

CAMERON CROSS

The Many Colors of Love in Nizāmī's *Haft Paykar* Beyond the Spectrum

Abstract

This article is a study of the many 'colors' of love in Nizāmī Ganjavī's *Haft paykar* (*The Seven Figures*), with special attention paid to the (evidently) dichotomous poles of white (purity) and black (concupiscence). The argument is divided into four sections: after introducing the *Haft paykar* and summarizing some of the scholarship that has been done to crack the code of its color symbolism, I survey these thematic poles as they occur in several landmark medical, philosophical, and poetic texts of Islamic tradition. This provides the basis for an in-depth discussion of the Stories of the Black and White Domes in the *Haft paykar*, where I observe how the two episodes, when read from this context, seem to support a linear progression from 'black' love to 'white,' with the latter presumably marking the point of apotheosis. In the final section, however, I consider how the stories resist such a straightforward reading, and indeed recursively feed into each other in such a way to suggest that neither color of love can fully exist or function without the other. I propose that the contrast of white and black in the *Haft paykar* is not sufficiently read as a static dichotomy of symbols; it rather evokes a dynamic interplay of light and shadow that hints at a reality beyond the sum of its parts, a pre-prismatic totality of which *all* colors of love are merely those refractions visible to the naked eye.

1. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. The Persian is taken from the edition of the *Haft paykar* by Ritter and Rypka (1934); note that this edition preserves many of the orthographic features of older Persian, such as the postvocalic *ḏ* instead of *ḏ* as it appears today (e.g., *بود* instead of *بود*). For cross-reference, the numeration of this edition (chapter.line) corresponds exactly with the newer edition of *Sarvatiyān* and the English translation by Julie Scott Meisami. My transliteration system is a slightly modified version of the one used by the *International Journal for Middle East Studies*; the biggest changes are that I represent the postvocalic *ḏ* with *ḏ* and maintain the older Persian vowels *ē* and *ō*, as in the words *pēsh* (پیش) and *gōr* (گور).

Introduction

Our story begins with a king of boundless munificence who housed and fed any guest at his court, asking only for a strange tale or some news from abroad in return. One day, however, a man dressed in black from head to toe appeared at the gate; intrigued, the king demanded to know the story of this unusual garb. "No one knows the story of this blackness, save for those who wear it" ("z-īn siyāhī khabar nadāraḏ kas • magar ān k-īn siyāh dāraḏ u bas," 32.60), replied the stranger, an answer that did little to satisfy the king's curiosity.¹ After much cajoling, the traveler finally gave in and revealed that the answer to this question would be found in far-off China. Without de-

lay, the king packed his bags and set off for the east. Eventually, he arrived at a town whose inhabitants, like the stranger, wore nothing but black, but they were as tight-lipped about their attire as his guest had been. With no other recourse, the king managed to secure the aid of a local butcher, showering him with gifts and gold until the man felt morally obliged to divulge the secret, loath as he was to do so. He led the king out of the city to a desolate ruin, where a basket lay on the ground, a bit of rope tied uselessly to its handle. There, the king was bade to sit; and as he did, the basket turned into a massive bird that bore him away into the sky! The terrified king clung on for dear life until he found himself suspended above a pleasant green meadow, where he said a prayer, let go, and tumbled down to the grass.

The following night, an amazing thing happened: a court of regal women assembled in the glade and began to feast, presided over by the beautiful fairy-born queen, Turktāz. She welcomed the king into the gathering and sat him on her throne, where he was served the finest of life's pleasures: delectable food, ambrosian wine, and a night with his pick of the lovely ladies in the queen's entourage. Though he had all his heart could desire, there was one thing still beyond the king's reach – Turktāz herself – and his love for her increased by the day. Though he begged the queen to accept his tryst, her response was always the same: be patient, and soon you'll get your wish. After thirty days of this exquisite torment, the king could no longer contain himself, and attempted to seize the queen by force. At this, she told the king to close his eyes, and he would attain what he so ardently desired. Delirious with anticipation, the king did as he was told – only to open his eyes and find himself once again in the ruined landscape, his regal throne replaced by the humble basket. He had indeed gained what he sought – the answer to the riddle of the robes of black – but this was small comfort, knowing now the price he had paid for it. Consumed by grief at his misfortune, the king too donned the black robes of mourning and wore them to the end of his days.

Our second story begins not with Paradise lost, but Paradise found: there was once a young man of exemplary beauty, wisdom, and (above all) chastity, who lived in a splendid garden surrounded by high walls that kept it (and him) safe from thieves and the evil eye. One day, however, returning home from his Friday prayers, the youth found the gate to his garden locked from the inside! Knocking on the door brought no answer, so the man made a breach in the wall and

crept inside, where he was immediately apprehended by two women standing watch. When they found that he was not a burglar, but indeed the owner of the garden, they quickly apologized and explained that all the maidens of the town had gathered in this spot for a feast; if he wished, they would be happy to make some introductions on his behalf. The youth was brought to a place where he could survey the festivities in secret, and as his gaze fell upon the beautiful women below, any vows of chastity he had made disappeared like smoke – the narrator interjects, “Behold unbelief! Long live the faith!” (“kāfirī bīn zahī musalmānī,” 38.136). One girl in particular, an enchanting harp-player, especially caught his eye, and with the help of his newfound allies, they made arrangements for a secret rendezvous.

Alas, it was not to be, for everywhere the couple met, something inevitably went wrong. The foundation of their first chamber was faulty and collapsed over their heads; later, they met in a secluded spot in the garden, only to be surprised by a savage cat as it pounced at a bird and landed on the lovers instead. The couple then sought refuge in a thicket, where an even stranger event took place: a field-mouse nibbled at the string that held a bunch of gourds, which fell to the ground with such clamor that the youth, certain the chief inspector had come to arrest him, scattered off without even putting on his shoes.² The harried lovers finally went to a cave, as their comrades kept guard outside; but no sooner did they embrace than a pack of foxes rushed over them, pursued by a hungry wolf. As the couple came shrieking out of the cave, the exasperated go-betweens began to beat the poor woman in their fury, convinced that she had been devising these tricks on purpose. The youth intervened (38.284, 287–89):

2. The word in Persian is ‘muḥtasib’ (38.232), the famous (and feared) head inspector who would patrol the city markets, ensuring that prices were fair, measures were accurate, and public propriety was maintained.

گفت زنهار دست ازو دارید * یار آزرده را میازارید
گوهر او ز هر گنه پاکست * هر گناهی که هست ازین خاکست
چابکان جهان و چالاکان * همه هستند بنده پاکان
کار ما را عنایت ازلی * از خطا داده بود بی خللی

(Keep your hands off her! Don’t abuse your poor friend! [...]
Her essence is pure of every sin; any sin here is of this earth.
The quick and crafty of the world are all servants of the pure.
Divine grace [*ināyat-i azalī*] has delivered our affairs out of
sin into flawlessness.)

The youth had realized the error of his ways: if he and the girl were to be together, it could only happen within the lawful bonds of marriage. The couple quit the garden and went to the city, where they were promptly married, found a proper room, and finally, after so many setbacks, enjoyed a night of love together undisturbed by falling gourds, wild animals, or collapsing buildings.

Even from these short summaries, it should be evident that these stories speak to each other in significant ways. Both stories, featuring male protagonists, begin with the hero's desire for knowledge (the secret to some mystery), and end with his desire for a woman. Both feature gardens as their primary setting, and both the king and the handsome youth find themselves in an identical position in which they intrude upon an exclusively female space and attempt to take the forbidden fruit for themselves. The binary of wilderness and civilization is another prominent theme, wherein the garden is a place for love, but evidently not for its consummation; if that is to happen, it must take place within the perimeters of human society. A stark contrast, of course, resides in the stories' conclusion: one ends tragically, with the king experiencing such a profound loss that he must mourn it as he would a death, while the other ends happily, even comically, given both the content of the story and the wedding that concludes it.³ We might therefore conclude that these are two stories about love and desire, in which temptation, self-control, and legitimacy are the crucial matters at stake.

These same themes are pervasive throughout the narrative structure that houses our two stories. The tales of the unfortunate king and the fortunate youth are the first and last in a series of seven that appears midway through the *Haft paykar* (*The Seven Figures*), a narrative poem written in 1197 by the Persian poet Nizāmī Ganjavī. Other tales in this sequence include the story of the patient, upright man Bishr, who clothed his houri-like wife in green; of the Princess of the Fortress, better known in European circles as Turandot (*Tūrāndukht*, “daughter of Turan”), whose florid beauty so inflamed the hearts of men that many came to a bloody end for it; and of the unfortunate merchant Māhān, who nearly lost his life in a greedy venture and consequently vested himself in blue to commemorate his deliverance.⁴ Although each story is quite independent from its neighbors in terms of plot and character, the topic of desire – be it for sex, money, knowledge, or power – is a constant presence throughout the series. The protagonist of each tale must confront that desire, and depending on the quality of his character, he will ar-

3. For more comparisons between the two stories, see Gelpke 290–91.

4. For more on the legend of Turandot in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and Turkish sources, and finally its 1762 debut in Europe as a *commedia dell'arte*, see Meier; Rossi; and Piemontese.

rive at a destiny that is symbolically marked by a particular color, be it the black of loss and melancholy, the red of passion and courage, or the white of salvation and purity. The seven tales are further couched within a broader tale, the life and deeds of King Bahrām Gōr (the legendary counterpart of the Sasanian king Wahrām V, r. 420–38), as he is raised in exile, comes to claim the Iranian crown, twice repels a Chinese invasion, and finally disappears into a cave during a hunt.

The distinctive structure of the *Haft paykar*, with its fabulous stories nested within an allegorically suggestive frame-tale, has played a major role in shaping the study of the poem. Guided by explicit cues from the author, scholars by and large tend to approach it as a kind of treatise, encoded like a puzzle box, on desire in all its nuance and variety – a literary exposition of the many ‘colors’ of love, so to speak. According to this approach, once the secret meanings of this work are unlocked and decoded, the reader’s journey – like that of Bahrām – will come to an end, at least on this material plane. The merits of such a reading cannot be denied, as it illuminates myriad and fascinating links between the disciplines of philosophy, theology, natural science, and political theory of the medieval Islamic world, united through the conceptual framework of love. Nonetheless, there seems to me something lacking in this symbolic-analogical approach, or at least something that remains hidden when we read the text through this lens. It may well be the kaleidoscopic structure of the text, offering as it does such a dazzling array of allusions, analogies, and interconnections to explore, that might obscure the fine details, or what I might call the *poetic* qualities, of the stories within its borders.⁵ The *Haft paykar*, and Nizāmī’s work in general, has long been admired for its dense and often oblique language, whose very multivalence allows it to simultaneously engage multiple layers of meaning without being constrained to any single reading. To push the envelope further, I am curious to see to what extent the poem *resists* its own systemization, and if this unruliness itself might have something to offer its readers.

In the spirit of self-resistance, then, I aim to provide a double-reading of the stories summarized above: first, I will build on the work of previous scholars to forge my own set of interpretive spectacles, establishing a genealogy of love theory in which the distinction between *erōs* and *agapē* plays the leading role; this will, I hope, complement and enrich the ongoing study of the *Haft paykar*’s conceptual vocabulary and act as a useful interlocutor for the other arti-

5. By ‘poetic,’ I am drawing from Longenbach’s wonderful monograph *The Resistance of Poetry*, which posits poetic language as “the language of self-questioning – metaphors that turn against themselves, syntax that moves one way because it threatens to move another, voices that speak because they are shattered” (xi); or as he puts it elsewhere, “A poem’s power inheres less in its conclusions than in its propensity to resist them” (10).

cles in this special issue. Then, I will discuss how the stories resist and even negate the conclusions imposed upon them from such structuralist and symbolic approaches. If such resistance is accepted, the hermeneutic horizons of the *Haft paykar* stand to grow ever more expansive and capacious, raising new possibilities for interpretation and comparison with other medieval literary traditions.

1 “A treasure-house, no fable”

For readers unfamiliar with Nizāmī and his work, a few introductory words are in order.⁶ Nizām al-dīn Abū-Muḥammad Eliyās b. Yūsuf, known by his pen-name Nizāmī, was born in about the year 1140 and lived in the town of Ganja (whence his sobriquet *Ganjavi*), modern-day Azerbaijan. His life coincided with the sunset of the Seljuk empire, which had been the dominant political power of southwest Asia since its establishment a century prior; Bausani describes him as one of the most important fruits of the urban bourgeoisie that emerged under the aegis of this polity (9). The last capable ruler of the Seljuks’ eastern territories in Khorasan, Aḥmad Sanjar, lost his realm (and his life) in a struggle against the Oghuz Turks in 1157, while the western half of the empire became fragmented among various Seljukid princes and their regents (*atabegs*);⁷ most of these petty kingdoms would be extinguished by the Khwarazmshahs in the last decade of the twelfth century, who were wiped out in turn by the Mongols in their 1220 conquest of Transoxania. It was during this turbulent thirty-five year period between 1165 and 1200 that Nizāmī composed a quintet (*khamisa*) of long-form poems, which he dedicated to these various *atabegs*. The poems were called, in order of composition, the *Treasury of Mysteries*, *Khusraw & Shirīn*, *Laylī & Majnūn*, the *Book of Alexander*, and finally the *Haft paykar* (see Table 1); the first of these is an ethical treatise, using anecdotes and short narratives to illustrate various kingly virtues, while the remaining four are narrative romances that treat the adventures of famous kings and lovers.⁸ Taken together, these five poems became one of the most successful works in the Persian literary canon, with many major poets of subsequent eras producing their own quintets in both a recognition of and claim to this distinguished legacy.⁹

6. A full biography or bibliography is beyond the scope of the present work, but Blois, *Poetry* 363–70 and Meisami, “Introduction” are two good places to start. Two valuable collections of essays that engage with various aspects of Nizāmī’s work are found in Talattof and Clinton; and Bürgel and Ruymbeke; the former ends with an extensive list of books and articles published on Nizāmī up to the end of the twentieth century (Talattof).

7. The verse form Nizāmī employed, called *masnavī*, consists of a regular succession of rhymed half-lines (*miṣrāʿ* *ṣ*) held together by a uniform meter; the overall effect is something akin to rhyming couplets.

8. The ‘romance’ in the context of Persian poetry is a term that requires further elaboration (something I hope to attend to in a later article); for the purposes of this essay, we can simply consider the romance in the same broad generic strokes as used in medieval European literature: love and adventure, *amor et militia*.

