable incorporation of competing worldviews and principles.

All of this said, these inconsistencies do not ultimately require an explanation and do not represent a deficiency on the part of the texts. This mindset of accepting internal discrepancies is important because it frees us from having to reconcile the irreconcilable, from 'solving inconsistencies' that the authors themselves did not identify or understand as inconsistencies.[13] Authors are of course performers, free to try on different personas, to test out different genres, and ultimately, may always be writing what they are writing for the benefit of a patron or particular audience they had in mind. Marshall Hodgson provides a more contextually specific reasoning for these inconsistencies when he emphasises the supremacy of experiential knowledge in mystical thought and the implications this has for generating potentially contradictory attitudes and statements:

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[13] Falling into this kind of trap regarding the consistency of the author's persona is well-exemplified by the study of the *rubāʿiyyāt* of Khayyām. After determining a so-called 'Khayyamic worldview' (presumably on the basis of quatrains they believed to be authentic), critics like Ṣādiq Hidāyat accept and reject various quatrains, using the assumed Khayyamic worldview as the criterion by which to judge their authenticity. It is not difficult to see the circularity of these types of arguments. Although a specific ʿAṭṭārian worldview has not been so rigidly defined by scholars, dangers remain in constructing an author's immutable personality on the basis of his work, or certain parts of his work. Ṣādiq Hidāyat, *Tarānah-hā-yi Khayyām/Bi-Ihtimām-i Ṣādiq Hidāyat*, ed. Peter Avery, *Taranés of Khayyam* (Tehran: Maṭbaʿah-yi Rūshanāʾī, 1313/1934).

> ... the Ṣûfîs often backed up their statements with an appeal to special experience (even when they were contradicting another Ṣûfî who had also appealed to such experience); not reckoning with just the lowest common denominator of experience in anyone, but taking into account the seemingly extraordinary. [...] [T]he same trust in the process of immediate experiencing left the Ṣûfîs free to regard no given verbal formulation as absolute, such that other points could be derived logically from it directly; any given formulation was felt as an image indicating one aspect of a truth (often regarded as accessible only at a given level of experiencing), which need not be incompatible with contrasting complementary aspects, though the formulation of those aspects might appear contradictory. One can scarcely tie down a true mystic to an unequivocal assertion about ultimate matters unless one allows him also its opposite in a different context.[14]

Critical here is to emphasise the significance of experiential knowledge to the epistemological worldview of the Sufis, in contrast to the supremacy of technical knowledge in fields like jurisprudence and *kalām*. The primacy of experience as the key mode of knowledge-generation regarding divine truths might allow for greater variation in viewpoints in these mystical poems than would normally be expected from a legal or theological treatise. Furthermore, it seems quite dangerous to try to construct an author's unified vision of a particular theme, motif or idea in a positivist sort of manner, considering the centrality of paradox to mystical literature and the way these authors often delight in presenting both an idea and its opposite. Particularly in the case of mystical Islam, then, this demand for internal consistency is at best misplaced, and at worst misleading.

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[14] Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 231.

1.1 Method and Approach

Lying at the intersection of two potentially problematic fields – mysticism and gender studies – my subject of research faces a number of possible pitfalls. Western scholarship on Islamic mysticism in particular has been hampered by a tendency to become at times wrapped up in the mystical outlook of these texts and not to approach them with the textual grounding and rigor that is typically expected from contemporary scholarship. Furthermore, there is a vast body of popular literature or semi-scholarly literature on Islamic mysticism that anyone carrying out rigorous inquiry in the field must be wary of.[15] Even within the legitimate academic body of literature, one encounters, especially in some older scholarship, a tendency to understand Sufism – which was appealing to many 19th century and early 20th century commentators – as the product of Christian or Buddhist influence.[16] To some Western observers, it seems, such an appealing gnostic worldview needed to have an origin that was essentially non-Islamic. Undertones of these ill-advised attempts to draw connections, where it is very difficult to prove any, still permeate some modern writings on Sufism.[17]

Gender studies is another controversial field, the theories of which must be applied to premodern texts with caution, and the use of which must be justified. Given

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[15] An example would be the very free translation-adaptation of Rūmī's work by Coleman Barks for popular Western consumption. Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and Coleman Barks, *The Essential Rumi* (San Francisco, California: Harper, 2004).

[16] Alexander Knysh, "Historiography of Sufi Studies in the West and in Russia," *Written Monuments of the Orient* 1, no. 4 (2006): 206–38.

[17] See particularly Julian Baldick, "The Legend of Rābiʻa of Basra: Christian Antecedents, Muslim Counterparts," *Religion* 20, no. 3 (July 1990): 233–47; and R. J. W. Austin, "The Sophianic Feminine in the Work of Ibn ʻArabi and Rumi," in *The Heritage of Sufism v. 2: The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism (1150- 1500)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oneworld Publications, 1999), 233–245.

the proliferation of descriptive studies in the field without a strong methodological aim, one must be discriminating and avoid verging on polemic or apology, two common tendencies within this type of scholarship. It has also been noted that the study of women and gender in Islam has often become entangled in issues of Westernisation and has been viewed through the lens of the Orientalist observer.[18] These studies implicitly or explicitly participate in oversimplified debates which often fuel the 'clash of civilisations' type of narrative. Furthermore, it has been noted time and again by feminist scholars that to look for one all-encompassing 'status of women,' even within a very narrow band of time and place, is presumptuous, reductive, and misleading.[19]

As a result, it must be questioned and reasoned out whether it is advisable to apply theories of such modern provenance, like those of gender studies, to premodern texts. The main argument in favour of such an approach is that the sources already display awareness of gender as a potential point of contention. As Fedwa Malti-Douglas argues regarding the Arabic tradition:

> Consciousness of gender and arguments about the roles of men and women were not brought to the Arab world by Western feminists, like serpents in the Garden of Eden. These issues have always been major and fully conscious preoccupations of Arab writers who have filled their literature with chapters and books on women, their roles, their problems, and the like.[20]

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[18] Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 4.

[19] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, New Historicism (University of California Press, 1987), 22; Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), preface.

[20] Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body*, 6.

Though Malti-Douglas refers to the Arabic literary tradition, the situation is similar in Persian literature. Because the classical texts themselves demonstrate gender consciousness and were produced in a society which spent considerable energy in delineating gender roles, it is worthwhile to re-read the premodern texts with an eye to gender, even if such a reading has not been often attempted for these texts. Furthermore, the realisation of gender historians that gender is a relational analytical tool has made it clear that we no longer have to confine ourselves to the study of women only, but can talk about, for example, constructions of masculinity and the gendered metaphors used to connote power and knowledge. The application of gender theory does not simply mean holding the texts of the past to artificial and anachronistic standards designated by the fashions in thinking at the present time.

Although this project was originally conceived as a study of gender, not just women, the construction of masculinity remains largely beyond the scope of a project of this length, except where it is directly invoked in representations of femininity. The thesis has therefore focused primarily on the construction of femininity and how it relates to power in these sources. Though the focus is mainly on women, it must be emphasised that a study of gender is not synonymous with a study of women:

> Thomas Laqueur, in his book on sex and gender, correctly observed that this tension between nature and culture or '"biological sex" and the endless social and political markers of difference' permeates feminist scholarship. Women become the focus of gender studies, because 'woman alone seems to have "gender" since the category itself is defined as that aspect of social relations based on difference between the sexes in which the standard has always been man.'[21]

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[21] Valerie R. Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (Routledge, 1999), 8, citing Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 22.

I focus on women particularly here because my sources were composed in a patriarchal context by men. It is not that men in the texts are 'without gender' – their achievements are emphatically encoded as masculine – but rather that these male stereotypes are all too familiar for us and show less complexity worth analysing when compared with the apparent diversity of representations of women. Our authors are able to hold the gendered meaning of masculinity mainly in place, especially when portraying male saints and aspirants. But it appears much more difficult for them to approach the contradictory stereotypes surrounding femininity with any kind of consistency, particularly in regards to the female saints, whose very success as spiritual authorities challenges the existing power structures and the gendered metaphors which reinforce them.

I see this study as one step towards recovering and re-integrating women's history into the mainstream of medieval Islamic history. This process of integration requires several phases of scholarship, which are reflected in the literatures I have consulted. The first step is for scholars to recover the lost women of history who have been forgotten. This is often known as the 'images of women' phase and draws much criticism from historians who see their work as more analytical.[22] An example of such a work in this field would be Margaret Smith's *Rabiʿa and Her Fellow Mystics*, who was the first to compile fragments of Rābiʿa's biographies from disparate sources.[23] These works are groundbreaking in and of themselves and require an enormous amount of

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[22] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), 41-49.

[23] Margaret Smith, *Rābiʿa the Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islâm: Being the Life and Teachings of Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya al-Qaysiyya of Basra Together with Some Account of the Place of the Women Saints in Islām.* (Cambridge, Cambridgeshire; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

sifting through hitherto ignored primary source material. Without these works there can be little meaningful analysis of gender relations or culturally constructed ideas of gender. The second phase of scholarship is to analyse gender relations in connection to power or cultural constructions of multiple genders. An example of this would be potentially *Woman's Body, Woman's Word* by Fedwa Malti-Douglas or even *Holy Feast, Holy Fast* by Caroline Walker Bynum.[24] They undertake robust analyses of women's negotiation with patriarchy and misogyny in different contexts.[25] These are the histories that focus on gender relations as such. A third step would be the incomplete integration of gender as a concept into otherwise 'standard' (that is to say, male-centered) literary histories. An example would be Shahzad Bashir's *Sufi Bodies*, which contains a number of chapters on various facets of embodiment in Sufi literature, and one chapter which deals specifically with women.[26] While I greatly admire Bashir's work and see this as important step towards integrating women into 'standard' histories, unfortunately to a certain degree it falls into the trap of ghettoising women by cordoning them off from the rest of the analysis.[27] But we simply do not have the requisite number of studies and depth in this field for Bashir to have done it any other way.

The final step towards integration is the sustained examination of gender as a category of analysis throughout a work of so-called 'mainstream' or 'standard' history

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[24] Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body*; Bynum, *Holy Feast*.

[25] This progression does not imply any value judgment on any of the stages relative to one another. They are all part of the process of moving towards an integrated history of gender relations.

[26] Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), esp. 135-163.

[27] I am aware my own work is at risk of falling into this trap. However, I think there is value in taking the first steps toward recovering this literary history when a complete synthesis cannot yet be attempted.

which does not simply use 'man as the measure,'[28] and deals with both classical genders and any other gender phenomena which might make a significant appearance on the cultural landscape (e.g. catamites and hermaphrodites for the medieval Islamicate contexts). An example would be Peter Brown's *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, which illuminates the ways late antique authors conceived of both men and women as deeply gendered.[29] This work does not posit masculine as standard, but rather interrogates the historical texts for doing so.

I see my own work as a combination of phases one and two. Some of the work presented here is the result of stage one type inquiry: where are the women in medieval Islamic literature and biography? How are they represented? In that sense the study is original for its attempted approach to the material, especially in terms of unearthing lesser-known biographies of Sufi women. From these very basic questions that lead to descriptive results, the study moves on to larger more analytical questions. Now that we have gathered a number of women into one place, what can we say about how the female gender has been constructed in Sufi literary texts, especially in relation to spiritual authority, race, and the body? What rhetorical strategies and metaphors do our authors employ to try to legitimise female Sufi aspirants? How do the authors confront patriarchy, negotiate with it, and collaborate with its power structures? How do other elements of identity interact and combine with femininity? What, if anything, can we say about how the women themselves negotiated with patriarchy as it is filtered through the words of male biographers? Do the literary reflections of women tell us anything

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[28] Mary Ritter Beard, *Woman as Force in History* (Persea Books, 1987), 163.

[29] P R L Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Columbia University Press, 1988).

about some women's lived experiences, or at least the perception of religious women in male eyes?

The main focus of this study, therefore, is not just the women of Islamic mysticism per se, but rather the construction of gender in this philosophical field and the constant negotiation between masculinity, femininity, and power structures – in this case, the power of religious, spiritual authority. In essence, then, the thesis places patriarchy at the centre of the study. According to Judith Bennett, this is one way we can keep the field of women's history relevant and politically engaged:

> If we make patriarchy (and its mechanisms, its changes, its endurance) the central problem of women's history, we will write not only feminist history but also better history. Our history will be more analytic and less descriptive; it will address one of the greatest general problems of all history - the problem of the nature, sustenance, and endurance of power structures; and it will eschew simplistic notions of times getting 'better' or 'worse' for women and grapple instead with the pressing problem of overall constancy in the (low) status of women. As we develop a more historical understanding of patriarchy, historians of women will also contribute in substantive ways to both feminism and feminist scholarship. By identifying the nature and causes of women's oppression in the past, we can directly enhance feminist strategies for the present.[30]

By making patriarchy one of the main objects of study, we can track the rhetorical strategies, images, and metaphors used to uphold the lower status of women in this period and examine those 'moments of transgression' identified by Gayatri Spivak that challenge the patriarchy.[31] This method allows us to admit the overall misogynistic

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[30] Judith M. Bennett, "Feminism and History," *Gender & History* 1, no. 3 (1989): 266.

[31] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

attitude women without suppressing the fascinating moments that try to overturn the established paradigm and hierarchy of power.

If we choose to put patriarchy, and how men and women of the period negotiated with it, at the centre of this study, it is best to define it precisely. I follow Adrienne Rich's definition of patriarchy as:

> a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.[32]

Therefore, in my usage patriarchy is a single word which refers to the entire system of structural sexism. Although the term patriarchy has come under attack in several waves since the beginning of its rise in currency in the domain of women's studies and later gender studies, I believe it is the most succinct and accurate term to describe the wide-ranging effects of the 'sex-gender' system.[33] The term also has the advantage of encompassing women's complicity in patricharal power structures. This framework emphasises that it is not individual men that conspire to put men in positions of power, but the way society is structured as a whole.

While the study focuses on the successes of, and challenges to, the patriarchy, I specifically want to avoid following studies that engage in what I term 'comparative progressivism.' These works attempt to determine which texts, authors, or periods are more misogynistic or more 'female-friendly.' Because the rigorous application of

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[32] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, W. W. Norton (Norton, 1995), 57.

[33] Bennett gives a spirited defense of the usage of the term in feminist histories in her article cited above, 'Feminism and History' pp. 260-262.

gender studies theories in the field of classical Islamic literary studies is very much in its infancy, these studies have sometimes tended to take a rather un-nuanced approach to the material that seeks to point how 'progressive' or 'forward-thinking' various epochs, intellectual fields, or even individual authors or texts have been. This exercise – which is implicitly comparative if not explicitly so – often takes modern (Western) democratic society as an unstated yardstick. This approach exhibits the dual problem of 1) assuming that is possible to determine a 'best' historical time and place for all women of that context and 2) that history is constantly marching towards progress and that the situation was demonstrably 'worse' for women in all historical periods. A further issue facing all studies in the field is the considerable fatigue regarding the patriarchal narrative. Sometimes, in an effort to turn away from the systematic oppression of women, which can be a tired argument, certain studies elevate individual 'superstar' women or overstate the powers held by certain classes of women. While it is important to point out women's power and agency where it existed, creating a counter-narrative of 'liberated woman' is unhelpful.[34]

One fairly clear-cut example of the problematic nature of comparative progressivism comes from the field of Shāhnāmah studies. On the one hand, we have Alyssa Gabbay's article 'Love Gone Wrong, Then Right Again: Male/Female Dynamics in the Bahrām Gūr–Slave Girl Story,' which examines three different authors' versions of the Bahrām Gūr episode and ranks the tellings from most misogynistic to least misogynistic. Moving from Firdawsī to Niẓāmī to Amīr Khusraw, her article argues that 'each version provides progressively more positive depictions of intergender dynamics, ones that are contingent upon more egalitarian understandings of

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[34] Asma Sayeed diagnoses this problem beautifully in her introduction: Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 18.

the male/female dichotomy.'[35] Yet at the same time, Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh holds up the Shāhnāmah as a shining example of respect towards women, while denigrating Niẓāmī:

> One can of course claim that women are disrespected in the Shahnameh just as in other writings, as I have shown before. But such general low regard and disdain for women, which can usually be traced back to Zurvanist ethics, rarely affects the individual female characters in the Shahnameh. […] The Shahnameh, like many other ancient world literary works, is not free of anti-feminist thoughts. However, in no other Persian literary work have women been treated with as much respect and valor as they have been in the Shahnameh.[36]

Khaleghi-Motlagh specifically points to the 'despicable women' of Niẓāmī's romances 'who sometimes dare to exercise liberties -- and even commit sins -- in their golden cages.' While Khaleghi-Motlagh labels Niẓāmī as the misogynist in favour of Firdawsī's superior respect towards women, Gabbay spends an entire article praising Niẓāmī's progressivism over Firdawsī's. It is for this reason that I find this line of analysis completely unproductive. If we as scholars cannot agree on what it means to have a 'better attitude toward women' or to be more 'progressive' (itself anachronistic), how can we possibly make an argument of this sort? Since we cannot agree what a 'positive' image of woman is, it is probably best to leave this kind of inquiry aside. There is a tendency in these studies to privilege texts and authors that are seen as 'proto-feminist' or less misogynistic. The aim of the thesis is not to generate a ranking of how misogynist various texts are. It rather tries to pin down the literary history of the

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[35] Alyssa Gabbay, "Love Gone Wrong, Then Right Again: Male/Female Dynamics in the Bahrām Gūr–Slave Girl Story," *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 5 (December 2009): 677.

[36] Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Women in the Shahnameh: Their History and Social Status within the Framework of Ancient and Medieval Sources* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2012), 19.

strategies of patriarchy and the ways in which patriarchy was both upheld and contested in the medieval period. The representations of women seekers and women saints represent one of the major battlegrounds in this contest.

Some writers have challenged the idea that the kind of work presented here is actually women's history at all. Gisela Bock would argue that because my work actually looks at the history of male luminaries' ideas on gender, it is not a history of women but rather a history of men's ideas and philosophies.[37] This is a point well taken. However, there are several counterarguments to be made here. First, as Denise Spellberg admits in her book-length study of the historical representation of ʿĀʾisha, 'we cannot deduce from the male debate about ʿAʾisha the experience of real Muslim women's lives, or surmise positions they might have articulated without documentation.' But neither would it be:

> judicious… to cease analysis of the premodern historical record because there were no female contributions to this written corpus. However, we can attempt to understand the particular historical context in which male imagination worked on multiple definitional levels… to shape ʿAʾisha's viability as a point of reference for shared Muslim communal concerns and qualified self-definition.[38]

Thus, in Spellberg's conception, the historical representation of women is not significant for the degree of 'truth' which can or cannot be extracted from it, but for the documenting the male imagination of woman and exploring how symbolic femininity was constructed.

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[37] Bock, "Women's History and Gender History," 17-18.

[38] Denise A Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of 'A'isha Bint Abi Bakr* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 9.

It is also possible to argue that the thesis makes use of the sources in two separate but related ways. First and foremost, it considers what the sources tell us about the attitudes towards and representation of various classes of women in this period. Secondly, and only tangentially, are the sources used as a primary source on the history of the early Sufi women themselves. This approach can only be taken with the hagiographies, which attempt to portray 'authentic' historical personages in a way that the *mathnavīs* do not. While some writers like Laury Silvers prefer to pull out the 'kernel of truth' from the representations and use that to generate historical theories regarding certain classes of women, at least in these cases, separating the 'kernel' from the totality seems very challenging.[39] As a result this study assumes that we must content ourselves with analysing representations and only using them to come to the most conservative of conclusions regarding possible 'historical accuracy.' In the absence of more neutral corroborating evidence, it is very difficult to come to any conclusions regarding the potential veracity of the hagiographic lives. As such, although I believe this project is in some sense a contribution to the history of women, I understand that is predominately a history of male authors' ideas on gender, and this is as far as we can go, given the limitations of the source material. For this time period, we have yet to find our Margery Kempe, a medieval religious woman writing in her own voice.[40] Finally, one can imagine a scenario where the strict boundaries between 'men's

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[39] Laury Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 24–52.

[40] Margery Kempe and Anthony Bale, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). From a later period we do have the work of ʿĀʾisha al-Bāʿūnīyya (d. 922/1517), a religious scholar and Sufi of the Mamluk period who wrote poetry, treatises, and relates considerable autobiographical information. See Th. Emil Homerin, "Writing Sufi Biography: The Case of ʿĀʾishah Al-Bāʿūnīyah (D.

history' and 'women's history' fall apart when put to close scrutiny. These methodological issues explain the scholarly trend of making gender relations the object of study rather than 'women' as such.

1.2 Sources

'Aṭṭār's work in particular has become the focus of my study because of the richness of the sources for this specific kind of analysis. The main body of his works were written outside of a courtly context, and in an anecdotal frame-story form. Consequently, the texts present more than just princesses, queens, nannies, and servant girls as one would find in the premodern Persian romances of the court.[41] Instead, a wide range of women are depicted from different social classes, ages, religions and occupations. Most types of medieval women imaginable are presented within his work: prostitutes, loyal married women, poetesses, princesses, courtesans, slave girls, musicians, famous female figures drawn from earlier literature, old women, Sufi saints, warrior women, etc. 'Aṭṭār, therefore, gives us a wide range of material to work with.

Since my project aims at establishing the function of 'Aṭṭār's representations of his female characters, as well as tracing the confrontation between patriarchy and

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922/1517)," *The Muslim World* 96, no. 3 (2006): 389–99. Homerin has also translated one of her major works for the Library of Arabic Literature: Aishah al-Bauniyyah, *The Principles of Sufism*, ed. Th. Emil Homerin (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

[41] Some of the female figures of the romance have been analysed by Leila Rouhi and Farzaneh Milani. Leyla Rouhi, "A Comparative Typology of the Medieval Go-Between in Light of Western-European, Near-Eastern, and Spanish Cases" (Harvard University, 1995); Leyla Rouhi, "The Representation of Gender in Pre-Modern Persian and Arabic Literature," *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*, 2007; Farzaneh Milani, "The Mediatory Guile of the Nanny in Persian Romance," *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1999): 181–201.

gender-egalitarian notions, the main sources will be his major didactic 'epics,' or *mathnavīs*, long poems written in rhyming couplets. These include the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*, *Muṣibat-nāmah*, *Ilāhī-nāmah*, and *Asrār-nāmah*, in addition to 'Aṭṭār's prose biography of saints, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*. All five of these works are well within the established canon of 'Aṭṭār Nīshāpūrī's oeuvre and are readily available in critical editions.[42] Some, like the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* and *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, have been translated more than once into English.[43] Two other works of 'Aṭṭār's oeuvre are of less certain attribution – the *Khusraw-nāmah* and *Mukhtār-nāmah* – and will be dealt with tangentially for this reason, and because they are quite different in content and style from the other *mathnavīs*. Furthermore, I will not be substantively working with the *Dīvān* because the

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[42] Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *Ilāhī-Nāme: Die Gespräche Des Königs Mit Seinen Sechs Söhnen, Eine Mystische Dichtung*, ed. Hellmut Ritter, Nasharāt al-Islāmīya (Istanbul: Staatsdruckerei, 1940); Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr: Maqāmāt al-Ṭuyūr / Bi-Ihtimām-i Ṣādiq Gawharīn.*, ed. Ṣādiq Gawharīn (Tehran, 1964); Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *Asrār-nāmah-yi Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nīshābūrī*, ed. Ṣādeq Gawharīn (Tehran, 1959); Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *Muṣībat-Nāmah*, ed. Nūrānī Viṣāl (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-yi Zuvvār, 1959); 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, ed. Istiʿlāmī. These are the editions referenced throughout unless otherwise noted.

[43] 'Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Awliya' (Memorial of the Saints)*; Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār and Paul E. Losensky, *Farid ad-Din 'Attār's Memorial of God's Friends: Lives and Sayings of Sufis*, trans. Paul Losensky, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, New York: Paulist Press, 2009); Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār and Peter Avery, *Speech of the Birds: Concerning Migration to the Real, the Manṭeq al-Ṭayr* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2001); Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, Dick Davis, and Afkham Darbandi, *The Conference of the Birds*, Classics Series (Penguin Books Limited, 1984); Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār and John Andrew Boyle, *The Ilahi-Nama: Or, Book of God of Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār*, trans. John Andrew Boyle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976); Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār and Fuad Rouhani, *Le Livre Divin, Elahi-Nameh*, Spiritualités Vivantes. Série Islam (Paris: A. Michel, 1961); Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār and Christiane Tortel, *Le Livre des secrets: Asrār-Nāma* (Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1985).

ghazal as a genre endeavors extensively to conceal or play with the ambiguity of the beloved's gender. Moreover, in a mystical context, the genre explicitly functions as a medium to blur the boundary between beloved and divine. The *Dīvān*, therefore, simply does not provide the right type of evidence for this study, as it would be difficult to comment meaningfully on the gender of many of the 'characters' that appear therein.

While 'Aṭṭār's work is firmly at the core of the thesis, the two chapters on hagiography – Chapters 5 and 6 – refer to other Sufi biographies for context and comparison. The main sources consulted in addition to the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* are works that treat a surprising number of women's biographies, including 'Abd al-Raḥmān Sulamī's *Dhikr al-Niswa al-Mutaʿabbidāt al-Ṣūfiyyāt*, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī's *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*. Other works tangentially referenced include Munawwar's *Asrār al-Tawḥīd*, Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān wa-Anbāʾ Abnāʾ al-Zamān*, and Anṣārī's *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*. In the chapters which deal primarily with the narrative or literary material from the *mathnavīs*, other points of comparison are also considered. There are many texts in Persian from 'Aṭṭār's period that show a tinge of Sufi thought, but according to the canon as it is typically presented, there are no major programmatically Sufi writers that are concurrent with him.[44] The Sufi *mathnavī* writers that must at least be considered for purposes of comparison are mainly Sanā'ī, Rūmī, and Jāmī. Sanā'ī is a valuable tool for comparison by virtue of the fact that he predates 'Aṭṭār, and that 'Aṭṭār was probably aware of his work. Furthermore, Sanā'ī's works contain the earliest formulations of

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[44] J T P de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Persian Poems*, *Curzon Sufi Series*, Curzon Sufi Series (Richmond: Curzon, 1997), 97-99. A case could be made for Niẓāmī, but as de Bruijn points out, ultimately he is not writing in the same overtly didactic mystical style as 'Aṭṭār.

Persian Sufism in the *mathnavī* style that have come down to us today.[45] However, it must be noted that Sanā'ī wrote in a slightly different genre to that of 'Aṭṭār's famous frame-tale *mathnavīs* – a more homiletic, sermon-type style. As such, he relates considerably fewer anecdotes, which is the key building block of 'Aṭṭār's style. Sanā'ī remains deeply influential for 'Aṭṭār, however.[46] Jāmī, meanwhile, gives us a later perspective on similar source materials, with his *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā* and *Nafāḥāt al-Uns*. Though these works come from the 15th century, they represent a useful tool for comparison because they shed some light on how a programmatically mystical *mathnavī* writer, composing his texts in Persian, might play with the tradition he has inherited, a tradition which largely overlaps with (and is influenced by) 'Aṭṭār's.

Finally, perhaps controversially for some, I omit Rūmī and his *mathnavī* from any rigorous inquiry in the course of this study. Such an omission may induce skepticism, but it is justifiable for the purposes of this project. Although Rūmī is seen as the direct successor to 'Aṭṭār's mission, and in terms of structure is technically closest to 'Aṭṭār's *mathnavīs*, to engage with the voluminous writings of Rūmī would be to overwhelm the intended purpose of this project. Not only are Rūmī's writings massive in their total amount, they are also notoriously wandering, multivalent, and in many

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[45] Ibid, 39.

[46] Majdūd b. Ādam Sanā'ī, *Mathnavī-hā-yi Hakīm Sanā'ī*, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bābak, 1981); J T P de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry: The Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Hakim Sana'i of Ghazna* (Leiden, 1983). The Babak edition of Sanā'ī includes some *mathnavīs* now believed to be misattributed to Sanā'ī, which will not be considered here: *'Ishq-nāmah*, *'Aql-nāmah*, *Ṭarīq al-Taḥqīq*, and *Taḥrīmat al-Qalam*. For this research I looked primarily at *Sayr al-'Ibād ilā al-Ma'ād*, *Ḥadīqat al-Ḥaqīqa*, and *Kār-nāmah-yi Balkhī*. For an initial inquiry into the comparison of Sanā'ī and 'Aṭṭār, see J.T.P. de Bruijn, "Comparative Notes on Sanāʾī and ʿAṭṭār," in *Classical Persian Sufism: From Its Origins to Rumi*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: New York, 1993), 361–79.

cases, nebulous.[47] Add to these issues the veritable ocean of Rūmī scholarship, sometimes rigorous, sometimes directed at a popular audience, sometimes even distorted, and the reader will see that to sift through such a mountain of material in any meaningful way is probably impossible for a dissertation, let alone a small portion of a dissertation. While it would no doubt be possible to 'cherry-pick' certain examples of Rūmī's representation of gender issues and analyse them on a superficial level, the value of the results of such a comparison would be minimal, if not misleading, without taking into considering the wider system of Rūmī's thought.

1.3 'Aṭṭār's Biography and Context: Medieval Nīshāpūr

The questions surrounding the attribution of various works to 'Aṭṭār have led to serious problems for the construction of his biography, which remains mostly unknown. His biography has traditionally been gleaned from those very works which are now considered spurious by the majority of 'Aṭṭār scholars, especially *Lisān al-Ghayb* and *Jawhar al-Dhāt*. Several references in the *Khusraw-nāmah* and *Mukhtār-nāmah* have also been taken at face value in a way which shows little attention to the conventionality of some of 'Aṭṭār (or pseudo-'Aṭṭār's) biographical remarks.[48] None of 'Aṭṭār's works

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[47] Even in his incredibly detailed tome on all things Rūmī, Franklin Lewis does not take on a full outline of Rūmī's teachings. Franklin Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teaching and Poetry of Jalāl al-Din Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 394.

[48] Hellmut Ritter, "Philologika X. Farīdaddīn ʿAṭṭār," *Der Islam* 25, no. 2 (1938): 134–173; ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb, *Justujū Dar Taṣavvuf-i Īrān* (Tehran: Mu'assisah-yi Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1978). Meanwhile, Frank Lewis notes that Furūzānfar takes 'Aṭṭār's references to age literally: 'Furūzānfar … calculated the composition of the *Ilāhī-nāma* on the basis of the author's invocation of the "sixty years of age" topos, to approximately the years 1200-1205.' Franklin D Lewis, "One Chaste Muslim Maiden and a

can be dated with any certainty, nor can a reliable relative chronology be established. In certain manuscripts of *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*, the date 1178 is put forth as the completion date in the epilogue (*khātimah*), but according to De Blois, it does not appear in the oldest manuscript, which is missing the epilogue entirely.[49] As a result of these uncertainties, and the dangers of taking the author at his word regarding his life in a work of fiction, we must dispense with the dream of a confirmable chronology for 'Aṭṭār's oeuvre, barring any major manuscript discoveries. Most scholars have settled upon 1221 CE as 'Aṭṭār's likely death date and suggest that he died in the Mongol conquest of Khurāsān. Some sources place his death later, around 1230 CE. Furūzānfar has speculated that 'Aṭṭār was born in 1145-6, but this cannot be confirmed.[50]

Supposing a birth date between 1140-50, 'Aṭṭār would have grown up in a time of considerable chaos, which could have influenced his decision to collect and consolidate his history of the early mystic movement, the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, specifically in the vernacular language of Persian. Early in life 'Aṭṭār would have witnessed the fall of the great, long-standing Saljuq Sultan Sanjar b. Mālik Shāh, who reigned over Khurāsān from 1097 to 1157. His reign was not without its turmoil, between external encroachments from the north on the part of Atsïz and the Khwārazm

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Persian in a Pear Tree: Analogues of Boccaccio and Chaucer in Four Earlier Arabic and Persian Tales," in *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, ed. Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Leiden: Boston: Brill, 2012), 168.

[49] F De Blois, *Persian Literature - A Bio-Bibliographical Survey: Poetry of the Pre-Mongol Period*, Royal Asiatic Society Books (Taylor & Francis, 2004), 239-40.

[50] Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, *Sharḥ-i Aḥvāl va Naqd va Taḥlīl-i Āthār Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad 'Aṭṭār Nīshābūrī*, Silsilah-yi Intishārāt-i Anjuman-i Āthār-i Millī (Tehran: Chāpkhānah-yi Dānishgāh, 1960), 7-16.

Shāhs on the one hand, and a marked inability to control the internal nomadic Ghuzz tribe on the other. But these minor instabilities could not compare to the fragmentation of Khurāsān and the subsequent conquest, loss, and reconquest of individual Khurāsānian cities for at least the next twenty years after Sanjar's capture and death in 1157. At this point Khurāsān was parceled out amongst Sanjar's individual *amīrs* and *ghulāms*. Some sense of stability came to Nīshāpūr in particular with the arrival of Muʿayyid al-Dīn Ai-Aba (d. 1174), who ruled as governor after driving out the Ghuzz from Nīshāpūr and Ṭūs until his death. However, that stability was short-lived. A power vacuum was left in Khurāsān after Ai-Aba's death that led to a three-cornered struggle between the Ghūrids (whose stronghold was in modern-day Afghanistan), the Khwārazm Shah Tekish (r. 1172-1200 in Khwārazm, on the south coast of the Aral Sea), and his estranged brother Sultan Shāh (d. 1193), which went on from about 1174 to 1193. After his brother's death in 1193, Tekish solidified his hold on Khurāsān and successfully passed it on to his son, Qutb al-Dīn Muḥammad, the last of the Khwārazm Shāhs, who reigned from 1200 through the Mongol conquests beginning around 1220.[51]

In addition to the political upheavals that ʿAṭṭār experienced during his time, it is important to understand the contours of Sufism's development within Khurāsān. Thanks in large part to a groundbreaking study by Jacqueline Chabbi, a great deal more is now known about Sufism's development in Khurāsān in the 9th and 10th centuries.[52]

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[51] John Andrew Boyle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran: The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, vol. 5, The Cambridge History of Iran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), see esp. pp. 135-57, 185-202; Edward G Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 301-10, 426-66.

[52] Jacqueline Chabbi, "Remarques sur le développment historique des mouvements ascétiques et mystiques au Khurasan: IIIe/IXe Siècle - IVe/Xe Siècle," *Studia Islamica* 46 (1977): 5–72.

As Chabbi had posited, and as later research has confirmed, Sufism was not the only type of mysticism present in Khurāsān. Rather, there were three other mystical groups: the Karrāmiyya, the Malāmatiyya, and the Hakims, who laid the foundation of renunciant movements in the region. Most important for our purposes is the Malāmatiyya, a movement which sprung up around Nishapur in the late 9th century. Their name, which means 'blame seekers,' implies one of their fundamental tenets, which was that the respect a pious person wins for their asceticism is actually an obstacle to achieving real piety.[53] Hence the Malāmatīs focused on inciting reproach and blame from society in order to crush the ego. These three movements were later absorbed, mainly in the 11th century, by the Sufi movements emanating from Iraq. The earlier Khurāsānī mystical sects were responsible for setting up the *khānaqāh* structures that the Shāfiʿī Sufis of Nishapur later co-opted so effectively to suit their needs.[54] During the 11th century, brotherhoods began to form and by the end of the 12th century they were firmly in place.

It has been conclusively shown that the majority of Sufis in Nishapur adhered to the Shāfiʿī *maddhab* of Islamic law. Richard Bulliet has done some innovative work using the *ṭabaqāt* (biographical dictionaries) to establish a fuller picture of the social history in Nishapur in this formative period for Sufism.[55] On the basis of Bulliet's

[53] Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 46.

[54] Ibid, 54; Margaret Malamud, "Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 3 (1994): 435-36.

[55] Richard W Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History*, Harvard Middle Eastern Studies (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972); Richard W Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979).

thorough and exhaustive work on two extant biographical dictionaries from Nishapur, Malamud has demonstrated that almost none of those people designated as mystics in the biographies were affiliated with the two other 11th century *maddhab*s present in Nishapur, the Ḥanafīs and the Karrāmīs. She finds that when the legal affiliation of a mystic is recorded, it is consistently Shāfiʿī. These findings have important implications for the intellectual and cultural climate in which ʿAṭṭār lived. While it is probably impossible to determine ʿAṭṭār's *maddhab* affiliation from his writings, it is certainly instructive regarding his influences that many of the giants of early Sufism – writers like Qushayrī, Sulamī, Abū Nuʿaym, Ghazālī, and Hujwīrī – were not only based in Nishapur but also of the Shāfiʿī school.[56] In this period, schools or *maddhab*s were not strictly intellectual or ideological categories but also had a social, political component. As Malamud notes, these *maddhab*s were instrumental in the late 10th and early 11th centuries in determining the new conquerors' relationship to the religious elites and helping them establish legitimacy. 'In exchange for providing the new elites with aid and legitimacy,' Malamud writes, 'the religious classes received support in the form of madrasas, *khānaqāhs*, stipends, and salaries. Patterns for the government's relations with the religious classes were first worked out in Khurasan and later adopted in Baghdad and the Seljuq successor states.' Thus the Shāfiʿī-Sufi link had real, tangible economic and political implications for the way Khurasan was being governed in this period. Qushayrī sees the two approaches to Islam as essentially intertwined, and in certain places even seems to equate adherence to Shafiʿism with adherence to the Sufi way.[57] At the same time, some of these Shāfiʿī-Sufis made clear their distaste for the *sukr* school of Sufism represented by Bāyāzīd (d. 874) and al-Ḥallāj (d. 922). Many

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[56] Malamud, "Sufi Organizations," 429.

[57] Ibid, 429.

preferred the *saḥw* school of Junayd (d. 910), and Qushayrī expressed disapprobation of the extravagance of prominent contemporary Sufi Abū Saʿīd b. Abī al-Khayr (d. 1049). This certainly does not hold true for ʿAṭṭār, however, who reveres al-Ḥallāj in the final biography of the *Tadhkirat*, extols the virtues Bāyāzīd in one of the longest single entries in the same work, and references Abī al-Khayr as a spiritual master.

These findings are also significant for the support they give to the revisionist argument that has emerged regarding the purported protracted, structural conflict between mystics and the *ʿulima*. The contours of this conflict between Sufism and Islamic law, drawn in fairly stark terms by earlier historians of Sufism such as J.S. Trimingham and AJ Arberry, have been redrawn by Malamud, Christopher Melchert, and Nile Green to include the fact that many mystics were legal scholars themselves.[58] Many of these scholar-Sufis used their authoritative position in the *ẓāhirī* realms to bolster their claims of the legitimacy of *bāṭinī* methods. As exemplified by the Qu'ran commentary of Maybudī, the 'exterior' and 'interior' approaches to Islam were not always seen as mutually exclusive, but often complementary, and were practiced by the same commentators. We would do well, therefore, not to assume Sufis were unpracticed in technical aspects of the Islamic sciences and constantly at odds with the prominent *ʿulimā'* of their day.[59]

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[58] AJ Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950); J.S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Malamud, "Sufi Organizations"; Christopher Melchert, "Competing Movements in Nishapur," *Iran* 39 (2001): 242–43; Green, *Sufism*, 1-3, 24-25.

[59] This is not to deny that there was real, tangible economic, political and social conflict between elements of the Sufi movement and members at the *ʿulima* in many different contexts, but we cannot assume this

For this discussion, we must also keep in mind that ʿAṭṭār was part of a larger textual tradition. For the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyāʾ*, this textual heritage included both the Sufi biographical tradition that ʿAṭṭār inherited from Arabic as well as the movement towards vernacularisation of Sufi teachings and history. To a certain extent, ʿAṭṭār follows the work of his predecessors who composed Sufi biographies and manuals in the late 10th and 11th centuries. The most important of these were the following, all written in Arabic: the *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* of Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 988), the *Taʿarruf li-Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf* by Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 900 or 995), and the *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya* by another Nishapurian Sufi, Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 1021).[60] Also significant were the works of two of Sulamī's students in hadith, the *Risāla al-Qushayriyya fī ʿIlm al-Taṣawwuf* by Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī of Nishapur (d. 1074) and the *Ḥilyat al-Awliyāʾ* of Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī. Of particular importance was Hujwīrī's *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, the earliest known treatise on Sufism written in Persian, which ʿAṭṭār cites by name in the Memorial.[61] Hujwīrī's example is critical because it may have encouraged ʿAṭṭār to compose his work in Persian rather than Arabic, thus taking part in the larger vernacularisation movement into Persian.

1.4 Authenticity Questions

Much ink has been spilled over the issue of which works attributed to ʿAṭṭār of Nishapur are actually from his pen. The problem has overshadowed ʿAṭṭār studies from its inception and as a result, the work of some of the earliest and finest scholars –

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paradigm holds true equally in all periods. See particularly Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke, *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics* (Leiden: BRILL, 1999).

[60] Green, *Sufism*, 52.

[61] Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, xxviii.

including Hellmut Ritter and Muḥammad Qazvīnī – has been undermined by later discoveries of misattributed works, upon which those scholars relied.[62] The authenticity of some works has never been called into question. These works include the *Dīvān*, *Ilāhī-nāmah*, *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr/Maqāmāt al-Ṭuyūr*, *Muṣibat-nāmah*, *Asrār-nāmah* and *Tadhkirat al-Awilyā'*.[63] For each of these texts, manuscripts are extant from within approximately 100 years of ‘Aṭṭār’s death, and many much earlier.[64] Once thought to have numbered as many as the suras of the Qur’an,[65] his undisputed works have now been reduced from nearly sixty in the days of Nafīsī and Ritter, to six.[66] Though only

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[62] See editor's introduction in Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *Majmū‘ah-yi Rubā‘iyyāt: Mukhtār-Nāmah*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Tūs, 1979).

[63] The authenticity of the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* has been questioned by Habib Muhammad, but his case has not been well-received. His arguments are thoroughly refuted in Barbara Lois Helms, “Rabi‘ah as Mystic, Muslim, and Woman,” *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions: Volume III* (1993): 47-52, note 3. Muhammad Habib, “Chishti Mystics Records of the Sultanate Period,” *Medieval India Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1950): 1–47.

[64] De Blois records the following: *Asrār-nāmah* 1258, *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* 1258 (same ms.) *Muṣibat-nāmah* 1287, *Ilāhī-nāmah* 1328, *Dīvān* 1306-7. Storey records: *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* 1288 or 1290. Charles Ambrose Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey. Volume 1, Qur’ānic Literature; History and Biography*, ed. Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (London: Luzac & Co., 1927), 930; De Blois, *Persian Literature - A Bio-Bibliographical Survey: Poetry of the Pre-Mongol Period*, 231–70.

[65] Benedikt Reinart, “AṬṬĀR, FARĪD-AL-DĪN,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1987, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/attar-farid-al-din-poet (accessed 16 May 2017).

[66] Sa‘īd Nafīsī, “Justujū Dar Aḥvāl va Āthār-i Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār Nīshābūrī” (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī va Chāpkhānah-yi Iqbāl, 1941); Benedikt Reinart, “AṬṬĀR, FARĪD-AL-DĪN,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1987, available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/attar-farid-al-din-poet (accessed 15 August 2016).

the *Dīvān* and the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* were mentioned by contemporary classical sources, the authenticity of the other four has never been seriously contested.

The authenticity of the *Khusraw-nāmah*, however, has been strongly challenged by Shafī'ī-Kadkanī in his introduction to the *Mukhtār-nāmah* in 1979, and many scholars have dismissed it outright on the basis of its non-mystical, romantic content.[67] The attribution of the *Mukhtār-nāmah* to 'Aṭṭār has also been questioned. Furūzānfar has been particularly insistent on this point, and more recently Eve Feuillebois-Pierunek has aired her doubts about its attribution to 'Aṭṭār. The question of the authenticity of both these works is dependent upon the other, and as such must be considered simultaneously. In the absence of significant new evidence, the authenticity or inauthenticity of either the *Khusraw-nāmah* and *Mukhtār-nāmah* cannot be proven without a doubt or to positivist standards. However, I argue here that the *Khusraw-nāmah* is most likely spurious on the basis of internal and external evidence. Although I come to the same conclusion as Shafī'ī-Kadkanī, I disagree with much of his evidence and method of argumentation. I continue to have doubts about the entire *Mukhtār-nāmah*, particularly its introduction, and suggest that it may have been compiled after 'Aṭṭār's death. The status of these two texts is most crucial for 'Aṭṭār studies, because the information contained therein has long been taken at face value and used not only to determine which texts rightfully belong in 'Aṭṭār's authenticated oeuvre, but also to

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[67] 'Aṭṭār, *Mukhtār-Nāmah*; Aḥmad 'Izzatī-Parvar, "Āyā Khusraw-Nāmah Az 'Aṭṭār-i Nīshābūrī Ast?," *Kayhān-i Andīshah*, no. 62 (1374): 163–72; Aḥmad 'Izzatī-Parvar, "Chand Nuktah Darbārah-yi Khusraw-Nāmah-yi Mansūb Bi 'Aṭṭār," *Nāmah-yi Farhang*, no. 29 (1377): 114–17; Taymūr Mālmīr, "Barrisī-yi Sabkī-yi Khusraw-Nāmah Barā-yi Tabyīn-i Ṣiḥḥat-i Intisāb-i Ān Bi 'Aṭṭār-i Nīshābūrī," *Faṣlnāmah-yi Takhaṣṣuṣī-yi Sabk-Shināsī-yi Naẓm va Nathr-i Fārsī* 4, no. 3 (1390): 1–20; Nafīsī, "Justujū"; Furūzānfar, *Sharḥ-i Aḥvāl*; Ritter, "Philologika X. Farīdaddīn 'Aṭṭār."

elucidate elements of his biography and to establish, however provisionally, a relative chronology for his works. To use these two texts as the basis for circumscribing the authentic works is a risky method, particularly when, out of the remaining texts still ascribed to 'Aṭṭār, they are the least investigated and the most suspicious.

The most recent publications in English and European languages contradict one another as to the *Khusraw-nāmah*'s authenticity. In his article in Encyclopaedia Iranica, Reinert lists the *Khusraw-nāmah* among 'Aṭṭār authentic works. He does not refer to the now seventy-year-old debate on its status as an open question. Rather, he affirms its authenticity with confidence, 'Although the contemporary sources confirm only ʿAṭṭār's authorship of the *Dīvān* and the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*, there are no grounds for doubting the authenticity of the *Ḵosrow-nāma* and *Moḵtār-nāma* and their prefaces.'[68] Similarly, Paola Orsatti takes the *Khusraw-nāmah* to be authentic in her article comparing versions of Niẓāmī's *Khusraw va Shīrīn*. On the opposite side of the coin, Eve Feuillebois-Pierunek makes a one-sentence reference to the *Khusraw-nāmah* in her 2006 article regarding the *Mukhtār-nāmah*, calling the *Khusraw-nāmah* 'a romantic mathnawi composed in the fifteenth century.' As she provides no source or reference for this information, I can only assume she has accepted Shafīʿī-Kadkanī's rejection of the *Khusraw-nāmah* attribution to 'Aṭṭār, as presented in his 1979 preface to his edition of the *Mukhtār-nāmah*. The *Khusraw-nāmah* and its status has not been seriously investigated in a European language since Ritter's series of articles in the *Studia*

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[68] Reinart, "AṬṬĀR, FARĪD-AL-DĪN."This article was originally written in 1987, and according to the online version, updated in 2011.

Iranica, and most contemporary scholars accept Shafīʿī-Kadkanī's theory without further comment.[69]

While the *Khusraw-nāmah* has not attracted any serious attention in Western languages since the 1940s, Iranian scholarship has continued to address the question in more recent years. Shafīʿī-Kadkanī has provided the most thorough and cogent discussion of the question since Ritter and Nafīsī, and he comes to the conclusion that the *Khusraw-nāmah* is absolutely spurious, and most likely was written in the 15th century. Other Iranian scholars have responded to this proposition, some refuting Shafīʿī-Kadkanī's dismissal of the *Khusraw-nāmah* from ʿAṭṭār's oeuvre, others agreeing it has been misattributed but providing different or further evidence of that fact. The debate has yet to be summarised in English, though its existence is alluded to by Pierunek. In order to properly engage with the debate on the *Khusraw-nāmah*, however, we need to address the *Mukhtār-nāmah*'s attribution to ʿAṭṭār, which has traditionally been used as a source to substantiate the *Khusraw-nāmah* as part of ʿAṭṭār's oeuvre. This is despite the fact that the authenticity of the *Mukhtār-nāmah* itself has been called into question.

There are significant challenges to the attribution of the *Mukhtār-nāmah* to ʿAṭṭār. First, the content of some of the quatrains does not seem to correspond to the worldview of the ʿAṭṭār we know from his *masnavi*s. While many of the quatrains are

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[69] Daniela Meneghini, "MOKTĀR-NĀMA," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2008, available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/moktar-nama (accessed 22 April 2017); Leonard Lewisohn and C Shackle, *ʿAttār and the Persian Sufi Tradition: The Art of Spiritual Flight* (London : New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 310; Paola Orsatti, "KOSROW O ŠIRIN AND ITS IMITATIONS," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2006, available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kosrow-o-sirin (accessed 10 April 2017).

mystical, others are more earthly, and some downright libertine.[70] This diversity of content, however, should not necessarily be taken as definitive proof of misattribution. Pierunek also points out that the influence of Khayyamic thought is quite palpable in some quatrains, while in the *Ilāhī-nāmah* 'Aṭṭār has specifically criticised Khayyām's work and worldview. Furthermore, the quatrains are arranged by subject matter, and at times the titles of the sections either do not match the content, or they use different terminology than the poems do themselves.[71] This has led Pierunek to conclude that perhaps the arrangement of the quatrains was done by a student or someone after 'Aṭṭār's death, and that the introduction may have been composed by someone else. She gives examples of similar phenomena occurring with other collections of quatrains and considers this a 14th century development.

Meanwhile, an examination of the external and internal evidence has led me to believe that the *Khusraw-nāmah* is not, in fact, a product of 'Aṭṭār's pen. The most common argument against it is the non-mystical subject matter of the work. I find this difficult to accept. As mentioned above, it is circular and reductive to assume an author did not write something because it does not conform to our vision of what that author would write. Carl Ernst does not find it necessary, as other writers have, to try to prove conclusively that certain works are spurious and others are not. He writes:

> While it may be intrinsically impossible to reach an understanding of mystical authorship according to positivist standards, it is nevertheless useful to clarify the reading strategies employed by various interpreters to illuminate the conflicting concepts of authorship that they bring to the subject.… Even

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[70] Eve Feuillebois-Pierenuk, "Mystical Quest and Oneness in the Mukhtār-Nāma Ascribed to Farīd al-Din 'Aṭṭār," in *'Attār and the Persian Sufi Tradition: The Art of Spiritual Flight*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and Christopher Shackle (London: New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 310.

[71] Ibid, 311.

without a consideration of postmodern literary theory, it is by no means unproblematic to define authors by either stylistic or thematic consistency.[72]

Such an approach, he argues, leads to an overly strict construction of authorial identity that is ultimately unverifiable.

However, there are other, more persuasive arguments against the *Khusraw-nāmah*'s attribution to 'Aṭṭār. First, the earliest manuscript according to Shafī'ī-Kadkanī is dated 1422, a century after all the other earliest dated copies of the 'canonical' works.[73] Second, the text, as it has come down to us, uncritically reproduced by Iqbāl and Khwānsārī, contains a suspicious hodge-podge of lines from other texts within it, including texts from later periods, such as *Dīvān-i Ḥafiẓ* and *Gulshan-i Rāz* of Shabistarī. Aḥmad 'Izzati-Parvar comes to the conclusion that the '*Khusraw-nāmah* is a mixture of *Khusraw va Shīrīn*, *Vīs va Rāmīn*, *Samak-i 'Ayyār*, and exact or near-exact lines from 'Aṭṭār's other works. It reminds one of a vulgar *Vīs va Rāmīn*.'[74] In particular lines from the *Asrār-nāmah* are found quite frequently, whereas I have found almost no other instances in which 'Aṭṭār copies from himself. We do not, for example, find lines of the *Ilāhī-nāmah* within *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*. This phenomenon of copying from the *Asrār-nāmah* is so pervasive that the introduction to the *Khusraw-nāmah* tries to account for it, referring to itself as a 'condensed' version of the *Asrār-nāmah*. For these reasons I am suspicious of the *Mukhtār-nāmah*'s attribution and consider the *Khusraw-*

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[72] Lewisohn and Shackle, *Spiritual Flight*, 332-33.

[73] It is important to note that this is disputed by other scholars, not least De Blois's information on a manuscript in the Bibliotheque Nationale dated 1297. De Blois, *Persian Literature - A Bio-Bibliographical Survey*, 236.

[74] 'Izzatī-Parvar, "Āyā Khusraw-Nāmah?" 169.

nāmah very likely to be spurious, though not for reasons of mystical content, as have been previously proposed.

1.5 Road Map

Having established what the thesis will cover, this section will clarify how it will be covered and what themes underlie and link the various parts of the study together. While some recent studies on 'Aṭṭār have pointed to various defamiliarising elements in 'Aṭṭār's work, none has systematically traced the effect through various identity markers or pointed out the pattern of reversal. A few recent works have made gestures in this direction. Harry S. Neale has pointed out in an article that the Zoroastrian functions as an agent of defamiliarisation in certain anecdotes of the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*.[75] Meanwhile, Claudia Yaghoobi notes the diversity of sources of spiritual authority in 'Aṭṭār's work, particularly from the perspectives of class and gender;[76] Annemarie Schimmel briefly points out the archetype of the wise old woman

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[75] Harry Stuart Neale, "Sufism, Godliness and Popular Islamic Storytelling in Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's Taḏkiratu-L-'awliyā'" (PhD. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2007); Harry Stuart Neale, "Zoroastrian in 'Attār's Tadkiratu'l-Awliyā'," *Middle Eastern Literatures: Incorporating Edebiyat* 12, no. 2 (2009): 137–56.

[76] Although Yaghoobi frames the discussion through the lens of 'transgression' and the post-structuralist theories surrounding that idea, I understand her analysis as another way of making reference to the phenomenon in 'Aṭṭār's work that I attempt to delineate with 'defamiliarisation.' Claudia Yaghoobi, "Sexual Trauma and the Spiritual Experiences: Rabiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya and Margery Kempe" 3, no. 4 (2014): 73–92; Claudia Yaghoobi, "Against the Current: Farid al-Din 'Attar's Diverse Voices," *Persian Literary Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (2012). Yaghoobi's forthcoming book, *Subjectivity in 'Aṭṭār, Persian Sufism and European Mysticism*, will no doubt be highly relevant to the arguments of the thesis, however

and the Christian as a source of spiritual guidance in Sufi texts.[77] My aim here is to bring all of those pieces together, to connect the dots between them and, while placing gender firmly at the centre of my analysis, to situate 'Aṭṭār's use of gender within a broader pattern of identity awareness that underlies his work. Though I focus on one element of the overarching strategy of defamiliarisation, my work looks to contextualise that element, thereby demonstrating the persistence and pervasiveness of the device in 'Aṭṭār's work and the fact that it was not limited to just one aspect of identity.

In order to demonstrate that the authors' depiction of women diverges from their stated misogynist premises, I will move from the broader context of Sufi conceptions of the category of women, to the range of specific representations that appear in 'Aṭṭār. First, I will begin with 'Aṭṭār's general statements about women and his, and other medieval authors', rigorous justification for including women in the ranks of the *awliyā'*. This chapter (Chapter 2) comprises a detailed analysis of the varying rhetorical strategies employed to justify women's presence in the canon of saints, and the general stated views on women, family, marriage and sexuality in select Persian literary texts of the 12th-13th centuries. Chapter 3 discusses some of the many stock female characters that appear in 'Aṭṭār's work and details his tendency to place authority in the hands of the lowest on the social hierarchy. This chapter argues that if spiritual progress is about 'stripping the self of delusions of superiority,' then according to some Sufi authors this could include stripping oneself of the delusion of masculine

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it is due to be released 15 May 2017 and there will not be sufficient opportunity to consider it in depth before this work is submitted.

[77] Annemarie Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 81-88.

superiority.[78] Chapter 4 moves from stock characters to the allusions to famous female literary characters. In particular this chapter traces the development of the literary character Zulaykhā from the Qur'an, through the commentaries, into the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, and through 'Aṭṭār's work. It uses Zulaykhā as a barometer for the treatment of female sexuality and traces her transformation from paragon of lust to model Sufi lover.

The fifth and sixth chapters then move from the narrative representations of stock and fictional characters to the biographies of holy women as they are presented in 'Aṭṭār and other hagiographies. Chapter 5 deals with the relationship between gender, corporeality, and spiritual status as it is represented in these texts. In this chapter, I posit that my hagiographical sources tend to associate the body, e.g. the lower, baser form, with the ontological category of female, and as such play into typical misogynistic notions. I argue that this gendered reading of the body/soul dichotomy leads to women divorcing themselves from their bodies as their primary means of attaining sainthood. In the sixth and final chapter of the dissertation, I examine the same set of hagiographical sources through the lenses of intersectionality and subaltern studies. I examine the different axes of identity like race, class, disability, and slavery and discuss how they interact with gender in the representations of saints, especially female slaves and black women. Finally, in my conclusion, I gesture towards avenues for further research and, from the position of tracing the history of negotiating with the patriarchy in these works, suggest that there tends to be a disconnect between the representations of 'woman' as category and women as narrative figures. This study ultimately reveals the necessity for careful consideration of individual Sufi authors' representation of gender and the discrepancies which can arise even within a single writer's oeuvre.

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[78] Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives*, 55.

2 THE LADIES' PATH

THE CATEGORY OF 'WOMAN' IN SELECT TEXTS OF PERSIAN MYSTICISM IN THE 12TH-13TH CENTURIES

كه اين عجوز عروس هزار داماد است   مجو درستى عهد از جهان سست نهاد

Seek not faithfulness from the world and her weakness of character,
For this old hag is the bride of thousand grooms.[79]

-Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīvān*

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[79] Khājah Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfiz, *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ: Ghazaliyyāt, Bi Taṣḥīḥ va Tawḍīḥ-i Parvīz Nātil Khānlarī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khwārazmī, 1359), #37, 90.

2.1 Introduction

<div dir="rtl">

گر مرد راه عشقی ره پیش بر بمردی   ورنه بخانه بنشین چه مرد این نبردی[...]

گرچه ز قوت دل چون کوه پایداری   در پیش عشق سرکش چون پیش باد گردی

مردان مرد اینجا در پرده چون زنانند   تو پیش صف چه آیی چون نه زنی نه مردی

مردان هزار دریا خوردند و تشنه مردند   تو مست از چه گشتی چون جرعه‌ای نخوردی

</div>

If you are a man of the Way of Love, stride forth with manliness.
If not, stay at home — you are no man, cut out for this battle! [...]
Though you may have strength of heart like an immovable mountain,
In the way of love, you are cast about wildly, like dust in the wind.
Manly men in this world are veiled just like women.
Why do you come to the front of the line, given that you're neither woman nor
      man?
[Real] men have drunk a thousand oceans and died thirsty.
How are you drunk? You haven't even had a sip![80]

This *ghazal* from the *dīvān* of 'Aṭṭār takes as its primary theme the notion of *mardī*, or 'manliness.' Any student of Sufism will know that this type of reference to the ideal (masculine) seeker is hardly unique or rare. As evidenced above, a *mard* in this context implies a seeker who is ready to brave the difficulties of the Path, the bewilderment of love, and the unimaginable scale of the trials held therein. It is perhaps intriguing for the uninitiated reader that this ideal mystic is identified with the masculine gender. The supremacy of the masculine gender is assumed, as is the lowness of the other main gender categories referred to in this literature, woman (*zan*) and catamite (*mukhannath/ḥīz*). Although the superiority of *mardī* is a given, it is certainly not assumed that all men are inherently capable of it, nor all women inherently

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[80] Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *Dīvān-i 'Aṭṭār*, ed. Taqī Tafaḍḍulī (Tehran: Bungāh-i Tarjumah va Nashr-i Kitāb, 1967): #776, 621-22. Wherever possible, each *misrā'* is represented by one line in my translations, and each *bayt* is split over two lines.

incapable of it. The third *bayt* above in particular goes after this idea. It tries to divorce the concept of *mardī* from a gendered meaning. A number of scholars of Sufism take up this line of argument – that *mardī* is indeed genderless in this context.[81] But I cannot be convinced that a thought-system which defines its highest rank by 'manliness' has successfully escaped the influence of patriarchy in favour of a gender-egalitarian system championing the equality of all types of souls before God. As Gerda Lerner puts it, 'By making the term "man" subsume "woman" and arrogate to itself the representation of all of humanity, men have built a conceptual error of vast proportion into all of their thought.'[82] By redefining successful women as men, or unsuccessful men as women (or even lower than women), the metaphor reproduces patriarchy even at the most basic unit of language. Adrienne Rich and Elizabeth Grosz write about the way that masculine subjectivity 'pretends to stand for "the human," and the problems that arise from marking men as the group that is always at the centre, while women are marked as Other, peripheral.[83] Although it is probably not surprising that such attitudes also permeate 'Aṭṭār's context, it is important to explore the range of pro-patriarchal, anti-female/misogynist statements, since the core of the thesis investigates the pushback against patriarchal norms by 'Aṭṭār and other Sufi writers.

