

Islamic Art and Spirituality

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR



STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS

1987

it is by this Quranic title that the immortal work of 'Aṭṭār finally became known to the world. This Sufi masterpiece, in accordance with the inner meaning of the Solomonic knowledge of the language of the birds, does not only penetrate into the meaning of alien forms of discourse,² but is specifically concerned with the types and classes of beings in spiritual quest, for it treats not the language of just any species of animals but those birds whose wings symbolize directly the archetypal reality of flight, and of ascension in opposition to all the debasing and downgrading forces of this world, leading finally to escape from the confinement of earthly limitation. As 'Aṭṭār himself states.

*I have recited for you the language of the birds,
one by one.
Understand it then, O uninformed one!
Among the lovers, those birds become free,
Who escape from the cage, before the moment of death.
They all possess another account and description,
For birds possess another tongue.
Before the Simurgh that person can make the elixir,
Who knows the language of all the birds.³*

The title of *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* is at one and the same time a reference to the language of the birds or spiritual beings, their conference or union⁴ and to that esoteric knowledge which is the fruit of the spiritual journey. In fact the word *manṭiq* itself implies both language and meaning including the categories of logic which, as can be seen from the previous chapter, are far from being opposed to the spiritual since they derive ultimately from the Divine Word as the source of all certitude and meaning. The Logos is the ultimate source of logic.

'Aṭṭār was not the first to write of the birds and their language, of their nostalgia for the royal court of the Divine Beloved, of their hardships and suffering in undertaking that journey which is in reality none other than *the* journey, and of finally reaching their goal. Ibn Sīnā had already written his *Risālat al-ṭayr* (*Treatise on the Bird*) over two centuries before, to be followed by Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī, the celebrated

VI The Flight of Birds to Union: Meditations upon 'Aṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*'

«فَوَرِّثْ سُلَيْمَانَ دَاوُدَ وَ قَالَ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ عَلِمْنَا مَنْطِقَ الطَّيْرِ.»

And Solomon was David's heir. And he said: 'O mankind!
Lo! we have been taught the language of the birds
(*Manṭiq al-ṭayr*).

(Quran, xxvii:16)

مقامات طيور ما چنانست که مرغ عشق را معراج جان است

Our 'Stations of the Birds' (*maqāmāt-i tuyūr*) is such,
that it is the nocturnal ascent of the soul for the
bird of love.

('Aṭṭār, *Khusrāw-nāmah*)

ALL THOSE who are not completely at home in this world of fleeting shadows and who yearn for their origin in the paradisaal abode belong to the family of birds, for their soul possesses wings no matter how inexperienced they might be in actually flying towards the space of Divine Presence. The *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, that peerless poet, gnostic and lover of God, is an ode composed for this family of beings with wings, this family which in the human species corresponds to the seekers among whom many are called but few are chosen. The Shaykh himself called his rhyming couplets of some 4458 verses *Zabān-i murqān*, literally, the *Language of the Birds* or *Maqāmāt-i tuyūr*, the *Stations of the Birds*⁵ in reference to the language of the birds (*Manṭiq al-ṭayr*) which, according to the Noble Quran, God taught to Solomon. And

theologian, whose treatise on the same subject is among his lesser known writings.⁵ But 'Aṭṭār's treatment, while drawing from the works of his illustrious predecessors, is of another order. While Ibn Sīnā deals with the intellectual vision which allows the soul to return to its celestial family and al-Ghazzālī with the suffering and helplessness of the seeker who is saved solely through grace and Divine Love, 'Aṭṭār deals with the supreme spiritual and mystical experience of Union. He uses the Ghazzālīan theme of suffering through which the birds are finally able to enter the court of the celestial King. But he passes beyond that stage through the highest initiatic station whereby the self becomes annihilated and rises in subsistence in the Self, whereby each bird is able to realize who he is and finally to know him-Self, for did not the Blessed Prophet state, 'He who knoweth himself, knoweth the Lord'?⁶ In gaining a vision of the Sīmurgh, the birds not only encounter the beauty of Her Presence,⁷ but also see themselves as they really are, mirrored in the Self which is the Self of every self.

The *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* begins with an *alpha* which is already the mirror of the *omega* of the spiritual life for in its prelude is contained an account of the Divine Reality, an account which cannot but be the fruit of the beatific vision by the bird of the soul of the Sīmurgh. Through a rhapsodic crescendo the master poet proceeds in his praise of the One until he reaches the stage wherein he utters:

O thou who through thy manifestation hath become
invisible,

The whole universe is Thee, but none hath beheld Thy
face.

