

## On Losing One's Head: Ḥallājīan Motifs and Authorial Identity in Poems Ascribed to 'Aṭṭār

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In the concluding lines of his celebrated mystical epic, the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār made the following declaration:

This book is the adornment of time, offering a portion to both elite and common.

If a frozen piece of ice saw this book, it would happily emerge from the veil like the sun.

My poetry has a marvellous property, since it gives more results every time.

If it's easy for you to read a lot, it will certainly be sweeter for you every time.

This veiled bride in a teasing mood only gradually lets the veil fall open.  
*Till the resurrection, no one as selfless as I will ever write verse with pen on paper.*

I am casting forth pearls from the ocean of reality. My words are finished, and this is the sign.

If I praise myself a lot, how can that praise please anyone else?

But the expert himself knows my value, because the light of my moon is not hidden.<sup>1</sup>

This passage is remarkable for the boast it contains, in which 'Aṭṭār claims that no one has ever annihilated his ego as successfully as he. Conjoined as it is with a bold advertisement of the quality of 'Aṭṭār's literary works, this paradoxical boast of ego-annihilation raises a difficult question regarding the nature of the authorship of Sufi writings. If the goal of the Sufi is the annihilation of the self, what sort of self may be ascribed to the authors of the central writings of Sufism? In principle,

this question is an extension of the fundamental paradox of sainthood in Sufism: if sainthood means the extinction of the ego, how can the saint know that he is a saint? The concept of divinely inspired writings also parallels the ecstatic sayings (*shaḥīyyāt*) of the Sufis, which are in theory overflowings of inspiration that occur in the absence of the ego. As ‘Aṭṭār himself remarked in comparing Ḥallāj’s utterances with Moses’ encounter with the burning bush on Sinai, it was not the bush that spoke, but God. Aṭṭār’s declaration is a specimen of the rhetoric of sainthood, which permitted the spiritual elite to engage in a boasting contest (*mufākhara*) to demonstrate the extent of God’s favours to them.<sup>2</sup> The debates of literary historians over the authenticity of the literary works ascribed to ‘Aṭṭār collide with this paradoxical notion of selfless sainthood. Who is the real ‘Aṭṭār? The differing understandings of this question depend entirely on the basic presuppositions that interpreters bring to it.

Helmut Ritter memorably presented the issues surrounding ‘Aṭṭār’s authorial identity in the article he devoted to ‘Aṭṭār in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Here Ritter candidly admitted that he had completely revised his original understanding of ‘Aṭṭār’s writings. The problem, as Ritter saw it, was that ‘the works attributed to him [‘Aṭṭār] fall into three groups which differ so considerably in content and style that it is difficult to ascribe all three to the same person.’<sup>3</sup> Briefly, these three groups of writings are: (1) *mathnawī* poetic compositions (*Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, *Ilāhī-nāma*, *Asrār-nāma*), usually characterized by clear frame stories, containing a rich variety of narrative material; (2) mystical epics (*Ushtur-nāma*, *Jawhar al-dhāt*) focused more narrowly on the identity of God and the world, with frequent reference to Ḥallāj; and (3) other writings (*Lisān al-ghayb*, *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib*) characterized by a strongly Shi‘ite devotion to ‘Alī. Ritter himself had initially entertained the possibility that ‘Aṭṭār had undergone an evolution of both thought and style, in which he had ultimately converted to Shi‘ism in his old age. Sa‘īd Nafīsī, following the earlier researches of Maḥmūd Sherānī, had then demonstrated that a separate individual named ‘Aṭṭār Tūnī had in the fifteenth century composed the Shi‘ite writings of the third group. Nafīsī supposed that it was conceivable that the same person had authored the writings of the first and second groups but, while admitting this possibility, Ritter on the whole considered it unlikely. He went on to describe a fourth category of clearly spurious writings that had been falsely ascribed to ‘Aṭṭār.<sup>4</sup> More recently, François de Blois has concluded that seven works are authentic compositions of ‘Aṭṭār (five *mathnawī* narrative poems, plus a *Dīwān* of *ghazals* and the collection of *rubā’is* known as *Mukhtār-nāma*), and he has enumerated a total of twenty-five other works that may be considered apocryphal. Nevertheless, de Blois is willing to consider the possibility that three of these doubtful works (*Ushtur-nāma*, *Jawhar al-dhāt*, *Lisān al-ghayb*) may be in fact by ‘Aṭṭār, though this question requires further research.<sup>5</sup>