This chapter attempts to set out that very premise—the patriarchal hierarchy assumed by Sufi texts—which later chapters show 'Aṭṭār and other Sufi writers at least partially upending. I cannot show the places in which authors subvert patriarchy without

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[81] Discussed in more detail below on pg. 59.

[82] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 220.

[83] Elizabeth A Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), xi; Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (W. W. Norton, 1995), 207.

demonstrating the extent of its significance to their worldviews. The first section of the chapter is critical in establishing the overarching misogynist framework in which the biographies and narratives regarding women appear. This section reaches beyond the immediate sources discussed at length in the dissertation and endeavors to provide a picture of the general attitudes towards women as a category in select texts of Sufi literature from the 12th and 13th centuries, predominantly focusing on Persian sources. The second section of this chapter considers the introductory material of sources consulted in the chapters on hagiography. These introductory passages, which look to justify the presence of women in the ranks of the Friends of God, begin to reveal the fundamental tension between the generic statements on woman as a category of thought and the representation of actual prominent, historical Sufi women in the *ṭabaqāt* literature. The tension and contradictions observed in these passages to some degree provide a microcosm for the structure of the dissertation. After setting out the misogynist context of the tradition's general approach to 'woman' ontologically conceived, the dissertation moves to indications of the analytical acrobatics performed by writers to justify including women, and then, in following chapters, finally to the narrative representations themselves which, I argue, function in an entirely different way. This disconnect between maxim and narrative, between concept and execution, is a result of the continual fluctuations of the struggle against patriarchy and participation in it.

While it is tempting to gloss over the areas in which some Sufi writers are profoundly and blatantly misogynistic, to do so can only be to misrepresent the sources. Although this chapter does not intend to be a mere catalogue of misogyny, to deny this significant element of mystical Islamic literature makes it impossible to analyse

accurately the more interesting places where a real struggle ensues to reconcile patriarchal values with glorifying and remembering female Sufis and masters. In this sense I must disagree ever so slightly with Franklin Lewis, who writes:

> In contrast to Sanā'ī (d. 525/1131), for example, 'Aṭṭār and Rumī do not tend to identify woman or the feminine with matter and the material world, nor do they necessarily subscribe to a theology that assigns women to an inferior rank in the hierarchy of spirituality; however they do nevertheless evoke the known gender prejudices of their societies, knowing that accusations of effeminacy will cut a man as sharply as any knife.[84]

On the contrary, in this section I provide evidence that 'Aṭṭār, like many other writers of a mystical bent, is not, in fact, immune to a theology which ascribes women to an inferior rank. We can, actually, adduce significant evidence of his identifying the feminine with the *dunyā*, and with lowness in general, particularly in the general references to the category of woman as a whole. 'Aṭṭār and other Sufi writers may support the theory of an impartial, Sufi equality of all souls, but in practice, their attempt to carry this philosophy to its logical conclusion is often contravened by patriarchal norms. To focus solely on these axioms is to tell only half of the story. Lewis's description exemplifies the tendency of the 'comparative progressivism' model, which I describe in my introduction, to typically locate the grossest misogyny elsewhere, or to implicitly compare authors and texts on the basis of their 'favourability' in their treatment and representation of women. By way of contrast, this study attempts to re-centre patriarchy as the analytical lens and demonstrate the ways gender is far from a stable construct in these texts, not to generate a ranked list of 'women-friendly' authors.

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[84] Franklin Lewis, "Sexual Occidentation: The Politics of Conversion, Christian-Love and Boy-Love in 'Aṭṭār," *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 5 (December 2009): 695.

It is important to note here that not only must we take stock of the profoundly patriarchal context surrounding this discourse, but we should also be careful to justify the use of a potentially anachronistic frame of analysis. How do we properly evaluate and avoid minimising the role of these formulations, without unnecessarily demonising the authors in question? What Shaikh writes about gender in Ibn 'Arabī could equally apply here:

> It is not only pointless but somewhat immature to discount, excuse, or defend what might appear to a twenty-first century reader those very androcentric formulations in the works of Ibn 'Arabī and other Sufis of his time. [...] I subject such ideas, as they present in such historical works, to a rigorous critique. Yet I do so without holding these past thinkers hostage to contemporary sensibilities.

It does not make sense, Shaikh argues, to hold medieval thinkers to the same standards that we would hold contemporary ones. But the misogynist ideas embedded therein need to be exposed and critiqued, insofar as they continue to find currency in the context of the present. These critiques also allow us to observe the sometimes wide variability in the way patriarchy plays out in different places. This variability throws into relief the very constructed nature of gender roles in all contexts. Rita Gross adds her voice into the mix with a warning not to demonise individuals, but rather to critique the oppressive system or society in which they lived as:

> 'androcentric in its thought-forms and patriarchal in its institutions is an analysis, an accurate description, not an accusation... We would be guilty of an inappropriate projection of feminist values onto the past only if we did not stop with an analysis of its thought-forms and institutions, but also railed against the humans who participated in those modes of thinking and living.'[85]

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[85] Rita Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1993), 23.

To sum up, it is no denigration of our authors' personal character to admit that they are subject to the patriarchal norms and mores of their context. At the same time, this does not mean that these moments do not bear an in-depth examination.

2.2 Proverbial Misogynistic Wisdom and Sufi Authors: Sanā'ī, 'Aṭṭār, Rūmī, and Ibn 'Arabī

This section brings together some of the highly misogynistic references to women in classical Sufi literature. It focuses on the writings of Sanā'ī, 'Aṭṭār, Rūmī and Ibn 'Arabī. It looks primarily at the evidence provided in poetry, while the stances of select hagiographers are discussed in section 2.3. The opinions laid out in the Sufi manuals remain beyond this discussion. Hadith and verses of the Qur'an that impact conceptions of gender are discussed only insofar as they are referenced by mystics to support their arguments. This field of gender in the Qur'an and hadith is quite wide and has already been addressed in depth by several scholars.[86] Sanā'ī and Rūmī are closest to 'Aṭṭār in time, genre, and mystical worldview in the Persian literary canon, and so their views on gender are quite relevant to an investigation of 'Aṭṭār's attitude towards gender. Ibn 'Arabī, meanwhile, as a towering figure of mysticism and subject of several scholarly inquiries regarding gender representation, can help give us a glimpse of how a

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[86] To cite just a few starting points: Karen Bauer, *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'ān: Medieval Interpretations, Modern Responses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Aisha Geissinger, *Gender and the Construction of Exegetical Authority: A Rereading of the Classical Genre of Qur'an Commentary* (Brill, 2015); Aysha A Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*, ed. Oxford University Press (New York, NY : Oxford University Press, 2014); Megan H Reid, *Law and Piety in Medieval Islam*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 50–55; Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam*; Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*, Oneworld Classics (Oneworld, 2001).

sophisticated and freethinking Sufi philosopher, roughly concurrent with 'Aṭṭār, dealt with gender issues. While there are many ways patriarchal norms manifest themselves in these Sufi texts, this section points out a few that are especially pervasive or shockingly blunt. These are the kinds of moments that scholars have tended to focus on, in order to provide evidence for a 'negative' depiction of women in Sufi thought.[87] Beginning with the axiomatic declarations of female inferiority, we look at the ways weakness, cowardliness, and lack of faith become characteristics imbued with femininity. Then, the overview moves to representations of woman as the *dunyā*, the *nafs*, and as distractions or temptations. Finally, it makes brief reference to the social treatment of women within the patriarchal family as it appears in these texts.

Particularly in the realm of axiomatic statements, the Sufi writers consulted here provide ample evidence of a pervasive notion that the category of the feminine is ontologically inferior. Sanā'ī gives a shocking confirmation of the tendency in his society to prefer male children over female children. The passage suggests the ruinous nature of all children for the mystic, but especially girls:

<div dir="rtl">

کانکه را دختر است جای پسر   گرچه شاهست هست بد اختر

وآنکه او را دهیم ما صلوات   گفت کالمکرمات دفن بنات

چون بود با بنات نعش فلک   بر زمین جفت نعش به بیشک [...]

هرکرا دختر است خاصه فلاد   بهتر از گور نبودش داماد

</div>

For whoever has a daughter in place of a son,
Though he be a king, he is most ill-favoured.
And the one we offer our prayers to said,
'To bury girls is an honourable action.'[88]

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[87] Clear exceptions include Schimmel and Smith. Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*; Smith, *Rābiʿa the Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islām*.

[88] Reference here to the (in)famous hadith, recorded by al-Ṭabarānī (d. AH 360):

> Just as the girls are on a bier in heaven,
> So is it their rightful spouse on earth. [...]
> Whoever has a daughter, especially a useless one,
> There is no better son-in-law than the grave.[89]

Here Sanā'ī references a discredited hadith which implies that burying girls (and murdering them) is a good work. He also plays with the name of the constellation Cassiopeia, which literally means 'the bier of the girls' in Persian, in order to make his claim that fathers are better off without children, especially female ones. Although I made a concerted effort to find a potential ironic reading for this passage, I do not think such a reading is possible within the context. Neither is he caricaturing opposing views.

In 'Aṭṭār, being female is not taken to such extreme, but it is often associated with shame, weakness, cowardliness, and fear. Although there are many such examples to choose from, I have pulled out only a few here, which emphasise these negative qualities of womankind. Readers should note that the majority of these general statements arise in the *ghazals*, which perhaps makes sense given their propensity for the self-contained line and epigrammatic maxim:

<div dir="rtl">

دیگر نزنیم لاف مردی   وز شرم ره زنان گزینیم

</div>

<div dir="rtl">

الحمد لله دفنُ البناتِ من المُكرَمات

</div>

This hadith does not appear in *Saḥīḥ Bukharī* or *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, and is included in Ibn al-Jawzī's collection of false hadith, *Kitāb al-Mawḍū'āt*. Ḥafīẓ Abī al-Qāsim Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, ed. Ḥamdī 'Abd al-Majīd Salafī, 2nd edition (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1984), v. 11, p. 290, #12035; Abū al-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Alī Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Mawḍū'āt*, ed. 'Abd 'al-Raḥmān Muḥammad 'Uthmān (al-Madīna al-Munawwara: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1966), v. 2, p. 138.

[89] Abū al-Majd Majdūd b. Ādam Sanā'ī al-Ghaznavī, *Kitāb-i Ḥadīqat al-Ḥaqīqah va Sharī'at al-Ṭarīqah; Bi-Jami' va Taṣḥīḥ-i Mudarris Raḍavī.*, ed. Mudarris Raḍavī (Tehran: Sipihr, 1950), 658.

No longer can we boast of manliness,
But out of shame, we adopt the ladies' path.[90]

در هیبت حالی چنان گشتند مردان چون زنان   چه خیزد از تر دامنان چو تهمتن افتاده شد

In a state of such fear, the men became woman-like.
What becomes of the impure when the mighty [Rustam] has fallen?[91]

بود تردامن در اول چون زنان   وآخر اندر کار تو مردانه شد

At first he was impure like women.
In the end, he became manly in regards to You.[92]

شیرمردان مرد را اینجا   عالمی عذر شد زنانه پدید

For the (manly) lion-men,
Here there appeared an entire world of womanly excuses. [93]

As mentioned by Lewis, we have the equivalent class of insults by which men are compared to 'effeminate' men. These statements also reinforce the traditional gender hierarchy of men above women by emasculating those who do not conform to ideal masculinity:

خویش را از جهل میخوانی دلیر   زانکه برگرمابه دیدستی توشیر
چون ز بیشه بانگ شیر آید پدید   حیز از مرد دلیر آید پدید
در قدیمی راه مُحَدَث کی بوَد   رستمی کار مخنث کی بود

You call yourself brave out of ignorance
Because you once saw a lion on a bathhouse [wall]

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[90] Dīvān #638, 512.

[91] Dīvān #264, 207.

[92] Dīvān #265, 208.

[93] Dīvān #267, 210.

> When the roar of a lion emerges from the jungle
> A sissy comes out of the heroic man.
> In the ancient way, when is there innovation?
> When does a Rustam act like a catamite? [94]

These kinds of remarks function simply as the reversal of the 'women as Men of God' trope. Courage is framed as a masculine attribute, which physical weakness and psychological passivity are presented as female attributes. Both these types of evidence can be understood as ways to uphold the supreme position of masculinity in the hierarchy of mystics, although Chapter 3 tries to challenge this reading.

2.2.1 Woman as Snare, *Dunyā*, and *Nafs* in Mystical Writings

The idea of woman as trap, impediment to the mystic, or faithless temptress resonates widely across the tradition. In the early Sufi manuals, for example, many references are made to the distractions caused by women and family, and the virtues of celibacy.[95] Sanā'ī, meanwhile, appeals to woman as an example of deception:

آینه زن بُوَد نکو هُش دار   دام باشد به خواب بستن کار

> It is a trap, to attach any importance to a dream.
> A mirror is a woman, be well on your guard.[96]

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[94] MN: 17/7, 186.

[95] Valerie J Hoffman-Ladd, "Mysticism and Sexuality in Sufi Thought and Life," *Mystics Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (September 1, 1992): 83–84; Kaoru Aoyagi, "Al-Ghazālī and Marriage from the Viewpoint of Sufism," *Orient* XL (2005): 124–39; Shahzad Bashir, "Islamic Tradition and Celibacy," in *Celibacy and Religious Traditions*, ed. Carl Olson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 133–50.

[96] Sanā'ī al-Ghaznavī, *Kitāb-i Ḥadīqat al-Ḥaqīqah*, 123.

In this passage from the *Ḥadīqat al-Ḥaqīqa*, Sanā'ī gives a long homily on the false appearances of dreams and uses a number of metaphors to convey how everything one does in dreams turns out the opposite of one's wish. Dreams, in this case, represent the beguiling façade of this world, while being 'awake,' according to typical Sufi language, would correspond to awareness of the divine presence (*hushyārī, bīdārī*). Thus he pairs 'dream' with 'mirror' and 'trap' with 'woman,' implying that woman's duplicity is analogous to the dream's.

Extending this initial idea of woman as trap, many Sufi authors identify the *dunyā* with a woman – typically a seductress – a motif which has great precedent in the mystical tradition. For example, the well-known '*Ayvān-i Madā'in*' *qaṣīda* of Khāqānī Shirvānī (d. ca. 1187) contains an extended conceit comparing the world to a vicious murderer, a pregnant woman who devours her own children:

ز ایشان شکم خاک است آبستن جاویدان	گفتی که کجا رفتند آن تاجوران اینک
دشوار بود زادن، نطفه ستدن آسان	بس دیر همی زاید آبستن خاک آری
ز آب و گل پرویز است آن خم که نهد دهقان	خون دل شیرین است آن می که دهد رزین
این گرسنه چشم آخر هم سیر نشد ز ایشان	چندین تن جباران کاین خاک فرو خورده‌است
این زال سپید ابرو وین مام سیه پستان	از خون دل طفلان سرخاب رخ آمیزد

> Where have those kings gone to now, you ask?
> The stomach of the earth is eternally pregnant with them.
> A pregnant earth giving birth is a long time coming, yes –
> Giving birth is difficult, but sowing the seed is easy.
> The heart's blood is sweet, that wine that the grapevine gives.
> The fortified wine that the landholders produce is from the clay and water of
>   Parvīz.
> The body of many a tyrant has this earth consumed.
> [Yet] this hungry-eyed one is never satiated with them.
> This old white-eyebrowed hag and black-breasted mother

Mixes the blood of the hearts of children as rouge for her cheeks.[97]

The image of the old hag here stands in for the vicious, ugly lower world. Even the classic image of the earth as a mother, typically a positive image of earth bursting with fecundity and creative force,[98] is turned on its head as the earth becomes a woman 'pregnant' with the bodies of the dead. Khāqānī makes the image even more gruesome as he reverses giving birth into an image of consumption, and characterises the earth-woman as a murderess of children.

But Khāqānī is not alone in his shocking portrayal of the grotesque old woman as an allegory for the *dunyā*. 'Aṭṭār takes a similar approach to the allegorical *dunyā* in the following anecdote, though he puts more emphasis on the seductress angle. In this way, 'Aṭṭār highlights the temptations of this world as a choice, rather than emphasising the inevitability of the world's betrayal. In this story, an incredibly ugly woman disguises herself in order to seduce and murder men:

بسی دیدار دنیا آرزو داشت	مسیح پاک کز دنیا علو داشت
بره در پیر زالی دید از دور	مگر می‌رفت روزی غرقهٔ نور
فتاده جملهٔ دندانش از هم	سپیدش گشته موی و پشتِ او خم
نجاست می‌دمید از چار سویش	دو چشمش ازرق و چون قیر رویش
دلی پر کین میان چنگ بودش	بر درجامهٔ صد رنگ بودش
دگر دستش بخون آلوده پیوست	بصد رنگی نگارین کرده یک دست
فرو هشته بروی او نقابی	بهر موییش منقار عُقابی

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[97] Julie Scott Meisami, "Khāqānī, Elegy on Madā'in," in *Qaṣida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa II. Eulogy's Bounty, Meaning's Abundance: An Anthology*, ed. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle (Leiden: New York: Köln, 1996), 162–69. Meisami includes the Persian with her translation. This translation is my own.

[98] Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives*, 123-31.

بگو تا کیستی ای زشتِ مختال   چو عیسی دید او را گفت ای زال

> The pure Messiah, who was high above this [lower] world,
> Greatly wished to see it.
> It just so happened one day he was walking, bathed in light,
> And saw an old woman from afar on the road.
> Her hair had grown white, her back, hunched,
> And all of her teeth had fallen out.
> Her two eyes were blue and her face, black like pitch.
> Impurity (*nijāsat*) sprang up all around her.
> She wore a garment of a hundred different colours.
> She had a heart full of malice in her clutches.
> One hand she had painted a myriad of colours.
> The other was always covered in blood.
> With every hair of hers, an eagle's beak
> Cast a veil down over her face.
> When Jesus saw her, he said,
> 'Say who you are, old woman – haughty and hideous!'[99]

Down to her very appearance, the old woman is presented as grotesque in every way. Her blue eyes are an indication of evil, which was a common motif in early Arabian and Islamicate folklore.[100] Though others are seduced by her colourful disguise, Jesus sees straight through to the woman's (and therefore, by extension, the world's) true ugliness. While Khāqānī presents the world as a mother-murderess, who gives birth to humans and will eventually kill them, 'Aṭṭār's chooses to embody the *dunyā* as an ensnaring seductress. In this way, he emphasises man's role in the act of seduction and highlights his choice in the matter. In Khāqānī's vision, man has no choice but to be born and

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[99] IN 5/3, 91-92.

[100] Kristina Richardson, "Blue and Green Eyes in the Islamicate Middle Ages," *Annales Islamologiques* 48, no. 1 (2014): 13–30. The motif of the blue-eyed hag could be based on the infamous witch of 7th-century Arabian folklore, Zarqāʾ al-Yamāma.

endure the *dunyā*, while ‘Aṭṭār gives humans more agency by suggesting that to embrace the *dunyā* is a decision to turn one’s back on the mystical Path.

‘Aṭṭār develops the woman-*dunyā* conceit further, and when Jesus asks about herself, she confesses to being a murderer of men:

<div dir="rtl">

که تا هرگز نبیند کس عیانم   چنین گفت او که در پردہ ازانم

کجا یک لحظه پیش من نشینند   که گر رویم بدین زشتی ببینند

که گم ره عالمی زین کردہام من   ازان این جامه رنگین کردہام من

همه ناکام مهر من گزینند   مرا چون جامه رنگارنگ بینند

چرا یک دست خون آلودہ داری   مسیحش گفت ای زندانِ خواری

ز بس شوهر که کُشتم در زمانه   جوابش داد کای صدر یگانه

</div>

> Thus she said, ‘I am covered by a veil,
> ‘So that no one will see me plainly.
> ‘For if they saw my face, which is so ugly,
> ‘When would they ever sit for a moment beside me?
> ‘That’s why I wear such colourful clothing.
> ‘This is how I’ve led an entire world astray.
> ‘When they see me wearing my multi-coloured outfit,
> ‘Inevitably, they all choose my love.’
> ‘O lowly prison,’ said the Messiah,
> ‘Why is one of your hands covered in blood?’
> ‘O Unique one, vanguard of all,’ she replied,
> ‘It is from the many husbands I have murdered over time.’[101]

This allegorical depiction of woman as a murdering temptress veers into misogynistic stereotype. ‘Aṭṭār reinforces patriarchal paradigms by identifying woman so clearly with the temptations of this world, implying that this world-woman deliberately leads the presumed male reader astray.

Rūmī makes similar comparisons in his *Dīvān*:

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[101] IN 5/3, 92.

گلگونه نهد بر رو آن روسپی زرده   دنیا نبود عیدم من زشتی او دیدم

The world is no jubilee for me; I have seen how repulsive it is.
That jaundiced prostitute covers her cheeks with blush. [102]

آنک حریفیش پیش و آن دگرش در قفاست   عالم دون روسپیست چیست نشانی آن
بوسه او نه از وفاست خلعت او نه از عطاست   چونک به راهش کند آن به برش درکشد

This world is just like a prostitute – and how do we know?
One companion comes first and the other right after.
When it sends one off, it embraces another.
Its kiss is no sign of loyalty, its robe, no sign of generosity. [103]

Despite all this, these highly allegorical depictions of women have more in common with the generic axioms than they have with representations of most female characters in 'Aṭṭār and the female saints in the hagiographical source material. In the cases of the allegorical women, negative images of women abound, while the narrative representations are much more likely to function as the site of challenge to the patriarchal order.

Although Rūmī and Ibn 'Arabī tend to be, in secondary sources, associated with a more 'positive' approach to women generally[104], they can also be shown to make

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[102] Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Kullīyāt-i Shams-i Tabrīzī: Az Āthār-i Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Mawlavī Rūmī*, ed. 'Alī Dahstī and Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1957), #938, 395.

[103] Ibid., #630, 279.

[104] Scholars often point to the 'Sophianic Feminine' aspect of the sources, following in the footsteps of Corbin. See in particular Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 159-70; Austin, "The Sophianic Feminine," 238-42; Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*, 102-4; Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives*, 177-84; Fatemeh Keshavarz, "Pregnant with God: The

the all too logical connection between woman and the feminine noun *dunyā'*, or to uphold the position that the female is inherently inferior. In a very memorable episode, Rūmī depicts the *dunyā* as an old woman who tears up the Qur'an and pastes the pieces to her face to look beautiful:

می‌بچفسانید بر رو آن پلید   عشرهای مصحف از جا می‌برید

تا نگین حلقهٔ خوبان شود   تا که سفره روی او پنهان شود

> She tore off pieces of pages of the holy book
> And pasted them to her face, that foul one,
> So the cloth of her face would become hidden,
> So she would be the gemstone, set in the ring of beauties. [105]

Thus the old woman's vanity is compounded by the sacrilegious act she undertakes, defiling the holy book for the sake of a deceiving external appearance.

In addition to identifying women with the *dunyā*, early mystical writings often embodied the negatively-connotated *nafs* (*al-ammāra bil-sū'*) in a feminine form as well. As Annemarie Schimmel notes, this was likely because of the feminine grammatical gender of this word in Arabic.[106] Since Schimmel has discussed this phenomenon in some depth, I will provide just one example here from a source contemporary to 'Aṭṭār. As Hamid Algar translates from Najm al-Dīn Rāzī:

Poetic Art of Mothering the Sacred In Rumi's Fihi Ma Fih," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 22, no. 1–2 (2002): 98.

[105]Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Mathnavī-yi Maʿnavī: Az Rū-yi Ṭabʿ-i Nīkulsūn (Nicholson)*, ed. Mihdi Ādhar-yazdī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Pazhūhish, 1374). 6/981, ln. 1275-76.

[106] Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*, 71. See also Rkia Elaroui Cornell, "'Soul of Woman Was Created Below': Woman as the Lower Soul (*Nafs*) in Islam," in *World Religions and Evil: Religious and Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Hendrik M Vroom (New York: Rodopi, 2007), 257–80.

> 'From the marriage of *ruh* (the soul) and *qalib* (the body) two offspring were born: *nafs* (the animal soul) and *dil* (the heart). The heart was a body who resembled his father, the soul, and the animal soul was a girl who resembled the earthly body of the mother. The heart was full of desirable spiritual attributes, whereas all that was found in the animal soul was earthly and base.'[107]

For Rāzī at least, the *nafs* is envisioned as female and has ties to the baser materiality of the human form. This connection between femininity and physicality will come up again in 'Aṭṭār, particularly as discussed in Chapter 5.

Even Ibn 'Arabī falls back on these stereotypical representations on occasion, though he makes complex against-the-grain arguments to support, for example, a woman's right to testify as a sole witness in certain cases, and consistently provides atypical readings. Ibn 'Arabī is unable to reinterpret the famed '*daraja*' verse of the Qur'an such that it falls in women's favour, despite the fact that a simple glance at the verse in question in context, instead of stripped of context as it is usually commented upon, deadens the supposed misogynistic impact of the line.[108] The Qur'anic verse states, 'and men are a degree above them' (*wa lil-rijāli 'alayhunna darajatun*), in the

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[107] Hamid Algar, *The Path of God's Bondsmen from Origin to Return: A Sufi Compendium by Najm al-Din Razi* (New York: Delmar, 1982), 66.

[108] This is indeed how modern Islamic feminist critics have begun to try to recover it and rehabilitate the Qur'an as a text fairly open to gender-egalitarian re-interpretations. Critics like Barlas, Wadud, and Shaikh have all at different points suggested that the Quranic commentators are often the ones 'who sculpted onto the [Qur'anic] narratives layers of misogyny.' Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives*, 150; Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'ān*, 1st ed (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002) 167-69; A Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 2.

context of divorce law, and may even be interpreted as the increased responsibility a husband owes a wife who is divorcing him.[109] In a pattern she finds to be typical of the commentary tradition, Karen Bauer summarises the ways in which the rights, superiority, and privileges granted men via this '*daraja*' were continually expanded by later (male) exegetes.[110] Ibn 'Arabī does not break much with tradition and analyses the verse as follows:

> 'Even though the human is an epitome of the cosmos, he will never reach its level in totality. Likewise, the woman can never reach the level [*daraja*] of men, despite the fact that she is choicest [*naqāwa*] of the epitome. [...] There is a reason why women were viewed as deficient in intellect compared to men: women's understanding derives from the measure [of intellect] taken from primordial man during the root of configuration. [...] Woman's preparation falls short of the preparation of man [during the root configuration] because [at the time] she was incubated in man. Therefore, with respect to deficiency of religion, woman is distinct from man.'

Even Ibn 'Arabī, that most creative of interpreters often unconstrained by convention, is unable to ignore or reinterpret the hadith which posits woman's fundamental inferiority because of her origin within man, as a part of his rib. As several commentators have demonstrated, the influence of Q 2:228, and the related hadith in which the Prophet refers to woman's deficiency in intellect and religion, was pervasive and wide-ranging.[111] These subtexts are hovering in the background of any of the authors' texts

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[109] Q 2:228, trans. Pickthall. Marmaduke William Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation* (London: A.A. Knopf, 1930).

[110] Karen Bauer, "Room for Interpretation: Quranic Exegesis and Gender" (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2008), 64, 102; Karen Bauer, *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'ān: Medieval Interpretations, Modern Responses* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2015), 168.

[111] Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, 149.

surveyed here, and they must necessarily be read in dialogue with these sorts of women-demeaning ideas.[112]

In addition to these kinds of explicit denigrations of women's abilities, as a sex broadly conceived, we find other, more implicit indications of patriarchal context littering these texts. While many of the statements above are openly hostile towards women or derogatory, there are also more subtle references to patriarchal attitudes and practices which appear to have been prevalent in the period. The strategies employed by the text to affirm women's lower status include: framing wives as a distraction from the Path, interpreting the difficulties of having a wife as a God-given trial of faith, referring to women as property, consistently referencing women's beauty as her most important attribute, affirming the husband's right to beat his wife, and upholding the traditional significance of virginity, which takes on disproportionate significance for women.[113] All of these indications taken together point to a demonstrably patriarchal society. To give just a few examples from 'Aṭṭār in particular, in the *Ilāhī-nāmah*, marriage or family ties are portrayed as obstacles to spiritual advancement. In one tale, an old man marries a young girl but they do not get along well. The old man is encouraged by the authorial aside to sever his ties with the girl, not for her benefit, but for his own:

<div dir="rtl">

چه سازی چون زنان با چرخ گردان   برافشان هرچه داری همچو مردان

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[112] This is in fact why Rkia Cornell argues that Sulamī consistently refers to the 'intellect' and 'wisdom' of the women in his hagiography – it is in order to specifically combat the image perpetuated by the deficiency hadith. Sulamī and Cornell, *Early Sufi Women: Dhikr al-Niswah al-Mutaʿabbidāt aṣ-Ṣūfiyyāt*, 63.

[113] See for example the story of a bride whose lack of virginity is discovered after marriage. IN 10/9, 177-79.

Cast off everything you have, just like the Men [of God].
Why concern yourself with a spinning wheel, like women?[114]

Concern for worldly cares is posited as a primarily female attribute, via comparison with the apparently feminine activity of spinning. '*Charkh-i gardān*' means both the turning wheel, i.e. fate, and a literal wheel for spinning. Annemarie Schimmel notes several examples in which the awful wife is framed as a test for the husband seeking to advance on the Path. 'Thus,' she writes, 'married life could be considered, by some, as a substitute for the hellfire the saint may escape when patiently enduring the afflictions brought upon him by a nasty, misbehaving, or talkative spouse.'[115]Perhaps unsurprisingly, 'Aṭṭār refers in several places to a man's *māl va dukhtar*, 'property and daughter(s),' in one set phrase which connotes everything a man owns.[116] Furthermore, he confirms a man's right to beat his wife, in an anecdote from the *Muṣībat-nāmah*:

<div dir="rtl">

گرچه میرنجانمش هر وقت سخت   مینگوید ترک این آن شور بخت [...]

خواجه گفت ای مرد اگر رنجانیش   هر زمان سرگشته تر گردانیش

گر بگوئی از سر لطفیش راز   او دگر نکند زفان هرگز دراز

</div>

'Though I beat her hard every time,
She will not lay off [cursing Abū Bakr], that despicable one.' [...]
'Dear man,' said the master. 'If you beat her,
'You'll make her more confused every moment.
'If you tell her kindly the secret of the matter,
'Never again will she lash out with her tongue.' [117]

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[114] IN 17.7: 257.

[115] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 428.

[116] Dīvān: Qaṣīda #1, 704; MṬ 28.

[117] MN 0/13, 39.

The anecdote and its accompanying moral do not have an issue with the man beating his wife in principle, but oppose it because it would prove an ineffective strategy here to convince the wife not to curse Abū Bakr. These are just a few instances of the ways in which 'Aṭṭār upholds patriarchal norms and values.

This section has demonstrated the ways in which Sufi authors, including 'Aṭṭār, can conform to patriarchal attitudes towards women in their writings in certain moments. These pieces of evidence show us a range of misogynist material, from the pointed remarks about women's deficiencies in intellect, bravery, and piety, to examples which reveal and underlying association of women with the bottom of the hierarchy. These moments occur particularly, in cases where the authors discuss women in general and femininity as an ontological category with essentialist overtones. They also occur commonly in cases where the women are highly transparent allegories, especially for the *dunyā* or the *nafs*. Finally, we see that a generally restrictive treatment of female sexuality is maintained, whereby women are expected to remain chaste until marriage and perform their sexual obligations to their husbands. 'Aṭṭār, at least, does not condone a husband using violence against his wife, but he does not seem particularly opposed to it on principle alone. Women are also expected to marry and provide children, thereby securing the parents' salvation in the afterlife by following the *sunna* of the Prophet. The very palpable tinge of misogyny permeates the texts, and certainly the effects of a patriarchal power structure are observable. This is not the only kind of evidence one finds, but to ignore it would be disingenuous. This section shows that if one approaches the sources looking to 'sift' them for misogyny, as Julie Meisami calls it, one will find what one is searching for. The results, however, may not be representative. The remaining chapters of the thesis, therefore, take on the other side of the story in an attempt to show the variable and inconsistent approach to gender taken by the sources.

2.3 Reasons for Writing and Explanations for the Presence of Women in the Hagiographies

If the previous section sought to determine how certain Sufi texts of the 12th and 13th centuries dealt with the category of 'woman,' this section examines another place where we might find observations of womankind—the metatextual commentaries of the hagiographers on their female saints. This material is naturally of completely

different content and aim. This section combs through in detail the authors' attempts to theoretically justify the presence of women in their writings, particularly the presence of numerous female saints in the biographical literature. The Sufi conflict with patriarchy, which is at the centre of this thesis, is succinctly represented in the following, highly contradictory passages. These passages vacillate between reclaiming women saints as 'men of God,' pointing to the irrelevance of gender to the Path, and heralding pious women as above men. I argue that these varying approaches do not necessarily need to be reconciled, but rather are representative of the constant struggle to keep gender constructs in place.

In describing a similar degree of apparent gender confusion in Ibn ʿArabī, Shaikh writes that Ibn ʿArabī presents us with several competing narratives of the creation story, 'each one displacing its predecessor so that the result is a veritable house of mirrors.' In this way, gender 'is never quite grasped definitively but is constantly shifting and opening up expansive spaces for understanding human nature.' In her analysis of Ibn ʿArabī's texts on gender, she identifies three seemingly contradictory approaches, which she argues are actually mutually constitutive.

> First, on many occasions, [Ibn ʿArabī's] views reflect normative assumptions of male superiority. Second, Ibn ʿArabī presents his readers with universal notions of humanity, pointing to the human condition while actively asserting the shared humanity (*insāniyya*) of both sexes at all levels of spiritual attainment. Third, he suggests women's superiority over men by presenting particular ways in which women uniquely or more powerfully manifest the divine. The different articulations of gender, arrived at in unpredictable and idiosyncratic ways, creatively destabilize most readers' assumptions about gender.[118]

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[118] Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives*, 150-51.

While 'Aṭṭār definitely provides all three of these types of evidence, I hesitate to ascribe to it the same degree of intentionality. I am not sure that the 'house of mirrors' effect in 'Aṭṭār is the result of a premeditated attempt to displace traditional readings of gender, or simply the end product of the conflict between Sufism's gender egalitarianism and the expected gender hierarchy in a patriarchal society. In either case, we will never know the motivations, and regardless of the purposefulness of its composition, the result remains clear – a contradictory and shifting approach to gender and gender relations in the sources. In this section, I will explore these contradictory approaches as laid out by 'Aṭṭār, as well as those presented by the other hagiographers considered in the dissertation, Ibn al-Jawzī and Jāmī. The representation of women within these hagiographies, and why these texts should be read together, is discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

2.3.1 'Aṭṭār's Aim in Writing the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*

Before we can consider how gender influences the representation of sainthood, we must first look at the authors' various explanations of why they chose to write their respective hagiographies at all. This section will give a brief overview of how the authors justify the enterprise of cataloguing saints and consider what these justifications reveal to us in relation to their respective agendas. A number of 'Aṭṭār's reasons for writing the *Tadhkirat* are conventional. He states that he saw a 'strong interest amongst my friends in the words of this group' and he composed it 'so that I should be remembered.'[1] Beyond the more conventional reasons, 'Aṭṭār explains his view regarding the value of the saints' words. The argument runs as follows:

دیگر باعث آن بود که بعد از قرآن و احادیث بهترین سخنها سخن ایشان دیدم و جملهٔ سخن ایشان شرح قرآن و احادیث دیدم. خود را بدین شغل درافگندم تا اگر از ایشان نیستم باری خود را با ایشان تشبه کرده باشم که من تشبه بقوم فهو منهم. چنانکه جنید – رحمة الله علیه – گفت که مدعیان را نیکو دارید که ایشان محقق نمایند و پای ایشان بوسه دهید که اگر همتی بلند نداشتندی به چیزی دیگر دعوی کردندی.

> Another reason [I composed this book] is that after the Qur'an and hadith, the greatest pieces of wisdom are their sayings, and I consider their sayings to be commentary (*sharḥ*) on the Qur'an and hadith. I then set myself to work on this so that, even though I am not one of them (i.e. the *awliyā'*), then I can still make myself similar to them, for *whoever imitates a people is one of them*. Just as Junayd (God rest his soul) said, 'Be kind to the imposters who appear to be

among the [spiritually] realised, and kiss their feet; for if they had not such high ambitions they would claim something else.'[119]

This short paragraph is representative of much of the style of argumentation 'Aṭṭār pursues in his introduction. He claims that the saints' words are the greatest pieces of wisdom outside the Qur'an and Hadith, and sees them as a commentary (sharḥ) of both. He then follows this claim with a popular hadith, and a quote from Junayd. His hadith citation implies that by imitating the saints, a seeker can become 'saint-like,' if not a saint him or herself.

Although 'Aṭṭār separates his preface into 15 sections, each beginning with 'dīgar bā'ith' and each containing a reason for writing, most of the attempts at *captatio benevolentiae* boil down to the two techniques we have just discussed – referring to the requests of others, and legitimation by hadith and sayings of famous Sufis. However, there are two other reasons 'Aṭṭār presents that are of particular interest for us in terms of interpreting his portrayal of female saints. First is his proclamation in favour of vernacularising the scriptures for the masses:

دیگر باعث آن بود که چون قرآن و اخبار را لغت و نحو تصریف می‌بایست و بیشتر خلق از معانی آن بهره‌ای نمی‌توانستند گرفت این سخنان که شرح آن است و خاص و عام را در وی نصیب است ـ اگرچه بیشتر به تازی بود ـ با زبان پارسی آوردم تا همه را شامل بود.

> Another reason [I composed this work] is that the Qur'an and the hadith contain words and grammar that require clarification, and most people cannot benefit from the meanings therein. These sayings [function as] commentaries upon them. There are gains in these texts for high and low alike – though they

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[119] TA, ed. Isti'lāmī, 8.

are mainly in Arabic, I have rendered them in Persian so that everyone may be included.[120]

'Aṭṭār thus makes clear his agenda of spreading the scripture to as broad an audience as possible and extending the benefits of studying them to both average people and nobility (*khāṣṣ va 'ām*).

A second point of interest for our purposes is 'Aṭṭār's insistence on the instructional value of these texts, couched in the language of a gender hierarchy.

و توان گفتن که این کتابی است که مخنثان را مرد کند و مردان را شیرمرد کند و شیرمردان را فرد کند و فردان را عین درد گرداند. و چگونه عین درد نگرداند؟ که هرکه این کتاب ـ چنان که شرط است ـ برخواند و بنگرد آگاه گردد که این چه درد بوده است در جان‌های ایشان که چنین کارها و از این شیوه سخن‌ها از دل ایشان به صحرا آمده است!

> It could be said that this is a book which turns hermaphrodites into men, men into lion-hearted men, lion-hearted men into exemplars, and exemplars into sources of pain/compassion. How could they not become wellsprings of compassion? For whoever reads this book – according to how it was meant to be read – and looks at it, will come to know what kind of pain in their souls has caused such works and words of wisdom to spring forth from their hearts.[121]

This passage is fascinating in that it reveals, and yet partly transcends, a fundamental gender paradigm which underlies 'Aṭṭār's work and indeed, many other Sufi and Islamic writings of the medieval period. This is a paradigm that Franklin Lewis points out in his study of gender and conversion in 'Aṭṭār, namely the relationship between male/Muslim/positive and female/*kāfir*/negative.[122] Based on my readings in 'Aṭṭār, I would also add to that second category the catamite and hermaphrodite. Although the

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[120] TA, 7.

[121] TA, 9. I am not certain of this reading of '*chinān ki sharṭ ast*.'

[122] Lewis, "Sexual Occidentation," 695.

passage does not mention women, it implies a clear hierarchy of piety that progresses from hermaphrodite, to men, to lion-hearted men (*shīr-mardān*), to individuals/exemplars (*fardān*), to wellsprings of pain (*'ayn-i dard*). Based on 'Aṭṭār's famous masculinised descriptions of Rābi'a, which are discussed in detail below, the reader can guess that women would fall below men, and probably below hermaphrodites on this hierarchy, that is, if they are meant to be included at all.[123] Although this passage reinforces the patriarchal paradigm outlined above, it also transcends it in the sense that the final two levels one can attain are specifically genderless. Rābi'a 'Adawiyya, for example, is referred to by both the epithets *shīr-mard* and *'ayn-i dard* in 'Aṭṭār's writings.

Part of reaching the highest levels of piety, therefore, is a requirement to lose one's gender whilst rising through the ranks. Scott Kugle makes a similar observation in his study of the bodies of Sufi saints:

> [A]ll saints, women and men, break patriarchal norms, since the goal of sainthood itself is to cultivate an integrated personality that transcends gender divisions. […] Men become saints by tapping 'feminine' qualities that are normally hidden or repressed in men, while women become saints by tapping 'masculine' qualities within themselves that ordinary women do not actively manifest.[124]

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[123] Most likely is that women were not thought to be part of 'Aṭṭār's audience and as such are left out entirely. Schimmel cites a 13th-century Arabic saying which would indicate the hierarchy more completely: 'Whoever seeks the Lord is a male, whoever seeks the otherworld is a passive pederast, whoever seeks the world is a female.' Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman*, 76.

[124] Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

Indeed it should not surprise us that female saints (and male saints, as Kugle claims) break gender norms. The entire basis of most saints' fame rests on their ability to transcend the laws of physics by performing *karamāt*, defy the needs of the body, or overcome disadvantages dealt them by poverty, class, or race. Gender simply complements the list of societal norms that can or must be broken by saints in order to attain the highest degree of earthly spiritual authority below prophethood, *wilāya*.

One must be careful, however, in relying simply on 'Aṭṭār's word choice in this passage to make such a claim. Part of the reason for choosing *fardān* (and not the admittedly more common, but different in meaning, *afrād*) is 'Aṭṭār's eye for *saj'*. We have the rhyming *mard*, *fard*, *dard*, and *mardān*, *fardān* several times. In order to support the idea that 'Aṭṭār's work relies on gender divisions, but ultimately attempts to transcend them, we must look beyond his words about his work and delve into the anecdotes themselves.

2.3.2 'Aṭṭār's Justification for Including Rābi'a

As Rābi'a is the only woman treated in an independent entry in 'Aṭṭār's biography (which includes ninety-five independent entries on men), her biography is a significant place to look for evidence of how the presence of female saints was justified. 'Aṭṭār offers three reasons justifying Rābi'a's appearance here, some of which seem contradictory. However, we can resolve the tension between his varying reasons if we keep in mind that some of the text's rationalising may be a result of the fact that genre conventions require that Rābi'a be characterised as a man, or *mard* in the Sufi sense. Furthermore, these seemingly contradictory statements allow 'Aṭṭār to present a range of possible readers with a broad spectrum of justifications in an attempt to engage these

readers with differing rhetorical strategies. 'Aṭṭār supports his first justification for including Rābi'a in his biography of men with a hadith:

خواجهٔ انبیا – علیه الصّلاة والسّلام – می‌فرماید که إنّ الله لا یَنظر إلى صُوَرِکم. کار، به صورت نیست. به نیت نیکوست.

> The Master of Prophets (peace and blessing be upon him) declares: *God does not regard your forms*. It is not a matter of form but of right intention.[125]

His first reason for including Rābi'a is that the prophet says God does not pay attention to human forms, thus neither should we when choosing who is to be regarded as a saint or friend of God. This reasoning in itself seems appropriate, but conflicts with the illustration he gives of this point. After telling the reader that form is unimportant, he proceeds in the following line:

اگر رواست ثلثان دین از عایشهٔ صدیقه – رضی الله عنها – گرفتن، هم رواست از کنیزکان او فایده گرفتن.

> If it is right to derive two-thirds of religion from 'A'esha-ye Sadeqa (God be pleased with her), then it is also right to derive benefit from one of His maidservants.[126]

Gender is in fact relevant to the justification then, since 'Aṭṭār looks for a precedent of citing female Muslims in Islamic tradition. His recourse is to 'Aisha, daughter of the first caliph Abū Bakr and wife of Prophet Muhammad, who was often cited as a source for hadith. This illustration seems to contradict his earlier point that form or gender is

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[125] NTA #08, 59.

[126] NTA #08, 59. This line is left out of Isti'lāmī. Otherwise the opening passages to Rābi'a's biographies are identical. Translated by Paul Losensky, *Memorial of God's Friends*, 97.

immaterial, since it relies on the precedent of another woman's influence on the male world of legitimate transmission of traditions; however, I will show in the following paragraphs that the two justifications are not necessarily at odds.

We can understand the tension between 'Aṭṭār's varying justifications as a reflection of the tension between his philosophy, according to which gender should not matter, and the expectations of the genre, born out of the hadith manuals and often called *kutub al-rijāl* or the 'Books of Men.' The sources consequently place a heavy emphasis on the masculinity of these saint figures.

<div dir="rtl">چون زن در راه خدای – تعالی – مرد باشد، او را زن نتوان گفت.</div>

> Because a woman on the path of the Lord most high is a man, she cannot be called a woman.[127]

Here 'Aṭṭār explicitly defines Rābi'a as a man because of her piety; there is no such thing as a Woman of the Way, so if a woman wants to be a Man of the Way, apparently she must literally be thought of as a man. Few statements in Rābi'a's biography have generated so much debate amongst scholars as this one. Some have taken it simply to refer to the *mard* as the ideal human or *sālik* on the Path, much like the concept of the *insān-i kāmil*.[128] Such a reading in itself contains a gendered comment about the 'standard,' unmarked nature of masculinity. Others have taken it as a clear indication that female spiritual accomplishments cannot exist *a priori* and must be reinterpreted

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[127] NTA #08, 59.

[128] Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*, 19-20; Smith, *Rābiʿa the Mystic*; Michael Anthony. Sells, "Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological Writings," *The Classics of Western Spirituality* ; 86, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 155.

into the male domain.[129] Cornell points out that this gender redefinition becomes a trope in Sufi biographical literature:

> For example, when Dhū an-Nūn al-Miṣrī calls Fāṭima of Nishapur 'my [male] teacher (*ustādhī*),' [aṭ-Ṭanāḥī, the first editor of the Arabic edition of al-Sulamī's *Dhikr al-Niswa*] dismisses this as a 'linguistic anomaly' (*ṭurfa lughawiyya*). More than just an anomaly, this use of gendered terminology is an example of what was to become a recurring trope in Sufi literature: that of elevating exceptional women to the ranks of honorary men.[130]

I side with Cornell, Schimmel and Smith and have come to the conclusion that 'Aṭṭār draws on convention when he points out the inner masculinity of accomplished women on the Sufi path, and it is not particularly unusual to highlight the 'masculine' identity of Rābi'a. However, this characterisation is not devoid of gendered comment. Valerie Hoffman-Ladd parses the line well when she writes, 'Although this "compliment" paid to Rābi'a implies the degradation of the female sex as a whole and suggests that true spirituality is normally found only among men, it also indicates that the sex of the body is not a barrier to the inspiration and grace of God.'[131]

Immediately following this statement, 'Aṭṭār reiterates his initial reason, that gender is negligible in the eyes of God, at the end of his preface to Rābi'a's chapter. He writes:

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[129] Heidi A Ford, "Hierarchical Inversions, Divine Subversions: The Miracles of Rābi'a al-'Adawīya," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 15, no. 2 (1999): 5–24; Marcia K Hermansen, "The Female Hero in the Islamic Religious Tradition," *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions: Heroic Women* 2 (1992): 111–44.

[130] Sulamī and Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 45.

[131] Valerie J Hoffman-Ladd, "Mysticism and Sexuality in Sufi Thought and Life," *Mystics Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (September 1, 1992): 83.

کسی که اگر در مجلس حسن [بصری] حاضر نبودی، مجلس نگفتی، لاجرم ذکر او در صفّ رجال توان کرد. بل که از روی حقیقت آنجا که این قوم اند، همه نیستِ توحیدند. در توحید، وجود من و تو کِی ماند؟ تا به مرد و زن چه رسد!

> When Hasan of Basra would not hold a prayer meeting unless a certain person were present, then certainly that person's memorial can be entered in the ranks of men. Indeed, to tell the truth, where this folk are concerned, all are the nothingness of unity (*tawḥīd*). In unity, how can the existence of 'me' and 'you' remain, much less 'man' and 'woman'?[132]

This idea that gender no longer exists when in *tawḥīd* fits nicely with 'Aṭṭār's first argument, in which he quoted the Prophet about God's lack of concern for human forms. Both of these statements suggest a transcendence of gender lines, while 'Aṭṭār's second and third justifications fall back on concepts of male and female. These statements help reconcile for 'Aṭṭār's readers the conventions of the genre and his entry on Rābi'a. The rhetorical strategy of this passage is to provide several justifications in order to resonate with the broadest spectrum of readers. Whether the internal logic of these justifications conflicts does not seem to be of consequence.

2.3.3 Jāmī's *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*

Jāmī's biography of saints, *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*, is also of value to us here as one of the few premodern Sufi sources including a significant number of women (34). Even though he writes well after 'Aṭṭār, he borrows greatly from the same sources predating 'Aṭṭār, and therefore throws 'Aṭṭār's choices with his material even more starkly into relief. Jāmī's work is structured by several organising principles. The first part of the biography, by far the most substantial part, contains only men, while a few entries on

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[132] NTA #08, 59. Adapted from Losensky's translation.

women are appended at the end. Within the section on female saints, the women are sorted by fame and locale, and are followed by the anonymous women whose names are unknown or unreported.[133] Both Malti-Douglas, in her discussion of adab literature, and Ruth Roded, in her analysis of Islamic biographies, hold that the structure of classical biographies and *adab* works corresponds to the social hierarchy in descending order of importance. Typically, the later in the book, the more marginalised the figure or type is.[134] But could the anonymity of the last women mentioned in the biography reflect, rather than marginalisation, a greater degree of success in effacing the self, to the point of losing one's very name? This is an attractive idea that gels nicely with the exhortation appearing commonly in Sufi texts not to cultivate religious fame and the warnings they give against hypocrisy, as well as the ultimate goal of annihilating the *nafs*. However, it ultimately does not fit with the overall pattern by which the sources are organised. First, perhaps as a result of the lack of onomastic identity, the anonymous women are usually attributed a greater number of other identity markers to make up for this. For example, it is mentioned that she is black, a slave, blind, or mad, or some combination of distinguishing characteristics that mark her individuality. If these women were truly represented as dissociated from the self, it seems unlikely that they would be over-identified in such a way. Second, many of the anonymous entries are extremely short and contain only one report from a named transmitter. As such, their entries appear more like afterthoughts or appendages, perhaps even added to the body of the text from a report that is primarily about someone else. Instead of functioning as the

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[133] The text also appears to be, to a certain extent, organised by transmitter – several anecdotes are reported by Dhū al-Nūn in a row and then several by Imam Yāfiʾī. This could reflect that Jāmī or his students copied from existing biographical material.

[134] Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word*, 29-30.

ultimate representation of women who have left every scrap of individuality behind, these entries reflect at worst, the narrator's active erasure of a woman's identity; possibly, inattention to detail or half-remembered stories; and at best, an attempt to protect a woman's modesty by not referring to her name directly in public.

As for the overall aim of the work, Mojaddedi has studied Jāmī's choice of saints in detail and what that may mean for his Sufi affiliations. While many *ṭabaqāt* texts are composed in support of a particular order, Devin DeWeese has shown that it is not possible to 'link them all to the goal of "propagandizing" particular Sufi communities.'[135] Jāmī's text is an example of those collections whose aims are not immediately apparent in terms of sectarian affiliation. Jürgen Paul summarises Mojaddedi's findings as follows:

> On the other hand, measured by what it includes and what it omits, ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Jāmi's (d. 898/1492) *Nafaḥāt al-Uns* does not seem quite so single-minded; rather, it includes distinct clusters of biographies devoted to the predominant Sunni orders still represented in Jāmi's day in the vicinity of Herat, as well as traditions associated with a further selection of illustrious Sufis of the past, such as Rumi and Ebn al-ʿArabi.[136]

Like ʿAṭṭār, Jāmī includes an introduction to his biographies of women, in order to justify the inclusion of women in his biographical dictionary of saints (*awliyā'*) and pious Sufis. He responds to an anticipated audience objection to the inclusion of

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[135] In reference to Devin A DeWeese, *An "Uvaysi" Sufi in Timurid Mawarannahr: Notes on Hagiography and the Taxonomy of Sanctity in the Religious History of Central Asia* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University, Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1993).

[136] Paul, "Hagiographic Literature"; J A (Jawid Ahmad) Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 151-76.

women by claiming that these are exemplary women whose lives deserve to be included:

<div dir="rtl">

فلا التأنيث لاسم الشمس عيب   ولا التذكير فخر الهلال

</div>

'Being female,' Jāmī writes, 'is no reason for the sun to be ashamed, just as being male is no point of pride for the crescent moon.'[137] By referencing the Arabic grammatical genders of the nouns 'sun' (feminine) and 'moon' (masculine), he implies that one should be proud of one's commitment to God, not of one's gender. This is in itself a strong statement rejecting inherent gender biases. Though it would appear to free both men and women from the stereotypical restrictions associated with gender roles in Jāmī's time period, his following line qualifies the previous one:

<div dir="rtl">

ولو كان النساء كمن ذكرنا   لفضلت النساء على الرجال

</div>

'If [all] womankind were like these we have mentioned,' he continues, 'women would be superior to men.'[138] This statement undermines any attempt to read Jāmī's preface as an unambiguous declaration of gender equality in Sufi thought and instead reinforces the anomalous nature of these pious women. The implication is that not all women can achieve such greatness, but that these exceptional few should become the objects of emulation by common women.

Jāmī makes references to two other works in order to justify his enterprise of cataloguing pious women. He quotes Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūḥāt* and also mentions the existence of a 'separate' work (*'alā-ḥidah*) collected by Sulamī. He translates the title of Sulamī's work, which we now know to be *Dhikr al-Niswa al-Muta'abiddāt al-Ṣufiyyāt*,

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[137] NU, 615.

[138] Ibid, 615.

as '*Dar Dhikr-i Aḥvāl-i Nisvah-yi 'Ābidāt va Nisā'-i 'Ārifāt*' or 'Commemoration of the States of Female Worshippers and Mystic Women.' He does not, however, make it clear whether he has seen an actual copy of Sulamī's book. Jāmī further justifies his inclusion of female saints by pulling the following quote from Ibn 'Arabī:

وكل ما نذكره من هؤلاء الرجال باسم الرجال فقد يكون منهم النساء ولكن يغلب ذكر الرجال. قيل لبعضهم: كم الابدال؟ قال: اربعون نفساً. فقيل له: لم لا تقول اربعون رجالاً؟ فقال: قد يكون فيهم النساء.

> All those men we have mentioned, we refer to as 'men,' despite the fact that there were women among them. But the mention of men predominates. It was asked of one them, 'How many are the Substitutes?'[139]
> 'Forty people.'
> 'Why not say forty men?' they asked.
> 'There were women among them,' he replied.[140]

Jāmī does not explain why he quotes what he does; he simply leaves it up to the reader to interpret the meaning. In this case, he uses an authoritative source, Ibn 'Arabī, to legitimise his project of commemorating Sufi holy women. In this passage Ibn 'Arabī explains that he has used the term 'men' to refer to all the people he mentions, even though some of them were women. This redefinition of holy women as men is conventional and explains why Jāmī entitles this section of his work *'Dhikr al-Nisā' al-'Ārifāt al-Wāṣilāt ilā Marātib al-Rijāl,'* or 'The Commemoration of Mystic Women Having Attained the Ranks of Men.' Rather than just remembering outstanding women,

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[139] The 'Substitutes' or 'Replacements' (*abdāl*) were 'a certain group of righteous people (*ṣāliḥīn*), by means of whom God rules the earth; consisting of seventy men of whom the earth is never destitute; forty of whom are in Syria, and thirty in the other countries; none of them dying without another's supplying his place from the rest of mankind, and therefore they are named the Substitutes.' Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863), vol. I, 168.

[140] NU, 615.

as Sulamī's title implied, Jāmī's title makes explicit the masculinisation of high-achieving pious women.

2.3.4 Ibn al-Jawzī's *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*

Unlike Sulamī's biography which is made up entirely of women, Ibn al-Jawzī's biography contains both men and women. Although the majority of entries focus on men, a surprising 240 entries centre on women, which make up 23% of the whole.[141] Despite the robust presence of women in this work of the *ṭabaqāt* genre, the very structure of the work replicates a perceived hierarchy. Women's secondary status is underlined by their position in the biographies. In Ibn al-Jawzī, they are divided by region but still placed after all the men of that region are listed. In some cases, there is a further section which includes the *majānīn*, and this is placed at the very end of the men's section. However, the madmen still occupy a higher place in the hierarchy than the sane women. The final category in any section is the unnamed, mad women (*al-muṣṭafiyāt min ʿuqalā al-majānīn majhūlāt al-asmā'*).[142] However, this secondary status is often subverted by the contents of these sections in themselves, which contain witty repartee and argumentative victories by women. In these cases, the woman in question is often represented as superior even to spiritually adept and renowned men. This phenomenon fits well with what Bashir and Pemberton have both pointed out regarding the disconnect between official discourse and the actual participation of women as is

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[141] Ruth Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections: From Ibn Saʿd to Who's Who* (Boulder: L. Rienner Publishers, 1994), 92.

[142] Abū al-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAlī Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa / li-Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qurashī al-Bakrī al-Baghdādī al-Maʿrūf Bi-Ibn al-Jawzī*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Hindāwi (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣrīya, 2000), vol. 2: 95, 241.

reflected in the texts (or in Pemberton's case, the communities she observes). Moreover, Ibn al-Jawzī critiques Abū Nuʿaym and his immense Sufi biographical dictionary *Ḥilyat al-Awliyāʾ* for not mentioning the female Sufi devotees (*ʿābidāt*). Ibn al-Jawzī considers this a grave oversight and uses it as a justification for why his compilation is superior:

أنه لم يذكر من عوابد النساء إلا عددا قليلا، و معلوم أن ذكر العابدات مع قصور الأنوثية، يوثِّب المقصر من الذكور، فقد كان سفيان الثوري ينتفع برابعة و يتأدب بكلامها.

> For [Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī] did not mention any women among the worshippers but a few, and it is clear that the remembrance of female worshippers, despite the defects of femininity, rectifies the shortcomings of the masculine gender, for Sufyān al-Thawrī was enlightened by Rābiʿa and instructed by her words.[143]

Like Jāmī, Ibn al-Jawzī seems to point to the documentation of spiritual women's lives as a worthy end in and of itself.

One biographical point regarding the life and views of Ibn al-Jawzī needs to be clarified before diving into a textual analysis of his work as it relates to Sulamī, Jāmī, and ʿAṭṭār. Some scholars have labelled Ibn al-Jawzī an 'anti-Sufi' by referencing his *Talbīs Iblīs* (Devil's Delusion), and have mistakenly used this as the biographical lens through which to view all of his works.[144] The *Talbīs Iblīs* scrupulously documents the ways in which Satan can delude even the most pious into thinking they have done their duty, when in fact they have fallen into grievous error. There is no doubt that the work contains passages that severely critique the more ostentatious practices of some Sufis. It has been difficult for some scholars to reconcile this 'anti-Sufi' tract with the compiler

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[143] ṢṢ, vol. 1: 8. Literally, the phrase *yuwaththib al-muqaṣṣir min al-dhukūr* I have interpreted to mean, 'causes deficiency to be transferred away from the masculine,' but the precise meaning of *yuwaththib* remains unclear to me in this context.

