SUFI BODIES

RELIGION AND SOCIETY IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM

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To **NANCY**

For making life beautiful and full of love

3

SAINTLY SOCIALITIES

Once Shaykh Abu l-Hasan ʿIshqi had come to a disciple's house that was in Mawlana Nizam ad-Din's neighborhood, God have mercy on him. As soon he entered the house, he began to sniff, turning his nose this way and that way, and said: "No smell of [a true] man comes from these environs." When they delivered these words to Mawlana Nizam ad-Din, his eminence said: "Faqir Abu l-Hasan has contracted a cold. His brain is stuffed up with a concern for status."

—KARAKI, *MALFUZAT-I AHRAR*

Sufi actors' significance in Persianate societies derived from the fact that the ideas and practices they espoused were treated as potent means for understanding and managing human affairs. This makes descriptions of communal life found within Sufi literature a major venue to observe the articulation of relations of power between individuals and social groups active in the Persianate context. As a prominent and influential domain, the Sufi social world with its various modes of cooperation, competition, and argumentation can be seen as a microcosm for the larger surrounding society. Although rhetorically invested in the superiority of the interior world, Persianate Sufis were keen contestants in struggles involving ideas, practices, and individuals that were played out in this-worldly terms. To get a relatively full sense of this world, we need to complement prescriptive statements with an assessment of how masters and disciples competed with each other while employing Sufi ways of claiming and cultivating prestige.

This book as a whole constitutes an account of Sufi social interactions as they come across in Persianate hagiographic literature. My specific purpose in the present chapter is to lay out the major axes of social differentiation deployed in these interactions that can act as a grid for discussions to come. As in the previous two chapters, my aim is to give an overall sense of the matter rather than providing a summary or an exhaustive account. I begin by highlighting the place of rules of etiquette described in Sufi sources that represent the foundations on which the edifice of Sufi social interactions was constructed. Taken as a whole, these rules amount to prescriptive programs operating in hierarchically arranged social groups that require individuals to act based on their positions relative to others. The two defining points of reference in such programs in the Sufi context are the positions occupied by the master and the disciple.

Mastery and discipleship are roles that could be occupied by the same person, depending on who he or she was confronting: great masters remained disciples in front of their own masters no matter how many others saw them as masters. The behaviors expected of masters and disciples presume the other half of the dyad, each one being thoroughly interpenetrated by the other. The repercussions of this paradigm are evident by considering the behaviors ascribed to some of the great masters. The rules of etiquette defined Sufis as a general group in society who were attempting to live in a certain way. But etiquette also helped some Sufis to coalesce around particular masters, to whom they would pay special respect as their spiritual guides. Such smaller groups were designated *tariqas* or fellowships of disciples devoted to the charismatic presence and particular practice of specific masters.

The principle of status differentiation at the base of the master-disciple relationship had a more universalistic application in the notion of a hierarchy that Sufis perceived to be embedded in the world at all moments in time. The idea that living friends of God constitute a hierarchy has roots in the earliest period in which Sufi ideas began to cohere as a distinctive Islamic paradigm. Such a hierarchy depended on the idea of friendship with God that allowed for differentiated proximity with the divine in conjunction with one's spiritual achievements. In the Persianate sphere during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Sufi authors understood this hierarchy as both a theoretical idea and something realized in the world in which they lived in the form of great masters.

The synchronic social world constituted of masters and disciples that comes into focus through considering Sufi etiquette and a worldwide hierarchy was cut through by diachronic lines of affiliation represented by genealogies and Sufi lineages going to earlier periods. The two most consequential principles in this regard were the status of being a sayyid—meaning claiming descent from Muhammad and ʿAli—and belonging to *silsilas* or chains of Sufis extending backward in time. The record indicates Sufis coming to place greater and greater emphasis on these lineages over the period 1300–1500. Valuations of lineage could sometimes stand in opposition to the interests of a charismatic master who claimed initiation via otherworldly experiences. In all, while the lineage never became an absolute paradigm for the assertion of Sufi legitimacy, its prestige certainly seems to have increased over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Lineages were venues for social cohesion as well as dispersion and competition since masters nearly always had genealogical descendants as well as many prominent students who competed with each other for their mantles after their deaths. This process produced an atmosphere of rivalry

between lineages as well as among different masters in the same lineage that is a prominent aspect of the social world reflected in hagiographic narratives.

The overlap between representations of individual bodies and the social body is a recurrent motif in this book. In the remainder of the present chapter, I take up, one by one, the playing out of this theme in the sphere of etiquette, universal hierarchy, and the organization of Sufi communities around lineages. Perhaps the most salient issue to be observed in abundance in these discussions is the fact that all human bodies we see represented in hagiographic narratives acquire their significations through linkages to the bodies of others. A focus on corporeal themes therefore consistently leads to social matters, here exemplified in patterned interactions expected of Sufis active in the Persianate world.