There are in fact several diverse criteria that scholars have used to determine the authenticity of the works attributed to ‘Aṭṭār. In the area of style, for instance, one may consider that narrative is a typical component in ‘Aṭṭār’s writings, and the relative prominence or lack of narrative could be one index by which to accept or reject a particular work. Likewise, the stylistic device of repetition or anaphora, which is used at great length in several doubtful works, has been cited as evidence for rejecting them, although it should be noted that the accepted works of ‘Aṭṭār display a certain taste for anaphora from time to time.<sup>6</sup> The age of particular manuscripts has been used as a criterion for judging certain works (or portions of works) as authentic or not. Metre could also be a factor, especially since some of the works which are considered apocryphal display surprising variations in metrical form, suggesting the possibility of different hands at work. From a thematic perspective, a focus on ‘Alī and Shi‘ism, an obsession with Ḥallāj, and excessive boasting have all served as indications for considering a work of ‘Aṭṭār as apocryphal. Another approach is to use autobiographical references in ‘Aṭṭār’s writings as a way of compiling an authentic canon of his works. But since the most detailed autobiographical information occurs in works (*Lisān al-ghayb*, *Maḥzar al-‘ajā’ib*) already judged to be doubtful, little actually remains that would allow us to fix ‘Aṭṭār or his evolution as a writer with any confidence.

Much depends, though, on how one is disposed to understand in particular the themes of ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry and his character as an author, and scholars differ in how they evaluate these questions. The lines quoted above from the conclusion to the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* were omitted from the excellent English translation by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis, on the grounds that this conclusion ‘consists largely of self-praise and is a distinct anticlimax after a poem devoted to the notion of passing beyond the Self.’<sup>7</sup> Although an argument against the authenticity of this passage might be made on the basis of the absence of the conclusion from some early manuscripts of the text,<sup>8</sup> Darbandi and Davis reject the conclusion as being thematically and dramatically at odds with the rest of the poem. Yet there are difficulties with applying an overly strict construction of authorial consistency. One still has to face the fact that, up until the dawn of modern criticism, the chief expositors of the tradition of Persian Sufism, such as Jāmī, have accepted even the dubious works as authentic compositions of ‘Aṭṭār. Even in recent times, there have been regular publications of the doubtful works, produced either in blissful ignorance of the controversy or decidedly in opposition to scholarly orthodoxy, although these editions are not always easy to find.<sup>9</sup> How have the various defenders of the dubious works understood their themes and their author?

In the generally accepted works of ‘Aṭṭār (*Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, *Ilāhī-nāma*, *Asrār-nāma*, *Muṣibat-nāma*), for example, the Sufi martyr Ḥallāj frequently appears with brief references to his mystical state and dramatic end, which ‘Aṭṭār portrayed so eloquently in his hagiographical anthology, the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*.<sup>10</sup> At the

same time, however, these poems contain blatant examples of boasting, in which ‘Aṭṭār claims to be the greatest poet of all time; sometimes this boasting includes a rejection of poetry, which has special reference to the role of court poet.<sup>11</sup> All this is combined with the mystical insistence that one annihilate the ego. In comparison, the doubtful works (*Lisān al-ghayb*, *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib*, *Pand-nāma*) may be said to contain the very same elements, but in sometimes greatly exaggerated form. In particular, the theme of headlessness – a universal theme perhaps – becomes a Ḥallājīan metaphor for transcending the self, particularly in the *Bisar-nāma*, or *The Headless Epic*.<sup>12</sup> Thus the mere appearance of these themes would in itself not be a convincing reason for rejecting the texts completely, although one still would need to account for the different style and presentation of these themes and their author – such as the remarkable claim (found in the *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib* and *Pand-nāma*) of the ultimate unity of Ḥallāj, ‘Aṭṭār, and ‘Alī.

In the examination which follows, I juxtapose a number of passages from both the accepted and doubtful writings of ‘Aṭṭār with the interpretations that certain readers have brought to ‘Aṭṭār. While it may be intrinsically impossible to reach an understanding of mystical authorship according to positivist standards, it is nevertheless useful to clarify the reading strategies employed by various interpreters to illuminate the conflicting concepts of authorship that they bring to the subject. But simple decisions on the nature of authorship ignore a series of difficult issues, including the question, ‘Is the human self infinite or finite?’<sup>13</sup> Even without a consideration of postmodern literary theory, it is by no means unproblematic to define authors by either stylistic or thematic consistency. As Maimonides pointed out, there are many reasons besides drunkenness and madness that may cause an author to be inconsistent in the treatment of a given subject. A good case in point from Islamic culture would be Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, who was notorious for dealing with the same subject differently for diverse audiences; certain critics have consequently rejected some works ascribed to him on the grounds of inconsistency. By provisionally dealing with the doubtful works as part of the overall corpus of ‘Aṭṭār’s writings, we at least open up the possibility of understanding how he has been understood by generations of interpreters.