[144] Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 6.

of *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, a biography of mystics and ascetics. It seems an overly-simplified understanding of the text has been circulating as least from the time of Goldziher.[145] This misreading was particularly amplified by the publication of the first work of Ibn al-Jawzī to be translated – David Margoliouth's selective translations of *Talbīs Iblīs* between 1935 and 1948. A closer look at the *Talbīs Iblīs* and the context of the passages on Sufism reveals a distaste for ostentation in all religious domains. Scarcely any group escapes criticism. If Ibn al-Jawzī takes issue with some of the more outward expressions of Sufi piety – which he understood as attempts to flatter the ego by garnering personal recognition and fame – he appears to admire the authentic ascetic feats of the Sufis, as reflected in the *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*.

2.3.5 Sulamī's *Dhikr al-Niswa*

Unfortunately Sulamī gives no introduction to his book of 82 women, or else it has been lost. Thus it is up to us, through careful observation of the text, to glean Sulamī's reasons for writing and writing about women in particular. Rkia Cornell has already pointed out that Sulamī is interested in linking the piety of his female saints with *'ubūdiyya* or 'servitude,' as well as establishing their legitimacy as sources of wisdom and possessors of intellect. The *isnāds* provided in Sulamī's biography are another important source of legitimacy that we cannot afford to ignore. As Cornell notes in her introduction to the text of the *Dhikr al-Niswa*, *isnād* citations are a significant component of Sulamī's method of argumentation: 'Although as-Sulamī's book of Sufi women is not, strictly speaking, a hagiography and as-Sulamī seldom portrays his

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[145] Merlin L Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzi's Kitāb Akhbār aṣ-Ṣifāt : A Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with Translation, Introduction and Notes* (Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2002), 29.

subjects as miracle-workers, he does attempt to demonstrate that Sufi women possess levels of intellect (*'aql*) and wisdom (*ḥikma*) that are equivalent to those of Sufi men. Since this assertion contradicts cultural expectations, the "footnoting" that he employs by citing chains of authority is crucial to his argument.'[146] This strategy of footnoting and stressing *'aql* and *ḥikma* is Sulamī's way of combating the prevalent misogynistic interpretations of the deficiency hadith within the tradition.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented two types of evidence which will form a significant foundation for the subsequent arguments of the dissertation. First, it has considered the tendency toward negative general statements by Sufis indicating the inferiority of the female as an ontological category. These kinds of statements extend well beyond the parameters of any one Sufi author's work, and represent a strong tradition of at least honouring patriarchal norms, if not always outright promoting them. The chapter has attempted to demonstrate that these general derogatory remarks occur especially in the discussions of women in the abstract, at the level of the 'maxim,' or within allegorical roles. As a result, they do not reflect the attitudes towards individual women in the biographies and narratives. This observation supports the idea that the patriarchy intrudes more effectively in the general relations between gendered groups than it does in the representation of individuals or the relations between individuals. The second type of evidence presented here is an overview of the rhetorical strategies deployed by my authors to justify the presence of holy women in their biographies. These moments are our first indication that the picture of women in these texts is more complicated than a discussion of the general invocations of the gender hierarchy would lead us to believe.

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[146] Sulamī and Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 50.

In these introductions to the biographies of female saints, apparently contradictory arguments coexist side by side. As we have seen, the hagiographers tend to make three different kinds of arguments. First, they recast women as male aspirants, to underline their success. Second, they may posit successful women as genderless, or emphasise gender's irrelevance on the Path. Third, they posit women as potentially even higher than men in their venerable piety. Therefore we must conclude that, even on the level of the general maxim, our authors are not particularly consistent. Perhaps we can suggest that, using what is supposedly the same category, they actually refer to different groups or types of women depending on the context. In the cases described in part 2.2, they may refer to the social view of women, as temptation or distractions, whereas in part 2.3, they refer more specifically to saintly women only. To some degree, the rationalisations of part 2.3 function as a microcosm of the argument of the dissertation. The contradictions embedded in these varying strategies mirror the fluctuations in the treatment of women in narrative. The initial evidence of misogyny is deeply at odds with the tendency to de-emphasise the importance of gender to mystical accomplishments. In the following chapters, this tension will be explored through the fascinating, dynamic cases of women, Sufi or otherwise, as they appear in both narrative and biography.

3 PARADOX AND THE APOPHASIS OF GENDER

MINOR FEMALE CHARACTERS
IN THE *MATHNAVĪS* OF ʿAṬṬĀR

3.1 Introduction

In the midst of long meditation given by a shaykh to a disciple on the ever-present pain felt by mystics, ʿAṭṭār writes:

<div dir="rtl">

او زنی باشد نباشد مرد این   هرکه آبستن نشد از درد این

</div>

> Whoever does not become pregnant with this pain
> Is a woman, not a man.[147]

With this thought-provoking image of the pregnant man, ʿAṭṭār invites us to consider the biological male-female dichotomy in reference to the Sufi path. This line tips the reader off that we would do well not to interpret his references to *mard* (man) and *zan* (woman) literally, since only those pregnant with God's pain are true men of the Way. With reference to the extensive and often contradictory references to masculinity and femininity like these, this chapter tries to get to the bottom of ʿAṭṭār's usage of gendered terminology in the *mathnavīs*.

The previous chapter demonstrated that one can find straightforward misogynistic statements regarding women and the occasional usage of woman to embody the allegorical temptations of the *dunyā*. At the same time, it noted that the hagiographers employ clever rhetorical strategies to justify women's presence in the *ṭabaqāt* literature. In this survey of anecdotal material from the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*, *Asrār-nāmah*, *Muṣibat-nāmah*, and *Ilāhī-nāmah*, I show that although the patriarchal attitudes demonstrated in Chapter 2 can sometimes permeate representations of female stock characters, they can also be used to subvert expectation. Stock female characters very often function in ʿAṭṭār's work as reversals of expectation, whereby the audience learns to question its assumptions about the gendered nature of achievement.

This chapter observes that there is a tendency for the anecdotes to posit social 'Others' as competent and successful mystics. However, this tendency appears to be undercut by persistent reference to the surprise or the shock of such capabilities in

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[147] MN 0/2, 13. Literally 'did not' (*nashud*), but I believe he means in general here, as it is in the context of about fifteen maxims on pain.

unexpected quarters. It might seem, therefore, like successful female mystics are undercut by the epimythia (concluding explanations) which reclaim her achievements as masculine. Instead, I argue that the paradoxes generated by the tales and their following interpretations could be understood as an intentional attempt to destabilise categories and 'unsay' gender. In this regard I rely on the insights of three other scholars of mysticism, Saʿdiyya Shaikh, Fatemeh Keshavarz, and Michael Sells, and try to apply their findings regarding the use of paradox and apophasis in Rūmī and Ibn ʿArabī to ʿAṭṭār's anecdotal representations of gender.[148]

This observation, however, does not necessarily imply that ʿAṭṭār always uses these seemingly empowering tales to support the theoretical gender-egalitarianism that animates the Sufi philosophy. While we have these attempts at unsaying gender, at negating all social hierarchy, at the same time we see the inferiority of the ontological category of female reproduced in other places. Accusations of femininity continue to be an insult calculated to spur the complacent male Sufi seeker into action. To make sense of the discrepancies in these two positions, I again return to our observation that the hierarchy-devastating Sufi appeal to the inner soul can be contravened by conventional appeal to stereotypical ideas regarding woman. We would do well here not to try to reconcile unreconcilable positions, but instead accept that we are witnessing the difficulties of consistently holding gendered metaphors and resonances in place.

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[148] Michael A Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, National Bureau of Economic Research (University of Chicago Press, 1994); F Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi*, Studies in Comparative Religion (University of South Carolina Press, 2004), see esp. ch. 3, 'The "Footless" Journey in "Nothingness": The Power of Illogical Tropes'; Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives*, 113-16.

The reversal of expectation theme permeates more than just representations of women in 'Aṭṭār's work. Just as we find women used in the narratives for their 'shock value,' so too do we find other marginalised figures in society, like Christians, slaves, and beggars, held up by 'Aṭṭār as surprising sources of virtue and piety. Claudia Yaghoobi observes the phenomenon briefly, noting that 'Aṭṭār includes 'stories in which infidels, sinners, fools, and members of despised professions appear as standard models for the believers.'[149] As such, this chapter demonstrates that the fictional, stock character women of 'Aṭṭār – who are commonly used as a tool to subvert expectation – do not occur in a vacuum but rather represent just one strand in the tapestry of Otherness. These reversals of expectation function to separate the reader from his assumptions, prompting him to interrogate those assumptions. The degree to which 'Aṭṭār is unique or not in this regard remains an open question.

3.1.1 Roadmap

In this chapter I investigate the minor female characters of 'Aṭṭār's *mathnavīs*, with an eye towards identifying patterns in the representations of women, and towards getting to the bottom of his paradoxical use of gendered language. The chapter begins with an examination of some of the most common types of stock female characters, namely women as earthly beloveds, as representations of the divine, and in the role of the old woman. This section traces a partial genealogy of the old woman figure in early Persian Sufism by examining parallel accounts in Sanā'ī and Niẓāmī. It is my contention that while the old woman figure, particularly as a plaintiff for justice, was known before 'Aṭṭār's time, he greatly expanded the importance of her role in his works and gave her a wider significance as the mystic visionary. The second section then takes

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[149] Yaghoobi, "Against the Current," 90.

a closer look at women as mystic lovers and as sources of spiritual wisdom. This section posits that 'Aṭṭār's use of the reversal of expectation within the narratives often relies on an implicit argument that women are equally capable as men in advancing spiritually, and appearances do not always correlate to the reality of the inner soul. At the same time, we often find that this kind of allusion to female spiritual strength appears to be undermined by the authorial aside or the concluding epimythium. I suggest these apparent contradictions between anecdotes and epimythia are intentional paradoxes that aim to disrupt gendered terminology, using the rhetorical device of apophasis. The final section examines some of the rare examples in which women are portrayed as lover and beloved within the same tale. It analyses the story of Shaykh San'ān and the Christian girl in particular depth, and demonstrates the importance of transgressive love for breaking free of the strictures of identity categories. The entire chapter, therefore, points to 'Aṭṭār's usage of gender as a significant battleground for shattering hierarchical distinctions and pointing out that any inherent sense of superiority is a veil blinding the seeker.

3.2 Stock Characters: Pious Women, Theophanic Women, and Earthly Beloveds in 'Aṭṭār

This section provides a brief overview of the stock character roles that are sometimes filled by women in 'Aṭṭār. It is not meant to be exhaustive and does not cover many women who appear but are marginal, who function as simple plot devices, or for whom gender seems to be of little importance to the anecdote in question. It looks at the women who play earthly beloveds, divine Beloved, and pious old wise women. It does not deal with the female saints, who are discussed in depth in Chapter 5. This section provides the background of female roles that are reprised again and again, before moving on to more interesting and dynamic minor female characters whose roles require more analysis to make sense of their place in the narrative.

3.2.1 Women as Earthly Beloveds and Objects of Desire

One very straightforward role that women play in the *mathnavīs* is the earthly beloved. In these cases the women are objects of men's lust, desire, or love. Though the role is straightforward, it is not particularly common. Very often, the object of mystical

or earthly love takes the form of a young boy, as noted by Franklin Lewis. The instances of women as earthly beloveds tend to be connotated negatively. We saw earlier in Chapter 2, for example, the personification of the *dunyā* as an old hag woman, and sometimes in disguise as a beautiful young woman. Not all female beloveds are connotated so negatively as that, however. Some are presented merely as distractions for men, such as in the case of the promising student described in the *Muṣibat-nāmah*, who is lured away from his studies by a beautiful young woman. The student's master successfully contrives to make the girl ill, so that she loses her beauty and the student regains focus.[150] Here, then, women's beauty is at best an unwanted distraction and a metaphor for false worldly temptation. Meanwhile, in another tale from the *Ilāhī-nāmah*, a prince becomes excessively drunk on his wedding night and mistakes a Zoroastrian burial tower for his bride's castle. Believing her to be his bride, he sleeps in the arms of a woman's corpse all night, only to wake up mortified and revolted.[151] Though the author's aside focuses on the dangers of consuming too much alcohol, the Zoroastrian woman in this story can be read as an allegory for the unchaste seductions of the world, whose inherent ugliness is disguised by a thin layer of the Sufi's own lack of awareness. Women, therefore, are not commonly placed in the role of earthly beloved, and when they are, the depictions tend to be anywhere from neutral to decidedly negative.

3.2.2 The Divine Feminine in 'Aṭṭār

From this role of earthly beloved, it is not a far logical leap for women to be cast as the divine Beloved in a mystical sense. In these anecdotes, the woman is a very

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[150] MN 25/5, 237-39.
[151] IN 19/10, 307-09.

clear metaphor for God. As Schimmel points out in *My Soul is a Woman*, these women are not really 'women' at all, but rather a Sufi's medium for loving God. I am not sure that there is particular significance to the gender of these Beloveds being feminine, although others have taken it as evidence of the authors imbuing femininity with a predisposition to divinity.[152] Elias especially makes the argument that '[a] complementarity of male and female is built into the structure of Islamic mysticism. On a scale of perfection she exists above the male and below the male; however, she is never equal to him.'[153] For Elias, representing women as a manifestation of the divine is a clear indicator of women's potential superiority. But our authors do not explicitly comment on the gender of their theophanies. It seems to be by logical extension from the cruel, haughty beloved that we reach the Beloved of either gender. For example, in one story a younger woman confronts a man for staring at her while they are circumambulating the Ka'ba. 'Aṭṭār suggests in a few lines of commentary at the end of the short episode that the man should use her as a catalyst for his divine love of God.[154] Most of the Laylī and Majnūn anecdotes in 'Aṭṭār's *mathnavīs* fall into this category, as do some of the Zulaykhā anecdotes, discussed in detail in Chapter 4. [155] In a similar story, a traveling Sufi catches a glimpse of a Sufi woman named Zubayda behind a curtain and falls immediately in love with her. He cries out continuously to see her again, but when she offers him money to stop, he accepts it and stops yelling. Zubayda

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[152] Austin, "The Sophianic Feminine"; Jamal J Elias, "Female and Feminine in Islamic Mysticism," *The Muslim World*, no. 603 (1981).

[153] Elias, "Female and Feminine," 224.

[154] IN: 14/15, 232.

[155] IN: 18/11, 299; 22/8, 360; MN 1/4, 69; 1/5, 69-70; 5/9, 101; 10/5, 135; 17/3, 249; 30/8, 273; 31/3, 279; 31/4, 279-80; MṬ, 188, ln. 3365-87.

then reproaches him for his inconstancy; if he truly loved her, no amount of money would be able to make him stop. Thus we see that in some cases, God is manifested by a woman and reproaches male seekers for their shortcomings. There are only two potential reasons I see for interpreting the femininity of these figures as significant: first is the emphasis on beauty as the catalyst for male inspiration, and second is the tendency for women throughout these sources to function as the surprising source of critique. Yet I am not convinced that gender here is of particular importance, other than the convenience of recasting well-known earthly female beloveds as objects of mystical desire.

3.2.3 Sanā'ī, Niẓāmī, 'Aṭṭār and the Old Woman

The final stock character type that is examined here is the wise old woman. Even a cursory look at the role of women in 'Aṭṭār's work will reveal the preponderance of old wise women who feature as protagonists. This section considers the figure of the old woman as she appears in earlier mystical tradition, represented by Sanā'ī, in one of 'Aṭṭār's contemporaries, Niẓāmī, and the way it is expanded and elaborated in 'Aṭṭār. While I do not argue that 'Aṭṭār was the first Sufi to choose an old wise woman protagonist for literary effect, I posit that the motif is much more widely used by 'Aṭṭār and to different effect than Sanā'ī and Niẓāmī.

Although it can be tempting to draw straight lines of influence between apparently related texts, it is important to be discerning in the way we approach the intertextual relationship of these anecdotes. Looking at the old woman in Sanā'ī's work can give us an idea of the preexisting Sufi interpretation of the trope that 'Aṭṭār inherited. If we take a closer look at the work of Sanā'ī, however, it becomes clear that, despite the overlap with 'Aṭṭār in regards to some major elements of the Sufi worldview, we are dealing with two texts that are very different, both stylistically and in terms of genre. With the exception of *Asrār-nāmah*, all of 'Aṭṭār's *mathnavīs* are highly structured frame tales that employ anecdotes both to advance the narrative and to drive home the points raised in the frame tale. Sanā'ī, on the other hand, makes use of a homiletic and sometimes wandering style, rarely punctuated by structural breaks and often moving to seemingly unrelated topics from one line to the next. Very few anecdotes appear in Sanā'ī's oeuvre.

In one of these very few anecdotes appearing in Sanā'ī's *Ḥadiqat al-Ḥaqiqa*, an old woman comes to the Sultan seeking justice. The first time, he sends her back to the offending party with a letter demanding the chief (*'amīd*) return her land, but the order is ignored and the old woman once again sets out to Ghaznayn to petition the Sultan:

<div dir="rtl">

بود سلطان در آن زمان مشغول   سخنِ پیرزن نکرد قبول

گفت سلطان که بر من آن باشد   که دهم نامه تا روان باشد

گر بر آن نامه هیچ کار نکرد   آن عمیدی که هست در باورد

زار بخروش و خاک بر سر کن   پیش ماور حدیث بی‌سر و بُن [156]

زان سبک گفت ساکن ای سلطان   چون نبردند مر ترا فرمان

خاک بر سر مرا نباید کرد   نبود خاک مر مرا در خورد

خاک بر سر کسی کند که ورا   نبود بر زمانه حکم روا

بشنید این سخن ز زن سلطان   شد پشیمان ز گفت خود به زمان

گفت کای پیرزن خطا گفتم   کز حدیث تو من برآشفتم

</div>

The Sultan was busy at that time.
He did not listen to the old woman's words.
The Sultan said, 'What is incumbent upon me
'Is to write a letter to set [events] in motion.
'If the letter is ineffectual, bring that chief in.
'Raise a great ruckus, and cast dirt on your head,
'Do not speak this nonsense.'
Quickly and calmly she replied, 'O Sultan!
'Since your order has not been followed,
'It is not I who should cast dirt on my head.
'Dirt is not what I deserve.
'Dirt should be cast on the one whose orders
'Are not heeded throughout the land.'
This the Sultan heard from the woman,
And at once regretted what he had said.
'I have spoken wrongly,' he said.

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[156] Raḍavī marks this as '*pīsh māvar*,' i.e. '*pīsh may-āvar*,' 'do not bring up.'

'I am shocked (*bar-āshuftam*) by your words.' [157]

In this anecdote, the old woman functions as the archetypal plaintiff seeking justice, a symbol of ultimate helplessness and weakness, and therefore a potential opportunity for the Sultan to show his mercy and concern for justice among all his subjects. This initial setup of the old woman as weak is reflected in Sanā'ī's linguistic choices. She is referred to as '*ḍaʿīf*' and '*ʿājiz*' by the Sultan and '*bīchārah*' by the narrator. Furthermore, the antagonist of the story, the local leader ('*amīd*), is also referred to consistently as the '*āmil*, i.e. the 'actor,' implying the passivity of the old woman in the situation. Thus, the reversal – represented by the old woman's intuitive grasp of kingship and justice – comes across even more strongly. Instead of weak and at the Sultan's mercy, the old woman is portrayed as having more wisdom than the Sultan and the strength and courage to express this to him. Meanwhile, the Sultan's surprise stands in for the audience's own surprise at the woman's condemnation. Sanā'ī depicts the woman as an unexpected source of knowledge in a way that upends the presumed gender hierarchy, and in this way, prefigures a motif that 'Aṭṭār expands upon. Sanā'ī's old woman displays superior knowledge of justice, rather than the mystical insight of 'Aṭṭār's old woman.

The wise old woman who appears in Niẓāmī, a source roughly contemporaneous to 'Aṭṭār's work, may provide evidence that there already existed a tradition in Persian to use the old woman as the traditional plaintiff who understands justice better than the king, or as the unexpected source of spiritual knowledge. Since an absolute chronology of 'Aṭṭār's oeuvre, or even a relative one, cannot be established

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[157] Sanāʾī al-Ghaznavī, *Kitāb-i Ḥadīqat al-Ḥaqīqah va Sharīʿat al-Ṭarīqah/Az Guftār-i Abū al-Majd Majdūd Ibn Ādam Sanāʾī Ghaznavī ; Bi-Jamiʿ va Taṣḥīḥ-i Mudarris Raḍavī.*, 546–47.

definitively, it is impossible to say which author's work predated the other. Furthermore, there is no direct evidence that either author knew of the other's writings.[158] As such, based on this information and the related Sanā'ī anecdote, we can surmise that a tradition of 'wise old women' stories predates 'Aṭṭār and existed, at least in oral traditions, if not in texts no longer extant or not consulted in this study. 'Aṭṭār has amplified and expanded the role of these kinds of anecdotes in his *mathnavīs* when compared to the writings of Sanā'ī and Niẓāmī.

An anecdote depicting this kind of archetypal old woman appears in Niẓāmī's *Makhzan al-Asrār*. This is the work in Niẓāmī's oeuvre that stylistically and structurally most closely resembles the *mathnavīs* of 'Aṭṭār. Although Niẓāmī's relationship to mysticism is ambiguous, most scholars agree this is his most mystical *mathnavī*. In this work, the old woman appears as follows:

پیرهزنان را به جنایت برند	رطل زنان دخل ولایت برند
ستر من و عدل تو برداشتست	آنکه درین ظلم نظر داشتست
هیچ نماند از من و از روح من	کوفته شد سینه مجروح من
با تو رود روز شمار این شمار	گر ندهی داد من ای شهریار
وز ستم آزاد نمی‌بینمت[...]	داوری و داد نمی‌بینمت
خرمن دهقان ز تو بیدانه شد	مسکن شهری ز تو ویرانه شد
میرسدت دست حصاری بکن	زامدن مرگ شماری بکن
مونس فردای تو امروز تست	عدل تو قندیل شب افروز تست
و این سخن از پیرزنی یاد دار	پیرزنانرا بسخن شاد دار
تا نخوری پاسخ غمخوارگان	دست بدار از سر بیچارگان

'Drunkards are put into power,
'And old women are treated as criminals.
'Whoever looks favourably upon this injustice,

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[158] Orsatti, "ḴOSROW O ŠIRIN AND ITS IMITATIONS." (accessed 8 November 2016).

'Lifts my veil[159] and encroaches upon your justice.
'My wounded heart has been crushed;
'Nothing remains of me and my spirit (*rūḥ*).
'If you do not serve me justice, your majesty,
'The day of reckoning will come to you, count on that.
'I see no justice nor fairness in you,
'I see you are not free of despotism. […]
'The city buildings have crumbled because of you.
'The country fields have gone barren because of you.
 'Count down [your days] in the face of approaching death.
'The hand will reach you — fortify your walls.
'Your justice is your shining light in the night,
'Your friend tomorrow is [what you do] today.'
—Consider the old woman happily in her wisdom.
Learn this fine speech from an old woman.
Leave off oppressing the poor and miserable,
So you don't face the retaliation of the suffering.[160]

Niẓāmī's depiction of the old woman as the voice of reason and justice is
entirely in the same vein as Sanā'ī's. Unlike Sanā'ī and 'Aṭṭār's depictions, however,
Niẓāmī's anecdote does not dramatise the king's surprised reaction, which functions as
a stand-in for the audience's own purported surprise at a scene in which the old woman,
the symbolic epitome of powerlessness, uses that weakness as its own kind of power.
Niẓāmī's anecdote is less interested in portraying the woman's surprising strength and
reversing expectations than it is in appealing to the old woman's helplessness. With his
final aside, the narrator urges the king towards a just treatment of the weak, not because
it is a moral imperative but because it is most politically expedient, so he does not 'face

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[159] I.e. Violates my modesty.

[160] Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *Kullīyāt-i Khamsah-yi Ḥakīm Niẓāmī Ganjah'ī: Makhzan al-Asrār, Khusraw va Shīrīn, Laylī va Majnūn, Haft Paykar, Bahrām-Nāmah, Haft Gunbad, Iskandar-Nāmah, Sharaf-Nāmah, Iqbāl-Nāmah.*, 3rd edition (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1972), 63-64.

retaliation.' Niẓāmī's old woman also draws a parallel that other anecdotes do not – namely, the connection between upholding justice and protecting a woman's modesty from violation: 'Whoever looks favourably upon this injustice, / Removes my veil and encroaches upon your justice.' This emphasis on the king's chivalric duty to protect the frailest of his kingdom, represented by the old woman, is quite different to 'Aṭṭār's depiction of the old woman. While the theme of women's upbraiding or surprising reproach appears in Sanā'ī, Niẓāmī, and 'Aṭṭār, what the old women reproach men about is quite different. In Sanā'ī and Niẓāmī she is the archetypal plaintiff for justice. In 'Aṭṭār, she is transformed into a mystic visionary.

Compared to Niẓāmī and Sanā'ī, 'Aṭṭār expands the role that old women play in his work. In his hands, she becomes the most prevalent type of female stock character, and he utilises her for several purposes.[161] First, she acts as a figure that reproaches men or warns them of their possible spiritual downfall, a characteristic that Annemarie Schimmel points out when she refers to the 'theme of the old woman as admonisher or warning voice.'[162] She often acts as a wise figure who sees hidden meanings that others cannot. At times the old woman figure exhibits remarkable or even miraculous physical strength that reinforces her unshakable piety. Finally, as we have seen above, the old woman is used as the archetypal weak, helpless petitioner, who turns out to demand justice from the king with success. I suggest that in these stories, 'Aṭṭār foregrounds the unreliable nature of outward appearances in order to encourage the reader to shed his or her prejudicial notions.

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[161] Other examples not discussed here include: MN 18/3, 188; 24/2, 230-31; 24/3, 231-32; AN 11/13, 101-02; MṬ 207-09, ln. 3706-40.

[162] Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*, 85.

A few examples of 'Aṭṭār's use of the old woman will demonstrate how she represents the pious mystic seeker, rather than the plaintiff of Sanā'ī or Niẓāmī. 'Aṭṭār's old woman undergoes a subtle shift from having a surprising grasp of statecraft, to having a surprising command of Sufi spirituality. This command of Sufi principles in such an unlikely form is meant to cause the reader to question his preconceptions. In the *Ilāhī-nāmah*, 'Aṭṭār includes many anecdotes in which the old woman acts as a reproachful character. An old woman admonishes a shaykh for his pride in his title, saying:

<div dir="rtl">

پلیدی می‌کنی دعوی پاکی   بدو گفتا که در عین هلاکی

برون آی ای جُنُب از پیش محراب   بدین شیخی شدی مغرور اصحاب

</div>

'You will be damned,' she said,
'For you are unclean, pretending to purity.
'You are prideful, high above your companions, because of this
      sheikhhood.[163]
'Withdraw, impure one, from the *miḥrāb*.'[164]

The fact that the old woman is able to command a shaykh in this way—and even insult him—shows that the old woman is lent strength and power because of her piety. Again in a typical hierarchal reversal, the lowest, weakest seeker upstages one of high religious rank. Similarly, in another tale, an old woman reproaches a courtier named Muḥammad b. 'Iṣā for his vanity. As the entire court admires Muḥammad b. 'Iṣā[165] in

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[163] There is a pun here with شیخی (*shaykhī*) – the status of being a *shaykh*, but also 'boasting.'

[164] IN 14/5, 222.

[165] According to Ritter, who cites Ṭabarī's *Tarīkh al-Rusūl wa al-Mulūk*, this story refers to Muḥammad b. 'Īṣā b. Nahīk, 'paritsan and police chief of caliph Amin.' Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār*, trans. John O'Kane, vol. 69, HdO (Leiden:

all his glory on a Rashkh-like horse covered in jewels, 'Aṭṭār tells of a dissenting woman:

<div dir="rtl">

چنین گفتا که کیست این مبتلائی   بره میرفت زالی با عصائی

بمکرِ از پیشِ خویشش دور کردست   که حقّ از حضرتش مهجور کردست

بذین بیهوذه مشغولش نکردی   که گر از خویش معزولش نکردی

</div>

An old woman[166] was walking along with a cane.
She asked, 'Who is this wretch,
'Whom God has expelled from His presence
'And driven away by guile?
'If God had not forsaken him,
'He would not have concerned himself with such foolish things.'[167]

The old woman's piety allows her to be a powerful social force of reproach or warning, despite her apparent physical weakness. Unlike some of the female saints and pious women like Rābi'a, Marḥūmah and Zayn al-'Arab, who are discussed in depth in Chapter 5, the old woman is not masculinised to demonstrate her piety, perhaps because she is no longer a truly feminine woman, wielding the power of sexual temptation.

In 'Aṭṭār's vision, the old woman is not just a source of social critique, she also plays a second role as visionary mystic. In one such anecdote, a woman predicts her house will not burn down, despite the fact that all the houses around it are burning to the ground. When asked how she knew her house would not burn:

Boston: Brill, 2003), 786. However, the name could also be a reference to the primary prophets of Islam and Christianity, thereby alluding to the folly of religious ostentation, regardless of denomination.

[166] *Zāl* can denote an old man or an old woman, but we know it is a woman here from previous context given in the anecdote.

[167] IN 14/12, 229-30.

که یا خانه بسوزذ یا دلِ من   چنین گفت آنگه آن زالِ فروتن

نخواهذ سوخت آخر خانه را   چو سوخت از غم دلِ دیوانه را

The old, humble woman answered:
'God could burn either my house or my heart.
'Since He's already burned my lovesick heart with grief,
'He would not burn my house too.' [168]

The old woman also appears as the wise sage in another episode, wherein the Caliph approaches her and asks to buy some of her beans. She refuses, saying that her *mulk* (grain) is a hundred times better than his. 'Aṭṭār sums up the story nicely when he writes:

ز مُلکِ زال ملکی نیست برتر   چو جَو جَو در حساب آرند یکسر

ولی در آرزوی ملکِ زالیست   اگر چه روستم صاحب کمالیست

Since every grain must be accounted for,
O Rich man, there is no wealth greater than the old woman's grass peas.
Although Rustam is perfect,
He aspires to the old woman's grass peas. [169]

The anecdote rests on the *mulk* pun, whereby the woman's lowly grass peas are compared favourably with the entire kingdom.[170] *Mulk*, typically 'kingdom' or

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[168] IN 9/9, 149.

[169] IN 15/1, 246-47.

[170] In the second line quoted here, there is also a play on words with *zāl*, meaning old man or woman, or the name of Rustam's father, giving the line two possible meanings. In the first reading, Rustam is perfect, except that he's aspired for a kingdom. In the second reading, though he is perfect, Rustam hopes for the grass peas of an old woman [i.e. the counterintuitive but correct object of a Sufi's hopes]. In either reading, the old woman's grass peas are the preferable possession.

'property,' has a second definition as a kind of legume, 'chickling vetch' or 'grass pea.' It is commonly used as feed for livestock. 'Aṭṭār uses the same pun elsewhere:

<div dir="rtl">

ملک گاوان را دهند ای بی‌خبر   ملک مطلب گر نخوردی مغز خر

</div>

Do not seek out *mulk* (possessions) if you haven't eaten donkey's brain.
They'll give you the *mulk* (grass peas) of the cows, O Ignorant one!

Now that the pun behind the anecdote is clear, we can see that the old woman's literal poverty (*faqr*) stands in for spiritual poverty, one of the Sufi virtues. As such her lack of wealth is positioned as the ideal Sufi state of being. As we have seen, 'Aṭṭār's narratives often present the old women as a challenge to the traditional gender order by emphasising the unreliability or even insignificance of external appearances, including assumptions made on the basis of gender and age. These narratives draw their power from the very femininity of these old women, and the presumed frailty and weakness that accompanies that archetype. By persistently overturning that presumed weakness, and enshrining her humility as a protection against the seductions of this world, 'Aṭṭār employs a reversal of expectation that encourages us to rethink our assumptions.

3.3 Women in the Role of the Lover (*'āshiq*): Narrative and the Authorial Voice

As we have seen with the archetypal old woman, 'Aṭṭār reverses the meaning of femininity as a symbol for the nexus of perceived weakness. Notably, he does not represent this reversal as an isolated phenomenon occurring only in regards to gender norms. His reversal of women's position in the hierarchy is part of larger pattern of defamiliarisation in which he posits the fundamental gap between expectation and reality as it applies to the ability of a person (or even an animal) to demonstrate spiritual superiority. Though the anecdotes tend to confirm this widespread reversal of expectation, the final commentary and occasional asides within the narratives sometimes appear to funnel the multivalent meanings of the anecdotes into a single direction, a direction which is usually in favour of the patriarchal understanding of the woman seeker's accomplishments as 'masculine' and surprising. Does this tendency represent 'Aṭṭār's attempt to regiment the potentially gender-transgressive or gender-transcendent tales in a direction that makes them less threatening to the overall idea of

masculine superiority in spiritual domains? Or should we rather presume that this could be a strategic operation to secure the comprehension of his (primarily male) audience, which interprets excellence as masculine? Or, finally, are we making a mistake by taking 'Aṭṭār's references to gendered categories too literally? It does not necessarily follow that, because he tailors to his audience's stereotypes, 'Aṭṭār also operates through them. I read these asides and comments to some degree as red herrings when taken in isolation. This section suggests that the apparent conflict between representations of gender in anecdote and epimythium may be a strategy to destabilise the very gender categories which underpin the texts. I posit that in order to 'unsay' the social hierarchy, since it does not apply within a Sufi worldview, 'Aṭṭār must also say it. This is a paradox of discourse that Michael Sells investigates in depth in regards to mystical writings in several traditions. He refers to this tradition as 'apophatic' discourse. He writes:

> The position taken here is that the paradoxes, aporias, and coincidences of opposites within apophatic discourse are not merely apparent contradictions. Real contradictions occur when language engages the ineffable transcendent, but these contradictions are not illogical. For the apophatic writer, the logical rule of non-contradiction functions for object entities. When the subject of discourse is a non-object and a no-thing, it is not irrational that such logic be superseded.[171]

That is to say, writers who try to describe non-objects or non-things often rely on paradox to describe the unnameable. These paradoxes or contradictions are not coincidental inconsistencies but rather intentional destabilisations and turnings back on the words that preceded them. While apophasis is usually used in theology to describe

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[171] Michael A Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, National Bureau of Economic Research (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 3-4.

the language which triangulates but never pinpoints the divine[172], it can also be used to describe the transcendence of frameworks of human society and understanding. In this way, I try to apply the concept of apophasis to describe what 'Aṭṭār is doing with gender in his representations of minor female characters.[173] I contend that 'Aṭṭār's conflicting usage of the categories of 'man' and 'woman' is an intentional strategy to destabilise the meanings of the categories and force the readers into interrogating their gendered framework for interpreting reality.

In order to understand how female characters figure into subverting expectation, we have to investigate the structure of 'Aṭṭār's *mathnavīs* and the links between these anecdotes and their contexts. It is especially important to investigate the stories in relation to the authorial voice, which appears in asides and in the closing epimythium. The context is also critical to understanding the point of each anecdote and what prompted it. Unlike in Rūmī's voluminous *mathnavī*, which has often thwarted scholars' efforts to discern the underlying structure linking episodes, 'Aṭṭār's train of thought is usually easy to follow. Within each discourse, the anecdotes tend to relate different aspects of the same theme or related themes, and each tale is concluded with an authorial aside. These asides or 'morals' of the story do not always agree with each other or display internal consistency within a given section. Indeed, some morals even seem not to fit the tale particularly well. They often perform the function of linking to the next tale, typically by a 'trigger word' appearing in one story which leads to the

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[172] Also called 'negative theology.' Ibid, 2.

[173] In this jump – from thinking about apophasis as a strategy for describing the divine, to apophasis as a rhetorical device for describing the transcendence of gender hierarchy – I follow Sells who also discusses apophasis as a means to negate gender for two early 14th-century Christian mystics, Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart. Sells, *Mystical Languages*, 180-205.

next, but this does not guarantee their relevance to the story they purport to summarise. As Christine van Ruymbeke writes regarding the 'morals', or better put, the epimythia (concluding explanations) of the *Anvār-i Suhaylī* tales, they are 'tyrannical indications which channel the reader's understanding of complex stories into a single direction, not allowing the story "to speak its own language directly to the reader, which was its whole vocation."'[174] Although it is possible to understand 'Aṭṭār's ill-fitting epimythia as an attempt to regiment interpretation, I suggest here that the gaps between anecdote and epimythium are meant to pique the astute reader's interest and lead him to interrogate categories through which he organises his understanding.

One of the most compelling examples of this pattern plays out across the second discourse (*maqālah*) of the *Ilāhī-nāmah*. Each *maqālah* of the *Ilāhī-nāmah* is framed with an overarching question from one of the princes to their father, the king. Next, the father's reply frames for us 'Aṭṭār's general opinion on the matter. In this particular discourse, one of the caliph's six sons asks the caliph about lust (*shahvat*). The second section of the *mathnavī* is structured in a way that is representative of most sections, and it begins with a story confirming women's unexpected spiritual acumen. In this episode in the *Ilāhī-nāmah,* a common woman falls in love with a prince and is tortured and beaten for showing her love in public. When she does not relent, the people are amazed. Her execution is ordered by the king. She makes one final request, to be trampled by her beloved's own horse. The logic is that, if she is killed by her beloved, she will live forever. In the authorial aside, 'Aṭṭār encourages men to learn from this woman's example:

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[174] Christine van Ruymbeke, *Kashefi's Anvar-e Sohayli: Rewriting Kalila and Dimna in Timurid Herat* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016), 75, citing Harold John Blackham, *The Fable as Literature* (London & Dover, 1985), xix, 8-11.

به حاجت خواستن در راه افتاد   زن سرگشته پیش شاه افتاد
مرا یک حاجتست آخر برآری   که چون بکشیم و آنگه بزاری
که جان بخشم بتو خود قصد جانست   شهش گفتا ترا گر حاجت آنست
بجز در پای اسپت خون نرانم   وگر گوئی مکن گیسو کشانم
زمانی نیست ممکن بی امانی   وگر گوئی امانم ده زمانی
زمانی نیز روی او نه بینی   ور از شهزاده خواهی همنشینی
زمانی نیز امان زان می‌نخواهم   زنش گفتا که من جان می‌نخواهم
مکُش در پای اسپم سرنگونسار   نمی‌گویم که ای شاه نکوکار
برون زین چار حاجت حاجتی هست   مرا گر شاه عالم می‌دهد دست
شهش گفتا بگو آخر کدامست   مرا جاوید آن حاجت تمامست
جزین چیزی که می‌خواهی بیابی   که گر زین چار حاجت سر بتابی
بزیر پای اسپم می‌کُشی زار   زنش گفتا اگر امروز ناچار
که موی من به پای اسپ او بند   مرا آنست حاجت ای خداوند
بزیر پای اسپم او کُشد زار   که تا چون اسپ تازد بهر آن کار
همیشه زندهٔ این راه گردم   که چون من کُشتهٔ آن ماه گردم
ز نور عشق بر عیّوق باشم   بلی گر کُشتهٔ معشوق باشم
دلم خون گشت گوئی جان ندارم   زنی‌ام مردئی چندان ندارم
برآور این قدر حاجت که سهلست   چنین وقتی چو من زن را که اهلست
چه می‌گویم ز اشکش خاک گل شد   ز صدق و سوز او شه نرم دل شد
چو نو جانی بجانانش فرستاد   ببخشید و بایوانش فرستاد
در آموز از زنی عشق حقیقی   بیا ای مرد اگر با ما رفیقی
کم از حیزی نهٔ این قصّه بنیوش   وگر کم از زنانی سر فرو پوش

The despairing woman fell before the king,
And began to make a particular request:
'Since you are to kill me, and so abjectly at that,
I have one final request for you to grant.'
'If your request,' the king began, 'is that
'I grant your life, that in itself will lead to your death.
'And if you say, "Don't drag me by my hair,"
'Then I'll just have you mauled beneath the horse's hooves.
'And if you say, "Give me respite for a time,"
'There is no time left, you have nowhere to turn.
'And if you request an interview with the prince,
'You'll not see his face even for a moment.'
'I do not ask for my life,' the woman replied,
'Nor do I ask for a temporary delay.
'I will not say, "O Benevolent King,
"Do not throw me headlong under the horse's hooves."
'If the king should grant it to me, there is one request other than these four.
'That is all I will ask, for all eternity.'
The king said, 'What is it, then?'
'For if you turn away from these four [options],
'You will receive whatever you ask for.'
'If you would have me trampled by horse,'
The woman said, 'this very day,'

'This is my one request, O Lord:
'That you tie my hair to *his* horse,
'So that when the horse gallops,
'He is the one dragging me behind him.
'For when I die by the hand of that beauty,
'I will attain eternal life upon the Path.
'Yes! If I am killed by the beloved,
'Then I will be amongst the Pleiades, in love's glow.
'I am a woman, I do not have that much manliness (*mardī*)
'My heart's turned to blood, you'd say my soul's deserted me.
'At this time, grant this simple request for a deserving woman like me.'
The king was moved by her authenticity and passion.
What can I say? His tears turned the dirt to mud.
He pardoned her and sent her to the palace.
He sent her to her beloved like one with new life.
— Come, O Man (*mard*), if you are one of us,
Learn real love from a woman.
And if you are less than a woman, hide your head.
(And if) you are more than a catamite, heed this [next] tale…[175]

This anecdote again illustrates that patriarchal expectations of female incapability conflict with the Sufi premise that the soul's ability to progress towards the divine is not gender-dependent. The nameless woman is presented as an archetypal Sufi lover – unafraid of death, devoted to her beloved, and willing to stand up to the king. The first moment of surprise comes when the woman does not request her beloved from the king, and expresses her wish to die at his hand. The second is when the narrator's aside delights in the irony that the Man of the Way (*mard*) should learn the real meaning of *'ishq* from a woman. While the anecdote initially leads the reader to confirm the spiritual capability of women, this premise seems to be undercut by the return to the typical patriarchal hierarchy of the closing aside: 'And if you are less than a woman,

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[175] IN 2/1, 50-51.

cover your head, / [And if] you are more than a catamite (*ḥīz*), heed this tale.' Woman in general is placed on the same level as the catamite in terms of how insulting and emasculating such as status would be for men. And yet, this contradiction can only remain in place because 'Aṭṭār is using the category of woman differently than he represents women in the anecdotes. This disconnect encourages us to interpret the category of '*zan*' as inherently negative, without assuming that all women belong to that category, just as '*mard*' is positively connotated, but does not include all men or exclude women.[176] Just because 'Aṭṭār's epimythium seems to confirm a patriarchal worldview in which women are firmly below men does not mean we should take this final word as authoritative, negating the subversion of gender expectations in the anecdote.[177] The two must be read in dialogue with one another, leading us to conclude that the paradoxical usage is intentional, and forcing the reader to come to grips with the destabilisation of terms that 'Aṭṭār's anecdote posits.

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[176] Again, I do not deny the patriarchal undertones of choosing '*mard*' as the positive category and '*zan*' as the negative. To my mind, this represents well the conflict between patriarchal norms and Sufi distaste for any kind of superiority complex. 'Aṭṭār tries to destabilise the terms but seems ultimately trapped by them.

[177] Sells notes how, when trying to interpret the paradoxical and contradictory statements of apophatic discourse, commentators tend to focus on the final rhetorical proposition as the correct one: 'The meaningfulness of the apophatic moment of discourse is unstable, residing in the momentary tension between two propositions. The habits of language pull the writer and reader toward reifying the last proposition as meaningful utterance. To prevent such reification, ever-new correcting propositions must be advanced.' Sells, *Mystical Languages*, 207.

3.3.1 Gender in the Context of Other Identities: Shattering the Social Hierarchy

The context of the anecdote sheds further light on its intended effect. It appears in the second discourse of the *Ilāhī-nāmah*. In the opening of this discourse, one of the king's six sons asks a question regarding the purpose of lust and love in this world, if not to ensure the continuation of the species. The father (and stand in for *pīr* of the text) replies that lust (*shahvat*) leads to passionate love (*ʿishq*) which leads to spiritual love (*muḥabbat*) in the end. However, the anecdotes that make up this discourse clearly take a different argumentative approach. Only the first anecdote (the woman lover discussed just above) even deals with the theme of love. After this, following upon the shocking triumph of the woman as a Man of the Path, the tales turn towards the question of the relationship between social hierarchy and spiritual acumen. ʿAṭṭār builds on the initial reversal, moving through increasingly striking examples to deepen the initial point set out in the woman's story. Directly following the woman's tale is the story of the manly catamite, and the then steadfast and brave ant. Thereafter three tales are related in succession on the superiority of the dog. The section concludes with Abū al-Faḍl Ḥasan on his death bed as he says:

<div dir="rtl">

کنیدم دفن هم در جای ایشان   نهید آنجا سرم بر پای ایشان

که من در خورد ایشانم همیشه   که در معنی چو ایشانم به پیشه   [...]

چه گر این قوم بس تاریک باشند   بنور رحمتش نزدیک باشند

که هر جائی که عجزی پیش آید   نظر آنجا ز رحمت بیش آید

</div>

Bury me among [the sinners (*gunāh-kārān*)].
Place my head at their feet,
For I am always on the same level as them,
And I am like them by trade, to tell the truth. […]
Though this tribe may be quite in darkness,
They are near to the light of His mercy.

> For wherever weakness comes to the fore,
> So does God watch over that even more closely.[178]

The overarching thrust of the discourse then is not the purpose of love in the mortal world, but the disintegration of the social hierarchy in the face of divine love. The continual reversals of expectation, moving from woman on down to representations of increasingly low social standing, function to erase all sense of traditional value judgment. The increasingly low status of each anecdote's hero operates as a kind of encouragement to those who are above them. This is primarily indicated in 'Aṭṭār's epimythia. These include transitions between stories addressing the reader. 'Though you may be less than a catamite in love, surely you are not lower than an ant!' he proclaims.[179] And onward down the ranks he goes. In this discourse, the role of the woman who is 'manly' in love is to shock and surprise the reader by her spiritual prowess, thereby stripping the reader of his prejudices. The epimythia may appear to regiment the reader's understanding into a patriarchal form, but the anecdotes themselves destabilise the meaning of hierarchy and neutralise the gendered power of the archetypal *mard-i rāh*. Again we see the conflict between the subversion of stereotype in narrative, and the resurgence of stereotype in the interpretation. This represents the Sufi principle of egalitarianism on the Path at odds with 'Aṭṭār's need to frame female excellence in a form readers will understand, which typically means appealing to patriarchal praise.

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[178] IN 2/10, 59.

[179] IN 2/2, 52. Also quoted below.

<div dir="rtl">

ز حیزی گر کمی در عشق دلخواه

نه‌ای آخر ز موری کم در این راه

</div>

The pattern of placing mystical genius unexpectedly in the hands of the lowest of the social order pervades more than just the representation of gender and goes beyond this one discourse we have explored in the *Ilāhī-nāmah*. One of the classic reversals of representation is exemplified by Iblīs, Satan, who is lauded by many Sufis for risking all to uphold the ultimate supremacy of God. For example, we find ʿAṭṭār giving Iblīs the following dialogue:

<div dir="rtl">

زبان بگشاد در تسبیح و تقدیس در آن ساعت که ملعون گشت ابلیس

که سر پیچیدن از تو سوی اغیار که لعنت خوشتر آید از تو صد بار

</div>

> At that moment that Iblīs was damned,
> He opened his mouth, in remembrance and praise of God,
> Saying, 'To be damned by You is a thousand times more pleasing
> Than turning away from You in favour of others.'[180]

Of course ʿAṭṭār is far from the only mystical writer to have pointed out the way in which Iblīs has proven himself the most loyal of the lovers of God, paradoxically, by disobeying one of the Lord's direct orders. Peter J. Awn explains this paradoxical treatment of Iblīs by a subset of Sufi thinkers. There is another strain within the Iblīs tradition that is 'nurtured by a group of Sufis who do not discount Iblīs' disclaimers nor condemn him for choosing to refuse God's command.' He furthermore echoes Hodgson's argument about the prime importance of paradox to the mystical worldview[181], and explains why Iblīs was an ideal symbol to reinvent from lowliest traitor to model lover of God. Calling mystical authors 'the masters of the science of opposites,' Awn explains how Iblīs' plight is the ultimate embodiment of argument by paradox. 'Because of the intensity of his contemplative love,' he writes, 'Iblīs became

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[180] IN 8/6, 134.

[181] Cited in the introduction, p. 19.

the model of monotheistic devotion. This dedication to the monotheistic ideal, however, forced Iblīs to disobey the command to bow.' As a result, God cursed him and forced him out of the His presence. But this did not deter Iblīs's loyalty. 'Because the Beloved had deigned to look upon him — even if the look was one of curse — Iblīs accepted his destruction like a martyr's crown.[182]

In one particularly notable passage, 'Aṭṭār links the motif of Iblīs as the consummate lover with the archetypal woman as a representation of God. In the *Muṣībat-nāmah*, Iblīs is asked in typical fashion why he did not obey God's command to bow to Adam. Iblis responds by telling a story of his own. He tells the story of a Sufi who falls in love with a woman. However, she rebukes him because his love is not deep enough. To prove this point, she brings out her sister, with whom he falls in love as well. Iblis then explains that this story is analogous to his situation. The analogy is in the test, although Iblīs triumphs, while the human male fails: Adam is like the sister, who is brought out second, but Iblīs's love for God (i.e. the first woman) is so pure that he does not fall for the second beauty, Adam.[183] Thus, 'Aṭṭār has explicitly linked the redeemed Iblīs with the paradigm of the reproachful woman who critiques a Sufi's inconstant love for the divine. This provocative use of Iblīs as an example corresponds to the unexpected role of women as exemplary lovers – both are placed above 'normal' males. This treatment of Iblīs is far from an isolated example – the majority of the anecdotes in 'Aṭṭār's *mathnavīs* which feature Iblīs or mention him as a character do so in order to posit his status as a model believer.[184]

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[182] Peter J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblīs in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden: BRILL, 1983), 187.

[183] MN 26/1, 240-42.

[184] A sample of Iblīs stories and references that allude to why he did not bow to Adam can be found in the following places: IN 8/13, 138-39; 23/9, 376-78; AN 1/1, 6; MN 0/1, 11; 8/8, 122; 26/2, 242-44.

The paradoxical treatment of Iblīs as the model believer is a theme expanded upon by ‘Aṭṭār and extended to all kinds of unlikely sources of piety, including non-Muslims. Harry S. Neale notes in his dissertation, for example, that the Zoroastrian is transformed in the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* into a source of spiritual guidance for Muslims. ‘In most Persian Sufi hagiographies,’ Neale writes, ‘the Zoroastrian is either the unbeliever who refuses to foreswear the old faith and embrace Islam or who becomes a Muslim after witnessing a miracle (*karāmat*) that has been vouchsafed one of God's friends.[…] Conversely, ‘Aṭṭār's *Tadkiratu'l-‘awliyā'* presents the Zoroastrian (*gabr*) as a source of spiritual guidance who teaches important Sufi concepts to whomever of God's Friends he encounters.'[185] In one such ‘Aṭṭār anecdote, the Zoroastrian (*gabrī*) is unexpectedly turned into the model believer from which the presumed Muslim male reader is meant to take his cues:

<div dir="rtl">

تن و جان باخت و دل از دین نپرداخت   چو آن بودش غرض با این نپرداخت

در آب افکند خویش آتش پرستی   که تا در دین او ناید شکستی

ولی تو در مسلمانی چنانی   که بربودست آبت جاودانی

چو گبری بیش دارد از تو این سوز   مسلمانی پس از گبری بیاموز

</div>

Body and soul he lost, but his heart was not moved from the faith (*dīn*).
Since that was his intention, he did not waver.
The fire-worshipper threw himself in the water
So his faith would not be tarnished.
Yet, are you such a devout Muslim
That [you would let] the water carry you away forever?
Since this Zoroastrian has this burning [passion] above you,
Learn Islam from the Zoroastrian.[186]

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[185] Neale, "Sufism, Godliness and Popular Islamic Storytelling," 13-14.

[186] IN 5/9, 97.

The Zoroastrian's name is, meaningfully, Pīr (spiritual guide), and he provides a model of religious excellence. The use of *tiḍād* (antithesis) with the juxtaposed *āb* (water) and *ātash* (fire) heighten the drama of the Zoroastrian's action. He has literally extinguished himself as a sacrifice to protect his faith. This kind of valorisation of the Other is precisely what we see happening in gender-based context as well.[187] Annemarie Schimmel, meanwhile, has pointed out the significance of the Christian in a similar role, 'A meeting with a Christian ascetic or with a wise monk is a fictional element in Sufi legends of early times: such a person usually explains some mystical truth to the seeker.'[188] Thus, 'Aṭṭār aims at the destruction not just of the gender hierarchy, but of any distinctions that result in a predetermined 'ranking' of seekers.

In some cases, these reversals do not involve women but do play with the gender hierarchy in a way that is relevant to our understanding of the role of the patriarchal structures in 'Aṭṭār. For example, 'Aṭṭār uses the case of the catamite as more 'manly' than the Sufi, potentially to humiliate the initiate into doing good works. 'Aṭṭār tells the story of three men who are imprisoned in Rome and asked to convert to Christianity. The 'Alawite and the scholar (*'ālim*) manage to reconcile themselves to idol worship, while only the catamite finds it to be beyond the pale. The final aside reads as follows:

چنین جائی مخنّث مرد آمد   چو جان آن هر دو را درخورد آمد
مخنّث راست در مردی ستایش   عجب کارا که وقت آزمایش

---

[187] While the Zoroastrian takes on the role of the unexpected spiritual savant in this example, we can also find examples of the Zoroastrian in 'Aṭṭār's *Divān* taking on a more transgressive dimension, linking *kufr*, transgression, and Otherness. Dīvān, ghazal 504, 405.

[188] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 34.

> When the lives of those two (the 'Alawite and the *'ālim*) fell into danger,
> Only the catamite appeared to be a man.
> What a strange thing! That at the time of trial,
> The praise belongs to the catamite for his manliness.[189]

Here again we see the predictable use of manliness (*mardī*) as the label by which 'Aṭṭār praises the catamite who stands up against idol worship. The outcome of the story, however, represents a significant reversal of expectation, as the 'Alawite and the religious scholar prove themselves to be less adherent to the faith than one whose very identity marker would imply they are not a devout Muslim. This kind of reversal, which frames the sinner more faithful than the devout, fits well with the overarching rhetorical device of apophasis. And yet, just as with the pious Sufi women, we see that the prevailing gender hierarchy appears to remain intact, primarily in the commentary on the episode, despite the reversal in terms of an individual's role in the narrative. In this paradoxical way, it is possible for 'Aṭṭār to both subvert and make use of stereotypes, gender-based or otherwise. The stereotypes seem to be subverted in the individual but upheld in the collective by the insistence on the individual's incredible exceptionalism – 'Oh how strange!' (*'ajab*) is a recurring refrain. But perhaps the epimythia are only meant to be taken at face value by the uninitiated reader. A reader who has seen many such reversals is prepared for them. As a result, by the time the initiated reader has reached the concluding remarks, he knows not to take 'Aṭṭār's *mard* literally – the term has been effectively destablised by the anecdote and no longer means what it did at the outset. So, while using the terms *mardī* and *mard-i rāh* in the epimythia to describe women, 'Aṭṭār successfully attacks the very premises of gender difference and 'unsays'

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[189] IN 2/2, 52.

implicit gender hierarchy, not directly but through paradox and contradictory uses of the same traditional gender terminology.

3.3.2   The Feminisation of Failure in 'Aṭṭār

We have seen that the patriarchal norms surrounding 'Aṭṭār's work tend to be in conflict with the idea that women can achieve on the Path. And yet, generally when women appear in 'Aṭṭār's narratives, they are shown to excel, surprise, subvert.[190] There seems to be little use for the failed woman Sufi, while there is certainly room for the failed male Sufi, whose imprint is left all over 'Aṭṭār's texts. This masculine failure is typically effeminised, and sometimes the blow of feminisation is delivered by a woman. As Frank Lewis explains in his discussion of Christian boy-love in 'Aṭṭār:

> When 'Aṭṭār wishes to chastise one of the male characters in a narrative (or, by extension, the reader) for spiritual lassitude or waywardness, his narrator will often unman and belittle him, labeling him as a non-man, a woman (*zan*), a sissy or a "fag" (*mukhannath*). [...] For this insult to fully work its venom, it must postulate not a mere dichotomy between manliness and non-manliness (that is, between a virtue and its absence), but must additionally insinuate a shameful effeminacy.[191]

One can argue that the negative statements about woman (*zan*) that occur in the Dīvān perform this function, partly because they are largely without context, which is why I have hypothesised in Chapter 2 that many such statements are directly at odds with what we find in the *mathnavīs*. However, in the course of the anecdotal narrativisations,

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[190] In the course of my research, one of the only female characters I found portrayed in a decidedly negative light was the wife of Ardashīr, who tries to poison her husband. This story is taken from the *Shāh-nāmah*. IN 20/4, 292-95.

[191] Lewis, "Sexual Occidentation," 694-95.

a different picture emerges. 'Aṭṭār depicts several women using this emasculating language for ironic effect. Just as 'Aṭṭār plays with the levels of *mardī* to undermine the notion that manliness is equivalent to masculinity, so does he carry that innovation over to *zan* and femininity. I suggest that he uses shock tactics in order to disrupt his audience's smug male chauvinism. This chauvinism might be an allegory for any kind of false sense of superiority, which is of no help on the Sufi path.

One such example of emasculating language occurs in the following tale from the *Muṣibat-nāmah*. A grieving woman asks the king for his boy Ayāz. Both believing themselves truly in love with the boy, they argue over who is the 'real' lover. The woman wins the argument, calls the Shah 'less than a woman,' and then dies. The king pities her and has Ayāz bury her with his own hands.

<div dir="rtl">

شربتی از من مفرح راستست	شاه گفتا گر دلت می‌خواستست
تو ایازم را نگوئی کیستی	لیک تو گر مردی و گر زیستی
هر دو بر روی عاشقیم از دیرگاه	گفت من آنم ایازت را که شاه
گفت من او را بجان بگزیده‌ام	گفت من او را بزر بخریده‌ام
پس تو بیجان زنده چونی درجهان	گفت اگر او را خریدی تو بجان
زندهٔ عشقم بجان زنده نیم	گفت جز از عشق پاینده نیم
چون تواند بود کس زنده بعشق	شاه گفتش ای سرافکنده بعشق
عاشقت پنداشتم ای پادشاه	زن چو بشنود این سخن گفتا که آه
نیستت در عشق بوی صادقی	من گمان بردم که مرد عاشقی
هستی ای مرد از زنی کم چون کنم	نیستی در عشق محرم چون کنم
نه چو من جانسوز کار افتادگیست	پادشاهی جهان آزادگیست
جان بداد و روی در چادر کشید	این بگفت و سر بروزن درکشید

</div>

'If you so desire,' said the king,
'A heartening drink from me seems in order.
'But you — be you dead or alive —
'you do not say who my Ayāz is to you.'
'Ayāz is to me just what he is to the king,' she replied.
'Both of us are his long-time admirers.'
'I have purchased him with gold,' said the king.
'I have chosen him with my soul,' she replied.
'If you've really bought him with your soul,' said the king,
'Then how do you live in this world, soulless?'
'I am sustained by nothing but love,' she remarked,
'I live through love, not through a life-force.'
The king said to her, 'O Lovestruck-one,
'How can anyone survive on love?'
When the woman heard this she sighed,
'I thought you a lover, Your Majesty.
'I believed you were a man of passion.

