

Satirical Poetry

Patrons and Ruling Classes

In this kind of compositions, the most common attitude towards patrons (sovereigns, princes, ministers, etc., whose names may or may not be mentioned) is that of disappointment and criticism for not having granted the poet the gifts that he expected. The gifts have often been requested by the poet himself and sometimes promised by the patron, as in the following example:

In my life I have composed and recited numerous poems,
one after the other, with care, for my lord Seqat ol-Molk.

Like a branch that is weighed down heavily with many hopes,
I entered his service, but that branch dried up and bore no fruit.

He made claims to being a poet, but didn't know the art,
and despite this, out of sheer ignorance, he even bragged.

I have never seen nor heard of a greater cow than him,
fate was mistaken in granting him such fine fortune.

Alas, that I ever placed my hopes in that great cuckold!

Alas, that I ever wasted my poems on that son of a whore!¹³⁵ *Gorgâni*

The last lines reveal how the poet may even be so audacious as to insult his patron. Notwithstanding the obvious risks, his reaction is characterised by outrageous abuse. Here are another two examples. In the first, the offence is directed at the patron's wife:

Considering character and nature,
your wife's arse is worthier than you:

you never meet my requests,
but it always satisfies my cock.¹³⁶

Sanâ'i

In the second example, the poet insults and humiliates the patron himself, emphasising his insolence through ironic self-imprecation:

I wrote this panegyric for an unworthy man
from whom I received no reward of any kind:

a fart straight in my beard as the panegyrist,
a cock in the arse of him whom I praised!¹³⁷

Anvari

In addition to insults, the disappointed poet may even make threats. The patron's wife is also often at the centre of such menacing:

You bent your back like a tent
under a thousand muleteers.

You have driven to starvation
many artists with deceit and lies.

Your face is as sour as yogurt soup,
for how much longer will you frown?

You are a cuckold, who sells his wife and even cheats,
and, if you reply, I'll fuck your wife just as the others do!¹³⁸

Zahir od-Din-e Fâryâbi

But the threats are more frequently directed at the patron and involve writing *hajv*:

O lord, in waiting for your gifts,
I have definitely lost my patience.

Panegyrists usually write three pieces of poetry:
the first is panegyric, the second expresses a request,

and, if met, a laud ensues as the third, otherwise you get lines of *hejâ*.
I have already written the first two; what would you like for the third?¹³⁹

Kamâl od-Din

In some cases the threats to the patron are mixed with the usual offences:

O Hamid od-Din, you are a great sun of generosity,
let not death come to your banquet before its time!

You promised me some cane sugar, which I never got.
Remember I am a poet, and I write both *madh* and *hejâ*.

For now I will merely remind you of the donkey's cock,
but, if I don't get my dues, I'll say where that cock is!¹⁴⁰ *Anvari*

Faced with the patron's indifference, and to obviate the consequent economic difficulties, *hajv* is often seen as the only possible solution:

O my lord, for over a year I have been drinking
the wine of your praise from the cup of poetry.

But I have not seen even a morsel of bread,
nor have I received a rag with which to dress.

If I were asked in a gathering about your generosity,
I would certainly have to put cotton in my ears.

I am reflective, good and silent
because of my generous nature,

but, when I begin to write poetry,
people always proudly put me first:

because of my *madh* and *hajv*, for thanks and complaints,
I shine brightly like the sun or thunder like the ocean.

If you give me no reward for my *madh* to you,
I will not grow sad or angry on that account.

I only need to read a line or two of *hajv* about you,
and I am immediately presented with a brocade.

In exchange for such *hejâ*, I can get pure gold,
it's thus quite obvious why I sell it so dearly.¹⁴¹ *Zahir od-Din-e Fâryâbi*

When, as a sign of extreme disdain, the poet declares he no longer wants to waste *madh* or even *hajv* on his patron, he does so in a kind of particularly caustic *hajv*:

He'd like all the poets in the world to be always
at his table, singing his praises with no reward.

By God, he must truly be great, wise and noble,
if everyone has to write him panegyrics for free!

But I won't write *madh* to him as it would sully my mind,
and I won't wear out my tongue reciting *hajv* about him.

Madh of that wrecked-arsed donkey would be false,
and *hajv* on that great cuckold would be a real waste.¹⁴² *Sanâ'i*

The threat can also develop into an invitation to abandon miserly, petty patrons who, in the following passage, are contrasted with generous kings:

Every master of the art of eloquence
found honour with the munificent king.

You, too, always hover round him!
There you'll find gold and money!

Why bring bunches of flowers
to the seed-seller in the alley?

Don't ask for clothes from those who are so greedy
as to steal the patches from their fathers' breeches.

Why do you compose poems for doormen and guards?
Do you want to be left in the corridor, like a pair of shoes?

When you kiss a lip, you will find sweet sugar,
if you kiss an arse, what will you find? A fart!¹⁴³ *Sanâ'i*

Rarer, and less significant in this context, are some moderately constructive complaints:

If my lord overlooks and forgets me,
I send him a note to refresh his memory.

If the suckling babe doesn't start crying,
he'll get no loving milk from his mother.¹⁴⁴ *Shahid*

The main cause of the patron's reluctance to satisfy the poets, provoking their discontent, is usually attributed to his stinginess, which is described in more or less irreverent tones:

Our lord owns goods and riches,
no one ever enjoys that fortune.

But he is always so tight-fisted that he will not even allow
the bath-attendant to touch his dirt or the barber his hair.¹⁴⁵ *'Asjadi*

Stinginess makes our lord colder
than snow in the freezing Winter:

he's so mean he won't stick all
of his cock up his wife's cunt.¹⁴⁶ *Kâferak*

A lord may also give the poet a gift, but if it is of poor quality, again a series of complaints will ensue:

O Sire, you promised me a horse,
and the word of my king is sacred.

But they gave me a really old black nag and I thought
there couldn't be a black horse as old as it in the world.

I gave it back to receive another,
hoping that no one would notice.

But I didn't get a horse of a different hue:
beyond black there is no other colour!¹⁴⁷ *Salmân*

I sang you many lines of praise,
gems paraded at every gathering.

In exchange you gave me a robe of honour like genitals:
I have to keep it well concealed in front of everybody.¹⁴⁸ *Kamâl od-Din*

Among the more frequent and more elaborate protests of these kinds are those concerning wine given as a gift by the patron, as in the next two poems, the second characterised by a curious sequence of curses:

I had asked for some wine from Razi od-Din,
he promised to give me it, but much time passed.

Yesterday evening he suddenly decided to keep his vow,
I was full of joy, and the night was shaping up as a feast day.

But then a young servant came forward with a small bottle,
so small that it certainly could be of no use whatsoever.

Inside was stinking, nauseating juice with a nasty colour,
almost as if they had poured a draught of pus into the cup.

It was like dregs mixed with sawdust,
crumbs of dung dissolved in horse piss.

Right off I said to the servant: 'Take it back, and tell our lord
I really did not expect such great courtesy from his generosity!

They must have procured this wine from the worst of possible places!'
He replied: 'Of course! It comes from the barrel of our glorious lord!'¹⁴⁹

Kamâl od-Din

From the one and only Sa'd od-Din As'ad,
two jars of wine we asked for the three of us,

to drink, with four other companions,
five cups of clear wine all at once.

But he sent us some six-year-old wine,
and all our seven members were dazed.¹⁵⁰

And so our gathering, which was like the eight paradises,
became a source of suffering like the nine celestial vaults.¹⁵¹

May ten men take him off to the tomb,
and his moustache go up eleven arses,

may twelve members of his family be ruined,
and thirteen of his female relatives be sullied,

may fourteen farts let rip and strike his beard,
and fifteen hairs be torn from his moustache!¹⁵²

Mojir od-Din

As in invective poetry, in this context we also come across compositions with a more complex thematic structure. In the next poem, the author

complains in great detail about his state of neglect and then abuses and curses a patron before moving on—through a classical-style passage—to praise another patron in the final lines:

In this world I have neither gold nor silver,
my balls are squashed and my cock is bare.

I'm a shield rained on by affliction's stones,
and a censor for the fire of great suffering.

I offer my flank to the kicks of poverty,
and my chin to the punches of injustice.

Like a cock, I am worthy of a place of honour,
but like balls I have to stay outside every door.

I can't hang about with dignitaries,
because poetry is my bow and quiver.

I would behave like Abu Nuwâs: when I fuck,¹⁵³
I hold boys' buttocks in the palm of my hand,
and when it comes to boisterous feasts,
my thighs make cushions for their arses.

Thanks to my cock, like sewing thread,
I could be a needle pushing into clothes.

My cock is held tight and suffocates,
even when I fuck the most wrecked cunts.

But since, like a man mirrored in water,
my big cock's destiny is upside down,

I only manage to fuck a beautiful boy
by taking advantage when he's asleep.

I don't have enough money to wash myself,
my clothes are worn out, like a piece of soap:

they are completely tattered and torn,
and look like sores after blood-letting.

That is what my clothes are like, and my food
is no better: raw lung is like roast chicken for me.

The town of Nishapur is a very inhospitable place,
and I survive thanks to aromas of distant tables.

Instead of soft bread, all I have is hard leather.
Not surprising, since I'm the guest of a cobbler.

I am like a prisoner kept in the palace
of that pansy prince, Mohammad Âshu.

He is always muttering away in a low voice:
'I'm one of the most powerful men in all Iran.'

Thanks to my poetic talent, before him
I am like Rostam in the hour of battle.¹⁵⁴

I have fucked every one of his great heroes,
I'm like Sâm the head-slicer, Narimân's son.¹⁵⁵

If he wishes to wage war on me,
I have no need of deceit and ruses:

to avoid the blows of his red-hot sword,
I'm well-protected by a helmet and armour.

One evening he said to me: 'Hey, get up,
and soothe the itch I have here behind!'

I gave him this for an answer: 'That ring
on your secret door has blunted my sharp file.'¹⁵⁶

Then he said: 'With the fine-tuned needle of your scales,
I implore you, weigh the goods that I have in my back-shop!'

I answered him: 'My scales, O great lord,
can't take the weight of stones and pebbles.'

And since I didn't stick my club into his bag,
he didn't give me any fresh bread for my bag.

I can't see either table or cups anywhere around him,
my hand reaches nothing, it's as short as the foot of a tray.

If I'm not telling the truth, may his wrecked arse
be stuck right up to the hilt of my hairy cock!

But I no longer want to talk of that wretch.
I even regret everything I have ever said.

Instead, I implore you with heart and soul,
since in time of pain you are my only salve.

As long as one can pray to his lord,
I will frequent no other court than yours.

May your door be open to fortune,
and my heart and soul bound to you.

In the garden of service to you, my pact
and pledge are as fresh as the rose and tulip.¹⁵⁷

Ruhi

There are also rarer cases in which the poet's resentment towards his patron is not clearly stated and the satirical aspect is played down in favour of pure invective:

Whenever I enter my lord's chamber,
that pansy never gets up in front of me.

He's frightened that a lot of cocks will fall from his arse,
and there will be no place anywhere near him left for me.¹⁵⁸

Kâferak

Occasionally, the satire of the powerful is not directly connected to personal disappointment, but rather takes on the more general tones of an underlying basic discontent:

One day a prince met his death in Isfahan,
one of those princes who had risen to power.

I saw his coffin carried on the shoulders of the bath attendants,
and was amazed: I couldn't understand what they were doing.

I asked a man: 'Why have the bath attendants
now started carrying coffins down here?

In every city gravediggers are a separate guild,
and every one must stick to his own trade.'

He pulled on his moustache and said: 'As far as I know,
the bath attendants have always carried the rubbish away.'¹⁵⁹

Khâju

The whole ruling class may be the subject of similar discontent:

The city of Bâvard is in every way like a watermill:¹⁶⁰
the wheel is all pain and the canal made of suffering.

Its prefect is a dog, the judge is an ass,
the governor a camel and the taxman a cow.

And what's the fate of its people?
Only beatings, taxes and insults!¹⁶¹

Bâbâ Sowdâ'i

In line with the spirit of these two last compositions, in which there are no more private and self-interested aspects, we find serious and committed protests addressed to the suffering wrought on subjects by tyrants. They are much nearer to a social critique than to pure satire. Some of these protests are permeated with a resigned pessimism:

Will wheat ever cost as much again as a bar of cheap soap,
given that its price now belittles that of pearls from Oman?

My heart has shrunk to a seed for lack of bread,
thinking of wheat has turned me into a poor wretch.

Once there was bread and faith in people's mouths,
now, not even at the price of faith can you obtain wheat.

A small locust came from Khorasan and immediately
gobbled up all the wheat in the realm of Qohestân.

But the tyrants, made shrewder by the harsh times,
have heaped up big piles of wheat in the granaries,

and have no intention of giving it to the hungry,
unless in exchange for gold, jewels and silver.

They wouldn't grant a single seed to the needy,
not even if wheat rained from the sky like water.

This is a time of ill-starred destiny and of calamity,
and if you find wheat at the price of your life, it's cheap.

Before this great catastrophe came, we were never aware
that wheat could be as dear as the heartbreaker and the soul.

However, Nezâri would never request from those cowards
a gift of wheat, even if he were about to die a hundred times.¹⁶² *Nezâri*

In other poems the accusations levelled at tyrants and their condemnation is accompanied by a spirit of rebellion and faith in better times:

O my friend, I'm utterly dejected,
and my innermost heart aches.

The pain for so many bewildered people
has taken hold in my anguished soul.

The kingdom in the hands of these oppressors
is as if it were tied under an elephant's foot.

They have renounced the real faith,
and, like pagans, attack all Muslims.

Look! They are scorpions in people's food,
they are worms boring their way into meat.

Or, rather, you'd say that these oppressors are dogs,
snatching at all kinds of food in a year of famine.

They are all after wealth and power,
but are like blind men fallen into a well.

They have filled up their bellies with wine,
and, like drunks, lie on their backs in the mud.

O unhappy people, when will you eat
your fill again, if you are so starved now

by these dogs here, who are nothing more
than teeth fallen from the kingdom's mouth?

That prince, who always handed out
gold to beggars in great quantities,
now has only heaps of lice in his shirt collar,
not the fragrance of ambergris and musk.¹⁶³

O that these plunderers and beggars
be attacked and kicked out by dogs!

They have laid people prostrate in the cold,
like snow fallen on the ground in Winter.

Alas! The authority of many princes
has passed into these beggars' hands.

The seal has slipped off Solomon's finger,
and has ended up in the hands of demons.¹⁶⁴

In the arena the women now have the ball,
the stick has dropped from the hands of men.

The hunter has been trapped like a bird,
he is like a grain of wheat fed to a hen.

In the age of these dogs, the flock of sheep
is in the wolf's claws for want of a shepherd.

The citizens are the sheep, and these dogs
are wolves always pouncing on the sheep.

O Lord, send us some leopards
to attack these rabid wolves!

Because of these assassins,
the whole kingdom is in ruins.

O you, who are persecuted and smitten,
who are stunned by such suffering,

O you, who, because of the violence of such oppressors,
have been humiliated in your own city like foreigners,

have a little patience and soon you will see
these oppressors slain and their leaders routed.

Those leaders who have tormented you
will be ruined in disgrace like prisoners.

Whoever lives in this earthly house,
will fall, just as its walls will fall.

If a warrior were suddenly to appear,
you would see these leaders succumb.