ETIQUETTE: MASTERS AND DISCIPLES INTERTWINED

According to his hagiographer, Baha' ad-Din Naqshband is said to have recited the following verses in the context of defining an accomplished Sufi:

> A friend of God has three markers, the first being this:
> When you see his face your heart is drawn to him.
> Second, when he speaks in gatherings,
> He steals everyone from his being to what he is saying.
> And the third indicator of the friend, the elect of the world, is this:
> No wrong deed ever comes from any organ of his body.[1]

Friends of God are to be seen as charismatic masters of their surroundings who have complete power over all the organs of their own bodies as well as the hearts and minds of their companions.

In referring to the master's bodily organs, Naqshband's primary allusion in these verses is to the fact that masters' bodies avoid all unlawful or unethical actions. Many hagiographic descriptions of masters' public comportment take the kind of corporeal control indicated here many steps further by showing them to be ultimate masters of social etiquette. Maintaining *adab* or proper etiquette while following the path was a major concern of Sufi authors from the earliest period and gave rise to a whole literary genre containing extensive prescriptions for how masters and disciples should behave in various situations.[2] One such popular manual of etiquette, written by the Suhravardi master 'Izz ad-Din Mahmud Kashani (d. 1335), prescribes that Sufi shaykhs should always be sincere, should live up to what they teach, should not abuse their disciples' trust in them, and should be humble in front of disciples despite their power over them.[3]

Handbooks prescribing Sufi behavior provide greater details for the behavior expected of disciples rather than masters since the latter are presumed to have already reached high stations. However, we can observe the etiquette expected of masters by looking at texts that describe them for the sake of attracting disciples. In this vein a hagiographic work dedicated to Ni'matullah Vali states that, when sitting in company, the master never moved his hands to touch his limbs or facial hair. He never did uncouth things like spitting, and no one ever saw him sleeping. He ate and drank very little and wore simple clothes and headgear in the tradition of Muhammad and earlier Sufi masters. A belt around the waist was the only thing that indicated he was a Sufi, since he never wore robes and other paraphernalia used by some Sufis to flaunt their religious vocation in public. His room was often adorned with flowers, and he spoke with such eloquence that one thought one was reading a book rather than listening to a person.[4]

Similar qualities are attributed to the Naqshbandi master Khwaja Ahrar. Because he refused to participate in childish games with his companions, his seriousness of purpose was evident throughout his childhood. One of his cousins recalled that other children would insist on his joining their play, and sometimes he would agree and get ready but would then refuse at the last moment. This is interpreted as an indication of his protection from sin (*'isma*), since this way he could not cross the bounds of appropriate behavior even inadvertently.[5]

Ahrar maintained his impeccable manners when he became a renowned master in later life. One man who acted as his personal attendant for many months on two occasions said that he never saw him yawn, cough, or expel phlegm or any other liquid from his mouth. He also never sat cross-legged, whether alone or while in company. Another person who observed him for thirty-five years claimed that he never once saw him spit even a fruit skin or stone from his mouth. He never blew his nose in company even when he was suffering from a cold because his bodily organs were simply incapable of creating an unpleasant impression for onlookers. On one occasion, some visitors decided to participate in his regular vigils and were impressed that, despite his age, he could sit erect for hours at night without moving a muscle or giving the least bit of indication of slumber. On this occasion he performed the morning prayer with the same ablutions that he had done at the beginning of the night, indicating his complete power over not only his limbs but even his internal organs.[6] As seen in these descriptions of Ni'matullah Vali and 'Ubaydullah Ahrar, the fully mature master is marked most strongly by a sense of total control over his body's functions and acts. Indeed, in considerable part, it is the very fact of such control, which ordinary human beings lack with respect to their bodies, that defines Sufi mastery as it is depicted in hagiographic literature.

As can be readily imagined, the imperative of proper etiquette pertained even more strongly to disciples than to masters, and prescriptions toward this

end form the bulk of the contents of Sufi *adab* literature. A brief but usefully illustrative example is a work by the master Muhammad Khabushani (d. 1531–32) that gives specific details for the way disciples' bodies are supposed to position themselves in the presence of masters. Khabushani writes that when the disciple enters the master's quarters he opens and closes the door carefully, steps lightly on the floor, and does nothing that would upset the master and compel him to withhold the benefits of his company. He sits so that the points of his toes or his profile never face the master and he never walks in front of a source of light, such as the sun or a lamp, so that his body is never in a position to cast a shadow on the master. He does not get too close to the master, fearing him to the degree to think that if the master's shadow were to fall on him, he would burn. He never closes his eyes or goes into meditative contemplation in front of the master. He never touches the master's clothes, prayer rug, or cane without being in a state of ritual purity, and never puts his feet on the place where the master sits even when he is not present. Khabushani states that these are just a few rules that apply since the overall paradigm requires each and every minute action on the part of the disciple becoming attuned to the master's presence in the world. In his view: "When the dervish performs a bath in the sea of etiquette, thereby dissolving in the fire of the master's company and finding the elixir of the master's gaze, then he becomes deserving of being in the solitary retreat (*khalvat*)."[7]