'[But] you have never truly caught a whiff of love!
'You are not a confidant in love, what can I do!
'O Man, you are less than a woman, what can I do!
'To be king means to be free through the world,
'Not to be distraught over one's troubles like me.'
This she said and hid her head in the window.
She gave up the ghost and hid her face in her veil.[192]

The woman is upheld as the 'true' lover of Ayāz, a role which is rare in 'Aṭṭār.[193] It is a strong statement to depart from this woman's expected representation. But, her status as such once again appears to be undermined by the ending of the story, in which 'Aṭṭār uses the shock of this feminine superiority to insult the king (and the presumably male audience of seekers) into more piously following the Path. The epimythium again casts the woman, as lover, in a supposedly masculine role:

از درخت عشق برخوردار نیست   هر که او خواهان درد کار نیست

درد خواه و درد خواه و درد خواه   گر تو هستی اهل عشق و مرد راه

Whoever does not desire the pain of trial
Does not enjoy the fruits of the tree of love.
If you are one of the people of love, and a man of the Path,
Seek pain, seek pain, seek pain.[194]

The true Man of the Path (*mard-i rāh*) in this tale is not the king but the lowly woman. As such 'Aṭṭār's aside posits manliness as a superior status which, decoupled from biological sex, can be attained by anyone. A straight reading of the gendered terms is

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[192] MN 30/9, 274-75. Uncertain reading on the image of the *rawzan* here.

[193] Other examples would include: IN 14/16 (Mahsatī and Sanjar), IN 2/1 (the trampled woman, cited above) and Zulaykhā, who is considered in depth in Chapter 4.

[194] MN 30/9, 275.

misleading here. He plays with the signification of gender in this anecdote in order to characterise divine love as an equalising force that appeals to the lover's internal rather than external attributes. However, this identification with woman as the Man of God seems to link piety with masculinity even as it tries to subvert the hierarchy. We see that egalitarian ideals are pointed to, but again patriarchal language conventions make a resurgence. The surprising reversal of expectation, which allows the tale to work, points out the 'soft bigotry of low expectations' for women seekers. The anecdotes function to break down that assumption, and when seemingly patriarchal interpretations return in the asides, it is with a new resonance to *mardī*, which is unshackled from gender. 'Aṭṭār looks to unsay the social hierarchy while appealing to the very language of that hierarchy. I suggest that the contradiction is not an accidental incongruence or oversight, but a purposeful contradiction to shock the reader into a reevaluation of his own assumptions of feminine inferiority. As Fatemeh Keshavarz writes in regards to Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, 'Searching for patterns in his work, will more often than not, lead to patterns that were created to be dismantled or transformed.'[195]

In a similar episode of feminising masculine failure, a Christian woman critiques her son who has just converted to Islam for not properly adhering to the tenets of Islam. If one is to convert, she implies, one must follow the rules of the new religion:

بمی خوردن شد آن جاهل دگر روز	یکی ترسا مسلمان گشت و پیروز
بدو گفت ای پسر آخر چه کردی	چو مادر مست دید او را ز دردی
محمّد ناشده خشنود از تو	که شد آزرده عیسی زود از تو
که هر رعنامزاجی مرد او نیست	مخنّثوار رفتن ره نکو نیست
که نامردیست در دین بت پرستی	بمردی رَو دران دینی که هستی

A Christian converted to Islam and was victorious.

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[195] Keshavarz, "Pregnant with God," 91.

> The very next day, that ignorant one got drunk on wine.
> When his mother saw him drunk, out of pain
> She said to him, 'O Son, what have you done?
> 'Jesus grew frustrated with you quickly.
> 'Neither is Muhammad pleased with you.
> 'Traveling on the Way like a catamite is not decent,
> 'For whoever is effeminate (*ra'nā-mizājī*[196]) is not His man.
> 'Pursue manliness in that religion you have accepted.
> 'Idol worship is unmanly within the faith.'[197]

In a twist, the Christian mother becomes the ultimate source of authoritative knowledge on Islam, while the male convert to Islam fails the spiritual test. And yet, surprisingly, she encourages her son to be 'manly,' (i.e. devout, righteous) even in the framework of a religion which is not her own. By putting the condemnation of 'womanliness' in the mouth of a woman who is presented as the Muslim's proper guide, 'Aṭṭār makes explicit the difference between 'womanliness,' as a negatively-connotated category, and femaleness. Lewis notes the way this authority can permeate religious traditions,

> 'Aṭṭār frequently couches his discourse on religious affiliation in terms of emasculation – both in insults directed against characters for a misguided confessional adherence, or for a deficient measure of faith and religious devotion to their religious beliefs (*whether in Islam or another tradition*). [...] Didactic insults calculated to prod the lackadaisical addressee into greater spiritual effort often come couched in gendered terms for 'Aṭṭār.[198] [Emphasis mine.]

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[196] An alternative translation could be 'like a stupid woman,' understanding *ra'nā* in the archaic meaning of *zan-gūl*, *sust*, and *ḍa'īf*, or *zan-i ablah* as given by Dihkhoda. *Mizāj* then functions as a compound-forming suffix, like *mānand*.

[197] IN 5/5, 95.

[198] Franklin Lewis, "Sexual Occidentation," 694-95.

Just as confessional background does not factor into a character's ability to demonstrate Islamic mystical insight, gender identity is also irrelevant to the seeker's success. Not only is 'Aṭṭār exposing the gap between mystical *mardī* and biological, masculine *mardī*, with these emasculating insults he also opens up the category of 'woman' as a potential home for men. While I do not deny the implication of placing male on top of the hierarchy and female at the bottom, 'Aṭṭār's aim here is to destabilise the terminology of polarised genders to the point where its relationship to biology disintegrates. [199] As a result, he attacks not only chauvinist distinctions based on gender, but also distinctions based on other identity markers.

3.4 The Radical Power of Transgressive Love: Shaykh San'ān and Destabilising Essentialist Categories

No consideration of minor female characters in 'Aṭṭār can be complete without exploring the critical role played by an unnamed Christian girl in one of his most well-known tales, the story of Shaykh San'ān. This tale is particularly tricky and ambivalent in its treatment of its female lead. Consequently, it makes a good candidate for in-depth analysis of the role of transgressive love and its relationship to gender in 'Aṭṭār's thought. The context of the anecdote is important for determining where it falls in the overarching structure of the narrative and how that might influence the intended message. The story of the Christian girl (*dukhtar-i tarsā*) appears directly after the final 'answer of the hoopoo' section. In this type of section, the hoopoo normally responds to

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[199] 'Aṭṭār destabilises the gendered terms, but within a frame that puts manliness over femininity. It is possible to explain this apparent contradiction by reference to the paradigm I've set up in which patriarchal context intervenes in the application of Sufi egalitarianism.

an excuse given by one of the other birds who decides not to come on the journey to find the bird-king (*sīmurgh*). Just prior to the episode of *dukhtar-i tarsā*, the hoopoo has finally convinced the birds to come and is explaining to them the difficulties that they will face on the Path as lovers. It tries to warn the others that the lover thinks nothing of his own life. It is in this context that we receive the famous tale of Shaykh San'ān and the Christian girl, wherein the Shaykh is upheld as the lover who has no consideration for his own safety and security.

There is a correlation in the tale between space, liminality, orthodoxy and Otherness. The Shaykh begins the story as the ultimate embodiment of formalist Islam. It is hardly a coincidence, then, that he is based in Mecca, that most traditional location for performing the outward rites of Islam. The object of the Shaykh's love, however, is a concatenation of several markers of Otherness — Christian, female, foreigner — reflected in her location in Anatolia. As Franklin Lewis's analysis reveals, the symbol of the Christian boy as the paragon of beauty is more common and normative than a Christian girl.[200] To the best of my knowledge, Shaykh San'ān's Christian girl is the only Christian female beloved who appears in 'Aṭṭār's *mathnavīs*.[201] This transgressive love of the Shaykh for the Other leads to his transition from an orthodox shaykh who practices only the outward rites of Islam to a true mystic seeker who understands the pain and sacrifice involved in loving the divine. The tale puts into narrative form the transformative power of love as it is described by the king in the *Ilāhī-nāmah* at the

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[200] Lewis, "Sexual Occidentation," 708.

[201] Ritter also does not record any other Christian female beloveds in 'Aṭṭār. He relates two other stories on the improper love of a Muslim man for a Christian girl, from Nīsābūrī's *Rawnaq al-Majālis*, but these tales straightforwardly aim at warning men of the dangers of being led astray by a woman of another faith. (*Bāb* 12, nos. 5 and 6.) Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, 401.

outset of Discourse II on love. We witness the shaykh develop through the stages of *shahvat, 'ishq*, and *muḥabbat.* These stages represent the traditional progression of a seeker, who is first inspired by earthly lust to begin his journey on the Path. Thus we see Sanā'ī's saying that *'ishq majāzī* is the bridge to *'ishq ḥaqīqī* borne out. As Yaghoobi notes in her analysis of the tale, 'Aṭṭār depicts the Christian girl (*Tarsā-bachchah*) and her conditions as the temptations and hurdles that the Shaykh must undergo to perceive heavenly love and divine beauty. He illustrates the way that these demands and hardships open up possibilities for the Shaykh.'[202]

The Christian girl herself points out the oddness of the match and reinforces her identity as Other. In the meantime, she also connects the Shaykh to *zuhd*. In 'Aṭṭār's writings, as well as in the writings of some others Sufis, *zuhd* takes on the dimension of rigorous asceticism done for its own sake, thereby becoming an obstacle to progress in the inner aspects of *taṣavvuf*.[203]

بود بالین آستان آن درش   بود خاک کوی آن بت بسترش

دختر آگه شد ز عاشق گشتنش   چون نبود از کوی او بگذشتنش

گفت ای شیخ از چه گشتی بی‌قرار   خویشتن را اعجمی ساخت آن نگار

زاهدان در کوی ترسایان نشست   کی کنند ای از شراب شرک مست

The dirt in that idol's alleyway became his bed,
The threshold of her door, his pillow.
Since he never left the alley,
The girl became aware he had fallen in love.
That beauty made herself up like a foreigner (*'ajamī*).
'O Shaykh,' she said. 'Why are you so distraught?
'You who are drunk on the wine of idolatry,

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[202] Yaghoobi, "Against the Current," 102.

[203] Christopher Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E.," *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996): 64-66.

'Since when do ascetics sit in the alleys of Christians?' [204]

The Christian girl seems to be using the word *zāhid* more generally to express her shock at the pious person languishing in the alleyway of an infidel. However, keeping the ultimate message of the story regarding the need to succumb to a dangerous and transformative love experience, the Christian girl's rebuke takes on a secondary resonance. We can understand her rhetorical question, 'Since when do ascetics sit in the alleys of Christians?', as means to express the shortcomings of the *zāhid*, in the more restricted definition of the self-congratulating renunciant. Furthermore, it associates the Shaykh with that negatively-connotated *zuhd* that appears later in the tale as his moniker. The Christian girl herself is also aware of her status as an earthly beloved and distraction, hence the reference to *shirk*, implying that San'ān worships her as one worships an idol. The illicit nature of the love affair is reinforced by her status as Other and this reference to *'ajamī*.

The transgressive nature of the Shaykh's love is made abundantly clear by the Christian girl's own speech. Although the Shaykh's actions are clearly labelled as *kufr*, his interactions with the Other are what finally allow him to move beyond the limitations of *zuhd* and come to grips with divine love:

<div dir="rtl">

دخترش گفت ای تو مردِ کار نه   مدعی در عشق، معنی‌دار نه

گر قدم در عشق محکم داریی   مذهب این زلف پر خم داریی

همچو زلفم نه قدم در کافری   زانک نبود عشق کار سرسری

عافیت با عشق نبود سازگار   عاشقی را کفر سازد یاددار

اقتداء گر تو به کفر من کنی   با من این دم دست در گردن کنی

</div>

The girl said to him, 'You are not a man of [real] work.

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[204] MṬ 73, ln. 1307-10.

'You are an imposter in love, not one who is authentic.
'If you step firmly into the way of love,
'You'll accept the religion of these curly locks.
'Set foot in infidelity, just like my tresses,
'For love is no superficial trial.
'Security has no place in the world of love.
'Infidelity suits a lover, remember.
'If you follow me into the ways of unbelief,
'This very moment your hand will reach my neck.'[205]

The Christian girl explicitly posits the necessity of descending into unbelief and casting off all pretensions of security if one wants to be more than an imposter in love. As Annemarie Schimmel puts it, 'Here, the rapture is produced by a beloved object that should, essentially, be repellent to the pious ascetic. The story of Shaykh San'ān symbolises that frenzy of love that is beyond all bounds, be they religious, social, or communal, a frenzy that defies logical reasoning and carries the lover into a state that he himself would never have anticipated.' The girl's invitation to consort with an example of extreme Otherness heightens the appearance that the Shaykh is certainly wandering into error. But, rather than a detour from the Path, the illogical and all-consuming nature of his love is a prerequisite for it to lead him to divine love.

To this point, the Christian girl's role in the story is fairly clear. As Yaghoobi also points out, she represents the temptation, and thereby the transformative force, which allows the Shaykh finally to submit to the will of the divine. However, the Christian girl's role in the story does not end once the Shaykh has made his transition from the formalistic practice of Islam to the enlightened mystic lover of God. She cannot, therefore, simply be interpreted as the symbolic trial the Shaykh undergoes to test and re-establish the depth and strength of his faith. The question remains, if the

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[205] MṬ 76-77, ln. 1368-72. '*Dast dar gardan konī,*' i.e. 'You'll be able to touch me.'

Christian girl is the transformative force revealing the pretensions of the outwardly 'pious,' why then is she converted to Islam at the end? Once her transformative function is no longer required by the narrative, why does 'Aṭṭār bother finishing her role in the tale?

One answer could be that 'Aṭṭār's anecdote is meant to imply the significance of a transformative love relationship not just for the lover but also for the beloved. In this story, 'Aṭṭār indicates that the earthly beloved's role does not have to end with his or her inspiring the lover to move from earthly to divine love. The beloved him or herself possesses agency and dynamism beyond the role of *bahānah* (pretext, or springboard). This dynamism presents itself in full force during the Christian girl's conversion scene. She has a vision in her sleep in which the sun tells her she made a grave error in leading the Shaykh astray. It compels her to go to him and ask for a conversion to Islam at his hands. Her transformation from haughty beloved to distraught lover is dramatic and indicative of a major shift from her previous characterisation:

خاک بر سر در میان خون دوید   نعره زد جامه دران بیرون دوید
از پی شیخ و مریدان شد دوان[...]   با دل پردرد و شخص ناتوان
از کدامین سوی می‌باید گذشت   می‌ندانست او که در صحرا و دشت
روی خود در خاک می‌مالید خوش   عاجز و سرگشته می‌نالید خوش

She screamed and ran outside, tearing her clothes.
She ran through blood, throwing dirt on her head.
With a heart full of pain and her body incapable,
She ran after the Shaykh and his disciples. [...]
She didn't know which way she should take
Within the expanse and empty desert.
Weak and bewildered, she wailed.
She rubbed her face in the dirt.[206]

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[206] MṬ 86, 1552-56.

This is where the Shaykh and his disciples find her when she pleads for the Shaykh's forgiveness and converts before dying. This transition from beloved to lover is rare and reads as jerky and uneven.[207] Most 'Aṭṭārian characters remain in one allegorical mode or another (lover or beloved), and typically cannot be both at the same time, as this would lead to union, which is rarely depicted in narrative form in 'Aṭṭār's work. By setting this event in a liminal place, a space of placelessness utterly unidentifiable, 'Aṭṭār points to the fundamental flexibility and fluidity of typical markers of identity in the wake of the all-effacing mystical encounter with divine love. In this place empty of meaning, the Christian girl is no longer the Christian girl from Anatolia, nor the Shaykh the orthodox master of asceticism associated with Mecca at the beginning of the tale. Their encounter has mutually transformed them both, shaken them out of not only their identities and faiths, but also out of their allegorical roles of *'āshiq* and *ma'shūq*. This could be 'Aṭṭār's ultimate point in continuing the story of the Christian girl beyond the Shaykh's moment of repentance, to show the transformative power that love can have even on a distant, exotic, and unmoved beloved who seems to be beyond love's reach. Just like the Shaykh, she is humbled by love and brought low to the station of the lover. When the dust settles after this radical upending of the stable categories of identity, both characters end up on the right side of the faith question and as successful mystical *'āshiqs*.

To illustrate the truly unusual nature of the role of the Christian girl in the Shaykh San'ān story, it may be instructive to contrast it with one of the only other instances I have found in an 'Aṭṭār anecdote that a woman plays the role of both beloved and lover. In one such episode in the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*, a king's daughter falls in love

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[207] The same is true for the transition in Jāmī's *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā*. See my discussion in Chapter 4.

with a slave. Her attendant slave girls drug him and put him in her bed at night. Dumbstruck, princess and slave spend the night together in union. As he sleeps, they carry him back to his room. He wakes up, and gives a long monologue in which he attempts to determine if what he experienced was real, and if was he drunk or sober. It is quite a long anecdote for the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*, coming in at 80 lines in the Gouharin edition. We have a very physical description of union, despite the recasting of it as divine union. This kind of ambiguity is not typical for ʿAṭṭār's allegorical representations of the love:

<div dir="rtl">

چشم او و در چهرهٔ جانان بماند   در رخ دختر همی حیران بماند

چون نمی‌آمد ز فانش کارگر   اشک می‌بارید و می‌خارید سر

هر زمان آن دختر همچون نگار   اشک بر رویش فشاندی صد هزار

گه لبش را بوسه دادی چون شکر   گه نمک در بوسه کردی بی‌جگر

گه پریشان کرد زلف سرکشش   گاه گم شد در دو جادوی خوشش

وان غلام مست پیشِ دل نواز   مانده بد با خود نه بی‌خود چشم باز

هم درین نظاره می‌بود آن غلام   تا برآمد صبح از مشرق تمام

</div>

His eyes were fixed on the face of his beloved,
Bewildered by [the beauty of] her countenance.
His words failed him, tears streamed down his face.
Every moment, the princess — a true beauty—
Cried a hundred thousand tears.
Sometimes she kissed his lips, sweet as sugar,
Other times salty, her heart lost [to passion].
Now he brushed aside her enchanting locks,
Now he was lost in her bewitching [eyes]
And that drunken slave boy was dumbstruck
Before that sweetheart, transfixed, beside himself.
And in that state of observance he remained
Until the sun came up all the way over the horizon.[208]

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[208] MṬ 215, 3864-70.

In this case, we see the woman playing an active role as lover in the set up to the crux of the tale. Considerable energy is spent describing her beauty and the inevitability of submitting to her love of the slave. She conspires to get her way and succeeds in attaining union with her beloved. However, the tale then takes a sudden shift in focus after the passage quoted above. The male slave is recentered as the focus of the anecdote, and becomes the archetypal Sufi lover who experiences union with God unexpectedly and then cannot decipher or even describe his experience. The transition is somewhat clumsily achieved. It is difficult for the reader to reconcile the highly physical description of an earthly love scene with the purely divine experience the slave is questioned about by his friends.

This paradox, which obscures the line between earthly and divine love, is precisely the point of 'Aṭṭār's tale. Very often in 'Aṭṭār, earthly love is not consummated, but represents a (chaste) bridge to divine love. The anecdote appears aware of its own paradoxical content, which it expresses through the words of the slave describing his experience:

حالتی نه آشکارا نه نهان	زین عجب‌تر حال نبود در جهان
نه میان این و آن مدهوش بود	نه توانم گفت و نه خاموش بود
نه از و یک ذره می‌یابم نشان[...]	نه زمانی محو می‌گردد ز جان
در میان این و آن شوریده‌ام	من چو او را دیده یا نادیده‌ایم

No stranger state than this has the world ever known,
A state neither plain nor hidden.
I can neither speak, nor remain silent.
I am dumbstruck between one and the other.
Nor for a moment is she effaced from my soul,
But neither do I find any sign of her. [...]
Ever since I saw her – or didn't see her? –

Not knowing has driven me into a frenzy.[209]

These repeated paradoxes, one after another, are an excellent example of apophatic discourse and the triangulation of descriptions of divine experience. But, surprisingly, given the setup of the story, the entire focus has shifted to the slave's confusion of the experience of union. To some extent, this makes sense given the context in which the anecdote appears – it is the very first anecdote appearing in the section entitled 'The Valley of Bewilderment.' However, the shift to the slave's experience is jarring, since the entire first half of the anecdote focuses on the princess's helplessness in love and descent into stratagem. It shows that a female character who appears to be at the centre of the anecdote can easily be dropped in favour a more convenient allegory, in this case the slave boy, who is identified with the archetypal *'āshiq*. While the tale begins with the princess in the role of the earthly *'āshiq*, by its close she is firmly positioned as *ma'shūq*. Meanwhile, the role of the slave is also reversed from *ma'shūq* to bewildered *'āshiq*. It is not clear whether this is because the *ma'shūq* is more naturally cast as feminine and the *'āshiq* as male, or whether 'Aṭṭār tries to emphasise the flexibility of these states for all people and genders. Given what we have observed elsewhere regarding the disintegration of gendered terms, I would tend to favour the second argument, but it is not clear from the anecdote alone.

In this way, the princess and the slave draw a useful contrast to Shaykh San'ān and the Christian girl. For the princess and slave, the transformative love experience causes each to switch roles in the lover-beloved paradigm. For Shaykh San'ān and the Christian girl the identity shifts are more complete – they include ruptures of the orthodoxy/non-orthodoxy, Muslim/Christian, and lover/beloved dichotomies. This final

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[209] MṬ 216-17, ln. 3887-89, 3893.

lover/beloved pairing most typically maps onto the male/female binary, but it is transcended in this case. By taking the story of the Christian girl to completion, instead of dropping her like the princess, 'Aṭṭār more effectively represents the transformative effect that transgressive love can have on the beloved as well as the lover. He thereby suggests its power to shatter hierarchy and notions of identity for all parties involved.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the representation of female stock characters and minor female characters in 'Aṭṭār's *mathnavīs*. It suggests that despite the misogynist maxims presented in Chapter 2, 'Aṭṭār's representation of women covers a wide range of roles, from embodiment of temptation to model mystic. Beginning with a brief overview of the stock characters easily summarised in patterns, the chapter notes their tendency to subvert expectations, especially with regards to the old wise woman figure. From there it examines woman in the role of the Sufi lover and the use of apophasis and paradox to destabilise gendered language. These destabilisations of language result in the disintegration of identity markers and questions the hierarchy erected on top of those distinctions. Finally, the chapter discusses some of the more intriguing and ambiguous cases where the lover-beloved designation is not fixed. These cases are used to suggest that through paradox, 'Aṭṭār aims at revealing the mutability of all kinds of identity markers, not just gender, in terms of their relevance to the mystic path.

For the literary critic or gender historian who seeks out positive representations of common women in Sufism, the works of 'Aṭṭār provide a wealth of material. Not only are women accepted as sources of religious authority, their very status as gendered Other is often used as a point of surprise to elevate woman's status as a spiritual authority and capable Sufi. The contrast between the veneration of these women and the anti-women maxims in Chapter 2 can be primarily explained as a manifestation of the tension between patriarchal context and Sufi egalitarianism. While in some places 'Aṭṭār manages to break out of the gender hierarchy by destabilising the terminology, ultimately, (non-biological) manliness (*mardī*) remains firmly on top. From these fascinating inconsistencies in the representation of minor female characters, whether intentional or not, we move next to the question of female desire in 'Aṭṭār's work, as viewed through the lens of that most iconic of seductresses, Zulaykhā.

4 RECASTING FEMALE DESIRE IN 'AṬṬĀR'S *MATHNAVĪS*

ZULAYKHĀ AND THE TECHNIQUE OF DEFAMILIARISATION

4.1 Introduction

'*Inna kayda-kunna 'aḍīm*!'[210] remarks 'Azīz in *Sūrat Yūsuf* of the Qur'an. 'Truly your women's guile is great!' This famous quote has formed the basis of many interpretations of the image of Zulaykhā, the Qur'anic analogue to Potiphar's wife, who represents the temptress *par excellence* in much of Islamic tradition. As Fedwa Malti-Douglas has pointed out, '[H]er impact on Islamic mental structures is enormous...

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[210] Q 12:28.

albeit negative. Her unfruitful adventures are there as a subtext in other narrative seduction attempts.'[211] Yet the same cannot be said regarding her 'negative' impact on the later Islamicate literatures in which the Yūsuf cycle proliferated, particularly in the mystical or Sufi interpretations of her character. Though Sufi literature in Arabic and Persian is by no means monolithic in its representation of Zulaykhā, 'Aṭṭār has followed that strain which reverses the symbolism of her character. He transforms the traditionally sexualised and demonised Zulaykhā into one of two figures, depending on the anecdote: a faithful mystic lover, or a manifestation of the divine. These roles could be filled by a generic woman or a female stock character, and indeed there are instances of this within 'Aṭṭār's works, so what is gained by reference to the Yūsuf story? The advantage of employing this familiar story for unfamiliar purposes is that it creates a shock for the audience to see Zulaykhā recast in such a role. This device was referred to by the Russian Formalists, in particular Viktor Shklovsky, as 'defamiliarisation.'[212] 'Aṭṭār's Zulaykhā is defamiliarised for the audience by virtue of the fact that in the Qur'anic tradition, she represents the acme of feminine lust, weakness, and duplicity. As a result, her transformation into the model lover who is patient, constant, and persevering in the face of adversity, cannot but represent a surprising reversal of expectation. These stories exemplify a larger trend in 'Aṭṭār's writings, that is, the insistence on the theme of appearance versus reality. The same logic that underpins Zulaykhā's transformation underlies many of 'Aṭṭār's stories which deal with the unexpected spiritual supremacy of otherwise low-ranking individuals in the social hierarchy.

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[211] Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word*, 56.

[212] Viktor Shklovsky, "Art As Technique," in *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Richard J Lane (New York: Routledge, 2013), 7–20.

In order to examine how 'Aṭṭār transforms the long-used image of Zulaykhā as seductress, I will be making use of the concept of defamiliarisation as first proposed by Viktor Shklovsky and elaborated by later theorists. Shklovsky posits that:

> The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.[213]

By making familiar objects unfamiliar, art 'defacilitates' the viewer / listener / reader's immediate understanding, and as such forces him to experience a response above and beyond habitual perception. 'Art removes objects from the automatism of perception' writes Shklovsky.[214] Although Shklovsky gives a few examples of defamiliarisation in Russian literature, he focuses mainly on the use of unusual narrator perspectives. Later theorists have expanded on the idea to include, 'such matters as the creative manipulation, radical upsetting, and distortion of familiar traditions or the "foregrounding" of certain artifices formerly employed less manneristically.'[215] These theories will be useful for investigating 'Aṭṭār's technique of transforming Zulaykhā's role and the potential effect such a transformation may have had on his readers.

To understand 'Aṭṭār's symbolic use of Zulaykhā, one must consider the earlier material which constructed the very image of Zulaykhā that 'Aṭṭār's work recasts. Only by exploring the sources on which 'Aṭṭār may have based his work can I elucidate the

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[213] Ibid, 11.

[214] Ibid, 12.

[215] Robert Harold Stacy, *Defamiliarization in Language and Literature* (Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1977), x.

changes he has made and how they were calculated to shock and surprise. As such, the chapter is structured into four parts. First, I give an overview of the scholarly discussions of Zulaykhā's role in scripture, *tafsīr*, and Persian mystical texts. I suggest that many premodern commentators fall into one of two camps regarding Zulaykhā, as a result so do many modern interpretations, though certainly not all. These two dominant interpretations – Zulaykhā as sinful seductress and Zulaykhā as redeemed, faithful lover – do not quite cover all of her representations in 'Aṭṭār, and should be expanded. Second, the essay considers Surah 12 of the Qur'an, *Sūrat Yūsuf*, which is the Islamic scriptural standard telling of the story, and briefly analyses Zulykhā's depiction therein. Third, I investigate the early Sufi Qur'an commentators from the 11th to 13th centuries to determine the range of mystical interpretations of the *Surah* that may have been available to 'Aṭṭār, either through physical copies of books,[216] or through circulating oral teachings. Using materials from outside the Qur'an, such as the *isrā'īliyyāt*, the Talmud and the Midrash, the commentators expand greatly on the Qur'anic narrative, some of them picking up where Surah 12 leaves off to tell the story of Zulaykhā's suffering and eventual marriage to Yūsuf.[217] I show that although there was no

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[216] It cannot be determined whether 'Aṭṭār had seen copies of these commentaries, but there is some possibility of it, as Nishapur was home base for some of the famous Qur'an commentators, including Qushayrī and Sulamī. Perhaps with detailed philological comparison, connections might be unearthed. Alan Godlas has recently demonstrated the wide influence of Qushayrī's *Laṭā'if* across the medieval Islamic world, so there is a chance it was known to 'Aṭṭār. Arberry suggests that it was. 'Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, 13-14; Alan Godlas, "Influences of Qushayrī's Laṭāʾif al-Ishārāt on Sufi Qur'anic Commentaries, Particularly Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's ʿArāʾis al-Bayān and the Kubrawi al-Taʾwīlāt al-Najmiyya," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 78–92.

[217] Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qur'an Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 189; Gayane Merguerian and Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Zulaykha and Yusuf: 'Whose Best Story'?," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (1997): 486.

consensus among the Sufi Qur'anic commentators, there is evidence of some commentators preferring a more sympathetic reading of Zulaykhā's conduct before 'Aṭṭār's time. This more sympathetic reading of the Qur'an could have given 'Aṭṭār a scriptural and theological basis for his works' representation of Zulaykhā. Fourth, having established what major sources of Qur'anic inspiration may have been available to 'Aṭṭār, I compare Zulaykhā in 'Aṭṭār's texts with her representation in some key texts of the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* genre and Jāmī's *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā* in order to contrast them and set 'Aṭṭār's representation into relief.

In the course of these comparisons, I argue that by liberating Zulaykhā from the continuity of narrative, 'Aṭṭār is able to circumvent the two most plausible readings of her character based on the Qur'anic material: lustful woman to be punished, or reformed transgressor who is rewarded for her repentance and suffering with marriage to Yūsuf. 'Aṭṭār escapes this dichotomy by giving us different angles on the narrative, never the whole. He provides us instead with two different interpretations: 1) devoted lover who is not repentant of her love, willing to suffer and 2) the divine beloved. While other writers who present a more positive Zulaykhā work to rehabilitate her image by making her clear transgression in the seduction scene comprehensible and maybe even excusable, 'Aṭṭār avoids it or reconfigures it into a chaste scene implying divine union. This is where 'Aṭṭār has broken new ground and made the familiar Zulaykhā tropes unfamiliar once more.

Zulaykhā represents more than just herself in 'Aṭṭār's writings. Her character functions as a barometer for attitudes towards female sexual desire and the concept of 'guile' as a feminine quality more broadly. As a result, she proves to be an important case study if we are to gain a more complete image of how femininity and sexuality,

and its relationship to trickery and seduction, were handled in Medieval Sufism. The tale is cited in many genres and thus has 'come to saturate the construction of gender in Islamic societies.'[218] As the symbol *par excellence* for female desire and temptation, the figure of Zulaykhā continues to resonate in contemporary debates about the position of women in Islam up to this very day.[219] Attempts have been made by modern writers to reappropriate the symbol of Zulaykhā and transform her into an example of strong, socially acceptable female sexuality.[220] As such, the arguments made here to expand our understanding of the possible spectrum of premodern functions of the Zulaykhā figure may also have consequences for contemporary debates.

4.2 Literature Review: Secondary Sources on *Sūrat Yūsuf* and Jāmī's *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā*

'A woman makes vain overtures to a man and then accuses him of attempting to force her.'[221] Thus Stith Thompson bluntly summarises the Potiphar's Wife cycle in folklore. Despite the fact that the gist of the tale can be encompassed in less than twenty words, the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife from Genesis and Yūsuf and Zulaykhā

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[218] Merguerian and Najmabadi, "Whose 'Best Story'?," 487.

[219] Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York : Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 50-55.

[220] Contemporary Turkish novelist Elif Shafak, for example, writes, 'The ghost of Zulaikha haunts my writing, and it is a good ghost, I know. My fiction is a tribute to the marginalized interpretation of the most controversial woman in the history of Islam.' Elif Shafak, "Women Writers and the Ghost of Zulaikha," *Words Without Borders*, December 2005. Accessed 17 Jan 2017.

[221] Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books and Local Legends.*, vol. 4 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955), 474.

from the Qur'an has produced vast amounts of scholarly analysis, the bulk of which would be beyond the scope of this study.[222] Only a fraction of that scholarly attention, though, has been directed towards the woman's role in the holy texts. This is justifiable because the woman's role in each case is quite limited. The story is mainly about Yūsuf's triumph, and thus, '[t]he ambiguity of the Qur'anic text vis-a-vis the woman's role and responsibility is linked to the narrative irrelevancy of the matter.'[223] It is true that we must be careful of over-emphasising Zulaykhā's role in the Qur'anic account. However, in later Islamicate literatures, Zulaykhā's role gains in significance as meaning as the Yūsuf cycle expands through Qur'anic exegesis, the stories of the prophets, the romance, Sufi literature, *adab* literature and the *makr-i zan* or 'wiles of women' morality literature, exemplified by texts such as *One Thousand and One Nights, Sandbād-nāmah*, and *Tūtī-nāmah*.[224] The ambiguity and leeway that the Qur'anic narrative affords later authors leads to a blossoming of a range of interpretations of Zulaykhā's persona, ranging from contemptible seductress to exulted feminine. Particularly in the case of the mystical narratives, the authors 'fluctuat[e]

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[222] For example, there is a large amount of scholarship comparing the Biblical and Qur'anic versions, which take the Qur'anic version as its endpoint. See M S Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph: Narrative Migrations Between Judaism and Islam* (Wayne State University Press, 2006); Gary A. Rendsburg, "Literary Structures in the Qur'anic and Biblical Stories of Joseph," *The Muslim World* 78, no. 2 (1988): 118–20. I do not consider the Biblical version in any kind of detail here.

[223] Merguerian and Najmabadi, "Whose 'Best Story'?," 490.

[224] These later two have been identified by Merguerian and Najmabadi, 'Whose "Best Story"?' 486. One interesting text of *adab* literature is discussed in depth by Malti-Douglas entitled *Kitāb al- 'Unwān fī Makāyid al-Niswān* by Ibn al-Batunānī (d. 6th/15th century).

between condemning Zulaykhā's attempt to take Yūsuf's innocence and admiring her total love for him.'[225]

Scholars who have focused on Zulaykhā's role in the holy texts and iterations appearing in later Islamicate literatures have generated several different interpretations of the material, typically depending upon which sources they focus on and which they see as authoritative. Some commentators, medieval and modern, interpret the Qur'anic tale as primarily a meditation on the dangers of female sexual desire and the need for controlling it.[226] M A S Haleem and Mustansir Mir, for example, both see Zulaykhā as a strong-willed, lust-driven character who is forceful enough to get her own way despite her husband. Neither attempts to explain why Zulaykhā is given the chance to accept blame and repent in the Qur'an, whilst Potiphar's wife is not. Others focus on this opportunity Zulaykhā is given to repent, and use it as grounds to posit the Qur'anic version as 'less misogynistic' than Genesis. Marilyn R. Waldman, for example, sees a significant difference between the Qur'anic treatment of Zulaykhā and the Biblical, connecting that to the narratives' differing functions as a universalist parable on God's guidance (Qur'an) and semi-historical narrative detailing Yūsuf's rise to prominence (Genesis). Even still, she reads Genesis as a misogynist narrative, and the Qur'an as a

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[225] Merguerian and Najmabadi, "Whose 'Best Story'?", 497.

[226] 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād, *Al-Mar'a Fī al-Qur'ān* (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Hilāl, 1971); Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing*; M A S Abdel Haleem, "The Story of Joseph in the Qur'an and the Old Testament," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 1, no. 2 (1990): 171–91; Mustansir Mir, "The Qur'anic Story of Joseph: Plot, Themes, and Characters," *The Muslim World* 76, no. 1 (1986): 1–15; Leila Ahmed, "Arab Culture and Writing Women's Bodies," *Feminist Issues*, no. Spring (1989): 48.

forgiveness story. We remain trapped inside the dichotomy of interpretation.[227] Still others claim that the story does not make a gendered point about guile, and that its main purpose is to show God's forgiveness of those who love and fall to temptation, whether male or female.[228]

Abdelwahab Boudhiba, who sees the Qur'anic version's misogyny as 'palliated' makes an argument to dampen the perceived misogynistic blow dealt by the Qur'an. 'This "your guile is great" is addressed beyond Zulaykhā, to the whole female sex,' writes Abdelwaheb Bouhdiba in his gender-psychological critique, *Sexuality and Islam*. He continues:

> Certain misogynists have seen this incident as proof of the eternal damnation of women. One really must be deaf to the poetry of the language not to feel the tender emotions at work in the Quranic account. Zuleikha certainly constitutes the prototype of the female temptress, intriguing, false, lying. But how sly and playful she is! Wickedness, artifice, trickery and false innocence, the *kaid* is all these things at once![229]

Of all the arguments which defend the Qur'anic account regarding its alleged chauvinist denunciation of womankind, this is one of the strangest. Bouhdiba defends women from the charge of collective duplicity, but gives us only a redoubled confirmation of the

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[227] Marilyn R Waldman, "New Approaches to 'Biblical' Materials in the Qur'ān," *The Muslim World* 75, no. 1 (1985): 1–13.

[228] Oliver Leaman, "Appearance and Reality in the Qur'an: Bilqis and Zulaykha'," *Islam Arastirmalari Dergisi* 10 (2003), 36; Shalom Goldman, *The Wiles of Women/The Wiles of Men: Joseph and Potiphar's Wife in Ancient Near Eastern, Jewish, and Islamic Folklore* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), xx.

[229] Abdelwahab Boudhiba, "La Sexualité en Islam," *Paris, PUF*, 1975, 33-41.

supposedly stereotypical representation. It is as though the effectiveness of her seduction absolves her from it being wrong.

The Qur'anic narrative itself contains elements of both readings and the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Many commentators have interpreted the role of 'Azīz's wife in the Qur'anic account in light of one strain of characterisation at the expense of the other. Scholars like Goldman have noted as much. He writes that upon closer study, 'We may find that Joseph is not as saintly, and Potiphar's wife not as villainous, as first impressions would indicate.'[230] Especially to encompass these Persian mystical re-imaginings of Zulaykhā, the interpretive possibilities need to be expanded.

Some scholars have begun to do just that. Regarding Jāmī's version of *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā*, David Pendlebury discusses Jāmī's 'ambiguous attitude towards his heroine' and posits that Jāmī exploits the ambiguity surrounding the nature of her love (divine or carnal?) to encompass all elements of the Qur'anic narrative without letting Zulaykhā entirely off the hook.[231] Najmabadi and Davis, on the other hand, suggest a new psychological interpretation, positing that from a male reader's point of view, the story is not about female desire at all, but that Zulaykhā acts as a screen allowing the male reader to entertain his own desire for Yūsuf.[232] A final group of studies deals with the

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[230] Despite referring to her as Potiphar's wife, Goldman references both the Biblical and Qur'anic versions here. Goldman, *The Wiles of Women/The Wiles of Men*, xxi.

[231] Nur al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad Jāmī and David Pendlebury, *Yusuf and Zulaikha: An Allegorical Romance* (Octagon Press, 1980), 172.

[232] Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Reading – and Enjoying – 'Wiles of Women' Stories as a Feminist," *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1999): 203–22.

Zulaykhā in the role of the Sufi lover, as it is expressed in some of the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* and Sufi literature, that is, a Zulaykhā entirely repurposed.[233]

The most useful pieces of scholarship for the purposes of this study are those that take a wider view of the Joseph cycle in Islamic literature and discuss the developments of her representation over time. Particularly helpful are Barbara Stowasser and Afsaneh Najmabadi and Gayane Merguerian.[234] Stowasser's study charts various female figures in the Qur'an and the historical development of their interpretations within Islam via the Qur'an itself, *ḥadīth*, and *tafsīr*, from premodern to modern times. Najmabadi and Merguerian's article takes a more focused approach, dealing only with Surah 12 and its later iterations. Their article traces the development of the Zulaykhā cycle through Genesis, the Qur'an, *tafsīr*, *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā*, Sufi literature, and *kayd al-nisā'* or *makr-i zan* stories. They accept Stowasser's argument that the post-Qur'anic solidification of the images of Zulaykhā into two camps – lustful seductress and faithful lover – does not encompass the full range of possibilities provided by the Qur'anic narrative. Finally, Annemarie Schimmel dedicates some pages in her general study of women in Sufism, *My Soul is a Woman*, to discussing Zulaykhā's manifestations in a range of mystical Persian texts, particularly literature from the Indian subcontinent.[235] By focusing in on a smaller selection of Sufi *tafsīrs*, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, and Persian mystical *mathnavīs*, we can explore the intertextual web from which 'Aṭṭār draws in more depth and uncover the unique spin he puts on the material to defamiliarise the classic wiles-of-women tale for his readers.

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[233] Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*. See particularly Ch. 10 on Maybudī's retelling of the Yūsuf cycle.

[234] Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*; Merguerian and Najmabadi, "Whose 'Best Story'?".

[235] Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*, 60-68. Also summarised in Annemarie Schimmel, "Women in Mystical Islam," *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, no. 2 (1982): 145–51.

4.3 The Qurʾanic Version of the Joseph Story

It is impossible to analyse 'Aṭṭār's manipulation of the Zulaykhā cycle without considering its most prominent Islamic telling as it appears in *Sūrat Yūsuf*. A brief summary follows, then an analysis of the significant Qurʾanic passages involving Zulaykhā, and a summary of the early Sufi exegetical opinions. The Surah begins with Yūsuf telling Yaʿqūb of his dream, in which the sun, moon and stars bow to him (Q 12:4). Yaʿqūb warns him not to tell his brothers, because he knows they will be jealous (Q 12:5-6). Yūsuf's brothers plot to throw him down the well. They tell Yaʿqūb he was eaten by a wolf, showing him the falsely-bloodied shirt (Q 12:6-17). Yaʿqūb does not believe their story (Q 12:18). A caravan finds him and sells him to 'Azīz as his slave, at the insistence of his unnamed wife (in later texts called Zulaykhā) (Q 12:19-21). 'Azīz's wife tempts Yūsuf, but a sign from God (*burhān*) saves him from temptation and he refuses, fleeing towards the door. She tears his shirt from behind, and 'Azīz opens the door at that moment. She falsely accuses Yūsuf of having designs on her person and asks 'Azīz to send him to prison (Q 12:23-25). A person from her own family (*ahlihā*) points out that since the shirt is torn from behind, she must be guilty (Q 12:26-27). 'Azīz accepts this proof, and makes his famous statement regarding 'the great guile of women' (Q 12:28). The women of the city gossip about 'Azīz's wife and her shameless behaviour (Q 12:30). She plans a gathering where she can show them all Yūsuf's beauty, and they distractedly cut their hands with their fruit knives because of it (Q 12:31-32). Yūsuf asks God to imprison him to protect him from feminine wiles (Q 12:33). Yūsuf proves his talent in dream interpretation by interpreting two of his fellow prisoners' dreams correctly (Q 12:36-41). The king hears of this and calls on Yūsuf to interpret a difficult dream (Q 12:43-45). Yūsuf does so, and after being exonerated by the townswomen's testimony, becomes guardian of the kingdom's storehouses. 'Azīz's wife admits to her husband that she is at fault, and (in most readings) Yūsuf also takes some of the blame (Q 12:46-57). Here ends the role of 'Azīz's wife in the story. Once Yūsuf is in a position of power, his brothers come before him asking for money, but do not recognise him. He plants a royal goblet in one of his brothers' bags (Q 12:58-87). When they return to the court, Yūsuf reveals he is their long-lost brother, forgives them, and sends his shirt to his father, which cures Yaʿqūb's blindness (Q 12:88-99). Yaʿqūb returns and Yūsuf praises God (Q 12:100-1). The *Surah* ends with an exhortation to

Muhammad to spread his message, though not all will listen (Q 12:102-110). The final verse tells that there is 'a lesson for those of understanding' in this text (Q 12:111).

4.4 Sufi Qur'anic Commentaries

While 'Aṭṭār and Jāmī were no doubt aware of the Qur'anic version of the Yūsuf and Zulaykhā story, there were many other versions and interpretations circulating prior to and during their lifetimes. By the 11th century, a distinct form of Sufi Qur'anic commentary had crystallised and was being written down, mainly from oral sources.[236] While it cannot be ascertained whether 'Aṭṭār had access to specific texts of Sufi commentaries, these texts in themselves provide valuable insight into how Sufi masters had been interpreting and teaching the Qur'an up to 'Aṭṭār's time. Whether 'Aṭṭār saw these specific texts is probably impossible to determine, except perhaps by in-depth philological comparison.[237] In either case, he was probably aware of Sufi oral interpretations and debates surrounding Zulaykhā which had been circulating for several centuries by his time.

The scholarly study of these Sufi commentaries has been most definitely on the rise in the past decade. While Gerhard Böwering worked on the oeuvre of Sulamī largely unfollowed from the 1970s onward, recent scholarship has expanded in this

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[236] Gerhard Böwering, "The Major Sources of Sulami's Minor Qur'an Commentary," *Oriens* 35 (1996): 35; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn Sulamī and Gerhard Böwering, "Ziyādat Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr," Langue Arabe et Pensée Islamique / Institut de Lettres Orientales de Beyrouth; (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1995).

[237] Arberry has listed some of 'Aṭṭār's known sources in depth, based on his quotations and wording of certain passages in the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, xxxviii-xxxii. Ritter, meanwhile, has referenced many of the antecedents to 'Aṭṭār's anecdotes in the *mathnavīs*. 'Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*; Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*.

area, with two major translations appearing of al-Tustarī and al-Maybūdī, an overview of the sources involved by Kristin Sands, and the inaugural issue of the recently formed *Journal of Sufi Studies*, which contains three articles on the Qurʾan commentary of Qushayrī alone.[238] Some of the contemporary debate has centered on whether we can even call Sufi Qurʾanic commentary a genre in and of itself. Böwering argues as much, while Jamal Elias has more recently challenged this notion.[239] Yet it is ultimately not that significant to this study whether it is a proper, stand-alone genre or not, especially since the chapter takes an intertextual approach to the material. We are interested in Sufi interpretations of the Yūsuf and Zulaykhā episode in the Qurʾan from the earliest times (8th century) to ʿAṭṭār's time (early 13th century) and how they may shed light on ʿAṭṭār's re-imaginings of the ancient tale. The key texts as identified by Sands, Böwering, and Alan Godlas are *al-Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* by Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896),

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[238] Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qurʾanic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl At-Tustari*, vol. 9 (Walter de Gruyter, 1979); Gerhard Bowering, "The Light Verse: Qurʾanic Text and Sufi Interpretation," *Oriens* 36 (2001): 113–44; Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qurʾan Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī*; Annabel Keeler, "Ṣūfī Tafsīr as a Mirror: Al-Qushayrī the Murshid in His Laṭāʾif al-Ishārāt," *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies*, 2006, 1–21; Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qurʾān in Classical Islam* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006); Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh Tustarī, Annabel. Keeler, and Ali. Keeler, "Tafsīr al-Tustarī," Great Commentaries on the Holy Qurʾan ; (Louisville, Ky.: Amman, Jordan: Fons Vitae; Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2011); Godlas, "Influences of Qushayrī's Laṭāʾif al-Ishārāt on Sufi Qurʾanic Commentaries, Particularly Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's ʿArāʾis al-Bayān and the Kubrawi al-Taʾwīlāt al-Najmiyya"; Martin Nguyen, "Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr: An Investigation of al-Qushayrī's Major Qurʾan Commentary," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 17–45; Kristin Zahra Sands, "On the Subtleties of Method and Style in the Laṭāʾif al-Ishārāt of al-Qushayrī," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 7–16.

[239] Jamal J Elias, "Ṣūfī Tafsīr Reconsidered: Exploring the Development of a Genre," *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 12 (January 1, 2010): 41–55.

al-Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr by Sulamī (d. 1021) and the later addition to it, *Ziyādāt al-Ḥaqā'iq*, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* by Qushayrī (d. 1074), *Kashf al-Asrār* by Rashīd al-Dīn Maybūdī (d. 1135), and *'Arā'is al-Bayān* by Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 1209).[240]

In addition to the Sufi Qur'an commentary sources, the chapter also engages in a discussion of some of the specific episodes represented in the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (Stories of the Prophets) as they relate to the material in 'Aṭṭār and Jāmī. I give here an overview of the various texts of this genre and the selection of which I have consulted. This genre emerged relatively early on, dating back to the eighth century, and became extremely popular in later periods in both Arabic and Persian, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries.[241] A sketch of the source material as it survives to us, however, may be laid out for the versions which predate 'Aṭṭār, which are fewer in number. Among the earliest and most significant Arabic versions are Wahb b. Munabbih's *Kitāb al-Mubtada' wa Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*[242] (d. ca. 110 AH/728 CE), Isḥāq b. Bishr's *Kitāb al-Mubtada' al-Dunyā wa-Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (d. 206 AH/821 CE), 'Umāra b. Wathīma's *Kitāb Bad' al-Khalq wa-Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (d. 279 AH/902 CE), al-Thaʿlabī's *'Arā'is al-Majālis fī Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, a portion of al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk* (d. 310 AH/923 CE), Abū 'Abdallāh al-Kinānī al-Ṭarafī's *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (d. 1062 CE), and

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[240] Godlas, "Influences of Qushayrī's Laṭāʾif al-Ishārāt," 81, note 9; Tustarī, Keeler, and Keeler, "Tafsīr al-Tustarī"; Sulamī and Böwering, "Ziyādat Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr."

[241] Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh Kisā'ī and Wheeler McIntosh Thackston, *The Tales of the Prophets of Al-Kisa'i*, Library of Classical Arabic Literature (Boston: Twayne, 1978), xxxii, note 25.

[242] The exact title is a matter of some dispute, as Wahb's work is only preserved in sources a century after him. See R Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature*, Curzon Studies in the Qur'an (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2002), 138.

Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-Kisā'ī's *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (dated to approx. 1200 CE[243]).[244] The most significant Persian version of the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* that predates ‘Aṭṭār is by Ibn Khalaf Nīshāpūrī, believed to have been composed in the 2nd half of the 11th century. Thackston details other Persian versions including those of al-Arfajnī, al-Bukhārī, as well as several Persian translations of Arabic *Qiṣaṣ* that appear before or around the time of ‘Aṭṭār, which I have not included due to a lack of published editions.[245]

Within the Sufi commentaries, there are three critical passages regarding Zulaykhā's role in the scripture which have generated most of the discussion – Q 12:24, 12:28, and 12:51-53. One of the much-debated verses, Q 12:24, reads as follows:

وَلَقَد هَمَّتْ بِهِ وَهَمَّ بِها لَولا أَنْ رأى بُرهانَ رَبِّهِ كَذَلِكَ لِنَصْرِفَ عَنْهُ السُّوءَ وَالفَحْشاءَ إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبادِنا المُخْلَصينَ

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[243] Some confusion here as al-Kisā'ī is thought by some to have been a 10th-century jurist but most others believe the work to be from the end of the 11th-century (Thackston, Storey, Nagel). Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Tha‘labī, *‘Arā‘is al-Majālis Fī Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā', Or, Lives of the Prophets / as Recounted by Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tha‘labī*, ed. William M Brinner (Leiden: Brill, 2002), xxi; Kisā'ī and Thackston, *Tales of the Prophets*, xix; Charles Ambrose Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey. Volume 1, Qur'ānic Literature; History and Biography*, ed. Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (London: Luzac & Co., 1927), 161. Tilman. Nagel, "Die Qisas al-anbiya: ein Beitrag zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte" (PhD dissertation, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelm-Universitat, 1967).

[244] Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, 165-75; Raif Georges Khoury, *Les Légendes Prophétiques Dans l'Islam: Depuis Le Premier Jusqu'au Troizieme Siècle de l'Hégire* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1978); Tha‘labī, *‘Arā‘is Al-Majālis*, xviii-xix.

[245] Thackston, *Tales of the Prophets*, xxxi, note 25.

For she desired him; and he would have desired her, had he not seen the proof of his Lord. So was it, that We might turn evil and abomination away from him; he was one of Our devoted servants.[246]

Controversy has long surrounded this particular line. Two specific issues come up repeatedly in the commentaries: 1) what exactly is meant by *hamma* in each case? And 2) what is the *burhān* shown to Yūsuf by God? Most relevant to us here is the question of *hamma*, because it is a reflection of a larger set of questions that troubled many exegetes: To what extent was Yūsuf tempted? How much is he to blame, and how much is she? Is it right for a prophet to be tempted?

The commentaries show considerable variation on this question. The oldest Sufi commentary we have is al-Tustarī. Tustarī interprets the meaning of *hamma* in the passage as follows, 'With his natural self (*nafs ṭabiʿiyya*), he desired and inclined towards her, but with his divinely supported and protected self (*nafs al-tawfīq wa'l-ʿiṣma*), he desired to escape from and oppose her.'[247] Thus he distinguishes between the parts of Yūsuf's soul that have opposing reactions to the temptation. Tustarī does not deny, as some other commentators have done, that Yūsuf was indeed tempted by Zulaykhā and desired her as well, and continues to emphasise the fact that only with divine support was Yūsuf able to escape temptation.

Sulamī's method of compilation relates many different schools of thought on the same issue. He quotes a number of reporters who claim that while ʿAzīz's wife

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[246] Adapted from AJ Arberry, *The Koran: Interpreted*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 142.

[247] Tustarī, Keeler, and Keeler, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, 95.

desired to seduce him, Yūsuf desired in his heart to oppose her.[248] Thus, according to this reading, *hamma* has a different meaning depending on who the agent is, Yūsuf or 'Azīz's wife. Those commentators Sulamī quotes here use the exact same word to condemn one agent whilst simultaneously absolving the other. This twisting of the text is accepted and promoted by these interpreters without further evidence. Najmabadi and Merguerian see this strategy alive and well in modern interpretations that they disagree with: 'Still another interpretation is that he did not desire her and that the proof of this is in the phrase beginning with the word "except" (p. 38). That is, the sentence might read, "He would have desired her except that he saw the proof of his Lord."'[249] A second group of commentators claims, 'she desired to sin while he desired to return to her even in the midst of fleeing. That is why they "raced to the door" (*istabaqā al-bāb*).'[250] According to these interpreters, both Yūsuf and 'Azīz's wife are culpable for having the desire but are not equal in terms of their response to it. A third group quoted by Sulamī claims that God made Yūsuf innocent pure of the act but not of the intention. For these commentators, Yūsuf is guilty of having the desire as well as 'Azīz's wife. A final group of commentators, particularly in the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, takes the scene of Yūsuf's temptation quite a bit further, placing him in increasingly compromising positions with Zulaykhā.[251] Some say the devil forced them together with his arms, that Yūsuf undid his waistband, or that Yūsuf lay with her as a man lies with his wife.[252]

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[248] Sulamī and Böwering, *Ziyādat*, 66.

[249] Merguerian and Najmabadi, "Whose 'Best Story'?," 492.

[250] Sulamī and Böwering, *Ziyādat*, 67.

[251] Najmabadi and Merguerian cover the ones related by al-Ṭabarī, "Whose 'Best Story'?," 491.

[252] Thaʿlabī, *'Arā'is al-Majālis*, 199; Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī and Roberto Tottoli, *The Stories of the Prophets by Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2003), 103, para. 270.

Qushayrī provides us with a slightly different understanding of who is at fault and for what. He writes of Q 12:24:

فلم يكن الهمُّ منه ولا منها زَلَّةً، وإنما الزّلَّةُ من المرأة كانت من حيث عَزَمَتْ على ما هَمَّتْ، فأمّا نفسُ الـهمّ فليس مما يَكْسِبُه العبد.

> His desire was no fault, nor was hers. The fault on the woman's part was that she acted upon that desire. As for desire itself, it is not something the slave [of God] possesses.[253]

Qushayrī makes it very clear that the only difference between the would-be seductress and the object of her desire is the fact that Yūsuf is guided by God away from wrongdoing. In a sense this is a very sympathetic reading of conduct of 'Azīz's wife. Both Yūsuf and Zulaykhā would be thus equally culpable, were it not for Yūsuf's divine guidance. This reading is most in line with the overall emphasis of the Surah on the importance of *tawwakul* or reliance upon and trust in God alone. Ruzbihān Baqli goes

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[253] 'Abd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin Qushayrī and Ibrāhīm Basyūnī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt: Tafsīr Ṣūfī Kāmil Lil-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, Turāthunā (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī, 1969), 178. Nīshāpūrī presents a similar justification for Yūsuf's behavior in his *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*. After interrupting the narrative with a question and answer (as if from student to master), wherein it is asked, 'Was is right for Yūsuf to think of Zulaykhā when he was a prophet?,' part of the answer reads as follows:

اگر اندیشه افتادش چه عجب بود. چون بفعل نکرد، و اندیشهٔ بی‌فعل مأخوذ نبود.

'If he did think of her, what harm in that? Since he did not take the action, and thought without action is not [action] taken.'

Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Manṣūr b. Khalaf Al-Nīshāpūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā': Dāstān-hā-yi Payghāmbarān*, ed. Ḥabīb Yaghmā'ī (Tehran: Bungāh-i Tarjumah va Nashr-i Kitāb, 1961), 97.

quite a bit further than this, when he presents Yūsuf and Zulaykhā's love as an inevitable consequence of the meeting between 'passion' and allegorical 'beauty':

همة زليخا سبقت على همة يوسف وحسن يوسف سبق بجذب قلب زليخا وهمتها الى معدنه لان عشق زليخا وحسن يوسف صفتان صادرتان من المعدنين الازليين وهما صفة جمال القدم ومحبة الازل فلما هاجت همة زليخا بعد انجذاب قلبها الى معدن عشق يوسف وحسن يوسف هاجت ايضا همة يوسف الى اهلية عشقها وحسنها وهمتها فصارت الهمتان بعضها من بعض فهاج همة الجوهر الى الجوهر والفطرة الى الفطرة والطبيعة الى الطبيعة والانسانية الى الانسانية والروحانى الى الروحانى والالهى الى الالهى فصارت جميعها بوصف الهمتين متحيرة حتى صار شخصهما وسوادهما وخيالهما وعقلهما وقلبهما وروحهما وسرهما واحدا فى واحد.

> Zulaykhā's desire surpassed Yūsuf's desire, and Yūsuf's beauty overpowered Zulaykhā's heart with attraction and her desire was for the core of his very being, for Zulaykhā's passion and Yūsuf's beauty were the two excellent qualities radiating from their primordial souls and they are the exemplars of the beauty of eternity and the love of pre-eternity. And when Zulaykhā's desire ran wild (*hājat*), after her heart had been swept away by the love of Yūsuf's soul and his beauty, Yūsuf's desire also inclined towards the worthiness of her passion, her beauty, and her desire. And so the two desires became one, and the desire of one essence for another, of one nature for another, of one temperament for another, of one humanity for another, of one spirituality for another, of one divinity for another, was inflamed. And all of these became bewildered, by virtue of their desire, until their person, their yearning, their imagination, their intellect, their heart, their spirit, and their innermost soul were united as one.[254]

Perhaps even more so than other commentators, Baqlī legitimises Zulaykhā's love in several ways. First, he emphasises that her love was for Yūsuf's *ma'dan* or 'pure inner soul,' and not simply a superficial lust (though he acknowledges the role that beauty played). Second, he quickly identifies Zulaykhā with her allegorical representation, *'ishq* (passion), framed as a positive virtue and indeed a *ṣifa* or 'excellent quality.' And

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[254] Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-Bayān Fī Ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mizyadī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2008), vol. 2, 160-61.

finally, he uses the key term *ahliya* 'worthiness' to describe her love, a quality which has been sparingly applied to Zulaykhā outside of a Sufi context in which she is understood as the allegorical seeker.

Surprisingly, none of Tustarī, Sulamī, or Qushayrī's commentaries touch on the much-discussed verse 12:28, 'Truly your women's guile is great.'[255] Considering the emphasis that other early Qur'an commentators, such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Bayḍawī, laid on this verse[256], the omission seems glaring. It provides evidence that early Sufi commentators were already turning a blind eye to some of the Qur'anic statements that more obviously condemn Zulaykhā, and in this case, womankind. Baqlī again goes further than the others and completely reverses the meaning of this seemingly derogatory statement aimed at women. He claims that woman's *kayd*/guile is achieved primarily through her beauty, charm, and grace, all God-given qualities:

حسنهن وجمالهن وظرافتهن من حسن فعل الله فى وجوههن وذلك الفعل مرآة تجلى حسن الازل

> [Women's] goodness, their beauty and grace are from the grace of God's work upon their faces, and that work is a mirror of the manifestation of pre-eternal beauty.[257]

Baqlī also adds that their guile is *'aẓīm* because of its divine provenance. Therefore, he defends not only Zulaykhā in particular but womankind in general from the accusation that they unfairly employ their feminine wiles.