And when least you expect it, the men of faith
will take their revenge on the world-worshippers.

What can they possibly know about the state,
these people who know nothing about religion?

Remember that, through God's will,
many rulers have lost their throne.

How many glorious diadems have tumbled down
from important heads to under dishonour's feet!

It only takes a sigh from you, oppressed ones, to bring down
the crown of the kingdom from the heads of these sovereigns.

Even if heaven were their throne,
and a hundred moons shone on it,

it's as if these people had already been cast down
from the heights of honour to deposition's mud.

And why do you, O Seyf -e Farghâni,
also hurt yourself in this house of pain?¹⁶⁵

You are only a pawn on this chessboard, but have already seen
how many down here have fallen from the horse of fortune.

You can be sure these people will also fall,
and someone else will sit in their place.

In this garden they are like poplars without fruit,
trees that will be blown over by a breath of wind.

God will send a remedy for the people
who suffer because of this great pain.¹⁶⁶

Farghâni

Similar to these attacks are the accusations against not only the political but also the overall social establishment, at times with claims that we might in modern terms describe as existentialist:

Do you know what the harp and the lute declaim to us?
'Drink wine secretly or you will be tainted with heresy!'

They always tell us not to reveal and not to listen
to love's secret. What they recount is a difficult story!

People dishonour the dignity of love and lovers' grace,
the young are thwarted and the old are strongly rebuked.

Outside the door we were deceived in a hundred ways;
who knows what they will invent behind their veils!

They even disturb the Old Man of the Magi,¹⁶⁷
look at what the disciples do to the Master!

Many honours could be bought with half a glance,
but the handsome ones hold back in this affair.

Some earnestly and eagerly seek out their friend,
whereas others simply rely upon their destiny.

Don't place your trust in today's stability,
this is a workshop where all is change!

Bring some wine, then, for if you take a closer look,
the sheikh, cleric, *mufti* and censor are all hypocrites.¹⁶⁸

Hâfez

Criticisms of authority may also ignore contemporary contexts and adopt the criteria of a moralistic and didactic outlook tending to describe the general conditions of those in power. Thus in the following lines, in which we find the topos of the madman, who, because his 'innocent' mindlessness is tolerated, can upbraid the sovereign without running risks that would otherwise be inevitable:

One day Bohlul, when he was drunk,
went to Hârûn and sat on his throne.¹⁶⁹

The guards beat him badly with sticks and stones,
so that he immediately started to bleed all over.

After taking all those terrible beatings,
he said: 'O Hârûn, sovereign of the world,

for just one instant I sat up there on your throne,
look at the state I am in because of the blows I got!

You've been sitting there all your life,
so you'll surely be hacked to pieces!

I got my dues for no more than one instant,
poor thing, you will come off much worse!¹⁷⁰

‘Attâr

Poets

In the court setting, the poets themselves are the second category, after patrons, who are frequently the butt of satire. At times this kind of satire was encouraged by the patron. There is a significant anecdote quoted in the *Chahâr Maqâle* (12th century), whereby the sultan provoked this witty response from Rashidi about ‘Am‘aq, who had described his rival’s poetry as lacking salt:

You criticise my poems for lack of salt,
and in this you may be perfectly right.

My poems are really like sugar and honey,
and salt certainly doesn’t go well with them.

But what you write tastes of turnips and beans,
and so it’s you, O cuckold, who needs the salt!¹⁷¹

Rashidi

Rivalry between poets, however, was such a deep-rooted phenomenon that it certainly did not require encouragement from the patron to occur. Poetic disputes are a feature of the whole history of Persian poetry, and we find examples both at the beginning and the end of the period considered:

If Farrokhi is now dead, why is ‘Onsori not dead too?¹⁷²
An old man lingers on and a young man has gone early.

We have lost a wise man and his departure only brings grief,
a madman is left and his permanence brings no gain at all.¹⁷³

Labibi

Sâghari claimed that the plagiarists took¹⁷⁴
every fine idea they found in his poems.

And he was quite right in making this comment:
I have read all his poems and they have no ideas.¹⁷⁵

Jâmi

Of the satires in the early period, Manuchehri’s blast against an envious poet includes a long list of the possible reasons for dispute:

Many are envious of me and I am left with no companions,
give justice to the oppressed, O glory of the Prince of believers!

The male lion is always alone and swine go in pairs,
but only God, the creator of souls, is unique and one.

My envier wishes to outdo me. He's making a mistake!
The rose that blooms before its time will soon fade.

My envier thinks he can match me in knowledge,
but someone with consumption won't grow fat.

My envier says: 'Why, when you listen to my speech,
do you bend like a bow and are ready to fly like an arrow?'

It's right to do so before such an envier: when stamped,
the reversed pattern on the seal appears the right way up.

He also says to me: 'You stole all my friends!'
But those friends were already angry with him.

Wise people stay no longer than a day with him,
nobody wants to court danger more than once.

My envier says: 'What are you doing at the king's court?'
Now the hate inspiring him is clear. Here is true ignorance!

Wherever there is a garden, there is birdsong,
and, for every bird, there is a sharp arrow.

My envier says: 'I am old and you are young,
in knowledge the young can't match the old.'

But if the wisdom of wicked people grew with age,
Satan the damned would not be more abject every day.

My envier says: 'Why are my poems
read less than yours by young people?'

My poetry is clear water, while yours is muddy.
Will people drink mud if they can have clear water?

My envier says: 'Why are you in the sovereign's service?'
Foxes are suited to the service of the lion in the forest!

The elephant herder earns a living by looking after elephants,
but we courtiers do so by obeying the king of the world.

My envier says: 'Mine is the only true poetry!' What?
People can tell the lute from the harp made by Râmîtin!¹⁷⁶

God did not place all wisdom in only one poet,
all perfumes aren't in the musk sac from China:¹⁷⁷

a poet is skilled in love lyrics, another in comparisons and panegyric,
just as a musician is good at a Qâlus tune and another at Shakkartovin.

My envier says: 'Why, at the gathering of dignitaries, do we count
for little or nothing, and you are so revered and held in high esteem?'

His words demonstrate and confirm his ignorance!
My knowledge is witness and surety for my mind.

O envious one, you will never be able to see the face of intellect,
just as the damned will never contemplate the black-eyed houris.¹⁷⁸

O envious one, you are called a poet, just as I am,
but your art is feeble while mine is in good health.

Look closely! Your poetry is full of many flaws and errors,
but, on the contrary, the precious pearl must be full of grace.

It's surely better to remain in silence than to write bad lines of verse,
just as it's better not to conceive than to miscarry in the sixth month.

O envious one, since I came to the court of the sultan
you have all only protested, lamented and moaned.

If you behave like that whenever a poet is near the king,
you are bound to suffer a great deal more. Be sure!

May our king enjoy long life and be endowed with strength!
May poets always come from the ends of the earth to him!

What quarrels and arguments we had last year!
And this year you still show rancour and enmity!

Whose turn will it be next year?
With whom are you ready to fight?

In writing verse and in all the arts of poetry,
I believe you are inferior to me. This is the truth!

A year ago the king ordered you to reply to one of my poems:
you haven't done so yet. Could there be greater shame than this?

If that magnanimous sovereign had asked me to do the same,
I'd have given a powerful reply greater than all your poems!

But your poems have no value and lack sufficient weight,
so that the king, that patron of poets, orders a reply to them.

You are foolish and don't realise what everyone knows,
which is that you are not my equal in the poetic art.

I am well versed in theology, medicine and grammar,
you can't tell *dâl* from *zâl*, *re* from *ze* and *sin* from *shin*.¹⁷⁹

I know numerous Arabic divans off by heart,
you can't even read the most famous Arabic lines.

The king of Iran invited me to Ray on an elephant,¹⁸⁰
and in so many years he has not even thought of you!

I am superior to you in knowledge, you are superior to me in wealth.
But knowledge surpasses wealth, just as faith surpasses this world.

You were able to grow rich thanks to the king of kings,
otherwise you would be cleaning the gutters of Ray!

You must find some great advantages in your present condition,
or you'd go back to leading the troops of our powerful sovereign.

You show off that every year you earn
no less than three or four hundred dinars.

Despite this, you refuse to be grateful to the king of the world.
If you have had nothing good from this king, pack your bags!

Go to Shervân, where they will always give you only¹⁸¹
barley bread and pork from a pig that's been dead a month!

For my part, I wish to stay in this royal court,
I never think of Ray, Gorgân or any other place.

Who has ever seen in Ray, Gorgân or Shervân,
poets on elephants with money bags on the saddle?

All the gifts our patron offers to the weakest poets in a single day,
have never been given in a lifetime by Mo'tasem and Mosta'in.¹⁸²

Express your sincere gratitude, then, without scrimping,
if you want good luck to grant you the king's protection.

He who is grateful is one of the noblemen,
he who is ungrateful is one of the wretched!¹⁸³

Manuchehri

Of the great number of satires on poets composed in subsequent periods, we can quote only a few representative cases here. Amongst the most prolific authors in this field is certainly Suzani. He wrote much poetry against a poet he names as Khar-e Khomkhâne ('Tavern Donkey'),¹⁸⁴ like the following example, which contains the famous claim that *hajv* necessarily includes offence and insults:

What on earth is this claim you make, you old donkey,
to be a poet who routs armies and conquers countries?

If you knew the art of routing armies and conquering countries,
why would the sovereign squander his finances on soldiers?

Why would he not give you the money
to send you to war and defeat his enemies?

And if you want to rout armies and conquer countries,
why do you put off this pleasant task so much?

Leap into the saddle, but check your feet carefully,
so that you don't fall off the horse during the attack,

as you spur on your steed at great speed,
and the fistula begins to bother your arse.

Conquer, in just one assault, that land whose king
is the angel of death and whose minister is the devil.

That land is called Tavern, its cities and villages are barrels,
and you, baring your stone heart, must seal its door with pitch.

Raise your standard and, with your beard for a flap,
attack all the flies on those barrels full of wine!

When you have seized all the cities and all the villages
of that powerful country where every road leads to hell,

when you have defeated that crowded land,
then you will be given the name of army-router!

Here you are actually nothing more than a tavern poet,
whose poems are sung by tavern musicians in any old way.

That's how you emulate your father's glorious deeds,
and the devil's eye lights up at the sight of you.

You ask: 'Who is the king of poets?' And you yourself reply:
'Me, of course!' O blind-spirited, brazen fool, what pride is this?

Your being a prince among poets costs you very little:
Abu Sahl made you a prince, but of dung-carters!

There is nobody like you to be found anywhere, from Kash to Kashmir,¹⁸⁵
you have garlic for teeth, your head is a turnip, your lips are eggplants.

And with my fist clenched like a turnip, I will wallop you and knock
your thirty-two teeth into your lips like garlic cloves into egg-plants.

You are a donkey-headed poet, and your desire for poetry
is just like a donkey's hankering after barley and straw.

You claim: 'Who can be my equal in drawing back the bow
of poetry? I'm as strong as Mars and have Mercury's mind!'¹⁸⁶

You should know that I am able to draw the bow much better,
and defeat the archer, even if he's a champion like Zâl or Hojir.¹⁸⁷

My poetry is like a delicate, full-fleshed fig,
yours is thick, dry yogurt, and the fig is better.

You are nothing but a dog and all your poems are a neck chain.
Indeed, you and your poems are worth less than a dog and a chain.

You asked me not to insult you when I am composing my *hejâ*.
What should I do? Offer you roast chicken, lamb, halva and silk?

This is certainly not advice to give to anybody,
not even to an enemy may such nasty things be said.

The wise man mixes the yeast of insult with *hajv*,
so that his spirit will be raised and grows well.

Hejâ without insults is like unleavened bread,
and unleavened bread is bad for the belly.

Anyway, the insults I aim at you are all true,
I can explain them down to every last detail.

Do you remember you gambled your arse,
and your creditors burst right through it?

You have respectable creditors, and you must give them the stake,
not only are they strong, but you agreed they should have their way.

They are all kinds of people, both distinguished and ordinary,
and because of them you always end up shouting and screaming.

They have poured so much yogurt into you from the tips of their cocks
that, when you cough, a smell of cheese comes out of your throat.

In the eyes of those who know the value of poetry,
the poet who pawns his arse is a blameworthy coward.

For many years the warriors of the faith have sung *Allâho Akbar*,
at the door of your forefathers' temple, to convert them to Islam.

Now different kinds of warriors pronounce
Allâho Akbar, and come behind you at night.

They clench their cocks like bell clappers,
and, while you sleep, play those instruments.

So you see death in a dream and, when you wake,
here is my *hajv* to interpret that terrible nightmare.

May you always worry about your daily bread and death,
may my *hajv* be your only daily bread and everyday death.

I wouldn't care if you were to live or die,
a fart in your whiskers, dead or alive!¹⁸⁸

Suzani

Suzani also turned his pen against illustrious colleagues such as Sanâ'i, Mo'ezzi (d. c. 1125) and Nezâmi-ye 'Aruzi. The following is a satire, with an interesting dramatic structure, written about a poet named Nezâmi who can presumably be identified with Nezâmi-ye 'Aruzi:¹⁸⁹

Even if Nezâmi is still alive, I think of him as already dead,
and dedicate to him this elegy, thus fulfilling my duty as a poet.

If I had to wait for his death to compose it,
he wouldn't hear it, and that would be a pity.

So I will declaim to him such elegant lines of verse
that he will be anxious to die so as to receive this elegy.

And I hope that, thanks to my poetry, his desire will then be satisfied,
this I yearn for at the feast with a stinking-moustached scoundrel.

He is a dog with a whore for a wife, and I hope he dies like a dog,
even though he always claims that he can challenge powerful lions.

Seeing his face gets right on my nerves,
it burdens me by day and enters my dreams.

Indeed, he appeared to me while I was sleeping,
describing his suffering and torments after his death:

'They have shut me so tight in the tomb
I don't even have enough room to fart.

I also ache all over because the angel of death
beat me with his club after questioning me.

The series of lies I told when alive
has irrevocably sent me to my fate.

They stuck the list of those lies to my pimpish neck,
and dragged me to be judged and to be punished.

I needed a long rope from the tomb to hell
to bind the bundle of the sins I had committed.

I tried to move but, since I couldn't budge,
they pushed me to burn, head down, in hell.

O what pain and punishment they inflicted
for all those lies I told to make me look good!

They put a muzzle on my mouth as people do with a dog,
but I disgust even dogs because of the garbage I have eaten.

I always bragged about my Samanid descent,¹⁹⁰
but now none of them down here speaks to me.

Moreover, no one cares how much they did or possessed,
I was clearly mistaken to bind all my fortune to theirs.

And because I said that Mount Khoshk belongs to me,
the angel of death hung me up on a dried-out branch.

Then they unrelentingly threw at me
all the stones that were on that hill.

They eventually gathered a thousand faggots
from its slopes, made a pile and stuck me on top.

I was so tightly bound all round by flames up there
that I felt like a grain in the middle of a pomegranate.

I lost all hope that anyone would bring me
a little fruit and ice from the town of Mazdikat.¹⁹¹

I became like the people from Sistan,
and felt as intrepid and strong as them:

instead of ice and fruit, I feed on infernal drinks and plants,
instead of roses and herbs, I always have thorns and flames.

Here I am food for snakes and I eat only thorns,
like thorns I get broken, like snakes I live in caves.