The self-negating dedication the disciple is required to show to the master is in evidence throughout the numerous stories cited in this book. An extreme example of this is given in the *Rashahat-i ʿayn al-hayat* where Khwaja Ahrar praises a certain Rukn ad-Din Khwafi for his unreservedly humble attitude. This man is reported to have said that he attached no hopes to the actions he had performed in life save for one: "One day the master Zayn ad-Din ʿAli Kula, a shaykh in Shiraz, was busy purifying himself, and I rubbed the clod of dirt he was going to use to clean himself after the call of nature on my cheek before giving it to him."[8]

This very brief consideration of etiquette literature conveys the connectedness of the roles occupied by masters and disciples in Persianate societies. Of course, the very idea of a Sufi master presumes the presence of disciples, and vice versa, making the two roles mutually interdependent by definition. As a consequence, in hagiographic works, we see disciples observing and memorializing the masters in their attempt to preserve their words and their physical demeanor. Disciples, on the other hand, are shown fashioning their lives in the images of masters, molding each and every action of their bodies to the masters' physical presence. Abstract rules of etiquette articulate these two imperatives in theoretical terms while hagiographic texts exemplify them in both content and form: they provide images of masters for disciples to emulate, and their whole literary demeanor drips with unqualified devotion to masters, conveying

the disciple's part in the theater of Sufi social performance. In a similar manner, paintings depict people placed around the master in carefully arranged scenes to display their relative positions based on age and religious status. For example, a painting attributed to the great master Kamal ad-Din Bihzad shows the poet Nizami instructing his son sitting in a group of older men (figure 3.1). The verses at the top right comment on the boy's transition into adulthood at the age of fourteen, comparing the moment to a cypress tree raising its top to display its height. The inscription above the door in the facade that occupies the left side of the building gives the painting's date. A verse within the frieze at the very top states:

> Company of dervishes is the eternal paradise.
> Servitude to dervishes is a tremendous treasure.

The painting depicts the incorporation of a young man into a Sufi collectivity, paying attention to the idea that this required the cultivation of devotion and servitude calibrated carefully with respect to the master and other members of the hierarchically arranged community.[9]

A look at some specific hagiographic stories can help us appreciate the fact that mastery and discipleship were functions performed according to societal scripts rather than reflecting personal predilections of particular individuals. Most revealingly, some masters are shown to react ambiguously to disciples' obeisance. A dervish reported that once when he was with Baha' ad-Din Naqshband in the public baths, disciples were arriving and would rub their faces against his feet. An attendant at the bath then came in and proceeded to kiss this dervish's feet before pouring water over the master's feet. Naqshband intuited that this made the dervish uncomfortable and reassured him by saying, "He is a supplicant coming through from the door of supplication. Since you are below me, he had to come through your door first."[10] In a slightly different attitude, Shaykh ʿUmar Murshidi allowed disciples to kiss his hands and feet but insisted that he would first do the same to them.[11]

In a story that lays out the greater repercussions of proper etiquette, a man named Majd ad-Din Surkhi reported that he had a great desire to rub his face on the feet of Zayn ad-Din Taybadi (d. 1389). One day, as the master was showing special kindness to him, he mentioned this desire to him, but this caused the master to become enraged. When this caused Surkhi to become extremely regretful for having expressed the desire, Taybadi showered great kindness once again and said, happily:

> "Being a Sufi is all about etiquette. In the path of being a wretch (*faqiri*), etiquette is the root of all other works. All other acts must feed into etiquette

3.1 The poet Nizami instructing his son. Attributed to Bihzad, 1482. 26.5 × 16 cm. Copyright © Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva. 1971-107/424.

since it is their great fruit and powerful result." After these instructions and gentleness, he said: "Just now the spiritual presence (*ruhaniyat*) of the Prophet, peace be upon him, appeared to me and I kissed his hand. The fortune of your hand that reached my hand, and the fortune of any hand that reaches yours, is that the fire of hell cannot touch it. Now take my hand and kiss it." I became extremely happy knowing this and went in front of him to kiss his hand and rub my face on it. I felt that I had been approved for, or rather had found, salvation.[12]

Connecting to the theme with which I began this book, this story displaces the meanings of the disciplinary and self-abnegating acts involved in following Sufi rules of etiquette from the physical acts to the necessity of acquiring religious merit and authority through connections to other persons. As such, the story is a stand-in for the overarching significance of etiquette as a social discourse that functioned to intertwine the lives of Sufis at many different levels of accomplishment.