9. For a full list of these works, which number in the hundreds, see Rādfar 205–36.

Table 1: Nizāmī's Quintet

This chronology is slightly different from the standard account, which has the *Book of Alexander* written after the *Haft paykar*. However, I find de Blois's revised sequence persuasive, and this is what is reflected in the table; see Blois, "Haft paykar;" and Blois, *Poetry* 363–70 and 483–88. The cities' names are rendered in standard English orthography; they fall within the borders of today's Azerbaijan, eastern Turkey, and northwestern Iran.

| Title | Year | Patron (City) |
|-----------------------------|----------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Makhzan al-asrār</i> | 1161 | Fakhr al-dīn Bahrāmshāh (Erzincan) |
| <i>Khusraw & Shirīn</i> | ca. 1180 | Jahān-Pahlavān b. Ēldügüz (Hamadan) |
| <i>Laylī & Majnūn</i> | 1188 | Akhsatān of Sharvān (Baku) |
| <i>Iskandar-nāma</i> | 1194 | Nuṣrat al-dīn Bēshkīn (Ahar) |
| <i>Haft paykar</i> | 1197 | Körp-Arslān b. Āq-Sunqur (Maragheh) |

As has already been noted, the *Haft paykar* is singularly complex in its structure: while Nizāmī's other narratives follow the relatively linear path of a love affair or a hero's life, the *Haft paykar* can be seen as a composite weave of horizontal (temporal) and vertical (transcendental) elements. Its temporal frame is firmly grounded in the tradition of 'heroic biographies,' stories that narrate the life, deeds, and death of a central (male) protagonist, such as the *Garshāsp-nāma* (w. 1066), the *Bahman-nāma* (w. ca. 1100), or Nizāmī's own *Iskandar-nāma*; in such a framework, when the hero dies or disappears, the story too will come to an end (perhaps to be followed by another heroic biography). Nizāmī confirms this foundation in his introduction to the *Haft paykar*, where he explicitly identifies his poem as a continuation of Firdawsī's "royal chronicle" ("tārīkh-i shahryārān," 4.19), the *Shāhnāma* (*Book of Kings*, w. 1010): "There remained a little dust from that ruby-powder, and everyone made something from those fragments; like a jeweler, I carved this treasure out of those shards" ("mānda z-ān la 'l-rīza lakht-ī gard • har yak-ī z-ān qurāza chīz-ī kard / man az ān khurda chūn guharsanj-ī • bar tarāshīdam īn chunīn ganj-ī," 4.21–22). And indeed, the first half of Bahrām's life as recounted in the *Haft paykar* does adhere to the model set by Firdawsī, in its broad strokes if not specific details.¹⁰

However, Nizāmī deviates from this heroic-epic trajectory when he arrives at the center-point of Bahrām's career: the king has now secured his rule, subdued his enemies, and married the princess of each of the seven climes – a veritable epitome of masculine prowess. At this moment, Nizāmī introduces a 'narrative pause' (to borrow a term from Green) through which the horizontal-linear movement of the story stalls and shifts into a vertical-transcendental arc.¹¹ This pause, effectively bisecting the heroic biography into two halves, occurs when the king builds a separate palace for each of his seven brides, topped with a specially-colored dome: black, yellow, green, red, turquoise, sandal, and white. Over the course of the week, Bahrām visits each princess on her respective day to be regaled with

10. Comparisons of Firdawsī's and Nizāmī's respective versions of Bahrām's life have proved to be a fruitful area of study; in particular, the ethical implications of Nizāmī's transformation of the *Shāhnāma*'s ill-fated harpist Āzāda into the (hyper-)strong and resourceful Fitna have been commented on by Meisami, "Fitnah or Azadah?"; Talattof; and Gabbay.

11. On this 'pause,' see Green, *The Beginnings* 177; and Green, "The Rise of Medieval Fiction" 58–59; for further discussion of this narrative strategy in the *Haft paykar*, see Agapitos 265–67.

12. Because of this context, the stories to which I refer as the Stories of the Black and White Domes are introduced in the manuscript tradition under much longer headings, with a good deal of variation. For example, the full title of the Black Dome in the Ritter and Rypka edition of Nizāmī's *Heft Peiker* reads: "Bahrām's stay on Saturday in the musk-colored dome and the tale told by the daughter of the king of the first clime" ("nishastan-i bahrām rōz-i shanba dar gunbad-i mushkīn va hikāyat kardan-i dukhtar-i malik-i iqlīm-i avval," 120), but other manuscripts have variations on the title like "Bahram's pleasure" ("ishrat-i bahrām") or identifying the princess as the daughter of the raja of India ("dukhtar-i rāy-i hindustān"); see the Zanjānī edition of Nizāmī's *Haft Paykar* 605–06. The full heading for the White Dome in the Ritter and Rypka edition is "Bahrām's stay on Friday in the white dome and the tale told by the daughter of the king of the seventh clime" ("nishastan-i bahrām rōz-i āzīna dar gunbad-i sapēd va hikāyat kardan-i dukhtar-i malik-i iqlīm-i haftum," 243); see other versions in the Zanjānī edition (663).

13. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* 205; Meisami, "The Theme of the Journey" 163–64; Meisami, "Introduction" xxix.

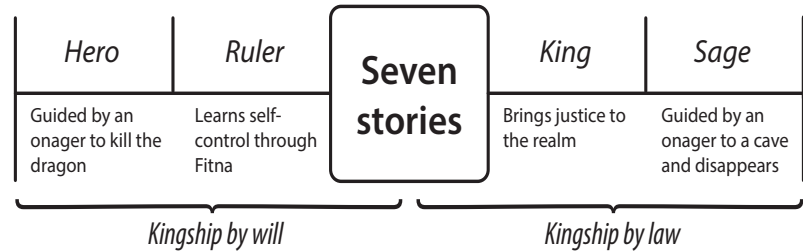
14. The 'seven climes' schema can be traced as far back as the Avesta, e.g., *Zamyād Yasht* 31 and *Ābān Yasht* 5 (Darmesteter 55 and 293); for a visualization of this sacred geography, see Boyce 17; Shahbazi; and Foltz 14.

15. Pantke 172. For similar maps drawn on the basis of Bīrūnī's (d. 1048) geography, see Zadeh 85; and Pinto 89. Piemontese 130 adds that the sequence of the tales also produces a textual map of the political reality of the Sasanian world, with the four major empires of India, Rome, China, and Persia bookending the series on either side and the entrepôt region of Siqlāb smack in the middle.

16. Thus, Tuesday is an auspicious day for the valiant and passionate, while Wednesday is best spent in thought and reflection (al-Awadhi

a story, then repeats the cycle; in this wise, seven years go by.¹² This moment of stasis, in which time both stands still and flies by in an instant, sits in the middle of a structural chiasmus brilliantly discussed by Meisami, who sees the seven stories as the cocoon or incubator that allows Bahrām to transform from a king of will (personal force) into a king of law (enlightened justice), attaining first temporal and then spiritual mastery (Figure 1).¹³

Figure 1: The linear trajectory of Bahrām's life



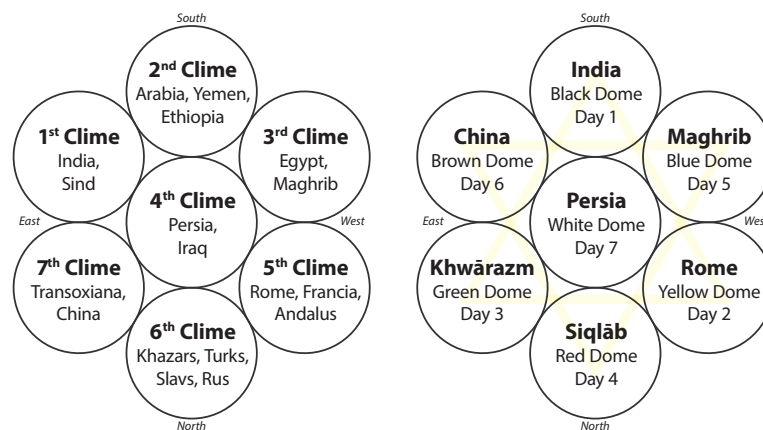
In addition to providing a 'before' and 'after' transition in Bahrām's life, the sequence and arrangement of the seven domes (and the stories told inside them) are loaded with symbolic referents. The domes recreate the classic Indo-Iranian arrangement of the world into seven climes (*haft kishwar*), which Nizāmī identifies here as India, China, Khwārazm (Central Asia), Siqlāb (the Slavic North), the Maghrib (Egypt and North Africa), Rūm (Greece and by extension Europe), and Persia in the center.¹⁴ This spatial arrangement, as Pantke notes, reproduces the hexagrammic Seal of Solomon, investing Bahrām with both royal and prophetic authority (Figure 2).¹⁵ The seven colors of the domes correspond to these climes, as well as the seven days of the week and the seven heavenly bodies, with all their astrological import: "Within that fortress, he made seven domes according to the nature of the seven orbs" ("haft gunbad darūn-i ān bāra • karda bar tab ' -i haft sayyāra," 31.5).¹⁶ Finally, as Gelpke observes, the seven domes correspond to the sum parts of the body (head, chest, belly, arms, and legs), producing an equivalence between the macro- and microcosms of world and man (289). The perfection of the individual thus resides in the same principles that ensure the perfect harmony of the universe, which the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā, a fraternity of philosophers based in tenth-century Basra, described as "The Great Man" (*al-insān al-kabīr*) guided by the wisdom of a single Soul (Nasr, *An Introduction* 67).

If seven represents the totality of being – the full spectrum of color, the entirety of the globe, the hierarchy of the heavens, and the

106–8). The white color of Venus represents devotion and fealty; the fact that her day is also the holy day of Islam strengthens this connection

between pure, selfless love and the generous intercession of revelation.

Figure 2: The Seven Climes



On the left is a typical al-Biruni schematic map of the seven climes. The same map is adjusted on the right to reflect the world of the *Haft paykar*. Note how Bahram's journey traces the Seal of Solomon.

17. Cf. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* 50; Chelkowski 113; and Meisami, "Introduction" xxix. A similar version of the four-caste system is found in Firdawsī, *The Shahnameh* 1: Jamshīd, vv. 19–31; cf. English translation by Davis in Firdawsī, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings* 6.

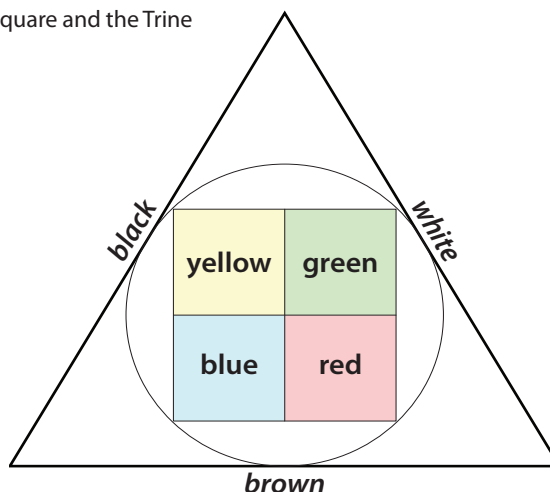
18. Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) writes: "No king without men – no men without money – no money without prosperity – no prosperity without justice and fair guidance" ("lā sultāna illā bi-rijālin wa-lā rijāla illā bi-mālin wa-lā māla illā bi-'imāratin wa-lā 'imārata illā bi-'adlin wa-ḥusni siyāsah"), pointing to the interdependence of the sovereign, military, administrative, and peasant classes that is necessary for a prosperous kingdom (1.9). Though not so pithy, the eleventh-century Ziyarid prince Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar also stresses the equilibrium the king must maintain between the viziers, soldiery, and commoners in his *Qābūs-nāma* (223–29).

19. See Krotkoff 110; Meisami, "The Theme of the Journey" 163; Meisami, "Introduction" xxv-xxvi; and Seyed-Gohrab 6.

body of man – the summand values of four and three depict its material and spiritual characteristics. Red, green, blue, and yellow represent the physical aspects of the universe: the humors, the elements, the seasons, the cardinal directions, the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music), and the four castes (craftsmen, chieftains, rulers, prophets).¹⁷ Because these are the components of material reality, they must be kept in equilibrium: a body with unbalanced humors will fall ill; a climate with extreme seasons will deform its inhabitants; a kingdom in which the four castes are pitted against each other is doomed to fall.¹⁸ Conversely, the three neutral colors of black, white, and brown are associated with the ethereal properties of the spirit, corresponding with the vegetable, animal, and rational faculties, or the ennobling arts of grammar, rhetoric, and poetry. Unlike the material realm, whose balance and harmony encourages a circular, cyclical movement between its constituent poles, the spiritual trine indicates change, 'pointing' towards a *telos* that is reached by ascending a specific hierarchy, a motion of ascent, descent, and return (Figure 3). A turn of the kaleidoscope reveals further patterns at work: Krotkoff observes a thematic repetition of loss, love, and marriage in the sequence of stories, while Meisami discerns an oscillation between concupiscence (Stories 1, 3, 5, 7) and irascibility (Stories 2, 4, 6), corresponding with Seyed-Gohrab's observation that Saturn, the Moon, Mars, and Venus were typically seen as the instigators of love in Islamic astrology.¹⁹

Given the numerous maps, patterns, and symbols embedded within the sequence of the seven domes, it is clear that however we interpret the stories, interpret we must. The simple act of engaging with the text marks the beginning of the mental and spiritual train-

Figure 3: The Square and the Trine



The four elements hold the temporal world in balance, while the spiritual trine orients it towards the Godhead; this schema essentially replicates the alchemic sign of the Philosopher's Stone.

ing of its readers; thus it is that Nizāmī, in his concluding chapter, can say to his patron, Körp-Arslān (53.23–29):

میوهٔ داذمت ز باغ ضمیر * چرب و شیرین چو انگبین در شیر
 ذوق انجیر داده دانئه او * مغز باذام در میانهٔ او
 پیش بیرونیان برونش نغز * وز درونش درونیان را مغز
 حقهٔ بسته پر ز دُر دارد * در عبارت کلید پر دارد
 دُر دران رشته سرگرای بُود * که کلیدش گره‌گشای بُود
 هرچ در نظم او ز نیک و بد است * همه رمز و اشارت و خرد است
 هر یک افسانه‌ای جداگانه * خانهٔ گنج شدن افسانه

(I've given you a fruit from the garden of my thoughts, sweet and juicy like honeyed milk. The flavor of figs infuses its seed, stuffed with almond pith in the center. The superficial will find its exterior sweet; the perceptive will find substance within. It is a sealed box of pearls, full of keys in [its] locations; once the key has opened the knot, the pearls on that string will be stunning indeed. Everything within its verses, good or ill, is all sign, symbol, and wisdom; each one, a fable on its own, has [together] become a treasure-house, and no fable.)

What is interesting to observe in the scholarship up to now is that, in spite of the text's structural and numerological complexity, which might suggest a plethora of divergent interpretations, the underlying message has been agreed on by near-universal consensus: the sequence of stories, starting in Black and ending in White, represent – and perform – a transcendental journey of some kind, a rite of pas-

20. See Bausani 10–11; Krotkoff 110; Chelkowski 113; Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*; Meisami, “The Theme of the Journey;” Meisami, “Introduction;” and al-Awadhi 80–89.

21. See Nasr, *An Introduction* 68; Corbin 13–25; Chittick 49–51; Ṭūsī 52.

22. Cf. Aṭṭār, *Mantiq al-tayr*, vv. 3252–55. English translation by Davis: Aṭṭār, *The Conference of the Birds* 166.

23. Cf. Corbin 107–08; and Schimmel 256.

24. It is rather refreshing, in fact, to see de Blois push against such hyper-allegorical readings of the *Haft paykar* and suggest a more down-to-earth account: “The point of the story is clearly that Bahrām’s attempt to find happiness by living in accordance with the stars is a failure. The seven domes are built in perfect accord with the properties of the stars, but they are very nearly the cause of his downfall. In the end it is only justice that matters” (Blois, “Haft peykar”).

