

Subjectivity in 'Attār's Shaykh of San'ān Story in The Conference of the Birds

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Claudia Yaghoobi,

"Subjectivity in 'Attār's Shaykh of San'ān Story in *The Conference of the Birds*"

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Abstract: In her article "Subjectivity in 'Attār's Shaykh of San'ān Story in *The Conference of the Birds*" Claudia Yaghoobi discusses intersections of transgression, law, inclusion and exclusion, self and Other in Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār's (1142?-ca.1220) treatment of religion with regard to Shaykh San'ān and the Christian girl's love story in *The Conference of the Birds*. San'ān is an ascetic master who has never transgressed any of the Islamic laws until he embarks on a journey from Mecca to Rome after a dream only to fall in love with a Christian girl, convert to Christianity, and begin drinking wine and herding her swine. In so doing, he transgresses all moral and religious boundaries of Islam. Yaghoobi argues that through crossing barriers, San'ān is provided with the opportunity for an alternative spirituality and identity.

Claudia YAGHOABI

Subjectivity in 'Attār's Shaykh of San'an Story in *The Conference of the Birds*

One of the most emblematic love narratives in Iranian literature is found in Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār's (دیرف نیدلاراطع) 1142?-ca.1220) *Qaṭnīm Rīṭl* (*The Conference of the Birds*), the story of Shaykh San'an's love for a Christian girl. *The Conference of the Birds* tells the story of seekers of truth and narrates a gathering of different types of birds to pick one to be their master and lead them through difficulties of life. Each of the birds comes up with an excuse to reject the Sīmurgh (name of a mythical bird) in order not to begin this difficult path. The birds choose the hoopoe as their master and the bird takes them through the journey of the quest of love, understanding, detachment, unity, bewilderment, poverty, and annihilation. After undergoing all the hardships and trials of the journey, only thirty birds reach the destination, but the Sīmurgh is not there. They are kept waiting for the Sīmurgh for so long that they realize that they — the *sī murgh* translated as "thirty birds" — are the Sīmurgh. 'Attār's purpose is to illustrate how the seeker needs to reach the highest degree of purity on the journey. He also shows that truth is inside the seeker. The final thirty birds realize that truth is in fact inside each one of them (see Purnamdarian 103-12).

Shaykh San'an's story occurs at an important moment when the birds are uncertain about the right course of the journey towards Sīmurgh and the hoopoe presents the story using examples in order to teach the birds about spirituality. Shaykh San'an is an eminent ascetic who has spent fifty years practicing abstinence and penance with his 400 disciples. He has never transgressed any of the traditional Islamic moral codes and laws until he embarks on a journey from Mecca to Rome after a dream and falls in love with a Christian girl, converts to Christianity, and begins drinking wine, going to taverns, wearing a *zunnār* (the belt which is an indicator of non-Muslimness), and herding her swine. In so doing, he transgresses all the moral and religious boundaries of Islam. Shaykh San'an's conversion to Christianity is blasphemous and its punishment is death. But, finally, owing to the prayers of one of his most loyal disciples and the intercession of Prophet Muhammad, he regains his senses, converts back to Islam, and returns to Mecca. At this point of the story, the Christian girl who has fallen in love with the Shaykh sees in her dream that she must follow her beloved to Mecca. She meets him in a desert on the way, converts to Islam, and dies immediately. By the end of the story, both Shaykh San'an and the Christian girl have undergone outward and inward transformation. The girl who is portrayed as an earthly love object at the beginning and whose only desire is to satisfy her own worldly urges, turns into a symbol of heavenly love and helps her lover purify his soul from worldly desires. This is of course an example of earthly love functioning as a bridge the lover has to cross to reach divine love — a well-known symbol in Sufi discourse (on 'Attār's text and Sufi poetry, see, e.g., Campbell <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2384>>). The Christian girl becomes a شاهد (*shāhid*), that is, the earthly manifestation of divine beauty in human form that leads the ascetic Shaykh San'an to the pure love of the divine.