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[255] Keeler, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, 96; Sulamī and Böwering, *Ziyādat*, 67; Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, 185.

[256] Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, 52-53.

[257] Baqlī, *'Arā'is al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 166.

Verses 12:51-53 may have also been a source of inspiration for Sufi writers of literary versions of the tale like 'Aṭṭār and Jāmī. These verses contain Zulaykhā's confession of guilt and are the basis upon which many commentators rely to show that the point of the Qur'anic tale was to forgive Zulaykhā for giving in to temptation. The verses in question state:

وقالَ الملكُ ائتونى به فلمّا جاءهُ الرسولُ قالَ ارْجِعْ إلى ربِّكَ فَسْئَلْهُ ما بالُ النسوةِ التى قَطَّعْنَ إنَّ ربّى بكَيدِهِنَّ عَليمٌ (٥٠) قالَ ما خَطْبُكُنَّ إذْ رَاوَدتُنَّ يوسُفَ عن نَفْسِهِ قُلنَ حاشَ للهِ ما عَلِمْنا عليهِ مِن سُوءٍ قالت امرأةُ العزيزِ الآنَ حَصْحَصَ الحقُّ أنا راوَدْتُه عن نَفْسِه وإنه لَمِنَ الصادقين (٥١) ذلك لِيَعْلَمَ أَنّى لَم أَخُنْهُ بالغيبِ وأنَّ اللهَ لا يَهدِىَ كَيْد الخائنين (٥٢) وما أُبرِّئُ نَفْسى إنَّ النَّفْسَ لأَمَّارة بالسوء إلا ما رَحِمَ رَبِّى إنَّ رَبِّى غفورٌ رحيمٌ (٥٣) وقالَ المَلِكُ ائتونى به أَسْتَخْلِصْنُ لِنَفْسى فَلَمّا كَلَّمَهُ قالَ إنَّكَ اليومَ لَدَيْنا مَكينٌ أمينٌ (٥٤)

The king said, 'Bring him to me!' And when the messenger came to him, he said, 'Return unto thy lord, and ask of him, "What of the women who cut their hands?" Surely my Lord has knowledge of their guile.' (50) 'What was your business, women,' he said, 'when you solicited Joseph?' 'God save us!' they said. 'We know no evil against him.' The Governor's wife said, 'Now the truth is at last discovered; I solicited him; he is a truthful man. (51) 'That, so that he may know I betrayed him not secretly, and that God guides not the guile of the treacherous. (52) Yet I claim not that my soul was innocent -- surely the soul of man incites to evil -- except inasmuch as my Lord had mercy; truly my Lord is All-forgiving, All-compassionate.' (53) The king said, 'Bring him to me! I would attach him to my person.' Then, when he had spoken with him, he said, 'Today thou art established firmly in our favour and in our trust.' (54)[258]

Both premodern and modern commentators and translators disagree on who exactly is speaking verses 12:52 and 12:53. No one disputes that 12:51 was spoken by the wife of 'Azīz, since it is clearly marked as such. However, commentators like Tustarī, Qushayrī, Ṭarafī and Baqlī, and modern translators like Pickthall interpret

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[258] Arberry, *The Koran*, 144.

12:52-53 as Yūsuf's words[259], while a number of modern translations including Saheeh International, Yusuf Ali, and Arberry, and the premodern commentator Sulamī, accept them as Zulaykhā's words.[260] The difficulty has arisen from the phrase, 'so he [or He] will know that I did not betray him [or Him],' which allows several possible readings. The subject of the verb 'ya'lam' could be either God or 'Azīz. For many readers, it is probably difficult to accept that Zulaykhā could claim to have not betrayed her husband. However, she was prevented from committing any actual infidelity. If we credit these words to her, this passage reveals that she ascribes this fortuitous result to God, who guided Yūsuf towards righteousness and away from trickery (kayd).

Although the majority of premodern and modern commentators ascribe the dialogue of vv. 52-53 to Yūsuf, there are several arguments in favour of attributing it to Zulaykhā. This Surah is otherwise very careful about marking shifts in speaker with some form of qāla and it is surprising that the narrative would not indicate clearly such an important transition of speaker. Furthermore, the context implies that Yūsuf is not

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[259] Keeler, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, 97; Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, 189-90; Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, 209-10; Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī and Roberto Tottoli, *The Stories of the Prophets by Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2003), 110. Maybudī appears to interpret them as Yūsuf's words, although Chittick's translation puts them in Zulaykhā's mouth. Abū al-Faḍl Rashīd al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Maybudī, *Kashf al-Asrār va ʿuddat al-Abrār*, ed. ʿAlī Aṣghar Ḥikmat (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1952), Surah 12, pt. 7, *nawba* 3; Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī and William C Chittick, *The Unveiling of the Mysteries and the Provision of the Pious: Kashf al-Asrār Wa 'Uddat al-Abrār* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2015), 248.

[260] Saheeh International, *The Qur'an: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings* (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia: Abul-Qasim Publishing House, 1997), 316; Abdullah. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary* (Birmingham: Islamic Propagation Centre International, 1946), 563; Arberry, *The Koran*, 144; Sulamī, *Ziyādat*, 67-68.

present for the scene in which the women exonerate him. Preceding Zulaykhā's confession is a scene in which 'Azīz sends a messenger to Yūsuf, in which he refuses to come before 'Azīz until his name is cleared. He tells 'Azīz to ask the women who cut their hands about his conduct. (12:50) Then, directly following the ambiguous speech in question (12:52-53), 'Azīz says, 'Bring him to me; I would attach him to my person.' (12:54) If Yūsuf were present, he would not need to be summoned. The commentaries which claim this speech belongs to Yūsuf gloss over the problem of Yūsuf apparently not being present for the conversation between the women and the king. Attributing the full confession of 12:51-53 to Zulaykhā, being a minority interpretation but a possible one, therefore reflects an even more sympathetic view towards Zulaykhā on the part of commentators like Sulamī, as it goes against the grain of majority interpretation.

Even if commentators did not necessarily accept 12:52-53 as part of Zulaykhā's confession, the majority of Sufi interpreters of 12:51 are still favourable towards her and use the verse to show the growth and perfection of her love for Yūsuf. These commentaries may represent the basis for 'Aṭṭār's and Jāmī's interpretations of Zulaykhā as an ideal mystic lover, or at least confirm the circulation of these ideas in a Sufi context prior to 'Aṭṭār. Sulamī argues that it would not be fair to absolve Zulaykhā without her having made an effort (*tajhad*) in the path of love, but since she has, she should be forgiven.[261] Qushayrī makes a similar judgment when he writes, 'When 'Azīz's wife was imperfect (*ghayr tāmm*) in her love (*maḥabba*) for Yūsuf, she shifted her sin onto him [.…] But when her love for him reached perfection (*tanāhat fī maḥabbatihi*), she took the blame for the sin upon herself.'[262] Both Sulamī and Qushayrī's interpretations are echoed in Jāmī's delineation of Zulaykhā's journey from

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[261] Sulamī, *Ziyādat*, 68.
[262] Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, 189.

earthly to divine love. We have shown here that not all Sufi interpretations of Zulaykhā in the commentaries are necessarily positive. However, by finding hermeneutical space to sympathise with Zulaykhā and admire her fervent passion, some of these exegetes laid the interpretive groundwork for later writers of Islamic mystical literature to re-envision Zulaykhā as a dedicated lover.

4.5 'Aṭṭār and Jāmī's Representations of Zulaykhā

Having taken into account the Qur'anic and exegetical sources for the Yūsuf cycle that were available to 'Aṭṭār, the paper will now demonstrate the way 'Aṭṭār has manipulated Zulaykhā's Qur'anic representation by using the technique of defamiliarisation. 'Aṭṭār's *mathnavīs* and Jāmī's *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā* are compared in order to illustrate the unusual function of 'Aṭṭār's Zulaykhā. Before moving on to the demonstration, however, a few notes are needed to justify the validity of the approach in two regards: first, the appropriateness of using Jāmī as a point of comparison, and second, the efficacy of drawing on anecdotes from throughout 'Aṭṭār's oeuvre without extensive reference to context.

There are several dangers in using Jāmī as a comparative tool, namely the differences in time period and genre. Jāmī lived and worked in a very different context, well after 'Aṭṭār. He shared his court with many renowned artists and statesmen, including Bihzād and 'Alī Shīr Navā'ī.[263] Another weakness of the comparison remains

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[263] Paul E. Losensky, "Jami. I Life and Works," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2008, XIV/5, 469-475; an updated version is available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jami-i (accessed 12 April 2014); Hans R. Roemer, "Ḥosayn Bāyqarā," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2004, XII/5, 508-511; an updated

the difference of genre. Despite these potential pitfalls, however, Jāmī's work is the pinnacle of the Zulaykhā rewritings in Persian mysticism, and his romance is close enough to the mystical worldview and didactic purpose of 'Aṭṭār's works so as to be useful in delineating subtle differences in the authors' respective attitudes toward female sexuality and guile. By placing these texts in dialogue with each other, and with the commentaries and versions of the *Qiṣaṣ*, we can more accurately triangulate where these authors reproduce tradition and where they put their own twist on the classic material.

As for the structure of the comparison, I have separated it into two main parts: the discussion of Zulaykhā as lover, and Zulaykhā as divine beloved. In the first section, I argue that while both authors are similar in their treatment of Zulaykhā as a dedicated lover, Jāmī's version focuses on the difficulties of Zulaykhā's transition from earthly to mystical love, whereas 'Aṭṭār only portrays her as a mystical lover. The second section shows that 'Aṭṭār omits or repurposes the scenes that are most compromising to Zulaykhā's character, particularly the scenes of seduction and false accusation. Of the six 'Aṭṭār anecdotes in which Zulaykhā plays a prominent role, only one is remotely connected with an actual verse or scene from the Qur'anic narrative – the seduction scene, which is altered almost beyond recognition. Jāmī's version, by contrast, parallels Surah 12 much more closely. As a result, Jāmī includes all the compromising episodes involving Zulaykhā in Qur'an. In fact, what all the non-'Aṭṭār versions have in common is their need for narrative continuity. The structure of 'Aṭṭār's *mathnavīs*, then, is what frees him in his representation. Contradictory interpretations of Zulaykhā's character sit side by side without issue. 'Aṭṭār's Zulaykhā can be sympathetic without being a

version is available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hosayn-bayqara (accessed 12 April 2014).

forgiveness/redemption narrative, and she can be cruel with her cruelty simply recast as the cruelty of the beloved. Perhaps 'Aṭṭār's most important innovation, then, is the choice of genre, combined with the allusion to the entire context of the Zulaykhā story without really telling it. By using the technique of defamiliarisation, 'Aṭṭār capitalises on this reversal of expectation to drive home his point that spiritual superiority may emanate from the most unexpected elements of society.

4.5.1 Zulaykhā as Sufi Lover

Both 'Aṭṭār and Jāmī consistently portray Zulaykhā's extreme lovesickness and use this as a means to establish her role as an allegory for the Sufi lover.[264] However, the representations differ insofar as Jāmī's Zulaykhā evolves from earthly lover to lover of the divine, while there is little indication of an earthly aspect to Zulaykhā's love in 'Aṭṭār. Jāmī's narrative aims to portray the stages of development of the Sufi lover's soul, including his faults. As such, Jāmī cannot ignore the more compromising elements of Zulaykhā's character as presented in the Quran and Old Testament, which 'Aṭṭār is free to do by selecting only choice components of her character. Jāmī's early

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[264] In case it is unclear to readers what I am referring to by the "ideal Sufi lover," I refer simply to the body of conventional attributes associated with the lover in a Sufi context. Seyed-Gohrab does an excellent job of explaining these conventional qualities in his chapter-length discussion. In his words, the mystic lover, 'follows closely the ascetic principles of celibacy, mortification, silence, seclusion, sleep-deprivation and abstinence from food.' Furthermore, 'Like an ascetic, the lover cannot eat and sleep because of the beloved's separation. Nothing matters to the lover save the union with the beloved. His mind is preoccupied with the beloved in such a way that everything, including people, becomes secondary if not redundant to him.' A A Seyed-Gohrab and Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *A Narration of Love: An Analysis of the Twelfth Century Persian Poet Nizāmī's Laylī and Majnūn*, Proefschri (Delft: De Systeem Drukkers, 2001), 116-17.

examples of Zulaykhā's love refer mainly to her obsession with his image and physical form. In the middle stage, Zulaykhā's obsessive love results in some underhanded machinations to achieve her ends, such as her attempts at seduction, and her attempt at proving her innocence, which causes all the women in Yūsuf's presence to cut their hands. By the conclusion of the *mathnavī*, she is in love with the divine, in a mystical way, beyond simple earthly love of Yūsuf, with whom she spends forty years in chaste marriage. The only way Jāmī could reconcile all these varying representations of Zulaykhā was to merge them into a linear narrative of transformation. This distinction between 'Aṭṭār's enlightened Zulaykhā and Jāmī's tale of transformation reveals how 'Aṭṭār's Zulaykhā, having attained mystical love from the outset, might represent a shocking reversal of expectations for readers familiar with Qur'anic Zulaykhā.

Perhaps even more revealing than what 'Aṭṭār has chosen to focus on is what he has left out. 'Aṭṭār does not dramatise some of the more infamous Zulaykhā scenes including the purchase of Yūsuf[265], the ladies cutting their hands at the sight of him, or the scene of her confession to 'Azīz. This may seem odd if 'Aṭṭār's purpose was to rehabilitate Zulaykhā's character. Significantly, 'Aṭṭār tends to focus on traditions outside of the original Qur'anic version, some of which appear to be influenced by the commentary literature, or he completely re-imagines the Qur'anic scenes that portray Zulaykhā poorly.

In the *Ilāhī-nāmah*, 'Aṭṭār relates two stories which delineate Zulaykhā's role as lover. In one anecdote, Yūsuf is accused of stealing poor Zulaykhā's heart and her grief is enumerated at length.

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[265] This scene is referenced in 'Aṭṭār but Zulaykhā is not present. Instead it is the wise old woman figure who attempts to buy Yūsuf for the paltry contents of her pocket, some pieces of string that constitute everything she owns. MṬ 145-46, ln. 2606-2620.

همه دان یوسف همدان یکی روز   چنین گفتست آن شمع دلفروز

که ای کرده زلیخا را دل افگار   که یوسف را چنین گفتند احرار

ز بی‌تیماریت بیمار مانده   زنی شد عاجز و بی‌یار مانده

اگر بازش دهی دل می‌توانی   ببردی دل ازو در زندگانی

نبردم من دل آن پیر عاجز   چنین گفت آنگهی یوسف که هرگز

نه هم جستم بقصد دلبری راه   نه از دل بردن او هستم آگاه

نه در من هرگز این پندار بودست   مرا نه با دل او کار بودست

که دل گُم کرده‌ام این خود محالست   مرا گوئی که اکنون بیست سالست

چگونه در دل دیگر برد راه   کسی کو از دل خود نیست آگاه

Thus said that heart-illuminating candle,
The all-knowing (*hama-dān*) Yūsuf of Hamadan[266]:
The noblemen told Yūsuf,
'O you who have wounded Zulaykhā's heart,
'She's become a helpless woman and remains friendless,
'Sick from your lack of caring for her.
'You stole that heart from her during her life.
'You could return it now if you so chose.'
Yūsuf replied that instant,
'I never stole that poor old one's heart.
'Neither was I aware it had been taken,
'Nor did I ever intend to take it.
'I have nothing to do with her heart,
'And I have never considered such a thing.'
You tell me it's been twenty years

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[266] Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf Hamadānī (d. 535/1140) was a Sufi master of the Khwājagān movement, who were the predecessors of the Naqshbandiyya order. The pedigree of this movement ran from the Prophet through Bāyazīd, Salmān al-Fārisī and Abū Bakr. He studied *fiqh* in Baghdād and spent much of his time between Marv and Herāt. He lived in the time of Sultan Sanjar and wrote a short treatise, *Rutbat al-ḥayāt*, and after his death, the *Maqāmāt-i Yūsuf Hamadānī* was composed by a disciple, ʿAbd al-Khāliq Ghujduwānī (d. 617 / 1220). Hamid Algar, "Abu Yaʿqūb Hamadānī," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1983, I/4, 395-396; an updated version is available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abu-yaqub-hamadani (accessed 31 January 2017).

Since you lost your heart.
That's impossible. How can anyone,
Unaware of his own heart, make inroads into another? [267]

Here the noblemen try to reproach Yūsuf for his heartlessness and cruelty toward Zulaykhā. Yūsuf defends himself by claiming he was unaware he had caused Zulaykhā to fall into illness and distress.

In the following closely-related story, Zulaykhā rushes to Yūsuf's defence, explaining that he does not even have her heart. Rather, her heart has wandered off somewhere else. Neither she nor Yūsuf possesses it.[268] The *Ilāhī-nāmah* continues:

که چون یوسف ببردت دل بگو راست	عزیزی از زلیخا کرد درخواست
اگر میخواهی از یوسف تو دل باز	که گر این دل تو داری میکنی ناز
که گر موئیم از دل آگهی هست	زلیخا خورد سوگندی قوی دست
وگر عاشق شد او باری کجا شد	نمیدانم دلم عاشق چرا شد
زلیخا نیز این دل هم ندارد	چو یوسف هیچ دل محکم ندارد
نه این دلبر نه آن دلدار بودست	چو نه این یک نه آن بر کار بودست
چه گویم زین طلسم و این بهانه	کنون این دل کجا شد در میانه
که از مشرق سوی مغرب دوان کرد	زهی چوگان که گوئی را چنان کرد
بهُش رَو تا نیفتی در گوِ خاک	پس آنگه گفت هان ای گوی چالاک
بمانی تا ابد در آتش و چاه	که گر تو کژ روی ای گوی در راه
گناه از گوی سرگردان نباشد	چو سیر گوی بی چوگان نباشد
ولیکن آن گنه درگردن تست	اگرچه آن گنه نه کردن تست

A friend asked Zulaykhā,
'How did Yūsuf steal your heart?
'Tell me the truth. For if you do have your heart,

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[267] IN 7/6, 116-17.

[268] The anecdotes are in fact so closely related that Rouhānī has edited his edition so that the two are both part of one *ḥikāyat*. I will follow Ritter's interpretation, however, and divide the two tales. The last two lines of the above read better as authorial aside rather than Yūsuf's speech, as Rouhani would therefore have to interpret them in order to justify condensing them into one narrative.

'You're just playing coquette,
'By asking for it back from Yūsuf.'
Zulaykhā swore a fervent oath,
'If I have a hair's breadth of knowledge
'About what happened to my heart,
'I have no clue why it fell in love. And if it fell in love,
'Where then did it go?
'Just as Yūsuf has no strong grip on this heart,
'Zulaykhā doesn't have it either.[269]
'Since neither this nor that is at play,
'There is neither this beloved nor that lover.
'Where then has this heart gone?
'What can I say about this sorcery and excuse?'
Beware the polo-stick which has struck the ball
So hard it ran from east to west.
Then it said, 'O agile ball, run with caution,
'Lest you fall into a ditch,
'For once you stray from the Path,
'O ball, you remain in fire and the pit for eternity.'
Because the ball can go nowhere without the stick,
The fault lies not with the rolling ball.
Though that sin be not your own doing,
The fault of it still hangs around your neck. [270]

In this anecdote, 'Aṭṭār has re-envisioned the Qur'anic scene in which the king interrogates Zulaykhā about whether she is guilty of seducing Yūsuf. No longer a question of her guilt, Yūsuf's culpability is now at stake. Via a conventional comparison between lover and polo ball, beloved and polo stick, the anecdote's accompanying

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[269] The placement of the quotation marks is debatable here. Zulaykhā's speech could end here, or two lines later in the Persian, which is what I chose to indicate in my translation. Ritter's edition indicates that the narratorial aside begins with, "Since neither this nor..." (*chu na īn yik...*).

[270] IN 7/7, 117. 'Aṭṭār, *Ilāhī-Nāme: Die Gespräche Des Königs Mit Seinen Sechs Söhnen, Eine Mystische Dichtung*.

interpretation absolves Zulaykhā and to an extent, blames Yūsuf, as the object of her love, while at the same time acknowledging that Yūsuf did not intentionally cause her any harm. In this sense 'Aṭṭār may be referring to the Ash'arite doctrine of *kasb*, according to which Yūsuf would be here the 'secondary cause' of Zulaykhā's lovesickness and the primary cause, the Prime Mover.[271] Furthermore, Zulaykhā is presented as the archetypal lover completely unaware of the process by which she fell in love and lost her heart. The anecdote also hints at the idea of the beloved as medium for divine love, with the line, 'Yūsuf has no strong grip on this heart,' implying that Yūsuf is not the real object of her love. The point is further emphasised in the following line, which nullifies the existence of either beloved or lover. This conversion of Zulaykhā into a devoted, Sufi lover who has transcended her earthly love/lust for Yūsuf in favour of divine love may have been surprising to readers, especially for initiates unaware of the *Qiṣaṣ* literature.

As in 'Aṭṭār's *mathnavīs*, Jāmī's Zulaykhā is in large part held blameless for her love of Yūsuf. Zulaykhā is characterised as the greatest of lovers from the first opportunity, within Jāmī's section describing the reason for writing (*sabab-i naẓm-i kitāb*):

بعشق از جمله بود افزون زلیخا	نبود از عاشقان کس چون زلیخا
بشاهی و امیری عشق ورزید	ز طفلی تا به پیری عشق ورزید
چو بازش تازه شد عهد جوانی	پس از پیری و عجز و ناتوانی
بر آن زاد و بر آن بود و بر آن مرد	بجز راه وفایی عشق نسپرد

> There was none among lovers like Zulaykhā.
> She surpassed all others in love.
> From childhood to old age she loved;
> She loved in the fashion of a king or emir.
> After old age, weakness, and infirmity,
> When the age of youth was renewed in her,
> She followed no path in love but fidelity.
> On that road she was born, lived, and died.[272]

To emphasise her innocence further, in Jāmī's romance, Zulaykhā is enticed by a series of dreams in which Yūsuf appears to her, starting at a very young age.[273] This is significantly different than the holy accounts, which portray Zulaykhā/Potiphar's wife as primarily motivated by unpremeditated lust or overwhelming love (*ḥubb*). These dreams emphasise her dedication to loving Yūsuf from the first pages of the *mathnavī*'s story:

<div dir="rtl">

ز حصن صورت و لطف شمایل   اسیرش شد بیک دل نی بصد دل

گرفت از قامتش در دل خیالی   نشاند از دوستی در چون نهالی

ز رویش آتشی در سینه افروخت   وز آن آتش متاع صبر و دین سوخت

وز آن عنبر فشان گیسوی دل بند   بهر مو رشتهٔ جان کرد پیوند

</div>

> From the beauty of his face and grace of his figure,
> With one heart she became his captive – no! with one hundred hearts.
> Within her heart, his stature incited an image,
> Love of which planted itself like a sapling.
> His face lit a fire in her breast.
> That flame incinerated forbearance and faith.
> She tied her soul to him,

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[272]Nur al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad Jāmī, *Mathnavī-yi Haft Awrang: Bi-Taṣḥīḥ va Muqaddimah*, ed. Murtaḍā Gīlānī (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-yi Sa'dī, 1958), 596.

[273] As Jāmī puts it, as soon as she was old enough to tell left from right. Jāmī, *Haft Awrang*, 728.

With every strand of those enchanting, sweet-scented locks.[274]

Dreams, as the realm of prophecy and predetermination in both mystical and non-mystical Islamic religious writings, function here to lend Zulaykhā's lovesickness an air of inevitability, rather than ephemeral lust. Hence Jāmī highlights that Zulaykhā falls in love with Yūsuf through the chaste medium of dreams at a young, impressionable age and can hardly be held solely accountable.

Further meditations on the depths of Zulaykhā's love appear in the *Muṣibat-nāmah*, such as the following anecdote in which 'Aṭṭār relates words' inability to encompass love. Unlike any of the commentaries or versions of the *Qiṣaṣ* consulted, 'Aṭṭār includes a critique of Yūsuf's conduct from Zulaykhā's mouth:

رفت از کنعان برون پیش پسر	گفت چون یعقوب بر عزم سفر
پای تا سر مصر را آراستند	مصریان بی پا و سر برخاستند
نه بپای اما بسر آمد دوان	چون زلیخا را خبر آمد از ان
بر میان خاک ره بنشست خوار	ژندهٔ بر سر فکند آن بی قرار
اوفتاد آخر بران بی دل نظر	یوسف صدیق را بر ره گذر
برد حالی سوی آن مجنون مست	تازیانه بود بر اسبش بدست
تازیانش گشت از آن افروخته	برکشید از دل دمی آن سوخته
تازیانه یوسف از دست او فکند	ای عجب چون گشت از آن آتش بلند
نیست در خورد جوانمردیت این	تا زلیخا گفت ای پاکیزه دین
تو بدست اندر نمی‌داری نگاه	آتشی کز جان من آمد براه
گو ترا در دست باش این یک زمان	سالها زین آتشم پر بود جان
یک نفس در دست نتوانی کشید	آنچه از عشق تو از جانم دمید
این وفاداری بود با چون منی	تو سر مردان دینی من زنی
از عبارت بر ترست و از بیان	شرح دادن حال عاشق جاودان
هم نیارد داد شرح حالها	گر زفان گردد دو گیتی سالها

He said: When Yaʿqūb decided to travel,
He left Kaʿnaan to go to his son.

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[274] Ibid, 605.

The Egyptians hurriedly set to work,
Decorating Egypt from end to end.
When Zulaykhā heard the news,
She ran not with her feet, but with her head.[275]
Wildly that desperate one threw herself to the ground.
Lowly she sat in the middle of the dusty road.
Passing by, Yūsuf's glance finally fell upon that lover.
Sitting on his horse, he held a whip in his hand.
That burnt one sighed from her heart,
Causing his whip to catch on fire.
How strange! – the flames rose so high,
Yūsuf dropped the whip from his hand.
'O righteous one,' said Zulaykhā,
'This is not in accordance with your gentlemanly code.
'A fire that came to be because of me,
'You can't even hold in your hand.
'My soul has been filled with this flame for years,
'The least you can do is hold it for one moment.
'What has sprung up in my soul because of love for you,
'You cannot tolerate for one breath.
'You are head of the men of faith, I am a woman.
'Is this loyalty to one like me?'
Explaining the state of the lover
Is eternally beyond words and expression.
If the tongue spends years in the two worlds,
Still it cannot explain the state of things. [276]

A similar story is related in Nīshāpūrī's *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, in which a blind Zulaykhā encounters Yūsuf in the street after 18 years of separation.[277] This version of the story, or one like it, could have provided the source material for 'Aṭṭār's version. One day, after the king died, Yūsuf went out hunting and Zulaykhā was informed about it. When

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[275] I.e., she ran very quickly.

[276] MN 33/4, 291-92. 'Aṭṭār, *Muṣībat-Nāmah*.

[277] It is translated in Najmabadi and Merguerian, 'Whose "Best Story?"'496.

asked what she will do if he decides to punish her, she says 'I don't fear those who fear God.' Then she is told he is passing by, and she yells, 'the slave who waits patiently will become a king, and the king who follows lust and desire will become a slave.' Yūsuf faints, wakes up, restrains his horse and says 'O Zulaykhā!' Now she faints, then Yūsuf cries. Yūsuf is surprised to find the love of him still in her heart. She tells him, 'If you want to know the depth of my love, give me a whip (*tāziyānah*) made of reed.' Her sigh lights the whip on fire and it disappears instantly. In the end, Zulaykhā's sight and beauty are restored, and Yūsuf marries her.[278] In contrast to 'Aṭṭār's depiction of their meeting, here the pair meet with mutual attraction and sympathy. Several other important differences in the 'Aṭṭār version include how suddenly Zulaykhā's sigh burns the whip without warning and the lack of an earthly or metaphysical consummation of the love between them.

Though the details are similar, 'Aṭṭār's major addition is that he dramatises Zualykhā's speech as she reprimands Yūsuf for his inability to withstand the flame of her love, which burns her heart constantly. This speech represents 'Aṭṭār's special twist on the story, where he transforms this romantic proof of an ambiguously earthly/divine love into the surprising reproach of the shortcomings of a prophet. In some ways Zulaykhā' makes a conventional lover's complaint against the beloved, but what makes it unconventional is that it comes from the mouth of a woman who, this time, couches it in the language of gender politics. 'You are the head of the men of faith (*mardān-i dīn*)' she says, emphasising that she herself is just a woman, yet her tolerance for the fires of love has proved stronger. This statement gives us a clue as to why Zulaykhā is chosen as the focus of the anecdotes centring on the love story. Since woman is already the traditional nexus of weakness and unfaithfulness, the choice of Zulaykhā as the

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[278] Al-Nīshāpūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, 145-49.

archetypal mystic lover serves to reinforce the Sufi doctrine that appearances are rarely what they seem and the highest gains on the spiritual path can be made by the lowliest of society's hierarchy. By drawing attention to her own gender, her speech could also have the effect of goading some male readers into piety out of embarrassment. If a lowly blind woman can attain the perfection of *'āshiqī*, the implication goes, so can the average initiate.

While the anecdotes to this point have hinted that Yūsuf was at fault in refusing Zulaykhā's love, an anecdote from 'Aṭṭār's *Ilāhī-nāmah* goes so far as to depict Zulaykhā critiquing Yūsuf for his lack of mercy and inability to see the value of her love.

<div dir="rtl">

مگر یک روز می‌شد یوسف پاک   زلیخا را نشسته دید بر خاک

شده پوشیده از چشمش جهانی   ولی پوشیده چشمِ خاکدانی

به بیماری و درویشی گرفتار   ز صد گونه به بی خویشی گرفتار

بهردم صد تأسّف بیش خورده   غم یوسف ز یوسف بیش خورده

بره بنشسته چون امّیدواری   که از خاک رهش یابد غباری

که تا بو کز غبار راهِ آن شاه   غباری گر بود برخیزد از راه

چو یوسف دید او را گفت الهی   ازین فرتوتِ نابینا چه خواهی

چرا او را نگردانی کم و کاست   که او بدنامیِ پیغمبری خواست

درآمد جبرئیل و گفت آنگاه   که او را بر نمی‌گیریم از راه

که او آنرا که ما را دوست دارد   جهانی دوستی در پوست دارد

چو او را دوستّی تست پیوست   مرا بهر تو با او دوستی هست

که گفتت مرگِ گل در بوستان خواه   هلاک دوستان دوستان خواه

که گر عمری بجان گردانمش من   برای تو جوان گردانمش من

چو او جان عزیز خود ترا داد   دلیلش چون کنم باید ترا داد

چو او بر یوسف ما مهربانست   کرا در کینهٔ او قصد جانست

گرش در عشق تو دیده تباهست   دو چشم آب ریزش دو گواهست

چو این عاشق گوا با خویش دارد   بنو هر روز رونق بیش دارد

اگر واقف شوی از جان فشانی   ز سرّ عاشقان یابی نشانی

وگر از جان فشاندن نیست بویت   ندارد هیچ سودی گفت و گویت

وگر جان برفشاند بر تو حالی   ستاند از تو تیغ لابالی

</div>

It just so happened that one day, pure Yūsuf was passing by
And saw Zulaykhā sitting in the dirt.
The world was hidden from her eyes,
Yet they became a repository for the dust [of Yūsuf's passing].
Afflicted with illness and poverty,
A hundred ways preoccupied and beside herself.
Every moment she was struck with a hundred sorrows.
She felt Yūsuf's grief even more keenly than he did.
She sat on the road hoping to catch a speck of his dust trail.

She would not get up until there was dust from that king's path.
When Yūsuf saw her, he said,
'God, what do you want with this blind decrepit woman?
'Why don't you get rid of her altogether?
For she tried to disgrace a prophet.'
Just then, Gabriel appeared and said,
'We're not removing her from the path,
'For she has a whole world of love
'Within her skin for the one who loves Us.
'Since she has bound herself to loving you,
'I love her on your behalf.
'Who told you to want the flower's death?
'Or the destruction of the friends of friends?
'For if I make her live a lifetime,
'If I make her young for you,
'Since she's given her precious life to you,
'What can I do? She must be given to you.
'Since she is kind to our Yūsuf,
'Who would will her destruction in vengeance?
'If she has wasted her sight in loving you,
'Her two weeping eyes are her two witnesses.
'Since this lover has a witness with her,
'Each day anew she gains in [divine] grace.'
If you become aware of the sacrifice of the lover,
You'll find a sign of the lover's secret.
And if you have no clue about sacrifice,
Telling you will make no difference.
If she were to sacrifice her life right now for you,
She'd be taking the dagger of your indifference. [279]

In a most unusual way, 'Aṭṭār has retold Yūsuf and Zulaykhā's meeting on the road

such that the angel Gabriel is forced to intervene on Zulaykhā's behalf when Yūsuf

continues to reject her love, even after she has made the transition to mystical love.

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[279] IN 20/7, 323-24. 'Aṭṭār, *Ilāhī-Nāme: Die Gespräche Des Königs Mit Seinen Sechs Söhnen, Eine Mystische Dichtung*.

Yūsuf appears quite unsympathetic to Zulaykhā's suffering, and this anecdote is the clearest reference in 'Aṭṭār to the idea that Yūsuf erred not to accept her love. Such cruelty from a prophet towards a faithful lover was probably also calculated to produce shock in 'Aṭṭār's readers. Once again 'Aṭṭār has not based his allusion to the Yūsuf and Zulaykhā cycle on any particular episode from the Qur'an and has used both figures in a way that may have been unfamiliar to Qur'anic readers, especially those unversed in the *Qiṣaṣ*. Indeed in none of the other sources consulted here has there appeared such a scene of Yūsuf being scolded for failing to value Zulaykhā' sufficiently. 'Aṭṭār may have been influenced, however, by Nīshāpūrī's depiction of Gabriel scolding Yūsuf, though the content of the reproach is slightly different. Some of this scene is in Arabic, and is introduced by the phrase '*dar akhbār ast kah...*,' which would imply Nīshāpūrī has copied it from somewhere, and perhaps it was a more widely known tradition than has survived to us. It reads:

چون یوسف گفت هی راودتنی عن نفسی، زلیخا بمن درآویخت، جبریل آنجا حاضر بود و سخن می‌گفت چنانکه یوسف می‌شنید لیکن او را نمی‌دید. گفت یا یوسف چرا پردهٔ کسی می‌دری که دعوی دوستی تو کرده بود؟ هرگز خردمند کریم پردهٔ دوست خویش ندراند. یوسف متحیر شد، گفت او مرا بعزیز غمز کرد تا مرا هلاک کند بی‌گناه. جبریل گفت: أمّا علمتَ یا یوسف إن وفاءِ الحبیب اجفاءِ المکروه؟ گفت یا یوسف تو ندانسته‌ای که وفای دوست مر دوست را رنج کشیدنست. [...] سخن بی‌وفا راست ندارند.

> When Yūsuf said, '*It was she who sought to seduce me* (Q 12:26), Zulaykhā clung on to me,' Gabriel was there, and spoke such that Yūsuf could hear him but not see him. He said to Yūsuf, 'Yūsuf, why do you tear the veil of one who claims to love you? A wise and honourable person never rips the veil of his own friend.' Yūsuf was stunned, and said, 'She defamed me before 'Azīz in order to destroy me – I who was innocent!' Gabriel said, 'Did you not know

that loyalty to the beloved means to suffer for the beloved? […] Disloyal speech is not considered right.'[280]

Although Nīshāpūrī's rendition does not go so far as 'Aṭṭār's does in suggesting that Yūsuf would be responsible for Zulaykhā's death by indifference, Nīshāpūrī's Gabriel still finds fault with the prophet. The angel scolds him for his complaints, implying that he should be willing to suffer for love of the divine. Perhaps this interpretation laid the groundwork for 'Aṭṭār's taking his critique of Yūsuf one step farther in the *Ilāhī-nāmah*. In contrast to Jāmī and some other commentators, 'Aṭṭār's Zulaykhā is often represented as a mystical lover who does not need to be forgiven by reader or narrative for prior 'transgressions' in the path of love. Freed by his choice of genre, 'Aṭṭār is not bound to create a cohesive character in Zulaykhā and as such does not portray her as 'redeemed' for prior sins. In his depiction, she has committed no sin by loving Yūsuf, and the anecdotes all bend towards justifying her in that fact.

4.5.2 Zulaykhā as Divine Beloved

While Jāmī and 'Aṭṭār's representations of Zulaykhā as lover are similar, if not entirely congruent, their paths diverge considerably when it comes to the episodes of seduction and union with Yūsuf. Even within the episode of her attempted seduction, 'Aṭṭār presents Zulaykhā as a divine figure. Jāmī, on the other hand, does not transform her in this way. She falls victim to earthly lust and is later rewarded with marriage after attaining mystical love. 'Aṭṭār's presentation of Zulaykhā as divine beloved is the ultimate reversal of her Qur'anic image. To present her as a beloved may have been unfamiliar to some audiences, being absent from the Qur'anic account and most *ẓāhirī* commentaries, but by suggesting a divine interpretation of her figure, he defamiliarises

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[280] Al-Nīshāpūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, 100-01.

her for the reader and makes him reconsider the traditional understanding of Zulaykhā as lust-driven adulteress or pitiable lover.

As discussed elsewhere, unlike some other mystical authors, or non-mystical authors who pick up on mystical themes, 'Aṭṭār does not usually depict union between a Sufi lover and his/her object, potentially out of respect for the impossibility of rendering the experience in linguistic form. As a result, in 'Aṭṭār's version of the seduction/union scene from the *Muṣibat-nāmah*, Zulaykhā is obsessed with Yūsuf, but he will not even look at her. In order to trick him into looking at her face, she has the image of her face painted six times, on all sides of a room, including floor and ceiling:

<div dir="rtl">

با میان آورد عشقش از کنار	چون زلیخا شد ز یوسف بی قرار
تا کند یوسف بسوی او نگاه	بر زلیخا شد همه عالم سیاه
تا زلیخا بر سر او می‌گریست	ذرهٔ یوسف بدو می ننگریست
خویش از نوع دگر آراستی	هر زمان از پیش او برخاستی
ننگرستی هیچ یوسف سوی او	جلوه می‌کردی بپیش روی او
حیلتی بر ساخت آن درمانده	چون زلیخا شد بجان درمانده
کرده صورت جمله نقش روی او	خانهٔ فرمود بر هر سوی او
بود از نقش زلیخا پر نگار	چار دیوارش چو سقف از هر کنار
هم ز نقش خود منقش ساخت او	لایق آن خانه مفرش ساخت او
چون نمی‌بیند چه خواهد بود نیز	گفت یوسف قبلهٔ روی عزیز
نیل مصر جامعم را شبنمست	چون رخم نقد عزیز عالمست
برکشم چون مصر نیل از چشم بد	چون عزیزم من چنین در چشم خود
یوسف صدیق را پیش آورم	شش جهت در صورت خویش آورم
همچو من از من شود دیوانه او	تا چو بیند نقش من از خانه او
کرد یوسف را درون خانه جای	عاقبت چون حیله ساخت آن دلربای
نقش آن دلداده دیدی پیش در	یوسف از هر سوی کافکندی نظر
ای عجب یک صورت از شش سوی بود	شش جهاتش صورت آن روی بود
در درون خانهٔ پر خاک تو	یوسف صدیق جان پاک تو
می‌دید از شش جهت جز روی او	چون نگه می‌کرد از هر سوی او
موج می‌زد جزو جزو اسرار حق	دید در هر ذرهٔ انوار حق
هر دو عالم نور وجه الله دید	لاجرم گر ماهی و گر ماه دید

</div>

When Zulaykhā grew restless because of Yūsuf,
She brought forth her love from the wayside.
The whole world was dark before Zulaykhā's eyes
Until Yūsuf would turn to look at her.
Yūsuf wouldn't take even the slightest glimpse of her,
and Zulaykhā wept over him.
Every time she came before him,
She'd dressed herself up in a different style.
She walked seductively in front of him,
But he paid her no attention.
When Zulaykhā was suffering bitterly,

She came up with a scheme, that suffering one.
She ordered a house to be painted
With her portrait on every side.
From every angle, its four walls
And ceiling were filled with her face.
She made carpets worthy of that house,
And made paintings of her image.
She said, 'Since that dear *qibla,*
'Yūsuf, does not also see what will be.
'My face is the precious coin of the world,
'It is to all of me, as mere dew is to the Nile of Egypt.
'Since in my own eyes, I am so dear,
'I will extract a Nile [of tears] from the evil eye.
'On all six sides I will have my face made manifest.
'I will bring Yūsuf forward [to see].
'When he sees my image in that house,
'He'll go as mad for me as I am for him.'
In the end, when Zulaykhā had performed her trick,
She brought Yūsuf into the house.
Whichever way he looked,
Yūsuf saw that lover by the door.
On six sides of him was her face.
How strange – a single face in all six directions!
—When your pure, honest Yūsuf-soul,[281]
In your dusty house,
Looked all around it,
It saw nothing but His face on six sides.
In every atom, it saw the light of God.
Particles of His secrets floated everywhere.
If it saw either fish or moon,[282]
It saw the light of God's face in the two worlds. [283]

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[281] The reading is debatable, but I have translated the passage as if the conventional authorial aside begins in this line, hence the direct address.

[282] That is, "whatever he looked at." This moment of the poem also refers to Q 2:115: 'And to Allah belongs the east and the west. So wherever you [might] turn, there is the Face of Allah. Indeed, Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing.' (tr. Sahih International).

In this anecdote 'Aṭṭār does not leave it up to the reader to decide whether Zulaykhā is a stand-in for the divine Beloved, but rather makes it explicit. This is the only case in 'Aṭṭār's writings where Zulaykhā represents both the divine Beloved and the Sufi lover at once. In this instance, Zulaykhā is both Yūsuf's admirer and the medium through which he sees the divine. Her otherwise distinct representations have become unified in this passage. The union of her two main allegorical functions – mystical lover and Beloved – is a reflection of the union between her and Yūsuf. 'Aṭṭār does not come any closer than this to giving the reader a scene of the pair's union, and it is a very tame version indeed when compared to al-Kisā'ī's, Nīshāpūrī's and Jāmī's versions.

The concept of building a separate house calculated to seduce Yūsuf appears in al-Kisā'ī's retelling and in Nīshāpūrī. In al-Kisā'ī it is referred to as the House of Joy and Pleasure, in stark contrast to Jacob's House of Sorrows (*bayt al-aḥzān*).[284] Al-Kisā'ī's version does not refer to the six sides of the room covered with Zulaykhā's face described by 'Aṭṭār. For this precedent, we must look to Nīshāpūrī, who describes a house of pleasures with the image of Zulaykhā and Yūsuf's face painted on all six surfaces, leaving Yūsuf no choice but to observe her countenance.[285] In this version, the ruse is dreamed up by a new character added to the narrative, Zulaykhā's nurse, who uses Zulaykhā's money to prepare the house. In this way, Nīshāpūrī deflects at least some blame from Zulaykhā, who is prompted by the suggestion of her scheming

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[283] MN 10/4, 134-35.

[284] Kisā'ī and Thackston, *The Tales of the Prophets*, 174.

[285] Al-Nīshāpūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā': Dāstān-hā-yi Payghāmbarān*, 94-96.

nurse.[286] This version is closest to 'Aṭṭār of those surveyed, but 'Aṭṭār again gives it a slight twist by representing only Zulaykhā's face on the six walls. By this slight alteration of the material, he distinguishes clearly between the earthly love implied by many of the commentaries and *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, the ambiguous earthly/divine love of Jāmī's depiction, and the strictly divine interpretation of their love which he privileges here.

Compare this scene with the same portion of the tale as expanded in Jāmī. Jāmī retells the same anecdote regarding Zulaykhā's attempt at seducing Yūsuf, though unlike 'Aṭṭār, he does not portray her as a manifestation of the divine. In Jāmī's version of the seduction scene, he expands upon the idea of the images of Zulaykhā's face plastered around a room for Yūsuf to see. However, instead of six images in one house, we have images of Zulaykhā all over the walls in seven different houses, each more elaborate than the last. In Jāmī's rendition, it is not Zulaykhā's face painted all the surfaces, but the image of Yūsuf and Zulaykhā embracing. Zulaykhā convinces Yūsuf to come to all the houses, and after the first six have failed, she takes him to the seventh house and begs for his mercy. But Yūsuf rejects her on two grounds: first, it would be against God's wishes to commit adultery, and second, the vizier has treated Yūsuf well and he does not want to betray his master. Unable to accept this, Zulaykhā threatens to

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[286] This also lends some credence to Farzaneh Milani's theory that the nurse functions as a kind of body double or duplicitous alter ego of the heroine, for in Nīshāpūrī, Zulaykhā's character has literally split into two in order to divorce her from some of the more negative qualities of scheming. Farzaneh Milani, "Voyeurs, Nannies, Winds, and Gypsies in Persian Literature," *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East* 8, no. 14 (1999): 113. The strategy does not deflect blame from Zulaykhā for long, however, for in the very next paragraph she offers to poison her husband if fear of him is what causes Yūsuf to hesitate.

kill herself. Yūsuf prevents her from doing so, but before he flees the situation entirely, she manages to steal a kiss from him, and put her arms around him:

بوصل خویشتن آرام او داد [...]   گمان زو شد که خواهد کام او داد
ز ساعد طوق وز ساقش کمر کرد   لب از نوشین دهانش پر شکر کرد
ز شوق گوهرش تن را صدف ساخت   به پیش ناوکش جان را هدف ساخت

> She thought he was going to grant her request,
> And give her peace by union with him. […]
> She filled his sweet lips with [her lips'] sugar.
> She made her arms his collar and her legs his belt.
> She made her soul his arrow's target.
> Out of desire for his jewel, she made her body like an oyster shell. [287]

Yūsuf, however, does not respond to her advances:

پی گوهر صدف را مهر نشکست   ولی نگشاد یوسف بر هدف شست
ولی می‌داشت حکم عصمتش پاس   دلش می‌خواست در سفتن بالماس

> But Yūsuf did not release the arrow.
> He did not break the oyster's seal by seeking the pearl.
> His heart wanted to pierce the pearl with his diamond,
> But he kept guard of his purity. [288]

Like the Qur'an and commentaries, Jāmī implies that Yūsuf was not impervious to her advances and indeed desired Zulaykhā as well, but did not act on those desires. Although there is no appearance of 'the proof of his Lord' here, the word 'ḥukm' probably implies that Yūsuf's commitment to chastity was divinely commanded and his ability to resist did not arise wholly from his own force of will. Avoiding the

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[287] Jāmī, *Haft Awrang*, 682-83.

[288] Jāmī, *Haft Awrang*, 683.

temptation, Yūsuf runs, and his vest is torn from behind. Following the Biblical and Qur'anic versions, Zulaykhā lies and tells the vizier it was Yūsuf who tried to seduce her.

Farzane Milani has pointed out the highly enclosed nature of the space in Jāmī's rendition of the seduction scene and the way in which the (presumed male) reader's intrusion of that space allows the narrative action to continue forward whilst maintaining the woman's proper sphere.[289] She writes that 'within the world of the text, women often appear in highly secluded, locked spaces with many doors, exciting the reader's curiosity and forcing him to assume the perspective of the voyeur.'[290] Milani interprets Zulaykhā's selection of a very enclosed space for her seduction attempt as Jāmī's 'seemingly obsessive effort' to keep Zulaykhā's declaration of love from being heard or seen by the outside world.[291] Though it is possible to make such a reading, the text is less concerned with stifling Zulayhkā's declarations of love and more insistent on showing her cunning and the lengths to which she is willing to go. The exaggerated seclusion of the space then is another indication of the extremity of her stratagem.

Just as the seduction scene is much more highly sexualised in Jāmī's rendition than in 'Aṭṭār's, so is the scene of Yūsuf and Zulaykhā's union. Constructing an unambiguous reading of Zulaykhā as divine Beloved, 'Aṭṭār strips the scene of its sexual content, leaving the carnal implications out of the picture entirely. Jāmī's retelling, however, maintains a delightful ambiguity surrounding the nature of Yūsuf and Zulaykhā's love. As Pendlebury observes:

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[289] Milani, "Voyeurs, Nannies, Winds," 111.

[290] Ibid, 109. This argument is elaborated in more detail in Milani, "The Mediatory Guile of the Nanny," 197-99.

[291] Milani, "Voyeurs," 110.

Jāmī is the master of what could be called 'constructive ambiguity', which is never designed merely to confuse, nor is it ever the result of confused thinking; rather its function is to enable the mind simultaneously to entertain multiple possibilities.[292]

In the scene depicting their union, Jāmī writes:

<div dir="rtl">

کلید حقه از یاقوت تر ساخت   گشادش قفل و دروی گوهر انداخت

کمیتش گام زد در عرصه تنگ   ز بس آمد شدن شد عاقبت لنگ

چو نفس سر کش اول تونسی کرد   در آخر ترک مایی و منی کرد

</div>

He made a key to the jewel box out of the glistening ruby.
He opened the lock and put the jewel in.
His stallion galloped back and forth in that narrow course,
From excess of going to and fro, it finally went lame.
While the (lower) soul initially behaves like a wild, unbroken horse,
Eventually it leaves behind the sense of 'self' and of 'us.'[293]

Via a psychological reading of the text, Merguerian and Najmabadi try to explain the function and effect of this ambiguity regarding the spiritual or physical nature of the couple's love in Jāmī's *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā.* As Zulaykhā's love is:

[n]o longer an evil temptation set against the purity of prophethood, [it] occupies the story from beginning to end. Is it divine? Is it carnal? The radical ambiguity of Sufi love thus rescues Yusuf from having to choose between conflicting desires and loyalties and rescues the male reader from the tension of being simultaneously attracted to and frightened by the figure of Zulaykha.[294]

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[292] Jāmī and Pendlebury, *Yusuf and Zulaikha*, 179.

[293] Jāmī, *Haft Awrang*, 727.

[294] Merguerian and Najmabadi, 'Whose "Best Story?"' 497.

The sacred and profane readings of Zulaykhā and Yūsuf's love could not be more intertwined than they are in the final line of this passage. The line appears to be a simple mystical cliché, comparing the taming of the lower soul to the breaking of a horse, leading to the dissolution of the concept of self. However, the astute reader will note that the comparison between the horse and penis established in the second line quoted actually continues into this line, with the pun on '*manī*,' being 'I-ness' or 'awareness of self,' but also 'semen.'

Despite this ambiguity, a great deal of emphasis is placed on Zulaykhā's virginity in Jāmī's narrative which is utterly absent in 'Aṭṭār's anecdotes. Zulaykhā's maintained chastity has implications beyond the simple primacy of virginity in a patriarchal context. It reveals to the reader the critical piece of information that 'Azīz was in fact impotent, further justifying Zulaykhā's desperation and giving the reader yet another reason to sympathise with Zulaykhā and her earlier trials and tribulations. After Yūsuf and Zulaykhā's wedding night, Yūsuf is surprised to have found her a virgin and asks her how this was possible:

چو یوسف گوهر ناسفته را دید	ز باغش غنچهٔ نشگفته را چید
بدو گفت این گهر ناسفته چون ماند	گل از باد سحر نشکفته چون ماند
بگفتا جز عزیزم کس ندیدست	ولی او غنچهٔ باغم نچیدست
براه جاه اگر چه تیز تک بود	بوقت کامرانی سست رک بود
بطفلی در که خوابت دیده بودم	ز تو نام و نشان پرسیده بودم
بساط مرحمت گسترده بودی	بمن این نقد را بسپرده بودی
ز هر کس داشتم این نقد را پاس	که کوته ماند از آن دست خیانت
دو صد بار ارچه بیم تیغ خوردم	بتو بی‌آفتی تسلیم کردم

When Yūsuf saw that pearl unpierced,
He picked the unplucked bud from her garden.
'How did this jewel remain unpierced?' he asked.
'How did the morning breeze not make this flower blossom?'
'No one has seen it but my 'Azīz,' she replied,

'But he never plucked my flower.
'Though he desired to take that ambitious road,
'When the time came to satisfy his desire, he was incapable.
'When I was a child and saw you in a dream,
'I asked you your name.
'You spread out the wares-blanket of kindness for me,
'And gave me this precious coin.
'I guarded the coin from everyone
'So that I would not betray you.
'Though I suffered a hundred blows from terror's dagger,
'I have delivered it to you unharmed.'[295]

Merguerian and Najmabadi take this passage and the strangeness of such a physical union after a long mystical love-affair as 'a befitting reminder that in all of the story's various existing versions, including Jāmī's, Zulaykhā is crafted by heterosexual male desire and imagination.'[296] They interpret the ending as a 'paradoxical anticlimax.' It is true that the transformation of Yūsuf from distant Beloved figure to devoted lover is swift, jarring, and seemingly at odds with the rest of the narrative. Zulaykhā's sudden reversal into a beloved figure is no less surprising. Jāmī both follows the Quranic exegesis which interprets Yūsuf as trapped in the *dunyā*, and yet turns Zulaykhā into a valiant struggling Sufi lover who is rewarded for her efforts. The conflict between these two aims leads to a number of contradictions in the *mathnavī* that are woven into one continuous narrative. As a result, Zulaykhā's role quickly shifts from lover to beloved, in an awkward transition that 'Aṭṭār does not have to navigate.

Though we have already seen Zulaykhā as seductress converted into the role of divine Beloved, 'Aṭṭār gives the reader an even more clear-cut example of her figure as

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[295] Jāmī, *Haft Awrang*, 727-28.

[296] Merguerian and Najmabadi, "Whose 'Best Story?'" 500.

a metaphor for the divine. According to 'Aṭṭār's tale in *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*, Zulaykhā has Yūsuf imprisoned and beaten.

رفت یوسف را بزندان بازداشت چون زلیخا حشمت و اعزاز داشت
پس بزن پنجاه چوب محکمش با غلامی گفت بنشان این دمش
کین دم آهش بشنوم از دور جای بر تن یوسف چنان بازو گشای
روی یوسف دید دل بارش نداد آن غلام آمد بسی کارش نداد
دست خود بر پوستین بگشاد سخت پوستینی دید مرد نیک بخت
ناله‌ای می‌کرد یوسف زار زار مرد هر چوبی که می‌زد استوار
گفتی آخر سخت‌تر زن ای صبور چون زلیخا بانگ بشنودی ز دور
گر زلیخا بر تو اندازد نظر مرد گفت ای یوسف خورشید فر
بی شک اندازد مرا در پیچ پیچ چون نبیند بر تو زخم چوب هیچ
بعد از آن چوبی قوی را پای دار برهنه کن دوش دل برجای دار
چون ترا بیند نشانی باشدت گرچه این ضربت زیانی باشدت
غلغلی افتاد در هفت آسمان تن برهنه کرد یوسف آن زمان
سخت چوبی زد که در خاکش فکند مرد حالی کرد دست خود بلند
گفت بس کین آه بود از جایگاه چون زلیخا زو شنود آن بار آه
آه آن باد این ز جایی نیز بود پیش ازین آن آه‌ها ناچیز بود
آه صاحب درد آید کارگر گر بود در ماتمی صد نوحه‌گر
حلقه را باشد نگین ماتم زده گر بود در حلقه‌ای صد غم زده
در صف مردان نباشی مرد تو تا نگردی مرد صاحب درد تو
شب کجا یابد قرار و روز هم هر که درد عشق دارد سوز هم

When Zulaykhā had her power and esteem,
She went and had Yūsuf imprisoned.
She told a slave, 'Prop him up right this moment,
'And give him fifty hard lashes.
'Hit him with such a blow
'That I can hear his cries from a great distance.'
That slave came and didn't give Yūsuf too much trouble.
He saw Yūsuf's face and didn't have the heart.
He saw a leather vest, this fortunate man,
And laid it over top [of Yūsuf].
Every solid blow that slave unleashed upon him
Caused Yūsuf to cry out in great pain.
Zulaykhā heard the wailing from afar.
'Hit him harder! You're too lenient,' she cried.
The slave said, 'O, dearest Yūsuf,
'If Zulaykhā takes one look at your back
'And doesn't see any whip marks,
'No doubt she'll have me whipped.
'Bare your shoulder, and brace yourself,
'And take a strong blow. Though it will hurt you,
'When she looks at you, there will be a mark.'
Then Yūsuf bared his body.
Uproar arose from the seven heavens.
The man extended his arm
And struck severely with a wooden branch,

> Throwing Yūsuf to the ground.
> When Zulaykhā heard that cry from him, she said,
> 'That's enough. This one came from the right place.
> 'The previous ones were nothing.
> 'The cries should come from this place.'
> If there were a hundred mourners at a funeral,
> The cry of the one in pain would be loudest.
> If there were a hundred grief-stricken ones in a circle,
> Their ring would be a grieving one.[297]
> So long as you have not experienced pain,
> You do not belong in the ranks of men.
> Whoever has felt the pain of love and yearning,
> Finds no peace, day or night. [298]

In this case, Yūsuf is the allegorical righteous Sufi *sālik*, whose cries of pain must be made legitimate. At the same time, Zulaykhā is a God figure, deciding which of his cries are genuine and inflicting suffering upon her lover. As is common in *taṣavvuf* writings, the cruelty of the divine Beloved is to be expected, borne, and according to the tradition of Rābiʿa ʿAdawiyya's love mysticism, even relished.[299] Although Jāmī and ʿAṭṭār's representations of Zulaykhā are similar when it comes to her role as a mystic lover, they diverge regarding Zulaykhā as a divine figure, and in terms of their retellings of the seduction and union scenes. This divergence indicates that ʿAṭṭār's is using Zulaykhā in an unusual role for maximum dramatic effect, in order to drive home his message that often the highest levels of spiritual achievement can be attained by the most unexpected people.

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[297] The reading is uncertain. I believe 'Aṭṭār is making a pun on *ḥalqah* and *nigīn* as figurative and literal "rings."

[298] MṬ 177-78, ln. 3170-88.

[299] Süleyman Derin, *Love in Sufism: From Rabia to Ibn al-Farid* (Istanbul: insan publications, 2008); Smith, *Rābiʿa the Mystic*, xvi.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter investigates *Sūrat Yūsuf* as the basis upon which many of 'Aṭṭār's readers would have approached their understanding of Zulaykhā's character as an overzealous, lustful, and impatient seductress. It then explores the representations of Zulaykhā in the Sufi Qur'anic commentaries and the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (Sufi or otherwise). Using this base of material, the chapter demonstrates how 'Aṭṭār's representation did not correspond to the Qur'anic vision, and is in fact transformed into one of two main allegorical functions: the exemplary Sufi lover and the divine Beloved. I argued that in both these roles, 'Aṭṭār reinvents and manipulates Zulaykhā's story in order to generate the most shock and surprise, defamiliarising her to the reader and forcing the reader to break out of the 'automatism of perception.' Though Zulaykhā as mystic lover has often been attested in literature predating 'Aṭṭār, Zulaykhā in 'Aṭṭār is not a flawed-but-repentant lover whose transgression is comprehensible to us – she is a symbol of perfection which should be emulated and admired for its utter devotion in the face of no reward.[300] Meanwhile, Zulaykhā as a divine beloved has not been attested in any of my other sources. Finally, perhaps following a lesser-known tradition, 'Aṭṭār represents Yūsuf quite harshly by depicting him as failing to recognise the inherent value of Zulaykhā's love. These departures from traditional tellings, subtle as they may be, reveal a unique interpretation of Zulaykhā's character which reinforces 'Aṭṭār's message that spiritual superiority often emanates from the most unlikely of sources.

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[300] This depiction exists in the *Qiṣaṣ* and commentary literature I investigated, but usually not without framing it as repentance for her poor conduct in the seduction attempt.

5 Gender, Saintly Authority, and the Body in Sufi Hagiography

ʿAṭṭār in the Context of Sulamī, Ibn al-Jawzī, and Jāmī

ابو حفص گفته است که: همیشه حدیث زنان را مکروه میداشتم تا آن وقت که امّ علی، زوجهٔ احمد خضرویه، را دیدم، پس دانستم که حقّ سبحانه معرفت و شناخت خود را آنجا که میخواهد مینهد.