25. This dichotomy overlaps somewhat with the common distinction made between ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ love (cf. Dols 313) in Islamic thought, or that of “metaphorical” (*majāzī*) and “real” (*ḥaqīqī*, cf. Seyed-Gohrab 19); but it is not exactly the same thing. I am thinking more about the dynamic of intent (Need versus Gift) between lover and beloved. Bausani notes a similar dynamic between “drunken lust” and “the matrimonial ethos” in the *Haft paykar*, but only in passing (12).

sage through the four material elements into the three aspects of the spiritual realm.²⁰ There is, of course, much evidence to support this reading: the stories are positioned at the center of Bahrām’s journey through life (recalling Dante’s famous “nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,” *Inferno* 1.1), and the widespread interest in man’s capacity for perfection, whether as the “universal man” (*al-insān al-kullī*) of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā, the “perfect nature” (*al-ṭibā‘ al-tāmm*) theorized by the mystical philosopher Shihāb al-dīn Suhrawardī (d. 1191), or the “perfect man” (*al-insān al-kāmil*) of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240) and Naṣīr al-dīn Ṭūsī (d. 1274), suggests that Nizāmī is not alone in this endeavor.²¹ The sequence of seven is evocative of similar seven-staged journeys found in other medieval Islamic texts; to name just a few examples, al-Awadhi (73) connects the *Haft paykar* to the seven “valleys” outlined by Farīd al-dīn ‘Aṭṭār (d. 1221) in his *Mantiq al-tayr* (*Conference of the Birds*),²² while Meisami (“Introduction” xxx–xxxii) notes that Suhrawardī and Najm al-dīn Kubrā (d. 1220) both produced their own versions of a seven-stage path, each stage marked by a distinctive color (Table 2).²³

Thus, regardless of the framework used – Neoplatonic, Hermetic, Sufi, Manichean, or any combination thereof – the resulting trajectory is one and the same: a story of *progress* from one pole to another, from dark to light, material to spiritual, ignorance to gnosis, caprice to wisdom, initiated when Bahrām grasps the underlying truths of the world that are reflected by and embedded within the stories of the Seven Domes.²⁴ The argument that follows may both complement and complicate such an account, as I will move away from the systematic frameworks outlined above and focus instead on a *dynamic* that had received extensive attention in the love-theory of Nizāmī’s day. The dynamic lies between two ‘modes’ of loving which have been theorized using a variety of terms: for the former, we have words like *agapē*, *caritas*, or “Gift-love” as it was articulated by C. S. Lewis; for the latter, *erōs*, *amor*, or Lewis’s “Need-love” (11). There are a number of terms found in medieval Arabic and Persian texts that also point towards these two modes; in the Gift-love category, *ḥubb*/*maḥabba* and *widād*/*mawadda* are important players, while in the area of Need-love, *hawā* and ‘*ishq* are significant terms.²⁵ We will pursue this dynamic in the following sections, first with the literary-philosophical tradition that Nizāmī had inherited, and then on to its function in the stories themselves.

Table 2: Love, Color, and the Universe

A visual summary of the relationships and connections that link the Seven Domes with the universal schemata discussed in the preceding pages; the “trajectories” section demonstrates a few of the various progressive ‘journeys’ these stories can be said to enact.

| Sequence | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|------------|------------------|------------------|--------------|--|--|------|
| <i>Day of week</i> | Saturday | Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | | | |
| <i>Celestial body</i> | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | | | |
| <i>Sign</i> | Capricorn and Aquarius | Sagittarius and Pisces | Aries and Cancer | Leo | Taurus and Libra | Gemini and Virgo | Cancer | | | |
| <i>Clime</i> | India | Rome | Khwarazm | Sijlab | Maghrib | China | Persia | | | |
| <i>Cycles</i> | Concupiscent | Irascible | Concupiscent | Irascible | Concupiscent | Irascible | Concupiscent | | | |
| <i>Color</i> | Black | Yellow | Green | Red | Blue | Brown | White | | | |
| Trajectory | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Najm al-din</i> | Ecstatic love | Faith | Tranquility | Gnosis | Certitude | Beneficence | Islam | | | |
| <i>‘Attār</i> | Desire | Love | Insight | Detachment | Unity | Awe | Self-gloss | | | |
| <i>Krotkoff</i> | Earth | Fire | Water | Air | Body | Spirit | Soul | | | |
| <i>Chelkowski</i> | Spirit | Primary (material) colors | | | | | | | | Soul |

2 Islamic theories of love and desire

As one might expect, the Qurʾān played a fundamental role in the development of Islamic love-theory, and it is with this text that we shall begin. By far the most common word for love in the Qurʾān (with about 80 occurrences) is *ḥubb*, with the meaning of holding something dear: “Those who believe, love God more ardently” (2.165); “He has smitten her with love” (12.30); “They give food, for love of Him” (76.8); “And you love wealth with an ardent love” (89.20); and so on.²⁶ As we see from these examples, the moral value of *ḥubb* depends very much on the value of its object, whether material, human, or divine, and indeed God’s *ḥubb* for humanity is also contingent on these choices: “God loves the pious” (3.76, 9.4) and “God loves the just” (49.9), but “God loves not the evildoers” (3.57, 3.140).²⁷ In addition to and alongside *ḥubb* and its cognates, we find *wadd* (with some 30 instances), which more or less carries the same connotation of affection and fondness – “I do not ask you for any reward, save that you love your kin” (42.23) – although at times we see it carry an additional valence of yearning, longing, and desire: “They long for you to suffer” (3.118); “Would any of you like to have a garden of palms and vines” (2.266).²⁸ *Wadd* also appears in the root of one of the ninety-nine beautiful names of God, *al-Wadūd* (11.90, 85.14).

The converse of *ḥubb* in the Qurʾān is *hawā*, which indicates, as does its cognate *hawāʾ* (“air,” “wind”), the mercurial and capricious aspects of desire: to imagine this concept, one need only recall Dante’s famous *contrapasso* for the lascivious, cast into “the infernal whirlwind, which never rests, driv[ing] the spirits before its violence; turning and striking, it tortures them” (*Inferno* 5.31–33). *Hawā* is an overwhelmingly negative term in the Qurʾān, consistently linked to the deeds of the wicked (*al-zālimūn*) and those who have gone astray (*al-dāllūn*), in contrast to those who walk the straight path (*al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*): “Do not follow caprice and deviate” (4.135); “Many are led astray by their witless fancies” (6.119); “Have you seen one who has taken caprice as his god, and God turned him away from reason?” (45.23).²⁹ These negative connotations endured across the centuries. For example, Nizāmī’s contemporary, the famous theologian Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200), composed a treatise entitled *Dhamm al-hawā* (*The Condemnation of Lust*) that begins with the following statement: “You should know that for your sake, to bring about your safe recovery and health, I came down off the hill of dignity in this

26. “Wa-l-ladhīna ‘āmanū ashaddu ḥubban lil-lāh;” “qad saghafahā ḥubbā;” “wa-yuṭ‘imūna al-ṭa‘āma ‘alā ḥubbiḥ;” “wa-tuḥibbūna al-māla ḥubban jammā.” All translations are mine, and are based on the standard Cairo edition of the Qurʾān.

27. “Inna allāha yuḥibbu al-muttaqīn;” “inna allāha yuḥibbu al-muqsiṭīn;” “wa-l-lāhu lā yuḥibbu al-zālimīn.”

28. “Lā as’alukum ‘alayhi ajran illā al-mawaddata fī al-qurbā;” “waddū mā ‘anittum;” “a-yawaddu aḥadukum an takūna lahu jannatun min nakhīlin wa-a’ nāb.”

29. “Fa-lā tattabi‘ū al-hawā an ta’ dilū;” “wa-inna kathīran la-yuḍillūna bi-ahwā’ ihim bi-ghayri ‘ilm;” “a-fa-ra’ayta man ittakhadha ilāhahu hawāhu wa-aḍallahu allāhu ‘alā ‘ilm.”

book to the low point of cheapening myself by speaking of [some of] those things” (Giffen 28). In any form, *hawā* never approaches the realm of erotic or mystical transcendence; it is pure animal passion that, if left unchecked, will enervate the moral fortitude of its victims and drive them off the path of righteousness.

In terms of its conceptual vocabulary, the Qur’ānic treatment of love and caprice aligns very well with the image of God as the loving and proactive father-figure found in Jewish and Christian scripture and exegesis; the *ḥubb* of the Qur’ān corresponds to and is cognate with the Hebrew *ahābāh*, one of the many words translated as *agapē* in the Septuagint.³⁰ In this cosmology, God is an entity capable of feeling both pleasure and anger: it is promised in the scriptures that he will *move* and *react* to the deeds of his children, be they good or ill (Hall 102). Like the Bible, the Qur’ān repeatedly warns its readers of the dangers of following their short-sighted whims and fancies (the *hawā* we saw above) in lieu of maintaining an affectionate *ḥubb* for the Creator; but the rewards for those who do, borne out of God’s *ḥubb* for those who revere him, are great. This scriptural love is best understood, then, as a reciprocal bond of giving and affection – what Augustine defined as *caritas* – in which personal needs and desires are entirely abandoned for the sake of the other; it is the *caritas* of God’s worldly incarnation that gives humanity its unique opportunity for salvation, and humanity may reciprocate that *caritas* by acknowledging said sacrifice.³¹ Thus, for all his fascination with the inward spiritual ascent of the Neoplatonists, Augustine sees their erotic journey as ultimately contingent on the fundamental gift-love of *caritas*, a *proactive force* that produces *movement* in both parties: “You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (*Confessions* 1.1).

Moving beyond these concepts of *ḥubb* and *hawā*, there is another very common term for love in Arabic that, interestingly, does not appear in the Qur’ān at all: *‘ishq*, which in its simplest definition, connotes an *excess* in love (*al-ifrāt fī al-ḥubb*: Bell, *Love Theory* 162). The idea of ‘too much’ love in and of itself implies a kind of fault, giving *‘ishq* a far more dubious moral value than the affectionate and familial relationship envisioned by *ḥubb*. The obvious analogue for *‘ishq* in the Greco-Latin tradition is *erōs*: just as Hesiod described *erōs* as a “limb-melter” who “overpowers the mind and the thoughtful counsel of all the gods and of all human beings” (13.120–22), the Arabs of late antiquity believed *‘ishq* to be a form of madness that unhinged

30. It should be noted that Anders Nygren’s (and subsequently C. S. Lewis’s) presentations of *agapē*/Gift-Love in the Bible are exercises in theology, not philology, and thus have been criticized for their ahistorical flattening of a complex term. See Hall for a discussion of the many valences of *agapē* in the Septuagint.

31. See Augustine’s definition of *caritas* in Sherwin 184: “The soul’s motion toward enjoying God for his own sake, and enjoying one’s self and one’s neighbor for the sake of God.”

32. Cf. Giffen 64; Bell, *Love Theory* 34–37, 162–64; Dols 313–48; Seyed-Gohrab 20–23; El-Rouayheb 85–89.

the emotions and impeded rational thought.³² The famous essayist Jāhīz (d. 868) put his finger on the distinction between *‘ishq* and other kinds of love in his *Kitāb al-qiyān* (*Book of the Singing-girls*), where he writes (Jāhīz 2.168; cf. Pellat 263):

ثمَّ قد يجتمع الحبُّ والهوى ولا يسمَّيان عشقاً ، فيكون ذلك في الولد والصدِّيق والبلد والصَّنْف من اللباس والفُرْش والدوابِّ . فلم نرَ أحداً منهم يسقُمُ بدنه ولا تتلفُ روحه من حبِّ بلده ولا ولده ، وإن كان قد يُصيِّبه عند الفراقِ لوعةً والاحتراق . وقد رأينا وبلغنا عن كثير ممَّن قد تليفَ وطال جُهدُه وضنَّاه بداء العشق

(Affectionate love [*ḥubb*] and fanciful desire [*hawā*] may be combined and not be the same as passionate love [*‘ishq*], for such a thing happens for a child, a friend, a country, or some kind of clothing, bedding, or pack-animal. But we’ve never seen anyone’s body grow enervated or his soul expire out of “love” [*ḥubb*] for his country or his child, even if he is struck by longing [*law‘a*] and yearning [*iḥtirāq*] when separated [from them]. But we *have* seen and heard about many who have gone to pieces and suffered long strain and weakness at the onset of *‘ishq*.)

‘Ishq was thus a debilitating sickness, chiefly understood in Galenic terms as a humoral imbalance such as described in the works of the Greek physicians Oribasius (4th c.) and Paulus of Aegina (7th c.); some centuries later, the treatises of Majūsī (10th c.), Avicenna, and Ibn al-Jazzār (both 11th c.) repeat this diagnosis (Biesterfeldt and Gutas 21–23). Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (d. 873), who translated Paulus’s work into Arabic, also transmits a late Alexandrian text ascribed to Hippocrates in his *Nawādir al-falāsifa* (*The Rarities of Philosophy*), enumerating the many unfortunate ends that await the lover whose malady goes untreated (Biesterfeldt and Gutas 43):

Sometimes he moans heavily, causing his spirit to remain concealed for twenty-four hours. He continues [in this state] until he is taken for dead, and then he is buried while still alive. Sometimes he heaves a deep sigh and his soul is stifled in his pericardium. The heart then closes in on the soul and does not release it until he dies. Sometimes during moments of relaxation he raises his eyes to look around and he suddenly sees the person he loves – and his soul departs in one stroke.

There is more to the story, however. Infused with such associations with madness, sickness, and death, *'ishq* became a powerful conceptual tool in the development of transcendentalist thought in Islamic literature, particularly in the arenas of Sufi theory, Neoplatonism, and erotic love stories. The underlying motive in all three cases is probably the (quasi-)insurmountable pressure that love places upon the lover, offering an opportunity to demonstrate courage, fortitude, and steadfastness of the highest caliber; as Giffen puts it, “the dark depths of passion are essentially tragic rather than evil; as long as one conducts oneself honorably such love appears to be a noble adventure of the spirit or at least a noble form of suffering” (118). The super-human acts of strength, endurance, and virtue; the mad self-destruction of the lover for the sake of the beloved; the upheaval of body and soul, pitted against one another; and the amazing highs and lows experienced by the love-stricken gave the experience of *'ishq* an enormous appeal as a literary and discursive space, both a challenge and an opportunity to test the mettle of those who dared to swim in its perilous waters.

Such themes are evident in a remarkable genre of lyric poetry that emerged during the early years of the Umayyad caliphate, near the end of the seventh century. Called the *Udhri* style, after the name of the tribe from which many of the genre’s pioneers are said to have hailed, this genre assumed an all-consuming but unconsummated passion on the part of the poet as its central motif. Although the formal features of *Udhri* poetry are quite different from that of the Greek novel of late antiquity, the two genres construct a strikingly similar moral universe, in which constancy, chastity, steadfastness, and loyalty are of paramount importance in asserting and demonstrating the protagonists’ virtue.³³ Like the Greek novel, the *Udhri ghazals* (short lyrical poems on the theme of love) tend to be populated with stock characters and conventional scenarios, allowing the focus to rest not on the story itself but the intensity of the lovers’ emotions, producing a psychologically charged world of isolation, estrangement, and masochism, with fleeting moments of ecstasy punctuating the lovers’ otherwise sad and melancholy existence. The poems often refer to ostracism and exile, devotional ascetic practices, and the renunciation of the material world; the commentaries on these poems often claim that the *Udhri* lover dies a martyr to love, and his grave becomes a site of pilgrimage (Seyed-Gohrab 64–66). Probably the most famous representative of this genre is Qays b. al-

33. This is a connection that few literary historians (to my knowledge) have pursued in detail. Von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam* introduces some fascinating points of comparison between Hellenistic conventions of love (310–14) and the *Udhri Liebestod* (315–18) that seem well worth further exploration; more recently, Davis discusses some of the themes and topoi common to both Greek and Persian romances, many of which feature prominently in Arabic literature as well.