The only relief would be to have a huge cucumber
to soothe the itching the thorns make in my arse hole,

until they put me in the saddle of that speedy horse,
the devil's cock, which is as robust as a big yoke.

Down here I've lost all my nobility and power,
and I mourn and lament about it continually.

Alas, I no longer have my gold and my villages,
my castles, my houses, my lands and my gardens!

I can't even mention the name of Mount Khoshk
without the angel stoning me, and he's quite right.

I suffer when I dream of Nishapur, its parks and its gardens,
when I think about Bukhara and about the village of Bakkâr.

My heart aches remembering the caravanserais of 'Arus and Malek,
although I obtained both of them in such a dishonourable way.

And what can I say of the falcon, the peacock, the crab,
and other animals that brought me gold and money?

I also yearn greatly for Samarkand and its weavers' quarters,
with those young Turks, who now appear in my daydreams.

I regret no longer being able to see my dear Sayyed Tegin,
although down here he says that he deeply hates our kinship.

I'm also nostalgic for those young donkeys that are now adult servants,
and dress themselves up so finely with my clothes and my turban.

Lastly, I am very depressed not to have my poems with me any more,
even if, as the fruit of my vile, rotten nature, they are cold and nasty.

I have only one wish, O poet: when you wake from this sweet dream,
I really implore you, do not spare your curses on me and my poems!

So be it! A thousand curses on Nezâmi and his poems
will I write when I am awake and when I am asleep.

Afflicting that evil bastard in this way
is one of the few good deeds I can do.

I expect then a reward from Mojir od-Din,
he who is surely a great and noble person.¹⁹²

Suzani

One of the most argumentative characters in the whole of the literary history of Persia is Khâqâni, as demonstrated by the fact that he is a central figure in a dense network of conflicts and quarrels. Of the many satires he wrote against his colleagues, here are two about Vatvât:

This cat-eyed little brute, this poodle from Ghur, this dinky faggot,¹⁹³
this hideous feeble creature, this tiny impotent being, this ugly pagan,

with me he tries to be a small panther, but is an undersized vixen,
a feeble sow-necked creature, a pooch with the nature of a jackal.

He claps his minute hands like a monkey and hops about like a bear,
this insignificant character with a goatee beard and baboonish looks.

He is a tiny hermaphrodite hare, both male and female,
menstruating like a woman and screwing like a midget.

He was my household pet and now, for my bad luck, he's become
a lion cub or, rather, a wolf cub. Indeed, he's a little worse than both.

That mangy hair of a dog, I refer to him as a dog's cock
because he peeks out bare and reddish like a dog's cock.

Like a cowardly small panther he runs after deer and jumps on them,
people endure him only because of love's talisman on his puny chest.

He wants to play the swaggering bully round the gazelles and fawns
at the king's feast, but remains an onager foal at his mummy's feet.

Like a doggy, he is a paragon of loyalty. This blithe little creature
will not even abandon someone who hammers his hands and feet.

He has no honour, like a tiny beaver with no balls,
this bad-tempered jackalette, this touchy little mule!

Khâqâni, don't moan! It is not even clear who this pooch belongs to!
This doggy, who only munches small bones, can easily be satisfied:

if he grunts a little bow-wow, you can simply throw him a few crumbs,
and, slightly wagging his tail, he will go to lie down behind a little door.

You, O Khâqâni, are the measure of wisdom, and must not be hurt
by this tiny scorpion who would like to sting you with his evil tail.

It was a similar blow that, after the month of Shavvâl,¹⁹⁴
struck the blessed nape of the son of Toghân Yazak.¹⁹⁵ *Khâqâni*

That impotent fag is an owl standing on a dung heap,
and, unlike the Homâ, he vaunts no noble origins.¹⁹⁶

He eats garbage and is as sinister as a crow,
like a rooster he is adulterous and depraved.

He's as mocking and brazen as a turtledove,
like a parrot he is a spy and a squealer.

He is really just as aggressive as an eagle,
like a great bird of ill omen, he elicits fear.

Unlike the sparrow-hawk he doesn't live in princely dwellings,
but always perches, with his tawny-owl face, on the battlements.

He has none of the nobility of the falcon or the fame of the phoenix,
but only the notoriety of the hoopoe and the nature of the vulture.

Like a wagtail he hops from branch to branch,
like a little bat he flaps from tavern to tavern.

Like the peacock he's the devil's eternal guide,
like the sparrow he is constantly fouling things.¹⁹⁷

As long as Khâqâni is the nightingale of speech,
he will be stalled like a merlin on a windy day.

He became my enemy, I the white hawk,
and his fate turned as black as a crow.

O if only the king's sword were immediately
to split open his head, like a swallow's tail.¹⁹⁸

Khâqâni

Among the satirical attacks aimed at Khâqâni himself, there are significant lines by his master Abu 'l-'Alâ'.¹⁹⁹

O Khâqâni, although you know the art of speech,
I want to say something. Listen, it costs you nothing!

Don't make *hajv* on somebody older than yourself,
you might be talking to your father without knowing it.²⁰⁰ *Abu 'l-'Alâ'*

Listen, Afzal od-Din, if you are asking me sincerely,
for your dear soul's sake, I'm dissatisfied with you!

In the whole region of Shervân you were famous²⁰¹
as the carpenter's son. I gave you the title of Khâqâni!

I did numerous other good deeds for you:
I gave you my daughter, goods and fame.

Why do you fail to show me respect?
I was a father to you and I'm your master!

How long will you keep on with your insisting
that I said things of which I have no memory?

By God, I never said: 'I fucked you!'
And if said it, by God, I don't remember!

Not one, but two hundred times did I actually make a point of saying:
'I didn't fuck you, I didn't fuck you, I didn't fuck you, I didn't fuck you!'

But if you keep repeating that I said it, all right then:
'I fucked you, I fucked you, I fucked you, I fucked you!'²⁰² *Abu 'l-'Alâ'*

Khâqâni was also considered to be a target of his putative student Mojir od-Din in the following lines:

He's so depraved that his nature is a real disgrace to life,
his lust makes him thirsty even when he's sitting in water.

His soul would still be as black as the back of a mirror,
even if Alexander built his mirror from that black soul.²⁰³

With my ice-cold sigh I have prepared a talisman for good health,
so that, like a salamander, I can pass through the fire of his hate.

God made him a vain, odious hypocrite,
full of all kinds of flaws, short and all red.

No one knows him, but he claims to be a celestial pole for people.
He is surely a pole: the only thing near him is his daughter's coffin!²⁰⁴

He cuts off his nose to spite his face, and I think
he does so to be compared to the carpenter's son.²⁰⁵

People actually refer to him as Abraham, the family-destroyer,
but only because Âzar of Shervân's son treats him like a brother.

But he must be exactly the opposite of Abraham,
otherwise why is the basil of my nature a fire to him?²⁰⁶ *Mojir od-Din*

Other contemporary poets, such as Jamâl od-Din, also criticised Khâqâni:

Who will take my message to the city of Shervân?²⁰⁷
Who will take my words to that eloquent man?

Who will say to him: 'O Khâqâni, what on earth are all these boasts?
Writing two lines is not enough for you to adopt an illustrious title!'

You've claimed there is no one like you in the whole world,
saying your speech is superior to that of Qeys and Sahbân.²⁰⁸

A man of intellect does not show off his learning,
if he does, he must prove the truth of what he says.

A man with so little knowledge as you can lay no claims to erudition!
A man like you with no talent can't speak of himself and the great!

You sent us your poetry as a gift, a foolish action:
no one with any sense would carry cumin to Kerman!²⁰⁹

You believe the wise and knowledge have abandoned our land,
otherwise how could someone like you make such huge claims?

The fact you send us poetry reminds me of the ant
who went to Solomon and gave him a locust's leg.²¹⁰

You consider your words to be like a necklace made of pearls,
but if one wants to make money, would one carry pearls to Oman?

You may well think that your speech is a kind of white magic,
but no one dares to compare his own miracles to those of Moses.

An old woman on a donkey's back is an unpleasant sight,
especially when trying to gallop and race on a feast day.

Someone brought your poems to our land so as to boast about them.
If he had had some nous, he'd have given them to a straw merchant.

No wise man ties dogs to the mosque,
no Muslim takes idols into the Kaaba.

Perhaps your fellow citizens have never read poetry,
since they have notebooks and divans with your poetry.

In that country which is devoid of imagination,
those wretched poems are galloping horses.

But our land is not the kind of place where anyone
making one paltry poem, can claim to be like Tayyân.²¹¹

In our land there are still some poets
who hold eloquence in great honour.

I am one of them and, when I write poetry,
Hassân's soul bows down before my talent.²¹²

Jamâl od-Din

Mojir od-Din was another poet at the centre of a notorious controversy because of some poems that he had composed casting aspersions on the city of Isfahan.²¹³ For this reason he was the butt of Jamâl od-Din's satires:

O little Mojir, why on earth did you write that *hajv*?
Do you know what will happen to you for those lines?

You have used your terrible tongue against Isfahan,
and you can't imagine what trouble is on the way.

For how much longer will you say that the people of Isfahan
do not have any kind of talent for expressing refined subtleties?

If I tell cities like Ganja and Tbilisi to go and get fucked,
think what I can say to towns like Shervân and Beylaqân.²¹⁴

If I can invoke a fart on the beard of the master Khâqânî,
just think what I can wish for a great cuckold like you.²¹⁵ *Jamâl od-Din*

From the outset when God, through grace and mercy,
created the reasoning spirit from the rays of Intellect,

Intellect set its nipples on the poets' mouths,
so that each sucked according to his skill.

Mojir od-Din arrived late, the milk had been finished,
so, into his gaping mouth, Intellect dropped a big turd.²¹⁶

Jamâl od-Din

Rivalry between poets was not always characterised by such long dissertations. Sometimes we find pithy repartee, as in the following famous exchange between Adib Sâber and Vatvât:

That minuscule faggot Rashid-e Vatvât
is to ignorance what Hippocrates is to science.

If there were talk of cocks in hell,
he'd jump off the bridge of salvation.²¹⁷

Adib Sâber

That minuscule faggot Adib Sâber
made *hajv* on me for no reason.

So I am going to fill his mouth up with shit,
even though it's absurd to carry dates to Basra.²¹⁸

Vatvât

We end this survey of poetic rivalries *ad hominem* with a satire on Nezâmi-ye Ganjavi, which is interesting and curious, especially in the light of the moral prestige traditionally enjoyed by this poet. The satire is an extract from 'Âref-e Ardabili's *Farhâdnâme*, a *masnavi* which, in some parts, may be considered a kind of obscene response to Nezâmi-ye Ganjavi's *Khosrow o Shirin*:

When Nezâmi's inspiration dimmed for ever,
he handed on his cup of sweet wine to me.

I ask pardon on behalf of that elderly master,
and I'll tell you, dear friends, how things stand.

In narrating Khosrow's life, in fact,
he did not say some crucial things.²¹⁹

When he spoke of the kind deeds of that prince,
who was intent on piercing the virgin pearl of Shirin,
he failed to pay close attention to the deeds of Farhâd,
who'd already manfully taken what was due from Shirin.

Nezâmi believed it pointless to celebrate a foreigner
like Farhâd, given the great regal prestige of Khosrow.

Nezâmi always lived in his own city,
and never bothered about foreigners.

But I suffered the hardship of journeying,
having been forced to go far from home.

I have been confined to a lonely life in Shervân,²²⁰
with no friends, confidants, relatives or kinsmen.

That loneliness deeply affected my mind,
and from my inner self oil came for my lamp.

My heart went out because of Farhâd,
and the light of sympathy lit within me.

I decided therefore to start recounting his numerous deeds,
as a foreigner who felt compassion for a fellow foreigner.

What is certain for me was doubtful for Nezâmi,
and what for Nezâmi was obscure is clear to me.

Amorous games were not Nezâmi's line,
his mind, therefore, could not describe them.

How can a man who has never grasped the cup
go about describing the state of the drunkard?

Only the drinker of wine knows its purity!
Inebriety's music can only be heard by drunks!

I know for certain that, during his courtings,
Nezâmi never consummated a carnal relation.

He was not a heretical painter like Mânî,²²¹
he was a man totally devoted to the spirit.

And anyone made wise by intellect
will be only strictly pure in love.

A person who has knowledge for a counsellor
will be detached from true amorous games.

He depicted the path of passion in such a way
that you would say had never been in love.

His manner of speaking made any kind of narrative monotonous,
in his moderation he didn't distinguish between man and woman.

He described in unsuitable tones love's happy time,
thus cooling completely the big flames of passion.

Men were stripped of all their virility in his words,
behaving like an old fellow, Nezâmi made love insipid.

Whereas, on the contrary, describing beautiful people
is our profession, and we have their features in our mind.

O my friend, whichever art you choose to learn,
remember that no one will master it like the experts!

Only someone who always keeps the company
of the drunken heart-breaker knows his mood.

I have experienced these stories first hand,
I have felt the mood of delicate beautiful boys.

I have also seen idols who were veiled whores,
celebrated by people because of their chastity:

behind their show of modesty and abstinence,
they were continually plotting how to deceive.

There are many secrets I could unveil,
I only need choose which to narrate.²²²

‘Âref-e Ardabili

At times the satire is addressed not to a particular poet but to a group of poets as the expression of a corrupt, incompetent class:

Having sufficiently celebrated the just,
I'll now speak about those who drivell.

They are people with neither skill nor vigour,
and are as useless as a cock with no balls.

Always inclined towards hypocrisy and deceit,
they measure the world for their own calculations.

They take their poems to those who wash or weave,
selling them for the price of a pair of shoes or a turban.

Like junk merchants, they make other people's old things new,
establishing the price of one of their poems at only two loaves.

They beg like hungry dogs from door to door,
and call the worst of poisons sweet delicacies.

They address *madh* to the rabble that should be for kings,
and they put their intellect at the service of the devil.

They are a herd of brazen idiots,
who use disgusting, ugly words.

They describe the crown as if they were referring to a chain,
their poetry has no strength, just as their cheeks have no beard.

None of them can express themselves properly,
and they are unable to tell right from wrong.

They don't know the difference between *tâbe* and *âftâbe*,²²³
they confuse the form of the sky with that of a comet,

for them *kâse* is the same as *korâse*,
and *tâs* is no different from *tâse*.²²⁴

They recite praises to the sovereign meant for governors,
and raise governors as high as the status of Mercury.²²⁵

They call ordinary folk lords,
and address nobles as servants.

Since they can't distinguish between praise and blame,
their houses and their wives' cunts are both wrecked.

They are always on the lookout for a morsel of bread,
but go round searching with no means and no wits.

Perpetually with dirty miserable faces,
they behave like scroungers and spies.

Their countenance and figure bring bad luck,
so they are perennially wretched and ruined.²²⁶

Sanâ'i

Court Milieu

Collective satire is also aimed at social categories other than poets who are also in attendance at the court. Here are three examples. The first is a satire against physicians, the second concerns cup-bearers and singers and the third describes some notables:

Scientists have described symptoms in books,
small and large, of all the gravest diseases.

But if you ask the physicians of today
about only one of those symptoms,

I assure you they won't understand a thing,
even if they leaf through book after book.

Out of ignorance, they are always trumpeting on,
but are worse than dull dim-witted street-sweepers.

They are all so competent that every year
they kill thousands and thousands of patients.

They are mates with the angel of death,
assassins, and people are their victims.

Pity the poor wretches who require
such a category of brazen blind men.