The soul is hidden in the body and Thou in the soul,

O Thou hidden in the hidden, O Soul of soul!

Although Thou art hidden in the heart and the soul,

Thou art manifest to both the heart and the soul.

I see the whole Universe manifest by Thee,

Yet I see no sign of Thee in the world.⁸

In his rhapsodic commentary upon the first *shahādah*, 'there is no divinity but the Divine' (*Lā ilāha illa 'Llāh*) 'Aṭṭār does not

only speak of God's Names and Qualities. His concern is not with only a theological exposition whether it be cataphatic or apophatic. Rather, he leads the enraptured reader through the symbolic language of gnosis (*ma'rifaḥ*) permeated with the fire of Divine Love to that knowledge of Unity which on the highest level is none other than the 'Transcendent Unity of Being' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).⁹ a knowledge which cannot be attained operatively save by passing through the hardships of the cosmic journey, passing through the gate of annihilation and reaching that vision of the Sīmurgh which both consumes and sanctifies.

Chants of glory of the One lead 'Aṭṭār to the praise of the Prophet as the Perfect Man, the Logos, the first created of God in whom God contemplates all His creation and for whom the created order is brought into being. If the sapiential understanding of *Lā ilāha illa 'Llāh* is *waḥdat al-wujūd*, that of the second testimony of Islam, *Muḥammadun rasūl Allāh*, is not only that Muḥammad is the messenger of God, but that all manifestation, all that is positive in the cosmic order comes from God. The second testimony is no less an assertion of unity (*al-tawḥīd*) than the first and in fact follows from it. 'Aṭṭār's vision of the Sīmurgh could not but make him aware that the Blessed Prophet is

The Master of the Nocturnal Ascent and foremost
among creatures,

The shadow of the Truth and the Sun of the Divine
Essence,

The Master of the two worlds and the king of all,

The sun of the soul and the faith of all beings,

His light was the purpose of creatures;

He was the principle of all existants and non-existants.

When the Truth saw that absolute light present,

It created a hundred oceans of light from his light.

It created that pure soul for itself,

Then created the creatures of the world for him.¹⁰

With his intoxicating poems in praise of God and His Prophet, poems which already contain the profoundest metaphysical truths and bear the fruit of the tree of gnosis, 'Aṭṭār sets out

upon the journey of the birds, a journey whose *omega* point is already contained in the *alpha* of the mystical epic. He returns the reader to the realm of terrestrial existence and the bondage of the soul of the profane man who has become entangled in the prism of passions, to the state of the birds ensnared and trapped far away from their abode of Origin. The prelude serves to remind the reader that the poem itself is the fruit of the supreme vision and that the guide, who describes the perilous journey of the birds to the presence of the Simurgh, has himself already undertaken the journey and is to be trusted as a veritable guide. The opening verses of the *Mantiq al-tayr*, being among the greatest masterpieces of Sufi poetry, reveal the nature and degree of inspiration of their author and enable the seeker to surrender himself to the work, to be led with the certitude that the guide is not simply an imitator of heresy but one who has already undertaken the journey towards the One, the *only* journey worthy of undertaking in this fleeting life.

The story of the *Mantiq al-tayr* is in itself a simple one. The birds assemble to select a king for they believe that they cannot live happily and in harmony without a king. Among them the hoopoe rises and introduces himself as the ambassador sent by Solomon to the Queen of Sheba. He considers the Simurgh as the One worthy to become their monarch. Each bird brings up a pretext and an excuse in order to avoid having to make that crucial decision of embarking upon the path and questions the hoopoe about the whereabouts of the Simurgh. The hoopoe answers each bird satisfactorily, removing its doubts and finally succeeding in having the birds prepare for the journey to meet the Simurgh. The hoopoe is chosen as leader and describes to them the stages of the journey to be undertaken. Having overcome these difficulties and responding again to the questions of the birds, the hoopoe and the other birds complete their preparation for the dangerous journey. They traverse the seven valleys of the cosmic mountain *Qāf* on whose peak resides the Celestial Monarch. The seven valleys leading to that peak which touches the void are those of quest (*alab*), love (*ishq*), gnosis (*ma'rifat*), contentment (*istighnā*), unity (*tawhīd*), wonder (*hayrat*), poverty (*faqr*), and annihilation (*fanā*).¹¹

These stages of the path are also the valleys and dales of the cosmos interiorized within the soul of the initiate.¹² Finally, the birds reach the abode of the Simurgh and after an initiatic transformation behold Her Presence as the mirror in which each bird sees it-Self, for the thirty birds (*sī murgh* in Persian) see the Simurgh at once utterly other than themselves and none other than the Self of their selves.