34. Majnūn Laylā 207. Many thanks to Samer Ali for his feedback and suggestions for my translation.

Mulawwah, popularly known as Majnūn Laylā (“Crazy for/by Laylā”), who recites lyrical poems like the following:³⁴

أَحِبُّكَ يَا لَيْلَى مَحَبَّةَ عَاشِقٍ * عَلَيْهِ جَمِيعُ الْمُصْعَبَاتِ تَهْوُونَ
 أَحِبُّكَ حُبًّا لَوْ تُحِبِّينَ مِثْلَهُ * أَصَابَكَ مِنْ وَجَدِ عَلِيِّ جُنُونُ
 أَلَا فَرَحَمِي صَبًّا كَثِيبًا مُعَذَّبًا * حَرِيقُ الْحَشَا مُضْنِي الْفَوَادِ حَزِينُ
 قَتِيلٌ مِنَ الْأَشْوَاقِ أَمَّا نَهَارُهُ * فَبَاكَ وَأَمَّا لَيْلُهُ فَأَنْزِينُ
 لَهُ عِبْرَةٌ تَهْمِي وَنِيرَانٌ قَلْبِهِ * وَأَفْجَانُهُ تُذْرِي الدَّمُوعَ عَيْونُ
 فَيَا لَيْتَ أَنَّ الْمَوْتَ يَأْتِي مُعْجَلًا * عَلَى أَنْ عَشِقَ الْغَانِيَاتِ فُتُونُ

(I love you, Layla, with the love of the love-struck
 [mahabbata ‘ashiqin]
 Against which all other difficulties are as nothing
 I love you with a love that if you loved likewise
 A madness would strike you in your longing for me
 Have mercy on a miserable, tortured boy
 Burning inside, a wretch with an exhausted heart
 Laid low by desires during his day
 Then weeping and sighing during his night
 His tears are flowing, a fire’s in his heart
 The lids of his eyes are scattering tears
 I hope that death may come to me swiftly
 For the love [‘ishq] of worthy women is madness, shattering)

There is a remarkable amount of self-diagnosis in this poem: it no ordinary love that ails Majnūn, but the “love of the love-struck,” the maddening, destabilizing, and potentially fatal disease of *‘ishq*; indeed, most of the poem would sound like the description of a crippling fever if not for its opening line. Like any chronic illness, the only sure remedy is death, whether in its literal form or in the ‘little death’ of union with the beloved (a highly unlikely scenario in this genre); hence the poet comes to desire death with the same ardor with which he desires Laylā. As the chief symbol of the Udhri movement, the man literally driven out of his senses by love, it was clear to later readers that Majnūn served as a valuable archetype, a mouthpiece through whom the experience of *‘ishq* could be articulated; the anthologist Abū al-Faraj Iṣbahānī (d. 967) notes that while none of his sources agreed on the full name or origins of this Qays b. al-Mulawwah, he had heard of many disgruntled lovers who used the name ‘Majnūn’ as their poetic persona, hoping to keep their true identities secret (Iṣbahānī 2: 5–7). The experience of internal displacement and exile generated by this self-orientation, and the dec-

laration of one's willingness to sacrifice oneself in the struggle for death-union, is the most salient aspect of the *'ishq* claimed by the Udhri poets that I would like to identify in this paper; long after the heyday of this movement, it remained the driving force behind other transcendental quests.

The topoi of the Udhri literary landscape are easily recognized in what is perhaps the most famous strain of Islamic (particularly Persian) literature in the West, the poetry of Sufi mysticism.³⁵ In this genre, the Udhri motifs of asceticism, isolation, and a relentless fixation upon the beloved were easily mapped onto the physical and mental practices of the early Sufi orders of the ninth and tenth centuries; the lover's experience of self-loss (*fanā'*) – an utter unawareness or surrender of the self in the presence of the B/beloved, reminiscent of Augustine's precondition for *caritas* – was particularly apt for describing the transcendental promises of the Sufi path. The shared valences of these two traditions meant that the erotic intensity of love-poetry could be powerfully integrated into a religious paradigm, with the result that *'ishq*, the divine madness, amplified and extended the relationship of filial devotion between God and man envisioned by the Qur'anic *ḥubb*. An interesting example of this can be found in a poem attributed to the early mystic (d. 801) Rābi' a al-'Adawīya (81):

35. The popularity of this genre, at least in contemporary North America, is largely due to the many translations and adaptations of the poetry of Mawlānā Jalāl al-dīn Rūmī (d. 1273) that have emerged in the last half-century.

أُحِبُّكَ حُبِّينِ حُبُّ الهوى * وَحُبُّ لِأَنَّكَ أَهْلٌ لَذَاكَ
فَأَمَّا الَّذِي هُوَ حُبُّ الهوى * فَشُغِّلِي بِذِكْرِكَ عَمَّنْ سِوَاكَ
وَأَمَّا الَّذِي أَنْتَ أَهْلٌ لَهُ * فَكَشِّفْكَ لِي الْحُجْبَ حَتَّى أَرَكَ
فَلَا الْحَمْدُ فِي ذَا وَلَا ذَاكَ لِي * وَلَكِنْ لَكَ الْحَمْدُ فِي ذَا وَذَاكَ

(I love You with two loves: one capricious [*ḥubb al-hawā*]
And one of which You are worthy
As for the capricious love
I am occupied by thoughts of You, excluding all others
And as for that love which You deserve
You raise the veil so that I may see You
No praise is due me for that one or this
But praise be to You for this one and that)

Love is an ambivalent force in this poem; in its claim to self-abnegation and unreasonable devotion, it represents the ideal way of approaching God, yet it runs the constant risk of being sublimated to the self. Thus Rābi' a uses the Qur'anic concept of *hawā*, capricious love, as a point of comparison with this *other* love, not explicitly named, that is worthy of God. The fundamental problem with the

36. A famous anecdote related about Rābi‘a is that she would roam the streets, Diogenes-like, with a torch in one hand and a bucket of water in the other; when asked what she was doing, she replied that she intended to burn the gardens of Paradise and extinguish the fires of Hell, so that all who worshipped God henceforth would do so only out of self-less love for him, rather than the selfish desire for reward or fear of torment. See Smith 98–99.

37. See Bell, “Avicenna’s *Treatise*” 79; Fakhry 243; Seyyed-Gohrab 19. The Iranian Ash‘ari scholar Juwaynī (d. 1085), for example, argued that because love is borne out of will, and because will can only be exerted on objects that exist in time and space, God, being outside of time and insusceptible to nonexistence, cannot be ‘loved’ in that sense (Bell, *Love Theory* 59). The Damascene preacher Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) encouraged his readers to avoid falling prey to ‘*ishq* at all costs and instead nurture “friendship” (*khulla*) for the Creator, which he considered the most pure expression of selfless devotion, exemplified “in the love of Abraham and Muḥammad for God” (Bell, *Love Theory* 35–36).

38. See Knysh 52–56, 60–66; and Tūsi 196. The Sufi poet ‘Irāqī (d. ca. 1289) puts it eloquently in his *Lama ‘āt* (*Flashes*): “Love courses through all; it must be everything. [Arabic] *How can you deny love when there is nothing in the world save it, when all that is manifest would not be so if not for love? For love manifests itself in love and moves through it; or rather, all of it is love*” (“‘*Ishq dar hama sārī-st nā-guzīr jumla-yi ashyā’ ast. Wa-kayfa tankaru al-‘ishqa wa-mā fi al-wujūdi illā huwa wa-law lā al-ḥubbu mā ṣāhara mā ṣāhara, fa-bi-l-ḥubbi ṣāhara al-ḥubbu sāra fihī bal huwa al-ḥubbu kulluh*,” Irāqī, *Lama ‘āt* 68; cf. the English trans. in Irāqī, *Divine Flashes* 84). Many thanks to Matthew T. Miller for drawing my attention to this passage.

39. For more on the affinity between Avicenna’s metaphysics and Sufi thought, see Anwar 340–43.

former mode of loving is that it cannot be separated from selfish desire: even if trained upon God, it pleases the self, thus ironically re-orienting Rābi‘a back onto herself and distracting her from her Beloved. The only hope for her, and the only love that will win God’s approval, is the love that annihilates the lover, leaving nothing left but the Beloved to adore.³⁶ While the total extirpation of the self is Rābi‘a’s goal, it can never occur without the proactive intercession of God, the moment when he raises the veil and makes self-loss (*fanā’*) possible. The reciprocal tension between Rābi‘a’s “two loves” – one rooted in the self (Need), one external to it (Gift) – is emblematic of the gradual maturation of love into a complex force without any clear boundaries between these two ideal categories.

As we have seen in these early examples of Udhri and Sufi poetry, the concept of ‘*ishq* was gradually integrated into diverse modes of thought and practices of self-fashioning, pregnant with possibilities for spiritual transcendence. Its relationship with the ‘safer’ *ḥubb* remained contested, and scholars continued to debate whether ‘*ishq* was to be cultivated or repressed – if the way of Majnūn was the proper way to orient oneself towards the Creator.³⁷ Some advocated a more ‘sober’ approach to life, whether that entailed sticking to the letter of the law or keeping one’s ecstatic passion away from the public eye, but those interested in the hidden and esoteric aspects of their world came to see love as *the* vital energy that bound all creation with its Creator; when properly harnessed, it could break down the petty boundaries of the self, exposing it to the awesome and bewildering horizons of unlimited being.³⁸

The underlying metaphysics that upheld this comprehensive understanding of love and affirmed its transcendental power was provided by Islamic philosophy, a tradition grounded in the Neoplatonic thought of the Alexandrian school and elaborated by giants in the field such as Kindī (d. 873), Fārābī (d. 950), and Avicenna (Abū ‘Alī ibn Sīnā, d. 1037); the latter, in addition to his major encyclopedic works *The Canon* (*al-Qānūn*) and *The Healing* (*al-Shifā’*), wrote a short treatise entitled *Risāla fī al-‘ishq* (*Epistle on Love*) that explains how it is that love can either hinder or enable the individual’s journey toward the Truth.³⁹ Avicenna describes love as a universal force, borne out of God’s emanation, that pervades all extant being; it is the very state of existing that causes being to be filled with love – or conversely, it is the state of being filled with love that causes existence (Fackenheim 212):

Every being which is determined by a design strives by nature toward its perfection, i.e., that goodness of reality which ultimately flows from the reality of the Pure Good (“al-khayr al-mahd”), and by nature it shies away from its specific defect which is the evil in it, i.e., materiality and non-being. Therefore, it is obvious that all beings determined by a design possess a natural desire and an inborn love, and it follows of necessity that in such beings love is the cause of their existence.

Thus, even inanimate objects like dust or immaterial forces like light and gravity are all manifestations of love, in that what gives them their existence and movement is their longing to be reunited with the Pure Good from which they came; this is what Avicenna calls the “presence of love in simple incorporeal essences” (“wujūdu al-‘ishqi fī al-jawāhiri al-basīṭati al-ghayri al-jismīyah”).⁴⁰ From that baseline, however, further degrees of kind and quality may be established: “Whenever the goodness of a thing increases, the merit of its love increases also, and so does the love for the good” (Fackenheim 214). The first category (*qism*) of love in this account is what Avicenna calls “natural love” (*‘ishq ṭabī‘ī*), namely the love of simple and vegetative souls. These souls have no choice but to move in the directions love prescribes for them: a rock cannot but fall when dropped; a tree cannot refuse to grow. After this comes “voluntary love” (*‘ishq ikhtiyārī*), that which is displayed by animals and humans who *choose* of their own free will (though not necessarily by reason) to pursue or not pursue a desired object. Thus a donkey, to quote Avicenna’s example, will forsake the pasture if a wolf appears on the horizon; it is capable, thanks to its faculties of sense and emotion, of choosing the better of two goods, i.e., continued life over a tasty meal.⁴¹ Each new kind of love overlays the previous one in a cumulative manner, and in an ideal state, they support and harmonize one another, enabling every created being to strive towards its Creator to the furthest extent its mental and spiritual faculties may allow.

Therein lies the rub: turning to humanity, Avicenna notes with disapproval that most members of his species live out their lives driven by desire for food and sexual reproduction – an existence not much different from that of a weed. Even a brave man has only risen to the spiritual level of a lion; a step in the right direction, but still not enough. Just as animals have an emotional faculty that allows them to make decisions that vegetables cannot, so too do humans have a rational faculty that both enables and obliges them to bring

40. My translation from Avicenna 55; another reading, followed by Fackenheim, is “al-ghayri al-ḥissīyah,” which he renders as “inanimate.”

41. Cf. Avicenna 62; trans. Fackenheim 217.

their love to a level of nobility that animals cannot perceive or attain. This cumulative hierarchy, based on the dynamic of gift and counter-gift, produces a theory in which love (*'ishq*) cannot be evaluated independent of context; depending on who is loving what in what manner, the same love that is praiseworthy in one scenario may become blameworthy in another (Fackenheim 221):

We can now make the statement that it is part of the nature of beings endowed with reason to covet a beautiful sight; and that this is sometimes – certain conditions granted – to be considered as refinement and nobility. [...] If a man loves a beautiful form with animal desire, he deserves reproof, even condemnation and the charge of sin, as, for instance, those who commit unnatural adultery and in general people who go astray. But whenever he loves a pleasing form with an intellectual consideration, in the manner we have explained, then this is to be considered as an approximation to nobility and an increase in goodness.

This contextual grounding allows for love to exist in a highly nuanced and flexible conceptual space where the sinful and sublime may blend and intermix, as Avicenna demonstrates in a number of examples. The animal desire for pleasure in sex may be co-opted by the rational soul as a means towards the “most excellent” act of preserving the species through procreation; the love of beauty and the desire to embrace beautiful bodies “are not in themselves blameworthy,” so long as they are fortified with moral rectitude (222). In other words, an appreciation of the physical form can be a very positive thing, if it inspires the soul to the Neoplatonic turning-inwards that will cause it to be aware of the Absolute Good; as von Grunebaum explains, “The moral duty for Avicenna is no longer the suppression of the lower parts but rather their integration in the soul’s struggle toward perfection” (233). Thus, the road to perfection is fundamentally a matter of *capacity* and *harmony*: every entity in existence has its own way to God depending on what it is capable of striving for, and the measure of its success will be determined by whether or not its actions are in line with that nature.

To conclude this section – which really only provides the tiniest of samples from the enormous corpus of classical/medieval Islamic love-literature – I would like to revisit the basic themes and points I hope to establish out of this survey and then bring to our reading of the Stories of the Black and White Domes. As we have seen, Islamic

42. One such schema is found in the second chapter of Ibn Dāwūd al-Isfahānī's (d. 910) *Kitāb al-zahra* ("Book of the flower/Venus"), which divides love into eight stages: inclination (*istiḥsān*), fondness (*mawadda*), affection (*maḥabbā*), intimacy (*khulla*), desire (*hawā*), passion (*'ishq*), obsession (*tatayyum*), and rapture (*walah*). See Ibn Dāwūd al-Isfahānī 19–21; for similar lists, Bell, *Love Theory* 157–60.

43. An excellent illustration of this understanding is found in Tūṣī's *Ethics*, where the philosopher writes, "Passion is of two kinds: one reprehensible, arising from an excessive quest for Pleasure, the other praiseworthy arising from an excessive quest for Good. The difficulty of distinguishing clearly between these two causes results in the diversity of men's attitudes towards praising or blaming Passion itself" (198).

societies, drawing from both peninsular Arabian and Hellenistic traditions, conceived of many different kinds of love with an abundance of names and classifications, to the point that it would be futile work to formulate universal categories that could apply to large corpora of texts, even within a limited time frame.⁴² Nonetheless, we *can* identify certain thematic bundles that seem to have acted as conceptual anchors for writers across time and genre, allowing us to trace some amount of development and elaboration across the *longue durée*. The thematic anchor I have focused on in this survey is the general distinction between sober, law-abiding, and charitable love (*agapē*), often conceived of as *ḥubb* and set in contrast with love as chronic disease and divine madness (*erōs*), for which *'ishq* eventually became the descriptive term *par excellence*. As we saw in our earlier texts, these phenomena were originally treated as quite separate things: the Qur'ān makes a clear distinction between the two, Majnūn is explicit that he is afflicted by *'ishq* for Laylā and not by *ḥubb*; Rābi'ā speaks of the "capricious" and "worthy" aspects of her affection for God. Yet even in these latter two examples, a curious kind of blending begins to take place, in which the "worthier" of the two loves is best understood as the all-consuming and at times transgressive form of *'ishq*. This blending was in part made possible by the intensive elaboration that *'ishq* received in philosophical and speculative circles; as a term that does not appear in the Qur'ān at all but that strongly resonates with the idea of *erōs*, it was probably the most malleable word at their disposal. Thus *'ishq* came to hold both the negative aspects of unbridled concupiscence as well as the ennobling nature of total devotion and self-sacrifice.⁴³ It was a capacious and ambivalent term, which is precisely why doctors of law emptied so many bottles of ink in their efforts to separate the good and bad aspects of *'ishq* from each other. But in the fields of mystical, philosophical, and poetic enterprise, *'ishq* had become an enormously productive concept for contemplating the human condition.

