

2 The Hidden Pearls of Wisdom: Desire and Initiation in *Laylī u Majnūn*

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The romance of *Laylī u Majnūn* is *par excellence*, the romance of desire: desire as passion, desire never satisfied in the visible world. This is not only true of Nizāmī's work, but also of its source of inspiration itself, the Arabian tale of old,¹ and of the story's innumerable versions in Arabic, Persian or Turkish. In lyric poetry, the mere allusion to the names of Majnūn or Laylī (or Laylā in the Arabic pronunciation) immediately evokes radical and maddening desire. In short, among the numerous hero-lovers of Islamic literature, Majnūn has become the archetype of the lover and Laylī, of the beloved. In a passage of *Salāmān and Absāl*, Jāmī, the fifteenth-century Persian poet of Herat, relates the following scene:

A man crossing the desert saw Majnūn /Seated alone in the middle of that barren land.

As if his fingers were a qalam on the sand /He wrote words with his hand.

The man said: "Hark, my poor madman! /What is that? Are you writing a letter? But for whom?

Whatever pain you take in writing this /The winds and storms will erase it soon."

... Majnūn answered: "I tell the beauty of Laylī /I solace my own soul by so doing.

I write her name in the first and last place /I write a letter of love and constancy.

Of her I have nothing in my hands but her name /From it my humbleness acquired great fame.

Not having drunk even a draught from her cup /Now, I make love to her name."²

Indeed, any desire is an unquenched thirst, the result of absence and/or frustration. What Majnūn does in his desert by writing the name of Laylī, by composing poem after poem on her beauty, by gazing at the muskdeers and ravens that remind him of her or by breathing the perfume of the beloved, is to fill the gap of absence and distance, to transmute emptiness

into fusion of essences. Nizāmī introduces the theme of hollowness at various levels of his work: the poem deals with an ever growing rarefaction of space, time, human relationships so as to better serve the violence of desire but also to penetrate into the very essence of things and to a higher reality. Indeed, Nizāmī has conceived his work as a reflection of the trajectory of desiring love: a movement towards nothingness that is the condition for the advent of perfect love. It is important to note that Nizāmī was commissioned by a local prince to write a Persian verse version of the Arabian tale. He complains (at the very beginning of the romance, in the chapter on “The Circumstances of the Composition of the Book”³), of the difficulty of composing a poem dealing with such a brief plot that takes place in a desert, with no occasion to describe royal feasts and beautiful gardens or to display his highly refined art of poetry:

گرده سخن از شد آمدن لنگ	دهلیز فسانه چون بود تنگ
تا طبع سواری نماید	میدان سخن فراخ باید
تفسیر نشاط هست ازو دور	این آیت اگر چه هست مشهور

(LM4,51-53)

*When the field of the tale is narrow / Then the speech that should
come becomes lame
The arena of speech must be vast in order to acquire the nature of
horsemanship.
Although this story is a famous one / It allows no description of ver-
dant bliss*

Nizāmī complains that the story as well as its setting are so dry that they have never inspired any poet (we may infer that he meant the story as such, exclusive of the love poetry in Arabic attributed to Majnūn). He also evokes the “nudity” of the story,⁴ the better to glorify his own poetic powers:

آنچاش رسانم از لطافت	با اینهمه تنگی مسافت
ریزد گهر نسفته بر راه	کز خواندن او به حضرت شاه
عاشق شود از نمرده باشد ...	خواننده اش اگر فسرده باشد
خاریدم و چشمه آب می داد	می گفتم و دل جواب می داد
در زیور او به خرج کردم	دخلی که ز عقل درج کردم

(LM4,63-5 and 88-89)

*Whatever the narrowness of the field / I shall raise it to such deli-
cate beauty
That when read to the king / It will spread perfect pearls at his feet.
Even depressed, any reader of it / Will fall in love if he is no dead
man ...*

(...) I spoke and the heart answered / I dug and the source provided water.

The pearls I obtained from reason / I used them for its ornamentation.

In short, although the theme did not immediately inspire him, and though he was only obedient to the prince, he decided to turn a painful love story set in the barren lands of Arabia into a “source” of inspiration. The decisive theme of the romance is love, but love considered as unquenched desire and paralleled to the process of inspiration. The metaphor of water, standing here for inspiration, is often used by the lovers in the romance, as the metaphor of love. The lovers themselves are often compared to plants and Laylī speaks of Majnūn as her *Khizr*,⁵ guiding her in the darkness to the Water of Life. Majnūn is precisely the archetype both of the absolute lover and of the poet of love. The search for love and the search for inspiration appear as an initiation to a higher wisdom, to a specific kind of knowledge that can in turn, be transmitted through the words of poetry: *any reader of it will fall in love*. Let us remark in passing that desiring love is evoked without object, as a pure state of being in itself, a sign of the living soul in the reader of Nizāmī’s poetry. Another parallel between Majnūn’s situation and that of the narrator concerns the background that provides such importance to the image of “water”. Nizāmī insists on the fact that the story in itself is, so to speak, “barren” and that he needed to dig in order to find water in it. As to Majnūn, it is necessarily in the desert that he can dig out his own heart and achieve both perfect love and perfect poetry. The “pearl” image strengthens this idea because pearls belong to the imagery of water as a sublime transmutation of a drop of water into a jewel.⁶ Chelkowski underlines this idea from an aesthetic perspective when he writes that “[Nizāmī] brought together in splendid tension the sparseness of the Arabian desert and the opulence of the Persian garden”.⁷ Miquel, the French scholar who has worked on the Arabian tale and the actual poems attributed to Majnūn, also insists on the importance of the theme of the desert as the only possible setting for such an extreme love story: “En ce désert qui, loin d’être un songe, lui impose ses conditions propres d’existence, Majnūn ne fait pas non plus que rêver sa poésie, il la vit désormais elle aussi; en ces lieux de dépouillement absolu, patrie et raison comprises, métaphore et autres figures poétiques explosent, le rapport de la poésie à la vie change de signe et d’être, celle-ci devenant naturellement celle-là sans le secours d’un adjuvant quelconque. Il n’est plus question de mettre de la poésie dans la vie, par le «comme» de tous les poètes, mais de s’inscrire, en chair et en os, par la poésie, dans un univers transfiguré.”⁸