O Lord, please free us, I beg You,
with Your grace, from such physicians!

The world is in ruins because of them,
save people from these wicked men!²²⁷

Sanâ'i

You may well relinquish the paradise of the beyond,
and abandon the realm of the world down here,

if you enjoy this banquet of joy and smiles:
even heaven will bow down before it.

The cup-bearers are like the moon and the host like the sun,
the wine is as strong as Mars, the singers as melodious as Venus.

Celebrated in every city, the singers
make Venus seem a modest apprentice.

Each has blown out from his arse
unforgettable angelic melodies.

Right from between their thighs, some air has risen
into lovers' instruments, and those cocks have swollen.

To seduce and to pretty themselves like half-moons,
they have dressed up with some fine double chins.

Meanwhile the cupbearers at that feast
are drunk with cup in hand and cock in feet.

Some are devoted to trials of love,
while others, all lust, are jerking off.

The shiest ones, with their swift movements,
have ended up under the axe of the strongest,
and even the abstinent are red-faced with joy,
their necks grown purple from slapping.²²⁸

Sanâ'i

Heaven has bestowed significant court honours
on whomever I have stuck it up as far as the balls.

My pansy friends have become important,
while in their eyes I am still a nonentity.

Alas that not even only once
can I stick it up my own arse!²²⁹

Suzani

As in the cases of patrons and poets, the other social categories may also be attacked at the personal level. At times the name of the *mahju* is mentioned, as in this poem:

When Mohammad the flautist plays,
his flute has the power of an organ.

A breath is blown down that pipe,
and cheers up every heart full of grief.

Since his melody enlivens their souls,
people willingly give their heart to him.

What pleasure is to be had, when he so dexterously
invents fine games with that two-eyed instrument.

From his authority come orders and bans,
from his words flow gold and pearls.

He brings together all the musicians,
and raises the curtain on the stage.

Then the bald Nâser bustles to and fro,
advances amidst pushing and great blows.

That donkey with a wrecked arse
bangs a shameless cock-eating whore.

For him the aim of all this beating
and din is only to earn his bread.

That depraved wretch and that whore
are actually good at making us laugh:

that cuckold gets angry and huffy,
and at once slaps begin to fly all over.

He only has to see a crumb, even in rubbish,
and he's willing to sacrifice his whole house.

He loves money above all else,
that's why he's a true cuckold.²³⁰

Mas'ud-e Sa'd

But the addressee more often remains anonymous, as in the following examples:

The judge is not well acquainted with me, otherwise he would give me,
at least, his fleas, passing them off as poppy and sesame seeds.

He is aware, however, that if I make the cock of *hejâ* hard,
his arse will start to fart, out of fearfulness, at every instant.

But, by God, he's so stingy he won't even give you a coriander grain,
no matter how much you threaten to lop off his head like a leek's.²³¹

Qomri

That blood-letting Jew has evil pagan blood,
his tongue is slow but his scalpel's tip is fast.

I asked him to cut a slit in a vein as narrow as my cunt,
he paid no heed and made one as broad as his wife's arse.²³²

Mahsati

In this context we have the significant cases of those beloved young crafts-men who are mocked within the framework of the genre called *shahrâshub* ('upsetting the town'). Their good looks are the cause of havoc in the town:

My handsome butcher skinned a tail,
held it up and said: 'What a beauty!'

I murmured to myself: 'What incredible greed!
With all the tails he has, he still loves a tail!'²³³ *Mahsati*

Albeit rarely, the beloved may also be described in ironic terms outside any professional context. His haughtiness may be criticised:

Yesterday I caught sight of a beautiful boy at Zuzan,²³⁴
if you want to praise the beautiful, he's the one to praise.

He showed no pity for my heart and took a wife.
And that unfaithful wife avenged my heart on him.²³⁵ *Mahsati*

The physical decline of the beloved also provides an opportunity to mock him:

As soon as your chin had a beard,
that beard was pointed at by all.

Your beard grew and then you tore it off. I am sure
that's what you did, otherwise where has it gone?²³⁶ *Mahsati*

As we have seen on the subject of patrons, in the case of other categories the criticism may also be less concerned with daily life and take on more didactic and moralising tones. Here is an example concerning a general aspect of the court milieu, in which the intimate friends of the sovereign (represented by the falcon) are bundled with him in a negative judgement:

The falcon entered the banquet with haughty mien,
eagerly intent on disclosing some secret truths.

He started bragging about his privileges,
showing off the noble headgear he had.²³⁷

He said: 'Because of my passion for the king's hand,
I have closed my eyes on the people of the world.

Here's why I keep my head under this hood:
so my feet are always on my king's hand.

I carefully taught myself to behave properly,
following a discipline worthy of an ascetic,

so that I would know the rules of service
for when they took me to the king's court.

Why on earth should I dream of the Simorgh?²³⁸
Why should I so recklessly rush towards him?

I'm happy being fed with a few morsels from my king,
because being in this place is enough for me in the world!

I don't aspire to set off on a journey,
I'm proud to remain on my king's wrist.

He who is worthy of a king
will then have that king's ear.

That's why being worthy of him
is better than roaming endless valleys.

I intend to spend my whole life
joyfully down here with my king,

either waiting for him to come to me,
or hunting because of my love of him.'

The hoopoe replied: 'O prisoner of forms,
those forms are far from true qualities!

If a king has an equal in his kingdom,
what value can his realm have for him?

Power only pertains to the Simorgh,
he is the peerless king in the world.

He who foolishly puts a chief
in every land is no true king.

Only he who has no equals and lives
loyally and courteously is a true king.

The kings of this world may also be fair,
but sooner or later they commit tyranny.

The closer you are to them,
the darker your future will be:

you must always be on the alert with them,
your life is always in danger next to them.

The kings you see around you are like fire,
avoid them, it's the only way to live in peace!

They want no one around them,
so why go near them? Fly away!²³⁹

'Attâr

Religious Context

Other frequent targets for satire are the religious establishment and religious figures. The satires of this kind are usually generic rather than personal. Very few names are actually mentioned. The criticism may be serious and with no obscenities, as in the following example:

O *mufti*, we surely are much more serious than you,²⁴⁰
despite all our drunkenness, we are soberer than you!

We drink the blood of the vine, and you that of people.
Be fair: which of us must be considered more bloodthirsty?²⁴¹

'Omar Khayyâm

Here are another two examples in this moderate style. The first is a ghazal aimed at the hypocrisy of preachers:

The preachers on the *menbar* and before the *mehrab* behave properly,²⁴²
but when they retire on their own, they do other, very different things.

I have a question for the wise man who sits in the assembly:
'Why do those calling for repentance, then repent so little?'

You might say that they don't believe in Judgment Day,
given all the deceits and tricks they play on our Lord!

I bow before the Old Man of the Tavern: his dervishes²⁴³
have no needs and they cast dirt on all the world's riches.

O my great Lord take these parvenus back to their donkeys,
they brag too much about having Turkish slaves and cattle.

And you Angel, recite prayers at the door of love's tavern,
because that is where Adam's clay is kneaded and shaped.

Several lovers have already been slain by His infinite beauty,
but in love many new lovers always appear from nowhere.

O you who go begging at the house of the Sufi, stand up now!
At the convent of the Magi they offer water making hearts strong.

O my heart, empty your house and make of it a dwelling for the king,
these pleasure-seekers have made their heart and soul a battlefield.

At dawn voices came from the celestial throne, and the Mind said:
'You would think that the saints recite Hâfez's poetry from memory!'²⁴⁴

Hâfez

The second ghazal is aimed at the hypocrisy of the Sufis:

For God's sake don't hang around with those wearing the cowl,
and instead show your face to the libertines who own nothing.

The cowls they have hide a lot of filth,
hurrah for the clothes of the wine-seller!

You are of a sensitive nature and surely can't stand
the dullness of a handful of people dressed in tunics.

You can easily see what the deceit of those hypocrites leads to,
the jug has a bleeding heart and the lutes send out laments.

You got me drunk, now don't hide yourself away from me!
You gave me sweet nectar, now don't make me drink poison!

In those who pose as Sufis I have never seen any kind of suffering,
may the joy of those who drink wine to the last drop always be pure!

You should watch out for Hâfez's ardour,
he has a breast which is like a boiling pan.²⁴⁵

Hâfez

Unlike the last three poems, many of the satires in the religious context contain obscene language and imagery. Some are short and epigrammatic, like the following:

A sheikh said to a prostitute: 'You are drunk,
every instant you fall into a different trap.'

She replied: 'I am everything you say,
but are you in reality as you appear?'²⁴⁶

'Omar Khayyâm

When that idol of pagan faith came to pray,
believers and dervishes interrupted the orations,

and the imam said, with great suffering and regret:
'If only he were in front of me and I behind him!'²⁴⁷

Sa'di

At other times we have a sort of story with a plot and a moral at the end:

I've heard that in the city of Herat,
there was an erudite and skilful man.

Being tired because of the infinite suffering he saw all around,
he acquired so much learning that he was the wisest in the world.

His knowledge was incomparable,
but he was troubled by a vexation.

He had just one vexation and no other,
the vexation due to his cock's vigour.

He hadn't had a fuck for such a long time and when,
at last, he picked up a boy, he didn't know where to go.

Finding no other possible place, he was forced,
having no other choice, to go into the mosque.

Seeing there was no one in front of the *mehrab*,²⁴⁸
he decided to have a quick fuck, there and then.

He drew down the veils from those silvery hills
so as to send his own fish back up to the spring,
and the mosque was flooded by such light
that a reflection flashed out from within.

A devout man was struck by that glow,
and set off to see what was going on.

From afar he noticed the boy bent double,
and a depraved man with his tool in his fist.

When, after entering, he slowly drew a bit closer,
he saw the man was slipping it up the boy's arse.

He began to wave his hands and to whirl a stick,
then, opening his mouth, he roared like a bull:

'You damned people are the only ones to blame
if there is no rain and the crops do not grow!

What effrontery is this in the holy dwelling?
The divine law certainly doesn't thrive in you!

What kind of behaviour do you think this is?
For the divine law, it's a disgrace and shame!

The end of the world really has finally come,
now it's the turn of ignorance and the ignorant!

No one holds God in fear any longer,
people's hearts are prey to temptation.

And on account of these kinds of evil actions,
there's no rain in the sky and the earth has no fruit.

If you commit the sins of sodomy and adultery,
then the eye of the Spring cloud will dry up,

all the plants will disappear from the world,
and people will lose their means of subsistence.

Creation will inevitably be destroyed,
when there is sodomy before the *mehrâb*.'

With a quick trick the depraved man jumped away,
so that he would not be caught by the devout man.

But no sooner was he out of the mosque door,
than the devout man took up the job, from the start.

And when the depraved man turned round,
to look at what the devout man was up to,

he saw the devout man had laid his carrot at the entrance
of the young boy's sack, without even offering a penny.

Sticking his head round the door, he said: 'O devout man,
this is the same mosque as before and that's the same boy.

Is our destiny so different and the situation changed so much
that everything prohibited for me is now legitimate for you?'

'God be praised!,' replied the devout man,
'The things of the world have really changed:

the earth now has plants in abundance,
and people have a means of subsistence.

Thanks be to God! It would seem
that pearls, not rain, fall from the sky.

The clouds, once dry, are full of water,
and people's hearts have all cheered up.

The crops have grown vigorously again,
and the things of the world are back in place.'

O you, who fear God and always show pity and righteousness,
O you, thanks to whose influence the world is in good health,

O you, who are so respectful of places of worship,
and may justifiably be described as a true Muslim!

If this is what the devout of the world are like,
what on earth can we expect from the others?

Run away from the house and from the street
of a devout man, a Sufi, who does such things!

And when a Sufi behaves like this,
a world of cocks up his wife's cunt!

It's true that these devout people exist,
they are as empty inside as cowbells.

Bound by the snares of hypocrisy and falsity,
what they really deserve is a hundred sneers.

Don't pay any attention to these kinds of Sufis
and their stories! Tell something about yourself!

They are the slaves of mindless fellows,
they humiliate themselves before people.

By dint of slappings may their necks
become like cotton in the dyer's hands!²⁴⁹

Sanâ'i

One place frequently associated in satirical terms with the depravation of religious people is the *khâneqâh* (Sufi monastery):

Hey khâje Sharaf, O you, who come from Herat,
and in a hundred ways have been a wife to believers!

You have suddenly become a sheikh yourself. What a pitiful sight!
You have become a master when no one expected it. What ignominy!

Your cell let out a moan and your prayer rug a sigh,
both are ashamed of you, so filthy and so impure.

May my fart shelter in the alcove of your beard,
and my cock take refuge in the hole in your behind!

Indeed, in what better cell than your arse
could I leave my one-eyed, bald club?

With all those hairs your arse is like a Sufi,
and with my cock it has found a fine turban.

If you set your arse for a short while on the prayer rug,
your brow will be blackened by the stink coming off it.²⁵⁰

Your eyes are sunk in the pit of your nose
to avoid seeing your ill-omened face.

Those eyes that remind anyone observing them
of mercury quivering at the bottom of a well.

You're like a dog and cat at the same time, but with monkey's face!
It's terrible that someone like you is in charge of such a *khâneqâh*!²⁵¹

Qomri

The *khâneqâh* is sometimes described as a place of pleasure where the confreres, led by particularly libidinous companions, give vent to their sexual instincts, as we read in the following lines:

The eye of a mystic's heart fell on a pretty face,
he saw those curls and they captured his mind:

he was a robust young man with impudent looks,
an expert at wrestling with chain-breaking brawn.

The mystic spent several days tempting that young man,
and eventually one night managed to be alone with him.

He put his hands on his musky apple,²⁵²
and kissed that sweet fruit several times.

Then he set about opening his breeches,
so he could plunge his arrow therein.

The young man was irascible and rough,
and threatened whippings and punches.

'I will never accept' he said 'such shame:
never will a free forehead rub on the ground!

But if kisses and hugs are all you want,
I am your slave, come and take them!'

The other replied: 'I agree to this pact,
O flourishing sapling and sinuous cypress!

Hugging you tight is really enough for me,
and to die at your feet, O my heart-breaker!'

They made their peace with these words,
and clasped each other in a long embrace.

They laid lip on lip, in love and agreement,
like two almonds in the interior of a shell.

The mystic keenly laid a hand on his beloved's neck,
his desire grew so strong his cock was about to burst.

All of a sudden he completely lost control,
got behind him and stuck it up his arse.

Patience was utterly defeated and passion prevailed,
he plunged in his banner, leaving only the handle outside.

The other said: 'What's this? Have you lost your head?
What a piece of cowardice, what a shameful thing!'

The mystic had now totally succumbed to his own desire,
and wouldn't let his friend so stupidly slip from his grasp.

So he dropped some coins into the beloved's fist,
hoping to win over that powerful arm with gold.

And that stunning boy let him in the back-shop,
saying: 'Stick your nail as far up as it will go!'

The mystic felt great joy and satisfaction,
for all his coming and going in there.

He took the young man to his friends and mates,
and left him to stay with the other confreres.

Some of them gave him a little kiss,
others a bougie up to his umbilicus.

Some showed all their fondness for him,
others offered him friendship and devotion.

But then they all began to fight over him,
and their yelling reached as high as the sky.

Screams, slaps and eventually stones began to fly,
and every confrere ended up with a bruised face.

So they went to their old Master,
and they told him the whole story.