How can these conclusions be brought to the *Haft paykar*? On one hand, it is quite possible to read the stories as allegorical treatments along the lines of concupiscent versus generous, material versus sublime, *erōs* versus *agapē*, *hawā* versus *ḥubb*; these two conceptual poles construct two very different cosmological worlds around them, governed by two different Gods who respond to and interact with man in different ways, with interesting implications for the kinds of conclusions we can draw from the poem as a whole. But on the other hand, the fact that all of these distinctions *can* be subsumed

under the broader concept of *'ishq*, that ambiguous and unfathomable force that binds all creation with its Creator, makes for a very different reading experience. The dense and multivalent language of the *Haft paykar* not only permits such a double-reading, but, I suspect, may encourage one.

3 From Black to White

The Story of the Black Dome is a story about desire: the desire to know, the desire to learn, the desire to possess. Such desire, on the surface of it, would not seem to be a negative thing; after all, the Prophet is famous for urging his followers to “seek knowledge, even unto China” (“uṭlubū al-‘ilma wa-law bi-l-ṣīn”) – the destination of our royal protagonist.⁴⁴ But what about those things beyond the pale of the human capacity to know? What happens, the story seems to ask, when mortal curiosity is pitted against the unknowable, the unintelligible, and the unobtainable? A hush falls over the audience; a sense of foreboding pervades the opening lines (32.15–22):

که شنیدم بخردی از خویشان * خرده کاران و چابک اندیشان
 که ز کذبانوان قصر بهشت * بود زاهد زنی لطیف سرشت
 آمدی در سرای ما هر ماه * یک بیک کسوتش حریر سیاه
 باز جستند کز چه ترس و چه بیم * در سوادى تویی سبیکه سیم
 به که ما را بقصه یار شوی * وین سیه را سپیدکار شوی
 باز گویی ز نیک خواهی خویش * معنی آیت سیاهی خویش
 زن که از راستی ندید گزیر * گفت کاحوال این سیاه حریر
 چونک ناگفته باز نگذارید * گویم ار زان که باورم دارید

(I heard from one of my wise relatives – attentive to detail and clever in thought – that among the leading ladies of the heavenly castle, there was a woman ascetic of sweet temperament who came to our palace every month, wearing clothes entirely of black silk. Everyone asked her: “O silver sun, from what fear or terror are you in black? You should acquaint us with the story, and make this black white. By your good will, tell us what the sign of your blackness means!” When the woman saw no escape from the truth, she said, “Since you won’t leave the unspoken alone, I will tell you about this black silk – if you will believe me.”)

44. Like many famous hadiths, this particular one may be spurious (Albānī 1: 600–09), but it was extremely popular and circulated by medieval writers who might have been less concerned with the precise authenticity of the words and more with the spirit of their message; see, for example, Aṭṭār, *Mantiq Al-tayr*, v. 740 (trans. by Davis in Aṭṭār, *The Conference of the Birds* 35). For a discussion of this ideal in medieval Muslim societies, see Gellens.

Notice how the woman's appearance on the scene kindles an immediate feeling of desire within everyone who sees her. Although this motif is common in many Persian literary genres, from romantic epics to the epigrammatic catalogues of beautiful "city-disturbing" (*shahr-āshūb*) youths, this woman is no young belle, but an ascetic; the desire she inspires is not derived from her appearance, but rather from what her appearance *hides*. The woman is obviously reluctant to speak, but as she sees no "escape" (another conspicuous word) from her situation, nor any sign that her companions' desire to hear the unspoken (and perhaps unspeakable) might abate, she surrenders to their will. Thus the story begins with an act of coercion, the uninformed demanding answers to questions best left unasked.

The narrative now shifts to the ascetic, who tells us of a king she once served. As we learned in the introduction, the king seems to be a kind and hospitable man, welcoming all and sundry to stay with him at court. But this generous treatment, she adds, did not come without a price: "That traveller would tell the king of all the wonders he had seen, and the king would listen" ("ān musāfir har ān shigift ki dīd • shāh rā qiṣṣa kard u shāh shanīd," 32.34). This little detail is important: it suggests that the king nurtures within himself the same desire to know the unknown that we saw from the princess's relatives. One day, without warning, he disappears from his court: "He turned his head away from us, as though he were a *sīmurgh*" ("sar chu sīmurgh dar kashīd az mā," 32.36), the ascetic says. Again, the wording is significant; the *sīmurgh* is the mythical bird that lives on Mount Qāf at the end of the world, and often stands, as it does in 'Attār's *Conference of the Birds*, as a symbol for the divine essence. Some time later, and just as abruptly, the king returns from his travels, clad in black from head to toe. In contrast to the ascetic, no one dares to ask the king what had befallen him on his journey, despite the dramatic change in his appearance; but it seems he is looking for a confidante, as he readily responds when questioned (32.48–50):

گفتم ای دستگیر غم خواران * بهترین همه جهانداران
بر زمین بارگی کرا باشد * کاسمان را بتیشه بتراشد
باز پرسیدن حدیث نهفت * هم تو دانی و هم توانی گفت

(I said, "O best of all kings, who takes the hand of those who grieve: who possesses such a mount by which to scrape the heavens with an axe?⁴⁵ You know what it means to seek out a hidden tale, and [only] you can tell it.")

45. The editors of Nizāmī's *Haft Paykar* disagree whether the word is *bārigī* (Ritter and Rypka), *yārigī* (Ṣarvatīyān), *yāri 'ī* (Dastgirdi), or *bāzu 'ī* (Zanjānī), meaning respectively "Who would have the horse/ability/courage/arm to...?" One interesting connection that comes with the *bārigī* ("mount") reading is that it might invoke the Prophet's journey to heaven (*mi'rāj*) upon the winged back of Burāq; thus the question would suggest, "Who (besides the Prophet) possesses such a steed as to attempt the journey?"

It is worth noticing at this juncture just how many degrees of separation now lie between us and the narrative. Along with Bahrām Gōr, we are apprised of a secret story by the Indian princess of the Black Dome, who heard it from a wise relative of hers, who heard it from the woman ascetic, who heard it from the king. The enabling agent behind each moment of exchange along this line of transmission is *curiosity* – the desire to know something manifestly hidden – and as we have seen, every person who is made privy to this knowledge will don the robes of black, a gesture that simultaneously expresses their initiation into this secret world and attracts the interest of those still in the dark, so to speak. The cycle repeats itself as the king recalls that fateful day when a man dressed in black entered his court (32.56–60):

گفتم ای من نخوانده نامه تو * سیه از بهر چیست جامه تو
گفت بگذار ازین سخن بگذر * که ز سیمرخ کس نداد خبر
گفتمش باز گو بهانه مگیر * خیرم ده ز قیروان وز قیر
گفت باید که داریم معذور * کارزویست این ز گفتن دور
زین سیاهی خبر ندارد کس * مگر آن کین سیاه دارد و بس

(I said, “Hey you, I haven’t heard your story – why are your clothes black?” He replied, “Never mind, let this matter go; no one speaks about the *simurgh*.” I said to him, “No excuses – spill the beans! Tell me about Qayrawan and *qīr*.”⁴⁶ He said, “You’ll have to excuse me; my wish is that this matter remains far from telling. No one knows the reason for this blackness save for those who wear it; that is all.”)

46. The king uses Qayrawan (Kairouan, in modern Tunisia) to mean a distant land, while *qīr* means “pitch,” the color of his clothing.

The *simurgh* again makes an appearance in this passage, tantalizing all with the lure of secret but powerful knowledge. It comes as no surprise that the king’s desire is only further inflamed by such allusions; casting off all decorum, he throws himself into a fit of begging and supplication that even he admits, in retrospect, was beyond the pale: “When my pleas went beyond all measure, the man grew embarrassed at my discomposure” (“*chūn zi ḥadd raft khwāstārī-yi man • sharm-ash āmaḍ zi bīqarārī-yi man*,” 32.63). The stranger finally relents and tells the king that far away in China is a town known as the “city of the bewildered, the mourning-house of those who wear black” (“*nām-i ān shahr shahr-i madhūshān • ta` ziyat-khāna-yi siyah-pūshān*,” 32.65); there he will find what he seeks. And with that, the guest departs, leaving behind more questions than answers. It is a strange paradox: the riddle of the black has completely possessed the king – “I feared I would go mad” (“*bīm-i ān shud ki man shavam*

shaydā,” 32.72), he confesses – but the answer to this riddle lies in a city at the end of the world, inhabited by people who have lost their wits: the cure is eerily akin to the disease. But the king cannot rest; he abdicates his throne and sets off in search of the mysterious village.

The political advice manuals of medieval Persian literature are replete with admonitions that a king must never become a slave of his own passions; given what we have encountered so far, the story functions well as an example of the consequences of such a condition.⁴⁷ Although the king’s desire is not of a sexual nature (yet), it has the same negative impact on his ability to control himself and maintain his dignity. We have already seen him embarrass the secret out of his guest, and upon arriving at the “city of the bewildered,” he must again resort to tricks and manipulation, singling out a poor butcher to do his bidding: “By showering him with gold, that butcher became my prey, like a sacrificial bull” (“mard-i qaṣṣāb az ān zar-afshānī • ṣayd-i man shud chu gāv-i qurbānī,” 32.91). His single-minded obsession with the riddle of the black has thrown him into a state, as he puts it himself, of instability and agitation (“bīqarārī”), beautifully illustrated in his account of his ascent to heaven in the magical basket (32.138–39, 142–48):

47. See, for example, Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar ibn Qābūs 70–76; and Ṭūsī 142–44.

شمع وارم رسن بگردن چُست * رسنم سخت بوذ و گردن سُست
چون اسیری ز بختِ بَد رنجور * رسن از گردنم نمی شد دور
بوذ میلی بر آوریده بماه * که زبر دیدنش فتاذ کلاه
چون رسید آن سبذ بمیلِ بلند * رسنم را گره رسید به بند
کارسازم شد و مرا بگذاشت * کردم افغان بسی و سوذ نداشت
زیر و بالا چو در جهان دیدم * خویشتن را بر آسمان دیدم
آسمان بر سرم فسون خوانده * من معلق چو آسمان مانده
زان سیاست که جان رسید بناف * دیده در کار مانده زهره شکاف
سوی بالا دلم ندید دلیر * زهره آن کرا که بیند زیر

(The rope quickly wrapped around my neck, candle-like
– the rope was hard, my neck was soft – and never let go, as
though I were a prisoner burdened by an evil fate. [...] There
was a pillar, stretching up to the moon; if someone tried to
see the top, his hat would fall off. When the basket came to
the top of that pillar, my knotted rope came to its fastening-
point. It loosed its knots and let me go, and I screamed for
help, to no avail. Looking high and low, I saw myself above
the sky! The heavens had laid a curse upon my head: like the

48. This is a slightly idiomatic rendering; a more literal version would be: “From that [the heavens’] policy/judgment, my life came to my navel; in the affair, my eyes remained leaking bile [*zahra-shikāf*, i.e., staring and terrified].”

heavens, I remained suspended. Thus condemned, my heart fell to my stomach; my eyes were blinded by fear.⁴⁸ My heart lacked the courage for me to look up – and who could have dared to look down?)

In addition to the king’s loss of direction, his suspension in midair, and his utter helplessness – all powerful metaphors for the experience of love – the image of the rope twisting around his neck situates the heavenly voyage in a liminal space between two worlds, between death and life: “Though that rope had strung up my body, it was the only thread between me and my life” (“gar-chi būd ān rasan ṭanāb-i tan-am • rishta-yi jān nashud̄ juz ān rasan-am,” 32.141). These two elements – the ecstatic, bewildering, and terrifying onset of love, initiating the journey to a world beyond and between life and death – suggest the onset of a transformative encounter from which there is no going back.

When the King is finally transported from the pillar by an enormous bird (perhaps the *sīmurgh* hinted at by the traveller?) and dropped in the middle of a verdant garden, it indeed seems like he has died and gone to heaven. We need not dwell on the description of the feast the fairy-maidens lay out for him, but readers may be assured that Nizāmī spares no effort to convince us of the sumptuousness and finery of the occasion. But alas, the king’s ascent to Paradise does not bring him any joy, for his now-sated (or diverted) desire to know the riddle has morphed into desire for sexual union with the fairy queen, Turktāz: “I washed the page [of my fortune] free of joyful words, for in my surfeit I sought ever more” (“varaḡ az ḥarf-e khurramī shustam • k-az ziyādat ziyādatī justam,” 32.394), he tells us ruefully. The queen, for her part, seems well aware of the king’s plight, and takes it upon herself to guide him back onto the path of reason.⁴⁹ This is suggested even in her opening speech to him: “The whole place is yours, and you have command; but you must sit and rise with me, so that *you become aware of my secret*, and gain a share of my love” (“hama jāy ān-i tu-st u ḥukm turā-st • lēk bā man nishasht bāyaḡ u khāst / tā shavī āgah az nihānī-yi man • bahra yābī zi mihrbānī-yi man,” 32.244–45). We are made privy to some of these lessons, which the queen delivers each time she rebuffs the king’s advances on her. They have the cadence of the pithy maxims of advice literature, as if she were quoting out of Sa’dī’s *Gulistān* (32.283–84; 32.345–46; 32.362–64):

49. Meisami has noted that many of the women in the *Haft paykar* and other works by Nizāmī act as guides for the male protagonists; see Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* 129, 220–21; Meisami, “The Theme of the Journey” 160–61.

گفت امشب بیوسه قانع باش * بیش ازین رنگِ آسمان متراش
هرچ زین بگذرد روا نبوذ * دوست آن به که بیوفا نبوذ

(She said, “Tonight, be contented with kisses; do not scrape the heavens’ brilliance more than this. Anything more than this is not proper; the lover is he who is not faithless.”)

بقناعت کسی که شاذ بوذ * تا بوذ محتشم نهاد بوذ
وانک با آرزو کند خویشی * اوفتد عاقبت بدرویشی

(As long as one is happy with his lot, he will remain noble; but he who serves himself out of desire will in the end fall into poverty.)

گر شبی زین خیال گردی دور * یابی از شمع جاودانی نور
چشمه را بقطره مفروش * کین همه نیش دارد آن همه نوش
در خود بر یک آرزو در بند * همه ساله بخرمی می خند

(If you can stay away from this fancy for a night, you’ll obtain light from an everlasting candle. Don’t sell a spring for a drop of water, for that will only sting you, while this is entirely wholesome. If your door is closed on one desire, you’ll laugh in joy forever.)