Traditionally, there are many versions of the story of Laylī and Majnūn and Nizāmī had certainly access to many sources (mostly oral) and he

knew of several versions, all the more so as he had a bent for research and never started a *mathnavī* without having gathered a great amount of data about his story.⁹ His version is thus based on former legends but it is probably the first one in Persian and certainly the most admired and famous one in the Persian-speaking world. His is certainly an important contribution to the penetration of the theme in Persian aesthetics in general and more particularly in poetry, though evidence of the archetypal character of Majnūn's character exists in previous texts.¹⁰ His romance has also greatly contributed to the "spiritualization" of the love story. Nizāmī has adopted the main elements of the legend, recalling its great moments, although with some personal choices and developments.¹¹ But because the story in itself is rather simple, he decided to extend those aspects that allowed a poetic treatment and the whole romance obeys a specific structure. Contrary to *Khusraw u Shīrīn* or *Haft Paykar* for example, the structure here is loose, giving the impression of successive lyric moments rather than of a tightly constructed story.¹² Because we know what Nizāmī is able to do, we may infer that he deliberately put aside the idea of "constructing" a plot. He designed his *mathnavī* as a great lyric that follows the structure of the desert itself: the reader wanders in the love story, sometimes relaxed by the evocation of a garden, sometimes roused to emotional climax by the poetic evocations of love.¹³ Although a *mathnavī*, it cannot be considered an epic poem; in many ways, it is the very essence of Nizāmī's lyricism.¹⁴ Although there are a few warlike episodes, we may argue that the poem basically only contains three types of action: falling in love, burning with desire and dying. And this does not only concern the main characters. In various degrees, it is also true of Majnūn's parents and of Ibn Salām, Laylī's husband, and of the lovers who visit Majnūn in his desert in order either to be initiated to true love or to gather his poems. These lovers act very little or not at all. Their main characteristic is that they long for someone they cannot possess: Majnūn's parents want him to return to reason, to life, to them, and they die in their frustrated desire; Ibn Salām literally dries up and dies because Laylī refuses sexual intercourse with him.¹⁵ Initiated to supreme love and sublime poetry, but incapable of rising to Majnūn's degree in the path of love, the other "lovers" return to the civilised world, taking with them Majnūn's words. Laylī herself mostly does nothing but cry, hidden in her tent (she also prays and sometimes sends letters), and explains her inaction by the fact that she is a woman. But strangely enough, Majnūn himself doesn't act either in order to obtain Laylī. In many ways, he is a "passive character". It is his father who in vain asks for her hand and who takes him to Mecca to cure him from his love; it is his friend Nawfal who in vain wages war against Laylī's tribe in order to obtain her by force. Majnūn's only actions as a lover are to flee to the desert, to refuse food and dress, and of course, to compose poetry or to save animals who remind him of his beloved.

Chapter after chapter he increasingly disincarnates and the desert becomes a symbol of his absence from himself. The climax of this absence is reached when he swoons in the presence of the beloved. This absence of real, efficient action confirms the idea that Nizāmī's *Laylī u Majnūn* is a long complaint of love, of a love that cannot be fulfilled in this world because of its very nature. The hollowness of actions underlines the idea that, paradoxically, the only real dynamic of action is in desire itself and in putting this desire into words. In the end, both lovers are reduced to tears, to a voice, to a perfume. This hollowing-out of their selves allows them to reach a higher degree of existence. Though by the deaths of Ibn Salām and her father, there is no obstacle any more to their union, Majnūn's refusal to marry Laylī (and even to remain in her physical presence) is a sign that he has reached a stage in love that is beyond any material form or desire. In addition, chapter 62 ("Zayd dreams of Laylī and Majnūn in Paradise") shows the lovers united in Paradise, walking in that highly verdant and flowery realm,¹⁶ like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The conclusion of the chapter is that:

زینگونه کشد درین جهان سر	هر کو نخورد در آن جهان بر
شادیش درین جهان چنیست	آن کس که در آن جهان حزنیست ...
وان عالم باقی است و پاکست	این عالم فانی است و خاکست

Whoever does not taste the fruits of that world [i.e. the earthly world¹⁷] / He will thus enjoy the good of this one for ever.

Whoever suffers in that world / Such will be his/her happiness in this world...

This¹⁸ world is but dust, doomed to nothingness / That world is everlasting and pure.¹⁹

This is so true that at a certain point, when Majnūn encounters Laylī, he tells her that it is not her but the love of her that he loves:

با صورت تو مرا چه کارست	چون عشق تو در من استوارست
یا عشق مرا حریف یا تو	شرک است مرا شریک با تو
گر روی تو غایب است شاید	چون عشق تو روی می نماید

So firm is my longing for you / What need do I have of that form of you?

To have you in my love is crime of association²⁰ / Either love is my man or you.

When your love shows its face / Absence best becomes your face.²¹

It is noteworthy that the concept of Majnūn not being in love with Laylī in the end, but with the idea of the ideal beloved or even with love itself, has been part of the legend, as attested by Ibn Tūlūn:

*Majnūn's beloved came one day to see him. She found him crying: "Layla, Layla!" And on his feverish bosom he threw snow that melted immediately. "Qays, she said, it is me, Layla!" Then, looking at her he said: "Go away! I'm all busy with the love of you, you are in the way!"*²²

So, Majnūn's love for Laylī, is avowedly not a desire of possession²³, not a desire of Laylī as a woman of flesh and blood. It is a quest of love for love's sake, the desire to experiment loving desire ('ishq) as a radical emotion that burns and destroys any other feeling, emotion or attachment. This kind of love requires the negation of all other things; that is why the only possible setting for Majnūn's wandering life is indeed the barren desert of Najd, far away from his family and tribe. That is why his outlook is that of an ascetic hermit who has renounced all the ways of the world and its attachments too. That is why from the beginning, we know that he will not obtain the right to marry Laylī, that he has condemned himself to eternal frustration by his own fault. Had he not practiced *tashbīb*, that is the public and poetic proclamation of Laylī's beauty and of his love, he would have obtained her without difficulty. Indeed, the reason why Laylī's father stubbornly refuses to let Majnūn marry his daughter is because he has publicized her beauty in love poems, which is considered a crime against the honour of the tribe. But marriage, after all, is not what he desires. He wants to experiment desire in two major modes: separation and poetry. And he is ready to pay a dear price in his quest for absolute love: he is ready to go through all the sufferings of renouncement. He renounces to be part of human society, he renounces his family, his friends, his reason, his pleasures, his status and of course, as we just said, he renounces Laylī herself. Ultimately, it is his own self that he renounces. The fact that his attitude is described through a series of negations (he does not eat, does not dress, does not sleep, does not speak) enhances the fact that he is following a path that will eventually lead to erasing his personal identity, or in other words, there is method in his madness. The method may look strange to people around him but Majnūn is perfectly consistent with himself all along the poem. He wants to go through what Laylī has initiated in him, he remains concentrated on the "idea" of Laylī, an idea expressed in successive images that are in the end but the incarnations of the idea of love.