Shaykh San'an's love story speaks about medieval Muslim societies' understanding of religious transgression and the power of love. We see that San'an faces the Christian Other, falls in love, and because of this love transgresses the laws of Islam. Considering that his mystical relationship is embedded in the suspicion of conversion, with regard to identity it is crucial that we pay attention to expressions of seeking, allegiance, self-transformation and psychology. Hence, I argue that through the crossing of barriers, the Shaykh is provided with the opportunity for an alternative spirituality and identity. The violation of religious laws creates the possibility of the acceptance of the religious Other and of the reconstruction of his own subjectivity. In his narration, 'Attār shows his own acceptance of religious transgression because the writing of the story required boldness and courage at the time. Since 'Attār believes that love is the reason for the Shaykh's aberration, he embraces the Shaykh's subversiveness and 'Attār portrays his protagonist as an individual who is connected to reality, but is simultaneously a representative of an exceptional phenomenon. While he is like everyone else, he is different and foreign. He is ordinary enough not to be cut from the real altogether, but he offers a transgressive and mystifying energy (Fradenburg 69). 'Attār is accepting Shaykh San'an's transgression because as a Sufi, he believes that any kind of true love, even the ordinary, can be a doorway to divine love. For 'Attār, a true lover does not think about the good or evil of what he/she

does and he shows that a true lover's only desire is to please the beloved — earthly and heavenly — regardless of worldly considerations. This beloved can be loved as flesh as long as he/she is inaccessible and foreign and this love is derived from the *jouissance* of the taboo and the distance. Louise Olga Fradenburg calls this love "sovereign love" because it allows the subject to be connected to the sovereign in order to reshape desire. Through "mutuality of lack and fulfillment," this sovereign love allows the subject to feel simultaneously at one with and free of power. It allows space for reciprocity and transformation (71). Through this love, the Shaykh's being is made and unmade: his subjectivity is deconstructed and reshaped and mutual transformation occurs.

During the first centuries of the spread of Islam, Muslims encountered members of other religions such as Christians in large numbers. The encounter between the new religion and society and the ancient societies and cultures generated hopes of freedom in some and fear and awe in others. From a religious perspective, the new changes had two principle features. On the one hand, Muslim rulers tried to declare the testimony of faith in Islam throughout the land and to impose Islam on their subjects although they had initially allowed many minorities to retain their own religion. This freedom of faith was because the Qur'an had stated that the faith of Jews and Christians was to some extent valid although certain beliefs and practices of these two religions were criticized. On the other hand, there was a campaign to erase all symbols of Christianity and especially the sign of the cross. From an economic perspective, members of the minority population living under Muslim rulers were expected to pay a special poll tax which according to the Qur'an was required. This shows that Christians and other non-Muslims were tolerated, but on a certain and limited basis. They had to pay a tax and could not engage in certain professions while there was also a policy which promoted the equality of all Muslims be they Arabs or converts. Socially speaking, for the Christians living under Muslim rule these circumstances made conversion to Islam an attractive option. Beginning in the eighth and during the ninth centuries, conversion to Islam was accelerated owing to the hardships of being a second-class citizen. Gradually, economic hardships became as important as the ideological ones (see Griffith 6-22). With the emergence of the Abbasid rulers (750-1258), the attitudes of Muslims towards Christians changed and because of the war against Byzantium during Harūn al-Rashīd's (763-809) reign once again Christians became suspicious in the eyes of the rulers. The tenth century was a turning point for Christians under Muslim rulers: while Christians managed to reinforce their position by having close links to the authorities of the time and they continued to hold important positions until the end of the reign of the last Abbasid ruler (see Khanbaghi 33-44).