At the beginning of the journey each bird is addressed separately according to its characteristics, what it symbolizes as a distinct human type, and as a particular power of the soul. In reality each bird is at once an aspect or tendency of the human soul and a particular type of soul in which the characteristics in question are predominant. The birds addressed include the hoopoe, the wagtail, the parrot, the partridge, the falcon, the francolin, the nightingale, the peacock, the cock pheasant, the turtle-dove, the ring-dove, the gold-finch, and the white falcon. In their description one discovers at once their special qualifications and gifts and their limitative and inhibiting characteristics.

Thus the birds assemble to prepare themselves for the flight to the cosmic mountain (*Qāf*). Their debates and discussions reflect those between the master and his disciples within Sufi orders and contain some of the most profound and subtle descriptions of the problems and questions which confront those who actually undertake the journey upon the path of spiritual realization. Each bird speaks of itself in a manner reminiscent of other classical Muslim works on animals such as the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'.¹³ That the hoopoe becomes the guide upon the path, the symbol of the Sufi shaykh, *murshid*, or *pīr*, is due to its association with Solomon and the court of the Queen of Sheba and that it was already the ambassador of the King, for only one familiar with the King can guide others to His presence.¹⁴

The hoopoe describes the Simurgh as gnostics 'describe' God. One feather from Her wing fell upon China during the darkness of the night, for according to *ḥadīth* 'God created the world in darkness,' and from beholding this single feather all of the people of China fell into the state of excitement.

*How strange that at the beginning, the Simurgh
Manifested Herself in the middle of the night in China.
One of her feathers fell in the middle of China,
Of necessity excitement and agitation filled the whole
country.*

*That feather is now in the museum of that land.
That is why it is said, 'Seek knowledge even in China'.¹⁵*

If one feather of the Simurgh caused a whole nation to enter into a state of agitation and ecstasy, what must it be to behold Her Face! The birds become excited at hearing the account of Her Presence and prepare to undertake the journey. But the gravitational pull within the soul is not to be so easily overcome. The passionate soul makes a thousand excuses to avoid being consumed by the fire of purification. Each bird, therefore, begins to find an excuse. The nightingale, which symbolizes the love of external and distracting beauty rather than the interiorizing beauty which unites,¹⁶ makes the pretext that its love is the rose whose vision solves all its difficulties and problems. The hoopoe replies that the rose withers away and its beauty does not endure. The wise should seek a beauty which does not perish.

The parrot, which symbolizes the love of earthly existence and its prolongation, seeks the water of life to make the life of this world enduring and would be satisfied with such a goal. To this excuse, the hoopoe replies that the soul was created to be sacrificed to God, this sacrifice being its entelechy and *raison d'être*, hence its final joy and beatitude.

The peacock, which resided originally in paradise but which fell on earth because it aided Satan in alluring Adam away from his edenic innocence and perfection, seeks the perfections of formal paradise and claims that it cannot endure the vision of the Simurgh. It is like many exoterists who seek the pleasures of paradise in themselves rather than in relation to God not to speak of God Him-Self, who seek the house rather than the 'Master of the house'; to quote 'Aṭṭār.

The other birds follow suit in a similar vein, each providing an excuse in accordance with the limitation of its perspective or particular passion that dominates it. The duck which spends

its lifetime washing, symbolizing only external observance of religious rites without penetrating into their meaning, does not want to leave the water which it loves. The partridge which loves stones, symbolizing men and women tied to wealth and the possession of precious jewels, does not want to abandon the stone upon which it sits. The bearded griffon, symbolizing worldly and political power, does not want to relinquish its hold upon people of position and power in this world. The falcon, symbolizing those who seek the proximity of the earthly king and worldly power, does not want to forgo its position of favour at court. The heron, symbolizing states of sadness and depression in the soul, does not wish to leave behind this continuous change of psychic states which are like the ever changing waves of the sea. The owl, symbolizing miserliness, does not want to leave the corner of solitude it has chosen. The finch, symbolizing human weakness, makes the excuse that human beings are simply too weak to be able to have a vision of the Simurgh. In each case the hoopoe answers the birds and refutes the excuses they are trying to provide in order not to embark upon the path through the cosmic mountain to the presence of the Simurgh. He acts much like the spiritual master who removes from the path of the disciples all the infirmities of the soul which manifest themselves as obstacles upon the way. Having heard the secrets of the path and responses to their inner doubts and problems, the birds finally assemble to actually begin their sojourn.