The central role of images as incarnations is perceptible in Nizāmī's own poetic technique. In the same way as Laylī is the living image of love that triggers Majnūn's "madness", the muskdeer, the night and the moon become the living images of Laylī, filling, so to speak, the gap of her

absence. And in turn, that is exactly the role assigned to similes and metaphors both in Majnūn's and in Nizāmī's poetry. Whatever its nature, an image is possible only when there is absence because its function is evocation of that which is not there in appearance and yet is there in the heart or in the imagination as an image. And what is essential here is the idea that this kind of image crystallised by poetry, is more real than material reality and becomes a source of true knowledge, as Corbin convincingly showed.²⁴ Imagination in this sense is inseparable from initiation. The representation of love and the beloved in separation are part of the process that guides the seeker of true love to its ultimate goal. This is probably one of the most important and inspiring ideas developed by Ahmad Ghazālī in his *Sawānih*. As L. Lewisohn summed up:

This degree of intoxication with the beloved transcends both separation and union (states that only pertain to the early stages of love). Both states relate to a knowledge gained through imagination, but when the presence of the beloved is intuitively known in the deepest level of the heart, even that imagined knowledge vanishes. On this level, the "Object-of-Apprehension of the imagination (...)" has become itself the very locus of imagination (...)" Ghazālī calls this degree: "realization" or "attainment".²⁵

The importance of Ghazālī's short treatise on the degrees and nature of love and its deep and longstanding influence on Persian love poetry has not yet been sufficiently accounted for.²⁶ Even though other treatises on the same theme were written before and after that, it seems that the *Sawānih* has a special status from the point of view of literary history because it states powerfully the intricacies between love as feeling, desire as an imaginative process and poetry as the only possible expression of desire. The word "poetry" means here not only the actual verses quoted or composed by Ghazālī but also in general, the process of creating a language made of images through which love can be evoked if not defined. A parallel reading of the *Sawānih* and *Laylī u Majnūn* gives the impression that Nizāmī had meditated Ghazālī's text which might have directly inspired the composition of his love romance. Historically, the *Sawānih* was known by the time Nizāmī started his career and the poet manifestly was extensively read. So, it is but natural to suppose that he was familiar with it; all the more so as Ghazālī's radical and erotic representation of transcendent love²⁷ is echoed in Nizāmī's poem but in a more developed and narrative manner. After Ghazālī, to express transcendent love in an erotic terminology²⁸ became a classical literary topos. But in Nizāmī's time the literary fusion of mystical and erotic themes was still in the making and we may consider that our author was indeed, with Sanā'ī and 'Attār, one of those who gave a powerful poetic and narrative shape to the concepts suggested in the manner of

“divine flashes” by Ghazālī. Apart from the fact that Ghazālī himself quotes two stories related to Majnūn²⁹ showing him as the archetype of the contemplative lover, many similarities may be drawn between his ideas on the different stages and forms of passionate love (*‘ishq*) and Majnūn’s progress on the path of love in Nizāmī’s poem. As far as structure is concerned, as hinted above, although Nizāmī provides a general narrative structure to his poem because he is telling a story with a beginning and an end, yet there is an apparent diffraction of time within the structure giving an impression of “successive moments of love”, rather than a real progression. The same thing happens in the *Sawānih* where we expect a full account (if not a narration) of the successive stages of love, but in fact find elusive evocations of successive “sudden events”³⁰ that don’t seem to follow a progression, and are sometimes even contradictory. Majnūn, as does the lover of the *Sawānih*, experiences love as a series of commotions that trigger contradictory desires: desire of union, but also of separation, desire to contemplate the beloved and yet the physical impossibility to do so (he swoons when he catches but a glimpse of Laylī), desire to tell the beauty of the Beloved and the certitude of losing her by so doing... And, just as the lover of the *Sawānih*, Majnūn becomes the archetype of absolute love that sees and lives for nothing else but his obsessive love. The only and major progression of the lover in both works is that through the ups and downs of love, he loses his own identity and is transmuted into the Beloved. Thus,

*When the lover sees the Beloved, this triggers in him a violent emotion because his being is but a borrowed being and he is facing the pole (qibla) of nothingness. In ecstasy, his being is overwhelmed with anxiety as long as he has not reached the ultimate truth. Then, he is not yet mature. When matured, in meeting, he becomes absent to himself because when the lover has matured in love and love has opened his inner self, then, at the rising of union, his being withdraws (rakht barbandad) in proportion with his maturity in love.*³¹

In Nizāmī’s work, the progress of Majnūn is definitely a progress towards nothingness to which his ascetic attitude and appearance contribute in a visual manner.³² The fact that he doesn’t eat or sleep anymore is a sign of the process of annihilation. Time and again, Nizāmī reminds us that for Majnūn, *‘ishq* (loving desire) is an initiation to self-annihilation. Thus, Majnūn says to Salām Baghdādī who comes to visit him in the desert and believes that love passes with time:

عشق آتش گشت و من چو عودم
من رخت کشیدم از میانه
من نیستم آنچه هست یارست

عشق است خلاصه وجودم
عشق آمد و خاص کرد خانه
با هستی من که در شمارست

(LM42,79-81)

*Love is the quintessence of my being / Love is like the fire and I'm
the aloes wood.*

*Love has come and made this house his / And me, I have withdrawn
(rakht kashīdam) from there.*

*Who can count on my being? / I am no more, whatever is, is the
Beloved.*

And later, in the chapter of the meeting between the two lovers:

من گم شده توام درین چاه	تو یافته منی درین راه
کین دست تو است دست من نیست	با هست تو به که هست من نیست
جز سایه تو مرا چه دانند	من خود کیم و مرا چه خوانند

*You are my found one in this path / I am your lost one in this well.
With your being, better if my being is not / This hand is yours, not
mine.*

*Who am I by myself, how am I called? / Am I known as anything
else but your shadow?³³*

In the journey of love, Majnūn loses all form of identity (“being”, “hand”, “name”) and any form of material density, in order to become but a reflection of Laylī. It is as if he is going through a process of dilution into the Beloved. After the meeting, in the same chapter, Majnūn, unable to stand the burning presence of the beloved, has to flee again to the desert in order to resume the composition of poetry.³⁴ This idea that the actual presence of the beloved is a burning fire³⁵ may again be read as an echo of Ghazālī’s remark that “Union must become the firewood for the fire of desire so that it can grow”.³⁶

We may consider today that this classical topos of self-annihilation in love has become a cliché. At the time of Nizāmī though, the theme still had its freshness. It had indeed become a “classical” mystical attitude under the impulse of such fascinating figures as Hallāj and Bāyazīd, and it had been dramatized in treatises such as the *Sawānih*. Nevertheless, it is likely that Nizāmī played a great part in introducing the theme into the realm of poetry and romance by transmuting a love story into a mystical quest.³⁷ It also is noteworthy that this self-annihilation does not lead to absolute nothingness because the aloes wood produces perfume by burning and the lover’s hollowness gives place to the “shadow” of the lover: so, annihilation in love means transmutation of the substance of the lover from dense and obscure matter into an evanescent, superior form of being. One of the keys to understand *Laylī u Majnūn* as a “mystical” piece of poetry³⁸ is precisely this strong presence of the theme of self-annihilation as a condition of true love and the only way to attain fusion (*baqā* after *fanā*). One of the key notions that points to this paradoxical conception of love as

renunciation to the self (as opposed to love as a desire of possession and affirmation of the ego) is *gharaz* (غرض) of which Nizāmī insists that Majnūn's love is deprived of. *Gharaz* is the goal sought in action, the purpose of action or speech; but Majnūn's love is, from a worldly perspective, precisely "purposeless":