The headless Ḥallāj is standard figure in such scenes as the following from ‘Aṭṭār’s *Asrār-nāma*,

They saw Ḥallāj in a dream one night, his head cut off, but with cup in hand.  
They asked, ‘How is it your head is cut off? Tell – how long you  
have chosen this cup?’  
He said, ‘The king of blessed name gave this cup to the headless one.  
‘Those who forget their own heads can drink from this spiritual cup.’<sup>14</sup>

‘Aṭṭār indeed proclaims Ḥallāj as his teacher in several of his lyrical verses:

That very fire that fell into Ḥallāj is the same that fell into my life.<sup>15</sup>  
 The story of that sage Ḥallāj at this time is gladdening the hearts of the pious.  
 Within the breast and the desert of the heart, his tale became the guide for  
 ‘Aṭṭār.<sup>16</sup>

In the Sufi tradition, authorities such as Jāmī accepted ‘Aṭṭār as having had a mystical relationship with Ḥallāj that fell into the category of Uwaysī initiation; like the Prophet Muḥammad’s contemporary, Uways al-Qaranī, ‘Aṭṭār was considered a spiritual disciple who did not require physical or temporal proximity in order to obtain a genuine mystical initiation. Jāmī quoted with approval the remark of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī that ‘the light of Maṣṣūr [Ḥallāj] after one hundred fifty years manifested to the spirit of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār and became his spiritual authority.’<sup>17</sup> Some stories even claim that, when the Mongols attacked Nishapur, ‘Aṭṭār went to his death by decapitation, welcoming his executioner as a manifestation of his beloved.<sup>18</sup> That headless destiny would certainly be an extreme form of Ḥallājīanism!

If ‘Aṭṭār was indeed on the Ḥallājīan path towards annihilating the self, this may explain in part his ambivalence toward writing. On one hand, he was not comfortable with the role of the poet as flatterer of kings. ‘I have not eaten the food of any tyrant, nor have I signed any book with my pen-name.’<sup>19</sup> At times there is a discomfort with the role of the poet: ‘Don’t count me any longer as one of the poets; don’t see me any longer with the eye of the poets.’<sup>20</sup> At the same time, ‘Aṭṭār put the following words into the mouth of a nameless Sufi, who may be expressing ‘Aṭṭār’s own mixed attitude towards his poetry:

My entire *Dīvān* is madness; intellect is a stranger to these words.  
 I don’t know what I’m saying – strange;  
 how long will I seek what is not lost? – strange  
 ...But I am excused in what I say, even if I recite my own poetry...  
 Since I saw no one trustworthy in the whole world, I spend time  
 reciting my own poetry.<sup>21</sup>

The possibility that ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry is incomprehensible to others does not prevent him from making remarkable claims, however, including being ‘the seal of the poets.’<sup>22</sup> All these remarks come from ‘Aṭṭār’s accepted writings.

Much in the same vein can be found in the apocryphal works. A sampling of Ḥallājīan boasts from the *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib* includes the following:

‘Aṭṭār, like Maṣṣūr, cries ‘I am the Truth’, striking the entire world on fire.<sup>23</sup>  
 The secrets of God are in my soul; my faith is the manifestation of the  
 secret of God.<sup>24</sup>

There is no bird like ‘Aṭṭār in the world; he is the nightingale of this garden.<sup>25</sup>  
Your ‘Aṭṭār came to know the meaning through God; he declared this in the  
way of Manṣūr.<sup>26</sup>

Here one also finds the repeated declarations of phrases, the anaphora referred to above, in which the poet begins fifteen or twenty lines in the same words, ‘Go forth like Manṣūr, to the gallows of annihilation, till you see the light of God beyond encounter...’<sup>27</sup> In the *Haylaj-nāma*, extended passages ring variations on Ḥallāj’s famous cry, ‘I am the Truth’ (*anā al-Ḥaqq*), as in the following:

From that wine, cry, ‘I am the Truth’ like me; behold yourself in your body,  
through your body.  
From that wine, cry, ‘I am the Truth’ at the lover’s door, for you will see the  
grace of all – none but you is in the world.  
From that wine, cry, ‘I am the Truth’ like Ḥallāj. Come out on top of heaven,  
wearing that crown.  
From that wine, I have drunk, my chosen shaykh; I have most certainly seen  
the beloved in reality.<sup>28</sup>

Ḥallāj is described bluntly as the thief who has stolen and revealed reality: ‘Manṣūr, you have spoken the absolute secret: ‘I am God,’ you have stated, ‘I am the Truth.’<sup>29</sup> ‘Aṭṭār focuses furiously on union with Ḥallāj:

You are one with me, you rebel Manṣūr, and tomorrow I shall consume you  
with fire!  
You are one with me in heart and soul – you are I, and I am you,  
master of union!<sup>30</sup>

In verses of stupefying grandiosity, ‘Aṭṭār claims to be Ḥallāj, God, and the sun and the stars; all creation is seeking his mercy.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, we find in these apocryphal works a new emphasis on the role of ‘Alī, who somehow takes the leading role in an apotheosis in which ‘Aṭṭār and Ḥallāj both merge.