These admonishments drive home a concrete ethical message, grounded in the principles of contentment, control, and fidelity. The king must know his place, maintain his vows to the queen, and keep his desire in check; should he manage these things, the queen promises, he will eventually be rewarded with all he desires and then some. This would constitute what we might call the ‘common sense’ logic of Nizāmī’s social and textual world, and it is interesting that even the king seems quite aware of his transgressions, even if he is powerless to correct his wayward path (32.456–59):

چون فریبِ زبانِ او دیدم * گوش کردم ولیک نشنیدم
چند کوشیدم از سکونت و شرم * آهنم تیز بوذ و آتش گرم
بختم از دور گفت کای نادان * لیس قریه و رای عبّادان
من خام از زیاده اندیشی * بکمی اوفتادم از بیشی

(As I perceived her beguiling speech, I heard, but did not listen. How much I struggled in steadfastness and shame! My

50. A proverb that basically means that this is the last outpost of civilization; one must not give up the blessings he has in pursuit of something greater. See Nizāmī Ganjavī, *Haft Paykar* 514 (ed. Sarvatīyān).

iron was sharp, and my fire hot. From far away, my fortune said: “You fool! ‘Beyond this Abadan there is no town.’”⁵⁰ But I, immature and obsessed with gain, fell out of surplus into lack.)

The king, it seems, is doomed to fail, and indeed it is only a few lines later that he finds himself returned to the basket, with nothing but the wasteland and the butcher there to console him. If he had died and gone to heaven, he must now mourn his restoration to life and the deprivation of the eternal joy that was so nearly his. The themes of concupiscence and unchecked desire exhibited by the king (and presumably all members of the order of the black robes), laid in counterpoint to the unheeded admonitions of the fairy queen in the celestial garden, bring the story to a close on a firm moral message: those who cannot control their desire, sooner or later, must don black robes of regret and mourning.

When we turn to the Story of the White Dome out of this reading, it appears to provide the perfect corrective to the king’s personal shortcomings of unchecked desire and concupiscence. It is worth noting that many of the structural and thematic features of the Black Dome are inverted in the White: where the Black Dome begins with the king’s desire to bring the wider world in, by receiving travelers and hearing their stories, the White begins with the youth’s desire to shut the wider world out, with walls, gates, and a self-imposed quarantine. Where loss and lack, even at the feast, dominate the thematic tone of the Black Dome, the setting of the White Dome – an earthly garden whose sumptuous beauty rivals the one in the sky – paints a scene of abundance and plenty. If the king is an outsider who intrudes upon the fairy garden, the youth will find, to his surprise, that it is the fairies who intrude on him! Why travel to the ends of the earth to find happiness and joy, the story seems to say, when all you could ever need is right here?⁵¹

As before, many of these themes are seeded in the story’s prelude. The *mise-en-scène* of Bahrām’s stay inside the White Dome is saturated with metaphors for the cycle of day and night, inviting us to appreciate the phenomenon for its aesthetic beauty, while Venus, the planet of love, looks on from above (38.3). When night arrives and the Persian princess, “dawn-born and night-awake” (“shab-nishīn-i sapēda-dam-zāda,” 38.6), is asked to speak, she introduces her story

51. One might compare this intratextual dialogue with, for example, the interaction of the stories in works like Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*; the juxtaposition of the idealistic quest for love in *The Knight’s Tale* with the ‘naturalistic’ view of desire in *The Miller’s Tale* (see Miller 40–43) seems especially appropos in this instance.

as one told to her during a marvelous feast, the very description of which would stir up the appetite. This elysian imagery of beauty, abundance, and pleasure overflows into the beginning of the story proper (38.24–28, 34–35):

گفت شیرین سخن جوانی بود * کز ظریفی شکرستانی بود
عیسی گاه دانش آموزی * یوسفی وقت مجلس افروزی
آگه از علم واز کفایت نیز * پارسایش بهتر از همه چیز
داشت باغی بشکل باغ اِرم * باغها گرد باغ او چو حرم
خاکش از بوی خوش عبیر سرشت * میوههایش چو میوههای بهشت
بر کشیده ز خط پرگارش * چار مهره بچار دیوارش
از بناهای بر کشیده بماه * چشم بد را نبود در وی راه

(She said, “There was once a youth of sweet speech, a sugar-cane-field in grace and eloquence. He was a Jesus at the time of teaching, a Joseph in the way he lit up a gathering. He knew [the value of] both knowledge and sufficiency, and his chastity was nonpareil. He had a garden like that of Iram: gardens round his garden, like an inviolate sanctuary [*haram*]. The sweet scent of its soil had the nature of ambergris, and its fruits were like the fruits of Paradise. [...] By the line of his compass, he had erected four walls with four seals; the evil eye has no way to reach buildings drawn up to the moon.”)

In addition to the paradisiacal imagery of delicious fruits and sweet soil, there is an element of the holy and the sacrosanct here that deserves further attention. It cannot be an accident that this youth is likened to two biblical and Qur’anic prophets, and the sacredness of his abode is underscored by the term *haram*, a common name for the sanctuary of Mecca.⁵² Balance and order reign supreme in this space; the youth’s awareness of knowledge (*ilm*) and sufficiency (*kifāyat*) suggests that he knows both when to ask and when to stay silent – qualities sorely lacking in the case of the king – and it is perhaps due to this inviolate purity that our hero’s chastity (*parsā’ī*) is of paramount importance, hence the four walls to guard him from the evil eye. With all these clues in the air, it is not far-fetched to suppose that we are standing in a garden of Eden (Iram), enjoying the fruits of God’s bounty as long as we resist the temptation to question it.

But who can resist temptation in the face of love? Having completed his Friday prayers (another gesture towards the sacred), the youth returns to his garden and is surprised to find the gates are

52. Meisami, “Introduction” 297 n. 38:27 notes that the image of the other gardens clustered around his own are a visual reminder of pilgrims circumambulating the Ka’ba.

locked, while beautiful music, so sweet to even set the trees a-dancing (38.44), wafts over the walls. The reaction of the youth – whose remarkable wisdom and modesty has only just been lionized – shows just how naive these earlier assertions were. With “no patience to turn his head away, and no key to open the door” (“na shakib-i ki bar garāyad sar • na kalid-i ki bar gushāyad dar,” 38.46), he begins to rend his garments and pound at the door, begging to be granted access and join in the fun. When no one responds, he has no option but the rather ironic move of breaking into his own house, whereupon he is immediately apprehended by the two maidens guarding the other side of the walls, who take him for a thief and start to beat him. Upon learning that he is the owner of the garden, however, they apologize to him and offer their services, as they patch up the breach with thorns to deter any further encroachments (38.75). This sequence of actions creates an interesting ambiguity around the question of ownership and legitimacy: having violated the walls that were meant to keep others out, the youth is now a guest in his own house. His bastion of chastity is now a garden of pleasure, and as the youth makes his way in, he stumbles into a scene that has been the time-honored *locus classicus* for the onslaught of love (38.107–10):

سوی حوض آمدند ناز کنان * گِره از بندِ قُرطه باز کنان
 صُدره کنندند و بی نقاب شدند * وز لطافت چو در آب شدند
 می‌زدند آب را بسیمِ مراد * می‌نفهتند سیم را بسواد
 ماه و ماهی روانه هر دو در آب * ماه تا ماهی اوفتاده بتاب

([The women] went towards the pool, coy and flirtatious, loosening the knots of their shirts; they doffed their vests and removed their veils, and gracefully slid into the water like pearls. They splashed water upon their silver necks, hiding silver in black.⁵³ Moon and fish glided in the water, and fish to moon fell ablaze.⁵⁴)

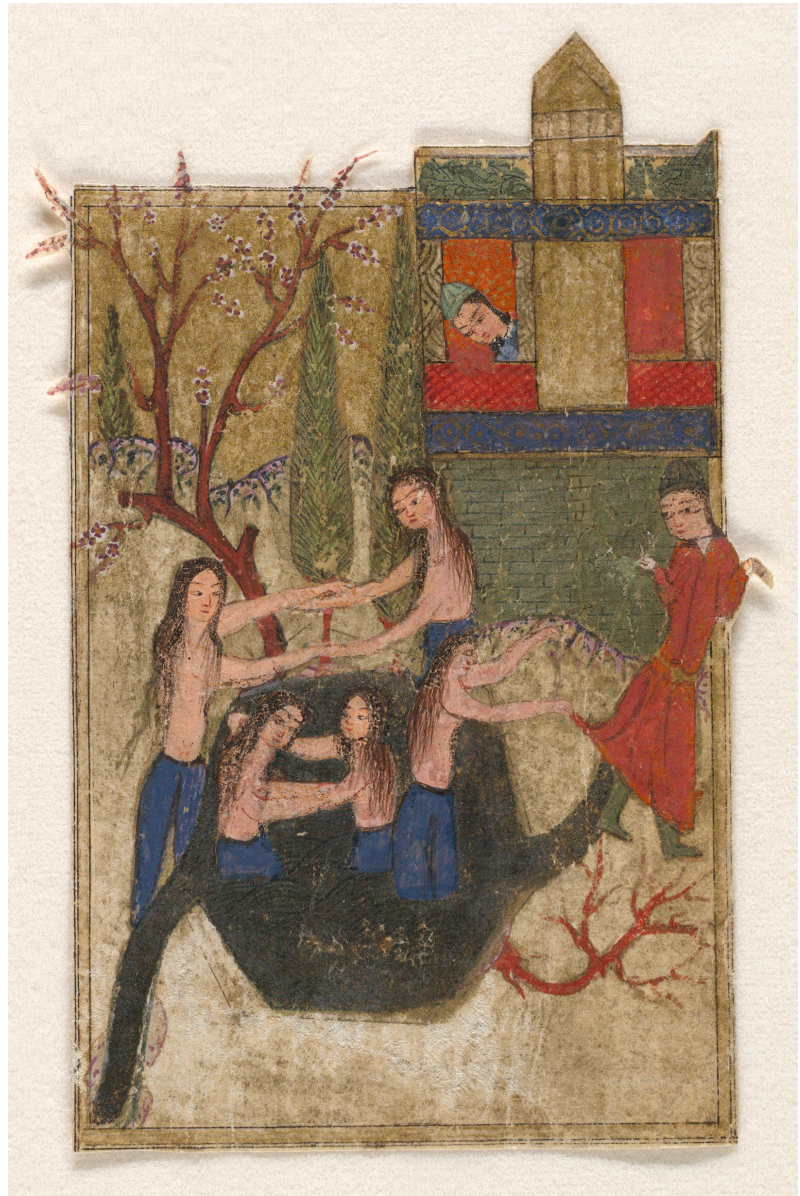
A bathing scene – the ultimate trump card Eros may wield against the chaste (Figure 4). Our poor “Joseph” is left helpless in the grip of love-sickness: “With his blood boiling throughout his veins, every limb let out a cry” (“rag bi rag khūn-ash az giriftan-i jūsh • az har andām bar kashīd khurūsh,” 38.122). The physical pain he feels upon beholding this scene is a sure sign that *‘ishq* has penetrated his body; just think of Palamon’s famous “A!” when he catches sight of Emily (Chaucer, v. 1078), or Khosrow’s heart bursting with grief like a split

53. This passage is an excellent example of Nizāmī’s mastery of polysemous language, whose ambiguity produces a far more vivid mental image than a more explicit style would allow. The word مراد, which most editors read as *marād*, would mean ‘neck,’ possibly a synecdoche for the whole body; but it could also be *murād*, ‘desired,’ alluding to their intoxicating beauty: see Nizāmī Ganjavī, *Haft Paykar* 300 (ed. Dastgirdī and Ḥamīdīyān). Likewise, the ‘black’ in which the women hide their ‘silver’ could be their musky locks or the dark water. My translation seeks to reproduce this multivalence.

54. Here, the language gets even denser. The ‘moon’ refers to the moon-faced beauties swimming with the fish in the pool (producing again an interplay of dark and light imagery, as in the previous line), and the phrase ‘from fish to moon’ is an expression for “from earth to heaven;” see Nizāmī Ganjavī, *The Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance* 288 n. 27:1. “Fell ablaze” is my take on “uftādan bi tāb;” *tāb* is a great word for this action, because it carries valences of twisting and rolling, burning and shining – thus the world is illuminated by the beautiful women even as it falls into passionate love with them.

Figure 4: Bathing Maidens Observed by the Master of the Garden

The bewildered youth looks torn between running away and diving in, while one of the women seizes the hem of his garment. Illustrated folio from a manuscript of the *Haft paykar* of Nizāmi (c. 1410); opaque watercolor and gold on paper; 8.5 x 5.2 cm (3 3/8 x 2 1/16 in). Image courtesy of Harvard Art Museums / Arthur M. Sackler Museum, The Stuart Cary Welch Collection, Gift of Edith I. Welch in memory of Stuart Cary Welch and Adrienne Minassian; object number 2011.539.



pomegranate (“zi hisrat gashta chūn nār-i kafīda”) when he sees Shirin bathing in the spring (Nizāmi Ganjavī, *Khusraw va Shirīn* 24-55).

Thus we find ourselves, once again, in a situation almost exactly parallel to the Story of the Black Dome: our protagonist has been utterly possessed by love and will stop at nothing to obtain his desire. The major difference is not in the hero, but his partner; where the queen of the fairies was firm in rejecting the king’s advances, our harp-player here is more than willing to play along. The transgression must therefore be stopped by other means, and as we recall, it is the *garden itself* that thwarts the lovers’ many attempts to steal away and have a little fun. This strikes me as extremely important, as it im-

plies a world in which chastity and licit behavior are not a matter of human custom, but belong to the laws of nature. In this world, love and success are immediately and effortlessly attainable, as long as we play by the rules that God has set; the only way that *ishq* can bring the lover to a happy end is if it is contained within the ‘proper ways’ of loving that Avicenna and other moral philosophers prescribed. If we go back to our earlier dichotomy of concupiscent love (*hawā* or *ishq*) and affectionate love (*ḥubb*), we might say that these two stories, juxtaposed, offer a concrete argument that the former love must end in disaster and ‘death’ unless it is regulated and brought into the service of divine *ḥubb*, that is, the laws of religion that God *lovingly* bestowed upon humanity (thinking back to the Qur’ānic passages discussed above). In this light, the sequence suggests a clear linear trajectory from black, the color of concupiscence, loss, and mourning, to white, the color of purity, chastity, and salvation.

The role of the Deity is further underscored in the speech that the youth delivers at the end of the story, in which he describes the series of strange events that befell him and the harp-player as an act of “divine grace” (*ināyat-i azalī*) that “delivered our affairs out of sin into flawlessness” (“*kār-i mā rā [...] az khaṭā dāda būd bī-khalalī,*” 38.289). The youth continues (38.291–302):

بخت ما را چو پارسایی داد * از چنان کارِ بَدِ رهایی داد
 آنک دیوش بکامِ خود نکند * نیک شد هیچ نیک بَد نکند
 بر حرام آنک دل نهاده بُوَد * دور ازین جا حرامزاده بُوَد
 با عروسی بدان پری چهری * نکند هیچ مرد بدمهری
 خاصه آنکو جوانیی دارد * مردی و مهربانیی دارد
 لیک چون عصمتی بُوَد در راه * نتوان رفت باز پیش گناه
 کس ازان میوه‌دار بر نخورد * که یکی چشم بَد درو نگرَد
 چشم صد گونه دام و دذ بر ما * حال ازین جا شدست بَد بر ما
 آنچه شد شد حدیث آن نکنیم * وانچ داریم ازان زیان نکنیم
 توبه کردم باشکار و نهان * در پذیرفتم از خدای جهان
 که اگر در اجل بُوَد تأخیر * وین شکاری بُوَد شکار پذیر
 به حلالش عروسِ خویش کنم * خدمتش زانچ بُوَد بیش کنم

(When Fate granted us forbearance, it delivered us from this wicked deed. He whom the demon cannot move to his pleasure is good, and cannot do evil, [while] he who has set his heart on the forbidden – far from here!⁵⁵ – is a bastard. No man could despise a bride with such a fairy face, especially if he is young, honorable, and loving; but when chastity is on

55. Or perhaps better, “present company excluded.”

the road, one cannot turn back to sin. No one will eat the fruit of a tree that has been gazed on by an evil eye. The eyes of a hundred kinds of beasts and animals were upon us; because of this, evil befell us. What happened, happened; let's not talk about it, lest we harm that which we have. I've repented both in private and in public, and I've accepted [the decree of] the Lord of the World: if my time of reckoning is delayed, and this huntress [of hearts] agrees to be hunted, I shall make her my lawful bride and serve her more than ever before.)