He bent his head, soon began to reflect,
and, raising his face, proffered his counsel:

'For people who usually survive only by begging,
one pair of sandals must suffice for twenty feet!'

These words were so welcome to all,
they were like a salve on a throbbing sore.

They set about prostrating themselves,
 chanted poems and clapped their hands.

No one had ever put that young wrestler on his back,
 but now all of them pressed his forehead to the ground.

That tulip face began to be inebriated with them,
 he took lots of cocks until his beard started growing.

Only then did he give up, imploring forgiveness:
 such poor wretches must always be very patient!²⁵³

Sa'di

We also find detailed descriptions of the general decadence in the *khâneqâh*, especially in terms of the circumstances leading to the corruption of young adepts by false masters:

In the past people were honourable,
 and usually had courteous manners.

Today there's no trace of those people or manners,
 no one bothers to even make mention of them.

Everywhere you find a traitor making traps,
 and laying down his snares of deception.

He sits in the place of honour saying: 'I am the sheikh!',
 while several boys like full moons stand all around him.

He seems to be painted there in his *khâneqâh*, stuck in like a nail,
 but only because he's a wretch and doesn't know where else to go.

He preens away at his moustache and beard,
 and hides bottles and hashish under his cushion.

He has chosen some despicable types in the city,
 and keeps them all lined up in a row next to him.

They are a debauched band with wrecked arses,
 people who have never listened to the masters.

They all have their tools straight and ready,
 at the continual thought of their beloveds.

During the day they work hard without eating or sleeping,
 at night they take loads of money to that place of pleasure.

All that they earn in three days' work,
they blow in an instant with their beloveds.

Those debauched men have their heartbreakers in there,
and are like wolves prowling round so many Josephs.²⁵⁴

Some of them bring fruit and yogurt,
and prepare everything for the night feast.

That *khâneqâh* is crammed full with cupboards,
bows, backgammon, chess and carafes of iced water.

The table abounds with loaves and pans brimming with food,
while all the bodies and hearts are stripped of humanity.

They shove at each other, fighting and joking,
not heeding the motion of the stars and heaven.

To take advantage of handsome boys,
a rumour is put about in their city:

'A brother, more generous than anyone else,
has just opened the doors of his *khâneqâh*!

There you will find a table that is overflowing with sweet syrups,
you can hear stories, dance and be with companions and masters,

there you can crack the rod on iron hoops,
get exercise with weights and javelins,

use long arrows, gloves, slings
and other similar instruments.'

With these words they deceive the boys' fathers,
profit from their ignorance and bury the boys alive.

Those fathers are stupid and their sons are simpletons,
that's why the debauched men can satisfy their own desires.

Why should those boys put up with the rigours of the family,
when they can be pampered in that fashion down there?

It would be silly to go back home,
hear all those counsels and tirades,

endure the torments of their fathers and masters,
see food only from afar and have to do housework,

leaving the witticisms, games and jokes,
all those delicacies, lawns and gardens.

If one were by nature lively and quick,
bright, intrepid, well-balanced and upright,

seeing there was no virtue to be learned,
or perfection and nobility to be acquired,

he would never become the laughing-stock
of that host, only for some raisins and nuts.

But those idle good-for-nothings, those sweet-eating cowards,
wouldn't leave that place, even if you shot an arrow at them.

Moreover, the big-whiskered fellows who gather there
describe those boys as a divine gift sent by Providence,

making them strike a pact for various presents:
one, for example, offers a bow and another a belt.

They praise those boys even if they commit deplorable actions,
and consider each of their faults as being the same as virtue.

All spend the night light-hearted and carefree,
never closing their eyes, always feasting away.

When day comes, all activities cease.
With the table bare and the host asleep,

each goes back to his own affairs,
thinking how to procure fresh victims.

When night comes again, it's back to those games,
and the chance for more pleasure and wasting.

So time passes, and the beardless youths
in that place never listen to anyone's advice.

But suddenly beards begins to dim their faces
and ruin the splendour of their former beauty.

The tulips vanish out of their gardens,
and freshness fades from their apple cheeks.

If they look for meat dishes, they won't get even a bowl of yogurt,
if they want some water, they will have to fetch it themselves.

They are always chased away, like dogs into the forest,
their fathers can't help them, and they don't have a trade.

At every instant their hearts grow darker and sad,
because of their flippancy the game is up for them.

Not even the whiff of any good has reached them,
they've drunk poison and will find no antidote.

Out of ignorance they have hurt themselves,
poor wretches, they have fucked themselves!²⁵⁵

Owhadi

In the following poem the accent is on the sheikh in charge of the *khâneqâh* and his illegal and depraved dealings with occasional guests welcomed from nearby cities:

Beware of the Sufis of these places and times,
they are all cowards and all great exploiters.

Whatever you trust them with they steal,
and they do whatever enters their head.

Their only activities are sleeping and eating,
none remember that one day they will die.

All they dream of are the table and soups,
their thoughts are only for their bellies.

For a home each has chosen
a *khâneqâh* or similar place.

To satisfy their desires and passions,
they have pans and kitchenware.

They lay down elegant carpets,
and set fine vases here and there.

They have the tripod up with a pan on the go,
and all the cooking utensils ready to be used,

always awaiting generous people,
who come from towns and cities,

to bring them a nice bit of meat or flour,
and thus be welcomed at their table.

Then, opening their bag of bragging,
they begin to say silly things to everyone.

They go on repeating drivel and nonsense
until they see that the soup is cooked.

Only when they see it about to be served
do they begin to look after their friends.

But they are only capable of being intimate with the soup,
and their eyes light up at the sight of the fire under the pan.

When a corrupt man gets the chance
to take a young lad out of the city,

he soon begins to think about these sheikhs,
and is ready to prostrate himself at their feet.

It thus happened that a man with a tablecloth full of bread,
dates wrapped in a rag, a bag of sweetmeats and a jar of halva,

came from the city, followed by an eager lad,
to visit the *khâneqâh* of one of these sheikhs.

He went inside and said: 'Hello!
I wish I could always live with you!'

The sheikh stood up and answered:
'To you my salutations and my respects!'

The two hypocrites embraced each other,
kissing each other's hands and hugging.

Then the lad also ran up and greeted the sheikh,
rubbing his face on the sheikh's hands and feet.

With Muslim piety the sheikh
kissed him on the forehead.

The sheikh went to sit in his place,
and began to ask about this and that:

how it was they were, what they were doing,
and inquiring after their families and goods.

He listened carefully to the answers one by one,
and then looked at the man of the two and asked:

'Is this boy here your son?
Or is a relative or a pupil?'

'None of these three', replied the other,
'but we have a very close relationship.'

And he spoke about remote connections,
thus making clear the secret of his story.

Anecdote

Amazed, a man once asked somebody:
'What bond do you have with that person?'

'He is a Turk and I am a Persian', replied the other,
'but we are very close indeed, almost relatives.'

He has a garden full of trees,
and in one a crow made its nest.

Whenever the crow begins to sing,
its voice reaches my house here,

and, as long as I am in this house,
I'll hear the sound of that song.'

The story continues

After they had gone on talking for a while,
those two presented some food as a gift.

The sheikh rubbed his hands, sat down,
and promptly grasped the bread and halva.

He ate some things and put other things aside,
even taking the share of those who were absent.

Examining the sweetmeats and dates,
he chose some that he would eat at night.

He said prayers for those two generous men,
before going on to deal with erudite matters.

He then read a *tafsir* and a *hadis*,²⁵⁶
and spoke of the evil demon's tricks.

He didn't stop even for a minute to argue,
and ended up talking of other sheikhs.

He said a little about his own master,
and after that about other old masters.

He described in detail the miracles of one,
illustrated the spiritual heights of another,
and narrated a lot of polished and elegant stories,
but never went from the skin to the core of things.

If you yourself are devoid of passion and rapture,
how can you speak of others' passion and rapture?

That sheikh was not inspired by such feelings,
and it was no use his saying that others were.

Anecdote

Once in a village a gypsy said to his son:
'There's nothing better than a wheat loaf'

His son asked him: 'Have you ever tried it?'
'No!,' replied the other, 'I've never eaten it!

But I had an old great grandfather,
who, having been blessed by destiny,

long ago had seen, just outside the city,
someone who had tasted a wheat loaf.'

The story continues

The sheikh went on talking the hours away,
and with various expedients spoke till evening.

After a while he took some herbs that were in the store,
 gifts from people who had come on previous occasions,
 and prepared a few bowls of food,
 to be offered to the guests for dinner.

The soup having been quickly eaten,
 the bowls were all cleared away.

Lastly, the sheikh offered the sweets he had set aside,
 and picked at them while telling some nice stories.

When most of the night had already gone by, the sheikh
 thanked the two friends for their sweets and company,
 and went off towards his bed chamber,
 leaving that wolf alone with that lamb.

Naturally, left all alone beside such a famished wolf,
 the defenceless lamb couldn't have come off unscathed.

The sheikh fell asleep but the depraved man stayed awake;
 while the former rested, the latter immediately set to work.

In the shelter of that shameful sheikh's monastery,
 the other man had his way just as he had wished!

Now, if you deplore that husband of a whore,
 you might be told: 'Some suspicion is a sin!'²⁵⁷

But God says: 'Some suspicion', thus not all!
 There are suspicions which are well founded!

These are not the things of Sufis and free men,
 but trickery and the customary ways of pimps.

And if I used the name of sheikh and Sufi,
 I beg to be forgiven for that big mistake.

What right has that cowardly Sufi
 to be acknowledged with such titles?

It's shameful to give attributes and names
 worthy of a sovereign to such deceivers.

When someone behaves in that way,
even the letters in his name are ashamed.

O, if only he had been an example
that could be held up to people!²⁵⁸

Jâmi

Not just corruption but also other negative aspects of religious circles are highlighted, such as the ignorance and superficiality of pilgrims:

The pilgrims have returned amidst great ceremonies,
full of sincere gratitude for the pity of merciful God.

They have endured the trials and tribulations in the holy places,
and now they are safe from hell and its painful punishments.

All of them have gone to Mecca from Mount 'Arafât,
and reverently said the canonical: 'I'm ready to obey You.'

They completed the pilgrimage and its rites,
and have come back home safe and sound.

I went out to welcome them,
something I'm not used to doing.

I went there because, in that caravan,
I had a dear, good and devoted friend.

I then turned to him and asked: 'So, tell me,
how did you survive this tough, fearful journey?

Since you went away and left me,
I have been in a state of sadness.

But now I am happy that you have undertaken
the pilgrimage, you really are unique in the world.

Well, how did you worship
that great and noble sanctuary?²⁵⁹

When saying your vows of renunciation,
what kind of intentions did you express?

Did you deny yourself everything,
with the exception of everlasting God?

‘No!’, he replied. I asked him: ‘Did you declare:
“I am ready to obey You willingly and reverently”?’

Did you hear the call of God clearly,
and did you respond as Moses did?’

‘No!’, he replied. I asked him: ‘When you stopped
on Mount ‘Arafât and enjoyed that huge privilege,
coming to know Truth and denying yourself,
did you feel the breath of true knowledge?’

‘No!’, he replied. I asked him: ‘When you slew
the lamb in the name of the wealthy and the poor,
did you see your base, vile soul,
and did you slay and sacrifice it?’

‘No!’, he replied. I asked him: ‘When you entered
the sanctuary, did you feel like those in the cave,²⁶⁰
safe from the evil of your flesh and well protected
from the pain of separation and the punishment of hell?’

‘No!’, he replied. I asked him: ‘Throwing
the ritual stones against the cursed devil,
did you cast completely out from yourself
all your evil habits and deplorable actions?’

‘No!’, he replied. I asked him: ‘Standing
before the place where Abraham stood,
did you entrust your inner self to God,
with sincerity, faith and certainty?’

‘No!’, he replied. I asked him: ‘When you went
on the circumambulation and trotted like an ostrich,
did you think of the circle of all angels
gathered round the Supreme Throne?’

‘No!’, he replied. I asked him: ‘When you finished
the ritual run that goes from Safâ up to Marwa,

did you contemplate the two worlds in your purity?
Was your heart liberated from the hell of lust?

'No!', he replied. I asked him: 'Before coming back,
with the pain of separation from the Kaaba in your heart,

did you bury yourself there,
did you become a putrid corpse?'

'Of everything you have just said', he replied,
'I didn't know what was right and what was wrong.'

'Well, my friend', I finally affirmed, 'you did not go
on the pilgrimage, you did not achieve your annihilation.

You simply went to Mecca, visited it and came back,
paying vast sums for the journey through the desert.

If you want to go on the pilgrimage,
follow the indications I have given you.'²⁶¹ *Nâser-e Khosrow*

Religious satire may occasionally even take on confessional tones, as in the following lines expounding an outrageous point of view on the leaders of the four principal juridical-religious schools of Sunnism:

Shâfe'i decreed that the game of chess is completely lawful,
and the imam says only what is right. Don't try and cheat!

Bu Hanife claims something even better about wine:
'Boil it up, and it will become a licit drink for you!'

And Ebn-e Hanbal says: 'If your are in pain,
take some drugs and have a good time!'

Lastly, if you listen to Mâlek, the fourth jurist,
he'll advise you to go with a young male slave.

Gamble, then, drink, take drugs and have a screw,
that's true faith according to these four imams.'²⁶² *Nâser-e Khosrow*

Finally, there are cases when the religious feeling itself is called into question
and the chosen victim is the Creator:

The All-knowing created and made nature beautiful.
But why did he forge it so full of flaws and faults?

If He made a good job of it, why ruin it?
And if He made a bad job, who is to blame?²⁶³

‘Omar Khayyâm

Women as Habitual Subject for Satire

Women are another target for satire in that society. There are general complaints about them:

Not just one woman but one thousand women
can't be trusted when it comes to making promises.

When fidelity and its pledges were conceived,
that idea was suspended on reaching women.

A woman will be your friend, but only
as long as she has no one else to love her.

When she finds the arms of another,
she will no longer wish to see you.

Woman is more inclined to passions than man,
but they are all passions to satisfy only herself.

When playing her games she always cheats,
her every deed is founded on hypocrisy.

Women often inflict suffering,
and never once are faithful.

If a man insists on putting them to the test,
he surely behaves even worse than they do.

A woman is the centre of deceit:
outside is all peace, inside is all war.

If she's your enemy, it's the worst disgrace in the world,
if she's your friend, it will mean the perdition of your soul.

If you tell her to do something, she won't even try to listen,
if you forbid her something, she'll go out of her way to do it.

If you are distressed, she'll be happy,
when you're content, she'll be in agony.

This is what the best of women do,
evil women's plotting is worse by far!²⁶⁴

Nezâmi-ye Ganjavi

When it comes to satirising women, however, their sexual desire is the main target for offence:

One day some noble women
went out to walk in the country.

Lingering a little out there,
they saw some donkeys grazing.

A jackass was lusting after a she-ass,
just as a lover desires his beloved,

and, with an ebony rod two metres long,
he began to shag as only donkeys know how.

That jackass kept pushing it in and out,
farting and braying with all his might.

Viewing that scene from afar,
one of the women sighed and said:

'O sisters, this is what it really means to get a cock!
This is surely what it really means to give your arse!