If you have faith, you become all light; you make the boast, ‘I am the Truth,’  
like Manṣūr.  
‘I am the Truth,’ says that enlightened pure one. He drank the wine of  
longing from the hand of ‘Alī.<sup>32</sup>

Elsewhere ‘Aṭṭār’s apostrophes are dedicated to ‘Alī alone:

Who am I to describe you in speech? For you are hidden in all souls.  
 Commander of the Faithful! I have spoken my soul, threading pearl of  
 meaning upon meanings.  
 Commander of the Faithful! Tell me the secret of God’s secrets face to face,  
 So my heart is clear and my soul complete, and I may recite your praises  
 in full!<sup>33</sup>

In long invocations addressed to ‘Alī, ‘Aṭṭār himself becomes a second Maṣṣūr in search of the divine essence.<sup>34</sup> In turn ‘Alī has revealed to him all of his secrets.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the bold claims made in the apocryphal works, there is occasionally a delicate reflection on the phenomenon of ecstatic speech (*shaṭḥ*), in which we see the flickering of the authorial ego in the storm of divinity:

What am I saying? What do I know? Who am I? In listening and speaking,  
 who am I?  
 He is speaking, like light in my body, for by his tongue I tell my story.  
 I relate these words from him, giving guidance to the people of the world.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, ‘Aṭṭār occasionally shifts his authorial ego entirely to Ḥallāj: ‘All of the secret that lies in the essence of the book is from that Maṣṣūr, and is unveiled in him.’<sup>37</sup> At other times, the shift to identification with God is complete: ‘It is not ‘Aṭṭār, behold! It is the beloved who is in the text and the proof. Behold!’<sup>38</sup> Indeed, we find unadulterated boasts about annihilation of the self: ‘It was reality; I myself saw annihilation (*fanā*). I saw annihilation and arrived at divine eternity (*baqā*).’<sup>39</sup> Hyperbolic claims are made about the efficacy of these writings, and readers of the *Jawhar al-dhāt* and the *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib* are promised miraculous results.<sup>40</sup>

It would be easy to multiply examples of Ḥallājian headlessness, deification, and adoration of ‘Alī from the apocryphal writings, given how large all of these works are. It is difficult to deny that these works exhibit a much more extreme emphasis on these topics, and that at times they become monotonous in their relentless theophanic assertions. How have these works been understood by those who defend their authenticity?

The most prominent scholar to embrace these apocryphal works as genuine compositions by ‘Aṭṭār was undoubtedly Louis Massignon who, in the course of decades of work devoted to the study of Ḥallāj, paid special attention to the role that ‘Aṭṭār played in the dissemination of the Ḥallājian legend. Massignon maintained that ‘it was above all due to the literary works of ‘Aṭṭār that the Ḥallājian theme became one of the most famous ‘leitmotifs’ in Iranian Muslim poetics,

wherever Islam was propagated together with the love of Persian poetry.<sup>41</sup> The remarkable emphasis on Ḥallāj found in the apocryphal ‘Aṭṭārian works required Massignon to deal with the issue of authenticity raised by Nafisī and others. Massignon brushed aside the theory of pseudonymous authorship of these works, endorsing instead Jāmī’s quotation from Rūmī, that the light of Manṣūr after many years had transfigured the spirit of ‘Aṭṭār.<sup>42</sup> Massignon acknowledged that there had been tampering with the texts of works like the *Jawhar al-dhāt*, remarking that Attar’s ‘extraordinary literary fecundity may perhaps also be explained by the flowering a century later of a cycle of pastiches,’ which seems to be a tacit admission of pseudonymous composition.<sup>43</sup> Massignon described the ‘Aṭṭārian apocrypha as ‘amazing collections flowing with repeated outbursts, whose dimensions are as immense as the Hindu epics or the interior monologues of ... Joyce, ... in which ‘Aṭṭār tirelessly sings of the mystical drowning of the soul in divine totality, using Ḥallāj, “the highway brigand” (*duzd-i rāh*), as the model and herald of this ardent annihilation.’<sup>44</sup> Giving emphasis to the decapitation motif, Massignon provided numerous examples of Ḥallājian themes in these writings. It is notable that Massignon depicted ‘Aṭṭār’s intellectual lineage with considerable flexibility, linking him to the philosophers Suhrawardī and Avicenna as well as to the Ismā‘īlīs.<sup>45</sup> Massignon became almost rhapsodic in describing works like the *Haylaj-nāma*: ‘This esoteric book, in which ‘Aṭṭār reveals to us all of his thoughts on Ḥallāj, is very important. It is not only a canonization, it is a total and absolute divinization.’<sup>46</sup> At the risk of appearing dismissive, one feels obliged here to point out that Massignon had a tendency to see Ḥallāj everywhere. What was frankly a life-long obsession with Ḥallāj impelled Massignon to accept as canonical those ‘Aṭṭārian works that canonized Ḥallāj.