It is at this stage, in the twentieth section of the *Manṭiq al-tayr*, that 'Aṭṭār introduces the incredible story of Shaykh-i Ṣān'ān, whose treatment marks one of the peaks of Sufi literature. Most likely based on the early stories of Muslim caliphs or other notables visiting Christian monasteries usually located in far away places of great natural beauty,¹⁷ the story of 'Aṭṭār deals with the tale of a celebrated and venerated Sufi master who, after fifty years of spiritual practice and with hundreds of disciples, falls in love with a young Christian woman. He forgoes his fame, reputation, spiritual function, and even religion for the sake of this love. He wears the girdle of Christian monks, drinks wine and even takes care of a herd of pigs while he burns for the love of the Christian maiden. He faces every

form of rebuke but no force in the world can alter his love which burns and consumes his being. He sings,

*I have passed many a night in ascetic practices,
But no one has revealed such nights as these.
Whoever has been granted one night such as this,
His day and night is spent in burning passion.
On the day when they were moulding my destiny,
They were preparing me for such a night.
O Lord what are these signs tonight?
Is tonight the Day of Judgement?
Reason, patience, the friend have departed.
What kind of love, what kind of pain, what kind of affair
is this?*¹⁸

All the means that the disciples use to bring the Shaykh back are of no avail. Finally only by an intervention of the Prophet who appears in the imaginal world of dreams does the Shaykh awaken to his original faith, make the ablution and enter Islam again, whereupon the Christian maiden, observing the transformation that has overcome Shaykh-i Šan'ān, also embraces Islam. All the lessons of the power of love, the inner and outer nature of men, the importance for disciples to be steadfast in their obedience of their master, the danger of pride caused by self-righteousness in the religious life and many other elements of the spiritual path are depicted in colours of unparalleled brilliance by 'Attār in this tale. No page of Persian literature is more moving than the description of the love of the venerable Sufi master for the beautiful Christian maiden.

There is, however, another pearl of wisdom of the greatest import hidden in the words of this literary masterpiece. This pearl concerns esotericism as such. The Shaykh's attraction to a Christian woman in such a shocking manner alludes obviously to the 'iconoclastic' and 'scandalous' character of all that concerns the supraformal Essence *vis-à-vis* the world of forms. But it also indicates clearly the crossing of religious boundaries through esotericism. Here, the maiden is not just the symbol of love, even of a 'scandalous' kind, but as a Christian she represents a being belonging to a different religious

universe. Through the attraction of love—which here represents realized gnosis—the Sufi master is not only carried from the world of forms to that of the Essence, but is also transported across religious frontiers. In 'Attār's incomparable story is to be found not only a highly poetic treatment of the theme of the love which attracts, consumes and transforms but also a powerful statement of the role of esotericism in making possible the crossing of the frontiers of religious universes. It is as if 'Attār wanted to state in the classical language of Sufi poetry that veritable ecumenism is essentially of an esoteric nature and that it is only through the esoteric that man is able to penetrate into the meaning of other formal universes.¹⁹

At this stage of the Epic, and after this long preparation the birds set out toward the Šimurgh. Having realized the necessity of having a guide, they choose the hoopoe as their master and promise to obey him. Their first glance upon the valley before them causes deep fear. They are also surprised that there are no other birds upon the path. The hoopoe explains that the very majesty of the King prevents just anyone from approaching Him. The seeker must be qualified and the qualified are always few in number.

The hoopoe explains the difficulties of the journey ahead and, when asked why it is necessary to have a guide at all, provides the traditional answer for the necessity of the prophet and the spiritual master who is his representative on the esoteric plane. The prophet is chosen by God and the spiritual authority of the shaykh is also bestowed from on high. Without the seal of approval of that prophetic authority which is possessed by the human embodiments of the Logos alone, no initiatic function and spiritual authority of an authentic kind are possible.