HIERARCHIES OF DIVINE FRIENDSHIP

From the earliest extant Sufi discussions in Persian, we are told that friends of God were a form of divine mercy and that their presence in the world was necessary for it to continue existing.[13] Sufi theoretical discussions on friendship with God generally divide cosmic salvation history into two parts: the period from Adam to Muhammad is the era of prophecy, while after Muhammad begins the era of friendship. In the latter period, the teachings and companionship of friends constitute God's guidance for other human beings, and their miraculous powers represent God's beneficence in the world. These friends form a group of human beings that occupies a special religious rank, although its members live embedded in the general population and are quite often unaware of their chosen status. From an early period, Sufis also started to divide the saints into various classes, according to their achievements, perceived closeness to God, and the kind of miracles they could perform. Such classification is formalized in the notion of an elaborate hierarchy of God's friends spread over the earth.

In the Persianate historical setting, it was a commonplace Sufi idea that the continued existence of the world was contingent on the presence of this hierarchy of God's friends. The hierarchy culminated in a pole (*qutb*) who represented the consummation of all human qualities and abilities and was regarded as the perfect microcosmic mirror standing between the macrocosm on the one side and God on the other. All other friends were seen as weaker forms of this pole, and humans outside the category of friends were considered still weaker speci-

mens of the species. For anyone who wanted to advance on the Sufi path, it was necessary to, first, recognize those who were already a part of the hierarchy and then become attached to them through discipleship. This imperative led Sufis to join one another in wide-spread social webs that emanated outward from the most famous masters, who were regarded as the poles of their times by their followers.[14]

Hierarchies in the Persianate Sphere

By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, most Sufis took the presence of some type of Sufi hierarchy in the world as a fact and used it to situate masters they themselves witnessed around them. This was particularly the case with hagiographers, whose attempts to establish the reputations of their subjects included frequent reference to them as the poles of their times. In addition, they also tended to give these masters' prominent companions epithets denoting the status of friends on the lower rungs of the hierarchy. Hagiographic appropriation of the idea thus turned the grand universal hierarchy into a local court assembled around masters who were the subjects of particular narratives.[15]

The exact details of the hierarchy of saints vary considerably between different accounts generated in the Persianate sphere. In fact, one gets the general impression that an exact plan for the hierarchy was not a matter of great concern for many. For instance, a work dedicated to ʿAli Hamadani provides many different schemes for the way the hierarchy can be constituted. In the first place in the text where the subject is mentioned, the author provides a long hadith report (used in earlier schemes as well) that states, "As long as the heavens and the earth subsist, God will maintain (on the earth) three hundred men whose hearts are like the heart of Adam, forty whose hearts are like that of Moses, seven whose hearts are like the heart of Abraham, five whose hearts are like the heart of Gabriel, three whose hearts are like the heart of Michael, and one whose heart is like the heart of Israfil."[16] Whenever a person in any of the levels dies, someone from the lower ring is promoted upward, and the whole hierarchy adjusts accordingly. The fact of death means that the structure is constantly in motion, with new individuals being inducted into friendship from ordinary people beginning at the lowest level.

A little later in the same text, however, the author provides various schemes consisting of 96, 4,000, 20,000, and 422 saints that also function on the same principle of substitution cited for the first case.[17] He seems to suggest that any and all of these schemes may be applied to the situation at a given time. These schemes appear as different but equally valid ways of taxonomizing friendship as a Sufi institution.

As mentioned previously, the hierarchy's most crucial figure is the pole, the position for which hagiographers usually nominate their protagonists. The pole's crucial cosmic function is stated succinctly in a work dedicated to Niʿmatullah Vali that states: "All divine graces that reach the world and those who live in it do so through the mediation of the pole's being. These graces first descend upon his holy heart and then divide out from this ocean into brooks that are the hearts of other friends of God and close companions. From there, they branch out into rivulets to reach all that remains."[18] The pole is therefore the sole conduit for God's continuing interaction with the created world and all humans wishing to partake of divine emanation must relate to him either directly or through intermediaries close to him.

When hagiographic authors place their favorite saints at the center of the hierarchy with other companions strewn all around, the effect is that the world appears seeded with saints belonging to the various classes that are part of the hierarchy. In such a world the key issue for those who want to be Sufis is to identify those who are already in the hierarchy and become devoted to them or their associates. Ultimately, they themselves have to become friends of God to fully recognize others in the hierarchy, but the journey has to begin through attachment to masters identifiable as friends. Once such an identification has been made, the novices are required to submit to the masters in all their endeavors.

LINEAGES

So far in this chapter I have discussed matters that pertained to Sufis as a general social group in Persianate societies; etiquette and the hierarchy of God's friends are universal principles that mattered to Sufis across groups and subgroups. In the remainder of this chapter, I will consider the paradigm of membership in Sufi lineages that differentiated Sufis from each other on the basis of historical constructions connecting individuals to ancestors or forbears initiated into particular identities or modes of practice.