If fucking is what this donkey is doing here,
then our husbands only ever piss in our cunts!²⁶⁵

Anvari

Women, in fact, are often described as being of easy virtue:

O dissolute woman, your deed was secret,
but now can you conceal that bastard son?²⁶⁶

Rudaki

She still keeps her cunt sealed very tight for you,
but she is a two-doored caravanserai for others!²⁶⁷

Labibi

O brother, if your beautiful wife
got with child while you were away,

there is no need for you to be suspicious of her:
 an able hen can lay eggs even without a rooster!²⁶⁸ *Shatranji*

Because of immoderate erotic activity, the female organ is described in abnormal terms:

Look at his bride's vagina and vulva, her shoes and bag:
 the first two are misshapen and the other two totally round.

The blame must be laid with no one but her,
 because she has battered all four of them:

the first two panting flat on her back,
 the other two slinking about sensuously.²⁶⁹ *Labibi*

It's for my cock that you make the point of your curls like a *jim*,
 and, with a smile, you shape your lips into a form similar to a *mim*!²⁷⁰

You have made my cock so fresh with your beauty!
 But your cunt is no use to it unless you sew it half up!²⁷¹ *Ebn-e Khatib*

If your bag weren't as lean as your flanks,
 when would you ever lust after others?

You have a slender mouth and big wide cunt.
 O if only your cunt were like your mouth!²⁷² *Qamar*

Among the negative inclinations attributed to women, there is also the desire for members of their own sex:

Here they are, the Baghdad women,
 all dead keen to give it a good rub.

They have silver mortars and crush saffron in them,
 and they don't feel the need to wield the heavy pestle.

They have little crystal boxes strewn with silver,
 which, every two weeks, welcome red rubies.

They have silver caves with grassy surroundings,
 and, right through the middle, a lively spring flows.

Those women roll round in twos, one on top of the other,
always together like a conjunction of stars in the sky.

Behind they have four silver cushions,
and in front they wear two silk bands.

When they rub on each other,
their moans reach up to the sky.

It's a roll on drums, not a banging of cunts!
And the whole world can clearly hear the din.

Hey brother, don't delay, be quick,
have a wank when you see such things!

The honour of the cock has gone with its luck,
since they raised their standard in such a way.

But come on, Khâqâni, what is this joking?
You know that jokes always end in tears.

If you stoop to speak about women,
you'll suffer the same harm as them.²⁷³

Khâqâni

Irony about women is also expressed, in a sexual context, by resorting to descriptions of a frequent abuse, namely, sodomy. Sodomy of women is considered an integral part of masculine rights and any protests by women are mocked:

Seeing a jackass mount a she-ass,
our lady soon became quite randy.

In the middle of the night she hung above her husband,
on top of his rod, but then it slipped up her behind.

She said to him: 'Pull that horse out, it's the wrong road,'
but he replied: 'He won't budge, he's gone completely wild!'²⁷⁴ *Mahsati*

A similar situation is illustrated at greater length in the following passage, in which the sodomy of a wife is given the blessing of a judge and, in the final line, even of the poet himself:

For people who might not have heard anything about it,
here is the story of the judge, the woman and the sodomite.

One day a little woman, who had a bugger for a husband,
went to a judge to try and free herself from that disgrace.

She turned to the judge and told her story:
‘You, who settle rows between people,

I am a pure woman with a wicked husband,
who torments me by day and by night.

How is it that with the door open and the hall tidy,
he always wants to come in through the roof?’

The judge answered: ‘Since the house is his,
he can choose whichever entrance he likes!’

Then that poor woman, overcome by shame, said:
‘O just man, that ugly pervert does illicit things!’

And she continued: ‘He eats bread from the back of the tray!’
The judge replied: ‘There’s no harm in turning a tray round!’

She insisted: ‘He is always going up the hill!’
The judge exclaimed: ‘He only goes up it to pray!’

Finally, the woman said: ‘O Muslim, he sticks
his bastard cock up my arse and vexes me greatly!’

The judge grew grim and, irritated, said to the woman:
‘You’re mad, where else would you want him to put it?’

What on earth does licit and illicit mean?
A good wife must satisfy her husband!’

That fair, even-handed, pious, devout judge
issued a truly appropriate sentence in this case.

The arse is the place for the cock by decree of Suzani:
women should stay at home and lift their buttocks up!²⁷⁵

Suzani

Satirising Members of a Family

The family is another of the social components targeted by poets' satire. In this sense the ninth book of *Hadiqat ol-Haqiqe* by Sanâ'i is emblematic, with its mocking of various types of relatives. The following description of a sister and a brother-in-law comes from that work:

Who on earth is this? It's your brother-in-law,
and his cock is nice and swollen for his wife.

He is always coming in and out of your house,
whether you like it or not, he's now family for you.

Everybody everywhere knows who he is:
he is the man who fucks your dear sister!

But he only fucks her when he gets gold,
only then does that jackass burst her cunt.

And when he doesn't get any money,
he sells that cunt to bulls and donkeys.

She gives him everything to get his cock,
but that dirty wretch is never satisfied.

And if she has problems paying him,
he threatens to leave her and to part.

For many years he has been fucking her for money,
but if the money stops coming, he'll kick her out.

A curse on your sister and your brother-in-law,
no one here can be happy on account of them.

Every time she wants to have a fuck,
she has to pay all her money to him.

If your brother-in-law gets no reward,
he won't split her cunt in two any more.

Alas that he who fucks your sister
is only waiting for your father to die.

O brother, may sisters and daughters
stay away from you, even if they're coy.²⁷⁶

Sanâ'i

The general negative remarks about relatives are also characterised by that embarrassing flatus we have already seen as being typical of invective:

Once I heard a story about the devil,
who one day farted three thousand times.

A man asked him: 'What happened?
Why have you made all this wind?'

The devil replied: 'Thousand farts are for the beard
of him who gives his goods to his son and son-in-law:
that wretched fellow must then beg
and weep to get something to live on.

The second thousand farts are for the beard
of him who suffers in order to hoard money:
he doesn't enjoy his goods or let them be enjoyed,
he is ruined, but his heir is fine and prosperous.

And may the last thousand farts
also be in the beards of those two.²⁷⁷

Ebn-e Yamin

In some cases the mocked relatives are given more personal features and appear to be individuals known to the poet:

Your father was a pious and principled man,
he didn't have an unworthy nature like you.

And your little mother never fornicated with anyone!
Hey, may your head be in the arse of your father's wife!

If your father keeps on saying that you are my son,
a donkey's cock in the cunt of your father's wife!²⁷⁸

Sanâ'i

Offensive poetry is also aimed at relatives in the author's family. Here are three examples, about the poet's father, wife and son:

For a father I have this great cuckold,
that the world's Lord created from fire.

He is a twin of Âzar and Nimrod's companion,
and he has Joseph the carpenter as his master.²⁷⁹

His nature is as sharp as an axe,
his nature is as cutting as a saw.

During the day he's always arguing with heaven,
and at night he's always fighting with Saturn.

If Mars had been in the first sphere,
he'd have pierced it with two nails.

His heavy feet are all swollen,
and his empty skull has grown bald.

The flesh of his carcass is putrid
like cotton in an old ink-well.

He lost the sap from his face and the air swelling his head,
since the sap and air are now in his most precious member.

My poor mother had to flee to the *menbar*²⁸⁰
because of my father's merciless minaret.

Although I'm the best son of the age,
he's ashamed of my learning and intelligence.

Oh, if only Khâqâni had been a weaver,
and so could have avoided these words!

Although my soul and heart suffer
and are destroyed by his rough speech,

he is God's delegate for my daily bread.
O Lord, save him, then, from calamities!²⁸¹

Khâqâni

Anvari has chosen a terrible whore for a wife,
because of her, all men on earth are adulterers.

As long as the world lasts, may her cunt be full of cocks!
But alas what a great pity that this world is so transitory!²⁸²

Anvari

Anvari doesn't fuck his wife
for fear she'll give birth to a son,

and that son, as soon as his father meets his death,
will take to dressing up pretty like modern boys.

Anvari's fear is that a benefactor, just like himself, will appear,
then get behind his son, stretch out his hand to caress his face,

and use all fine manners, like a father,
until he pulls down the pants of the boy,

and sticks the cock right into his arse,
forcing it up and down in the usual way.

Why should you give your soul for your son
only for someone to come and fuck him for free?²⁸³

Anvari

There are also several 'self-satires', that is, poems written by the poet against himself. They are often obscene, and linked to sexual incapacity or impotence:

Last night I met a fine idol and, with great lust,
said to myself: 'Tonight I'll screw till I drop.'

But my member fell into a deep slumber,
and I didn't know what remedy to devise.

I said to him: 'If you can invent some kind of way
to make it hard, and put it in the bag of your behind,

I guarantee that then you will surely get
what you deserve from my generous nature.'

He answered, saying: 'Do you take me for Moses,
able to turn your stick into a snake by holding it?'²⁸⁴

What do you want of me? I'm certainly not
Jesus, who was able to resuscitate the dead!²⁸⁵

Mas'ud-e Sa'd

Peoples and Towns

It is also common to find satires of a geographical and political nature aimed at certain peoples or a town's inhabitants. These satires represent one of the collective variants of the satirical *shahrâshub* genre.²⁸⁶

As long as the country is in the hands
of the Turks, free men will have no bread.

Try and be someone with a wrecked arse,
since this age is an age of wrecked arses.²⁸⁷

Kâferak

Do you know why the inhabitants
of Ghazna liken their city to a sea?

Pearls lie hidden on the sea bed,
and shit and garbage float on top.

Well, what you see today in Ghazna are shits,
and those underground are the precious pearls.²⁸⁸

Anvari

I thought that relief could come to the soul from Isfahan,
and that magnanimity was a ruby to be found in that mine.

I would never have thought that the inhabitants of Isfahan
were blind, with all the collyrium that's produced in that city!²⁸⁹

Mojir od-Din

O Khâqâni, don't expect any loyalty from the inhabitants
of Baghdad, you won't find that elixir in a city of swindlers.

Even if the blood of the world flowed like the Tigris,
no one would shed even a single tear in Baghdad.²⁹⁰

Khâqâni

At times an individual is singled out from the inhabitants of a city to
symbolise its negative features:

It is said that the people of Qazvin are stupid,
and Najm of Qazvin is the living proof of it.

Yesterday a respectable man told me something
which confirms a similar idea about that hypocrite.

Our dear fellow Najm of Qazvin,
always speaks of himself as of a god.

But his house is as narrow and dim as a pagan's grave,
with a roof which is as dilapidated as the devil's den.

The portico is like the mouth of a fierce but debilitated dragon,
while the bedroom is shut tight like the tomb of deceitful sophists.

When he goes to lie down, he rests on seventy quilts:
his cushions, one on top of each other, add up to a ton.

At home he often sits face to face with a dear friend,
they worship each other like the idol and the idolater.

If one whispers on the other's whiskers: 'You are the best of our age!',
the other immediately replies in his ear: 'You are the glory of our time!'

If someone asks Najm of Qazvin who taught
the prophet to write, he jumps up and cries: 'Me!'

And if someone else asks him who wrote the important texts
of medicine, the old hypocrite says to his son in Turkish: 'You!'

If the masters are like these two great men described here,
may the beard of all the masters be up my arse to their chin!²⁹¹

Asir od-Din-e Akhsikati

Addressees with no Social Labels

The satirical poetry we have considered so far has been aimed either at individual representatives of social categories and groups (sovereigns, poets, professionals, craftsmen, clerics, women, relatives and peoples) or has involved those same categories and groups seen as collective wholes. There also exists a series of satirical compositions on individuals for whom no social labels have been given, or at least cannot be reconstructed today. At times only the names of these individuals are mentioned and little else, as in the following passage, in which the victim is described as being prey to an unbridled desire whose object is clearly unattainable:

Sahlân Rostam has earnestly sworn
he'll fuck all those whom I've fucked.

But how can he fuck his mother and sister?
He would certainly be sentenced to death.

And even if he fucks them, claiming
that a promise should always be kept,

he certainly cannot fuck himself,
unless he has more science than us!²⁹²

Anvari

Another two examples of this type appear to be particularly significant. The first, with an idyllic final hemistich providing a startling contrast to the harsher tones of the overall text, tells of the poet's anger at having lost a female slave to a certain Oghol, identified only by caricature, insults and curses:²⁹³

Hey, sun of the kingdom, late on last night
I was sleeping absent-mindedly, my wits gone.

In the morning, when I opened my eyes, I noticed
some people in our quarter. Like angelic messengers,
they said to me: 'Yesterday evening the world's sovereign
gave a woman, from among all your slaves, as a gift to Oghol.'

Divine commands and royal orders must be executed,
I am a compliant servant who obeys without protesting.

But it is truly insulting to leave, beside that dog,
a cypress with a starry face, a sun in a tulip's clothes.

He is a man who is ready to give away his wife for money.
Could our women be suitable for one who sells his wife?

Can someone who has been quietly fucked
by a hundred pansies ever be a bridegroom?

His mouth gapes from one ear to the other,
just like the mouth of a fish gasping in sewage.

His lips are like a Magus' buttocks, his ears are fans,²⁹⁴
he has the face of a demon and a big pot for an arse.

Hey you, whose arse is more worn than the devil's shoes,
have you found no other victim in the city except us?

No woman has an arse anything like yours,
going from head to foot, from heel to ear.

Until your beard turned white, you had a man,
why do you scream for want of women today?

Only now that your arse, having been bunged so often,
is worn and sore, you want a cunt. Try to be a little patient!

All the men in this world have stamped
brands on your arse from their cocks.

You are a servant from my stables, as impure as a hundred dogs,
but the dog of a whore-monger is really much better than you.

Your mother and all the little women in your family are whores,
listen to what I have to say and, just like a dog, try to pay heed:

may your wife always be in the arms of my son,
as long as violets, irises and primroses bloom.²⁹⁵

‘Am‘aq

The second example begins with a long, expertly scurrilous description (a full thirty-eight lines beginning with the word ‘fart’). The reason for the poet’s irritation is a series of wicked actions and, in particular, the theft of some barley belonging to the poet by a bigwig from Mazdaqân (in the north-west of Isfahan), identified only by the name Ziyâ’ and characterised by his evil behaviour and malevolent influence:

A fart whose thunder torments the celestial spheres,
a fart sorely vexing and annoying the whole world.

A fart that, should the trumpet of the universal judgment
blow as strongly, would have all the dead shitting for fear.

A fart that, if the hole is open below,
leaves a deep mark even on granite.

A fart that, if it lets off its fragrance under the sky’s robe,
is so powerful it makes blood flow from Saturn’s nose.

A fart whose roar clearly illustrates
the secret of living beings’ cavities.

A fart that magically splits the hairs on a chin in two,
at a gathering where the most cutting tongues compete.

A fart that, if the lofty peak of a mountain got only a whiff of it,
the slopes of the mountain would be as full of holes as a rat’s nest.

A fart that, if it were to let rip in Spring,
would jaundice the cheeks of the Judas tree.

A fart that, with a simple gust of its fragrant breeze,
makes sober people roll on the ground like drunks.

A fart that, like a falling star, shoots
and marks the dark night's long beard.

A fart that, like a whirlwind, rises into the sky,
transforming the Milky Way into a shitty way.

A fart that scatters the bright moon's halo like a blown crop,
if it unleashes even only one blast into the celestial vault.

A fart that, if it blows on the sun and moon,
puts out those two lamps in the firmament.

A fart that, even when it's a quiet one,
rumbles as loud as a peal of thunder.