Another bird complains to the hoopoe of the difficulties of the path and lack of certainty of ever reaching the end. He is answered that since the goal is the Truth Itself, even if one were to lose one's life on this path, it would be worthwhile. As for all the apparent difficulties, they are most of all due to the fact that the roots of the soul are sunk in the creaturely world of multiplicity and that man is too dispersed and diverted by creatures to be able to concentrate his mind and soul upon the Creator.

One bird is ashamed of the sins he has committed and is reassured of the infinite mercy of God, and another of the fact that he is prone to a constant change of moods and states and is answered that through spiritual practice this weakness can be slowly cured. One of the birds complains of the snares of the passionate soul and is told that the lower soul must be conquered. Another fears the temptations of the Devil and the hoopoe answers that the Devil has power only as long as man is attached to worldliness. Once the world is overcome, so is the power of the adversary. Likewise, the hoopoe asserts that the attachment to houses and mansions is an obstacle to the path as is the love of external forms which perish. Only the 'beauty of the Invisible' is worthy of being loved. In a similar manner other important questions which usually lurk upon the path of those in whom there is already a dissatisfaction with where they are, who they are and who have therefore a need to seek and to find, are answered in a masterly fashion by the hoopoe who, being the symbol of the spiritual master, answers the birds as a Sufi master would his disciples.

Finally, the hoopoe enumerates the seven valleys to be traversed and describes each valley beginning with the valley of quest (*wādī-yi talab*) and ending with the valley of annihilation (*wādī-yi fanā'*) which cannot but lead to subsistence (*baqā'*) in God.

*Release from thee whatever thou hast, one by one,
Then begin a spiritual retreat by thyself.
When thy inner being becomes unified in selflessness,
Thou shalt transcend good and evil.
When good and evil pass, thou shalt become a lover,
Thou shalt become worthy of annihilation.*²⁰

Having heard the description of the seven valleys, the birds fly into the first valley to accomplish their journey of destiny. For years they traverse the ups and downs of the cosmic mountain. Many lose their lives; others become entrenched within some intermediate station. Of the many birds who commence the journey only a few finally reach the presence of the

Simurgh. Many are called but few are chosen. But as for the few who do reach the Presence of Divine Majesty,

*They observed a Presence without qualification and
description,
Beyond perception, reason and understanding.
If the spark of His Self-Plenitude were to be cast,
A hundred worlds would burn in one moment.
A hundred thousand esteemed suns,
A hundred thousand moons and stars, even more.
They observed them all in wonder,
Coming like atoms in a dance.*²¹

The birds begin to tremble before such majesty and lose hope of being able to gaze upon the Countenance of the King. The herald of the Court of Majesty discourages them from advancing any further, stating that the lightning of Divine Majesty would burn them all to cinders. But the birds insist that among thousands who set out only thirty have reached this stage and they will not leave. Rather, they would prefer to cast themselves moth-like upon the fire of the Presence of Majesty. Here, the story of Joseph mentioned in the Noble Quran is presented to them and they become aware that they had sold their celestial Self into 'slavery' by betraying it, as had the brothers of Joseph. When would each bird recognize Joseph as king? When would he recognize him to be what he is?

The very agony of this realization transforms each bird inwardly to such an extent that suddenly the self realizes the Self. The thirty birds (*sī murgh*) realize that they are the Simurgh.

'At that moment, in the reflection of their countenance, the Sī-murgh (*thirty* birds) saw the face of the eternal Simurgh. They looked: it was veritably that Simurgh, without any doubt, that Simurgh was veritably *these* Sī-murgh. Then amazement struck them into a daze. They saw themselves Sī-murgh in all; and Simurgh was in all Sī-murgh. When they turned their eyes to the Simurgh, it was veritably that Simurgh which was there in that place. When they looked at themselves, here too it was Sī-murgh. And when they looked both ways at once, Simurgh

and Sī-murgh were one and the same Šimurgh. There was Šimurgh twice, and yet there was only one; yes, one alone, and yet many. This one was that one; that one was this one. In the whole universe none understood such a thing. All were sunk in amazement; they remained in a state of meditation outside of meditation.