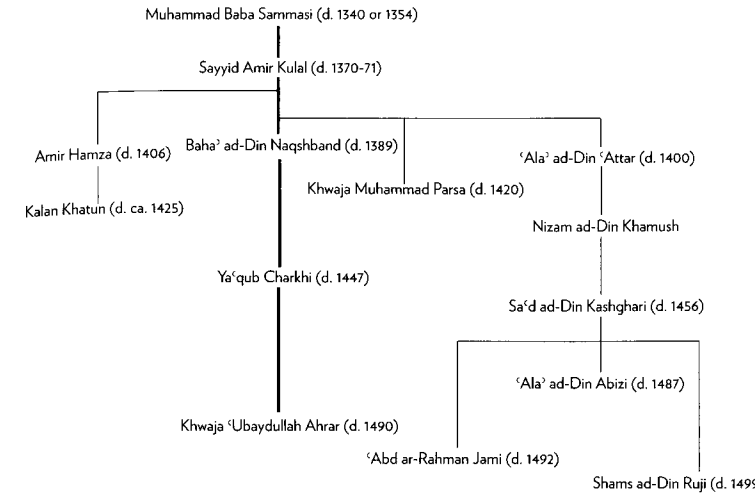
The two types of lineages that mattered most in the Persianate context, often invoked in tandem, are the status of being a *sayyid* (claiming descent from Muhammad and ʿAli), and belonging to a chain (*silsila*) of Sufis extending backward to the time of the Prophet. Famous masters such as ʿAli Hamadani, Niʿmatullah Vali, Qasim-i Anvar, and Muhammad Nurbakhsh combined the honor of being sayyids with initiation into important Sufi chains. Their hagiographies make a point of asserting their genealogical distinction as a part of their claims. In a case reflecting respect for sayyids due from nonsayyids, a Naqshbandi hagiography relates the story of someone who saw Muhammad's daughter Fatima

in a dream being very cross with him. When he inquired the reason for this, she replied that he had been rude to one of her descendants, who ought to be respected irrespective of any infractions of etiquette he may have committed.[19] In a similar vein, Muhammad is said to have appeared in a dream to Sayyid ʿAli Hamadani to say that whoever is descended from him has no reason to ask for aid from the ever-living prophets Khizr and Elias.[20]

In contrast to the more or less constant regard for sayyids, there is a general tendency over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries for the masters' personal charisma to become overshadowed by the legitimacy they derived from the chains to which they belonged. This is an understandable development given that this period saw a considerable expansion of Sufi communities that were subdivided into smaller groups centered on masters with varying ranges of influence. By extending backward in time, Sufi chains provided legitimacy for the new communities being formed by the various competing disciples of any major master.

Two different angles on interrelationships between Khwajagani-Naqshbandi masters can illustrate the opposing forces that coexist in the lineage principle (figure 3.2). Seen from the viewpoint of a particular practitioner such as Khwaja Ahrar, the chain is imagined as a straight line connecting him to Baba Sammasi and earlier masters via the intermediacy of Charkhi, Naqshband, and Amir Kulal. But when examined as a historical phenomenon, this chain contains multiple subdivisions extending outward from each linking point. Historiographically, then, the Khwajagan-Naqshbandiyya consists of multiple collateral chains that include masters with no direct connection to Ahrar, such as Amir Kulal and his descendants, Muhammad Parsa, ʿAlaʾ ad-Din ʿAttar, Saʿd ad-Din Kashghari, and ʿAlaʾ ad-Din Abizi. Precisely because the chain mattered deeply for claims of authority put forth by an individual master and his community, it was the primary arena in which various masters and their hagiographers constructed their own rights of spiritual inheritance and negated those of their rivals. The same principle applied to the status of sayyids as well since many different genealogical groups competed with each other for being regarded as heirs to the Prophet.[21]

While the status of being a sayyid was a matter of genealogical claim by a person or a family, to be seen as belonging to a chain required Sufis to experience events that would connect them to masters already in the lineage. Hagiographic narratives represent the establishment of such connections in a number of different ways. To provide a sampling of this theme, in the following pages I will discuss three different cases of Sufis becoming incorporated into chains. These include: individuals perceived as being born into lineages, ritual initiations involving oaths that induct someone into a chain, and initiations in dreams and visions. These three ways of forming links to lineages are deployed



3.2 Chart 1: Cohesion and dispersion in Khwajagani-Naqshbandi lineages.

sometimes separately, and at other times together, in narratives aimed at legitimizing Sufi masters' claims.

Born to God's Friendship

Hagiographic narratives concerned with Bahaʾ ad-Din Naqshband provide an example of someone being incorporated into a Sufi chain prior to his birth. The author writes that the great master was born in the village of Qasr-i Hinduvan (the "Abode of the Indians" that was later renamed Qasr-i ʿArifan, or "Abode of the Knowledgeable," in his honor) near the Central Asian city of Bukhara. Three days after his birth, the Khwajagani master Muhammad Sammasi passed through the village and Naqshband's grandfather, who was devoted to Sammasi, presented the infant to him for a blessing. As soon as he saw the child he said, "He is our son and we have accepted him." After this instantaneous recognition, he turned to his companion Sayyid Amir Kulal and recalled that a number of times when he had passed through this village he had told Amir Kulal that the dust of this place emitted the smell of a special man. This time the smell had become intensified, and he had remarked that perhaps that man had been born. He then identified the child as the awaited one and expressed the hope that he would be a leader of his age.[22]