This speech confirms the promises that the queen of the fairies made in the Story of the Black Dome of a happy ending for those who wait: by curbing his desire, accepting what God has given him, and taking the road of chastity and marriage, the youth gains both the bride and the paradise that eluded the king in black. Moreover, we learn that it was the eyes of the *animals*, rather than the gathering of women, that jinxed the lovers' previous efforts; in a sense, it was the natural world that drove the lovers out of the wild and secluded places in the garden and back into society, where they could fulfill their responsibilities and potential as rational humans. One is reminded of the story *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* by the Andalusian philosopher Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1184), where the animals act as mute teachers to a marooned child, who deduces from their example the proper hierarchy of creation and the necessary existence of God (Ibn Ṭufayl 127–35).⁵⁶ Most important of all, however, is the opening line of this passage, where the youth realizes that it was nothing less than *divine grace* (*'ināyat-i azalī*, literally something like the “favorable attention of the Eternal” or “[God's] everlasting attention”) that moved the world to save them.

The intervention of divine grace – especially as it is framed in opposition to the ultimately unsuccessful quest for union in the Story of the Black Dome – is a key element in unpacking Nizāmī's cosmology of love, taking us back to the fundamental interplay between Need and Gift that we noted at the beginning of this essay. Unlike the first story, where the protagonist was so consumed by need that “he heard, but did not listen,” the lovers here realize that their frustrated efforts are a sign of God's *'ināyat* – his attention, care, and mercy. Thus it is that God, in this final story, exhibits the same concerned, proactive, and compassionate love for humanity that distinguishes his nature in scripture. In Nizāmī's notion of *'ināyat*, we may have fallen back into the orbit of *agapē*, *caritas*, and *ḥubb*: a gift-love in which God *moves* towards his creatures and steers them towards the

56. As suggested above, both the Story of the White Dome and *The Miller's Tale* seem to offer a vision of the world in which God's bounty is immediately accessible and naturally plentiful, without any need for human struggle: consider Mark Miller's description of the latter in the context of our discussion: “For the Miller's project to get off the ground, then, he must suggest not only that nature determines our ends and provides for their motivational transparency, but also that nature determines and provides the means to our ends. Then the connection between desire and its objects will look completely seamless, and there will be no gaps left for practical reason to fill and speculative reason to reflect on” (43).

straight and narrow. If the king of the Black Dome is doomed to failure, no matter how hard he struggles for his paradise, in the White Dome it is almost as if the lovers simply let God come to them in the earthly paradise they already inhabit.

Union, both earthly and divine, is thus made possible through the restoration and implementation of sacred law, an act of submission and commitment (*islām*) to divine love after the failure of *‘ishq* to reach its goals. This ending to the stories – taking place on Friday, the day of communal prayer – is a fascinating example of a motival turn-around similar to those found in other works of love-literature. The writers Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) and Andreas Capellanus (fl. late 1100s) are both famous for writing treatises on love that first extol its ability to take us beyond the bounds of normal human habitation and experience, then bring us back into the fold of religion at the end of their work. One would be hard-pressed to believe that the saucy *Decameron* would conclude with the grim, almost horrifying tale of Griselda, or the *Canterbury Tales* with the Parson’s sobering homily. The carnival of love has come to an end; it is time for law to reassert itself (38.317–22):

گر ببینی ز مرغ تا ماهی * همه را باشد این هواخواهی
دولتی بین که یافت آب زلال * وانگهی خورد ازو که بود حلال
چشمه یافت پاک چون خورشید * چون سمن صافی و چو سیم سپید
در سپیدیست روشنایی روز * وز سپیدیست مه جهان افروز
همه رنگی تکلف اندوخت * جز سپیدی که او نیالودست
در پرستش بوقت کوشیدن * سنت آمد سپید پوشیدن

(Everything you see, from birds to fish, are driven to seek their desire [*havā-khwāhī*, lit., “desire-seeking”]. Behold a [man of] good fortune, when he found a sweet water and, at that time it became licit, drank of it. He obtained a spring, clear like the sun, pure like jasmine, white like silver. In white resides the splendor of day; from white the moon achieves its brilliance. Save white, which is pure, every color is overlaid with artifice.⁵⁷ At the time for striving in worship, it is the custom to wear white.⁵⁸)

57. This word “artifice” (*takalluf*) is quite interesting here; it literally means “taking trouble” and is used to describe aesthetic artifice and ornament that looks or feels rather forced, rather than the “inimitable ease” (*al-sahl al-mumtani*) that is more regularly prized as the ideal. This might support my suggestion that the world of the White Dome is an ‘easy’ world, where good things come to you if you just let the natural order run its course – in contradistinction to other colors, which require more ‘work’ on the part of the hero and with less chance that his efforts will be rewarded (e.g., the Red and Turquoise Domes). This is especially true in the case of the Black Dome, which involves an arduous journey to the ends of the earth, a year of living in disguise, cultivating a false friendship, an ascent to heaven, and thirty days of sweet torture and supplication, with little material gain to show for it in the end.

58. Another important term, “custom” (*sunnat*) must certainly invoke here the Prophetic custom (*sunna*) of wearing white, unstitched (i.e., without *takalluf*) cloth when making the Hajj pilgrimage. This word choice further integrates the description of white with the rites of Islam.

4 Pre-prismatic love

This reading of the *Haft paykar* certainly supports the trajectory ‘from ignorance to wisdom’ presented by other scholars of the poem, but I would like to end this paper, as promised, with a few thoughts about how the text in fact complicates this interpretation and forces us to consider ways of reading that are not strictly linear and teleological. This is not to deny the power and importance of teleology in Nizāmī or in his sources: the description of Bahrām’s encounter with the angelic onager and his mysterious disappearance (perhaps occultation?) in the cave at the end of the *Haft paykar* (chapter 52) strongly supports Meisami’s suggested transition from a ‘kingship of will’ to ‘kingship of law,’ a trajectory that recurs on a much larger scale in Nizāmī’s biography of Alexander (*Iskandar-nāma*), the two-part *Sharaf-nama* (*The Book of [Martial] Honor*) and *Iqbāl-nāma* (*The Book of [Divine] Fortune*). More broadly speaking, the Neoplatonic cosmology that informs the warp and weft of the *Haft paykar* is certainly committed to a hierarchy of spiritual states, ascending ever higher towards the absolute Truth. Nonetheless, Nizāmī’s framework allows for more nuance than a simple best-to-worst, highest-to-lowest ranking of the colors of love; that is to say, it resists an overly facile allegorical mapping of its components where black is *merely* bad and white *merely* good. It rather seems to suggest the capacious and contextual approach of Avicenna, in which love is a both/and phenomenon, simultaneously pure and concupiscent, self-fulfilling and self-annihilating, allowing for a multiplicity of objects without losing sight of its eternal ultimate goal.⁵⁹

59. Cf. Bausani 12–13, where he likewise argues for a “deistic” reading of the “two loves.”

Correspondingly, the stories of the *Haft paykar* may not only point towards the ‘purification’ of love in the linear journey from dark to light, but may also recursively spiral into themselves, complementing and complicating their neighbors to the extent that a one-to-one equivalence is no longer *sufficient* to explain their meaning; though articulated in a language of color, the stories ultimately point towards something beyond color itself.⁶⁰ In other words, this would suggest that white, albeit the color of purity, religion, and salvation, is not in fact the goal; it is only a color, one among seven, that constitutes something far greater than it itself has the capacity to express. What if black was an aspect of love just as valid – and indeed indispensable – as any other?

60. Meisami points out this cyclical recursivity a number of times in *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (207 n. 37 and 235 n. 67), so what I am discussing here is not entirely new; it is an aspect that I feel will open the text up to further horizons of exploration and interpretation.

Indeed, the Story of the White Dome is not even possible without the ‘darker’ side of love motivating its characters. The youth is

every bit as much a prisoner of his obsessive desire for the harp-player as the king was for the queen of the fairies, and it was only through his experience of this condition and eventual surmounting of it (through the grace of God) that the rather sterile garden he inhabited before transforms into a paradise where sexual pleasure and spiritual security can peacefully coexist and even complement each other. In this regard, the most interesting character in the story is not the youth but rather the harp-player, whose beauty acts as the catalyst that makes heaven accessible. Her playful and elusive answers to the youth's questions show that she has much more to teach him than the importance of waiting for marriage (38.152–56):

خواجه کز مهر ناشکیب آمد * با سهی سرو در عتیب آمد
گفت نام تو چیست گفتا نور * گفت چشم بد از تو گفتا دور
گفت پردت چه پرده گفتا ساز * گفت شیوت چه شیوه گفتا ناز
گفت بوسه دهیم گفتا شست * گفت هان وقت هست گفتا هست
گفت آبی بدست گفتا زود * گفت باذ این مراد گفتا بود

(The master, who had grown impatient from love, began to reproach the straight cypress. He said, "What's your name?" She said, "Light." "The evil eye...?" "Is far away." "What is your veil?" "Music." "What is your mode?" "Coquetry." "Gimme a kiss?" "How about sixty!" "Is now the time?" "Indeed it is." "Will you come to me?" "Soon!" "Will this desire come true?" "Let it be so.")

These lines, deliciously riddled with puns and sexual innuendo, offer much food for thought. The harpist's name, Light (*Nūr*), is suggestive of the Illuminationist philosophy that was being developed by Nizāmī's contemporary in nearby Aleppo, Shihāb al-dīn Suhrawardī (d. 1191), for whom light served as the constitutive center of existence and the manifestation of God: "Everything in the world is derived from the Light of His essence and all beauty and perfection are the gift of His bounty, and to attain fully to this illumination is salvation" (Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* 69). If such is the case, "Light" still has her secrets, which she veils from the hero in music and song – a brilliant play on the word *parda*, which means both "veil" and the fret of a stringed instrument. Simultaneously, she claims her *parda* to be *sāz*, which is both the verbal noun of "playing" and the literal word for instrument; read another way, the youth could be asking her what kind of garment is covering her, to which she replies, "A lute... and nothing else."⁶¹ Even her "style," "method,"

61. See Dastgirdi's commentary in Nizāmī Ganjavī, *Haft Paykar* 304.

or “mode” (as in a musical mode, continuing the pun) is coquetry (*nāz*). Despite its apparent elevation of marriage and holy law at its conclusion, the Story of the White Dome does not seem to write out the importance – and possibly even the necessity – of music, games, and play in the pursuit of love. These are the things that make the harpist’s beauty all the more enticing, giving the young man the determination and strength of will he needs to overcome all the obstacles that waylay him and arrive at the truth that will finally be revealed.

The same ambiguity is found within the Story of the Black Dome, which on the one hand is a story about unregulated concupiscence and the inevitable failure that stems from it, yet on the other hand may be the key that allows the transformative quest for knowledge and understanding to take place. As Annemarie Schimmel notes, black lay not at the bottom, but at the top of the color-coded cosmology of the Kubrāwīya Sufi order: “Black is the light of the essence, the ‘Divine Ipseity as revealing light that cannot be seen but makes see;’ it is the color of *jalāl*, the unfathomable divine majesty, whereas God’s *jamāl*, His beauty, reveals itself in other colors” (Schimmel 256; cf. Corbin 107). This “black light” (*nūr-i siyāh*), Corbin adds, is only perceptible to those who have made “the most perilous initiatic step” into the veiled presence of the *Deus absconditus*; hence it can only be found in darkness (Corbin 100, 114).⁶² And indeed, the king, upon his return, is said to dwell in a darkness akin to the Water of Life (“*dar siyāhī cho āb-i ḥayvān zīst*,” 32.41) – a man who has tasted the everlasting beyond, and must now mourn his separation from it.

The king’s journey to heaven and back thus works as a powerful metaphor for the transcendental quest for the knowledge of worlds beyond normal human experience, a journey that may affect radical transformations on the level of both individual and society, though often at a tremendous personal cost. The answer to the King’s question can only be answered by going through the same experience as those who have trod the path before; as Abū-Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) writes, “What a difference between being acquainted with the definition of drunkenness [...] and being drunk!” (Watt 55). Yet wine, while it can elevate the spirit to realms inaccessible to the ordinary mind, can also confuse the mystic into losing sight of his ultimate destination; hence the necessity for strict discipline and obedience to the guide (*shaykh* or *pīr*) if one hopes to stay oriented on the right path. The king, who grew so intoxicated that he could no longer hear the queen’s guidance, must sober up before he can realize where he

62. Many thanks to Austin O’Malley for alerting me to this notion of ‘black light’ in Sufi thought.

63. In many ways, the king's tale is a reminiscent of the Orpheus myth: although the bard's overwhelming love for Eurydice allowed him to descend into the underworld and transgress the bounds of mortality, he cannot, in the end, keep himself from looking back to satisfy his desire for certainty, and thus fails to save her and himself.

went wrong.⁶³ Even when they end in failure, however, a certain fellowship is formed through these transformative experiences. When the king returns to earth, he is met by the butcher whom he had so callously treated before (32.500–03):

آنک از من کناره کرد و گریخت * در کنارم گرفت و عذر انگیخت
گفت اگر گفتمی بتو صد سال * باورت نامذی حقیقتِ حال
رفتی و دیدی آنچه بود نهفت * این چنین قصه با که شاید گفت
من درین جوشِ گرم جوشیدم * کز تظلم سیاه پوشیدم

(He who had left me behind and fled [now] embraced me, apologizing: “If I had told you for a hundred years, you never would have believed the truth of this matter. You’ve gone and seen that which was hidden; to whom should one tell such a tale? I [too] boiled in that hot passion, and donned the black from [this] oppression.”)

Through their shared experience and secret knowledge, the king and the butcher become brothers, their mutual embrace eradicating the social hierarchy that formerly stood between them. Divisions of class and gender between the king and his female slave are similarly dissolved when she hears his story and joins the fellowship of those who wear black: a slave (*kanīz*, 32.23) no more, but a respected ascetic (“zi kaḏbānuvān [...] zāhid zan-ī,” 32.16), the woman transmits this knowledge of the truth to the princess, to Bahrām, and finally in turn to us. Thus the king's efforts were not all in vain; indeed, the bitterness of his loss taught him wisdom no amount of prosperity and opulence could have provided. Upon his return to his kingdom – which is again described as a kind of divine providence (“az ‘ināyat-i bakht,” 32.38) – he rules his kingdom well and without incident: “As long as he held the world, he practiced wisdom; he dressed in black with nothing to mourn” (“tā jahān dāsht tīz-hūshī kard • bī-musibat siyāh-pūshī kard,” 32.40). Although he remains trapped in bereavement and separation, his eyes have been opened to a truth few ever get to witness. The king has become a member of the elite, the *ahl al-khawāṣ*, those who have probed the secrets of the world and experienced proximity to the Beloved. We can only properly mourn, it seems, after realizing what we stand to lose; only in blackness do we truly see (32.514–19):

در سیاهی شکوه دارد ماه * همچو سلطان بزیر چتر سیاه
هیچ حرفی به از سیاهی نیست * داس ماهی چو پشت ماهی نیست

از جوانی بود سیه‌مویی * وز سیاهی بود جوان‌رویی
 بسیاهی بصر جهان را بیند * چرکنی بر سیاه ننشیند
 گر نه سیفور شب سیاه شدی * کی سزاوار مهد ماه شدی
 هفت رنگست زیر هفت اورنگ * نیست بالاتر از سیاهی رنگ

(The moon gains brilliance enfolded in black, just like a sultan beneath a black parasol. No letter is better than the black; the fish's bones are not like its back! Black hair comes from youth; a young face is known by this black. The eye sees the world through darkness, and no stain can sit upon black. If night's brocade was not black, what would be worthy of cradling the moon? There are seven colors below seven thrones; none is higher than the color black.)