'As they understood nothing whatever of their state, they questioned the Šimurgh, without using language. They implored it to unveil the great Mystery, to solve the riddle of this reality-of-the-us and this reality-of-the-thou. Without the aid of language too, this answer came from Her Majesty: My sunlike Majesty is a Mirror. He who comes sees himself in that mirror: body and soul, soul and body, he sees himself entirely in it. Since you came as *Sī-murgh* (thirty birds), you appeared as *thirty* (*sī*) in that mirror. If forty birds, or fifty, come, the veil will likewise be lifted before them. Had you become a multitude, you would yourself have looked and you would have seen yourselves . . . I am far, far above Sī-murgh (*thirty* birds), for I am the essential and eternal Šimurgh. Therefore, engulf yourselves in me, that ye may find yourselves again in me . . .'²²

To be consumed by the light of the presence of the

Šimurgh is to realize that,

I know not whether I am thee or thou art I;

*I have disappeared in Thee and duality hath perished.*²³

But such a state cannot be reached until man tastes the annihilation of himself through the realization of his-Self.

*Become nothing so that thy being will become
established;*

*As long as thou art, how can Being establish Itself in
Thee?*²⁴

Through his incredible poetic art combined with the highest stages of spiritual realization, 'Aṭṭār depicts in inebriating beauty that final goal of human existence whose attainment is possible only through the actual journey of the bird of the

soul to the peak of the cosmic mountain and beyond but whose anticipated vision is made possible by a work of sacred inspiration such as the poem of 'Aṭṭār. In the *Manṭiq al-tayr* the Sufi sage of Nayshapur, at once gnostic and artist, has created a work of Islamic art which, like other masterpieces of traditional literature—and art in general—has an alchemical effect upon the soul, radiating a beauty which both melts and rends asunder, even if it be for a moment, the limited confines of earthly existence. It presents, as if by anticipation, a glimpse of that goal which is the end of all wayfaring and the entelechy of human existence.

NOTES

1. See B. Forouzanfar, *Sharḥ-i aḥwāl wa naqd wa taḥlīl-i āḥār-i Shāykh Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad-i 'Aṭṭār-i Nayshābūrī*, Tehran, 1340, (A.H. solar), p. 313. This excellent study of 'Aṭṭār contains a thorough analysis of the *Manṭiq al-tayr* on pp. 313–394.

On the life and works of this 6th/12th century Sufi master and poet see also S. Naficy, *Justajū dar aḥwāl wa āḥār-i Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār-i Nayshābūrī*, Tehran, 1320, (A.H. solar); H. Ritter, *Philologia X. Der Islam*, vol. 25, 1939, pp. 134–173; H. Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele*, Leiden, 1955; and *Colloquio Italo-Iraniano sul Poeta Místico Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār*, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rome, 1978.

2. In Sufism the art of mastery over the language of the birds, a science taught to Solomon, implies both the power to penetrate into the meaning of alien forms and the capability to know the meaning of the spiritual states and stations through which the seeker of the Truth must journey.

3. *Manṭiq al-tayr*, edited by M. J. Mashkur, Tehran, 1337, (A.H. solar), p. 316. The translation from 'Aṭṭār throughout this chapter is our own unless otherwise stated. Henceforth, all reference to this work will be to this edition which is accepted by the scholarly public as the most exact printed so far. For the translation of the *Manṭiq al-tayr* in European languages see M. Garcia de Tassy, *Manṭiq al-tayr, ou Le Langage des oiseaux*, Paris, 1863; Edward Fitzgerald, *Bird Parliament*, 1889, reprinted in Fitzgerald, *Selected Works*, London, 1962; G. M. Abid Shaikh, *Translation of Manṭiq al-tayr*, Ahmedabad, 1911; *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. R. Masani, Mangalore, 1924; *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. from Garcia de Tassy's French by S. C. Nott, London, 1954; and *The Conference of the Birds*, translated with and introduction by Afkhan Darbani and Dick Davies, Harmondsworth, 1984.

4. In Persian as in Arabic *manṭiq* itself means logic or meaning while *nūṭq*, from the same root, means speech as well as language. As already mentioned, in Islamic thought, logic, far from being opposed to spirituality, has been seen as the first step in the attainment of sapience and is treated as such by many figures such as Suhrawardī in his *Ḥikmat al-ishraq* and even Ibn Sīnā, the master of Peripatetics who wrote *Manṭiq al-mushriqiyyūn* (*The Logic of the Orientals*). See H. Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, trans. W. R. Trask, New York, 1960; Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 11; and Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Part III.