Yet as the ongoing publication of ‘Aṭṭārian apocrypha reveals, there are evidently audiences, particularly in Iran, who continue to find reasons for accepting the validity of these works. One recent example is Qādir Faḍīlī, who has written on ‘Aṭṭār as well as on contemporary religious thought in Iran.<sup>47</sup> Faḍīlī’s large subject concordance to the writings of ‘Aṭṭār furnishes a distinctively Shi‘ite perspective on the ‘Aṭṭārian apocrypha. Faḍīlī begins, however, from an unusual methodological position, arguing that the very concept of pseudonymous authorship and pseudepigrapha is illogical:

Some believe that this book (*Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib*) and the *Pand-nāma* are falsely attributed to ‘Aṭṭār, and their proof is the weakness of metre in this book. Thus they say someone else published his own works in the name of ‘Aṭṭār. This theory does not appear to be correct with such reasoning, because no one who is an author with ability attributes his work to another.<sup>48</sup>

Faḍīlī thus regards the ‘Aṭṭār who wrote the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, *Ilāhī-nāma*, and *Muṣibat-nāma* as identical with the author of the *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib*. Acknowledging that there are problems with the rhyme and metre in certain writings, Faḍīlī

pieces this together with autobiographical statements in the apocryphal *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib* (‘Aṭṭār’s best work, in his opinion), in which ‘Aṭṭār states his age as over 100 years; old age and weakness, he concludes, are responsible for any slips on ‘Aṭṭār’s part.<sup>49</sup>

Moving on to the question of Shi‘ite references, Fāḍilī maintains that the challenge to the apocryphal works is motivated by anti-Shi‘ite prejudice.

It is only Sunni fanaticism that motivates the questioning or rejection of these works as being by ‘Aṭṭār, because his devotion to ‘Alī and the Shi‘ite Imāms makes it clear that he is Shi‘ite. All true gnostics, even if they observe Sunni practice and the edicts of the four Sunni imāms, from the viewpoint of the mystics, their creed is Shi‘ite and they consider themselves Shi‘ite. Their *Dīvāns* and books are filled with poems in praise of the family of the Prophet and their role in the order of existence. This applies to many great past masters of mysticism and literature, such as Rūmī, Sa‘dī, Sanā‘ī, Nizāmī, Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Qayṣarī, etc.<sup>50</sup>

The assumption that all true mystics are Shi‘ites handily eliminates any question of inconsistency about the move toward veneration of ‘Alī in the apocryphal works.

Nevertheless, Fāḍilī is not able to overcome certain critical theological reservations about the radicalization of Ḥallāj in these ‘Aṭṭārian works, particularly the blatant tilt toward divinization that shifts from Ḥallāj’s ‘I am the Truth’ into an outright ‘I am God’. This he sees as extremism, fundamentally in contradiction with the mystical teachings with which Ḥallāj inspired ‘Aṭṭār, as Rūmī and Jāmī have attested. Thus a certain suspicion attaches to these writings of ‘Aṭṭār insofar as he presents Ḥallāj in such a radical form.<sup>51</sup> Fāḍilī therefore takes ‘Aṭṭār to task for having written the verse, ‘I am God, I am God, I am God!’ Fāḍilī views this as logically impossible, because the very use of the separate words ‘I’ and ‘God’ demonstrates an inescapable duality.<sup>52</sup>

In the end, Fāḍilī is deeply uncomfortable with the self-praise that appears in many ‘Aṭṭārian writings. For one thing, he considers this to involve implicit criticism and denigration of others, as when ‘Aṭṭār styles himself ‘seal of the poets’, or ‘the unique pearl (Farīd) of the age’. Fāḍilī concedes that there is an ambiguity in the Ḥallājian claim, ‘I am the Truth’. It can mean the elimination of the ego and total submission to God through annihilation. Amazingly, Fāḍilī quotes a poem from Khomeini to this effect: ‘I abandoned my self and clashed the cymbals of “I am the truth”; like Manṣūr, I became a customer of the gallows.’ In this manner Fāḍilī demonstrates at length what he sees as the difference between legitimate proximity to God and extreme claims to union with God that no genuine prophet or saint has ever made.<sup>53</sup> Throughout his interpretation of ‘Aṭṭār, Fāḍilī has recourse to firm dogmatic principles that allow him, with a certain circularity of logic, both

to claim as authentic the disputed works of ‘Aṭṭār and to criticize them when they fall short of his standards.

The persistence of apocrypha and pseudepigraphic writing has been noted in many of the world’s literary traditions. While it is perhaps easy to dismiss such works as forgeries, many questions remain, particularly when recent criticism runs into long-established traditions in which these writings have been accepted (this has been particularly true of the criticism of Biblical texts and other sacred writings). In part, the production of pseudepigrapha forms part of the reception history of texts, and it is particularly challenging to assign a motive for the production of such works. Is it vanity? A crude attempt to gain consideration for writings that would otherwise be dismissed? An innocent and admiring tribute? A confident submission of truths considered to be inspired? There are many possibilities.<sup>54</sup> The following brief remarks are offered as a speculative reconstruction of this particular process.