Although Muslims and Christians have coexisted since the beginning of the Arab conquests in the sixth century, neither religion has been accepting of those who abandoned their original faith and converted to the other. In a world where Muslims were making efforts to bring awareness to members of other religions, persuade them about the flaws of their faith, and spread Islam, what Shaykh San'ān did was an act of apostasy (see 'Attarpour). Shaykh San'ān might have been a fictitious character who appeared in the literature of the period; however, the mere fact that this fictitious character, his infatuation with the Christian girl and his conversion to Christianity entered the literature of the period speaks about the existence of such unorthodox relationships in real life as well. The Christian child ترسا بچه (*tarsā-bachcha*) is of course one of the most important symbols in Sufi poetry. In Sufi literature, this Christian girl as the earthly manifestation of divine love in human form represents love as the first step on the divine path (Lewis 697). According to Husayn Ilahi-Ghomshei, this enigma is an archetype in the Persian poetic imagination personifying the epiphany of god to the heart of the spiritual aspirant (44). Conforming to the same rhetoric, the Christian girl who leads Shaykh San'ān away from his asceticism and infatuates him by her beauty is the one who initiates him into the higher religion of love as well (Ilahi-Ghomshei 43). Through the Christian girl, Attār illustrates how the earthly manifestation of divine beauty that is both the "Idol" and the "Christian child," seduces the Shaykh and transforms him into an unconventional Sufi master who contemplates divine beauty through a woman's form. Before meeting the Christian girl, Shaykh San'ān is merely a pious ascetic; however, after his encounter with her he becomes a real devotee of the religion of love. 'Attār portrays how the Christian girl helps the Shaykh convert from his "illusory Islam" to "real infidelity" (Ilahi-Ghomshei 47).

The Christian girl's love empowers the Shaykh and he breaks away from formalist Islam, converts to Christianity and perceives sacred love of the divine through its earthly emanation. As Leonard

Lewisohn comments, in 'Attār's works "Love's great act of subversion was, both erotically and religiously ... with the divinity or icon of the divine appearing to the Sufi lover in a *Christian or Zoroastrian* form" (292) and thus in the love story, the hierarchy of the believer and the infidel is subverted. Religious, social, and traditional taboos are violated. Conventional piety surrenders to the universal and unconventional power of love and thus the narrative depicts a moment of transgressing the limits which offers alternatives and through liminal experiences reshapes the established cultural and religious boundaries. Violation of the law allows the Shaykh's self to face the Christian Other and through crossing of established boundaries and reconstruction of subjectivities dismantles the binaries of self and the Other, believer and infidel, Muslim and Christian and leads to union with the divine Other. Thereafter the ascetic Shaykh transforms into a mystic of love: a true Sufi.

In comparing asceticism with mysticism, Jalal Sattari postulates that asceticism without love is mere arrogance and vanity which creates an illusion of union with the divine. Being infatuated with pretentious asceticism is the result of self-conceit, which is itself the consequence of egoism and egoism is the worst kind of idolatry. Sattari espouses that contrary to pretentious asceticism, love annihilates the ego and guides the Sufi towards perfection (75-77). In Sattari's reading of asceticism, a true lover of the divine is therefore free from worldly matters, social concerns, egoism, and self-conceit. To be a true lover, the Sufi has to move beyond asceticism. Although it might seem that an ascetic has turned into a selfless human through self-discipline, the truth is that the ascetic's self and his/her ego is looking for an opportunity to reappear and imprison the ascetic's soul. Therefore, mere piety and asceticism do not refine the Sufi's soul: it is only through trials and pains of love that an ascetic truly polishes the mirror of his/her heart. This is the process that Shaykh San'ān has to undergo to transform from an egotistical ascetic to a love mystic.