> Abū Ḥafṣ said, 'I always held the society of women in contempt, until I met Umm 'Alī, wife of Aḥmad Khaḍrawayh. Then I realised that the Lord places knowledge and recognition of Him wherever He wills.'[301]

- Jāmī, Nafaḥāt al-Uns

> Since neither man nor nature have of themselves a sacred character, they must get it from another source.[302]

- Durkheim, Elementary Forms of Religious Life

5.1 Introduction

In his wide-ranging study of heroism in the Islamic milieu, John Renard identifies two broad categories of religious heroes: the macrocosmic, universal hero, and the microcosmic, local hero. There can hardly be a set of heroes with a more universal concern than the Friends of God (*awliyā'*), whose primary objectives are to be a conduit for God's blessings (*barakah*) and to ensure the journey of every individual's soul towards divine union. 'Universal heroes,' Renard writes, 'achieve broader victories that afford human society as a whole the possibility of rejuvenation.'[303] Under this

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[301] Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*, #600. This quote also appears in Sulamī and Cornell, *Early Sufi Women: Dhikr al-Niswah*, #41. There, Sulamī uses the word *niswān* (translated by Jāmī simply as *zanān*), which Cornell argues refers to the 'practitioners of female chivalry.' Cornell, *Early Sufi* Women, 168. She understands *niswān* as a kind of *javānmardān* for women, although Christopher Melchert disagrees. Melchert, Christopher. "Before Ṣūfiyyāt." *Journal of Sufi Studies* 5, no. 2 (2016): 119-120.

[302] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life / Emile Durkheim; Translated from the French by Joseph Ward Swain.* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2008), 87.

[303] John Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 93.

model, it is assumed to be critical that the hero possess a generalisable, imitable quality if he is to attract wider following.

Yet, this need for a more general appeal presents a problem for our female saints, whose lives and experiences were likely not interpreted as representative of universal human experience. The problems faced by the hagiographer of women saints are something akin to the woman writer's issues in representing her own self:

> If the woman poet wants…to link her particular experiences with larger universals... she can call upon only a percentage of her own experiences. Much of what she knows does not link up to universals because the universals presently in existence are based upon masculine experience, masculine norms.[304]

If we come to accept the feminist premise that the knowledge-creation process and cultural productions of the past have emphatically not been gender-neutral, and have been, in fact, androcentric insofar as they pretend to 'universal' human experience, the precarious position of the female heroine becomes clear. This has implications for the way our authors incorporate women saints, who are distinctly marked as Other in this context due to their sex. This chapter investigates the process by which women become 'universal' Islamic religious heroes. It examines how the biographers navigate the conflict between the attempt to represent the universal appeal of the ideal mystic seeker, and the inevitability that female experience does not represent so-called universal experience. It explores how they selectively reformulate the biographies of women saints to ensure that they contain enough general interest and applicability to be

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[304] Susanne Julhasz, *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Women, a New Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 139.

effective with a predominately male audience. It asks whether female saints face extra hurdles to demonstrate, as Julie Meisami puts it, their 'perfectibility.'[305]

This chapter argues that the main strategy of the Sufi hagiographers is to portray the woman saint transcending the markedness of her sex in order to lend her more general (i.e. masculine) and less specific (i.e. feminine) appeal. To become universal, relatable symbols of heroism, women saints are mythologised, de-sexualised, and in the end, like almost all saints, shown to surpass the limits of the human form. This chapter investigates two of the most common tactics by which Sufi biographers construct idealised Islamic heroines. The first is the extraction of the female saint from a context, from a personal history and backstory, in favour of a static representation of constant piety from birth, very often removed from indications of the specificities of time and place. The second is the definitive separation of the female saint's soul from her body, and from her sexuality. Women of God in particular must vanquish the lower impulses of the body to become 'Men of God,' a tendency observed by interpreters of the Christian saintly tradition.[306] The female saint's authority, therefore, is located in this transcendence. In fact, as I will demonstrate, her heroism is *contingent* upon the misogynist premise of her spiritual and physical inferiority.

In order to clarify the ways in which pious women's religiosity is represented in the source material, I have structured the chapter into four sections. The first section gives a brief overview of the sources and presents my reasoning for analysing them in

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[305] Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 134-35.

[306] Gillian Cloke, *"This Female Man of God": Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350-450* (London: Routledge, 1995), 33-38; Kerstin Aspegren, *Male Woman: A Feminine Ideal in the Early Church* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1990), 11-14.

concert with one another. The second part lays out the evidence for the first main argument, which claims that the woman saint is decontextualised and separated from many details of her personal history in these hagiographies. The third and fourth sections tackle the second major argument regarding the ways in which female saints overcome the limitations of their physicality by rejecting it entirely. These attempts to vanquish the body are exemplified by recurring themes such as bleeding, fasting, and weeping, in addition to discussions of sexuality, celibacy and marriage. Within the material on the body, there is so much related to sexuality, marriage and celibacy that it has been grouped in its own section. Together, these final two sections of the chapter describe how the hagiographers place an emphasis on the corporeality of female saints, and posit the importance of shedding that corporeal existence for women to attain sainthood.

This research is not the first to point out the complex relationship between female saints, spiritual authority, and the body in the Islamic context. It is a topic which has been fruitfully discussed by Shahzad Bashir, Scott Kugle, and others.[307] This paper also takes into account scholarship on Christian female saints and investigates the extent to which their findings can apply to the women in these sources. On both sides of the tradition – Christian or Islamic – most studies on this subject have come to the

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[307] Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*; Homerin, "Writing Sufi Biography: The Case of 'Ā'ishah Al-Bā'ūnīyah (D. 922/1517)"; Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam*; Caroline Walker Bynum and Catherine M Mooney, *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen and Bernard Heyberger, *Le Corps et le sacré en Orient Musulman* (Aix-en-Provence: Aix-en-Provence: Édisud, 2006).

conclusion that there is an increased emphasis on the body for female saints.[308] At least two major hypotheses have arisen to explain this association of woman and body. In the first theory, taking into account the misogynist assumption that the female body is inherently weaker and more susceptible to temptation, it follows that women would have to do more in terms of restraining their concupiscent desires of the flesh in order to overcome their bodies and attain sainthood. Elizabeth Robertson maintains this position when she writes that, '[s]anctity is not a gender neutral concept' and that hagiographic accounts 'assume a woman's essential, inescapable corporeality,' which requires that her sainthood be achieved through her body.[309]

The other dominating school of thought is exemplified by Bynum, who takes up seemingly the opposite position when she argues that female saints are able to use their close relationship to their bodies as a source of power and authority. She constructs, therefore, not a narrative of misogynist restriction on women's closely regulated path to sainthood, but a narrative of empowerment and negotiation with the patriarchal order. She envisions her study as:

> [...] a complex refutation of the standard interpretation of asceticism as world-rejection or as practical dualism and of the standard picture of medieval women as constrained on every side by a misogyny they internalized as self-hatred or masochism. Rather, I argue that medieval efforts to discipline and manipulate

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[308] This is particularly true with regards to personification of the *nafs* as a woman, discussed above, p. 46.

[309] Elizabeth Robertson, "The Corporeality of Female Sanctity in the Life of Saint Margaret," in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 269.

the body should be interpreted more as elaborate changes rung upon the *possibilities* provided by fleshiness than as flights from physicality.[310]

These two strains of argument do not have to be mutually exclusive. Instead, they both complement each other and highlight aspects of the same phenomenon. I would argue that in these sources, the close relationship between holy women and their corporeality does in fact stem from the misogynist premise that women are more susceptible to temptation and more likely to succumb to the desires of their flesh. However, this association, and their ability to overcome it, is then used by women (in the sources, if not in reality) as leverage by which they can assert their spiritual authority and right to hero status. As such, it is not a question of 'internalised misogyny' versus 'possibilities' heroically rung upon the flesh; the subversion of misogynist assumptions is instead converted into a tool for exemplary holy women to control their own circumstances and exert influence on their communities.

If we fail to provide a convincing answer to the question of what specifically makes a female *valī* in Islam, we risk succumbing to the temptation of simply evaluating women saints by the yardstick of male saints' accomplishments. Though attempting to interpret texts through the eyes of the medievals themselves, European medievalists 'have in fact tended to use male religiosity as a model,' notes Caroline Walker Bynum. They 'look simply for women's answers to questions that have always been asked about men,' and these questions were 'generated in the first place by

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[310] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 6. Further on this topic, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

observing male religiosity.'[311] She cites especially the renunciation of sexual gratification and economic or political power as elements of Christian men's piety which have been discussed at length in regards to women as well. Instead, we must observe the biographies of women and allow the questions to arise naturally from what we find there.

Some commentators reject the concept of a particular 'women's spirituality' outright, (perhaps reasonably) fearing the findings in this area would be used to support essentialist claims regarding the nature of women. Silvers writes:

> There is nothing inherent to women about any of these socio-historical contexts. Thus, there is little historical value in identifying a 'spirituality' particular to women, unless it refers to the dynamic and intersecting socio-historical narratives that name certain types of bodies, experiences, and articulations 'female.'[312]

While on the whole, I agree with Silvers' caution against essentialism, she seems to be strawmanning a bit here. I have not seen a study on this subject claiming that the particularities of women's spirituality observed in the case of the female *awliyā'* were 'inherent' to women. More productive is to analyse to what extent these 'female' practices were imagined by their male biographers. Or, simply admitting that any particular female spiritual practices were no doubt socially constructed (either in life or in text), we can move on to try to define those particular practices and use them to shed light on social attitudes towards saintly women in Sufi hagiography. My study attempts to elucidate the representation of women's piety in literature as it relates to specific socio-historical contexts of the authors, and does not treat them as products of a static

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[311] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 29-30.

[312] Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women," 28.

period or single understanding of women's piety. It attempts to tease out the ways in which male writers have identified their subjects as particularly female, and what they try to achieve by applying a gendered label.

5.2 Sources Consulted

The sources consulted in this chapter represent a wide timespan – about 400 years – and were composed in Persian or Arabic. The earliest text referenced here is the *Dhikr al-Niswa al-Muta'bbidāt al-Ṣūfiyyāt* by 'Abd al-Raḥmān Sulamī (d. 412 AH / 1021 CE), an Arabic work of the *ṭabaqāt* genre containing 82 entries solely on pious women, as the title implies. This text was known to exist by scholars since at least the early 20th century, but was presumed to be a lost appendix to Sulamī's *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, much like Jāmī's appendix to the *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*, instead of a standalone work. Rkia Cornell rediscovered the work in the 1990s and she has published an edition and translation of this unique manuscript. Entries tend to be short and focus on the sayings of the saints rather than anecdotes. *Isnād*s are included as part of the legitimation project. Chronologically, the next works consulted are Abū al-Faraj b. al-Jawzī's *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa* (d. 597 AH / 1200 CE) and Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā' (*d. ca. 618 AH / 1221 CE), whose biographies are roughly contemporaneous. 'Aṭṭār's famous *Tadhkirat* was written mainly in Persian, with an Arabic introduction and quotations, and features lengthy narratives on 72 to 96 saints.[313] As noted in Chapter 2, he dispenses with sources and sets out his work as a definitive act of vernacularisation.[314] He claims

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[313] Depending on the edition, though typically only the first 72 are accepted as genuine. See Helms, "Rabi'ah as Mystic, Muslim, and Woman," 47.

[314] Nile Green identifies and describes this phenomenon at length: 'If the Arabic prose literature we have seen the Sufis developing from their early days in Baghdad helped them maintain their position in the

to understand the saints' words as a commentary on the Qur'an and hadith. Ibn al-Jawzī, by contrast, wrote his *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa* in Arabic in the *ṭabaqāt* style featuring shorter anecdotes and sayings. The latest work consulted here is 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's *Nafaḥāt al-Uns* (d. 898 AH/ 1492 CE), written in Persian in a style closest to 'Aṭṭār's, of the other works presented here. It does not include extensive references to sources and more fully develops the hagiographic narratives than the Arabic biographies of Ibn al-Jawzī and Sulamī. Though Jāmī's *Nafaḥāt al-Uns* is after 'Aṭṭār, it is included to examine the potential choices 'Aṭṭār did not make while looking at a similar set of materials. Since Jāmī's style is closest to 'Aṭṭār's, it represents a valuable point of comparison to throw into relief 'Aṭṭār's unique interpretation of the biographical tradition preceding him.

The reason that these sources from varying time periods and languages can justifiably be brought together in this chapter is that they all have something in common that is unusual in Islamic literature. All four of these texts contain extended biographies of holy women in mystical Islam, and represent a significant portion of the available data on female saints in early premodern Persian and Arabic sources. I think it is fair to look at these sources as part of a coherent tradition because they were very clearly in dialogue with one another, and large parts are copied over from one author to the next with little to no alteration.[315] This is not to imply that pious women do not feature in numerous hagiographies and biographies which take men as their subjects. However, I

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religious establishment, then it was through their co-option of such vernacular entertainments that the Sufis were able to reach a more general audience. If sanctification brought the Sufis a mass following based on power and respect, the vernacularization ensured that it was also a relationship which was warmed with affection and informed by at least a measure of understanding.' Green, *Sufism*, 109.

[315] For a detailed chart of the overlap of women's biographies, see Appendix 1.

contend in this chapter that these biographies which focus on holy women as subjects –
instead of mentioning them in passing – operate according to a different set of
expectations and employ another set of motifs, separate from those used to describe
women (pious or otherwise) who hover in the periphery of male-centered texts. With the
exception of the studies completed on the biography of Rābiʿa bt. al-ʿAdawiyya like
Smith's, most serious scholarly studies in Islamic hagiography concern themselves with
the marginal women appearing in the background of men's biographies, or other male-
centered texts.[316] This chapter aims to offer a corrective to that narrative by focusing on
the fairly rare accounts of female saints who take centre stage as the subjects of these
biographies.

Though parts of these sources have remained largely untouched, especially
from the perspective of gender, some of the material has been worked on by scholars
whose foundational work cannot go unmentioned here. First, Ruth Roded's ground-
breaking monograph laid out lines of primary source material for later scholars to
follow. As mentioned previously, Rkia Cornell's rediscovery of Sulamī's *Dhikr al-*

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[316] Studies that focus mainly on peripheral women include John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood* (University of California Press, 2008); Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 154-63; Margaret Malamud, "Gender and Spiritual Self-Fashioning: The Master-Disciple Relationship in Classical Sufism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 1 (April 1, 1996): 89–117. Some welcome interventions in this field have been published more recently, especially Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women"; Homerin, "Writing Sufi Biography: The Case of ʿĀʾishah al-Bāʿūnīyah (D. 922/1517)"; Maria Dakake, "Guest of the Inmost Heart: Conceptions of the Divine Beloved among Early Sufi Women," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2007); Maria Dakake, "'Walking Upon the Path of God Like Men?' Women and the Feminine in the Islamic Mystical Tradition," in *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*, ed. J-L Michon and R Gaetani (Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom, 2006); Christopher Melchert, "Before Ṣūfiyyāt," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 5, no. 2 (2016): 115–39.

Niswa in the 1990s, and her thorough introduction to the translated material, has brought a unique primary source to the fore. She raised the initial questions relating to a distinct women's piety in medieval Islam, contextually and historically contingent, and these questions have been influential in determining the direction of contemporary discussions. Finally, in recent years deeper analytical work on the sources has been just beginning by scholars such as Laury Silvers, Maria Dakake, Michel Chodkiewicz, and Saʿdiyya Shaikh. Silvers has been undertaking a methodologically rigorous study of these texts through the lens of women's social history.[317] At the time of writing, her analysis and translation of *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa* is forthcoming.[318] Her work also responds to Maria Dakake, who has claimed that early Sufi women's love of God took on the form of His patriarchal guardianship.[319] Meanwhile, though some of Chodkiewicz's claims can be reductive,[320] his article covers female saints' biographies as a coherent tradition and with a breadth that other studies do not. Most recently of all, Shaikh touches upon this literature in developing the background for Ibn ʿArabī's conceptions of what it means to be human and what it means to be gendered. Though her approach is one open in its commitment to the cause of Islamic feminism in a contemporary political

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[317] Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women"; Laury Silvers, "'God Loves Me': The Theological Content and Context of Early Pious and Sufi Women's Sayings on Love" 30 (2010): 33–59.

[318] According to Silvers' personal website, its anticipated title is Simply Good Women: The Lives, Practices and Thought of Early Pious and Sufi Women.

[319] Dakake, "'Walking Upon the Path of God Like Men?'"; Dakake, "Guest of the Inmost Heart."

[320] See, for example, his argument that Mary forms the prototype for all of the anonymous women (*ʿābida majhūla*) in Ibn al-Jawzī, which, given the variety in the depiction of these women, seems doubtful. He also writes, 'The part played by women is extremely variable, but in the best-case scenario – like in Ibn al-Jawzī, especially – she remains noticeably inferior to men in her capabilities.' Chodkiewicz, "Feminine Sainthood in Islamic Hagiography," 114 and 103.

context,[321] she provides very cogent insights into Ibn 'Arabī's conceptions of gender and sexuality and has also attempted to place him within a tradition of gender-egalitarian tendencies in Sufi literature. The work of these scholars has paved the way for this study of subalterns in the Sufi biographical tradition.

5.3 Decontextualising Women: Lack of Backstories for Female Saints

'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,' Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote in *The Second Sex*.[322] Centuries before this distinction between sex and gender became widely accepted, our authors here imply precisely the opposite for female saints: one does not become but is born a woman saint. In the Sufi context, pious women's biographies often lack any kind of backstory. This represents a sharp departure from the formulaic emphasis laid on childhood piety or adolescent conversion for male saints. The male saints of 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* serve as a prime example of this phenomenon. This lack of backstory indicates yet another way in which Sufi women saints are removed from their physicality and detached from the self. Bynum points this phenomenon out as well in relation to medieval Christian

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[321] She writes, 'Muslim women and men with feminist commitments engage in 'multiple critique': they are critical of sexist interpretations of Islam and patriarchy in their religious communities while condemning neocolonial feminist discourses on Islam.' Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, 23. This commitment by no means precludes Shaikh's work from being worthy of consideration and study, as long as one is aware of the modern political debates which she hopes to influence with her reconstruction of the past. Since every history is political, it is actually preferable that she acknowledges her aims upfront because it gives us a sense of what the author's conscious biases are.

[322] Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 301.

hagiography.[323] She notes that the lives of holy men and women exhibit basic differences, and that women's saintly tendencies begin in early childhood and steadily grow, whereas men are much more likely to undergo sudden conversions in adolescence. Sudden and dramatic change are significantly more prominent motifs in the biographies of holy men. As Bynum explains:

> It is because women lacked control over their wealth and marital status that their life stories show fewer heroic gestures of casting aside money, property, and family. [...] Men were inclined to tell stories with turning points, to use symbols of reversal and inversion, and to externalize motives in events (particularly when talking about men). Women more often used their ordinary experiences (of powerlessness, of service and nurturing, of disease, etc.) as symbols into which they poured ever deeper and more paradoxical meanings.[324]

The paradigm outlined here for structuring the lives of both male and female Christian saints to a large extent holds true in the Islamic context as well. Male sainthood in the hagiographies surveyed here seems heavily correlated with sudden conversion stories. In these stories, the male saint renounces his wealth, kingship, family, or dramatically reforms his thieving or otherwise sinful ways. However, women's lives are often characterised by a consistent piety that is less dynamic. Furthermore, our sources on

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[323] Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700*, ed. Rudolph M Bell and American Council of Learned Societies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 19-47. The tables on pp. 123-37 indicate that of the 646 male saints surveyed, 357 (55%) converted as teenagers and only 96 (15%) as children; of 172 female saints, 55 (31%) converted as children and 58 (34%) as adolescents. Bynum has discussed the importance of this finding in more detail in her essay, 'Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality,' in Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 27-52.

[324] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 24-25.

Muslim women are fewer, and unlike in Christian tradition, we have almost no writings from women themselves and as such must rely on men's voices, which shape our knowledge of these women.

Careful study of the sources reveals that while approximately 50% of the men's backgrounds are dealt with in detail in the *Memorial*, the same cannot be said of female saints in all four of these biographical compendia. Of the 37 male saints in 'Aṭṭār whose biographies are translated by A.J. Arberry, 14 of them have conversion stories that form a prominent part of the narrative. Most of them come at the opening of their entries and recount a shift in worldview that results in renouncing such worldly things as power, wealth, love, family, sleep, food, and so forth. While nearly 40% of the male saints undergo some kind of conversion, I could find no examples of such a conversion by a woman in Sulamī's *Dhikr al-Niswa* or Jāmī's *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*.[325] Furthermore, of these 37 male saints, at least an additional 5 fit the 'prodigy' sainthood model, in which it becomes apparent quite early that the saint is destined to be a holy man. The biographers accomplish this by emphasising their subject's spiritual precociousness in several ways. 'Aṭṭār, for example, portrays the male saints as having a positive moral influence on their family before they even come out of the womb (Bāyazīd, Sufyān al-Thawrī), as masters of the Qur'an at an impossibly young age, or devoted to ascetic practice as young as three (Sahl al-Tustarī). If we include the male saints who are

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[325] I have not considered the question of a backstory for all 240 female saints of the *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*. However, of the 80 I checked in detail, only 8 made reference to the saint's childhood, and all of these were to show her advanced comprehension of true piety at a young age. 7 of these come in a special section labelled 'Young girls that speak with the words of mature worshippers.' Ibn al-Jawzī it seems, therefore, tends to present female piety as inherent rather than conversion-based. §§ #232, #1023-29.

marked as holy from childhood, then the number rises to 50% of male saints sampled from ʿAṭṭār whose background is dealt with in detail.

Bynum's premise – that men's stories feature dramatic conversions because they generally have so much more power to shape their own destinies – appears to hold for the Islamic hagiographical texts sampled here as well. However, it is not just a lack of power which keeps conversion stories out of Islamic female saints' life narratives. There seems to also be a marked lack of interest in the early lives of these women saints. While the women of Christianity are marked as saints from age 8 and earlier, the female saints of Islam are consistently portrayed as adult women who, by implication, have more or less always exhibited pious and ascetic leanings.[326] The development of a woman saint is of no interest, perhaps because it is so unusual that it must be divinely ordained and hence cannot be emulated. The lack of dynamism in these accounts may imply that women must occupy quasi-mythical space of non-time and non-place in order to become saints. In addition to transcending gender and physicality, they are also often portrayed as overcoming any specificity of their individual history and historical context to attain sainthood.

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[326] ʿAṭṭār's Rābiʿa is an outlier here, as her childhood is depicted, unlike the vast majority of female saints' biographies sampled. One could argue that ʿAṭṭār's Rābiʾa fits the 'prodigy' model to a certain extent. However, it is not primarily her own piety which is highlighted at an early age, but rather the positive influence of her father who practices *tawakkul* and *waraʿ*.

5.4 Transcending Physicality to 'Rise Beyond the Female Sex'[327]

In addition to distancing women saints from a distinct backstory and history, the biographies investigated here also distance women from their corporeality. The following sections will discuss three main techniques by which the woman saint is wrenched apart from her physicality. First, the biographers re-inscribe blood, that fundamental symbol of female impurity, with a new meaning. No longer the sign of ritual impurity and the inability to worship at certain times, blood and menstruation are converted into symbols of heroic suffering and opportunities for our heroines to display strength in the face of pain. Second, the biographers lay significant emphasis on female's saints' skill in practicing restraint in regards to food, while at the same demonstrating the ability to produce it miraculously for those in need. Third and finally, considerable attention is paid to the thorny issue of sexuality for women saints. Some female saints are quite strictly divided from their sexuality by being portrayed as celibate, a status which must be continually justified and defended to the questioning masses. Meanwhile, the heroism of other female saints, particularly those who are married, is demonstrated by their ability to compartmentalise. The married woman saint fulfills the sexual needs of her husband, but is not tempted herself, while still worshipping God to the extent prized by the Sufis.

5.4.1 Male Awliyā' and Corporeality

Before moving on to represent the relationship between female saints and their bodies, it is important to allude briefly to the relation between male saints and their

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[327] Sandra Lowerre, "To Rise Beyond Their Sex: Female Cross-Dressing Saints in Caxton's Vitas Patrum," in *Riddles, Knights, and Cross-Dressing Saints: Essays on Medieval English Language and Literature*, ed. T Honegger, Collection Variations (Peter Lang, 2004).

bodies, if we plan to argue that the relationship to the body is different for saints of different genders. As Kugle points out, the body is significant for both genders as a means to commune with God. Bashir, meanwhile, describes in detail the importance of handshakes, tufts of hair, and even spit, to disseminate *ma'rafat* and *baraka* between shaykh and disciple in medieval Islamic mysticism. Although corporeality has a substantial impact on men's paths to sainthood, the body is not the only mechanism by which they can attain *wilāya*. Men have other options to show their conversion and commitment to the Path, including the renunciation of wealth, power, and family. In 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* we find many examples of this. Ibrāhīm Adham, king of Balkh, is pursued by signs of the divine until finally he relents, relinquishing his station and extravagant wealth to live in a cave and become a seeker.[328] Ibn 'Aṭā', meanwhile, displays his saintly commitment to *riẓāyat* (contentment in God's will) by laughing as his children are executed one by one.[329] Finally, Mālik b. Dīnār, a highway robber, reforms his rakish ways after feeling compelled to honour a man's request for *amānat* (safekeeping of property).[330] Many of these avenues are not open to women saints, however. In the following sections I will demonstrate how women's sainthood was primarily attained through the body.

5.4.2 Rhetorical Jousting between the Sexes: Trading Wit for Value

In her study of Arabic literature, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word*, Malti-Douglas argues that woman became another type in *adab* literature, like the miser, the wise madman, or the fast-talking criminal. The influence of *adab* literature is also

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[328] TA #11, 80-82.

[329] NTA #50, 68.

[330] NTA #04, 41-42.

palpably evident in these hagiographical sources. Malti-Douglas notes the ways wit can be used as a bargaining chip to make up for physical deformity. By extension, she argues that woman's speech in classical Arabic *adab* literature functions as a tool by which she can overcome her bodily disadvantage. 'Ability to manipulate discourse,' she writes, 'may or may not permit the woman to transcend that physicality with which she has been plagued.'[331] I find that the motif of the witty repartée between female saint and male questioner becomes a kind of structuring principle for many anecdotes in the biographies of Sufi women.[332] Several of 'Aṭṭār's anecdotes on Rābi'a particularly center on her as genderless or divorced from the physical body, and yet delight in bringing up her gender for effect within the context of verbal jousts with other (male) Sufi shaykhs.

'Aṭṭār's subtle twist on an anecdote related by Sulamī will illuminate the way feminine wit can compensate for her supposed disadvantage:

بإسناده، قال صالح المرّي بين يديها: من أكثر قرْعَ الباب يُفْتَحُ له. فقالت: البابُ مفتوحٌ، ولكنّ الشأن فيمن يَرغَبُ أن يدخُلَهُ.

> Also on [Ja'far b. Sulaymān's] authority: Ṣāliḥ al-Murrī said in her presence,
> 'He who persists in knocking at the door will have it opened for him.'
> 'The door is already open,' she replied. 'But the question is: Who wishes to enter it?'[333]

A variant of this same anecdote is related by 'Aṭṭār in the *Tadhkirat*:

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[331] Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word*, 43.

[332] Mojaddedi discusses this in the context of interactions between men. Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism*, 54. Meanwhile, Silvers describes this motif as it applies to female saints in 'Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women,' 46.

[333] Sulamī and Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 80.

صالح مری بسی گفتی که هر که دری می‌زند زود باز شود.
رابعه یکبار حاضر بود. و گفت: با که گویی که این در بسته است و باز خواهد گشاد؟ هرگز کی بسته
بود تا باز گشایند؟
صالح گفت: عجب! مردی جاهل و زنی ضعیف دانا.

Ṣāliḥ Murrī often said, 'For whomever knocks, the door shall open.'
Once, Rābiʿa was present [as he said this]. She replied, 'For whom do you imply this door is closed that it will be opened again? It was never closed to begin with.'
'To think!' he said. 'A man ignorant, and a weak woman wise.'[334]

In ʿAṭṭār's version of the anecdote, Rābiʿa's tone is more combative, as she uses a sharp rhetorical question as opposed to simply contradicting al-Murrī's statement in Sulamī's version. The most significant addition in ʿAṭṭār's rendition, however, is the commentary provided afterwards by a stunned Murrī who highlights the reversal of the traditional power dynamic. While Sulamī's account is a gender-neutral confirmation of Rābiʿa's authority, ʿAṭṭār's variant specifically emphasises Rābiʿa's gender as a point of interest and refers to the shock value of this gender reversal. This example shows the power of wit and word to make up for perceived physical deficiencies or disadvantages in relation to the social hierarchy.

The symbolism of the female voice and its pleasing sound is also reconfigured in this context. No longer a sign of the woman's powers of seduction, the woman's voice becomes a medium through which to inspire her listeners, express her yearning for the divine, or even a vehicle to accomplish her miracles. Though in later periods we find women's voices functioning as a metaphor for sexual temptation, these precautionary tales are quite absent from the texts at hand. This metaphor is pursued to

[334] NTA #08, 68.

such an extent in other sources that Bashir relates an example wherein a shaykh, after following the beautiful sound of a woman's singing, is shocked by her disgusting nakedness when he arrives. In another instance, a man breaks his foot while following the sound of a woman's voice.[335] But in Sulamī, Ibn al-Jawzī, and Jāmī, the music of women's voices is viewed as a permissible tool to help the mystic attain a higher state. Sarī al-Saqaṭī narrates his visit to a sick-house where he finds Tuḥfah, a female slave, crying and reciting poems in Arabic, so beautifully that he is deeply moved. Long after Sarī buys her freedom, he hears her voice again as he circumambulates the Ka'ba.[336] Fāṭima bt. al-Muthannā, meanwhile, sends her voice across a vast distance to recall a husband from another city, where he means to take a second wife without consulting his first wife.[337] Jāmī reports of Sha'wāna, whose beautiful voice, combined with her deep religiosity, moves others to tears:

وی از عجم بود و در اُبلّه می‌نشست. آواز خوب داشت و به نغمات خوش وعظ می‌گفت و چیزی می‌خواند زاهدان و عابدان و ارباب قلوب در مجلس وی حاضر می‌شدند.

> She was one of the *'ajam* (non-Arab people) and lived in Uballa. She had a good voice and preached in beautiful tones. She recited such things that ascetics, worshippers, and those who were masters of their hearts attended her gatherings.[338]

Perhaps it is significant here that Jāmī mentions specifically who would attend these gatherings. He makes it clear that the attendees were 'masters of their hearts' to the degree that they could handle such beauty, and channel the inspiration from it into

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[335] Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 148-49.

[336] NU #605: 624.

[337] NU #609: 629.

[338] NU #591: 617.

appreciation for the divine. Ibn al-Jawzī reports an anonymous slave girl whose beautiful Qur'an recitation moves other:

فلما كان النوم بتّ أنا والغلام خارجا وباتت الجارية في الخيمة وكنت أسمع دويّ القرآن الليل كله بأحسن
صوت يكون وأرقه. فلما أصبحتُ قلت للغلام: صوتُ من كان ذلك؟ فقال: تلك أختي تحي الليل كله إلى
الصباح فقلت: يا غلام أنت أحق بهذا العمل من أختك، أنت رجل وهي امرأة. قال: فتبسم و قال لي:
ويحك يا فتى أما علمتَ أنه موفق ومخذول؟

> And when it was time for bed, the slave boy and I slept outside and the slave girl inside the tent. I was listening to a Qur'an recitation all night long in the most beautiful voice there ever was. It kept [me] up all night. In the morning I asked the slave boy, 'Whose voice was that?'
> 'That's my sister,' he replied. 'She stays up all night until the dawn.'
> 'O Slave,' I said, 'It is more appropriate for you to do this work than your sister, for you are a man and she is a woman.' He smiled and told me, 'Woe unto you, dear boy, haven't you learned that there are the blessed and the forsaken?'[339]

In this case, the biography even directly addresses the question of the acceptability of a woman reciting Qur'an. With the brother's sharp response, we are led to understand that it is not gender which determines fitness to recite, but rather one's standing before God. This relationship to the female voice provides a sharp contrast to the later Persian Sufi hagiographies surveyed by Shahzad Bashir, where it is explicitly categorised as dangerous. Jāmī and Ibn al-Jawzī's women, conversely, use recitation, sermonising, poetry and music to further their spiritual meditations, and can even provide the basis for listening male mystics to have a transcendent experience. Our authors once again transform a potentially damaging aspect of female identity, namely the voice as a tool of seduction, into a source of spirituality and sign of divine inspiration.

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[339] ṢṢ #253.

5.4.3 Weeping, Physical Attractiveness, and Valuing Women's Bodies

Both demonstrations of wit and the power of the female voice are significant claims to legitimacy for these pious women's biographies. Another approach is to intentionally decrease the value of their bodies to demonstrate their commitment to the Path. One way women saints are able to do this is through the practice of weeping, which plays a major role in their biographies. Although weeping also features in the hagiographies of male *awliyā'*, it can function as a kind of female speciality.[340] One reason weeping is found so often in the women's hagiographies is that it is a way for women to show their utter disregard for one thing society does value them for – physical attractiveness. The concern that the woman will ruin her eyesight, physical appearance, and hence her marriage prospects come up repeatedly in these accounts.[341] 'Don't you worry about losing your sight?' Burda al-Suryāniyya is asked. 'I pray to lose my sight,' she replies, 'so God will give me better eyes.'[342] Sha'wāna's followers are afraid she will blind herself by her crying, to which she replies: 'Us, afraid?' By God! Going blind in this world from weeping is more desirable to me than being blinded by Hellfire in the Hereafter!'[343] Silvers points out that weeping may have been used by early pious women as a way to avoid marriage:

> Some reports may address concerns that weeping and fasting were ruining women's chances at marriage, and thus motherhood, by destroying their looks.

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[340] Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women," 32; Christopher Melchert, "Exaggerated Fear in the Early Islamic Renunciant Tradition," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21, no. 3 (2011): 283–300; Melchert, "Before Ṣūfiyyāt," 129.

[341] ṢṢ #234, #589, #593, #603, #604, #607; DhN #01, #09, #14.

[342] ṢṢ #596.

[343] Adapted from Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 106.

Accounts seem to vouch for these women by presenting their ruined bodies as a great loss to men and thus presented as a sacrifice for God's sake, nowhere so explicitly as in the case of Khansā' bt. Khidām. She reportedly 'had a resounding voice and was a great beauty like a fattened camel adorned for sacrifice,' but she fasted until she was skin and bones, and wept until she lost her eyesight. [344]

Physical beauty was certainly presented as desirable for women, including female saints, and is used at least by Ibn 'Arabī to indicate the reward for a female saint's remarkable devotion. Jāmī relates from Ibn 'Arabī the following report on Fāṭima bt. al-Muthannā:

من سال‌ها بنفس خود خدمت وی کرده‌ام، و سن وی آن وقت بر نود و پنج سال زیـادت بـود و مـن شـرم مـی‌داشـتم کـه بـه روی وی نگرم از تـازگی و نـازکی رخسارهٔ وی. هرکه وی را بدیدی پنداشتی که چهارده ساله است.

I served her personally for years. At that time she was over 95 years old, yet I was ashamed to look at her face because of its freshness and delicacy. Anyone who saw her would assume she was 14. [345]

Ibn 'Arabī relates to us here his own shame at looking at his master's face because she has maintained her beauty across the decades. The emphasis for women on outward beauty during life does not abate even in old age, even for a Sufi saint who rejected the aesthetic pleasures of the *dunyā* during her life. The practice of weeping to destroy that

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[344] Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women," 34.

[345] NU #609: 629.

beauty intentionally, therefore, represents one way the female saints could symbolically destroy the monetary value placed on their bodies.[346]

In our texts, one salient example of this appears in the previously-mentioned account of Tuḥfah in *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*. Sarī al-Saqaṭī narrates his account of buying the freedom of Tuḥfah from her owner. As a slave, Tuḥfah probably would have had no say in her sexual availability, and was not a viable marriage prospect, so her weeping could not have been a sacrifice of marriage prospects in favour of devotion to the Lord. Rather than the typical loss of a beautiful woman from the marriage market, this report implies an actual economic cost to the slave owner due to her seemingly hysterical behaviour. 'She's lost her mind. She won't eat, drink, or sleep; she thinks and cries too much. She's the only property I have,' complains the owner, 'I thought I could profit.'[347] The slave owner's objection is not about concern for Tuḥfah herself, but for the impact the neglect of her physical health may have on her potential resale value. In several other reports, it is implied that women are not physically strong enough to maintain their extreme lifestyle of devotion and are questioned about the wisdom of such a practice.[348] Overall, weeping, like other renunciant practices, functions in these texts as a tool for attaining spiritual authority via bodily sacrifice. The efforts of these women and their biographers

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[346] It should be noted here that the practice of women's weeping also very often carries the same resonance it has for male Sufis, namely, extreme fear of being separated from God. However, for women, it has this secondary implication that I discuss here.

[347] NU #605: 624.

[348] In ṢṢ #596, for example, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī responds to excessive female weeping by telling her, 'Your body and your eyes have a claim (*ḥaqq*) over you.'

to negate the impact of the female body ultimately 'challenged scholarly efforts to direct orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and women's role in public religious practice.'[349]

5.4.4 Blood as Motif in Women's Miracles

One bodily motif that appears early in the Christian hagiographies (ca. 13th century) is the bleeding of the stigmata, the wounds on the hands and feet that bleed, supposedly in empathy with Christ's wounds sustained during the crucifixion. Although in the Islamic tradition, the image of bleeding contains no allusion to the crucifixion, the motif of blood still follows the female Muslim saints. One of the first known examples of this motif in the Christian tradition comes from the life of the male saint, Francis, Caroline Walker Bynum finds that 'stigmata rapidly became a female miracle, and only for women did the stigmatic wounds bleed periodically.'[350] Bynum and Scott Kugle both posit that this association of women with bleeding was a reflection of the defining difference between the male and female body – menstruation. This consistent association of women with blood reveals most dramatically their increased corporal experience of sainthood as opposed to men.

Among the most pervasive arguments against women's full participation in public religious life is the hadith that proclaims women's 'deficiency in religion,' which stems from her monthly ritual impurity:

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[349] Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women," 33.

[350] Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff, and Nadia Tazi (New York: Urzone, Inc., 1989), 182.

> [The Prophet said to a group of women,] 'I have seen none more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. […] Is not the evidence of two women equal to the witness of one man?'
>
> They replied in the affirmative.
>
> 'This is the deficiency in her intelligence,' he said. 'Is it not true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?'
>
> The women replied in the affirmative.
>
> He said, 'This is the deficiency in her religion (*nuqṣān dīnihā*).'[351]

As Shaikh notes, this hadith was cited widely to prove women unfit to hold many kinds of power, large and small. Other scholars commented upon it to resist the strictly misogynist interpretation propounded by some.[352] Some of the biographers of female saints undermine and challenge this conventional understanding of menstruation as a sign of female deficiency in the faith.

In one of Rābiʿa's stories comes an example of the way ʿAṭṭār reconfigures the traditional meaning of blood as impurity. Rābiʿa is asked about the Companions of the Prophet, she replies that since she is never done speaking of God, she has no spare thought for the Companions. She then adduces the analogy, that once a thorn broke in her eye and bled all over the ground, but she did not notice, because she was in devotion.

تو رها کن به سر به مهر این واقعه	مرد حق شو روز و شب چون رابعه
او نه یک زن بود او صد مرد بود	از قدم تا فرق عین درد بود
بود دایم غرق نور حق شده	از فضولی رسته مستغرق شده].[.
زو یکی پرسید کای صاحب قبول	تو چه می‌گویی ز یاران رسول
گفت من از حق نمی‌آیم به سر	کی توانم داد از یاران خبر
گرنه در حق جان و دل گم دارمی	یک نفس پروای مردم دارمی
آن نه من بودم که در سجده گهی	خار در چشمم شکست اندر رهی

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[351] Muḥammad b. Ismāʾīl Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Salām, 1997), hadith #304.

[352] Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, xx.

من ز خون خویش بودم بی‌خبر   بر زمین خونم روان شد از بصر

کی دل کار زن و مردی بود   آنک او را این چنین دردی بود

دیگری را کی شناسم در قیاس   چون نبودم تا که بودم خودشناس

Surrender your head out of love of this calamity[353].
Be a man of God day and night like Rābi‘a.
She was no woman, rather a hundred men.
From head to toe she was a spring of anguish.
She was forever drowned in God's light.
She escaped haughty pride and was immersed [in God].[…]
'O Intimate [Friend of God]!' someone addressed Rābi‘a.
'What do you say of the Companions of the Prophet?'
'I am never sated with God,' she replied,
'How then can I speak of the Companions?'
'Had I not lost my heart and soul within God,
'I would have a moment's concern for the people.
'Was it not I, that once in prayer,
'Had a thorn break in my eye?
'My blood spilled forth over the ground,
'Yet I was completely unaware of it.'
Since she experienced such pain,
How could her heart be concerned for any man or woman?
Since I did not exist, how could I know myself?
Not knowing myself, how could I know another?[354]

The thorn broken in her eye represents her love of God, and conveys the suddenness and pain that it is associated with mystical love of the divine. The blood functions as a symbol of her corporeality and her womanhood, all recollection of which is effaced within her contemplation of the divine. This effacement of the bodily self as a strategy to posit the disintegration of the ontological self into the divine has been theorised by

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[353] The context here implies that this *vāqe‘e* is death, as the previous lines praise some prophets for their bravery in accepting their exit from this world with grace.

[354] MṮ 32-33, ln. 580-589.

Beresford in his analysis of St. Margaret's legend. 'Margaret,' he writes, 'once a bounded entity marked by ontological integrity, begins to spill out over the borders of her former self, as parts of her body, particularly blood and flayed skin tissue, are forcibly integrated into their broader physical environment.' Thus the legend succeeds 'in dissolving the dialectical integrity of the distinction between internal/external and self/other.'[355] Blood here does not signify ritual impurity, nor does it allude to the women's 'deficiency in religion' implied by that impurity. Instead, it denotes a breaking down of boundaries between self and environment, metaphorically representing the merging the self with the divine.

The corporeal nature of Rābi'a's saintly experience is further emphasised by a story which explicitly involves the issue of menstruation, and indeed hinges upon it as a central moment in the anecdote. In this account, Rābi'a makes a seven-year trip to Ka'ba for the pilgrimage, but once she arrives, she begins to menstruate, thus making her ritually unclean to perform the rites of the pilgrimage. She begs God to be admitted to His sanctuary:

گشت بر پهلو زهی تاج الرجال	رابعه در راه کعبه هفت سال
گفت آخر یافتم حجی تمام	چون به نزدیک حرم آمد به کام
شد همی عذر زنانش آشکار	قصد کعبه کرد روز حج گزار
راه پیمودم به پهلو هفت سال	بازگشت از راه و گفت ای ذوالجلال
او فکندی در رهم خاری چنین	چون بدیدم روز بازاری چنین
یا نه اندر خانۀ خویشم گذار	یا مرا در خانۀ من ده قرار
کی شناسد قدر صاحب واقعه	تا نباشد عاشقی چون رابعه

[355] Andy M. Beresford, "Torture, Identity, and the Corporeality of Female Sanctity : The Body as Locus of Meaning in the Legend of St Margaret Of Antioch," *Medievalia* 18, no. 2 (2015): 184.

> Rābi'a travelled for seven years on her side[356] on her way to the Ka'ba,
> O that Crown among Men!
> When she grew close to her aim, the Ka'ba, she said,
> 'Finally! I've completed the pilgrimage.'
> That pilgrim headed towards the Ka'ba on the day of the *ḥajj*,
> When suddenly, she was struck by women's particular ailment.
> She turned away from the road and said,
> 'O Glorious one! I came all this way, on my side,
> 'Over the course of seven years!
> 'Just when I reach the throng [of pilgrims],
> 'He lays such a thorn in my path!
> 'Either give me peace within my own house,
> 'Or do not grant me passage into Yours!'
> 'If there were no lover like Rābi'a,
> 'Who would know the value of one who has seen reality?[357]

'Aṭṭār's closing aside to the reader is that even the greatest of Sufis have their struggles and that one should not give up because of difficulties on the Way. Thus 'Aṭṭār has explicitly referred to the 'double bind' of women trying to achieve mystical sainthood that has been brought forth by scholars of the Medieval Christian saints – they must first overcome womanhood and second overcome the boundaries of normal personhood to become saints. This anecdote implicitly asks – and answers – the question of what further trials of the body that women saints must transcend. As Kugle puts it, 'Women saints were able to reverse the social dynamic of bleeding: rather than having it be hidden as private, shame-inducing, and a mark of inferiority, they were able to display

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[356] 'Aṭṭār's use of *bar pahlū*, which I've translated as 'on her side,' remains obscure to me. Dick Davis and Afkham Darbani leave it out of their translation: "Saint Rabe'eh for seven years had trod / The pilgrimage to Mecca and her God," *Conference of the Birds*, ln. 1803. Meanwhile, Peter Avery interprets it to mean she rolled there on her side. 'Aṭṭār, Farīd al-Dīn, and Peter Avery. *Speech of the Birds: Concerning Migration to the Real, the Manṭeq al-Ṭayr*, (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2001), 161.

[357] MṬ 100, ln. 1803-09.

this holy bleeding as public, pride-invoking, and a mark of their claim to religious leadership.'[358] Particularly in the case of Rābi'a, the betrayals of the body are presented and vanquished. It is this bravery and the acceptance of what God wills (*riḍāyat*), even in adversity, that establishes Rābi'a's authority as a holy woman. She realises that the Lord's house represents merely the trappings of the goal and not the true aim itself. She does not need to be in the physical proximity of the Ka'ba, because she is perpetually in a state of closeness to the divine.[359] In this way, 'Aṭṭār, Sulamī, and Ibn al-Jawzī all challenge the 'deficiency of religion' hadith which assumes women's inferiority in religious practice due to her ritual impurity.[360] All saints wage war on their bodies and their lower souls, but female saints have more fighting to do (as naturally baser creatures), or more specific ways in which they are required to deprive or overcome their bodies.

Blood also figures in the hagiographies of some male saints, but the resonance of the symbol is quite different. In these cases, the emphasis is more on blood and bleeding as an indication of the depths of their mystical love. In in the gruesome execution account of Ḥallāj in the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, for example, 'Aṭṭār makes the comparison between the blood and mystical love explicit:

پس دو دست بریده خون آلوده در روی در مالید تا هر دو ساعد و روی خون آلوده کرد. گفتند: این چرا کردی؟ گفت: خون بسیار از من برفت و دانم که رویم زرد شده باشد شما پندارید که زردی من از ترس است. خون در روی مالیدم تا در چشم شما سرخ روی باشم که گلگونهٔ مردان خون ایشان است. گفتند: اگر روی را بخون سرخ کردی ساعد باری چرا آلودی؟ گفت: وضو می‌سازم. گفتند: چه

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[358] Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, 105.

[359] This is further evidenced by a *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* story in which the Ka'ba comes to Rābi'a. NTA #08, 61.

[360] Cornell, *Early Sufi Women,* 63*,* and ṢṢ #229.

وضو؟ گفت: رکعتان فی العشق لا یصح وضوئهما إلا بالدم – در عشق دو رکعت است وضوء آن
درست نیاید الا به خون.

> Then [Ḥallāj] rubbed his bloody, amputated hands over his face, so that
> both his arms and his face were stained with blood.
>   'Why did you do that?' they enquired.
>   'Much blood has gone out of me,' he replied. 'I realise that my face will
> have grown pale. You suppose that my pallor is because I am afraid. I rubbed
> blood over my face so that I might appear rose-cheeked in your eyes. The
> cosmetic of heroes is their blood.'
>   'Even if you bloodied your face, why did you stain your arms?'
>   'I was making ablution.'
>   'What ablution?'
>   'When one prays two *rak'as* in love,' Ḥallāj replied, 'the ablution is not
> perfect unless performed with blood.'[361]

Here, blood represents the depth of the male saint's divine love by showing his courage
in the face of suffering. For Rābi'a above, however, the blood can represent an obstacle
on the Path to be overcome, a roadblock to be circumvented by shedding awareness of
corporeality, or an indication of the tenuous and porous boundary between self and
environment, self and divine. This distinction could be the result of gender difference –
the bleeding of female saints has a secondary resonance which influences its
representation in the texts. It functions more as a symbol of corporeality than as an
allusion to the love of the divine.

    'Aṭṭār reconfigures the meaning of this integral symbol of female physical
impurity and as such uses her corporeality as a tool to assert her rightful place as a
heroine and martyr. In 'Aṭṭār's *Ilāhī-nāmah*, another female saint appears who is

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[361] TA #72, 419. Translation adapted from Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, 365-66.

associated particularly with blood. This saint, called Zayn al-‘Arab[362], is an accomplished poetess who falls in love with a Bektashi slave, though her love for him is construed as a pretext (*bahānah*) for love of the divine. Her brother presumes she has dishonoured their family and condemns her to death. He has a surgeon cut open her wrists and orders her to be walled in. Using the blood from her own veins, the master Sufi poetess writes many verses on the walls of her enclosure until she dies:

بسی اشعار خود بنوشت آنگاه   سر انگشت در خون می‌زد آن ماه

بدرد دل بسی اشعار بنوشت   ز خون خود همه دیوار بنوشت

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[362] Popularly known as Rābi‘a Balkhī, Zayn al-‘Arab or Rābi‘a bt. Ka‘b al-Quzdarī lived approximately in the 10th century, although not much is known about her life. She appears in Muhammad ‘Awfī’s (d. 1228) 13th-century biographical collection, *Lubab al-Albāb* and Jāmī’s *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*, under the name ‘*Dukhtar-i Ka‘b*,’ but otherwise what little we do know about her seems to be more legendary than factual. Scholars and biographers have often assumed she lived during the same era as Rūdakī (d. 945), presumably based on the anecdote describing their poetry duel, which appears in this very episode of the *Ilāhī-nāmah*. There is even considerable disagreement about her birthplace, some citing the Quzdār of her name and others claiming she was from Isfahan. While ‘Aṭṭār presents her as definitively ascribing to the Sufi path, little evidence exists to support this. What scattered pieces do remain of her *dīvān* show little to no signs of Sufi leanings. Thus if Rābi‘a Quzdarī was an actual historical figure, her connection to the Sufi path remains doubtful and unclear, so we should consider it probable that ‘Aṭṭār manipulated her story for his own ends. See Abdullaeva, Firuza, “Arts: Poets and Poetry: Iran: Classical”, in: Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures, General Editor Suad Joseph. Consulted online on 06 June 2017 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1872-5309_ewic_EWICCOM_0293e; Muḥammad ‘Awfī, *The Lubábu ’l-Albáb of Muḥammad ‘Awfí / Edited in the Original Persian, with Indices, Persian and English Prefaces, and Notes, Critical and Historical, in Persian, by Edward G. Browne and Mírzá Muhammad Ibn ‘Abdu ’l-Wahháb-I-Qazwíní.*, ed. Edward Granville Browne and Muḥammad Qazvīnī (London: Luzac & Co., 1903-1906), xx; Muhammad Ishaque, *Four Eminent Poetesses of Iran; with a Brief Survey of Iranian and Indian Poetesses of Neo-Persian* (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1950).

چو در گرمابه دیواری نماندش   ز خون هم نیز بسیاری نماندش

همه دیوار چون پر کرد ز اشعار   فرو افتاد چون یک پاره دیوار

میان خون و عشق و آتش و اشک   بر آمد جان شیرینش بصد رشک

چو بگشادند گرمابه دگر روز   چه گویم من که چون بود آن دلفروز

چو شاخی زعفران از پای تا فرق   ولی از پای تا فرقش بخون غرق

ببردند و بآبش پاک کردند   دلی پر خونش زیر خاک کردند

That moon-faced one dipped her finger in the blood,
And wrote many of her own verses with it.
With her own blood, she wrote all over the wall.
She wrote many poems flowing forth from her heart's pain.
When there was no space left on the walls of the bathhouse,
She too had little blood left.
Once all the walls were covered with her poetry,
She collapsed like a piece of wall.
In the midst of blood, love, fire, and tears,
Her sweet soul departed with great pride.
The next day when they opened the bathhouse,
That enchantress was in such a state as cannot be described.
[She was] like a thin stalk of saffron from head to toe, but drowned in blood.
She was taken to be washed with water,
And her blood-filled heart was entrusted to the earth.[363]

Thus, blood, the fundamental symbol of womanhood which distinguishes her body from the ideal male form, is ultimately transformed into the vector by which her mystical poetry is disseminated. It is this poetry, extolled even by the great master Rudakī in an apocryphal meeting, which forms the basis of her claim to spiritual authority in 'Aṭṭār's tale. 'Aṭṭār unites here the trifecta of blood, anguish, and divine love in Zayn al-'Arab's final defiant act and transforms the traditional symbol of female ritual impurity into an act of devotion, into a physical means, drawn from within her own body, by which her voice will continue to be heard.

[363] IN 21/1, 350.

5.4.5 Women's Miracles of Food and Fasting

While most saints are portrayed as mastering their lower soul (*nafs*) in one capacity or another, be it through rejecting material temptations of money or the allure of fame, women saints seem to be particularly associated with miracles of denying the belly what it wants. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the lower soul is often personified in the Sufi tradition as a woman, partly because its Arabic gender is feminine.[364] Scholars of Christian tradition have also posited that women mystics have a special relationship to food. Caroline Bynum Walker shows convincingly in her study how women in the Christian tradition have been associated primarily with 'the belly,' encompassing the stomach and the genitalia, and representing the triple vices of food, drink, and lust in excess. Scott Kugle then extends that argument and makes the case that the same holds for the periods of North African history that he examines. I would argue that these associations also hold true for the texts consulted here.

This increased emphasis on women overcoming the needs of the body reflects the patriarchal assumption that women, as the locus of base desires of the flesh in society, have more work to do in order to tame their bodies and attain sainthood. These assumptions manifest themselves in part through the food-related miracles, which are also extremely common amongst female saints. Many women are said to perform miracles of fasting for 60 years. The extreme measures of self-denial undertaken by Rābi'a and other female mystics may stem from the misogynist premise that 'women are tied to lower, material forms while men have the capacity to delve into the highly valued interior.'[365] However, paradoxically, this premise is undermined, but not

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[364] Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*, 71.

[365] Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 157.

dispensed with, by biographies of female saints that emphasise the woman's escape

from physicality and represent it as an accomplishment to be emulated. Rābi'a is

presented as chosen by God, in part because of the fact that He helps her to battle her

concupiscent soul:

نقل است که وقتی خادمه رابعه پیه پیازی می‌کرد که روزها بود تا طعام نساخته بودند. به پیاز حاجت
بود. خادمه گفت: از همسایه بخواهم.
رابعه گفت: چهل سال است تا من با حق تعالی عهد دارم که از غیر او هیچ نخواهم. گو پیاز مباش.
در حال مرغی از هوا درآمد، پیازی پوست کنده در تابه انداخت. گفت: از مکر ایمن نیم.
ترک پیاز کرد و نان تهی بخورد.

> It is narrated that once Rābi'a's servant woman was making onion stew since
> they hadn't made any food for days. She needed onions. 'I'll ask the
> neighbors,' the servant said.
>   'For forty years I have had a covenant with God that I will ask none but
> Him for anything,' Rābi'a replied. 'Don't worry about the onions.'
>   Just then a bird flew overhead and dropped peeled onions into the pot.
>   'I can't be sure there's no trick[366] in this,' said Rābi'a. She left the onions
> alone and ate plain bread.[367]

This tale positions Rābi'a as an elite practitioner of *vara'*, or avoidance of

food, goods, or money of uncertain origin.[368] The main purpose of the anecdote is to

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[366] Note that this 'trick' (*makr*) refers to the Sufi concept of the divine ruse to test the trueness of their

faith. Near the end of his entry on *makr*, Dehkhoda discusses this more specialised meaning of word in

Sufi texts.

[367] NTA #08, 64.

[368] Ethically, the Sufis generally do not want to take part in any transaction in which a profit is made or

consume food which they cannot be sure was sold at a fair price or produced in a *halāl* fashion. This

practice of *vara' (or wara'* in Arabic) was not limited to the Sufis but was also practiced by important

orthodox theologians and scholars, like Ibn Hanbal, who was known for avoiding anything he could not

be completely sure was religiously permissible. See Abū al-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Alī Ibn al-Jawzi

emphasise Rābiʿa's command over her *nafs*, to the extent that she is not even tempted by what is presumably God's gift to her in response to her dedication to her covenant with Him. Denial of her physical needs and desires is one of the main methods by which Rābiʿa's biographers establish her spiritual authority.

5.5 Male-Female Interaction, Sexual Temptation, Marriage, and Celibacy Among the Female Sufi Saints

5.5.1 Cross-Gender Relations Between *Awliyāʾ*

Measured by the frequency of anecdotes dealing with the subject, one of the greatest anxieties surrounding the development of the female religious hero is her relationship to sexuality. Several commentators on classical Sufism have noted the tradition's tendency to characterise the student-master relationship as a love relationship, where the master's task is to redirect the student's love/lust into appropriate channels.[369] Thus the master functions as the beloved, as well as an earthly token representing the divine beloved. This theoretical framework forms one of the systematic barriers to women's participation in Sufi religious life, because it may be compromising for a woman to function as a conduit to the divine beloved. A woman

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and M Cooperson, *Virtues of the Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal: Volume One*, Library of Arabic Literature (Library of Arabic Literature, 2013); D Urvoy, "Waraʿ," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs). Accessed online 14 February 2017.

[369] This topic is discussed in depth by Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 107-133, and Malamud, "Gender and Spiritual Self-Fashioning."

playing such a role would be too easily confused with the object of human earthly lust. In general, this hypothesis holds for marginal women and even some female saints. Bashir extrapolates from his 14th and 15th-century sources on Persianate Sufism (mainly of the *maqāmāt* genre) that women faced serious impediments to advancement in the Sufi ranks because of their inability to mix freely with *nā-maḥram* men. He sees face-to-face interaction between spiritual master and disciple as the social practice which forms the locus of any attempt to make gains on the Path:

> As to be expected, the primary reason women were marginal characters in the milieu had to do with bodily difference. Persons embodied as female were often perceived to have lesser potential to reach spiritual ends. However, I argue that a more significant element in women's systematic lack of access to this world was that they could not cultivate intimacies with male Sufis that required unrestricted corporeal contact. […] Women's exclusion from the scene was, therefore, related directly to the particular way the male body was inflected as a vehicle for social solidarity in this context.[370]

The idea that Sufi men and women could not always interact freely, and that the requirement for contact with *nā-maḥram* men was one of the primary barriers to women's participation in Sufi life, is certainly supported by the source material. However, this section argues that once the state of 'genderlessness' is achieved, interactions between men and women in a Sufi context are represented as permissible and desirable. 'Aṭṭār and the other hagiographers circumvent the tension brought about by inter-gender mixing among the elite Sufi practitioners. The key is that the women, in particular, must be seen as genderless. Once that happens, we find evidence of permissible or beneficial contact between the genders, contrary to what Bashir finds in his sources.

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[370] Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 22.

Bashir tantalisingly alludes to important exceptions to this rule and gives the reader a sense that not all male-female *nā-maḥram* relationships are strictly forbidden:

> It should not come as a surprise that Sufi hagiographic representations pay close attention to legal strictures regarding male-female relationships. These texts are products of the religious literati who can be expected to adhere to established conventions in such matters. There is, however, no reason to take these legal strictures as literal descriptions of reality and presume that men and women interacted very narrowly in this context. Even hagiographic narratives do contain instances of unrelated men and women connected through gazes that do not merit censure.[371]

Unfortunately for us, Bashir does not follow up on this observation, which is tangential to his study. It is left to us then, to try to recover these moments of acceptable interaction between the sexes. I would suggest that the texts Bashir considers – i.e. those focused on the miracle stories of male *awliyā'* – are not ideal choices if one is looking examples of female Sufis or saints interacting with *nā-maḥram* men. According to his descriptions, the vast majority of women who appear in the *maqāmāt* texts he surveys hover at the margins of the story and their existence is often mentioned in passing. When we look to texts in which women are the central focus and not at the periphery, however, a different picture of the role of women in Sufi social life emerges. By transcending the body and its desires, Rābi'a and other female saints are able to interact freely with men, attend mixed gatherings with them, and function as either masters or disciples.[372] Rābi'a is not the only woman who interacts freely with men and even takes

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[371] Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 150.