On the relation between logic and realized knowledge, which is attainable through the intellect in its original and not modern sense, see F. Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*; Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, trans. G. Polit and D. Lambert, Bloomington (Indiana), 1982; Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*.

5. On these treatises see Corbin *Avicenna* . . . pp. 193ff. Al-Ghazzālī's brother, the celebrated Sufi master Ahmad al-Ghazzālī, is also the author of a treatise on the birds of great literary beauty which is more or less the translation of his brother's Arabic work.
6. *Man 'araḥa naṣṣah faqad 'araḥa rabḥah*. This initiatic *ḥadīth* has many meanings of which one of the most profound characterizes the goal and end of the 'Aṭṭārīan epic.
7. Although modern Persian has no gender, the word *Simurgh* can be referred to in the feminine because first of all its Avestan origin *sāena merēgha* is feminine; secondly, the Arabic term for *simurgh*, namely *al-'anaq*, is feminine; and finally, the *Simurgh* on the highest level as understood by 'Aṭṭār refers to the Divine Essence (*al-Dhāt*) which in Sufi literature is referred to as the female Beloved. Moreover, the word *al-dhāt* itself is feminine in Arabic reflecting the metaphysical truth that the internal dimension of the Divinity which is identified with Beauty and Infinity is the prototype of femininity and is 'feminine' in the highest sense of this reality. In order to remain faithful to the original text, however, when 'Aṭṭār refers to the *Simurgh* as *shāh*, the term king rather than queen has been used, and also he rather than she.
8. *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, p. 6.
9. The numerous errors concerning the meaning of *waḥdat al-wujūd* bear witness indirectly to the esoteric nature of the doctrine in question. *Waḥdat al-wujūd* is nothing more than unity (*al-tawḥīd*) as understood at its highest level, an understanding which, however, cannot be attained by either philological expertise or the best of fideist intentions nor by the sharpest analytical tools of reason. As Rūmī has said, one needs a deep sea diver to fetch the pearl from the bottom of the sea. Only the eye of the heart can grasp the sense of *waḥdat al-wujūd* without either denying Divine Transcendence or positing an independent reality for 'that which is other than God' (*mā siwa Llāh*), an assertion which is a hidden form of polytheism. On the meaning of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and its distinction from pantheism as usually understood see T. Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, trans. D. M. Matheson, Wellingborough, 1976, pp. 28–30.
10. *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, pp. 18–19.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 227–291. The *Simurgh* in reality symbolizes both the Divine Essence which stands above the created order and the Divinity as Creator and principle of manifestation. The point on top of Mount Qāf is at once in the infinite expanse of the sky and the principle of generation of the whole cosmic mountain below it. Moreover, it is the point where the two orders, namely, the created and the uncreated, meet. Under this aspect, the abode of the *Simurgh* corresponds to the Logos or Intellect which is both created and uncreated depending upon how it is envisaged.
12. On the states and stations of Sufism see S. H. Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, London, 1972, chapter v; on the interiorization of the cosmos by the gnostic see Nasr, *An Introduction to the Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, chapter xv.
13. See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Dispute between Man and the Animals*, trans. J. Platts, London, 1869; and L. Goodman, *The Case of the Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn*, Boston, 1980.
14. 'Aṭṭār is re-asserting the perennial truth, currently forgotten in so many circles, that only the human embodiment of the Logos, that is the prophet, however that function is understood in various religions, can guide men to God. There is no authentic and complete spiritual realization without tradition. Only the ambassadorial background of the hoopoe qualified him to lead the birds to the presence of the King.
15. In reference to the famous *ḥadīth*.
16. In reality all beauty is interiorizing and liberating if only the beholder were to see in every form of beauty the reflection of the Beauty of the Face of the Beloved.
17. See Foruzanfar, *op. cit.*, pp. 320ff. More specifically Foruzanfar relates 'Aṭṭār's story of Shaykh-i Šan'ān to a very similar tale in Persian found in a manuscript in *Aḡa Sophia*, number 2910, in a treatise entitled *Tuḥfat al-mulūk* and attributed to Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī.
18. *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, pp. 85 et. seq.

19. On this fundamental and very timely subject see F. Schuon, *Esotericism, as Principle and as Way*, and *L'Islam/Christianisme-Visions d'Occidentisme ésotérique*, Milan, 1981.
20. *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, p. 284.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 293.
22. Corbin, *Avicenna* . . . pp. 201–202.
23. *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, p. 267.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 304.