This discussion may help us put to rest a nagging question that emerges if we read the Stories of Black and White as simple allegories of failure in concupiscence and salvation in piety. As argued above, the only thing that led to success in one case and failure in the other is God's *direct intervention*, not the superior wisdom or morality of the youth – why then, it begs to be asked, did God not show such kindness to the king? One could hunt for extenuating circumstances, arguing perhaps that the king was innately less worthy of deliverance and needed to learn his lesson, but I am more inclined to suggest that the king's voyage to heaven is in its own way part of the same gift, the discovery of truth through love; truth comes through in many guises and aspects, and one form need not negate the other.

I would like to conclude by turning to another narrative poem about love that was written at more or less the same time as the *Haft paykar*. In his version of the story of Tristan and Iseult (w. ca. 1200), Gottfried von Straßburg at one moment brings his heroes to a love-grotto (*Minnegrotte*) where they seek refuge from Mark's persecution. Every feature of this edifice protects the virtues of love – discretion, purity, kindness, humility, and so on – and locks the vices out. In this passage, Gottfried creates an elaborate architectural metaphor, reminiscent of Nizāmi's seven domes, through which his readers can imagine the component parts of love and see them work together in its ideal and perfect state. In this structure too, color plays an important symbolic role (Gottfried, *Tristan* 264 ed. Hatto; vv. 16967–88 ed. Marold):

The wall was white, smooth, and even: such is Integrity's nature. Her brilliant and uniform whiteness must never be mottled with colour, nor should Suspicion find any pit or ridge in her. In its greenness and firmness the marble floor is like Constancy; this meaning is the best for it in respect of colour and smoothness. Constancy should be of the same fresh green as grass, and smooth and gleaming as glass. At the centre, the bed of crystalline Love was dedicated to her name most fittingly. The man who had cut the crystal for her couch and her observance had divined her nature unerringly: Love *should* be of crystal – transparent and translucent!

This final image of love as transparent and translucent bears important implications for Gottfried's theory of eros. We might have expected Love to be white, the color associated with purity; yet this turns out to be merely the attribute of Integrity, an important component of the edifice but categorically distinct from Love itself. Love, we learn, is color-less; in combining the perceptible colors together within its form, it somehow moves beyond color itself, shedding the material or visible attributes that allowed it to be seen in the first place. Indeed, if we imagine this couch to be utterly translucent, we may not be mistaken to assume that it is in fact *invisible*, bringing us to the question of whether Love can even be 'seen' in its pristine, pre-prismatic state? It may be, in fact, that the only way to perceive Love in the first place is through the use of a prism: only by refracting its pure light back into its visible component parts can we even begin to contemplate Love's nature, all the while aware that what we are seeing is not Love itself but the shards of its fragmentation.

This same metaphor could apply to the structural organization of the stories in the *Haft paykar*: unlike Gottfried, love is not portrayed as a single building, but as a series of seven, each one marked by a distinctive color; yet, just as the colors of the rainbow indicate the refraction of an original ray of light, Nizāmi's buildings are intended to be read as constitutive parts of the whole, the polychromatic elements of an overarching totality. Although the stories of the Black and White Domes are placed at opposite ends of the *Haft Paykar* sequence and in seeming opposition to each other, it seems likely that, when taken together, they encompass an understanding of love that allows for ambiguity and intermingling, in which black and white, external desire and inherent goodness, *erōs* and *agapē*, *'ishq* and *ḥubb*, all have a part to play in bringing about inner contentment, justice in the world, and union with the Beloved. If the pilgrim

on Love's road has only managed the journey from black love to white, he may have to double back if he hopes to find the road beyond color itself.

Bibliography

- Agapitos, Panagiotis A. "In Rhomaian, Persian, and Frankish Lands: Fiction and Fictionality in Byzantium." *Medieval Narratives Between History and Fiction: From the Centre to the Periphery of Europe, c. 1100–1400*. Edited by Panagiotis A. Agapitos and Lars Boje Mortensen. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2012. 235–367.
- al-Awadhi, Petra Martin. *The Seven Pavilions*. Firenze: Olschki, 2001.
- Albānī, Muḥammad Nāṣir al-dīn. *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ḍa'īfah wa-l-mawḍū'ah*. Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 1992.
- Anwar, Etin. "Ibn Sīnā's Philosophical Theology of Love: A Study of the *Risālah fī al-'Ishq*." *Islamic Studies* 42.2 (2003): 331–45.
- ʿAṭṭār, Farīd al-dīn. *Manṭiq Al-ṭayr*. Edited by Muḥammad Rizā Shafī'ī-Kadkanī. Tehran: Sukhan, 1383 [2004 or 2005].
- . *The Conference of the Birds*. Translated by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis. London: Penguin, 1984.
- Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Henry Chadwick. Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Avicenna. *Risālah fī al-'ishq*. Edited by Ḥusayn Ṣiddīq and Rāwiyah Jāmūs. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2005.
- Bausani, Alessandro. "Introduzione." *Nezami de Ganje: Le sette principesse*. A cura di Alessandro Bausani. Bari: Leonardo da Vinci, 1967. 5–24.
- Bell, Joseph Norment. "Avicenna's *Treatise on Love*." *Der Islam* 63 (1986): 73–89.
- . *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979.
- Biesterfeldt, Hans Hinrich, and Dimitri Gutas. "The Malady of Love." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104.1 (1984): 21–55.
- Blois, François de. "Haft peykar." *Encyclopædia Iranica* 11.5 (2002): 522–24. Available [online](#).
- . *Poetry of the Pre-Mongol Period*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2004. Vol. 5 of *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey*. By Charles Ambrose Storey. 1970–.
- Boyce, Mary, edited and translated by. *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Bürgel, Johann-Christoph, and Christine van Ruymbeke, edited by. *A Key to the Treasure of the Hakīm: Artistic and Humanistic Aspects of Nizāmī Ganjavī's Khamsa*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011.
- Chelkowski, Peter Jan. *Mirror of the Invisible World: Tales from the Khamseh of Nizami*. With an Essay by Priscilla P. Soucek. Foreword by Richard Ettinghausen. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975.
- Chittick, William C. *Ibn 'Arabi: Heir to the Prophets*. Oxford: One-world, 2005.

- Corbin, Henry. *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*. Translated from the French by Nancy Pearson. New Lebanon, NY: Omega, 1994.
- Dante Alighieri. *Inferno*. Edited and translated by Robert M. Durling. Introduction and Notes by Ronald L. Martinez and Robert M. Durling. Illustrations by Robert Turner. New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. Vol. 1 of *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. 1996–2011.
- Darmesteter, James, translated by. *The Šîrôzahs, Yasts, and Nyâyis*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883. Vol. 2 of *The Zend-Avesta*. 1880–1887.
- Davis, Dick. *Panthea's Children: Hellenistic Novels and Medieval Persian Romances*. New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 2002.
- Dols, Michael W. *Majnûn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*. Edited by Diana E. Immisch. Oxford – New York: Clarendon, 1992.
- El-Rouayheb, Khaled. *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Fackenheim, Emil L. "A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina." *Mediaeval Studies* 7 (1945): 208–28.
- Fakhry, Majid. *A History of Islamic Philosophy*. 3rd ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Firdawsî. *The Shahnameh = Book of Kings*. Edited by Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh. Vol. 1. New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988.
- . *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*. Translated by Dick Davis. New York: Penguin, 2007.
- Foltz, Richard C. *Religions of Iran: From Prehistory to the Present*. London: Oneworld, 2013.
- Gabbay, Alyssa. "Love Gone Wrong, Then Right Again: Male/Female Dynamics in the Bahrâm Gûr-Slave Girl Story." *Iranian Studies* 42.5 (2009): 677–92.
- Gellens, Sam I. "The Search for Knowledge in Medieval Muslim Societies: A Comparative Approach." *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination*. Edited by Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. 50–69.
- Gelpke, Rudolf. "Nachwort." *Die sieben Geschichten der sieben Prinzessinnen*. Aus dem Persischen verdeutscht und herausgegeben von Rudolf Gelpke. Zürich: Manesse, 1959. 283–300.
- Geoffrey Chaucer. *The Riverside Chaucer*. General Editor Larry Dean Benson. Edited by F. N. Robinson. 3rd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- Giffen, Lois Anita. *Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre*. London: University of London Press – New York: New York University Press, 1971.
- Gottfried von Straßburg. *Tristan*. Karl Marold, ed. Vol. 1. [...] Mit einem auf Grund von Friedrich Rankes Kollationen verbesserten Apparat besorgt von Werner Schröder. Berlin – New York: de Gruyter, 2004.
- . *Tristan*. Translated entire for the first time. With the surviving fragments of the *Tristran* of Thomas newly translated. With an introduction by Arthur Thomas Hatto. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960.
- Green, Dennis H. *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction, 1150–1220*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- . "The Rise of Medieval Fiction in the Twelfth Century." *Medieval Narratives Between History and Fiction: From the Centre to the Periphery of Europe, c. 1100–1400*. Edited by Panagiotis A. Agapitos and Lars Boje Mortensen. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2012. 49–61.
- Grunebaum, Gustave Edmund von. "Avicenna's *Risâla fi 'l- 'išq* and Courtly Love." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 11.4 (1952): 233–38.
- . *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation*. 2nd ed. Chicago – London: University of Chicago Press, 1953.
- Hall, Amy Laura. "Complicating the Command: Agape in Scriptural Context." *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 19 (1999): 97–113.
- Hesiod. *Theogony; Works and Days; Testimonia*. Edited and translated by Glenn W. Most. Cambridge, MA – London: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Ibn Dâwûd al-İşfahânî, Abû Bakr Muḥammad. *al-Niṣf al-awwal min kitâb al-zahrah*. Edited from the unique manuscript at the Egyptian Library by Alois Richard Nykl in collaboration with Ibrâhîm Ṭûqân. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932.
- Ibn Qutaybah, 'Abd Allâh ibn Muslim. *'Uyûn al-akhbâr*. Cairo: Dâr al-Kutub al-Miṣriyah, 1996.
- Ibn Ṭufayl, Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Malik. *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy ibn Yaqzân: A Philosophical Tale*. Translated by Lenn E. Goodman. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2009.
- Irâqî, Fakhr al-dîn Ibrâhîm. *Divine Flashes*. Translated by William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson. New York: Paulist Press, 1982.

- . *Lama 'āt*. Edited by Muḥammad Khvājavi. Tehran: Mawlā, 1371 [1992 or 1993].
- Iṣbahānī, Abū al-Faraj. *Kitāb Al-Aghānī*. Edited by Iḥsān 'Abbās. 25 vols. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2002.
- Jāhiz, Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr. *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*. Edited by 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1964.
- Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar ibn Qābūs, 'Unṣur al-Ma'ālī. *A Mirror for Princes: The Qābūs Nāma*. Translated by Reuben Levy. London: Cresset, 1951.
- Knysh, Alexander. *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*. Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2000.
- Krotkoff, Georg. "Color and Number in the *Haft Paykar*." *Logos Islamikos: Studia islamica in honorem Georgii Michaelis Wickens*. Edited by Roger M. Savory and Dionisius A. Agius. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984. 97–118.
- Lewis, Clive Staples. *The Four Loves*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960.
- Longenbach, James. *The Resistance to Poetry*. Chicago – London: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Majnūn Laylā. *Dīwān Majnūn Laylā*. Edited by 'Abd al-Sattār Aḥmad Farrāj. Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 1973.
- Meier, Fritz. "Turandot in Persien." *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 95 (1941): 1–27.
- Meisami, Julie Scott. "Fitnah or Azadah? Nizami's Ethical Poetic." *Edebiyāt: A Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures* 1.2 (1989): 41–75.
- . "Introduction." *The Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Julie Scott Meisami. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995. I–XLV.
- . *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- . "The Theme of the Journey in Nizami's *Haft Paykar*." *Edebiyāt: A Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures* 4.2 (1993): 5–22.
- Miller, Mark. *Philosophical Chaucer: Love, Sex, and Agency in the Canterbury Tales*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*. 2nd ed. London: Thames and Hudson, 1978.
- . *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Ibn 'Arabī*. Delmar, NY: Caravan, 1964.
- Nizāmī Ganjavī. *Haft Paykar*. Edited by Bihruz Ṣarvatīyān. Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1387 [2008 or 2009].
- . *Haft Paykar*. Edited by Vahīd Dastgirdī and Sa'id Ḥamīdīyān. Tehran: Qaṭrah, 1386 [2007 or 2008].
- . *The Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*. Translated by Julie Scott Meisami. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995.
- . *Haft Paykar-i Nizāmī Ganjavī*. Edited by Barāt Zanjānī. Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Intishārāt va Chāp-i Dānishgāh-i Tīhrān, 1373 [1994 or 1995].
- . *Heft Peiker: ein romantisches Epos des Nizāmī Genge'i*. Herausgegeben von Helmut Ritter and Jan Rypka. Praha: Orientální Ústav, 1934.
- . *Khusraw va Shīrīn*. Edited by Bihruz Ṣarvatīyān. Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1392 [2013].
- Pantke, Mechthild. *Der arabische Bahrām-Roman. Untersuchungen zur Quellen- und Stoffgeschichte*. Berlin – New York: de Gruyter, 1974.
- Pellat, Charles. *The Life and Works of Jāhiz: Translations of Selected Texts*. Translated from the French by D. M. Hawke. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Piemontese, Angelo Michele. "The Enigma of Turandot in Nizami's Pentad. Azāda and Bahrām Between Esther and Sindbād." *A Key to the Treasure of the Hakim: Artistic and Humanistic Aspects of Nizāmī Ganjavī's Khamṣa*. Edited by Johann-Christoph Bürgel and Christine van Ruymbeke. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011. 127–44.
- Pinto, Karen C. *Medieval Islamic Maps: An Exploration*. Chicago – London: University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Rābī 'ah al-'Adawīyah. *Dīwān Rābī 'ah al-'Adawīyah wa-akh-bāruhā*. Edited by Muwaffaq Fawzī al-Jabr. Damascus: Dār Ma'ad, 1999.
- Rādfar, Abū al-Qāsim. *Kitāb-shināsī-i Nizāmī Ganjavī*. Tehran: Pazhūhishgāh, 1371 [1992 or 1993].
- Rossi, Ettore. "La Leggenda di Turandot." *Studi orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida*. Vol. 2. Roma: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1956. 457–76.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- Seyed-Gohrab, Ali Asghar. *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Nizāmī's Epic Romance*. Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2003.

- Shahbazi, A. Shapur. "Haft kešvar." In *Encyclopædia Iranica* 11.5 (2002): 519–22. Available [online](#).
- Sherwin, Michael S. "Aquinas, Augustine, and the Medieval Scholastic Crisis Concerning Charity." *Aquinas the Augustinian*. Edited by Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, and Matthew Levering. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007. 181–204.
- Smith, Margaret. *Rābi'a the Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islām*. 2nd ed. With a new introduction by Annemarie Schimmel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Talattof, Kamran. "Nizami's Unlikely Heroines: A Study of the Characterizations of Women in Classical Persian Literature." *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love, and Rhetoric*. New York: Palgrave. 2000. 51–81.
- , and Jerome W. Clinton, eds. *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love, and Rhetoric*. New York: Palgrave. 2000.
- Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad. *The Nasirean Ethics*. Translated from the Persian by G. M. Wickens. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964.
- Watt, William Montgomery. *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1953.
- Zadeh, Travis. *Mapping Frontiers Across Medieval Islam: Geography, Translation, and the 'Abbasid Empire*. London – New York: Tauris, 2011.