آن عشق نه شهوت و هواپیست شهوت ز حساب عشق دور است کس عشق عرضی روا ندارد عشقی که غرض نشست برخاست دور از تو همه غرض پرستند	عشق که ز عصمتش جداپیست عشق آینه بلند نوراست عشق (عرضی) بقا ندارد با عشق کجا غرض بود راست جز تو همه عاشقان که هستند
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*A love that is disjointed from chastity / Is not love but pure lust.
 Love is the higher mirror of light / Lust is far away from love.
 Accidental love has no permanence (بقا baqā) / And is deprived of
 consideration.
 How could purpose (gharaz) in love be right? Where there is pur-
 pose there is no love.
 Except you, all the lovers of the world / Are purpose-worshippers,
 far from you!³⁹*

Nizāmī carefully and constantly refers to the "purity" of Majnūn's love (as opposed to ordinary love or lust) and to Laylī's chastity and virginity⁴⁰ even after marriage, perhaps to ensure that the reader clearly understands his interpretation. This tends to show on the one hand that in Nizāmī's time, the Arabian romance was not necessarily understood as a spiritual story and on the other hand, that such an interpretation needed to be clearly stated because the spiritualization of the love topos was not yet a common literary ground. We may thus argue that if Nizāmī added to the Arabic original the theme of "the wild animals tamed", it was to make sure that his purpose would be understood and Majnūn considered as an idealized mystical image.⁴¹ Taming the wild animals is a classical Sufi metaphor for the taming of the carnal self and base desires (lust being one of them). In Nizāmī's romance, it is repeatedly taken as a proof of Majnūn's higher spiritual status and valour. The theme is echoed in the poem itself in chapter 41 (immediately placed after the chapter entitled "Of Majnūn and the Wild Beasts") that recounts the story of a king who kept wild dogs and would throw to them the courtiers whom he disliked. One of the courtiers fed the dogs in secret and was spared when he also happened to be thrown to them. As the king's anger subsided and he regretted his decision, he discovered that the courtier had been saved because he had tamed the wild dogs, contrary to the king. This extraordinary event "woke him up from his drunkenness and made him shun his dog-like behaviour and dog-worshipping".⁴² Nizāmī explicitly relates this story to the situation of Majnūn

and the fact that his “kingship” is witnessed by his control over the wild animals, symbol of his control over his instincts.⁴³ And in turn, the animals become his protection against the intrusion of the *aghyār*, those who are not admitted in the intimacy of his experience because they cannot understand his state and stamp him a madman. The wild beasts he has tamed protect him (and Laylī in the time of union) from any intrusion and are the rampart (حصار *hisār*) against both the human community that he has left and its illusory passions. Thus Zayd who arranges the last meeting with Laylī remarks:

کالوده شهوت و غرض نیست	کین عشق حقیقتی عرض نیست
کو را دده درنده رامست	هم عشق به غایب تمامست
کالایشی از ددی درو نیست	زان از ددگان بدی برو نیست
فرمانیر او شد این ددی چند	او چون دد خویش را سر افکند
سر برنزند مگر به پاکی	پیداست که عشق آن دو خاکی

This true love is no accident ('araz) / 'T is not stained with lust and purpose (gharaz).

It is love in an absolute sense / That is why he has tamed those wild animals.

The wild beasts would never harm him / Because there is no beastly pollution in him.

Since he has beaten his own beast / He has become the king over the beasts.

'T is clear that the love of those two earthly beings / Has its end and origin in purity.⁴⁴

Nizāmī has largely contributed to the “spiritualization” of the Majnūn theme by developing the idea of self-denial through a set of images. However, this interpretation of the love romance is already present in Ghazālī’s work in the two allusions to the story of Majnūn mentioned above. More generally, Ghazālī interprets the whole tradition of the attributes of beauty in a purely spiritual manner and reads the details of classical beauty in the light of mystical love. Thus, in the epoch-making passage:

In the realm of imagination, when [Love] manifests its face, sometimes it shows a sign through vision and sometimes not. Sometimes it appears through the curl, sometimes through the cheek, sometimes through the mole, sometimes through the stature, sometimes through the eye or through the eyebrow or through the coquettish glance, sometimes through the beloved’s laugh and sometimes through her rebuke. And each of these significations is a sign in the lover’s realm of desire (...) Each of these signs in the intuitive

*experience of love says something of the lover's spiritual or physical desire, or something on his illness or fault.*⁴⁵

This perspective may account for the fact that the description of Laylī's beauty (with the traditional cypress-like stature, gazelle eyes and coquettish glances, black hair and curls)⁴⁶ is reserved to the beginning of the story, when Majnūn has not yet become the king of love and still needs to be initiated by Laylī's beauty to the higher reality of love. In addition, it is not Majnūn who evokes the physical beauty of the beloved but the narrator, Nizāmī, who is indeed a master in such evocations. When Majnūn speaks, his eloquence rather points to the essence of Laylī, to the reflection of her luminous and scented presence in his heart or to the nature, the impact and the trial of love. Very soon, Laylī's physical beauty is replaced by her perfume⁴⁷ and in the end by the idea of the Beloved (as stated above) and we realise that her celebrated beauty was seen essentially through Majnūn's eyes and revealed his own state as a lover and a seeker. Thus it is but natural that his parents and friends don't see the reason why he is so much in love; for them, Laylī is just another woman, easily replaceable by other beauties. Laylī is Laylī only in the eyes of Majnūn and vice-versa.⁴⁸ This is stated in the famous passage of chapter 11, when the two fall in love at school. The series of double anaphors at the beginning of each *misra'* stresses the opposition between "their schoolmates" (ياران *yārān*), those who seek knowledge in external sciences and books, and "them",⁴⁹ the two lovers (essentially united through the pronoun ايشان *ishān*), who seek to be initiated to a higher reality through the contemplation of each other and the experience of love.⁵⁰

To express the idea of such a "higher reality", Nizāmī uses many devices and metaphors and more particularly metaphors of light that contrast with the night that is the general background of the whole poem.⁵¹ But here, we will focus on the image of the "pearl" as a central metaphor that brings together desire and initiation, poetry and love. The pearl is traditionally considered as concentrated light or water hidden in the dark womb of the shell. The magic alchemy that allows the mysterious transformation of a "drop" into a shining jewel has been used repeatedly as a mystic symbol of the process of spiritual transformation of the self into a higher state of being. Thus already in one of Hallāj's orisons:

*Time (وقت *waqt*) is a shell in the heart of the ocean; tomorrow, at the day of Resurrection, the shells will be thrown on the sand, opened, and will show the pearl.*⁵²

This pearl refers to the quintessential reality of the person that reveals itself when, at the day of Resurrection, there is no shell any more, no matter and no appearances. In the first chapter of the *Sawānih*, Ghazālī evokes the

image of an invaluable pearl that is given to the immature wayfarer to put him to trial, a pearl (در ثمن و لؤلؤ لالا) *durr-i thamīn u lu'lu'-i lālā*) so precious that not even a master would dare to hold it let alone to pierce it.⁵³ That this pearl (given as a grace) is love as reflected in the innermost of the soul, is confirmed by the last chapter where the image of the pearl reappears:

*Reasons are blind to the understanding of the essential quality
(ماهیت māhiyat) and reality of the soul and the soul is but the shell
of love. Thus, if the shell cannot be reached through knowledge,
how could one reach the hidden pearl in the shell?*⁵⁴

By putting together Hallāj's vision and Ghazālī's evocation, we may infer that love is the beating heart of the soul, its essential reality and it is this quintessential quality and shining beauty that is expressed through the metaphor of the pearl. Through a metonymic process, the pearl becomes the metaphor of both love and the heart⁵⁵. In this same chapter, Ghazālī expresses the impossibility to describe such a reality through words, except by allusions and metaphors that may not be understood by the common reader. Such significations are "hidden" as the pearl is "hidden" in the shell. Indeed, the adjective "hidden" (مکنون *maknūn*) is often used to qualify the pearl because inner meanings, love's reality and the beloved's beauty, are hidden in the shell of outward reality and as far as expression is concerned, in the shell of words.

In *Laylī u Majnūn*, the pearl represents the beloved Laylī and also Majnūn's poetry.⁵⁶ Time and again Nizāmī uses the metaphor to refer either to Laylī as a virgin ("unpierced pearl") and a shining beauty or to Majnūn's poetry and its blazing quality, suggesting the close link between the two by the association of the images. Using traditional imagery Nizāmī also refers to his own poetry as a pearl. Thus, in the chapter devoted to the circumstances of the composition of the book, he relates that the prince Manūchīhr of Shirvān urged him to compose a book relating in Persian the story of Laylī and Majnūn:

رانی سخنی چو در مکنون بکری دو سه در سخن نشانی	خواهم که به یاد عشق مجنون چون لیلی بگر اگر توانی
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(LM4,25-26)

*In memory of Majnūn, I want you / To scatter words like hidden
pearls.
And like Laylī the virgin, if you can, / Compose virgin poetry.*

Nizāmī naturally complied and as an alchemist who transmutes a dry and barren story into sublime beauty, he produced a work of art that tells what seemed impossible to tell:

زین بحر ضمیر هیچ غواص بر نارد گوهری چنین خاص
هر بیتی از او چو رشته ای در از عیب تهی و از هنر پر

(LM4, 85-86)

*From this ocean of the inner self, no diver / Can bring back such
unique pearl.*

*Each verse, like a row of pearls / Is flawless and replete with
perfection.*

It is to be noted that Ghazālī too, complied to a dear friend's demand⁵⁷ in order to express what he deemed impossible to say (as he states in both the introduction and the last chapter of the *Sawānih*). Both use the image of the diver who plunges into the ocean of the inner self to find the precious pearl of love/knowledge/beauty, as in the lines quoted above:

می گفتم و دل جواب می داد خا‌ریدم و چشمه آب می داد
دخلی که ز عقل درج کردم در زیور او به خرج کردم

(LM4, 88-89)

*I spoke and the heart answered / I dug and the source provided
water.*

*The pearls I obtained from reason / I used them for its
ornamentation.*

That "unique" pearl-like quality is thus the result of self-knowledge obtained through the experience of love, a testimony of the lover/poet's visionary world into which the reader is invited to dive in turn. As mentioned, the poem as pearl is also the mirror of Laylī as a "hidden, unpierced pearl".⁵⁸ The immediate traditional function of this image is to express metaphorically the virginity of a woman,⁵⁹ thus Laylī's purity and lack of lust.⁶⁰ The theme is a reminiscence of the Qur'anic verse: "[There shall be] large-eyed Huris, resembling the hidden pearl [*al-lu'lu' al-maknūn*]" (*Qur'an*, 56; 22-23), where the "hidden pearl" of virginity is interpreted spiritually as God's Verb.⁶¹ In Persian, the words "unpierced" (*nāsufta* ناسفته) and "virgin" (*bikr* بکر) are used both to express virginity and excellent quality (excellence of a pearl when not yet pierced and of poetry when new and "pure" in its style and expression) and directly relate Laylī to poetry. So much so that she herself composes pearl-like poetry:

لیلی که چنان ملاحظتی داشت در نظم سخن فصاحتی داشت
ناسفته دری و در همی سفت چون خود همه بیت بکر می گفت

(LM19, 56-57)

*Laylī who had such sweetness / Was also eloquent in poetry.
An unpierced pearl who pearls would pierce / She would compose
verses virgin like herself.*

From a mystical perspective, it also means that Laylī (“woven with thousands of hidden pearls”)⁶² is indeed the personification of love, though hidden and mysterious, an object both of desire and knowledge and an object of poetry. To pierce the pearl would thus mean to penetrate the innermost mystery of love, poetry and being.

Laylī is indeed “hidden”, as a woman belonging to an Arab tribe, veiled, secluded and lonely in her tent,⁶³ but most of all unattainable, hidden from the worldly eyes like a pearl in a shell, as Nizāmī explicitly states:

چون باز شدند سوی خانه شد در صدف آن در یگانه
(LM19,143)

*When they went back home / That unique pearl returned into her
shell.*

Laylī is represented as withdrawn from the world into her tent and her beautiful moon-like face as impossible to behold even by her husband Ibn Salām⁶⁴. The theme of the tent again explicitly relates Laylī to poetry as the word *bayt* signifies both the tent and the verse.⁶⁵

Through the complementary images of tent/veil and pearl, both Laylī and poetry are presented as uniting in their beauty, darkness and light, night and day, mystery and knowledge, desire and initiation. The supreme pearl of love and knowledge (knowledge of the lover leading to self-knowledge and in the end to the knowledge of God), echoed by the shining face of the Beloved, is hidden somewhere in the long dark hair of the Beloved, metaphor of the night of desire. Laylī is indeed a “hidden treasure (گنج *gani*)”⁶⁶ protected, as the tradition goes, by either a snake or a dragon:

لایلی که چراغ دلبران بود رنج خود و گنج دیگران بود
گنجی که کشیده بود ماری از حلقه به گرد او حصاری
می زیست دران شکنجه دلتنگ چون دانه لعل در دل سنگ
گر چه گهری گرانبها بود چون مه در دهان اژدها بود
(LM43,11-14)

*Layli, the torch among the lovelies / Was a pain to herself but a
treasure for the others.
On this treasure a snake was coiled up / Like a protective bulwark.
She lived in her sorrow (شکنجه) suffering / Like a ruby in the heart
of stone.*

Although a priceless pearl she was / Like the moon, she was in the mouth of a dragon.