One may assume that the works of ‘Aṭṭār were initially in private circulation in Khurāsān, and that they began to attain more popularity in the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This period coincides with an increase in ‘Alid piety in Persianate lands, as well as the popularization of monistic philosophies summarized under the heading of ‘the unity of existence’ (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), particularly through the medium of Persian poetry. The annihilation of the authorial ego leaves open special opportunities for would-be imitators of the great masters of Sufi literature. The boldness of Ḥallāj was so captivating, after all, precisely because he revealed the secret (*ifshā’ al-sirr*), publicizing the intimacy of his relationship with God. Although some judged this revelation to be a crime, others clearly took it to be a licence and authorization for new authors to declare the same truth, that they too had become one with God. The very popularity of ‘Aṭṭār’s writings as manifestos of mysticism made them almost a *sui generis* category of literature: what we might call the poetry of annihilation (*fanā’iyyāt*), in parallel with the poetry of wine (*khamriyyāt*) or unconventionality (*qalandariyyāt*). Thus ‘Aṭṭār, like ‘Umar Khayyām, may be said to have become ‘no longer a historical person but a genre.’<sup>55</sup> From the frequently quoted testimony of Rūmī and Jāmī, we know that ‘Aṭṭār has been considered to be particularly inspired by the spirit of Ḥallāj. It is less well known that ‘Aṭṭār himself has performed similar initiatic functions in certain Sufi circles, particularly those associated with the Shaṭṭārī Sufi order. In the complicated lineages claimed by the sixteenth-century Shaṭṭārī master Shaykh Muḥammad Ghawth, Farid al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār plays a central and inspiring role.<sup>56</sup> Both the annihilation of the ego and the expansion of ‘Aṭṭār’s popularity make it easier to understand how his literary oeuvre might miraculously expand as well.

The growth of a Shi’ite interpretation of or response to ‘Aṭṭār should be no more surprising than the extension of the Ḥallājian message. According to Ivanow, ‘Aṭṭār was particularly popular with Ismā‘īli readers, and we may assume that they

brought their own hermeneutic to bear upon his writings.<sup>57</sup> At roughly the same time that the 'Aṭṭārian apocrypha may have been produced (i.e., the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), the works of Rūzbihān Baqlī were likewise undergoing alteration in a Twelver Shi'ite direction. In their biographies of Ruzbihan, his descendants typically translated his Arabic writings into Persian with dramatic shifts of emphasis, in which 'Alī takes over the central role as dispenser of mystical knowledge.<sup>58</sup> While the blatant Shi'ite partisanship of Faḍilī may be overdone, it forms part of a long tradition of strongly Shi'ite interpretation of Sufi texts.

The critical evaluation of the writings of 'Aṭṭār is a fairly recent phenomenon. Before the twentieth century, it was normal to read all the epics ascribed to 'Aṭṭār as part of a continuous whole. An eclectic and inclusive reading strategy was a characteristic aspect of the history of these texts. It is certainly legitimate for scholars to raise questions about these works in terms of their style and themes. But the changes in Ritter's views on this question, the Ḥallājīan enthusiasm of Massignon, and the Shi'ite rationalism of Faḍilī demonstrate how differently readers continue to approach the 'Aṭṭārian corpus, even after the introduction of modern criticism. In short, there is still no agreement about who 'Aṭṭār really was. This debate would no doubt have been amusing to 'Aṭṭār, who after all had so eloquently expressed this fundamental paradox, the boast of the author without ego: 'Till the resurrection, no one as selfless as I will ever write verse with pen on paper.'

### Notes

1. Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār Nishābūrī, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, ed. Muḥammad Javīd Mashkūr (3rd ed., Tehran, 1968), p. 288, lines 1–9 (emphasis mine).

2. I have explored the topic of the rhetoric of sainthood in several places: *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany, NY, 1984); 'The Man without Attributes: Ibn 'Arabi's Interpretation of Abu Yazid al-Bistami', *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, 13 (1993), pp. 1–18; *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism* (London, 1996).

3. Helmut Ritter, "'Aṭṭār, Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrīhīm', *El*, vol. 1, pp. 752b–755a.

4. See also B. Reinert, "'Aṭṭār, Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn', *E Ir*, vol. 2, pp. 20–25.

5. François de Blois, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey* (London, 1994), vol. 5, part 2, *Poetry ca. A.D. 1100 to 1225*, pp. 270–313. (But the difficulty of achieving consensus is indicated by Eve Feuillebois-Pierunek's discussion of the authenticity of the *Mukhtār-nāma* in her chapter above –eds.)