The juxtaposition of asceticism and mysticism is echoed in the very first lines of the text: 'Attār begins the narrative by describing that Shaykh San'ān has reached perfection in asceticism, practices mortification day and night, and has mysterious skills and abilities for healing people (68). Although he has reached such perfection, the Shaykh has never experienced human love. Love of the Christian girl is sent to him from the divine as a trial of his spiritual path. Since Shaykh San'ān is an ascetic, the Christian girl should indeed be repellent to him. Not only is he an ascetic and should avoid associations with women, but he is also a Muslim Shaykh and should not be attracted to a Christian girl. As Annemarie Schimmel suggests, the frenzy of love is beyond all religious and social boundaries: it defies the logic and leads the Shaykh into a state that he himself would have never anticipated. 'Attār illustrates how divine beauty reveals itself in the form of a woman and how the love of this woman is so deep that it can change the entire orthodox life of a Shaykh into an unconventional Sufi life by surrendering in love (Schimmel 432). The Christian girl becomes the means for the Shaykh to contemplate divine presence on earth. Hence, San'ān owes his transformation from asceticism to mysticism to his encounter with the Christian Other and the subversive love of her, which in turn leads him to transgress the constructed paradigms, transcend beyond the earthly, and reconstruct his subjectivity.

With regard to San'ān's first encounter with the Christian Other, 'Attār narrates that when the Shaykh meets the girl and she lifts her veil, fire seizes all the joints of his limbs. When the Shaykh sees the girl's face, he falls in love with that "idol's face" and loses his control completely. He falls unconscious out of the intense fire of love: "The Christian turned, the dark veil was removed, / A flare flashed through the old man's joints — he loved! // One hair converted hundreds; how could he / Resist that idol's face shown openly? // He did not know himself; in sudden fire / He knelt abjectly as the flames beat higher; // In that sad instant all he had been fled / And passion's smoke obscured his heart and head" (70). 'Attār employs the word "veil" in this narrative to portray the two different layers of the poem. First, 'Attār refers to the veil the girl is wearing, the unveiling of which has a sexual undertone and in the next line 'Attār refers to the girl's unveiled hair, which can enslave hundreds like the Shaykh. Although the Shaykh tries to avoid the temptations of the seductress, it is a moment of fire and passion when the Shaykh loses all control and falls. Second, if the girl is the earthly manifestation of the divine in human form, then the veil is the veil of ignorance — the veil that hides the divine from ordinary people's eye. The earthly love of the Christian girl sets fire to the Shaykh's heart after the unveiling and this is similar to the process a Sufi undergoes on the divine path. When the divine unveils, it sets the Sufi on fire and the Sufi falls unconscious and is bewildered.

In Shaykh San'ān's case, the unveiling of the Christian girl first brings bewilderment and then awareness leading him away from his disciplined asceticism to love mysticism. The Christian girl functions as both the one who leads the Shaykh astray and the one who ultimately enlightens him.

'Attār's reference to the Christian girl's face and its impact on the Shaykh's subjectivity is also a reminder of Emmanuel Levinas's ideas about the Other's face. Levinas refers to "a living presence," an expression and a "face [that] speaks": it is the first encounter of "I" with the living presence of another person (*Totality* 66). As Levinas explains, this "living presence" is exposed to "I" and expresses him/herself by being there as an undeniable reality which cannot be reduced to ideas or images in mind. The impossibility of capturing this Other indicates the Other's irreducibility to a finite entity over which "I" can have power. It shows the "infinity" of the Other and brings the self's freedom into question. Although the Other is expressed in various ways through actions, thoughts, gestures, etc., the most expressive aspect of the other's presence is the face because "The face resists possession, resists my powers" and it is "present in its refusal to be contained" and the face breaks through the form that delimits it and "speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation" (Levinas 194-98). This relation is incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge. And it is through the face that "the Other expresses his eminence, the dimension of height and divinity from which he descends" (Levinas 262). When the Face of the Other enters the self's world and crosses the boundaries which his/her mind has created, the Other becomes part of the self's construction as well. However, this is only the construction of the self's mind and the Other can never be the self's "same" because it transcends the self's attempt to know it: "the other (*L'Autre*) thus presents itself as a human Other; it shows a face and opens the dimension of height, that is to say, it infinitely overflows the bounds of knowledge" (*Emmanuel Levinas* 12). These bounds of knowledge are the framework for the reality that the self has constructed in his/her mind. The Other exists outside this frame because he/she rises above the self's constructed boundaries. It is because of this transcendence that the Other is sacred for Levinas (*Totality* 195). In this way, therefore, the Other becomes the one for whom "I" allows space for growth, becoming, and transcendence.