[372] There are many, many examples of this phenomenon but to cite some of them: DhN #1, #3, #30, #32, #37, #41, #43, #59, #60, #66, #78; ṢṢ #465, #473, #589, #598, #604; NU #599: 621, #600: 622, #602:623, #603:623, #604:624, #609:629, #618:634.

on male disciples. Many of the less well-known women in Sulamī and Ibn al-Jawzī's writings meet with men outside their immediate family, and run or attend prayer circles that have mixed audiences.[373]

In order to circumvent this problem of requiring contact with non-related (*nā-maḥram*) males, exceptional female saints are sometimes represented as transcending gender entirely. The *Tadhkirat* focuses mainly on the relationship between Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Rābi'a as the exemplary platonic relationship in which both parties negotiate the difficulties that arise from interacting with an unrelated member of the opposite sex. For example, 'Aṭṭār relates to us this simple quote from Ḥasan al-Baṣrī to emphasise transcending concerns over gender:

نقل است که شبی حسن بصری گفت که یک شبانه روز رابعه پیش رابودم و سخن طریقت وحقیقت می‌کردم که نه بر خاطر من بگذشت که مردم و نه بر خاطر او که زن است. آخر الامر چون بر خاستم خود را مخلسی دیدم و او را مخلصی.

> It is related that Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said, 'I was with Rābi'a for one full day and night. I was talking about the path and the truth in such a way that the thought 'I am a man' never crossed my mind, nor did 'I am a woman' ever cross hers. In the end when I got up, I considered myself a pauper and her a devotee.'[374]

This kind of anecdote is prevalent in Rābi'a's biography and shows that neither Ḥasan nor Rābi'a is concerned with gender during their talks about the Sufi path. 'Aṭṭār implicitly advocates their unconcerned attitude toward gender, urging the Sufi reader to take this as prescriptive rather than descriptive. Ibn al-Jawzī also includes one such tale, related by Dhū al-Nūn, as he listens to a woman praying in the Ka'ba:

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[373] Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women,"46.

[374] NTA #08, 65. Translation by Losensky, *Memorial of God's Friends*, 104.

> By now I had completely forgotten that I was in God's House, and [I] also overlooked the fact that the woman was wearing a *chādur*. She suddenly reproached me saying, 'Close your eyes, Dhū al-Nūn. It is forbidden for you to look upon me.'
>
> Her words made me remember that she was female. Trying to excuse myself, I said, 'I swear your words so preoccupied me that I was totally unaware that you were a woman.'[375]

By emphasising the total unawareness and unimportance of gender in the context of spiritual exchange, our biographers make it clear that gender is immaterial between people of a high spiritual station, and that contact between genders is not subject to the standard restrictions.

5.5.2 Female Sexuality in the Hagiographies

Although one strategy employed by the biographers is to efface the saint's gender while in union with the divine, it is not the only approach to the female saint's sexuality. In some cases, the saint's determined commitment to celibacy is presented as a kind of heroism. It is not a lack of sexual desire, as in the anecdote immediately above, but rather an admirable restraint in the face of an easily-satisfied desire. In another anecdote involving Rābiʿa and male interlocutors, corporeality and female sexuality is at issue between members of the opposite sex. This style of anecdote, wherein the female saint unexpectedly demonstrates her superior spiritual state to her male disciples, becomes a recurring motif in the biographies of women saints.[376]

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[375] Javad Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Women [Translated by Leonard Lewisohn]*, 2nd ed. (London: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, 1990), 173. Lewisohn cites the tale as coming from *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, though I was unable to locate it there. It does not appear in Dhū al-Nūn's own biography and the edition gives no proper index.

[376] Noted above, p. 180.

عبد الواحد عامر می‌گوید: من و سفیان ثوری به بیمارپرسی رابعه درشدیم. از هیبت او سخن ابتدا
نتوانستیم کرد. سفیان را گفتم: چیزی بگو.
گفت: اگر دعایی بگویی این رنج بر تو سهل کند.
روی بدو کرد و گفت: یا سفیان تو ندانی که این رنج به من که خواسته‌است نه خداوند خواسته‌است.
گفت: بلی!
گفت: چون می‌دانی پس مرا می‌فرمایی که از او درخواست کنم به خلاف خواست او؟ دوست را
خلاف کردن روا نبود.
پس سفیان گفت: یا رابعه! چه چیزت آرزوست؟
گفت: یا سفیان! تو مردی از اهل علم باشی، چرا چنین سخن می‌گویی که چه آرزو می‌کندت؟ به عزت
الله که دوازده سال است که مرا خرمای تر آرزو می‌کند، تو می‌دانی که در بصره خرما را خطری
نیست. من هنوز نخوردم که بنده‌ام و بنده را با آرزو چه کار؟ اگر من خواهم و خداوند نخواهد، این
کفر بود. آن باید خواست که او خواهد تا بنده‌ای به حقیقت او باشی. اگر او خود دهد آن کاری دگر بود.
سفیان گفت: خاموش شدم و هیچ نگفتم.

'Abd al-Wāḥid reports: Sufyān al-Thawrī[377] and I went to visit Rābi'a when she was ill. In awe of her, we were unable to begin the conversation.

'You say something,' I told Sufyān.

'If you say a prayer,' he offered, 'your pain will be lessened.'

She turned towards him and said, 'O Sufyān! Do you not know who has willed this pain upon me? Was it not God?'

'Indeed!'

'So you know, and yet you ask me to request that which is against His will? It's not right to oppose one's friends.'

'O Rābi'a!' he replied. 'What do you want then?'

'O Sufyān! [Try to] be a member of the people of wisdom. Why are you asking me things like 'what is your wish'? By the glory of God, for twelve years now I've been craving fresh dates. You know that in Baṣra dates are not hard to find. Yet I haven't eaten any, for I am a slave [of God], and what do slaves have to do with desire? If I desire something that God does not will, that is impiety (*kufr*). One must want what He wills in order to be a true servant of His. If He provides it Himself, that is a different matter entirely.'

'I fell silent and said nothing,' reported Sufyān.[378]

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[377] It is striking the extent to which Sufyān al-Thawrī, Dhū al-Nūn, and Bishr, are depicted interacting with women throughout the *Dhikr al-Niswa*.

[378] NTA #08, 70-71. Translation adapted from Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, 43-44.

This anecdote appears on the surface to relay to us the story of two inexperienced disciples visiting their master and angering her by trying to alleviate her God-given pain. Yet this is just the setup for the real crux of the anecdote, which is the question of how the saint responds to desire, temptation, and the baser instincts of the body. Not only does Rābi'a respond to the gluttonous desires of the belly; a sexual joke may also be at play here. Understanding the 'fresh dates' as a crude metaphor for the penis,[379] the anecdote is transformed from a simple proof of Rābi'a's ability to deny her cravings into the provoking image of a saintly woman making dirty jokes to get her point across. The anecdote therefore posits Rābi'a's mastery of the physical body on both the levels of gastronomical and sexual temptations. Because of the persistent association of woman and body, 'Aṭṭār emphasises her ability to distance herself from her physical reality in order to portray Rābi'a as saintly. The anecdote makes it all too clear that God's true servant has nothing to do with desire (*ārizū*) of any kind.

While 'Aṭṭār and Jāmī's texts explicitly advocate looking beyond simple human forms (gender), the narrative components actually rely on these differences and exploit women's 'Otherness' as a proof of their superiority in terms of spiritual authority. Bashir notes the disconnect between general statements about gender in Persian Sufi literature and the actual portrayal of gender in the narrative portions of the texts. While the split between exterior/interior (*ẓāhir/bāṭin*), and this world/next world (*dunyā/ākhira*) is typically mapped onto the female/male divide in these texts, the

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[379] See Steingass under *khurmā*. Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary: Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to Be Met with in Persian Literature: Being Johnson and Richardson's Persian, Arabic & English Dictionary, Revised, Enlarged and Entirely Reconstructed*, ed. Francis Johnson, *Persian-English Dictionary* (New Delhi, India: Manohar, 1892).

narratives provide overwhelming evidence of Sufi men being seduced by elements of the physical world. 'The actual narrative material available to us thus dissembles from the stated ideology,' writes Bashir, 'indicating a more complex view on both gender and the material world than what first meets the eye when we read Sufi texts.'[380] Contrary to the many general statements in which women are presented as roadblocks to men's progress on the path, the fault for sexual temptation is actually often attributed to men. In the biography of Rābi'a we find one such example:

نقل است که جمعی بامتحان پیش او رفتند و گفتند که همه فضائل بر سر مردان نثار کردهاند و کمر کرامت بر میان مردان بسته هرگز پیغمبری بر هیچ زن نیامدهاست. تو این لاف از کجا میزنی؟ رابعه گفت این همه که گفتی هست اما منی و خودپرستی انا ربکم الاعلی از گریبان هیچ زن بر نیامده است وهیچ زن هرگز مخنث نبودهاست. مخنث در میان مردان پدید آمدهاست.

> It is related that a group went to see Rābi'a to put her to the test. They said, 'All the virtues have been dispersed among men. The crown of nobility has been placed upon the heads of men, and the belt of magnanimity has been tied around their waists. Prophecy has never descended upon any woman. What do you have to boast of?'
> Rābi'a said, 'Everything you said is true. But egoism, egotism, self-worship, and *I am your highest lord* have not welled up in any woman. And pederasts have [only] appeared amongst men.'[381]

Rābi'a defends herself eloquently against charges that women cannot be as pious as men, and in fact claims womankind to be above men in terms of their humility. In this way, her response labels masculine egotism and chauvinism as another kind of veil that blinds male seekers with a false sense of superiority incompatible with Sufi principles. Furthermore, the insult 'no woman has ever been a pederast' lays the blame for being unable to overcome sexual desire at men's doorstep. Despite the expectations set up by

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[380] Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 138.

[381] NTA #08, 70. Translation adapted from Losensky, *Memorial of God's Friends*, 109-10.

authors' consistent references to gender hierarchy, the fault for relapsing into awareness of gender difference is often placed on men rather than holy women.

'Aṭṭār goes so far as to imply that holy women are less susceptible to physical temptation than men. Such an implication is a radical upending of the typical association of women to the exterior, lower form. Even a male saint as venerated as Bāyazīd can relapse into an awareness of physicality, which, however innocuous, implies a transgression more serious than the relapse itself. In a classic story repeated elsewhere in Sufi tradition,[382] Bāyazīd is shown to visit freely with a married Sufi woman, until the day he notices henna on her hand:

فاطمه ترک شغل دنیا بگفت و بحکم عزلت با احمد بیار امید تا احمد را قصد زیارت بایزید افتاد. فاطمه با وی برفت. چون پیش بایزید اندر آمدند، فاطمه نقاب از روی برداشت و با ابو یزید سخن می‌گفت احمد از آن متغیر شد و غیرتی بر دلش مستولی شد. گفت ای فاطمه این چه گستاخی بود که با بایزید کردی؟
فاطمه گفت: از آنکه تو محرم طبیعت منی بایزید محرم طریقت من. از تو بهوا برسم و از وی بخدای رسم و دلیل سخن این است که او از صحبت من بی نیاز است و تو بمن محتاجی و پیوسته بایزید با فاطمه گستاخ می‌بودی تا روزی بایزید را چشم بر دست فاطمه افتاد که حنا بسته بود.
گفت: یا فاطمه از برای چه حنا بسته‌ای؟
گفت: یا بایزید تا این غایت تو دست و حنای من ندیده بودی مرا بر تو انبساط بود. اکنون که چشم تو بر اینها افتاد صحبت ما با تو حرام شد.
بایزید گفت: از خداوند درخواست کرده‌ام تا زنان را بر چشم من چو دیوار گرداند و بر چشم من یکسان گردانیده‌است چون کسی چنین بود او کجا زن بیند. […]
این فاطمه در فتوت چنان بود لاجرم بایزید گفت هرکه خواهد که تا مردی بیند پنهان در لباس زنان گو در فاطمه نگر.

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[382] The tale appears in some of its earliest iterations in 'Alī b. Uthmān Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf Al-Maḥjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism*, trans. Reynold A Nicholson (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1976), 120; Abū al-Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā' Wa-Ṭabaqāt al-Aṣfiyā'* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1932-38), vol. 10, 42; 'Alī b. 'Uthmān Hujwīrī, *Raskrytie Skrytogo Za zavesoĭ "Kiashf-al-Makhdzhub". Persidskiĭ Tekst, Ukazateli I Predislovie.*, ed. B A Zhukovskiĭ (Leningrad, 1926).

When they entered Bāyazīd's presence Fāṭimah removed her veil from her face and engaged Bāyazīd in conversation. Ahmad was dismayed by this, jealousy overmastering his heart. 'Fāṭimah, what boldness was this you showed with Bāyazīd?' he said.

'You are intimate with my natural self,' Fāṭimah replied. 'Bāyazīd is intimate with my spiritual way. You bring me to desire, but he brings me to God. This is why he can dispense with my company, whereas you need me.' Bāyazīd was bold with Fāṭima, until one day his eyes fell upon her hands and he noticed that they were stained with henna.

'Fāṭimah, why have you put on henna?' he asked.

'Bāyazīd, until now you have never looked at my hands and noticed the henna,' Fāṭimah replied. 'Thus far I have been at ease with you. Now that your eyes have fallen on my hands, it is unlawful for me to keep your company.'

'I have petitioned God,' said Bāyazīd, 'to make women in my eyes no more noticeable than a wall, and so He has made them in my sight. One who is like this, how can he see a woman?' […]

This Fāṭimah was such in chivalry (*futuvvat*) that Bāyāzīd used to say, 'Whoever wishes to see a man hidden in women's clothing, tell him, "Look at Fātimah."'[383]

Despite the fact that women are often characterised as distractions or disruptions on the Path, here the onus is laid upon the male saint for resisting sexual temptation. The fear of giving in to sexual desire appears to have been one of the major anxieties for male followers of the Path, as it is a recurring theme in many accounts.[384] It is implied here that such an atypical interaction between an unrelated man and woman could only take place between two initiates of an extraordinarily high station. Although Fāṭima does not need God to make men 'no more noticeable than a wall' to her, Bāyazīd's supplication to God for the same ability is presented as evidence that he is *mustajāb al-duʿā,* 'one whose prayers are answered.' The male form, apparently, represents no temptation for

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[383] NTA #33, 288-89. Translation adapted from Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, 228.

[384] See, for example, the biographies of Ibn Khafīf and Tirmidhī in *Tadhkirat al-Awliyāʾ.* Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, 347 and 333.

her. The passage does not portray Fāṭima as tempted, but it makes reference to the patriarchal understanding of the female form as inherently destabilising, as disruptive temptation (like a *fitnah*) which must be overcome. Bāyāzīd has been made not to notice women, and cannot 'see a woman' even when she is interacting with him. Thus, Bāyazīd can only transcend his lust towards an unrelated woman by divorcing her from the ontological category of female. This anecdote demonstrates the ways in which gender-egalitarian impulses of Sufi thought can be contravened by deeply patriarchal interpretations of the human body. Genderless souls can occupy the same rank and interact, but the moment awareness of the corporeal form intrudes, the ability to safely interact collapses.

5.5.3 Celibacy and Sexual Renunciation for the Female *Awliyā'*

The question of marriage and celibacy continually surfaces in the biographies of pious women. Many holy women circumvented the problem by remaining unmarried, but that was a state of being that had to be constantly justified because it does not conform to the example of the Prophet. Just as marriage is sometimes represented as an obstacle to a male Sufi's spiritual journey, so is it represented as a distraction for women seekers. Rābi'a, for example, is asked to explain her celibacy several times in her biography. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī asks her at one point why she does not take a husband, to which Rābi'a responds by emphasising her lack of being (*vujūdī*) and recasts her existence as not belonging to herself but to God:

نقل است که حسن رابعه را گفت: رغبت کنی تا نکاحی کنیم و عقد بندیم؟
گفت: عقد نکاح بر وجودی فروآید. اینجا وجود برخاسته است که نیست خود گشته‌ام. و هست شده
بدو، و همه از آن اوام. و در سایه حکم اوام، خطبه از او باید خواست نه از من.

It is related that Ḥasan asked Rābi'a: 'Do you wish us to get married?'

'Matrimony is predicated upon existence,' she replied. 'Here, existence has vanished and I have become nothing. Being is through Him, and I am made up entirely of Him. I am in the shadow of His command. The marriage request must be made of Him, not of me.'[385]

Following from the Sufi premise that the interior state trumps the exterior form, this passage is an excellent example of the gender-transcendent mystic philosophy coming to the fore. What is at stake here is more than the question of marriage and the implications that has for male-female physical interaction. The anecdote aims at the renunciation of all physicality, all being, and as such, they encourage the Sufi reader to strive for a negation of the male-female polarity based on corporeality. A similar question is posed to Rābi'a by an unknown group of people:

گفتند: چرا شوهر نکنی؟

گفت: سه چیز از شما می‌پرسم مرا جواب دهید تا فرمان شما کنم. اول آنکه در وقت مرگ ایمان به سلامت بخواهم برد یا نه؟

گفتند: ما نمی‌دانیم.

گفت: دوم آنکه در آن وقت که نامه‌ها به دست بندگان دهند نامه‌ای به دست راست خواهند داد یا نه؟ سوم آنکه در آن ساعت که جماعتی ازدست راست می‌برند و جماعتی از دست چپ مرا از کدام سوی خواهند برد؟

گفتند: نمی‌دانیم.

گفت: اکنون این چنین کسی که این ماتم در پیش دارد چگونه او را پروای عروسی بود؟

'Why don't you take a husband?' they asked.

'I'm going to ask you three questions,' she replied. 'Answer me so I that I may follow your wishes. First, at my time of death, will I be safely transported to peace or not?'

'We don't know.'

'Second, when the records of deeds are presented to God's servants, will mine be delivered to my right hand, or not? Third, when a group passes by me

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[385] NTA #08, 66. Trans. Losensky, *Memorial of God's Friends*, 97.

on the right [headed towards Paradise], and another passes by me on the left [headed towards hell], how am I to know which way I will be taken?'

'We don't know.'

'How, then, can such a person – who faces an assembly of mourners – be inclined[386] to marry?'[387]

In this case, Rābi'a is given the chance to defend her decision to remain celibate. Like other episodes involving Rābi'a and female saints, the anecdote is set up as a purported 'test' from an unknown group of people. The saint in question then overturns that dynamic and transforms it into a test for the people, which the people invariably fail and thus come to see the saint's wisdom in rejecting her prescribed social role. Although the question was posed in a gendered fashion and is commonly asked of celibate women Sufis, Rābi'a responds in a gender-neutral way. Her reasoning can be applied to anyone's decision to remain celibate. In the face of mortality and the transience of this world, there is no point in attaching oneself to it by marriage and distracting oneself from reunion with God. Both anecdotes look to convince the reader to cut off all attachment to this world, including physicality.

Hagiographers also justify the celibacy of women saints in this world by portraying them as promised to someone in the next world. In these cases, the women find their spouses via mystical dream. So far, I have found the motif of finding one's spouse by mystical dream only in the biographies of female saints, though this does not, on its own, prove that it is an especially female phenomenon. It does, however,

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[386] *Parvā* here may be understood here as 'occasion,' 'opportunity,' 'the necessary time and energy for a task,' or equally it may be interpreted as 'inclination' (*mayl*). 'Alī Akbar Dihkhudā, *Lughat-Nāmah.*, ed. Muḥammad Mu'īn and Ja'far Shāhidī (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1993).

[387] NTA #08, 66.

strengthen our case that women tend to attain sainthood by disassociating from their physicality, including sexually. It seems that the question of marital status could not be avoided for women Sufis. Many Sufi texts vacillate between advocating celibacy as a dedication to God on the one hand, and promoting adherence to the example of the Prophet on the other. As alluded to in Chapter 1, the advice given to men about marriage in Sufi literature ranges widely, from the classic woman-as-burden paradigm, to the idea of one's wife being yet another test from God, to the idea of the wife as a spiritual partner, to the insistence on marrying simply because it is *sunna*.[388]

In the following example from Ibn al-Jawzī, a man sees in a dream who will become Rabīʿ b. Khathīm's wife in heaven. They meet in real life, he asks her some questions about her Sufi practices, then tells her of his dream. She replies that she had the same dream.

عبد الله بن نافع قال: أتى الربيع بن خثيم في منامه فقيل: إن فلانة السوداء زوجتك في الجنة فلما أصبح سأل عنها فإذا هي ترعى أعنزا لها. فقال: لأقيمن عندها فأنظر ما عملها [...] فقال: يا هذه علمت أني رأيت في المنام أنك زوجتي في الجنة. قالت له: أنت الربيع بن خثيم؟ قلت لعبد الله بن نافع: كيف علمت هذا؟ قال: لعلها أن تكون رأت في منامها مثل ما رأى.

> 'Abdallāh b. Nāfiʿ said that someone came to Rabīʿ b. Khathīm in a dream and said, 'That black woman will be your spouse in heaven,' and when he awoke, he asked after her, and it so happened that she was tending her sheep. And he said [to himself]: 'I will stay in her midst and observe what she does.' [...]

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[388] For a fairly typical example of the theme of family as burden, see Sufyān al-Thawrī's entry in the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyāʾ*. Asked why he is feeding a dog instead of his family, he responds as follows: 'If I give bread to the dog,' he replied, 'he keeps watch over me all through the night so that I can pray. If I give it to my wife and child, they hold me back from my devotions.' Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, 169. Bashir unearths some fascinating evidence of 'the trying wife' as another of God's tests for the Sufi, see Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 154-57.

> And he said: 'Hey you! [Do] you know that I saw in a dream that you would be my wife in paradise?'
>
> 'Are you Rabī' b. Khathīm?' she asked.
>
> I said to 'Abdallāh b. Nāfi': 'How did she know that?'
>
> And 'Abdallāh replied, 'She must have seen in a dream the same thing that he saw.'[389]

A similar example of destined partners revealed to each other via dreams appears in Maymūna's biography in Ibn al-Jawzī. Maymūna's future husband has a dream about her, and when he finally finds her, she recognises him on sight, but tells him, 'Go away, for this is not the appointed time.' In both Maymūna and the anonymous woman's anecdotes, it is implied that the marriage is not an earthly union to be consummated in this world, but rather a union for the afterlife, the reward in paradise for a devout life in this world. The dream is a well-known device in Sufi biographical (and many other) texts used to establish the legitimacy of the person receiving a vision of a famous Sufi or a prophet.[390] The fact that their marriages are prophecised by mystical dream provides evidence that their celibacy in this world is divinely ordained. These anecdotes show that in these mystical biographies, both women and men are given a complex set of implicit instructions about the question of marriage as it relates to spiritual progress. While female piety and male piety both seem to be correlated with celibacy, it is not presented as the only path to spiritual attainments for Sufi women or Sufi men.

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[389] ṢṢ #472.

[390] Özgen Felek and Alexander D Knysh, *Dreams and Visions in Islamic Societies* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2012).

5.5.4 Married Female Saints: Solving the Conflict of Loyalty

Not all female saints were able to remain unmarried. To reconcile the perceived conflict between her duty to God and her duty to her husband, the female saint is valorised for her apparent ability to compartmentalise her commitments. In the case of the wife of Aḥmad b. Abī al-Ḥawārī, there are reports from her husband describing her dedication to celibacy. In his accounts, the wife acknowledges that she must be sexually available for him if he so desires, according to law. This acknowledgement, combined with her obvious reluctance and resistance to break her spiritual devotions to be intimate, inspires her husband's respect:

> She also said to me: 'It is not lawful for me to forbid you from myself or to forbid you from another. So go ahead and get married to another woman.' So I married three times. She would feed me meat and say: 'Go with strength to your wives!' If I wanted to have sex with her during the day, she would say: 'I implore you in the name of God to not make me break my fast today.' And if I wanted her during the night, she would say: 'I implore you in the name of God to grant me this night for God's sake.'[391]

The conflict of expectations placed on the married female saint – both to serve her husband and to serve God by her ascetic practice – come to a head in this anecdote. By satisfying both requirements, but clearly placing her duty to the Lord above her duty to her husband, this holy woman acquits herself nicely of the double bind. Loyal, devout and unflinching service to the husband becomes analogous to service to the divine.

Jāmī takes this depiction of Rābiʿa Shāmiyya and her clever avoidance of intimacy with her husband one step further by transforming her relationship to her husband into a chaste marriage. If he was aware of Ibn al-Jawzī's version, he has

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[391] Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 316.

excised any reference to her views on intimacy with her husband, instead preferring the more chaste quote in which she says:

<div dir="rtl">و احمد بن ابی الحواری را می‌گفته: لستُ أحبّك حبَّ الأزواج إنّما أحبّك حبّ الإخوان.</div>

'I do not love you in the way that spouses love each other; I love you as brothers love one another.'[392]

Through this declaration, it is made clear that in fulfilling her wifely duty, there is no intrusion of passion or desire on her part. One wife, ʿĀʾisha of Marv, chronicled in Sulamī, lives at the house of her shaykh instead of her husband, much to the husband's dismay.[393] Even in marriage, it seems, women saints show their transcendence of their lower form by remaining celibate and inspiring awe and respect for their God-given powers of self-denial.

An explicit meditation on this divide appears in Ibn al-Jawzī, who records a quatrain of poetry by Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl describing this phenomenon:

<div dir="rtl">
وأبحتُ جسمي من أراد جلوسي   ولقد جعلتُك في الفؤاد محدّثي
وحبيبُ القلب في الفؤاد أنيسي   والجسم مني للجليس مؤانس
</div>

I have made You the One who speaks to me in the depths of my soul,
While I made my body lawful for the one who desires to sit with me.
My body is my intimate gift to my worldly companion,
While my heart's Beloved is my true Intimate in the depths of my soul.[394]

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[392] NU #594:618. 'Ikhwān' could refer also to the Sufi brethren here.

[393] DhN #52. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 196.

[394] Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 316. Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl, ŠŠ #823.

It is the successful distinction between divine love and physical love that provides the basis for Rābiʿa's strong claim to authority. Rather than finding creative ways to avoid her sexual duty to her husband, this Rābiʿa accepts the physical reality of her situation on earth, but places it firmly below her commitment to the true Beloved. By clearly prioritising her two commitments, and placing the soul above the body, she demonstrates how married women saints could navigate their dual roles successfully.

5.6 Conclusion

Pious Sufi women of the medieval period were able to gain spiritual authority by performing heroic feats and disassociating themselves from their bodies. While all saints were norm-breakers and almost all display some victory over the body, the treatment of women saints in particular shows how they negotiated with, bent, and sometimes broke the rules that would constrain ordinary women. The portrayal of female Sufi saints does not have to be reduced to a binary choice between being 'constrained on every side by misogyny' and making use of the possibilities of the body to legitimise saintly authority. Rather the male authors employ a combination of tactics to justify the presence of female sainthood and lend it a universal appeal. Though the biographers often take the gender-egalitarian theories of Sufism to their logical, practical conclusion and argue for the unimportance or non-existence of gender in unity with God, the Otherness of the female saints is unavoidable and continually remarked upon. As noted in sections 5.4 and 5.5, their accounts rely heavily on misogynist perceptions prevalent in their contexts, which paint women as tightly associated with their baser corporeality. The biographers set up these premises only to then subvert them and establish the legitimacy of the female saints. Although the strategies used to legitimise female saints may seem contradictory, the authors surveyed here were not necessarily concerned with maintaining internal consistency on this front. The basis of many saints' fame rests on their ability to defy the needs of the body, transcend the laws of physics by performing *karāmāt*, or overcome disadvantages dealt them by poverty, class, or race. Gender simply complements the list of societal norms that can or must be broken by saints in order to attain the highest degree of earthly spiritual authority below prophethood, *wilāya*.

6 SUFIS AND SUBALTERNS

WOMEN, BLACKS, AND SLAVES

IN ʿAṬṬĀR, SULAMĪ, IBN AL-JAWZĪ AND JĀMĪ

<div dir="rtl">

خه خه ای طاووس باغ هشت در   سوختی از زخم مار هفت سر

صحبت این مار در خونت فکند   وز بهشت عدن بیرونت فکند

برگرفتت سدره و طوبی ز راه   کردت از سد طبیعت دل سیاه

تا نگردانی هلاک این مار را   کی شوی شایسته این اسرار را

</div>

And welcome, peacock – once of paradise,
Who let the venomous, smooth snake entice
Your instincts to its master's evil way,
And suffered exile for that fateful day;
He blackened your untutored heart and made
A tangled darkness of the orchard's shade –
Until you crush this snake, how can you be

A pilgrim worthy of our mystery?[395]

    – ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*

'No state is more elevating for the slave than his awareness of his shortcomings in attaining it.'

    – Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz, on the authority of *muḥadd$tha* Amat al-Ḥamīd.[396]

6.1 Introduction

وی گوید که ذو النون گفت که: در بادیه زنگیی دیدم سیاه، هرگه که اللّه گفتی سپید شدی.
ذوالنون گوید: هرکه اللّه یاد کند در حقیقت صفت وی جدا گردد.

[Walīd b. ʿAbdallāh al-Saqqāʾ] reports that Dhū al-Nūn said, 'I saw a black slave in the desert. Whenever he said 'Allah,' he would turn white.'
    Dhū al-Nūn says, 'Whoever remembers God, in reality, separates from his aspect.'[397]

With this statement, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492 CE) invites the reader to think about identity as an effaceable aspect of the self, as an 'accidental' (*ʿaraḍī*) rather than essential quality in Aristotelian terms, an external skin which can be shed whilst in communion with the divine. The 13th-century Sufi philosopher Ibn ʿArabī comes to a similar conclusion in his *Futūḥāt*: gender cannot constitute an obstacle to women attaining *wilāya*. Being a woman does not bar one from attaining sainthood, because being male or female does not relate to one's essence.[398] But is Jāmī's pronouncement

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[395] ʿAṭṭār, Davis, and Darbandi, *The Conference of the Birds*, 30–31; MṬ 37, ln. 651-54.

[396] DhN #34, tr. Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 156.

[397] From the biography of Walīd b. ʿAbdallāh al-Saqqā. NU #7:37.

[398] Chodkiewicz, "Feminine Sainthood in Islamic Hagiography,"108.

really generalizable as far as subaltern or subordinated groups are concerned? According to medieval Persian and Arabic hagiographical traditions, are aspects of a saint's identity simply another veil (*pardah*) impeding his or her path to God? This chapter examines the relationship between sainthood, subalternity, and identity in select texts of the Sufi hagiographical writings. It posits that while some identities are shown to impede the saint's progress, others accelerate or confirm it. It explores the differences between these representations and provides a theory as to why these differences might arise.

When looking to recover the voices and representations of the subaltern classes like blacks, women, and slaves in medieval texts, it is all too easy to assume we will find many incompatibilities with the modern ideals of egalitarianism. Indeed, it is possible to find examples of such misogyny, racism, and classism within the texts I survey here. Consider, for example, Farīd al-Dīn ʻAṭṭār's succinct summary of the existing gender and racial hierarchy:

نقلست که گفت: جوانی به خواب دیدم به غایت صاحب جمال.
گفتم: کیستی؟
گفت: تقوی.
گفتم: کجا باشی؟
گفت: در دل اندوهگنان.
پس نگه کردم زنی سیاه دیدم به غایت زشت. گفتم: تو کیستی؟
گفت: خنده و نشاط و خوش دلی.
گفتم: کجا باشی؟
گفت: در دل غافلان واهل نشاط.

[Kattānī] related: I saw an extremely handsome youth in a dream.
'Who are you?' I asked.
'Piety,' he replied.
'Where do you dwell?' I asked.

'In the hearts of the mournful.'
Then I saw a terribly hideous black woman. 'Who are you?' I demanded.
'Laughter, levity, and delight,' she answered.
'Where do you dwell?'
'In the hearts of the heedless and the feckless.'[399]

Despite the one-to-one correlation implied here between ugliness, blackness, femininity, and heedlessness, unbelief, and the treachery of this world, not all Sufi authors' attitudes can be so simply summarised as proofs of the conception that black or slave women function as the nexus of inferiority. More often in the early mystical Persian and Arabic hagiographies we find an interesting tendency to reverse the status quo, which works to generate favourable portrayals of otherwise marginalised figures like black male *awlīyā'* and female Sufis. Rather than a systematic dismissal or denigration of subaltern classes, what one finds is a complex negotiation between those on the lower rungs of the social hierarchy and the path to saintly authority.

6.1.1 Theoretical Underpinnings

This chapter documents and analyses that negotiation between subalternity and the dominant religious power structures by making use of the methods of subaltern studies as informed by intersectionality theory. I argue that intersectionality theory, as borrowed from gender studies, can help bring the potential of subaltern studies to fruition, by making use of intersectionality's major insight – the recognition of difference between women. Not only, then, do we need to employ the subaltern method with more awareness of gender, but also of the interaction of gender, race, class,

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[399] NTA #69, 122. (Note this anecdote appears in the Nicholson edition only, it is missing from Istiʿlāmī.)

nationality, disability, and more. The chapter does not attempt to cover all those interactions, but focuses on the interplay between race and gender, and class and gender.

A very brief history of the field of subaltern studies will illuminate the need for increased awareness of gender as a factor in this context. The idea of the 'subaltern' was pioneered in 1981 by Ranajit Guha, who kicked off a major development in the field of South Asian history with a relatively straightforward premise – that historians could take a bottom-up look at history through the subaltern lens.[400] Guha, one of the founding members of the group surrounding *Subaltern Studies*, defines the subaltern as 'a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way.'[401] Despite Guha's explicit mention of gender in the movement's founding statement, it took two full decades for gender to make significant inroads in the field. In all the volumes of *Subaltern Studies I - X* published between 1981 and 1999, I find only seven articles with an overt approach to gender.[402] A special volume, *Subaltern Studies XI: Community, Gender and Violence*, was produced in 2000 in an attempt to rectify this imbalance.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was one of the first to address the gender imbalance in subaltern studies. She noted the lack of attention to gender in the Subaltern Studies group as early as 1988 in her famous essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', as well

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[400] Ranajit Guha, *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society. Delhi: Oxford University Press.* (Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1982).

[401] *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 1988, 35.

[402] The table of contents of all 10 original volumes are reprinted in D Ludden, *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia*, Anthem South Asian Studies (Anthem, 2002).

as in 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography.'[403] 'Indeed,' Spivak wrote, 'In a collective where so much attention is rightly paid to the subjectivity or subject-positioning of the subaltern, it should be surprising to encounter such indifference to the subjectivity, not to mention the indispensable presence, of the woman as crucial instrument.' She continues to criticise historians of the group for tending 'not to ignore, but to re-name the semiosis of sexual difference 'class' or 'caste-solidarity.''[404] In the subaltern approach, gender difference, she argues, has been subsumed by class difference. Spivak essentially makes an intersectional argument here, before the advent of the term and the fleshing out of the theory.

'Intersectionality' is a term coined by legal scholar Kimberlé W. Crenshaw to describe the 'simultaneity and mutual co-constitution of different categories of social differentiation.'[405] It is her contention, and that of other gender theorists in this field, that the various strands of identity cannot be separated from one another and should not be treated piecemeal. Rather, they have a simultaneous effect on the subject which is different from 'single-axis' discrimination, positive or negative. '[W]hat makes an analysis intersectional,' write the founders of the field, '—whatever terms it deploys, whatever its iteration, whatever its field or discipline—is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power.' In this framework, one tries to conceive of categories 'not as distinct

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[403] See particularly the fourth and final section of Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 271–313.

[404] Spivak, "Deconstructing Historiography," 238–39.

[405] L Supik, M T H Vivar, and P H Lutz, *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, The Feminist Imagination - Europe and Beyond (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012), 2.

but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power.'[406]

Using the reading strategy of subaltern studies – 'from within, but against the grain'[407] – the chapter investigates the complex relationship between sainthood and subalternity in medieval Persian and Arabic hagiography, which often takes a paradoxical form. I argue that the hagiographers surveyed here display an awareness of the intersectional nature of identity in their texts. Their tendency is to simply reverse single-axis indications of subalternity (e.g. being black, female, or lower class) by reclaiming them into the unmarked, dominant group. However, figures with multiple or intersectional subaltern identities are difficult to reclaim, and as such the hagiographers often take a different approach – they compound the subject's Otherness and transform this alterity into a badge of honour and an indication of spiritual superiority. Subaltern identities are therefore alternately portrayed as inescapable and necessary to escape if one is to rise to the level of a saint.

This paradoxical attitude towards the subaltern, however, does not mean the authors cited here are necessarily consistent in an effort to challenge the dominance of normative identity. Rather, it serves to allow them to valorise the exceptional few who transcend their identity while maintaining and upholding traditional power structures. Sa'diyya Shaikh makes a similar observation when she notes a potential in Sufi philosophy more generally for challenging social norms. 'In particular,' she writes, 'Sufism's essential critique of egotism presents an opportunity to challenge notions of

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[406] Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie Mccall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis," *Source: Signs* 38, no. 4 (2013): 795.

[407] Spivak, "Deconstructing Historiography," 228.

male superiority.'[408] But, she admits, this potential has not always been exploited. Instead, the tradition provides many examples of 'male Sufis who, despite their reverence for women who achieved spiritual excellence, could not unshackle themselves from broader prevailing negative gender stereotypes.'[409] In the texts examined here, the gender-egalitarian aspects of Sufi thought once again clash with the often-patriarchal assumptions that permeate our authors' contexts.

6.1.2 Sources and Approach

This chapter makes use of the same sources as Chapter 5, though it considers them through an intersectional lens. As for the approach to the subalterns in these sources, one method I thought to try was an examination of the variants between biographies. Using this approach, scholars compare biographies of the same individual and use this information to make comments about the author's own context and agenda.[410] However, the variants approach is nearly impossible for the parts of the source material we are interested in here: the subaltern, the marginalised, the nameless. There are a few reasons the contextualising approach does not work for this material. First, apart from a few towering names, a particular woman's biography is often confined to a unique source.[411] If my focus were not primarily on ʿAṭṭār, one could

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[408] Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, 39.

[409] Ibid, 43.

[410] See for example Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism*; Jawid A Mojaddedi, "Getting Drunk with Abū Yazīd or Staying Sober with Junayd: The Creation of a Popular Typology of Sufism," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 66, no. 1 (2003): 1–13.

[411] Many of Sulamī's women provide an exception to this rule. At least 19 of Sulamī's 84 women reappear in Ibn al-Jawzī, potentially more. However, as an extremely influential text in the field, Sulamī's *Dhikr al-Niswa* was simply copied verbatim in many these cases, which does not reveal much, except that

probably produce some interesting results using the 25 biographies that appear in two or more sources. Second, women's biographies are already much less often recorded than men's in the sources. Looking particularly at race and class pares down the material even further, which makes overlap even less common. Finally, a great percentage of women are anonymous, and there appears to be less overlap among the named women than there is overlap among the named men. This is potentially due to a phenomenon pointed out by Silvers, that women are taken from their own entries in some biographies, and turned into side characters by later compilers. Less commonly, they make the opposite journey, as I find in some of Jāmī's entries.[412]

For these reasons, a structuralist approach – that is, the attempt to identify patterns of representation – has been taken for the hagiographies, as opposed to some of the alternative approaches taken by others in the field.[413] In the case of the subaltern saints, the reader is struck not by a series of shifting attitudes towards them, but rather a surprising continuity of motif and theme linking these texts across the centuries.

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the author saw fit to copy the biographies in their entirety. Only 8 women's biographies appear in all three of the hagiographies of Sulamī, Ibn al-Jawzī, and Jāmī.

[412] See *Dukhtar-i Ka'b* for example. NU #608:629.

[413] These approaches are discussed by Jürgen Paul in 'Hagiographic Literature,' *Encyclopædia Iranica*, XI/5, 536-539; an updated version is available online at

http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hagiographic-literature (accessed 16 October 2015). These include the variants approach, macro-data collection, and methods borrowed from comparative religion. Devin DeWeese has attempted a similar approach to my own in his *An "Uvaysī' Sufi in Timurid Mawarannahr: notes on hagiography and the taxonomy of sanctity in the religious history of Central Asia*. Bloomington: Indiana University, Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1993. Examples of the data mining approach can be found in Jürgen Paul, "Hagiographische Texte als historische Quelle," *Saeculum* 41 (1990): 17–43.

Perhaps most important to this justification is the 'ahistorical' nature of some of the biographies of subaltern saints. Ruth Roded hypothesises that '[m]ost of the devout women in the sufi collections date to a distant, idealised past.' They are 'timeless' in a sense, and the hagiographies 'relay messages about the proper or perhaps ideal behavior of women.'[414] For these reasons, this chapter takes a structuralist approach that unearths an unexpected continuity in the representation of the subaltern in these biographies.

6.1.3 Roadmap

In order to demonstrate the authors' awareness of intersectional identities, I first look at the way they treat 'single-axis' identities, or those individuals who are only one status marker removed from the unmarked norm (in this context, free non-black, and potentially Arabic-speaking[415] males). These cases portray simple reversals or separation from the 'accident' of identity. This first section on 'single-axis' identities examines the representation of black men, male slaves, and free women. The second main section moves to the intersectional cases. For these intersectional subaltern cases, identity is compounded and reconfigured as the source of legitimacy, because, I suggest, they are too 'Other' to be reclaimed into the unmarked group. Because of their relative prevalence in the sources, I have found that the sometimes-overlapping categories of

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[414] Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*, 94.

[415] For discussions of the changing significations of 'Arab' and 'Iranian' at least in earlier periods, see Michael Cooperson, "'Arabs' and 'Iranians': The Uses of Ethnicity in the Early Abbasid Period," in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts* (Leiden: Boston: Brill, 2014), 364–87; Hayrettin Yücesoy, "Language of Empire: Politics of Arabic and Persian in the Abbasid World," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 130, no. 2 (2015): 384–92; Roy P Mottahedeh, "The Shu'ubiyah Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7 (1976): 161–82.

black women and slave women provide some of the most useful material by which to examine the authors' attitudes towards intersectional identities. Other intersectional identities are represented in the texts, but not in numbers which allow me to make a significant comment on gender difference. By comparing the hagiographers' attitudes towards the single-axis cases to their attitude towards the intersectional subaltern identities, we can see a difference in the authors' treatment of the intersectional cases. This difference reinforces the importance of considering the simultaneity of identity markers like race, gender, and class.

6.2 Single-Axis Identities vs. Intersectional Subalterns

This section discusses the texts' attitudes towards single-axis cases of subaltern identity (e.g. being black, female, a slave, etc). Although not all subalterns are treated in the same way, I focus here particularly on black men, male slaves, and free women. In the course of discussing the representation of black men, I also discuss briefly the history of the symbolism of white and black and Sufi texts, as this will have a bearing on our understanding of how both black men and black women are represented. Even in single-axis cases, the biographies reflect a tension between the hagiographers' tendency to transform the marker of alterity into an indication of superiority and their attempts to wrench the saint apart from any indication of identity, implying transcendence to the divine. This is why we see an insistence on two seemingly conflicting kinds of characterisations: first, the subaltern divorced from his/her subalternity and second, the use of subalternity to indicate the lowest social status, which is ultimately equated with the highest spiritual status.

6.2.1 Whiteness, Blackness, and Race in the Sources

Historically, not all slaves were black in the Medieval Islamic world, nor were all black people enslaved. White slaves were more expensive than black slaves, and talented white female slaves were most highly valued.[416] While relatively few blacks or slaves appear as saints in these hagiographies generally, there are comparatively many more female saints in these categories than male saints. In Jāmī's hagiography, a very small percentage of the saints therein are specified as having black skin. There are only four male *awlīyā'* in the entire *Nafaḥāt al-Uns* whose blackness is alluded to. With a total of 584 male saints in Jāmī's work, that means the black male saints comprise less than 1% of the total. Black male *murīd*s also appear, as do black men in the margins of the text. Meanwhile, there are four black female saints out of just 34 (11.7%), and more described as slaves (*kanīzak* or *jāriya*) but not specified as black. In the *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa* of Ibn al-Jawzī, the percentage of women in the text is greatly expanded, as is the number of those specified as black or as slaves in turn. Ibn al-Jawzī includes 240 women, about 40% of the saints therein. Nearly one in four of those from Medina, Mecca, and Baghdad are identified either as a slave or black, or both.[417] In all of 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, only one black male saint appears, Khayr al-Nassāj, while again other black men and women and a number of slaves can be found in the margins. Sulamī includes the fewest black and slave women with just one black woman (Sha'wāna, DhN #14) and one slave (Baḥriyya al-'Ābida, DhN #32) forming the subject of their entries.

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[416] Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56.

[417] A considerable proportion of these are non-black slaves or slaves whose skin colour is not specified.

'Aṭṭār, Jāmī and Ibn al-Jawzī's characterisation of black male saints is quite straightforward.[418] They do not hesitate to establish a clear line between white and black. Whiteness is established as the norm, an unmarked social category, and is therefore the ideal way a saint would interact with the divine. In order to commune with the divine, a saint is usually dissociated from any particular element of his identity that would label him as 'Other.' This is particularly the case for those that display single-axis alterity. In the biography of Maymūn al-Maghribī, for example, we find a black saint whose skin turns white when he hears the *samā'*.[419] Similarly, Abū Ḥamīd al-Aswad turns white whenever he reaches the state of *wajd*, or 'ecstasy,' and turns black again once he leaves it. 'Aṭṭār follows the same kind of logic with a story from the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*:

نقل است که جنید را در بصره مریدی بود در خلوت. مگر روزی اندیشه گناهی کرد و در آینهٔ نگاه کرد و روی خود سیاه دید. متحیر شد و هر حیلت که کرد سود نداشت. از شرم روی به کس ننمود. تا سه روز برآمد باره باره آن سیاهی کم می‌شد. ناگاه یکی در بزد، گفت: کیست؟ گفت: نامه آورده‌ام از جنید. نامه برخواند. نوشته بود که چرا در حضرت عزت با ادب نباشی؟ سه شبانه روز است تا مرا گازری می‌باید کرد تا سیاهی رویت به سپیدی بدل شود.

> It is related that Junayd had a disciple dwelling in seclusion in Baṣra. One day, it so happened, he had a sinful thought. He looked in a mirror and saw that his face had turned black. Astonished, he tried every trick he could think of, but to no avail. He was so ashamed that he showed his face to no one. Three days

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[418] As I have not delved into *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣufiyya*, a separate collection of Sulamī's biographies of male saints, I have not found any black male saints (or even marginal characters) in Sulamī, since *Dhikr al-Niswa* is entirely devoted to female saints. Melchert considers the voluminous *Tārikh al-Ṣufiyya* to be the real counterpart to the *Dhikr al-Niswa*, but it survives only in fragmentary quotations. Melchert, "Before Ṣūfiyyāt," 118.

[419] NU #99: 102.

went by, and the blackness faded little by little. Someone knocked on his door unexpectedly.

    'Who is it?' the disciple asked.

    'I have a letter from Junayd,' the messenger replied.

    The disciple read the letter, which said, 'Why do you not behave respectfully in the presence of Glory? For three days, I have had to work around the clock as a fuller, so your face might turn from black to white.'[420]

These episodes could hardly be more explicit in terms of demarcating whiteness as the transcendental, unmarked status through which one communes with the divine. Blackness, by contrast, is associated with impurity and sin, as the disciple's face turns black with an impious thought. It is in this context that Jāmī offers us his even more general statement regarding the transcendence of any kind of identity, quoted above: 'Whoever remembers God, in reality, separates from his aspect.'

    These authors are not the first to use the imagery of white and black to convey ideas about purity. This general symbolism of white and black undergirds the more specific allegorical uses of skin colour in the texts. Such imagery appears in the Qur'an, wherein believers destined for heaven have 'whitened' faces and those destined for hell have 'blackened' faces.[421] Furthermore, a well-known hadith tells of two white birds that appear to the Prophet when he is an infant and remove two black clots from his heart, returning it cleansed and ready to receive revelation.[422] Yet it is not just in

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[420] NTA #43, 21.

[421] 'On the day when (some) faces will be whitened (*tabyaḍu*) and (some) faces will be blackened (*taswadu*); and as for those whose faces have been blackened, it will be said unto them: Disbelieved ye after your (profession of) belief? Then taste the punishment for that ye disbelieved. As for those whose faces have been whitened, Lo! in the mercy of Allah they dwell for ever.' (Q 3:106-7) Tr. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*.

[422] Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1949), 3:76.

scripture that we find such ideas circulating. The mystics picked up this imagery early, including in such influential texts as the *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'* of Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/1038) and the *Qūt al-Qulūb* of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/998). According to the editors of the *Kitāb al-Bayāḍ wa-l-Sawād* by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Sīrjānī (d. ca. 470/1077), many of these manuals participate in the 'subscription of white to enlightened existence, which in effect is annihilated existence. The true mystics who are enlightened with clear certitude have hearts that are pure, white and ephemeral.' This reading is supported by 'Aṭṭār's entry on Ḥabīb:

نقلست که حسن بجایی خواست رفت بر لب دجله آمد و با خود چیزی می‌اندیشید که حبیب در رسید. گفت: یا امام بچه ایستاده‌ای؟ گفت: بجایی خواهم رفت کشتی دیر می‌آید. حبیب گفت: یا استاد ترا چه بود؟ من علم از تو آخوختم. حسد مردمان از دل بیرون کن و دنیا را بر دل سرد کن و بلا را غنیت دان و کارها از خدای بین. آنگاه پای بر آب نه و برو. حبیب پای بر آب نهاد و برفت و من ماندهام. اگر فردا آواز آید که بر صراط آتشین بگذرید اگر من همچنین فرو مانم چه توانم کرد؟ پس حسن گفت ای بچه این بچه یافتی؟ گفت بدانک من دل سفید می‌کنم و تو کاغذ سیاه. حسن گفت: علمی نفع غیری ولم ینفعنی – علم من دیگران را منفعت است و مرا نیست.

> It is related that one day Ḥasan wanted to go somewhere and ended up at the bank of the Tigris. He was thinking something to himself when Ḥabīb arrived.
> 'O Imam,' said Ḥabīb, 'Why are you standing there?'
> 'I'm waiting for a boat to arrive. It's late.'
> 'Master, what has got into you? I learned from you – purge your heart of jealousy, cut yourself off from this world, value the calamities [that befall you], see all works as originating with God. Then, place your foot on the water and pass over it.'
> This he said, then laid his foot on the water and went.
> 'I remained there,' Ḥasan narrated, '[Thinking,] if tomorrow the call came telling me to walk across the fiery bridge to Paradise, in this state of helplessness, how could I do it? Ḥabīb, how did you discover this power [to walk on water]?'
> 'By making my heart white, whereas you make paper black,' Ḥabīb replied.

'My learning profited another, but it did not profit me,' Ḥasan commented.[423]

There are two significant ideas here which underpin the logic of the anecdote. First is the association of blackness with sin, which we saw underlying the Junayd report, and 'whiteness' of heart (i.e. purity) as a positive. Second is the reference to the black words on white paper as a potential negative. The words on paper are negatively connotated not just because of their blackness but also because of the suspicion towards the written word that existed particularly in the early centuries of Islam and during the codification of the *hadīth* material as it began to be put down in writing in the 9th century CE.[424] 'Aṭṭār plays with this second layer of metaphorical significance – blackness is identified with sin, and the image of black on white to denote improper reliance on writing.

And yet, the signification of this black/white metaphor can shift, and we would do well not to ascribe a single value to it. In some contexts, the skin of a devoted Sufi turns black as a sign of intense fasting.[425] Annemarie Schimmel relays Sufi references to blackness as the ultimate realisation of *fanā'*, or annihilation of the self.

> [M]etaphors... are not merely poetic ornaments but are indicative of a peculiar way of thinking. The Sufis have, for instance, spoken of the experience of the black light – the light of bewilderment: when the divine light fully appears in the mystic's consciousness, all things disappear instead of remaining visible.... Such is the experience of *fanā'*, a blackout of everything until the mystic

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[423] NTA #05, 54.

[424] See, for example, G H A Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Christopher Melchert, *Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*, Makers of the Muslim World (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 2006).

[425] ṢṢ #604. See also the biography of Hayyuna in Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb al-Nīshāburī, *Kitāb al-'Uqalā al-Majānīn* (Cairo: Maṭba'a al-'Arabīya, 1924), vol. 1, 407; Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Women*, tr. Leonard Lewisohn, 111–13; Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women," 43, note 104.

perceives that this blackness is 'in reality the very light of the Absolute-as such,' for existence in its purity is invisible and appears as nothing. To discover the clarity of this black is to find the green water of life, which, according to the legends, is hidden the deepest darkness.[426]

Despite possible associations between blackness and *fanā'*, the general, metaphorical relationship between whiteness and purity, blackness and impurity, assumes primary significance for the sources at hand. This association holds firm not just in the abstract but also permeates representations of skin colour in these Sufi hagiographies.

6.2.2 Free, Non-Black Women

Just as the hagiographies draw clear lines between the metaphorical significances of white and black, Ibn al-Jawzī and Jāmī also structurally distinguish between female and male saints. From the structure of the texts alone, we can make some inferences regarding the perceived 'lower' position of women in the hierarchy, or at the very least, note the way in which they are explicitly separated by gender. In Jāmī, the women are added on as a kind of appendix, while in Ibn al-Jawzī, the saints are sorted by region, and each region lists the men, the madmen and anonymous men, followed by women and then madwomen. In these cases, women are clearly positioned as subalterns even before the first words of their biographies.

In order to analyse the intersectional subaltern cases effectively, we must consider all relevant single axis cases that will give us an insight into how the black and slave women are sometimes represented differently. This includes free, non-black women. Just as in the cases of black men, we find many examples of single-axis female Others who are divorced from the specific aspect of their identity, womanhood, when

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[426] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 144.

communing with the divine. However, as opposed to the black male saints who are straightforwardly recategorised as white while in *tawḥīd*, not all the cases of women saints can be so easily explained as instances of simple effacement of an identity marker. In the entries on otherwise-unmarked women, there exist two conflicting tendencies in representing their subaltern status. In some cases, the biographers may attempt to wrench the saint apart from any indication of identity, thus implying that the saint has transcended to the divine. Conversely, in other instances the authors transfigure the marker of alterity from a sign of inferiority into an indication of the subject's superiority. At times, both strategies appear within a single biographical entry. This paradox reflects the tension between the fundamental egalitarianism inherent in the Sufi philosophy, which disregards appearances in favour of the inner spiritual journey, and the social power structures, which continually interfere with the practical execution of this philosophy. This paradoxical conception of identity, far from representing a challenge to be met by my authors, functions as a means to avoid a definitive answer to the role of identity in sainthood in these texts.

Because of this inconsistent attitude toward subaltern identities, we find examples – even among the single-axis cases – of subaltern saints being divorced from their identity in one instance, but valorised for that very identity in the next. This is part of what I have argued in chapter 5, namely, that women are divorced from the primary signifier of Otherness, but inconsistently. ʿAṭṭār's biography of Rābiʿa bt. al-ʿAdawiyya perfectly encapsulates this apparent contradiction. She is called the 'Crown of Men' (*tāj al-rijāl*)[427] and is described in the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* as follows:

<div dir="rtl">

او نه یک زن بود او صد مرد بود   از قدم تا فرق عین درد بود

</div>

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[427] MṬ 100, ln. 1803.

> She was no woman, rather a hundred men.
> From head to toe she was a spring of anguish.[428]

Hailed at first as an honorary 'Man of the Path,' Rābi'a is later turned into a heroic figure by 'Aṭṭār for showing bravery and commitment to God even when the onset of her period prevents her from circumambulating the Ka'ba after a seven-year pilgrimage.[429] 'Aṭṭār's moral of the story encourages the reader to show the kind of bravery that Rābi'a has in the face of her lower, female physicality. If Rābi'a can transcend the problem of womanhood, 'Aṭṭār seems to imply, surely the average gnostic can reign victorious over his own *nafs*. The shock of this kind of reversal is meant to break down the veil of male chauvinism separating seekers from God.

Other examples of women recast as honorary men abound. Cornell, as mentioned in Chapter 2, notes that Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī calls Fāṭimah of Nishapur 'my [male] teacher (*ustādhī*).'[430] In Sulamī, it is also reported that 'Ḥukayma was Rābi'a [bt. Ismā'īl's] teacher (*ustādh*) and companion,' again preferring the masculine form of the word 'teacher.'[431] Also in 'Aṭṭār, a similar pattern to Rābi'a's biography is upheld in the tale of Marḥūmah. The tension resurfaces between masculinisation and valorising the Otherness of femininity. From her first appearance, Marḥūmah, a pious heroine who protects her chastity by cross-dressing, is praised in masculine terms:

شمردیش از شمار شیر مردان   زنی بوذی که دور چرخ گردان

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[428] MṮ 33, ln. 581.

[429] NTA #08, 62-63 and MṮ 100, ln. 1805.

[430] Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 45.

[431] Ibid., 126.

> She was a woman that Time's turning wheel
> Accounted as a lion-hearted man.[432]

Though initially complimented for her manly bravery, she is later praised for her restraint and self-control when she refuses to take the kingship offered to her. This self-control arises from her appropriate feminine modesty, which places her above men:

<div dir="rtl">

تن یک بنمای چنین این ز مردان نجنبید از برای ملک یک زن

زنی کورا ز مردان هم نفس نیست نظیرش مستجاب الدعوه کس نیست

</div>

> This woman did not jump to hold the reins –
> You show me just one man with such control [...]
> No one's prayers are answered more completely than hers,
> She has no peer among men.[433]

Again, we see the conflicted portrait of spiritually successful women. They are valorised by being equated with honorary men, but then praised for the special perspective femaleness offers them, which here prevents Marḥūmah's seduction by worldly ambition and egoism.

The reversal of female status from low to high is accomplished by drawing on her status as Other to demonstrate her superiority to the dominant identity. It is this type of surprising, demonstrative moment that Spivak refers to when she talks about methods for recovering the subaltern voice. 'You can only read against the grain if misfits in the

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[432] IN 1/1, 32. Adapted from the translation by Franklin Lewis, "'Tale of the Righteous Woman (Whose Husband Had Gone on a Journey)': A Poetic Translation from the *Ilāhī-Nāma* of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār," in *Converging Zones: Persian Literary Tradition and the Writing of History: Studies in Honor of Amin Banani*, ed. Vali Ahmadi and Amin Banani (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2012), 202.

[433] IN 1/1, 42. Adapted from Lewis, 'Righteous Woman,' 212.

text signal the way,' she explains. 'These are sometimes called "moments of transgression" or "critical moments."'[434] Especially on this topic, we can find numerous such 'moments of transgression' in which the women – filtered through men's reports – explain their rejection of their presupposed social role. One such moment occurs in the biography of Malīka bt. al-Munkadar.

قال أيوب فما حدثت نفسي بامرأة قبلها فقلت لها لو تزوجت رجلا كان يعينك على ما أنت عليه. قالت: لو كان مالك بن دينار أو أيوب السختياني ما أدرته. فقلت أنا مالك ابن دينار و هذا أيوب السختياني فقالت: أف لقد ظننت أنه يشغلكما ذكر الله عن محادثة النساء و أقبلت على صلاتها فسألنا عنها فقالوا: هذه مليكة بنت المنكدر.

> Ayyūb reports:
> I never inclined toward a woman before her. I told her, 'If you marry a man, he will tell you what you are to him.'[435]
>   'Even if it were Mālik b. Dīnār or Ayyūb al-Sakhtīyānī, I'd still refuse,' she replied.
>   'I'm Mālik b. Dīnār, and this here is Ayyūb al-Sakhtīyānī.'
>   'Pfft, I assumed remembrance of your Lord would preoccupy you from chatting with ladies.'
>   She went back to her prayers. We asked around about her, and the people said, 'That's Malīka bt. al-Munkadar.'[436]

The jarring rebuff and reproach made by Malīka shows her rejecting societal expectations of marriage in favour of emphasising preoccupation with contemplating the divine. Such a rejection is meant to show these Others' worthiness for the Path by

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[434] Spivak, "Deconstructing Historiography," 233.