6. As is demonstrated by the J.C. Bürgel's essay above –eds.

7. Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *The Conference of the Birds*, tr. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (Harmondsworth, NY, 1984), Introduction, p. 25. The translators also omitted the proemium, on the grounds that the lengthy praise of God contained there is irrelevant to the main thrust of the book.

8. De Blois, *Persian Literature*, p. 281, notes that certain old MSS of *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* lack this *khātima*.

9. The works of ‘Aṭṭār, both accepted and doubtful, were frequently published in lithographed editions in British India, often in the form of large anthologies. For a comprehensive description of editions, commentaries, and translations into Indian languages, plus detailed accounts of manuscripts in Indian libraries, see Riḍā Muṣṭafawī Sabzawīrī, “‘Aṭṭār dar shibh-qārra-yi Hind (Puzhūhishī dar nuskhahā-yi khāṭṭī va chāpī va sharḥhā-yi āthār-i ‘Aṭṭār); *Qand-i Pārsī* (New Delhi, 1373 Sh./1994), no. 8, pp. 1–126. Modern Iranian editions of the works of ‘Aṭṭār not mentioned by de Blois include the following: *Haylāj-nāma*, ed. Aḥmad Khwushniviṣ (Tehran, n.d.); *Jawhar al-dhāt*, ed. Muḥammad Mīr Kamīlī (Tehran, 1936); *Jawhar al-dhāt* (Tehran, n.d.; repr., Tehran, 2001); *Majmū‘ayi az āthār-i Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ‘Aṭṭār Nishābūrī: Bisar-nāma, Bulbul-nāma, Sī faṣl, Pand-nāma, Nuzḥat al-aḥbāb, Bayān-i irshād*, ed. Aḥmad Khwushniviṣ (Tehran, 1984); *Mazḥar al-‘ajā‘ib*, ed. Taqī Ḥātīmī Nishābūrī (Tehran, 1966); *Mazḥar al-‘ajā‘ib va Mazḥar al-asrār*, ed. Aḥmad Khwushniviṣ (Tehran, 1991); *Ushtur-nāma*, ed. Mahdī Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1960; repr., Tehran, 1979); *Waṣlat-nāma* (Tehran, 1957). Recent studies on dubious works of ‘Aṭṭār include Ḥusayn Ḥaydarkhinī, *Andīshāha-yi ‘Aṭṭār dar Lisān al-ghayb va Waṣlat-nāma va Miftāḥ al-irāda* (Tehran, 1997).

10. Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār Nishāpūrī, *Ilihī-nāma*, ed. Fū‘ād Rūḥānī (Tehran, 1351 Sh./1972), pp. 86–87, 246; *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, pp. 150, 276, 311. On Ḥallājian themes in ‘Aṭṭār, see also Meer, index, s.n. ‘Ḥallāc’; Riḍā Ashraf-zāda, *Tajallī-yi ramz va rivāyat dar shī‘r-i ‘Aṭṭār-i Nishābūrī* (Tehran, 1373 Sh./1994), pp. 239–245; Aḥmad Shawqī Nawbar, *Guft: Ān Yār ... Shakhṣīyyāt-i Ḥallāj va bāztāb-i ān dar ash‘ār-i panj shī‘r-i buzurg (Sanā‘ī, ‘Aṭṭār, Mawlawī, Ḥāfiz va Ṣā‘ib)* (Tabriz, 1377 Sh./1998), pp. 72–75; Marina Reisner, ‘Ma‘āni-yi qiṣṣa-i Ḥallāj dar ghazaliyyāt-i ‘Aṭṭār’, *Kayhān-i Farhangī*, 12, (Adhar 1374 Sh./1995), pp. 32–33; Natalia Chalisova, ‘Ḥallāj az nigāh-i ‘Aṭṭār’, *ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

11. Reinert, “‘Aṭṭār”, p. 22a.

12. For the theme of decapitation treated comparatively, see Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, ‘Headless Magicians; and an Act of Truth’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 64 (1944), pp. 215–217.

13. Donald E. Pease, ‘Author’, in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, ed., *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago and London, 1990), p. 105.

14. Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār Nishābūrī, *Asrār-nāma*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīmī (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997), p. 42.

15. Dn, p. 127, v. 2215.

16. Dn, p. 228, vv. 4221–4222.

17. Nūr al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmīn Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-uns min ḥaḍarāt al-quds*, ed. Maḥmūd ‘Ābidī (Tehran, 1370 A.Hsh/1991), p. 597. See also Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad Aflākī, *The Feats of the Knowers of God (Manāqeb al-‘areḥīn)*, tr. John O’Kane, *Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts*, 43 (Leiden, 2002), p. 399, para. 570.

18. Muḥammad Ibrāhīmī, introduction to *Asrār-nāma*, pp. [ii–iv], citing Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Alī Ṣafī, *Laṭā‘if al-ṭawā‘if*.

19. *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, p. 293, line 16.

20. *Asrār-nāma*, p. 23.