A fart that, if it finds its way up the earth's nose,
stinks so much it rips every veil of the sky's nostrils.

A fart that, like dawn's arrow,
easily pierces the sky's shield.

A fart that, if it leaves for India,
raises perilous storms at sea.

A fart that breaks all the moorings
of the ship in whose sails it blows.

A fart that, if it sees a thick beard,
immediately nests in it like a hen.

A fart that, when it starts to play its sweet tune
in the morning, makes the dawn tear at its shirt.²⁹⁶

A fart that, like a flash of lightning,
uproots every old beard it grasps.

A fart that, if a drummer hears its sound,
he will be angry with the band's trumpets.

A fart that, if it handed over its reins to the morning breeze,
would allow the dung-beetle to enjoy the rose and the garden.

A fart that, if it goes through the garden,
makes a wet gherkin grow on a plane tree.²⁹⁷

A fart that, if it suddenly roamed around China,
would turn the musk deer's pouch into a dog's arse.²⁹⁸

A fart that, if at any time it were to enter into conjunction
with the sky's nostrils, would blind all the eyes of the stars.

A fart that lasts for such a long time
that the earth and the sky hold their nose.

A fart that is like a torrid high wind,
making your hair fall out with one touch.

A fart that tinkles in the celestial basin,
a fart of whose wind Venus' flute moans.

A fart that flutters about more than a pigeon in love,
a fart that soars so high it makes an eagle look like a hen.

A fart that, if it gets under someone's whiskers,
will fill up his mouth with heavy loads of shit.

A fart that, when it blows on a chin's fresh down,
will instantly make it fall out like Autumn leaves.

A fart that makes every beard it reaches
immediately long for the sharp razor.

A fart that, if a jackass happens to hear it,
he'll be so ashamed he'll never bray again.

A fart that produces, free of charge,
the fragrance of shit for the stupid.

A fart that, as soon as it comes out of its private meanders,
goes to give public audience on the beard of I know who.

A fart that, when it wants to go from Isfahan to Mazdaqân,
begins by blowing at the gates of the town of Guzdân.²⁹⁹

May a fart as I have described and another thousand like it
strike the beard of anybody wishing to be an enemy of poets.

Only that bear face makes such a decision,
that donkey look-alike, that herder of cows,

that old and decrepit wolf, Ziyâ' the swindler,
whose cheating goads the sheep to kill the shepherd.

That witless buffoon who, when he wants to be kind
and generous, instantly turns Summer into Winter.

If his hand entered the source of the sun,
it would stain its light with the black of night.

If he ever tells something as straight as an arrow,
that thing is also as painfully piercing as the arrow.

When he worships you outwardly, then fear him,
because in his soul he surely wants to hurt you.

He is the sum of lies, hypocrisy, pride and greed.
What gains people have made with that demon!

He is capable of suddenly stopping motes rising to the sky,
if he only thinks of sowing discord between them and the sun.

Anyone standing close to that malevolent man
will lose even the company of his own shadow.

The twin stars near the Great Bear will instantly split up,
if he stands together with them just for a brief instant.

Anyone offering him hospitality, be it for only one night,
will ruin his relationship with his own wife and children.

He creates quarrels between the sword and its sharpness,
every time he spitefully whets the blade of his tongue.³⁰⁰

He needs only to gaze absent-mindedly at his hands,
and the nails will grow out and rip his fingers' flesh.

He is so rich that, if he constructed a ladder
from his own coins, it would reach the sky.

In his house he conceals a keg full of gold,
but grudges his servant a mouthful of food.

His wretched wife is too terrified to touch bread,
for fear her husband will denounce her for adultery.

He claims that public devotion is hypocrisy,
and that's why he won't give alms to beggars.

When he gets the chance to indulge in backbiting,
he'll gossip at length about both old and young.

Every simple-hearted person who has placed his trust in him
has met with the same fate as a peasant with a highwayman.

At home his wife is a weaver,
who weaves beautiful cloth:

she makes a mat with hairs from his beard
as a saddle rug for champions' horses.

He claims: 'The science of religious disquisition is my art',
but everything he expounds is the opposite of that science.

His writing is filthier than his beard and whatever he says
is worse than how he says it; yet he criticizes learned imams.

When he claims to give a scientific explanation,
in trying to educate another donkey of his ilk,

sticky words issue from his stammering tongue
just like pieces of shit dripping from a sewer.

In fact I like really shitting right into his mouth,
especially when he claims lineage and a noble house.

Hey brazen face, aren't you ashamed someone like you
asserts he is wiser than all the erudite men of Isfahan?

The only thing you leave in peace and never touch
is your bread, while everybody flees from you.

Hey vile miser, why bother someone like me?
Only he who wants to be damned will do so.

Annoying poets brings no benefits at all,
stupidity can only make people cuckolds.

There can be no doubt that, if the foolish guarded against
the company of the depraved, it would be a good thing.

One day sneering like a goat and playing the cunning fox
will certainly make you a fine morsel for an enraged lion.

You stole two hundredweight of barley from me,
but watch out, this *hejâ* is worth two loads of saffron.

You'll lose that barley when it's eaten by another donkey,
but my lines of poetry will stick on your back for ever.

You would do well to leave alone sharp-tongued people,
who can write *hajv* piercing the chest like javelin tips.

You already fill your belly with other people's bread,
why do you want also to be blamed for other things?

Someone who has depicted a fart as I have
is surely capable of describing a shit like you.

Let anyone who reads these lines, from now to Resurrection Day,
consider it his duty to overwhelm your soul with heaps of curses!

Beware of the people who live in the town of Mazdaqân!
They always try to rob their friends of their possessions!

May every crook who is native of Mazdaqân
be puny, petty and miserable in his homeland!³⁰¹ *Kamâl od-Dîn*

The decontextualisation of the satires becomes extreme when not even the name of the *mahju* is mentioned. In such cases there may have been alternative clues to help the contemporary audience identify the person mocked. In the following case, for example, the poet mentions the Lârijân mountains, in northern Iran, as the new home that the 'sordid individual' in question has moved to:

You have got two great whiskers but you are as cowardly as a camel,
you are a donkey-born cow, your arse is a trunk, your balls two flasks.

You are not only wretched but also stingy,
you almost die whenever you glimpse a loaf.

If you simply eat even a morsel of it, O impure beast,
your soul becomes like a dog's out of regret and pain!

When you were young, being fucked was the sole relief for your arse,
it was the only way you could get that beneficial brown ointment.³⁰²

Now, thanks to your arse, you have everything for the perfect scribe:
its hole is the inkwell, its hairs the ink-soaked cotton in that inkwell.

Your armpits are like a cesspool and your arse is like a sewer,
because of their stench, the spring of your sight has been muddied.

In your eyes, all that is left of humanity is the name,
but it too will soon leave because of that ugly spectacle.

To avoid the shame of seeing your own face
you have become blinder than a bat by day.

But if you want to be able to recover your sight,
eat the cock's soup! Up the arse it's a good broth!

Hey you, shit-eater and husband of a whore,
vile cuckold, dull braggart and lifeless buffoon!

You are a great warrior and, out of fear of you,
an army of fleas will scatter to the right and left.

You found a good home in the Lârijân mountains,
but here you collapse in the abyss left by your arse.

In the hope of radishes pouring in yogurt,
you filled your buttocks' bowl with herbs.³⁰³

And just how many cocks, in the meantime, have unfastened
the red satin of their hats at the busy loom of your wife's cunt!³⁰⁴

Qomri

In some cases all references to the identity of the *mahju*, whether proper names or other clues, are omitted:

Because of my tongue you are glum and terrified,
where are all your bold claims and crap now?

Your arse receives all its beauty and honour from a cock,
like a garden become lush thanks to a cypress and a pine.³⁰⁵ *Labibi*

You are cuckolded by your wife and your sister,
it's no secret, even if no one has spelled it out yet.

How much longer will you insist that your sister is chaste?
It would be better if you kept quiet and didn't say such words!

The only chaste thing in your house is bread,
neither the men nor the women can touch it.³⁰⁶ *Anvari*

If your mother's skirt had been tied,
as tight as the strings of your food-cloth,

that whore would never have given birth to a cuckold like you,
and the world would have been spared the calamity you are.³⁰⁷
Jamâl od-Din

Behaviour and Customs

At times the anonymous *mahju* is even vaguer than in the last poems. The outcome is a sort of proverbial maxim against, for instance, arrogance or faith in reason, as found in the first and second, respectively, of the following examples:

Each owl that wants to fly off with hawks and cranes
will end up with its wings broken and its arse in shreds.³⁰⁸ *'Asjadi*

People who strain their minds
are attempting to milk an ox.

The dress of the stupid suits those persons:
here, with the intellect, you buy only weeds.³⁰⁹ *'Omar Khayyâm*

The general, sententious criticism of certain attitudes may include advice and warnings:

Those limp individuals look like impotent cocks,
when they speak they make only pointless claims.

You should choose men who, through wisdom,
are able to fill your soul with ideas and concepts.³¹⁰ *Homâm*

When a son of a noble is impoverished, stay with him!
A branch stripped of flowers will soon be covered in fruit.
But if the son of a poor man becomes rich, avoid him!
The cesspool, when it fills up, stinks worse than before.³¹¹ *Ebn-e Yamîn*

The company of an ignorant man is like leather clothing:
it is cumbersome and does not even keep the body warm.
What is even worse than the company of an ignorant man
is that of a relative become important and showing no modesty.

Worse than both is a king who sheds blood
in his own kingdom, and is without mercy.

Lastly, I'll tell you what is worse than all three:
an old man who acts like a youth and isn't ashamed.³¹² *Ebn-e Yamîn*

The attempt to ignore the passing years, described in the last hemistich, is a frequent topos. Poets usually describe its sexual implications, either directly or in more gentle ways, as in the next two extracts:

Let's suppose that you trick your way into spending the night
with someone, and you make your milk-white hair as black as tar.

When you're with your friend and close the alcove door,
what type of remedy will you find for your dead cock?³¹³
Sharaf od-Din Yahyâ al-'Owfi

I heard of an elderly man who, recently,
thought of taking a wife in his old age.

He chose a young and beautiful girl called Pearl,
and hid her, like a jewel box, from the eyes of all.

There then ensued the typical scene of a marriage,
but, at the first assault, the old man couldn't get it up.

He drew the bow but was unable to hit the target:
a thick cloth can only be sown with a steel needle.

He began to complain to his friends and look for excuses,
saying that the impertinent girl had emptied his house.

Rows and quarrels broke out between the husband and wife,
and this reached the police chief and came before the judge.

'All of these problems and these contrasts are not the girl's fault'
I said to him 'if your hand trembles, how can you thread a pearl?'³¹⁴

Sa'di

Moral teachings about behaviour and customs may be obviously found in mystical poems. The following example highlights the pointlessness of earthly striving and pomposity:

A king had a castle built with gold ornaments,
which had cost hundreds of thousands of dinars.

When this heavenly castle was complete,
he had it furnished with carpets and hangings,

and people who came from every part
brought precious offerings in homage.

The king summoned his wise men and companions,
and beckoned them to sit on benches beside him.

He asked: 'What does my castle
lack in beauty and perfection?'

They replied: 'In all the world, no one
has ever seen nor will see anything like it!'

But an ascetic there got to his feet and declared to the king:
'O you of noble fortune, a crack has been left, a terrible flaw.

If your beautiful castle was complete without this crack,
the castle of paradise itself would pay homage from heaven.'

The king replied: 'I've seen no crack in my castle,
O ignorant man! Do you want to stir up trouble?'

The ascetic continued: 'O you, who are distinguished by royalty,
the crack is the one which will be opened by the angel of death.

Let's hope that you will fill it in properly, otherwise
what will you do with your castle, crown and throne?

Although this castle is as joyous as paradise,
death will make it appear ugly in your eyes.

Nothing lasts for ever: our existence
is transient. What remedy to this?

Don't brag about your dwelling and castle,
don't goad the horse of pride and haughtiness!

If someone then discovers a flaw
in your noble condition, woe to you!³¹⁵

'Attâr

Even in mystical poems, as mentioned in the introduction, the authors have no scruples about resorting to bawdy language in order to express their moral beliefs and capture and persuade the audience. The following story is a classic example of this. In an inextricable blend of humour and seriousness, the poet obscenely describes and condemns concupiscence, which blinds the ability to learn, and greed, which prevents any distinction between the forms and substance of life:

A maid was in the habit of pulling a donkey onto herself,
because she was so very lecherous and greatly depraved.

She had accustomed that animal to coitus,
teaching it how human beings couple.

The cunning girl always made use of a gourd,
which she fitted on the donkey's cock as a stop.

That wretched girl wore it to ensure that,
when they coupled, only half the cock got in.

If the whole cock had penetrated her,
it would have ripped her womb and guts.

But after a while the donkey gradually began to waste away,
and the lady of the house was puzzled seeing it as thin as a hair.

She took the animal to the farrier to enquire of him
what disease could have reduced it to such a state.

The donkey seemed quite healthy,
and the secret wasn't discovered.

The lady decided to investigate further,
and devoted all her time to the problem.

It's right that the soul should take its commitments seriously,
anyone who seeks seriously will eventually find an answer.

She thus began to pay close attention to the donkey's affairs,
and found that the little narcissus of her maid lay beneath it.

Spying the scene through a crack in the door,
she came in for an even bigger surprise:

the donkey began to penetrate the servant
in the same way men penetrate women.

She was struck by envy and said: 'If this is possible,
I should get precedence since the donkey belongs to me.'

The donkey had been instructed and trained,
the table was ready and the lamp was lit.

She pretended to have seen nothing and knocked on the door,
saying: 'Have you much more sweeping to do in the house?'

And to confuse things further, she continued:
'O my young girl, I'm here, open the door!'

Then she went silent and said nothing more to the girl,
concealing the secret for the purposes of her own pleasure.

The maid put away all her illicit things,
and, stepping forward, went to the door.

She made her face look pained with moist eyes,
and rubbed her lips as if to say: 'I'm fasting.'

She also picked up and brandished a soft brush,
to make it seem she'd been sweeping the room.

When, with the broom in hand, she appeared at the door,
the lady murmured to herself: 'O you cunning vixen,

you pulled a pained face and picked up the broom,
but why is the donkey so far from its pasture?

It has been caught in the middle of the act, and is now angrily
waiting for you, eyes on the door and cock swinging about.

She said this to herself, without revealing anything to the girl,
whom she treated courteously as if nothing had happened.

Then she told her: 'Put on your chador,
go to that house, take a message from me,

say these things, and do these other tasks!'
This, in short, was the meeting they had,

and it is enough for now to convey the essence of the story.
Once the maid had been sent away, that wary old woman,

elated with the drunkenness of lust,
closed the door behind her and said:

'Now I'm alone and can shout
my joy: I am rid of all hindrances!'

The woman was so enthusiastic that she grew more lecherous,
excited as she was by the great fire of her lust for that donkey.

But those carnal instincts deceived her,
as happens when a fool is caught out.

Lustfulness makes the heart of people blind and deaf,
so a donkey may look like Joseph and a fire like a light.³¹⁶

O how many drunk with fire or in search of it
believe themselves to be the absolute light.

Only the help of a servant of God or the calling to God
can put them back on the right path and change their attitude,

making them see that the image of fire
is only a false thing on their long way.

Greediness makes ugly things seem very beautiful,
and lust is the worst disaster besetting the right path:

it has shamed a hundred thousand good names,
it has confused a hundred thousand wise men.