[435] Ayyūb may mean, 'what you are to Him' or 'what your duty is to him/Him.' This may be another example of Ibn al-Jawzī playing with the ambiguity of the pronoun (him or Him) and the analogic relationship between serving the husband and serving the Lord.

[436] ṢṢ #200.

appealing to the commonality of all devout seekers before God. Malīka's surprising superiority to the men in the anecdote is only further highlighted by her sharp rebuke regarding their frivolous attentions to the outward form of her person.

Despite the active rejection by women in these texts of their social role, which works to neutralise the significance of their Otherness, we also find numerous instances in which women turn their perceived disadvantage into an opportunity to prove their dedication to the Path. Thus the relationship between sainthood and Otherness is complex: not only are women reclaimed into the dominant sphere of masculinity (or genderlessness), their subordinate position itself can also be converted into an indication of spiritual authority. The biography of Ḥafṣa bt. Sīrīn provides an example of the way an embrace of feminine duty can represent a kind of defiance, based on the attitude and context in which it is undertaken. ʿĀsim Aḥwal reports:

كنا ندخل على حفصة بنت سيرين وقد جعلتِ الجلباب هكذا وتنقّبتْ به فنقول لها: رحمك الله قال الله «والقواعد من النساء اللاتي لا يرجون نكاحاً فليس عليهن جناح أن يضَعْنَ ثيابهن غير متبرجات بزينةً» وهو الجلباب. قال فتقول لنا: أي شيءٍ بعد ذلك؟ فنقول: «وأن يستعفِفْنَ خيرٌ لهن» فتقول هو إثباتُ الجلباب.

> Once we visited Ḥafṣa. She was wearing her veil in such a manner as to shroud her entire body. We were taken aback and reproached her saying, 'God have mercy on you. Do you not remember God's own pronouncement? "Such elderly women as are past the prospect of marriage, there is no blame on them if they lay aside their garments, provided they make not a wanton display of their beauty."(Q 24:60) The point of this precept,' I commented to her, 'is that you should cover yourself, not drape yourself in a robe.'
> 'What comes after that verse?' Ḥafṣa then asked.
> 'But it is best for them to be modest,' I replied.
> Ḥafṣa then observed, 'And this verse demonstrates the necessity of the robe.'[437]

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[437] SS #585.

At the centre of this anecdote is Ḥafṣa's commitment to the spirit of the Qur'anic regulations regarding her dress. By following the Qur'an carefully and interpreting it conservatively – in defiance of her companions who would have her do otherwise – Ḥafṣa demonstrates how an extra duty placed on her because of her gender can be another chance to prove her saintliness. Otherness (femininity) is thus reframed as one of the sources of her spiritual authority. The case of free women in the hagiographies is much less straightforward than the cases of the black men, who are also only one step removed from the 'neutral' identity. In the cases of women who display only a single-axis of alterity (femaleness), the tension between de-gendering the woman and using her Otherness as a proof of saintly worth creates a multifaceted portrait of the women which belies the authors' conflicted attitude towards the source material. For women of intersectional marked identities, however, this tension appears to resolve itself, which I will discuss in the following section.

6.3 Intersectional Cases: Black Women and Slave Women

Jāmī's general rule of distancing marked individuals from their 'aspect' holds up well for those who are only marked by one type of subalternity. It is simple enough to reverse a single category of identity and thus validate the saint by making him into part of the dominant group. However, the situation becomes more complicated when we turn to the intersectional cases. We do not find examples of black women metaphorically re-categorised as black men or non-black women. Neither do we find examples of black women transcending both aspects of their identity. Instead we find authors adding to the indications of subalternity, converting these saints into the nexus

of low social status, and using that to establish their spiritual authority. Laury Silvers explains this latter phenomenon in her description of the function of blackness in these texts: 'In some of these stories,' she writes, 'black skin seems to articulate the ideal of spiritual poverty by connecting the lowest social status, an enslaved black woman, with the highest spiritual status.'[438]

This section demonstrates several ways in which the authors exhibit a unique attitude towards the intersectional[439] women. First, it describes how the intersectional subaltern cases are usually further demarcated as Other wherever possible, and the way that this alterity becomes an unexpected source of authority. Second, the section explores the master-slave relationship and how it functions, particularly for the female saints. Finally, I show that in Ibn al-Jawzī and Jāmī, it is from these subaltern women that the most miracles emerge, rather than the women of more well-known biographies. This is in opposition to 'Aṭṭār, who ascribes miracles much more liberally. For black men, miraculous occurances are not necessarily framed as proofs of their own sainthood, whereas black women saints are associated with their own miracles. Black women's relationship to the supernatural is interpreted as a sign of sainthood, while the same is not necessarily true for black men. All three of these points are made in service of the larger argument, which claims that the authors persistently associate these subalterns with varying types of Otherness in order to overturn the established social hierarchy and justify the presence of subaltern saints in the *ṭabaqāt*. Rather than

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[438] Silvers, 'Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women,' 43.

[439] I am using 'intersectional' here as a shorthand for those who display multiple and intersecting subordinated/subaltern identities. I realise that all identities are intersectional by definition (including dominant or unmarked identities) and that by using such a shorthand I may be reinforcing the very categories I hope to deconstruct. It is simply done to avoid clunky phrasing.

dividing the intersectional saints from their 'aspects' of identity, these are converted into the source of legitimacy.

6.3.1 Compounding the Alterity of Intersectional Subaltern Saints

Many of the black women of these hagiographies remain anonymous or appear only in one source, and so comparison of individuals across the sources is difficult. There is one black woman slave, however, who is chronicled in her own entry by the three writers Sulamī, Ibn al-Jawzī, and Jāmī. She is known simply as Sha'wāna. A comparison of her representation in these three hagiographies can reveal our authors' attitudes towards their subaltern subjects. Ibn al-Jawzī does not back away from Sha'wāna's identity as a black slave, something Sulamī does not mention.[440] Jāmī, meanwhile, calls her an *'ajam*, and a slave, but does not specify if she is black. Ibn al-Jawzī also does not avoid presenting Sha'wāna as a lover towards her spiritual master, which Bashir has shown was standard practice for male disciples in his sources. As noted in Chapter 5, the gender difference may have been perceived as an obstacle to this type of mystical love relationship, suggested by the following passage from Ibn al-Jawzī:

> Manbūdh greeted her and said: 'This is the son of your Sufi brother Ḍaygham.' She greeted me and welcomed me warmly, and said: 'Welcome, son of the one whom we love without seeing him! By God, my son, I have long been yearning for your father. The only thing that has prevented me from seeing him is the fear that I will distract him from his service to his Master. For service to his Master is more worthy than talking to Sha'wāna. [...] But who is Sha'wāna? And what is Sha'wāna? Nothing but a sinful black slave!'[441]

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[440] DhN #14.

[441] Adapted from Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 300.

Here the lowness of her black and female identities both contribute to Shaʿwāna's claims to spiritual authority. Ibn al-Jawzī also turns Shaʿwāna's identity as literal slave into an articulation of her figurative status as God's slave. While Sulamī does not mention that Shaʿwāna is a black slave, Ibn al-Jawzī converts this fact into one of the focal points of his rendering of her biography. Subaltern status often functions as the source of the claim to authority in the intersectional cases.

The alterity of these saints can also be amplified by the accumulation of identity markers that are outside the norm. Ibn al-Jawzī's biography of Maymūna al-Sawdā' (Maymūna the Black)[442] is a perfect example of compounding an intersectional subject's alterity by adding on even more indications of Otherness. Maymūna is not only a black woman, she is also impoverished, deemed mad (referred to as *majnūna*), a wandering sheep-herder, and, it is implied, a former slave.[443] All of these indications reveal the additive nature of subaltern identity. Take, for another example, this tale of a slave woman who advises the well-known saint Dhū al-Nūn:

و هم ذوالنّون گوید قدّس سرّه که: مرا کنیزکی صفت کردند متعبّده، از حال وی خبر پرسیدم. گفتند: در دیری خراب است. به آن دیر آمدم کنیزکی دیدم ضعیف جسم که بی خوابی شب در وی اثر کرده بود. بر وی سلام کردم، جواب داد. وی را گفتم: ای جاریه! در مسکن نصارا میباشی؟ گفت: سر بردار! غیر خدای تعالی در هر دو سرای میبینی؟ گفتم: هیچ وحشت تنهایی نمییابی؟ گفت: از من دور شو! او دل مرا از لطایف حکمت خود و محبت خود چنان پر کرده است و شوق دیدار بر من گماشته که در دل خود هیچ موضع از برای غیر او نمییابم. گفتم: ترا حکیمه میبینم، مرا بیرون آر از این تنگی، و راه راست بر من بگشای! گفت: ای جوانمرد! تقوی زاد خود ساز، و زهد طریق خود و ورع بارگیر خود و سلوک کن در طریق خایفان تا برسی به دری که نه حجاب بینی آنجا و نه بوّاب. خازنان خود را بفرماید که در هیچ کاری نافرمانی تو نکنند.

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[442] 'Maymūna' also means the blessed or fortunate one, from *y-m-n*.

[443] She wears a woolen vest which has woven into it the words 'To be neither bought nor sold.'

Dhū al-Nūn – may his spirit rest in peace – also reported:

I was told of a devout slave girl, so I asked around about her. 'She lives in a ruined monastery,' they told me. I went to the monastery and saw a slave girl, haggard from lack of sleep. I greeted her, and she returned my greeting. I said, 'O slave girl! Why are you [living] in a Christian building?'

'Look around you!' she replied, 'Do you see anything other than the Lord Almighty in either world?'

'Don't you fear loneliness?' I asked.

'Get away from me!' she said. 'He has filled me with His subtle wisdom, His love and longing for a vision of Him to such a degree that I have no room in my heart for anything else.'

'You seem like a sage (*ḥakīmah*) to me. Deliver me from this predicament; show me the way!'

'O *javānmard!* Make piety your provision, renunciation your Way, and avoidance (*vara'*) your steed. Become a traveller on the way of the fearful, until you reach a door where you see neither veil nor doorkeeper. He has ordered His treasurers to obey your every command.'[444]

Here we see that, far from distancing this woman from her subaltern status (as both slave and woman), Jāmī actually reinforces her alterity, compounding her Otherness by relating her to other subaltern categories, including Christian. The idea is further underlined by the use of the term *muta'abbida* to describe the slave girl. Cornell has already pointed out that Jāmī's predecessor Sulamī seems preoccupied with the terms *ta'abbud* (making oneself a slave or slave-like) and *'ubūdiyya* (literally, 'slavery', which Cornell interprets as 'service') and their association with women's religious practice in particular.[445] Those who follow Sulamī in the tradition of Sufi women's biography, like Jāmī and Ibn al-Jawzī, take this metaphor to its literal conclusion and enshrine a number of their female Friends of God as actual slave girls. Of this tendency

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[444] NU #612: 631.

[445] See Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 54-58.

Silvers writes, '[S]laves sometimes play a romantic role in the literature because their abject submission to their owners is analogous to abject submission to God.'[446]

Furthermore, this slave girl remains anonymous in the text, referred to only as 'unknown slave girl' *(jāriyya majhūla)*. I read this anonymity as another indication of subalternity. These accounts of anonymous women, unrestricted by prior sources, may in fact give us the most accurate portrait of the ideal woman saint as envisioned by medieval male scholars. The number of anonymous women in these texts is, percentage-wise of the whole, much greater than the number of anonymous men.[447] Rkia Cornell asks if this is a case of 'convenient amnesia,' where women's names (and even the title of Sulamī's biography) were lost over time as male biographers did not care to transmit and reproduce their records.[448] Another possible explanation is that biographers avoid transmitting women's names because of concerns over the immodesty of mentioning them publicly. I suggest here that anonymity is just another way women are commonly cast as subaltern and transformed into stock characters of sorts. Unencumbered by personal identifying details, such as names, dates, locations, well-known sayings, and anecdotes, the author is free to compose an image of the woman saint entirely bent to his own will, or perhaps of his own invention.

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[446] Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women," 42.

[447] Roded, Women in Islamic Biographical Collections, 93.

[448] Cornell, *Early Sufi Women*, 43. Silvers has taken this one step further in her paper "God Loves Me" in which she argues that the women who are the subject of main entries in earlier Sufi biographies are eventually pushed out into the periphery of male-centered entries. She argues that this process follows the same contours as the women in hadith transmission field, that is, as professionalisation of the saint occurred, women were pushed to the side and only those that were critical to the transmission itself were retained, and sufficiently masculinised so as to be inoffensive. Silvers, "'God Loves Me',"36-37, note 14.

Despite Roded's argument that the de-historicised biographies of women function as messages to shape the behaviour of women who wish to be pious, the images of the slave girls tend to be non-conventional. Perhaps we are safe in suggesting, then, that these slaves were not chronicled as exempla to emulate, and that they are free from the restrictive bounds of womanhood because they are not viable marriage prospects. Slave women and outcasts could be more likely to achieve notoriety for their Sufi practice because they are uninhibited by societal expectations of being 'ladylike.' One such anonymous stock character, a pious slave girl (*kanīzak*), appears in 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat* and again makes use of her subalternity to sidestep the expectations placed on her gender:

نقلست که گفت: در بادیه همی‌شدم کنیزکی را دیدم در غلبات وجد سوری. در وی سر برهنه گفتم: ای کنیزک سر بپوش! گفت: ای خواص، چشمم نگه دار. گفتم: من عاشقم و عاشق چشم نپوشد. اما خود بی‌اختیار چشم بر تو افتاد. کنیزک گفت: من مستم. مست سر نپوشد. گفتم: از کدام شرابخانه مست شدی؟ گفت: ای خواص، زنهار، دورم می‌داری. هل فی الدارین غیر الله؟ گفتم: ای کنیزک مصاحبت من می‌خواهی؟ گفت: ای خواص خام طمعی مکن که از آن نیم که مرد جویم.

> It was related that [Khavāṣ] said:
> I was once travelling through the desert when I saw a slave girl in the throes of ecstasy (*vajd*), wandering with her head uncovered.
> 'Servant-girl, cover your head,' I cried.
> 'Khavāṣ, avert your eyes!' she replied.
> 'I am in love,' I said, 'and the lover does not avert his eyes. Rather my eyes involuntarily fell upon you.'
> 'I am drunk,' she answered, 'and the drunkard does not cover his head.'
> 'In which tavern did you become intoxicated?' I asked.
> 'Take care, Khavāṣ,' she cried. 'You are impeding me. *Is there anything other than God in the two abodes*?'
> 'Servant-girl, would you have my company?' I asked.

> 'Don't entertain naive hopes,' she answered. 'I am not the kind that's looking for a man!'[449]

Unveiled, (figuratively) intoxicated, and unaccompanied in the desert, this slave girl represents almost everything that a good, pious Muslim woman theoretically should not be. It is perhaps surprising then that this is not an atypical image of female seeker on the Path, especially amongst those display intersectional subalternity. In the cases of women like these, they are not recast as honorary men, but rather, the authors intensify the indicators of their subjects' outcast status, allowing them to circumvent the expectation of modesty and seclusion.

Another way to reinforce alterity of these saints is by emphasising their foreign origin. Foreignness, or being '*'ajam*' – often indicated by surnames, place names, or linguistic identity – is also very common among the female saints. Sha'wāna, considered in detail above, is described by Jāmī as *'ajam*, rather than as a black slave like she is in Ibn al-Jawzī.[450] In addition to names and descriptions, this foreignness can be expressed in Arabic texts through intrusions of the Persian language. For example, the biography of Jawhara al-'Ābida illustrates the significance of ethnic or linguistic identities perceived as Other in these texts, particularly in relation to those that are already subaltern. Ḥukaym b. Ja'far informs us that Jawhara was a slave girl (*jāriya*) for several kings and then she was manumitted. She later married Abū 'Abdallāh al-Birāthi, whom she served (*ta'abbudat*).[451] Abū 'Abdallāh reports:

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[449] NTA #73, 148. Translation adapted from Arberry, *Muslim Saints*, 370.

[450] ṢṢ #630, NU #591: 617.

[451] The term *mu'tabbida* appears twice in her biography.

عن أبي عبدالله البراثي قال: كانت [جوهرة] تنبّهني من الليل وتقول: يا أبا عبدالله «كاروان رَفْت»
معناه: قد سارت القافلة.

> It was relayed by Abī 'Abdallāh al-Birāthī that he said, 'She [Jawhara] would
> wake me up in the night and tell me [in Persian], 'Abī 'Abdallāh, the caravan's
> gone (*karavān raft*),' which means 'the caravan has departed' (*qad sārat al-
> qāfila*).[452]

A similar story appears in Ibn al-Jawzī's biography of 'Amra, who wakes her husband

Ḥabīb al-'Ajamī when he is oversleeping:

وقالت له: قم يا رجل فقد ذهب الليل وجاء النهار و بين يديك طريق بعيد و زاد قليل، وقوافل الصالحين
قد سارت قُدامنا ونحن قد بقينا.

> 'And she said, "Get up, man! Night has passed and midday is here. You have a
> long way to go and few provisions. The caravans of the pious have departed
> before us and we have fallen behind."'[453]

This is the only clue I have found to help make sense of the report in Jawhara's

biography, and it implies that the caravan's departure is a metaphor for the lagging

behind of those who are not sufficiently pious.[454] Ibn al-Jawzī follows up on the

previous report by showing that Jawhara was awake all night doing devotions and hence

in a position to wake Abū 'Abdullāh up. The report glorifies her for serving her husband

dutifully, through encouraging him in his devotion, which again reinforces the female

virtue of *ta'abbud*. However, both of these goals could have been accomplished without

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[452] ṢṢ #360.

[453] ṢṢ #595.

[454] The phrases *qad sārat al-qāfila* and *qawāfil al-ṣāliḥīn* did not turn up as Qur'an or hadith references.
The same information, further condensed, appears in the *Aḥkām al-Nisā'*, which was also compiled by
Ibn al-Jawzī.

reference to the linguistic preferences of Jawhara. Whether or not 'the caravan has departed' was a known phrase or idiom, I suggest that Jawhara's linguistic and implied ethnic identity is the actual point of the report here. It specifically highlights her use of Persian language to further mark her alterity as intersectional to an extent even beyond her status as a female slave. The choice to use Persian could also be meant to remind the reader of the fact that as a *jāriya* she spent time in the cosmopolitan environment of the court in Baghdad where Persian may have been used, and should actually be understood as a reference to her class as well. Thus, through a variety of strategies to 'Other' the female saints – by associating them with racial Others, slavery, anonymity, and foreignness – the authors surveyed here further the female saints' alterity, to crystallise their status as outcasts, and in this way, convert them into saints worthy of veneration.

A particularly compelling example of this phenomenon appears in Ibn al-Jawzī, who reports the biography of Taḥiyya of Nubia. The narrator relates:

دخلتُ على تحيةَ زائراً فسمعتُها من داخل البيت و هي تناجي وتقول في مُناجاتها: يا من يُحبّني وأُحبَّه.
فدخلتُ إليها وسلّمتُ عليها وقلت: يا تحية هَبي أنك تُحبّين الله تعالى فمن أين تعلمين أنّه يحبّكِ؟ فقالت:
نعم إني كنت في بلد النوبة وأبوايَ كانا نصرانيين. وكانت أمي تحملني إلى الكنيسة وتجيءُ بي عند
الصليب وتقول: قبلي الصليب، فإذا هممتُ بذلك أرى كفّاً تخرج فتردّ وجهي حتى لا أقبله. فعلمتُ أن
عنايته بي قديمة.

> I came to Taḥiyya as a visitor and heard her praying inside the house. 'O You who love me and You Whom I love,' she was saying.
>
> I went in to see her and greeted her. 'Taḥiyya,' I said, 'It's a given that you love God, but how do you know that He loves you?'
>
> 'Yes, well, I was in Nubia, and my parents were Christians. My mother used to carry me to the church, bring me up to the cross and say, "Kiss the cross." And if I tried to do it, I saw a hand reach out and turn my face away, so I would not kiss it. Thus, I learned that His regard for me was eternal.'[455]

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[455] §§ #852. See also Silvers' translation and analysis of the account in Silvers, "'God Loves Me'," 56-57.

We may guess from her being specified as Nubian that Taḥiyya was probably also a black woman. Ibn al-Jawzī then amasses four different types of subalternity in her identity as black, female, foreign, and Christian. Just as being female sometimes gives female saints the opportunity to disprove prejudices held against their spiritual abilities, Taḥiyya's Christianity provides her the chance to prove her status as one of the *awliyā'* by demonstrating that God has helped her reject this portion of her identity. A Christian background, paradoxically, is what allows Taḥiyya to prove she has been chosen to excel as a Muslim. Though she rejects her Christian upbringing, the other aspects of her subaltern identity remain intact. The fact that her subaltern identity forms the basis of her authority demonstrates that spiritual knowledge and talent can be bestowed upon anyone, regardless of society's dominant hierarchy. Compounding Otherness through emphasis on intersectional subaltern identity appears to be the biographers' chosen method to convey the link between social inferiority and spiritual superiority.

6.3.2 The Master-Slave Relationship in Sufi Hagiography

The submission of a slave to his or her master mirrors his or her submission to the ultimate Master, God. The tradition plays with potential earthly or divine readings of 'master,' much as it does with the multivalent layers of interpretation wrapped up in the beloved / Beloved of the *ghazal*. This could be another reason why so many female saints are also slaves, as *ta'abbud* (submissiveness, servitude) is already associated with being female in several contexts, to her husband, to her master, to her Lord. Khayr al-Nassāj, the only male saint of the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* explicitly described as black, exemplifies the tendency to interpret earthly servitude in this life as analogous to serving the divine master. In the following episode, Khayr al-Nassāj pretends to be a runaway slave:

چون به دروازهٔ کوفه رسید مرقعی پاره پاره پوشیده و او خود سیاه رنگ بود چنان که هر که او را دیدی، گفتی: این مرد ابلهی می‌نماید. یکی او را بدید. گفت: روزی چند او را در کارگَشَم. پیش او رفت وگفت: تو بنده‌ای؟ گفت: آری. گفت: از خداوند گریخته‌ای؟ گفت: آری. گفت: تو را نگه دارم تا به خداوند سپارم. گفت: من خود این می‌طلبم. پس او را به خانه برد و گفت: نام تو خیر است. او از حسن عقیدت که داشت که المؤمن لا یکذِّب او را خلاف نکرد و با او برفت و او را خدمت کرد. پس آن مرد خیر را نساجی در آموخت و سال‌ها کار او می‌کرد.

> [Khayr] arrived at the gates of Kufa wearing a tattered patchwork robe, he
> himself black of complexion, so that anyone who saw him would cry, 'This

man looks like a fool!' Someone saw him there. 'I will employ him for a few days,' he thought to himself. He approached and asked, 'Are you a slave?'

'Yes,' Khayr replied.

'Have you run away from your master?'

'Yes.'

'I will take charge of you until I can restore you to your master,' the man said.

'That is what I am seeking myself,' said Khayr.

Then the man took him home and said, 'You'll be called Khayr.'

Out of the firm faith that he had – for *the believer does not deny* – Khayr did not contradict him. He went with him and served him. Thus the man taught him weaving and Khayr served him for many years.[456]

This story relies on the multiple possible significations of the master and slave relationship and the metaphorical resonances with the devotee's relationship to the divine. 'Aṭṭār exploits the potential for confusion between literal and metaphorical slavery by highlighting Khayr's absolute submission to God and implying that if Khayr does not intentionally engender the slave owner's misapprehension of the situation, he at least abides by it in acceptance of his fate. Meanwhile, in *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*, Jāmī's mad slave girl Tuḥfah does not just exploit the divine/earthly ambiguity, she explicitly points it out to confirm her own faithfulness. Given her freedom and told to go where she wishes, she replies:

گفت: ای سریّ! به کجا روم و مرا جای رفتن نیست؟ آنکه حبیب دل من است مرا مملوک بعض
ممالیک خود گردانیده است، اگر مالک من راضی شود بروم، والّا صبر کنم.

She said, 'Where should I go? There is nowhere for me to go, and He who is my heart's dear Friend has indentured me as a slave to another of His slaves. Only if my Master approves will I go, else I will forbear.'[457]

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[456] NTA #65, 111-12.

[457] NU #605: 624.

As we can see, just as with the beloved/Beloved ambiguity, hagiographers play with the literal and metaphorical dimensions of the master-slave relationship. At times they even choose to take the literal line of interpretation to reinforce the allegorical signification of divine servitude. In the case of the wife of Abū Shuʿayb al-Barāthī, Ibn al-Jawzī unifies all three types of servitude possible for female seekers in one person.

<div dir="rtl">

فعزمتُ على التجرد من الدنيا والاتصال بأبي شعيب.

فجاءت إليه وقالت: أريد أن أكون خادمة. فقال لها: إن أردت ذلك فغيري هيئتك، وتجردي عما أنت فيه حتى تصلحي لما أردت. فتجردت عن كل ما تملكه ولبست لبسة النساك وحضرته فتزوجها.

</div>

> She resolved to abstract herself from the world and attach herself to Abū Shuʿayb. She went to him and said, 'I'd like to be a servant (*khādimah*).'
>
> 'If that is what you want, change your desire. Separate yourself from what you want so that you will be reformed.'
>
> And she got rid of everything she owned, dressed in rags, and she went to him and he married her.[458]

Here the unnamed wife of Abū Shuʿayb, a former slave, is a servant to her husband, her Sufi master, and God all at once. Her success in each earthly dimension reflects success in the otherworldly dimension as well. The traditional lover/beloved relationship between *murīd* and shaykh is legitimised in this case by its enshrinement in marriage. A former palace slave, she exchanges false slavery to the Caliph for true service of the divine.

An even more involved and explicit case that plays with the master/Master concept appears in the *Ilāhī-nāmah* involving a female slave. Although the *Ilāhī-nāmah*

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[458] SS #361.

does not purport to convey the biography of a historical figure, the reader will note that the same theme observed in the hagiographical accounts can be traced into the purely fictional depictions of women with intersectional subaltern identities. ‘Abdallāh tells his slave woman he needs to sell her for the money. Readying herself for sale, she combs her hair and finds a few gray hairs. She begins crying hysterically, and ‘Abdallāh tells her not to worry, as he has decided not to sell her after all. However, it turns out that the threat of sale is not exactly why she is crying. She delivers a surprising speech, questioning the purpose of her life and the point of having served someone her whole life who would, in the end, sell her:

<div dir="rtl">

كنيزك گفت من گريان نه زانم   كه در حكم فروش تست جانم
وليكن زان سبب گريم چنين زار   كه عمرى كردهام پيش كسى كار
كه يافت از خدمتش مويم سپيدى   بآخر كار آمد نا اميدى
چرا بودم بآخر پيش مردى   كه بفروشد مرا آخر بدردى
چرا كردم جوانى خرج جائى   كه در پيرى نهندم در بهائى
چرا بودم بجائى روزگارى   كه آن خدمت فروش آورد بارى
چرا بر درگه غيرم ره بود   چو درگاهى چنان در پيشگه بود
كسى را كان چنان درگاه باشد   بدرگاهى دگر چون راه باشد
تو اى خواجه حديث من بمنيوش   اگرچه مىنيرزم هيچ بفروش
درآمد جبرئيل و گفت حالى   به پيش صدر و بدر لايزالى
كه عبدالله را گوى اى وفادار   مباش اين درد را آخر روا دار
سپيدى يافت در اسلام مويش   جز آزادى نخواهد بود رويش

</div>

The slave woman said, 'I'm not crying because [you want to sell me],
For the right to sell me belongs to you.
I cry so fervently because
I have spent my life working for someone,
In whose service I have found my hair turned white,
And in the end it turned to hopelessness.
Why then did I work for a man
Who would sell me in the end so painfully?
Why did I spend my youth in a place

Where in old age I am put up for a price?
Why did I spend my days in a place
Where that service just led to being sold?
How could there be a way to the other threshold,
When such a threshold was in front of me?
How can someone who belongs to such a court,
Find his way to the other court?
Master of mine, heed not my words.
Even if I am worth nothing, sell me.'
Gabriel appeared and said,
Before the Prophet, that eternally full moon[459]:
'Tell 'Abdallāh, O Loyal One,
Not to consider this pain a rightful end for her.
Her hair grew white in submission;
She will have nothing before her but freedom.'[460]

The slave's story is again predicated on the analogic relationship between slave/master and devotee/divine. The angel Gabriel asks for the Prophet's intercession, informing him (and the reader) that the slave woman has spent her entire life in submission (*dar islām*) and as such deserves her freedom. The phrase *dar islām*, 'in submission' or 'in Islam' is perfectly calculated to encompass both earthly and divine understandings of the woman's servitude. Hellmut Ritter has written of this story parenthetically that,

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[459] This *ṣadr va badr* appears to be an epithet for Prophet Muhammad, in reference to his moon-splitting miracle. See 'Aṭṭār's line in the *Asrār-nāmah*, to open an entire section in praise of the Prophet (AN 2/1, 11):

<div dir="rtl">

سزای صدر و بدر آفرینش   ثنائی نیست با ارباب بینش

</div>

According to the people of vision,
No praise can ever be worthy of the Prophet of creation.

[460] IN Epilogue/13, 382.

''Aṭṭār does not, of course, recount the story in order to describe the slave woman's fidelity.' As he does not comment further, one can guess from the placement of the story in Ritter's theme-based chapters that he understood it to be primarily an indication of the Prophet's mercy and just conduct towards even the lowest or most insignificant creatures, in this case, the female slave too old to work.

While this reading is possible and certainly a theme present in the anecdote, it is difficult to discount the female slave's centrality to the episode. Most of the lines of the anecdote are indeed taken up by her speech, and 'Aṭṭār's long aside is essentially a paralleling of her speech, in which he compares himself to her and asks for similar consideration from God. Reading this in the context of the large number of female slave-saints in the hagiographies, I understand this old slave woman as another intersectional subaltern figure whose destitution is used to highlight her piety, especially in the face of a cruel fate, and subvert reader expectations regarding her spiritual capabilities. This reversal of expectations may be the reason why so many female saints and pious women are depicted as slaves. From this status as slave, the convenient metaphor of devotion to master/Master then follows. Finally, I have suggested in this section that slave status provides some of these women with a freedom from the normal expectations of 'respectable' womanhood which makes sainthood easier to attain. Crucially, this lack of respectability sanctions contact between men and women, allowing these women to advance as saints and their lives to be recorded and reported by the men who ultimately tell their stories.

6.3.3 Race, Gender, Sainthood and Miracle Stories (Maqāmāt or Karāmāt)

In Ibn al-Jawzī and Jāmī, saints of multiple subaltern identities are also particularly strongly correlated to miracle stories. This is distinctly different to 'Aṭṭār,

who includes miracles across the board for most saints that he catalogues.[461] Like anonymity, the tendency to perform miracles can be another characteristic associated with the Other. Lacking real power in terms of social capital, the marginalised in society must demonstrate their power in visible form. 'Magical practices have a sense of "otherness" because of the supernatural power that is believed to be channeled through the practitioner, who is a marginalised or stigmatised figure in some societies and a central one in others.'[462] In some cases the performance of miracles is linked to the marginalised status of the performer.

While saints of an 'unmarked' identity also perform miracles, some members of subaltern groups perform miracles or supernatural acts without being specified as a *valī*. In these cases, the supernatural act is most often portrayed as the proof of the saint's, not the performer's, connection to the divine. Moreover, Jāmī actually suppresses the fantastical backstory of some of the prominent saints – Ibrāhīm b. Adham, Bāyāzīd, Bishr al-Ḥāfī, even al-Ḥallāj[463] — and instead cordons off the 'supernatural' elements of these biographies into the realm of the subaltern, the domain of blacks, women, and slaves. In the few examples attested, black males appear either as named saints of their own entry, or nameless, non-saintly sources of sorcery and magic

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[461] Sulamī is omitted from this discussion because he includes almost no miracles at all in his *Dhikr al-Niswa*.

[462] Karen Louise Jolly, Robert Andrew Gilbert, and John F.M. Middleton, "Magic (Supernatural Phenomenon)," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.), accessed May 3, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/topic/magic-supernatural-phenomenon.

[463] By Jāmī's telling, both Bāyāzīd and al-Ḥallāj perform only one miracle each (cf. 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-Awlīyā'*). Jāmī is more concerned with relating different opinions of shaykhs who were contemporary with al-Hallāj or just after his time, and establishes him as a contested but legitimate figure in the tradition.

at the margins. We find, for example, a male black slave miraculously producing food in times of famine when Abū ʿAqqāl recites a particular verse.[464] Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī relates a story in which one of his disciples, a heavy-set male black slave (*zangī*), levitates during *samāʿ* and perches light as a sparrow on the shaykh's shoulder.[465] Muḥammad Yamanī describes a black man who can read minds.[466] ʿAṭṭār's Bāyāzīd returns from the pilgrimage immediately after departing, explaining that he saw a black man standing beside the road with a drawn sword, who informed Bāyāzīd that he had 'left God in Bisṭām and set out for the holy house.'[467] While blackness is associated with the supernatural, on the male side it is not necessarily linked to saintliness. In fact, we find quite the reverse: male black saints are co-opted into the unmarked realm of whiteness when they commune with God. Male blacks who do magic or are connected to the supernatural are firmly marginalised in the biographies. They represent manifestations of other saints' connections to the divine, rather than their own.

While the black men associated with supernatural activity often appear only in the margin of entries about other saints, subaltern black women saints continue to be strongly associated with miracles even when they are named and are the central subject of an entry. On the female side, such a simple reversal of blackness as the only identity marker is not possible, since being female is a sign of alterity. Too clearly 'Other' to ever be divested of identity markings and recast as unmarked, the biographers embrace their subalternity and transfigure it. Their compounded alterity is transformed into saintliness in a way that is not true of the single-axis identity (here, black male). Jāmī in

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[464] NU #68: 77.

[465] NU #468: 424.

[466] NU #503: 475.

[467] TA #14, 119.

particular does not relate the miracle stories of the famous female *awlīyā'*, including those of Rābi'a, whose fantastic deeds in 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-Awlīyā'* were likely known to him. In Ibn al-Jawzī and Jāmī, these kinds of stories seem reserved particularly for the realm of the less famous and intersectional saints, quite in contrast to the fanciful and incredible anecdotes that litter 'Aṭṭār's *Memorial*.

One common type of supernatural proof of holiness typical of the intersectional cases is clairvoyance or miraculous recognition. This type of miracle is by no means exclusive to black female saints, however I suggest it is a common one by which these saints provide proof of their being 'chosen.' The mad singing slave girl, Tuḥfah, recognises Sarī al-Saqaṭī without having seen him before.[468] These miracles of second sight are often tied up in the symbolism of the veil (*pardah/ḥijāb*), whether in the common or the mystic definition. Another anonymous black slave girl is described as follows in the *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*:

ذوالنّون گوید که: کنیزکی سیاه دیدم که کودکان وی را به سنگ می‌زدند و می‌گفتند: این زندیقه می‌گوید که من الله را می‌بینم. من در پی او برفتم. مرا آواز داد وگفت: ای ذوالنّون! گفتم: تو مرا چه شناختی؟ گفت: جان‌های دوستان او سپاه اویند با یکدیگر آشنا. گفتم: این چیست که این کودکان می‌گویند؟ گفت: چه می‌گویند؟ گفتم: می‌گویند که تو می‌گویی که: من الله را می‌بینم. گفت: راست می‌گویند تا او را بشناختم هیچ محجوب نبوده‌ام.

> Dhū al-Nūn reports:
> There was a black slave girl I saw being stoned by children. They said, 'This heretic says she sees God.' I went after her.
> She called to me, 'Dhū al-Nūn!'
> 'How did you recognise me?' I asked.
> 'The souls of His friends are His soldiers, recognisable to one another.'
> 'What is this [nonsense] these children are saying?' I asked.

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[468] NU #605: 624.

'What do they say?'
'They say that you claim to see God.' I said.
'They're telling the truth,' she replied. 'Since I recognised Him, I have [no longer] been veiled.'[469]

Jāmī plays here with the figurative and literal meanings of the word *maḥjūb* ('veiled'), which primarily implies, in the Sufi context, the obstacles that cause the seeker to remain at a distance from God. But here, the word can take on its literal meaning as well, suggesting that the black slave girl is not veiled because of her low status. This status, therefore, becomes the path by which she 'sees' more clearly than the rest. Similarly, Zahrā al-Wāliha miraculously recognises Dhū al-Nūn, because, she says:

كشف عن سرّي الحبيب فرفع عن قلبي حجاب العمى فعرّفْني اسمك.

'Within my soul's mystery, my Beloved disclosed your name to me, and rent aside the veil of blindness which beclouded my heart.'[470]

While the black men performing miracles in these texts tend not to be depicted as *awliyā'*, the intersectional subaltern women of Ibn al-Jawzī, Sulamī, and Jāmī are portrayed as saints who can also perform miracles. Thus, although black skin can be shown to be correlated with the supernatural in general, the implication is very different for black men's 'magic' and intersectional women's miracles. While the 'magic' surrounding black men tends to point to the legitimacy of another saint, the intersectional women's miracles function as a proof of their own divine connection. This suggests there is a difference between the symbolic value of black female skin and

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[469] NU #610; 630.

[470] SS #881. Tr. Lewisohn, *Sufi Women*, 120.

the representational meaning of black skin for males in regard to its power to determine saintly authority, or not.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the hagiographers represent the intersectional subaltern cases, like black and slave women, differently than single-axis cases like black men or free women. While they tend to reclaim single-axis subalterns into the dominant group, they instead connect the lowest intersectional subalterns with the highest spiritual station. In some cases, therefore, Jāmī's observation holds true that identity is an 'aspect,' or 'accident' (*ṣifat*), separate from the true self or the soul. These tend to be the straightforward single-axis cases where a specific element of the identity is rejected. Hence black men turn white, white women become (metaphorically or otherwise) white men. However, even the cases of non-black, free women are not always so clear. Our authors provide a mixed representation, sometimes favouring the 'masculinising' approach, other times referring to the perceived 'lowness' of femininity as spiritual highness.

From the fairly straightforward single-axis male cases, the chapter moved to the more conflicted representation of single-axis women, and finally to the intersectional subaltern women. These intersectional subalterns in no way approach the 'unmarked' status that is gained by the likes of Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī's black disciple, for example, when he becomes white. For the intersectional subalterns, black skin is identified with a lack of social capital, as demonstrated in my discussions of both the general symbolism of black the colour, and black the skin tone. Rather than a disadvantage, this lack of social capital is portrayed as an advantage on the path to sainthood. At the same time, slavery is portrayed as the ideal state for the worshipper, as it implies a correlation between the utter devotion to the master and the seeker/slave's unflinching fidelity to the divine. The intersection of all these marginal identities in the form of the black slave woman is represented as ultimate conversion of low status into high.

Contrary to expectation, not only do blacks, women, slaves – and the intersections thereof – appear in the hagiographies, they are in fact venerated in a

dramatic reversal of hierarchy that conveys a typical Sufi worldview. According to this worldview, the greatest achievements in spirituality often emanate from the most unexpected sources. On a broader scale, the chapter reveals the need to look at more than just class when using the tools of subaltern studies, and the imperative to consider the interaction between class, race, gender, and other differentiating factors. And finally, it demonstrates that the medieval sources are rich enough, and the approach of intersectionality studies malleable enough, to sustain a reading of these quite old sources through a very new lens.

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 Research Questions

The broad question animating this research asks what literary representation can tell us about medieval Islamicate attitudes towards gender, as opposed to what is uncovered by more conventional studies of gender as it functions in historical chronicles, the Qur'ān, hadith, and *tafsīr*. Specifically, it asks how gender, particularly femininity, is represented and constructed in Sufi literary texts. It provides a partial answer to this question by undertaking a thorough investigation of a prominent author of the medieval Persian poetic tradition, Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nīshāpūrī, in the context of other Sufi hagiographers who recorded women.

A number of sub-questions have emerged from this initial inquiry. The research considers to what extent 'Aṭṭār's generalised statements regarding the category of women line up with narrative depictions of women. Relatedly, it investigates how much continuity there is between narrative and meta-textual commentary, between anecdotes and the authorial voice of the epimythia. It explores whether the purported historicity of women in the hagiographies affect their representation, and how 'Aṭṭār's work characterises the relationship between gender, the body, and saintly authority.

Finally it asks how race and class complicate this already-mixed bag of gender representation.

7.2 Main Findings

The primary answer I have found to the overarching question driving my research is that there is a striking disconnect between the representation of the category of women in the abstract or in allegorical functions, on the one hand, and their representation in narratives and biographies on the other. In the abstract, women are often denigrated as symbols of weakness or temptation. In the allegorical representations, women can function as anything from the old hag representing the *dunyā* to the wise old woman sage. In the concrete, however, specific women appearing in 'Aṭṭār and the hagiographies tend to be represented as exceptional Sufis. These exceptional mystic women seem to require justification or further commentary. These commentaries explain their existence via three different legitimisation strategies. First, they may claim her authority by masculinising her, and hence, apparently, relieving her of the compromising specificity of her female gender. Second, they may advocate for genderlessness in the eyes of the divine, an argument which is apparently not at odds with the first. This leads us to suggest, in this context, that masculinity may function as the absence of gender, a marker of neutrality. Third, the authorial commentary may argue that these women, in their exceptionality, are set apart from 'normal' women, placed even above men, and as such are not subject to the same restraints. The study found that these meta-commentaries, which often try to minimise the significance of

gender, tend to be at odds with the narrative representations wherein gender is very much at issue.

On the basis of these results, I suggest we should be wary of claims that classical Sufism provides a gender-egalitarian environment that leads to increased freedoms for women and access to the highest levels of religious life.[471] Nor, I find, can we claim that it confirms a rigorous theoretical misogyny with consistency. Ultimately, my research shows that while Sufi literary representations did allow space for gender-egalitarian principles to gain traction, these principles are, in practice, persistently contravened by patriarchal norms of the period.

7.3 Source Material and Arguing the Findings

In terms of primary sources, the dissertation focuses chiefly on the *mathnavīs* of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (d. ~1221 CE) and the *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*. For comparison, it considers the *Ḥadīqat al-Ḥaqīqa* and *Sayr al-'Ibād ilā al-Mu'bād* of Sanā'ī,[472] and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's (d. 1492 CE) *Yūsuf va Zulaykhā*, and his *Nafaḥāt al-Uns* (*Breaths of Intimacy*). It refers to the following Arabic works for context: *Dhikr al-Niswa al-Muta'bbidāt al-Ṣūfiyyāt* (*Memorial of Pious Sufi Women*) by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī

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[471] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 432; Kelly Pemberton, *Women Mystics and Sufi Shrines in India* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010).

[472] Sanāʾī al-Ghaznavī, *Kitāb-i Ḥadīqat al-Ḥaqīqah va Sharī'at al-Ṭarīqah*; Sanā'ī, *Mathnavī-hā-yi Hakīm Sanā'ī*.

(d. 1021 CE), Abū al-Faraj b. al-Jawzī's *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa* (*Qualities of the Excellent*) (d. 1200 CE), and Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt al-A'yān* (*Lives of the Eminent*) (d. 1282 CE).[473]

Each of the project's five chapters serve to develop the overarching argument. I argue that there is a disconnect between the representation of women in the works consulted in terms of their narrative representation and in the meta-textual commentary and general statements on women in this context. I suggest that this disconnect is reflective of the conflict between the idealism of the egalitarian, Sufi philosophy which values only the inner spiritual life, and the realities of the social hierarchy of the authors' contexts, which is so dependent on outward form. The first chapter collects material from a broader range of Sufi texts in an effort to document the general misogynistic view of women which permeates this context. It also analyses 'Aṭṭār's and other medieval authors', rigorous justifications for including women in the ranks of the *awliyā'*, which present quite a different side to the question of women's roles and capabilities in Islam. The second chapter discusses some of the many stock and minor female characters that appear in 'Aṭṭār's work. It lays out the paradigm in which he consistently places authority in the hands of the lowest on the social hierarchy, and explores how he uses paradox to 'unsay' gender. The third chapter uses Zulaykhā as a barometer for the treatment of female desire in these texts and traces her development

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[473] Nicholson, *The Tadhkiratu 'l-Awliya (Memoirs of the Saints) of Muḥammad Ibn Ibrāhīm Faridu'd-Din 'Aṭṭar Edited in the Original Persian, with Prefaces, Indices and Variants.*; Sanā'ī, *Mathnavī-hā-yi Hakīm Sanā'ī*; Jāmī, *Mathnavī-yi Haft Awrang: Bi-Taṣḥīḥ va Muqaddimah*; Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-Uns Min Haḍarāt al-Quds*; Sulamī and Cornell, *Early Sufi Women: Dhikr al-Niswah al-Muta'abbidāt aṣ-Ṣūfiyyāt*; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa / Li-Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qurashī al-Bakrī al-Baghdādī al-Ma'rūf Bi-Ibn al-Jawzī; Taḥqīq 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Hindāwī*; Aḥmad Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ al-Zamān*, ed. Aḥmad b. Muṣṭafā Ṭāshkubrīzādah, Muḥammad b. Shākir Kutubī, and 'Alī b. Bālī Manq (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Maymaniyya, 1892).

from the Qur'an, through the commentaries, into the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, and through 'Aṭṭār's oeuvre. It concludes that 'Aṭṭār may have followed a previously existing minority tradition in Sufi Qur'an commentary to arrive at his reversal of the image of Zulaykhā. The fourth chapter covers the biographies of holy women as they are presented in 'Aṭṭār and other hagiographies, and sets out to identify the relationship between gender, corporeality, and spiritual status. The fifth chapter examines the same set of hagiographical sources through the lenses of intersectionality and subaltern studies. It examines various axes of identity like race, class, disability, and slavery and discusses how they interact with gender in the biographies of the saints. Thus the thesis begins with a broad overview of established misogynist views permeating 'Aṭṭār's context, then moves more specifically to representations of minor female characters and female literary figures in 'Aṭṭār. Finally, the scope again begins to broaden out, situating 'Aṭṭār's saintly women in the context of the hagiographies, and finishing with a discussion that ventures out beyond gender as the sole category of analysis.

7.4 The Findings in the Context of Scholarly Literature

Many scholars have approached similar questions in the past regarding the attitudes towards gender and sexuality in the medieval Islamicate world. Despite much excellent work on themes such as women in *adab* literature and in the Persian romance, however,[474] scholars examining the literary representation of gender in Islam have not

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[474] Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word*; Julie Scott Meisami, "Writing Medieval Women: Representations and Misrepresentations," in *Writing and Representation in Medieval Islam: Muslim Horizons*, ed. J Bray, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures (Taylor & Francis, 2006); Milani, "The Mediatory Guile of the Nanny in Persian Romance"; Rouhi, "A Comparative Typology of the Medieval Go-Between."

yet fully explored the importance of Sufi literature in stretching and expanding the perceived roles available for women in the context of spiritual authority. To that end, this study aims at filling a small gap in our knowledge regarding gendered representations of the medieval Islamic world. To ignore the literary representation of gender in favour of the strictly historical is to miss out on the distinctive information these representations can provide to us. More than telling us how women lived, these depictions can show us the limits of the imagination regarding women's possible roles, or the breadth of possibility that was afforded them in the abstract, literary world, if not necessarily in the concrete. By consistently focusing on women as a corrective to male-dominated histories, we can prevent ourselves from falsifying or distorting our literary-historical conclusions by making sure we are not, in the words of Carl Degler, 'half wrong before we even begin.'[475]

The studies that examine Classical Persian literature through a gendered lens are fairly limited in number. A few works undertake a gendered reading of classical Sufi primary sources, notably Murata, Schimmel, Elias, and Smith.[476] Some focus particularly on Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī.[477] Though the bibliography on ʿAṭṭār is relatively large, very little of this draws meaningful attention to gender. Even Ritter's magisterial

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[475] Carl N Degler, "'Woman as Force in History' by Mary Beard (Review)," Daedalus 103, no. 1 (1974): 70.

[476] Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (Albany, N.Y, 1992); Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam*; Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*; Elias, "Female and Feminine in Islamic Mysticism"; Smith, *Rābiʿa the Mystic.*

[477] Zahrā Ṭāhirī, *Huḍūr-i Paydā va Penhān-i Zan Dar Mutūn-i Ṣūfiyyah* (Tokyo: Muʾassasah-yi Mutālaʿāt-i Farhang-hā va Zabān-hā-yi Āsiyā va Afrīqā, 2007); Zulaykhā Sāqifi, *Tajallī-i Zan Dar Asār-i Mawlavī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Tarfand, 2002); Austin, "The Sophianic Feminine in the Work of Ibn ʿArabi and Rumi."

tome includes reference to subjects as detailed as the role of doves, for example, but not women as a group.[478] The large amount of work done on Rābiʿa bt. ʿAdawiyya tends to look at the Arabic sources documenting her, or the Arabic poetry attributed to her, with the notable exceptions of Yaghoobi, Helms, and Hermansen.[479] Arabic Sufi literature has drawn more attention, especially the writings Ibn ʿArabī and Sulamī.[480] Finally, this research responds to the growing literature of theoretical depth on Islamicate sexualities that can help us think through the relationship between gender and sexuality in Islamicate society.[481]

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[478] Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, 338-40.

[479] Yaghoobi, "Sexual Trauma and the Spiritual Experiences: Rabiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya and Margery Kempe"; Siham. Khidr, *Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiya bayna al-ustūra wa-al-ḥaqīqa* (Bayrut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyah, 2010); Widad. El Sakkakini Safwat, Nabil F., Lessing, Doris, *First among Sufis: The Life and Thought of Rabia al-Adawiyya, the Woman Saint of Basra* (London: Octagon Press, 1982); Erin S Prus, "Divine Presence, Gender, and the Sufi Spiritual Path: An Analysis of Rabiah the Mystic's Identity and Poetry" (Xavier University, 2009); Jean Annestay, *Une femme soufie en islam: Rabi'a al-ʿAdawiyya* (Paris: Entrelacs, 2009); Yaghoobi, "Against the Current: Farid al-Din ʿAttar's Diverse Voices"; Ford, "Hierarchical Inversions, Divine Subversions: The Miracles of Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawīya"; Baldick, "The Legend of Rābiʿa of Basra: Christian Antecedents, Muslim Counterparts"; Derin, *Love in Sufism: From Rabia to Ibn al-Farid*; Hermansen, "The Female Hero in the Islamic Religious Tradition."

[480] Melchert, "Before Ṣūfiyyāt"; Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women"; Silvers, "'God Loves Me'"; Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*; Dakake, "Guest of the Inmost Heart"; Dakake, "'Walking Upon the Path of God Like Men?'"; Rkia Elaroui Cornell and Muhammad ibn al-Husayn Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*.

[481] Wendy DeSouza, "The Love That Dare Not Be Translated: Erasures of Premodern Sexuality in Modern Persian Mysticism," in *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, ed. Kamran Scot Aghaie and Afshin Marashi (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014), 67–86; Lewis, "Sexual Occidentation"; K. Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations Across Temporal Geographies of Desire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008); Malek

Though the gendered readings of Persian sources are limited, other fields provide us with models to draw on and apply to our own sources. From within religious studies, there exists a fairly large corpus of research on the relationship between Christian female saints and their bodies, much of which can be used to add theoretical rigor and facilitate cross-faith comparison.[482] Recently, scholars of Islamic Studies have begun to follow these methodological leads.[483] Also relevant from a theory perspective is the significant body of feminist critical theory which was developed beginning in the 1980s and continuing up to the present time.[484]

Chebel, *Encyclopédie de l'amour en Islam : Érotisme, beauté et sexualité dans le monde Arabe, en Perse et en Turquie* (Paris: Payot, 1995); Afaf Lutfi. Sayyid-Marsot, *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam* (Malibu: Undena, 1979), Boudhiba, "La Sexualité en Islam."

[482] Beresford, "Corporeality of Female Sanctity"; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*; Bynum, "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. M Feher, R Naddaff, and N Tazi (New York: Urzone, Inc., 1989); Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*; Robertson, "The Corporeality of Female Sanctity in the Life of Saint Margaret"; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

[483] Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*; Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*; Mayeur-Jaouen and Heyberger, *Le corps et le sacré*.

[484] To note just a few representative sources: Joan Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Gisela Bock, "Women's History and Gender History," 7–30; Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*.

7.5 Specific Contributions to the Field

The originality of this study lies in several areas. First, it takes a new approach to one of the major authors of the canon, engaging deeply with gender studies theory in a way that has not been done before for these sources. In that sense, it adds another brick to the house of research on gender and Islamic literature, alongside the work of scholars like Sa'diyya Shaikh, for example, who has elucidated a comprehensive view of gender in Ibn 'Arabī. The dissertation expands on some of the discoveries of the newly-developed field of Islamicate Sexualities and adjusts their insights to fit my author and period, as the theory continues to work its way backward into medieval material. It takes an initial step towards bridging the gap between Persian and Arabic hagiographical sources, making connections between the texts that include women in large numbers across the two languages. The study makes use of corporeality theory and adds data to the literature on the body in Sufi practice. It engages in comparative study with the scholarly literature on gender in the Christian saintly tradition, examining to what degree the theories developed by scholars of Christianity can apply to our sources. It incorporates discussions of intersectionality, referencing race and class as categories of analysis, and models ways to use the analytical category of gender in concert with other elements of identity formation.

7.6 Limitations of the Study

Perhaps the most significant limitation of the study is that it is primarily a systematic exploration of the world of a single author. Therefore, the results produced therein must be expanded to other Sufi authors with caution and only after careful further study. The thesis does not claim that the conflict between theoretical egalitarianism and strict social hierarchies can necessarily be generalised to Persian or Arabic mystical texts of the same period and context. It merely suggests this as a plausible backdrop to explain the highly conflicted portrait of women painted within 'Aṭṭār—and, to a certain extent, the other hagiographies examined here—which may or may not be confirmed in other Medieval mystical texts. It is important to note also that even within the discussion of 'Aṭṭār's work, the study of female figures is not exhaustive. I have certainly not analysed every single woman that 'Aṭṭār depicts in my

analysis, but instead have summarised patterns and analysed in depth where I felt that there was more to pull out of the text than superficial readings.

The analysis of gender representation focuses primarily on constructions of femininity and as a result, not much room is left to consider constructions of masculinity, except as they are directly raised in the discussions of femininity. This also means that, unfortunately, a deeper investigation into the role of homosexuality and the *mukhannath* has been left aside. The study is also limited primarily to ʿAṭṭār's *mathnavīs* and the other hagiographies. It does not explore the use of gender in the *ghazals*, partly because the change in genre makes for a very different representation.[485] Although in some sense it is a shame to miss out on a complete overview of gender in all of ʿAṭṭār's work, gender in the *Dīvān* is sufficiently different that it could probably fill its own book. Finally, as mentioned throughout the study, the thesis views gender in these texts through the lens of literary representation. It is concerned with the history of ideas and attitudes towards women, not how they really were but how they could be perceived and depicted. To that end, the study was not undertaken with a focus on mining these texts for historical data in the service of social history.

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[485] The genderless nature of Persian pronouns tends to be exploited in this genre for maximum blurring of gender lines, which would make any definitive pronouncements, it seems to me, immediately compromised by this principle of purposeful ambiguity. This ambiguity has also already drawn scholarly attention, although the consensus now leans towards presuming a male beloved unless indicated otherwise. See particularly Stephen O. Murray, "Corporealizing Medieval Persian and Turkish Tropes." In *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*, edited by Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, 132–41, esp. 138.; New York, 1997.; Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, "To Be Feared and Desired: Turks in the Collected Works of ʿUbayd-i Zākānī." *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 5 (2009): 725–44, esp. 726-32; Ehsan Yarshater, "Persian Poetry in the Timurid and Safavid Periods." In *The Cambridge History of Iran Vol. 6*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 973-74.

7.7 Implications of the Research

The results of this study imply that there is no single, simple representation of woman in at least one major author of Persian Sufism. These inconsistencies regarding the representation of women, especially women in positions of religious authority, suggests that if we investigate deeply the representations of gender in other Sufi authors, we will find different degrees of complexity and confusion within their representations as well.[486] I hope the thesis shows that if we approach the tradition with an eye to 'sift' it for evidence of patriarchal attitudes, we will certainly find what we are looking for, just as we would when employing the same selective technique to analyse modern representations of gender. However, if we acknowledge the moments of theoretical (and practical) misogynistic statements, and move beyond them to consider a holistic picture of the representation of women in a medieval Sufi context, we can generate a more complex image of Sufi attitudes towards women that more accurately depicts the 'constant struggle to hold gendered meanings in place.'[487] In the broadest sense, this research ultimately has some tangential impact on neo-Orientalist discourse and debates over 'women's position in Islam,' although it does not participate directly in these debates. Studies on medieval Islamic depictions of gender probably cannot help but be co-opted into politically motivated discussions regarding the history of the treatment and status of women in Islamicate societies. I would hope that the results presented here would inject some much-needed nuance into these debates.

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[486] Not all Sufi authors provide us with sufficient information to do this us, however. I found Sanā'ī's *mathnavīs*, for example, largely unhelpful for information on conceptions of femininity. Likely candidates of interest would be Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī.

[487] Scott, *Fantasy*, 5.

7.8 Avenues for Further Research

As a result of this study, further research might well be conducted on other mystical literary texts using the same lens to expand our knowledge about medieval Sufi attitudes towards gender. One could envision a fascinating comparison of gender representation in literary texts and to the interpretations provided in Islamic legal texts, to investigate the degree to which they conform, or not. Similarly there is room to explore the relationship between the construction of gender in literary texts such as ours and the medieval Islamic medical texts' conceptions of gender, sex and sexuality. This work on constructions of femininity could also benefit greatly from in-depth considerations of the representation of homosexuality, the practice of *shāhid-bāzī*, the role of the hermaphrodite and the catamite, and their relationships to femaleness. The hagiographies in particular leave much to be done, and by selecting a broader range of sources one could put the 'variants' approach (described in chapter 5) to excellent use with some of the female saints.[488] Further work could also be carried out to more thoroughly catalogue the differences between male and female saints' claims to authority. These sources could also be mined for historical, social data or be subjected to computational methods as described by Jürgen Paul.

While there remains much to be done in order to establish a more complete view of medieval Sufi attitudes towards questions of gender and sexuality, I hope this study takes one step toward the eventual goal of illuminating individual idiosyncratic

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[488] A few pilot studies like this have already been carried out for Umm ʿAlī, Rābiʿa, and Ḥafṣa bt. Sīrīn, for example. See Arezou Azad, "Female Mystics in Mediaeval Islam: The Quiet Legacy," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 56 (2013): 53–88; Ahmed Ragab, "Epistemic Authority of Women in the Medieval Middle East," *Hawwa* 8, no. 2 (October 1, 2010): 181–216. Laury Silvers' work on Ḥafṣa bt. Sīrīn is forthcoming at the time of writing.

conceptions of gender, unearthing trends in representations and schools of thought, and discerning changes over time through varying contexts. In regards to 'Aṭṭār's own views, I must conclude, that while God may not regard your forms, it seems that Farīd al-Dīn certainly does.

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9 APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: OVERLAPPING BIOGRAPHIES OF SUFI WOMEN

	Sulamī	Ibn al-Jawzī	Jāmī	‘Aṭṭār
Rābi‘a bt. ‘Adawiyya	1	588	585	9
Maryam of Baṣra	3	592	587	-
Mu‘ādha al-‘Adawiyya	5	584	589	-
Rayḥāna	8	632	588	-
Ghufayra al-‘Ābida	9	593	590	-
Sha‘wāna	14	630	591	-
Athāma	16	820	-	-
Kurdiyya	18	608	592	-
Umm Talq	19	597	-	-
Ḥafsa bt. Sīrīn	21	585	593	-
Ajrada al-‘Amiyya	25	589	-	-
Umm Salīm	26	931	-	-
Ubayda bt. Abī Kilāb	27	594	-	-
Rābi‘a Shāmī	29	823	594	-
Fāṭima of Nishapur	30	688	597	-
Umm Hārūn	31	824	-	-
Baḥriyya al-‘Ābida	32	601	-	-
Fāṭima al-Barda‘iyya	33	-	599	-
Zaytūna	37	-	598	-
Bishr's Sisters	50	361	-	-
Abda	51	822	-	-
Umm al-Aswad	13, 40	591	-	-
Mu'mina bt. Bahlūl	-	365	4	-
Lubāba	2, 22	783	-	-