And again, the treasure she is, metaphorically relates her to Majnūn's poetry and knowledge, also represented as a "hidden treasure". This treasure is the riddle solved by Majnūn, the poet, in his quest for love:

حل کرده رموز آسمانی	داننده دانش نهانی
بیت و غزلی چو لولو تر	زیبا سخنی چو سکه زر
دیوانه نریزد آن چنان در	داند همه کس که بی تفکر

*He (Majnūn) knew the knowledge hidden / Having solved the riddles of heaven.
With beautiful words like golden coins / With verses (bayt) and poems like bright pearls.
Everyone knows that never could / A heedless madman scatter such pearls.⁶⁷*

Thus, in the same way as Laylī embodies the archetype of beauty, Majnūn's poems embody a higher knowledge found only in the experience of love. This "embodiement" takes the form of metaphors that are, *par excellence*, poetic riddles. But the "riddle of heavens" is also solved by Nizāmī, in the "ocean" of verses that recount the story of love:

گردابه رهان خود پرستی ...	عشق است گره گشای هستی
کشتی به عدن رسید دریاب ...	دریای سخن نمود پایاب
در خواندن او خجستگی باد	این قصه کلید بستگی باد

*T' is love that undoes the knot of being / And saves from the whirlwind of self-adoration.
(...) The ocean of words reached shallow waters / Look, the boat has reached haven!
(...) May this story be the key that opens the riddle/ May there be radiant bliss in reading it.⁶⁸*

So, both Majnūn and Nizāmī try to bring into the form of poetry the unutterable beauty of the mysterious pearl and thus to pierce the secret of love, as Ghazālī had done. For Nizāmī, embarking on the ocean of poetry is equivalent to embarking for the journey of love, the only journey through which the desiring soul can be initiated to higher realities. Both poetry and love are focused on the idealized figure of the Beloved and celebrate her Beauty.

The dynamics of desire stand in the successive evocations of the beloved's beauties as tokens of another reality. The poetic evocation inflames

the imagination, filling it with metaphors of the beloved and initiating thus to the nature of love, much more convincingly than the flesh and blood presence of the beloved which can never be so dynamic. This is what Nizāmī wants to underline when he insists that the possibility to speak through images disappears in the presence of the beloved. Indeed, in chapter 57, when Laylī and Majnūn can at last be together in a loving embrace, they suddenly become silent:

تا در شب انتظار بودند چون شمع زبانه دار بودند
حالی که به هم رسیده گشتند چون صبح زبان بریده گشتند

*As long as they were in the night of longing / Like candles, they
had tongues.
But now that they had joined / Like (that of) the morning, cut were
their tongues.*⁶⁹

Majnūn who is after all the great poet of *tashbīb*, who lost Laylī because he could not silence his love and her beauty, remains thus silent in the presence of the Beloved. Astounded by this attitude, Laylī even tries to bring Majnūn back to language, but in vain:

لایلی به زبان غمزه تیز می گفت بدبیه ای دل آویز
کای سوسن ده زبان چه بودت کاندیشه من زبان ربودت
بلبل که سخن سگال باشد بی گل همه ساله لال باشد
چون ببند روی گل به بستان گوید نه یکی هزار دستان
تو بلبل باغ روزگاری من با تو چو گل به سازگاری
امروز که هست روز پیوند بر درج دهان نهاده ای بند

Through her coquettish glances, Laylī / Spoke with charming improvised similes.

"Oh my lily with ten tongues"⁷⁰, what is it? / Why did the thought of me deprive you of your tongue?

The nightingale who is a sweet speaker / Without the rose remains silent all year.

*But when in the garden he sees the rose's face / He sings not one but thousand melodies.*⁷¹

You are the nightingale of the garden of life / And I'm in accordance with you like the rose.

*How is it that today, the day of union / You've closed the jewel-case of your mouth?"*⁷²

And Majnūn answers in substance, not with words but through tears red with blood, that he is unable to speak because in her presence he loses his own identity; he becomes her and thus no place is left for language. In

union, there is a fusion of identities that obliterates the need for language.⁷³ The theme of union is nevertheless evoked in forty-four *bayts*⁷⁴ expressing the wordless speech of Majnūn through a series of images that shun duality as belonging to the world of mere appearances and point to unity beyond duality, as the only possible dogma in the religion of love:

اینجا منی و تویی نباشد در مذهب ما دویی نباشد

*Here, there is no "I" and no "you" / In our religion, there is no duality.*⁷⁵

and further:

چون من توام این دو پیکری چیست چون هر دو یکیست داوری چیست

*Since I am you, why these two bodies? / Since we are both one, why this opposition?*⁷⁶

Among the series of images, the metaphor of the pearl reappears with a renewed emotional and spiritual charge related to the perfection of its form:

در دل ما ز یک خزانہ ست الا دو صدف که در میانه ست

*The pearls of our heart are of one treasury / Only, there are two shells in here.*⁷⁷

And just after this sequence of eloquent silent speech by Majnūn, Nizāmī depicts Laylī's reply in the form of a kiss and an embrace:

چون ریخت نثار اشک مجنون زین گونه هزار در مکنون
لایلی به کرشمه های مستش بر عقد گهر علاقه بستش
کرد از لب خود به جای آن در از آب حیات حقه را پر

*After Majnūn bestowed the token of his tears / Tears of this kind, thousands of hidden pearls.
With her loving drunken glances, Laylī / Encompassed him with a necklace of pearls.
Through her lip, instead of that pearl / She filled the jewel-case with the water of life.*⁷⁸

At this point the tears of the lover (token of longing and desire) and the saliva of the Beloved (by excellence the fluid of initiation, and as such considered as the "water of life")⁷⁹ are united in the shining, living image

of the pearl. The eyes that behold the beauty of the Beloved and in turn become eloquent and the speaking mouth that breathes life while becoming silent are united in the same image; eyes and mouth shed pearls of a spiritual quality that stand for the realization of love and lead to a final kiss that bestows eternal life. This is indeed the final exchange that seals the fusion of identities between lover and Beloved and reunites at last the two parts of the same soul⁸⁰ after the long pilgrimage on the path of separation, suffering and longing.