If lust has given a donkey the looks of Joseph of Egypt,
what looks, then, will that Judean lust give Joseph?

If its enchantment makes dung look like honey,
what will it make honey like at a time of temptation?

Lust comes from eating: cut down on your food
or get married, and you'll be able to flee from evil.

If you overeat, it drives you to illicit things,
what goes in must find some way out!

Marriage, in this case, is a divine formula,
so that the devil won't cast you into misfortune.

If you are greedy for food, find a wife at once,
or else the cat will come and steal your provisions.

Immediately bring to a halt the kicking donkey
with a load of stones, before it can dominate you.

If you don't know the effect of fire, avoid it!
Don't hang around it, if you are inexperienced.

You must learn the art of pots and stoves,
or you will burn the soup and the pan.

You need water and you must be skilful,
if you want everything to be cooked right.

If you don't know the art of the blacksmith,
you'll burn your beard and hair in his smithy.

The woman closed the door, joyfully pulled the donkey
towards her, and inevitably received her just reward.

She dragged it into the middle of the room,
and then lay down under it on her back.

Resting on the bench where she'd seen her maid,
she hoped, that whore, to satisfy her own desire.

She raised her legs and when the donkey stuck it in,
that cock lit up a huge fire and it blazed within her.

The well-trained donkey pressed it into the woman
up to its balls, and the woman perished on the spot.

The strokes of that cock had burst her liver,
while all her guts had been torn to shreds.

She had no time even to sigh before yielding her soul,
and she fell to one side while the bench fell to the other.

The room filled with blood and the woman hung head down.
She died instantly: 'Fate's uncertainty' robbed her of her soul.³¹⁷

O father, what an evil death with great ignominy.
Have you ever seen a martyr of a donkey's cock?

Listen to what is the 'chastisement of humiliation'³¹⁸
in the Koran: don't sacrifice your life in such disgrace!

You should know that concupiscence is like a jackass,
being under it is more vile than that jackass itself.

If you die of selfishness on the road of concupiscence,
then you can be certain you are similar to that woman.

God gives our concupiscence the aspect of the donkey
because He creates forms according to their nature.

This is the secret that will be revealed on Resurrection Day,
for God's sake, eschew your body, which is like a donkey!

The Lord warned the infidels with fire,
but they said: 'Better fire than shame!'

He replied: 'But the source of all shame is a fire,
it's the same fire that destroyed this woman!'

In her greed she craved for an enormous mouthful,
but it stuck in her throat and presaged a brutal death.

O greedy one, eat with moderation
even the most delicate sweetmeats.

God, may He be praised, has in this way given voice
to the balance. Read the Sura of The All-merciful!³¹⁹

Be careful not to lose your balance through too much longing,
cupidity and greed are enemies leading you to perdition.

He who is greedy wants everything and so loses everything,
don't be a slave to greed, O turnip-head and son of a turnip-head!

As the maid was leaving the house, she said to herself:
'Alas, my lady, you have chosen to send the expert away!

You'll try to do things without a master,
and so you will foolishly lose your life.

You have stolen an incomplete lesson from me,
and were ashamed to ask if there was a trick!

If a bird pecks the grain from the ear of wheat,
it will not be in danger of falling into a trap.

Eat with great discretion and don't go stuffing yourself full.
First recite: 'Eat and drink!' and then: 'but be you not prodigal!'³²⁰

In this way you can have your food without any danger,
thanks to wisdom and to contentment, and so be it!

The wise man gathers good fortune, not pain, from the world,
while the ignoramus has nothing other than many regrets:

as soon as the rope tightens round his neck,
he'll no longer be able to swallow his food.

Can a bird savour the grain in a trap?
Eating it in a trap is like taking poison.

Only thoughtless birds would eat grain found there,
just as ordinary people fall into the trap of this world.

Conscientious and shrewd birds
are careful to avoid that grain.

The grain in a trap is mortal food,
any bird seeking that grain is blind.

The Lord of the trap will cut off the head of the stupid,
but He brings the thoughtful to His own gatherings:

for the former, only the body counts,
while the latter can sing in every key.

The maid returned and, through the crack in the door,
saw her lady lying dead, there beneath the donkey.

She said: 'O stupid woman, could this have happened
if the master had shown you how it should be done?

You only saw the exterior, the secret was concealed from you,
you didn't learn anything but still persevered in that business!

To you that cock seemed like honey and a date cake.
O greedy woman, why didn't you notice the gourd?

Blinded by your passion for that donkey,
the gourd remained hidden from your gaze.

You only superficially paid attention to your master,
and thought, quite satisfied, you had learnt the art.'

There are many stupid and ignorant hypocrites,
who, faced with holy men, only note their cowl.

And many brazen-faced ones who, through inexperience,
learn from the great to talk and brag only about themselves:

one, holding his club in hand, saying: 'I am Moses',
another, breathing on the stupid, claiming: 'I am Jesus!'

Alas, when the time of the test comes,
you're asked for the sincerity of the sincere!

Go and ask the master for the rest of the subject!
Or, as well as being greedy, are you blind and deaf?

If you try to have everything, you will lose everything,
and you will be one of that bunch of idiots prey to wolves!

You should not only pay attention to the form of words
repeating them like a parrot: you must grasp their meaning!¹³²¹

Rumi

At times the criticism of immorality within satires seems to be aimed not so much at people but at institutions and customs themselves. Thus, for example, we have the following curious and bold mocking of arranged marriages:

Once upon a time in the north,
there was a greedy rich man.

He had an ugly, bad-tempered daughter
who loved clothes above everything else.

But clearly damask and brocade
cannot suit girls with no beauty.

Her father gave her as a bride to a handsome man with silver limbs,
and, at the ceremony, asked him for a huge sum as a guarantee.³²²

Eager to enjoy her first night of marriage in the best way,
the maiden daubed her body with the sweetest scents.

It was like coating counterfeit coins with silver,
or mixing amber perfume with armpit stink.

When she swiftly removed from her ugly face
the gold-embroidered veil she was wearing,

her husband immediately realised his terrible luck
and cruel fate: hell's door opened to this heavenly man!

All night he held his face turned to the wall,
because he didn't want to behold that spectacle.

Several times his new bride badgered him,
pulling his clothes in order to be embraced.

That young man became totally dismayed
by such misfortune. Forcing a smile, he said:

'You'd make even a minaret limp,
and you want desire to grow in me?

You're a greater affliction than the angel of death!
I'd rather be stung by a scorpion than touched by you!'

He drowsed until dawn, meditating on his fate,
he was desperate, beating one hand on the other.

In the end he realised he couldn't put up a fight,
and he also saw that the way out was closed.

He thought for a long time on what he could do,
he certainly didn't want to waste his life like this.

Meanwhile, sorrow had reached the depths of his heart,
that thought was like a spine pricking him to the bone.

He decided to tell his father-in-law the way things stood:
'O you, who know what justice is and are inclined to good,

until now you have treated me kindly,
you have been so courteous and generous

that even long years would not be enough
for me to thank you for your favours.

So, if you can, order that my feet
be freed from the snare of this sorrow!

A husband and a wife marry each other
thinking only to live in love and agreement,

but I have no peace and she is unhappy:
find a remedy for our miserable condition!'

Raising his head, the old man replied:
'Don't keep harping on about it, my friend!

Either you adapt to the pains and pleasures of the world,
or you'll end up in prison. Can you pay for a divorce?'

Hearing such unpleasant words spoken by the old man,
the young man was stunned and didn't know what to say.

He asked for help from the elders of the place,
and called on a myriad of people to intercede.

The old man paid no heed to any of them,
nothing he listened to would move him.

The young man felt desperate and nailed by misfortune,
the sea of his great worries seemed to have no shores.

So, neglecting his wife, he began
to court her sister and won her heart.

And one night, slipping into her bed,
he put his stick into her ivory phial.

Given her tender age, the girl began to scream,
but he closed her mouth with a fistful of gold.

He laid her face to the ground with her buttocks in the air,
and stuck it up her behind, easily pushing up to his balls.

He thus placed his cheek to her cheek, his hands
on her neck, navel on navel and pestle in the mortar.

After this he decided to try his brother-in-law,
and take down the breeches of his honour.

He found the house empty and saw a thick tail,
his cat leapt up and ripped the tablecloth.

He also gave his mother-in-law her due,
setting her down with her legs in the air.

Then he decided that it was the turn of his wife's aunts:
the paternal one had syrup, the maternal one a bougie.

Next, he decided to console his wife's nurse,
and beguiled her with kindness and sweet words.

He inquired where she slept and lived,
and finally found the street and house.

One festive evening he went there with his candle,
and promptly stuck half of it up between her thighs.

He also pursued and then fucked
a young girl employed by his wife.

He gently set her down on her knees,
and did everything in the proper way.

The slender girl didn't like this business,
and began to kick out and twist about.

In the end, however, he tamed her like a colt,
and stuck his cock up her crystalline arse.

He went all the way, and unspeakable things happened.
He couldn't have threaded a lovelier pearl than that!

Then, he took care of his wife's maid,
and, making every effort to do his best,

filled her jar with a portion of yogurt,
so that she wouldn't envy the others.

And anyone else he met in that family,
he had them from the front or rear.

He wielded his steel horn on those people,
like a sword reaping death all around.

The neighbours knew everything that was happening,
yet couldn't do anything to stop such indecencies.

But a roll of drums can't be concealed,
and so an endless scandal was born.

Acquaintances and friends of the bride's father
went to tell the old man what was going on.

It was a blow for that poor fellow,
he closed his shop and hurried away.

He picked up the bag with the marriage contract,
and rushed to take it to his lustful son-in-law.

'I don't want any money, if you ask for a divorce,' he said,
'I'll leave you the dowry, the clothes and land, but go away!'

On hearing these words from the old man,
the helpless groom was amazed and speechless.

Tears began to flow from his eyes,
on realising he could finally be happy.

And he said: 'O my lord and patron,
what have I done to receive this order?'

The other replied: 'Don't say anything!
This house is too small for the two of us!

Of all the people who live with us here,
I'm the only poor wretch to have been spared.

All the others, whether they be male or female,
you good-for-nothing, you have raped them all.

If one night you decided to jump on me,
O lewd demon, who would come to my aid?'

'I'd never commit this crime,' replied the other,
'and I don't want to leave my sweet bride!'

The old man's companions and friends
jumped on the young man from all sides.

He began a fight with each of them, and the brawl
only ceased when the divorce was agreed upon.

That victim, who no longer even dreamed of being saved,
at long last managed to free himself from the mortal snare.

His cheeks began to bloom again,
and strutting about he murmured:

'It's not wise to suffer and sigh,
force can only be met with force!'

Take care to avoid bad company, and may God
'guard us against the chastisement of the fire!'³²³

Sa'di

The next poem is critical of the very idea of marriage and the family routine,
whose boredom and strain are blamed on the woman:

A son implored his father saying:
'Please, help me find a good wife!'

'My dear son, fornicate if you wish,' he responded,
'but don't take a wife! Learn from others, not from me!'

If you commit adultery and then a guard arrests you,
he'll let you go for he's already caught so many like you.

But if you go and take a wife, she'll never let you make off!
And if you leave her, you've no idea what trouble she'll stir up.

Why do you want to follow in the footsteps of your mother and me?
You've seen these situations, and I have seen even more of them!

Avoid the naggings about bread and firewood!
Look at your dad's beard, less than half is left!³²⁴

Owhadi

Another aspect of household life dealt with is the relationship between the lord and his slaves. The following poem describes the advantageous purchase of a poor slave, and his rapid and unexpected transformation:

At the bazaar I bought a young Indian slave,
for so little, I'm ashamed even to mention it.

As wretched as an arse, fragile as a cunt,
stinking like pitch and as black as ink,

he had a grim sour face, teeth like a pomegranate slice,
and instead of balls he had two lumps of rotten meat.

He had suffered so much he was as lifeless and as puny as an ant,
he was so weak he slithered about like a snake, with no hands or feet.

Covered in nits, his head was like a piece of silk with poppy seeds,
and his armpits stank as much as a burnt carcass within a grave.

Round his mouth was so dried up, it was encrusted with salt,
and his cheeks were so rough that they looked like a broom.

He was bent on his knees because of his unhappy state,
and his eyes were sunk into their sockets through hunger.

With big balls and a tiny face, he really looked like a monkey,
but his long nails and short hair made him more like a hyena.

He was like a seed without a root, a root without a trunk,
a trunk without a branch and a branch without fruit.

I took him home, anointed his head, combed his hair,
and bought him a hat and a garment with a pair of trousers.

In a couple of months he was totally transformed,
and began to do a little of all the domestic chores.

He was a groom, a valet sorting clothes, a steward,
a butler and a book-keeper for income and expenses.

If he heard me fart, he said: 'God bless you,'
if he saw a fly on me, he chased it off like a snake.

He became so kind, scrupulous and prompt
that I believed it right to treat him affectionately.

I thus took to looking after him with every care,
and he grew graceful, deserving kisses and embraces.

He became a heavenly flower, to the awe of the celestial creatures,
he became an idol worthy of a temple, envied by all the other idols:

refined, wise, polite and charming,
gentle, dashing, elegant and obliging.

He learned to drink wine, sing melodies, recount amusing things,
use very eloquent phrases and confidently expound concepts.

His ways became so imbued with sweetness
that I amusingly dubbed him Black Sugar.

I felt a strong desire to fuck him: whatever could be more appropriate!
He was sweeter than the best sugar, and handsomer than a painting!

One night, I lay down and said: 'Caress the feet of your lord,
because his wild heart is suffering greatly on your account!'

So he embraced my feet, and with his hand
caressed them as tenderly as only the Sufis do.

Like the worst of sinners I pulled him under me,
adopting the credo that any prohibition is misbelief.

I fucked him with the kindness of a Zoroastrian Magus
when he fucks his sister, but with even more love.³²⁵

When I fell asleep, he got up and, to get his own back,
slipped his cucumber in my hole and stuck it up.

In the middle of the night I woke and noticed that
my slave's cucumber was hooked on my flask.

It was like a nightmare: he had put me under in such a way
that I could hardly breathe and thought I was on death's door.

I screamed and said: 'What are you doing? I'm not a girl!
Stop fucking me, you've made me all sore and worn!'

Because of my rough manner he grew angry and exclaimed:
'What! Were you dead when I fucked you a hundred times?

But no sooner were you sated than you woke up, you brazen face!
These refusals are certainly not very nice after such a warm welcome!

I have poured out my heart, and now I end
this story to put a halt to all these trifles.

With a thousand strategies and tricks,
I'd turned my servant into a feeble pansy.

But then, from under my cock, he jumped up like a true bugger.
This is a lesson you should learn, O you, who are so sharp of sight!³²⁶

Mokhtâri

Sometimes the poet's irony goes beyond the household setting to focus on
more social and public traditions such as oracles and omens:

If your right ball starts quivering,
you'll have wealth and no trouble.

If, on the contrary, it's your left ball that quivers,
you'll have a son and welcome that little darling.

Finally, if both balls quiver at the same time,
you'll be a king and enjoy great satisfaction.³²⁷

Badr-e Jâjarmi

If your arse suddenly quivers,
you'll have news of good luck.

If your right buttock quivers,
your enemy will slander you.

If your left buttock quivers,
you'll get rich and be happy.³²⁸

Badr-e Jâjarmi