In 'Attār's narrative, the Christian girl can be viewed as Levinas's "living presence" that is exposed to the Shaykh's "I" and expresses herself by being present as an undeniable reality that cannot be reduced to ideas or images in his mind. She is real, but she resists possession and refuses to be confined through her demands that the Shaykh burn the Qur'an, convert to Christianity, drink wine, and herd her swine. The Shaykh's "I" cannot have power over her and his freedom is questioned. As with Levinas's Face of the Other, when the Shaykh sees the Christian girl's face unveiled, he surrenders. By breaking through the limits, her face invites the Shaykh to a relation which does not work with power. Further, Fatemeh Keshavarz discusses 'Attār's employment of the sun metaphor in the story of San'ān and his love for the Christian girl and her bright complexion. Keshavarz suggests that although 'Attār uses the metaphorical sun to portray the bright complexion of the Christian girl, the rays of the sun also highlight the most significant moments of the story such as the Christian girl's unveiling and the comparison of her beauty with the sun. Keshavarz espouses that this reappearing metaphorical sun represents the "various events in the story and the various levels of human experience" (123). This metaphorical sun also representing the Face of the Other is what opens up possibilities for a new human experience for San'ān, namely the experience of acceptance, growth, and transcendence.

The Christian girl's bright face expresses an eminence and divinity from which she descends and invites San'ān to transcend, but the Christian girl exists outside of San'ān's boundaries of knowledge. Thus, the love of her is a difficult trial: "Love sacked his heart; the girl's bewitching hair / Twined round his faith impiety's smooth snare. // The sheikh exchanged religion's wealth for shame, / A hopeless heart submitted to love's fame. // 'I have no faith,' he cried. 'The heart I gave / Is useless now; I am the Christian's slave'" (70). San'ān's actions and thoughts are surrounded by metaphors which structure his perceptions of his surroundings. These concepts which govern his mind also govern his everyday functioning and they structure what he perceives and how he relates to others. These metaphorical concepts, which are highly dependent on San'ān's cultural experiences and contexts, have a significant role in defining his realities. San'ān should therefore be willing to transgress these prohibitions, which reinforces the fact that under normal circumstances his actions would seem horrible. San'ān's transgression of these metaphoric hurdles — constructed as barriers of

his mind — and his encounter with the Other help him to restructure the way he defines his realities. Therefore, San'ān has to transcend the boundaries which his mind has constructed to reach perfection and allow space for the Christian girl's growth and transcendence as well.

The initial barriers which San'ān has to transcend are the four conditions the Christian girl lays down for accepting his love: abandoning Islam, worshipping an idol, burning the Qur'an, and drinking wine: "The girl replied: 'There are four things you must / Perform to show that you deserve my trust: // Burn the Qur'an, drink wine, seal faith's eye, / Bow down to images'" (75). At first, San'ān only acquiesces to drink wine, but as a result of his intoxication with the wine, he becomes a more ardent lover: San'ān violates the religious law of Islam, which forbids drinking wine. After drinking wine, he assents to the rest of the girl's demands. The Christians take him to a monastery and he converts to Christianity. Since San'ān is in a Christian region, he becomes a minority and therefore subject to the Christian girl and her demands. In spiritual context, he becomes intoxicated with divine love and prefers mysticism to asceticism: he becomes a slave of the divine through true love. Overwhelmed with the Christian girl's love and intoxicated with wine, San'ān loses self-control and agrees to all that the beloved demands: "The abject sheikh had sunk to such a state / That he could not resist his wretched fate" (76). Exhilarated and elevated by these two powerful forces, he seems to be experiencing a mystical rapture.