Through the burning desire for the ideal Beloved, Majnūn has been able to empty himself from himself and thus make room for Love. He has travelled through the desert to himself and reached the ocean of love where Laylī's pearl was hidden. In the end, he has attained to that higher reality that stood in his own heart and of which Laylī was but a beautiful reflection and reminder because

"the path from the self to oneself is the path of love". "As long as he has not crossed through love – love that encompasses all his being – he cannot reach to himself".⁸¹

And for Nizāmī, it is also the ultimate function of poetry: to initiate the reader to the realities of love, to reflect the beauty of the beloved in the mirror of the heart and thus to dive into the ocean of desire to bring back the hidden pearl of knowledge.

Notes

- 1 For further information on the Arab tale and the poems attributed to Majnūn, see Miquel (1984) and Krachkovskij (1378), Introduction to his critical edition of the romance.
- 2 Jami-Dad'alishah (1378) 400-1.
- 3 LM4,47-53. Quotations from Nizāmī's text refer to the edition by Dastgirdi: Nizami-Dastgirdi (1372). The abbreviation used is LM, followed by the chapter number and the verse number in this edition, when not otherwise stated. The last chapters are indeed considered spurious by Dastgirdi (followed by Gelpke, but not by Browne, Massé and Arberry) and when lines are quoted that are absent from Dastgirdi's edition, the reference is Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364). For more details on the question, see Chelkowski (1995).

4

و آنگاه برین برهنه روئی	زیبا روئی بدین نکونی
زین روی برهنه روی ماند است	کس در نه به قدر او فشانده است

(LM4,73-74)

*Such a beautiful face [this story]has / But then so naked is her face,
No one has spread pearls on her price / That is why naked has remained her face.*

- 5 Literally, *Khizr* derives from the Arabic root meaning "green". This prophet, said to have guided and initiated Moses, is also the guardian of the Water of Life. LM35,111: *O you, the source of Khizr in darkness / You, moth of the morning candle*. And a few lines later, LM35,130: *Verdant is your land, and you wear the robe of Khizr / Be in accordance with*

me like the water of Khizr. In the miniature representations of Majnūn, this “Water of Life” is often present running under the tree that bows before Majnūn’s grandeur. (See also the contribution by F. Franke in this volume. Barry (2004) 15).

- 6 See below.
- 7 Chelkowski (1975) 67.
- 8 Miquel (1996) 66-7.
- 9 On the probable sources of *Laylī u Majnūn*, see Krachkovskij (1378), the introduction to the text.
- 10 See particularly the purely spiritual treatment of Majnūn in Ghazālī (1359): chapters 25, 52.
- 11 See for example the displacement from the pastoral setting of the Arab tale where Laylī and Majnūn fall in love as children while keeping their camels together, to the *maktab* where Majnūn experiences love at first sight when he sees Laylī’s face. See Safa (1977).
- 12 Although Seyed-Gohrab (2003) 54, argues that “the episodes are not only charmingly told, they are coherently arranged so that there is a line of development and a dramatic climax to the plot,” compared to Nizāmī’s mastery of complex story-telling, *Laylī u Majnūn* definitely lacks structure.
- 13 See also the illuminating remarks of Lory (2004) on the desert as the ideal setting for the emergence of Arabian poetry.
- 14 As Seyed-Gohrab (2003) 188, rightly puts in his convincing study of the poem: “Nizāmī produces sheer lyricism in the *mathnavī* form.”
- 15 Critics rightly note that this is socially bold and hard to imagine: see Sarvatyan (1376) 158, and also Talattof (2000) 58-9. This question is also dealt with by Seyed-Gohrab (2003) 251ff and by Meisami (1987) 162. Whether this is a sign of the spiritual meaning of love in the romance (Sarvatyan’s viewpoint) or a proof of Nizāmī’s open-mindedness on sexual issues (Tallattof’s conclusion), Laylī clearly warns her enforced husband that she will not have him in her bed. That is why she is referred to, till the end of the story, as the “virgin”. This refusal of sexual intercourse contributes to a further disincarnation of the characters.
- 16 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 348: a description of the “green” (*khizra*) setting of Paradise.
- 17 These are the words of a *pīr* of the other world to Zayd in his dream, thus the reversal of perspective in the use of demonstratives.
- 18 Now it is again Zayd who is speaking from an earthly perspective.
- 19 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 349, 37-38 and 42.
- 20 *Shirk*, literally «association», designates the crime of associating anything to God.
- 21 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 245, 107-109.
- 22 Ibn Tulun (1962) 9, quoted by Miquel (1984) 165-6.
- 23 For a development on this subject, see Anvar-Chenderoff (2007).
- 24 This is a recurrent idea throughout his work. See more particularly Corbin (1964) and Corbin (1952-4).
- 25 I thank Dr. Lewisohn for putting at my disposal the longest version of an article on Ahmad Ghazālī he is preparing for the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (D. Borchert, editor in Chief) from which I quote here.
- 26 Although it is always asserted in passing, for example by Pourjavady (Ghazali (1359) in the introduction and Pourjavady (1357)).
- 27 As noted by Seyed-Gohrab (2003) 13: “Ahmad Ghazālī systematically used profane erotic vocabulary throughout the *Sawānih*. The use of these terms in the transcendental sense of love is noteworthy and has a lasting impact on Persian mystical love poetry.” See also Bürgel (1979).
- 28 In many ways Ghazālī may indeed be considered as “the founder of the literary topos and mystical persuasion known as the ‘religion of love’” (Lewisohn (2006) n. 26).
- 29 The two “Majnūn stories”: Ghazali (1359) 22 and 24 (*fāsl* 23 and *fāsl* 24).