Naqshband's hagiographer writes that the master considered this incident his first incorporation into the Khwajagani chain of Sufi authority. The fact that Sammasi addressed his words to Amir Kulal was particularly significant since

the latter eventually acted as Naqshband's immediate teacher and predecessor in the chain.[23] The most noteworthy aspect of this story is the close perceived connection between human bodies and the earth from which they are constituted. The body's origins in dust (*khak*) are universally acknowledged in Persian linguistic usage, but here this aspect gets accentuated through the notion that the saintly body is formed of special dust that gives off characteristics identifiable by other Sufis even before it is constituted into a human corporeal form. Also, this relationship between the earth of a particular place and the bodies that rise from it makes it possible to regard saints' birthplaces as sacred locations.

Stories similar to the ones told of Naqshband are found in the hagiography of the later master Khwaja Ahrar. One of his hagiographers states that for four months before the master's moment of conception his father felt like he was carrying a great burden. As a result of this he spent this time in seclusion and felt himself to be greatly relieved when the seed was transferred from him to the womb of the future master's mother.[24] Ahrar's body therefore had weight and potency before its formation in a recognizeable form. Later, a Naqshbandi master by the name of Khwaja Shihab ad-Din Shashi immediately recognized Ahrar's impending greatness when he saw him as a child. He rubbed his face all over Ahrar's body and lamented that he was too old to be alive at the time in the future when the promise he could see would become manifest in the world.[25]

Outside the Naqshbandi milieu, the idea that the elect among Sufis can recognize their successors even before their births is affirmed in an autobiographical narrative written by Muhammad Nurbakhsh, who claimed to be the messiah himself because he was the greatest Sufi adept of his age. Nurbakhsh's messianic confession is an isolated case that can be called an autohagiography: it is written exactly in the form of a hagiography except that, unlike other such texts, he eulogizes himself and his companions instead of earlier masters. Nurbakhsh claims that some time before he had been conceived his father (a sayyid) became seriously ill, and people thought that he was about to die. When he realized this, he assured them that that was impossible since he still had to father the future saint. When Nurbakhsh's mother was pregnant with him, his father would point to her stomach and say that this is my son Muhammad who is going to do such and such. The mother's companion teasingly told him it was a girl when the child was born. He flew into a rage and declared that he was not a sayyid if it was not a boy. She then told him that it was a boy with blue eyes. He rejected this as well, and when his eyes were proven not to be blue, it underscored the fact that he had substantial specific knowledge about Nurbakhsh's body before the child's birth.[26]

In claims put forth in these stories, lineages are seen as inherent in the materials that come to form Sufi bodies. This is, of course, the basis on which

genealogical inheritance is privileged in every context in which it carries value. However, it is important to note that the hagiographers take care to show the claims being made and ratified in the social sphere, by being put in the mouths of those who are already in the lineages in question. Whether justified through parents or through Sufis acknowledged as masters, incorporation into lineages occurs through speech issued during public performances. In Nurbakhsh's case, this pertains to establishing his credentials as a sayyid from his father, whereas statements about Naqshband and Ahrar link the charisma perceived to be inherent in their bodies to the Khwajagani chain of Sufi authority. The process is bidirectional since in it masters' authority is domesticated to the abstract chains while the chains acquire local material hosts in the forms of masters' bodies.

Rituals of Initiation

Although Naqshband, Ahrar, and Nurbakhsh are presented as born friends of God in hagiographic representation, these men also underwent explicit initiations into the Sufi chains to which they belonged in later life. Such initiations were ritual processes whose symbolic elements marked particular moments in Sufis' lives as points of transformation and emphatic commitment. Here I would like to consider two examples of such initiations that are presented in the hagiographic record in appreciable detail.

The hagiography of the Iranian master Amin ad-Din Balyani provides a description of the method of initiation employed within his community in southern Iran.[27] The author of this work reports the shaykh to have said that the cutting of hair and wearing of a dervish's clothes that occurs during Sufi initiation are the equivalent of a master laying down the foundations of a fortress for someone who is under attack and needs to protect himself. The foundation alone does not carry out the whole work of protection, but no fortress can ever be built without first laying down the foundation. The initiation appears here as a foundation made out of words, upon which the disciple builds the fortress using the effort of his mind and body.