This subversion narrated in the story suggests a transgression of the "limit" which "opens violently onto the limitless, finds itself suddenly carried away by the content it had rejected and [is] fulfilled by this alien plentitude which invades it to the core of its being" (Foucault 34). San'ān who never experienced love and conformed to formalist Islam, by crossing the limit faces the alien content that he rejected previously and is carried away to the core of his being. San'ān resisted the Christian girl's temptations up to a certain point; however, when he got drunk and surrendered to her demands, the limit opened with a rush of all its contents which he rejected so far. By encountering the Other and her subversive love, the narrative de- and reconstructs San'ān's identity in transgression of religious laws and his process of making and unmaking of his being. In *Tales of Love*, Julia Kristeva also comments on this reconstruction of identity through love; she writes that "Love is the time and space in which "I" assumes the right to be extraordinary. Sovereign yet not individual. Divisible, lost, annihilated; but also, and through imaginary fusion with the loved one, equal to the infinite space of super-human psychism. Paranoid? I am, in love, at the zenith of subjectivity" (5). San'ān's crossing of religious boundaries is an act of apostasy and transgression of Islamic law, but it is at the same time surrender to the will of god. San'ān's idealization of the Christian girl is incompatible with Islamic law and his love for her makes them an "impossible couple" who transgress cultural laws, but creates intimacy (Kristeva 209-10). However, regardless of this incompatibility, San'ān aspires to direct his love to a higher object and to an unattainable one. Not only does he aim for the unattainable, he guides his beloved towards the unattainable. But desiring the unattainable requires transcendence of the earthly and thus to reach the sublime, he needs to surpass his ego which has imprisoned him with worldly concerns and urges (Ritter 398). Only after he breaks the chains of his slavery to the self and crosses the lines of pretentious asceticism, does San'ān realize that the most important element on the path to the divine is love. Violating laws and crossing the uncrossable, San'ān reconciles his self with the Christian Other and diminishes the boundaries reigning over social interactions.

The Christian girl is the Shaykh's repugnant object of fascination that forces him into a process of subjectivity construction through "a mobile, conflictual fusion of power, fear and desire" despite the dominance of the law and its rejection of the Other (Stallybrass and White 5). When San'ān transgresses, he is rejected by his community and is marginalized; however, we see that he is simultaneously in the center of social attention (and criticism). As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White posit, since the self and the Other are interdependent and since the Other is both socially despised and desired, the self-Other dyad is an integral part of the dominant culture's social imaginary. Thus, the Other is simultaneously in the periphery and center of the society. This contradictory fusion is what helps San'ān to challenge the constructed barriers of his mind and reconstruct his subjectivity in his relation to the Christian Other. Conflicting demands of various desires and demands are present in other relationships in this story as well. San'ān is not alone in being challenged by conflicting desires and transgressing boundaries and 'Attār depicts how San'ān's disciples, who are expected to be following their Shaykh unquestioningly, criticize, question, ridicule, and counsel him: they subvert the

master-disciple dominant-subservient power relationship. The disciples challenge the Shaykh's authority by not following him: Hurmuz Maleki suggests that this debate is a portrayal of the differences between asceticism and mysticism. On the one hand, there is the afflicted lover who sees the beloved wherever he looks and on the other hand there is society for whom love has no particular significance. It is also the debate between love and reason as the narrative emphasizes the distinction between love mysticism and asceticism (Maleki 65-66). Although San'ān was an ascetic, after being introduced to love, he despises rational counsel. However, as a Shaykh, it is his duty to lead his disciples to mysticism of love as well. It is also the disciples' duty to conform to their Shaykh's authority under all circumstances without questioning. Hence, both the Shaykh and the disciples forget their duties and deviate from what is expected from them. The Shaykh's disciples are symbols of all the feeble Sufis on the divine path who waver and are at times insincere.