21. *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, p. 292, vv. 9–10, 16; p. 293, v. 1.

22. *Muṣibat-nāma*, p. 364, bottom line.

23. Lacking access to independent editions of these titles, I have consulted the extensive

subject concordances to the works of ‘Aṭṭār compiled by Qādir Fāḍilī, *Farhang-i mawḍū‘i adab-i Pārsī, mawḍū‘-bandī va naqd va barrasī*, 1-2: *Mantīq al-ṭayr va Pand-nāma*; 3-4: *Asrār-nāma va Haylāj-nāma*; 5-6: *Muṣībat-nāma va Mazhar al-‘ajī‘ib* (Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995), who unfortunately does not provide exact information on the text editions he has used. This verse comes from *Mazhar al-‘ajī‘ib*, p. 25 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:414).

24. *Mazhar al-‘ajī‘ib*, p. 45 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:416).

25. *Mazhar al-‘ajī‘ib*, p. 61 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:416).

26. *Mazhar al-‘ajī‘ib*, p. 152 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:418).

27. *Mazhar al-‘ajī‘ib*, pp. 57-58 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:368). Several of these lines substitute Abū Dharr for Manṣūr. Other interesting anaphora passages use phrases like ‘I am not crazy, but ...’ in *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 112 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:338-39); ‘I am the secret you have spoken ...,’ *ibid.*, p. 159 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:339); ‘It is not Manṣūr ...,’ *ibid.*, p. 112 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:342).

28. *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 82 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:187); see Fāḍilī, 5-6:184-93, for further examples on this topic.

29. *Haylāj-nāma*, pp. 37-39 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:387-88).

30. *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 42 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:388).

31. *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 247 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:396).

32. *Pand-nāma*, p. 115 (Fāḍilī, 1-2:243).

33. *Mazhar al-‘ajī‘ib*, p. 181 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:412).

34. *Mazhar al-‘ajī‘ib*, pp. 242-243 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:422-23).

35. *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 203 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:343).

36. *Mazhar al-‘ajī‘ib*, p. 42 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:415).

37. *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 70 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:389).

38. *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 352 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:340).

39. *Haylāj-nāma*, p. 181 (Fāḍilī, 5-6:355).

40. *Mazhar al-‘ajī‘ib*, p. 8 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:473); *ibid.*, p. 45 (Fāḍilī, 3-4:474).

41. Louis Massignon, *The Passion of Al-Ḥallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islām*, tr. and ed. Herbert Mason (Princeton, NJ, 1994), vol. 2, *The Survival of al-Ḥallāj*, pp. 361-362.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 362.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 363.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 364.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 382. Fritz Meier has also explored similarities between Ismaili thought and the accepted works of ‘Aṭṭār in ‘Ismailiten und Mystik im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert,’ *Persica*, 16 (2000), pp. 9-29. (On which, see also the first essay of this volume by Hermann Landolt – eds.)

46. Massignon, *The Passion of Al-Ḥallāj*, p. 385.

47. Qādir Fāḍilī, *Andīsha-i ‘Aṭṭār: taḥlīl-i āfāq-i andīsha-i Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār Nīshābūrī* (Tehran, 1995), to which I have unfortunately not had access; *idem.*, *Khāṭṭ-i qirmīz: naqd va barrasī-yi Kitāb-i Farbihtar az idī‘uluzhī* (Tehran, 1994), a critique of Farbihtar *az idī‘uluzhī* by ‘Abd al-Karīm Surūsh; *idem.*, *Yād-i yūr: 160 khāṭira az ‘allāma-yi ustād Muḥammad Taqī Ja‘farī, va chand maqāla-yi digar dar khuṣūṣ-i vay* (Tehran, 1999).

48. Fāḍilī, *Farhang* (see above, n. 22), 3-4:16.

49. Fāḍilī, *Farhang*, 3-4:17.

50. Fāḍilī, *Farhang*, 3-4:18.

51. Fāḍilī, *Farhang*, 5-6:16.

52. Fāḍilī, *Farhang*, 1–2:434–35, citing *Pand-nāma*, p. 55.
53. Fāḍilī, *Farhang*, 5–6:440–45.
54. For methodological reflections on pseudonymity in New Testament studies, see Frank W. Hughes, ‘Pseudonymity as Rhetoric: A Prolegomenon to the Study of Pauline Pseudepigrapha’, *Journal for the Study of Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament*, available online at <http://rhetjournal.net/Hughes.html>, accessed July 15, 2003.
55. De Blois, *Persian Literature*, p. 363.
56. Muḥammad Salīm Akhtār, ‘Ta’thīr-i ‘Aṭṭār-i Nīshābūrī dar shibh-qārā...’, *Haft guftār darbāra-yi Sanā’ī va ‘Aṭṭār va ‘Irāqī* (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996), pp. 129–142.
57. See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 454, references cited in n. 38.
58. Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli*, esp. ch. 3.