The hagiographer relates that, when carrying out the initiation, Balyani would sit the prospective disciple down in front of him and begin with Arabic prayers that consisted of greetings to Sufis of the past and present and a call for God's blessings upon the Prophet and those who have chosen to follow his commands. Then he would instruct the disciple to repeat after him that from here on he would abstain from acts against God's will and do only that which pleases Him. Then he would take scissors and, one by one, cut three hairs from the disciple's forelock, saying each time in Persian, "With the permission of God, the Prophet, Shaykh Abu Ishaq, and Shaykh ʿAbdallah." Following this, he would slowly take hold of a quantity of hair from the right side, saying a long

prayer in Arabic that recalled God as light and as the one who bestows light and guidance on human beings. The ritual would finish with the shaykh putting the cut strands of hair on his own head and saying more prayers in Arabic, calling on God's mercy, guidance, and aid, and asking for protection from the evils of sinning, pride, and doubt.[28]

This description provides a generalized initiation procedure to be followed in all cases, which would be adapted to the particular relationship between a master and a disciple in actual cases. The initiatory moment would then mark the crossing of a significant threshold within a longer history between the two individuals. To see the full impact of what the initiation accomplished requires considering the periods before and after it as well.

A good example for an initiation in context is Jaʿfar Badakhshi's description of his relationship with the Kubravi master ʿAli Hamadani, described in Badakhshi's work *Khulasat al-manaqib* (*The Summary of Virtues*). Badakhshi provides a number of details from Hamadani's early life, but his portrayal of the master as a shaykh is keyed mostly to the author's own interactions. He reports that as a young man in search of religious guidance he went to the village of ʿAlishah in Khuttalan in 1371–72 where one of his companions saw a dream informing him of the arrival of a friend of God in their midst in a year's time. Hamadani then appeared there exactly a year later and greatly impressed Badakhshi with his knowledge of Sufi literature and the ability to provide answers to religious questions.[29] Badakhshi tried to draw close to Hamadani, but the master rejected the overtures, which caused the latter to become sad and troubled. Eventually, however, he was accepted as a disciple when the friend who had originally seen the dream heralding Hamadani's arrival interceded on his behalf and the master promised to accept his oath after a forty-day Sufi retreat. This friend interceded on his behalf on two occasions: first, when he informed him of Hamadani's impending arrival through the dream and, second, when he asked the master to accept him. When he came to the master's presence on the appointed day, he felt confounded as he saw only a form of glittering light where Hamadani's body was supposed to be present. He came to his senses after a few moments, and the master asked him to sit down in front of him.[30]

Although Hamadani conveyed some of his opinions to Badakhshi on this occasion, he deferred the acceptance of his oath of discipleship, which eventually took place more than two months later, after Hamadani once again tried to dissuade Badakhshi from it. At the eventual moment of success, Hamadani took one of Badakhshi's hands between his own, and the disciple saw it enveloped by a light that filled the whole room. He then felt his turban taken away from his head without his knowledge. He presented it to the master as an offering, saying that the cloth could be made into the straps of his sandals. Hamadani replied

that a handkerchief would be more appropriate. Hamadani then used a pair of scissors that had appeared miraculously out of nowhere to cut some strands of hair from Badakhshi's forelock as a part of the initiation (202–3.).

Hamadani led the life of an itinerant dervish, and, in the years after the initiatory oath, Badakhshi was physically present in his company only sporadically. However, Hamadani never reneged on his responsibility to guide him, sending him instructions in dreams or in messages conveyed by people who met him in various places and then traveled to where Badakhshi lived. Hamadani could be a severe master, once telling Badakhshi to leave his company or he would break open his head with his cane because he had failed to comprehend some instructions. He later called him back and said that the master's anger is a kind of mercy during the early stages of a Sufi's path (206–8).

Badakhshi's work carries the tone of a lover who finds pleasure in all aspects of the beloved's attention toward him, a type of relationship whose details are discussed in chapter 4. After reporting that Hamadani berated and mocked him in one instance, he immediately states that all this was for his own good and that he deserved to be treated in this way (293). He describes the pleasure of having experienced physical proximity to the master when he narrates the moment of seeing Hamadani's sweet-smelling body arrive in Khuttalan after the master's death on the way back from Kashmir: "This poor man, who is the collector of that noble man's effects, has trained other dervishes in seclusion for three months after having heard the sound of zikr from every part of his abode and every part of his body. He has smelled his perfume and tasted the honey of the path on every one of his teeth. These experiences are all branches that have stemmed out from that noble person to reach these beggars, the collectors of his fruit" (284). Badakhshi indicates his closeness to Hamadani as well by telling the reader that the master had entrusted him with his leather shirt and water vessel once when he had gone away on a trip and installed Badakhshi as the caretaker of other disciples. He felt a very strange, overpowering sensation whenever he put on the shirt, the like of which he had never experienced before. The closeness between the bodies of the master and the disciple in this instance is also marked by Badakhshi's report that he later had a dream in which the Prophet Muhammad gave him three things. After the dream, ʿAli Hamadani gave him three things in real life: a toothpick, a silver earwax remover, and iron tweezers for pulling nose hair (296).[31] These instruments are connected to three primary senses—taste, hearing, and smell—so that the master's gift was meant for the intimate grooming and training of the disciple's body in order to make it progress properly on the Sufi path. Additionally, the tools could be taken as gifts indicating Hamadani's confidence in Badakhshi's ability to take care of other, less advanced disciples.