When the disciples abandon the Shaykh and travel back to Mecca, they meet one of the most loyal disciples of the Shaykh who had not gone on the journey to Rome with them. Upon hearing the news about the Shaykh's degradation, the disciple admonishes them for their weakness and disobedience. He explains that they have committed an act of absolute rebellion against their Shaykh and asserts that even if the Shaykh converted to Christianity, they had to follow him and remain loyal. The disciple represents the wayfarers on the path who are sincere and aim at union regardless of all the hardships and suffering. Abandoning the Shaykh at the time of his hardships and trials shows the disciples' infidelity. Leading them back to Rome, the loyal disciple begins praying and asking for the Shaykh's salvation. Ultimately, the Prophet who promises to free the Shaykh from his obsession with the Christian girl answers the disciple's prayers. When they arrive in Rome, they find that the Shaykh has regained his senses and is remorseful: the Shaykh resumes his faith, converts back to Islam and they return to Mecca. At this moment in the story, the Christian girl sees a dream, which urges her to follow the Shaykh. She pursues the Shaykh into the desert and undergoes a transformative process where she is restored to life by the Shaykh's tears and compassion. 'Attār portrays the Christian girl as remorseful of her conduct at the moment of her death. She repents and asks the Shaykh to admit her into Islam: "She knelt before him, took his hands and said: / 'The shame I brought on your respected head // Burns me with shame; how long must I remain / Behind this veil of ignorance? Make plain // The mysteries of Islam to me here, / And I shall tread its highway without fear'" (85). In this moment, 'Attār employs the word "veil" again when he refers to the Christian girl's spiritual desire to be acquainted with the mysteries of the divine and shows how the girl expresses that her soul is burning and she can no longer bear being outside the divine kingdom: she wants to be in the proximity of the divine and wants to see Him unveiled because the proximity of the divine offers efficacy and power. Therefore, she converts to Islam and dies immediately.

With regard to the Christian girl's action and feelings (note that she has no name!), we can interpret that the joy from the proximity of the divine is so intense that she cannot endure His unveiling and dies. However — and this is the point — the union of the Shaykh and the girl represents not only the spiritual marriage of true minds, but also the transformation of both. The girl who was an idol and "seduced" the Shaykh initially transformed him in a way that she now needs him for her own transformation. While this story portrays the process of the Shaykh's and the Christian girl's spiritual growth, by the end of this story we are left wondering if the Christian girl is only a means for the Shaykh's spiritual transformation. On the one hand, we might question her sudden exit and wonder whether she was merely used to help the Shaykh to emerge out of his trials and that signifies an instrumental utilization of her. On the other hand, we see that the Shaykh's intense love for the Christian girl has transformed her as well which is significant because this functions as a means for the Shaykh's transformation by which she is provided with an equal opportunity of self-seeking and self-expression through which she benefits from a reciprocal relationship and a mutual transformation. Therefore, much like the Shaykh, she transcends earthly boundaries.

Remarkably, 'Attār's San'ān's love story for the Christian girl is so powerful and intense that it has found its way into world literature such as Kashmiri and Malay literatures. San'ān's name can be found in Turkish and Sindhi mystical literature too (see Fayzizadeh). San'ān has become the emblem of true love and surrender regardless of religious and social boundaries. From his metaphorical death to his return to Islam, the story is full of spiritual symbols and messages. Through love, the Christian girl aids the Shaykh to free himself from the shackles of the self. He breaks away from all customs and

chains of earthly slavery. The Christian girl helps the Shaykh to break the real idol inside himself, his ego. This idol — the self — cannot be broken through logic: the only way to break such a fierce idol is through love and the only way to reconcile the self with the Other is through love. The Shaykh annihilates his ego in order for them to be in union and this is the moment of San'ān's awakening and enlightenment, the moment of his freedom from asceticism and his initiation into love mysticism. It is through profane love and boundary crossing that the possibility for a union with the divine is opened up for the Shaykh.

In conclusion, 'Attār's story portrays love as a powerful force impossible to resist: it can scandalize anyone and any community at any time and it subverts laws and diminishes binaries. Love is the only sublimated element in this story and allows the protagonists to be extraordinary, to transgress religious boundaries in order to emerge with new subjectivities, and to realize that the essence of human existence is love. The couple's story suggests that mystical experiences are embedded in intersubjectivity and can reconcile the self with the Other, make and unmake identities, allow for crossing of earthly boundaries, and provide opportunities for the de- and reconstruction of subjectivities.

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