- 30 This is in fact the literal meaning of the word *Sawānih* (see Lewisohn (2006), n. 26)
- 31 Ghazali (1359) 24, *fasl* 25.
- 32 On Majnūn's ascetic appearance and attitude, see Seyed-Gohrab (2003) 89-113.
- 33 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 317-318; 130-132. These lines seem to echo the opening lines of the *Sawānih*:
In the times of nothingness [‘adam], love was for me created / I was, of all the world, love’s ultimate purpose.
I will not cut from you as long as perfume does not cut from aloes wood / All day and night and month and year, notwithstanding the jealous (Ghazali (1359) 3, *fasl* 1).
- 34 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 321; 189-194.
- 35 Early on, the theme became a classical topos of mystical literature. See for example the numerous recurrences of the image of love as fire in ‘Attār’s works. In the opening verse of one of his *ghazals*, he expresses the idea in a global image: *Loving the beauty of the Beloved-source of life (janan), Is an ocean of fire / If you are a lover, you shall burn: for love is nothing but that.* (‘Attar-Tafazzoli (1362) *ghazal* 96, 1)
- 36 Ghazali (1359) 23, *fasl* 23.
- 37 De Bruijn (1986).
- 38 Such an interpretation has been discussed, for example by Talattof (2000).
- 39 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 321-322; 196-200.
- 40 See below, the image of the pearl.
- 41 We could even use here the word “icon” for the representation of Majnūn with the wild beasts as a symbol of the man who has tamed his own nature has become a cliché in the miniature tradition.
- 42 LM33,93: هشیار شد از خمار مستی بگذاشت سگی و سگپرستی
- 43 For a development of the dog theme and its spiritual meaning, see Barry (2004: 283). See also the story of Hallāj appearing with two black dogs in a Sufi circle while master and disciples are having their meal. The master gives him his place and Hallāj eats with his two dogs by his side to the bewilderment of the disciples. When he is gone, the disciples express their disgust to the master who answers: “His dog is his slave. It runs behind him from outside whereas our dog is inside us and we run behind it. And there is a great difference between those who follow their dog and those who are followed by their dog.” (‘Attar-Isti‘lami (1370)).
- 44 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 314, 71-75.
- 45 Ghazali (1359) 31, *fasl* 37-38.
- 46 See the description of her beauty in LM19 (“On Laylī’s Beauty”), *passim*.
- 47 Schimmel (1982) 81, argues that this process is a recurrent pattern in Persian mystical poetry: “Words are the scent of the muskdeer, which leads finally to the source of the fragrance; or they are like the scent of Yusuf’s shirt, which brought his father glad tidings from his faraway son and cured his eyes, which were blind from weeping. Through the image of fragrance mystical poetry gives some news of the everlasting Beloved even to those who have never seen him, and who never realized that His Beauty is hidden behind cypress and rose, behind the dark cloud and the jasmine bush.”
- 48 This idea has been beautifully summarized by Rūmī (Rumi-Isti‘lami (1372) *Mathnavī* Book I, l. 410-1):
The caliph one day to Laylī said: “Is that you? / Is it you who made Majnūn mad and lost?
You have nothing more than the other lovelies!” / “Silence!, she answered, for you are not Majnūn [mad]”.
- 49 LM11,75-79 starting with یاران به حساب علم خوانی .
- 50 For the pictorial interpretation of the scene and its mystical connotations, see Barry (2004) 14-5.

- 51 On this question, see Seyed-Gohrab (2003 314-9) ("Light as the marker of time and as background"). In the opening of the text, the importance of finding one's own inner light in the darkness of the world is stated in the prayer that Nizāmī addresses to God:
 ده با نور خود آشنائیم ده از ظلمت خود رهانیم ده *Free me from my own darkness / Show me my own inner light* (LM1,63).
- 52 Quoted by 'Attar-Istī'lami (1370).
- 53 Ghazali (1359) 4, *fasl* 1.
- 54 Ghazali (1359) 55, *fasl* 77.
- 55 Rūmī expresses this in a beautiful passage: "*the jewel-box of the chest holds a heart that is a drop and a universe, a pearl and an ocean, a slave and a king*" (Letter XXXIX).
- 56 Among other instances: *Laylī would hang flowers to trees / Whereas Majnūn would scatter pearls as offerings* (Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 97, 14); *Laylī would comb her long hair / Majnūn would shed tear-pearls* (Idem 97, 22); *Someone recited from Majnūn's poems / A lyric like pearls hidden* (Idem 135, 57); *When through his pearl-scattering poems / The story of Qays became known to the world* (Idem 275, 7).
- 57 This "dear friend" alluded to in the introduction of the treatise and in the last chapter was actually his close disciple and spiritual companion, 'Ayn al-Quzat al-Hamadānī.
- 58 See for example when she tells Majnūn that her husband has not touched her: *I am pierced but my pearl is not / No one has tested my diamond* (Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 235, 22). More generally she is referred to as "an unpierced pearl" from the beginning of the story:

ناسفته دریش هم طویلہ	بود از صدف دگر قبیلہ
چون عقل به نام نیک منسوب	آفت نرسیده دختری خوب

(LM11,53-54)

*From the shell of another tribe / Was an unpierced pearl of same rank.
 A precious girl, untouched and pure / Like reason, of such good fame.*

- 59 See Chebel (1995) 332.
- 60 This is all the more important as Laylī's virginity is an essential element of the plot: indeed, if *tashbīb* (Majnūn's original crime) was considered dishonourable, it was because it induced the possibility of the lover/poet to have dishonoured the beloved. It was only by marrying the girl to another man that her virginity could be proved to society (the husband, contrary to the lover had no reason to lie on this chapter). On this idea explaining somehow the social detestation of *tashbīb* which otherwise seems irrational and hard to account for, see Mestiri's commentary in Isfahani-Mestiri (2004) 181. The theme of *tashbīb* as revelation of a secret has also been used in a mystical sense, as Schimmel (1982) 73 remarks: "For the greatest sin of the lover is *ifshā'as-sirr*, divulgence of the secret. (...) Persian poets have therefore woven a veil of symbols in order to point to and at the same time hide the secret of love, longing and union."
- 61 See Chebel (1995) 332.
- 62 LM19,8: در بنده هزار در مکنون
- 63 On the seclusion of Laylī, see Seyed-Gohrab (2003) 243-51: *An incarcerated heroine* and more particularly his development on the theme of *parda* (244-5).
- 64 (LM43,29) شد شوی وی از دریغ و تیمار دور از رخ آن عروس بیمار
Pain and regret made him ill / Deprived of his bride's face
- 65 For a development on this idea, see the luminous article by Addas (1997) on the hermeneutic meaning of Ibn 'Arabī's poetic language and its cognitive function.
- 66 The theme is related to the famous *hadīth* by the prophet Muhammad: "I [God] was a hidden treasure and I wished to be known; so I created the creatures."
- 67 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 282, 4-6.

- 68 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 350, 49; 54; 56.
- 69 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 316, 110-111.
- 70 The «tongues» being the petals.
- 71 Reference to the quality attributed to the nightingale: he usually is هزار داستان ("with a thousand melodies").
- 72 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 317, 115-120.
- 73 In Ghazali (1359) 23, *fasl* 24, the same idea is expressed: "*In the beginning, there is shouting and screaming and crying, which means that love has not yet invaded all the territory [of the self]. When things reach perfection, and [love] invades all the territory, telling falls into eternal being/silence? and crying is transmuted into contemplation and not being/non-being? because pollution is transmuted into purity.*"
- 74 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 317-327, 122-166.
- 75 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 319, 150.
- 76 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 319, 153.
- 77 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 319, 159.
- 78 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 320, 167-169.
- 79 See Chebel (2004) 125: «...la salive est le corollaire du souffle spirituel du maître à son disciple (...) moyen mystique de transmettre son pouvoir spirituel (crachement dans la bouche du disciple)».
- 80 The platonic image is reused by Majnūn when he says: *We are one soul separated in two* (Nizami-Sarvatyan (1364) 319, 152).
- 81 Ghazali (1359) 4, *fasl* 2.