Although lineage was the dominant form of legitimation among Persianate Sufis, belonging to one of the major chains through explicit connection to a living master was not a completely hegemonic principle. In cases that subvert the lineage principle, the imperative of having a Sufi pedigree is fulfilled through interactions with past figures that occur in the realm of dreams and visions. Such interactions are used to solidify masters' credentials even in cases where they are shown to have undergone initiation or apprenticeship with living masters. For example, although Baha' ad-Din Naqshband was ratified as a member of the Khwajagani chain through Baba Sammasi and Amir Kulal, his foremost claim of belonging to this group came from a vision in which Khwaja ʿAbd al-Khaliq Ghijduvani initiated him as his follower in the presence of all the masters who formed the intervening links in the chain.[32] Similar stories can be seen in works devoted to ʿAli Hamadani, Muhammad Nurbakhsh, and others, who are shown to interact with figures such as Muhammad and earlier Sufi masters in their visions and dreams as a matter of course.

I would like to exemplify the presence of charisma outside the main charismatic chains by discussing the local shaykh Ahmad Bashiri whose life is memorialized in a single work. According to his hagiographer, Bashiri related to his companions that, in the beginning of his travels on the Sufi path, he grew completely tired of the sights and smell of normal life and would often retire to the wild, away from home. One day, as he was sitting under a tree by a stream, he went into a trance and saw himself go through seven levels of increasingly torturous hells where he experienced intense burning of his body and felt that all his negative qualities were incinerated one by one.

The journey eventually brought him to the source of the fire, where he realized that, by now, his whole body had come to be composed of nothing but fire. Here he saw many others with similar bodies and made his way to someone who appeared to be the leader. Upon being questioned, this person identified himself as the leader of hell and refused to help Shaykh Bashiri escape the place. The shaykh was downcast over this, but then he saw an immensely beautiful person appear in the same place and was drawn to him. This turned out to be Muhammad, and when the shaykh met him he got the sensation of a drop falling into the ocean. The prophet took charge of him and led him on an ascent to God's throne, which they circumambulated together. Shaykh Bashiri then came out of his trance and realized that the experience had lasted sixteen days, during which his actual body had become covered with dust, having been exposed to the elements. He then made his way home where his mother told him that the family had been worried about him and unable to find him despite extensive searching. She had trouble believing his account of where he had been because

they had searched the area near the stream multiple times and had seen no one there. He explained this to his companions by referring to the accounts of prior Sufis who said that the body becomes invisible to ordinary humans when it is undergoing an extensive experience in the interior world, as had been the case with Bashiri's sixteen-day trance.[33]

As with initiations that occur in the material sphere, Shaykh Bashiri's experience in this story was a major transformational point in his life. The most traditional aspect of the narrative is the encounter with Muhammad and the ascension to God's throne in his company, through which the shaykh joined countless other Sufis before him who had gone on similar journeys that emulated Muhammad's celebrated night journey (*miʿraj*).[34] This part of Bashiri's experience marked him as an Uvaysi Sufi, a term that refers to the relationship between Muhammad and a man named Uvays Qarani who converted to Islam without ever meeting the Prophet.[35] More significantly, the story shows the shaykh undergoing a kind of rebirth into a new body that is ratified through both internal experience and external observation. On the interior side of things, he sees his original body completely consumed by fire and then, through his contact with Muhammad, he acquires a new body that receives the distinction of journeying to the proximity of God's throne. And, on the exterior side, first his normal body disappears from the sight of ordinary people for the whole period he is in a trance. When he reappears to his companions after his extraordinary experiences, he is in effect a new physical being, devoid of corporeal weaknesses and infused with the effects of his trance.

Shaykh Bashiri's experiences in this story exemplify the central Sufi concepts annihilation (*fana'*) and subsistence (*baqa'*), the ultimate two goals sought by a person on the Sufi path. As discussed in chapter 1, the first refers to the ideal of annihilating one's self or ego so that the ordinary world becomes extinct to one's being, and the second indicates the further step of coming to subsist solely in and through divine reality. These concepts received extensive elaboration in Sufi theory early in history and were taken for granted by the period that concerns me in this book.[36] As we see them played out in Shaykh Bashiri's story, annihilation and subsistence have psychological as well as physiological aspects. Although much of the experience he recounts takes place within a trancelike state in the interior realm, it affects his body by first making it disappear and then transforming it into a new being upon his return to normalcy.

Experiences similar to these are attributed to saintly bodies in other narratives as well. For example, we are told that Baha' ad-Din Naqshband said that once, when he experienced a total annihilation, his body lost all qualities of life for a period of six hours. Then, when he came back to himself, all his organs started to function one by one, and it took some time before his body became fully normal.[37] In these cases as well as in numerous other examples in Persian-

ate Sufi literature, annihilation denotes a literal fulfillment of the Sufi imperative to die before one's death, and the body's coming back to life is presumed to be a new corporeal presence marked by subsistence in God. In all the many forms in which initiations could happen, they represented beginnings of the paths that could lead Sufis to claim having undergone highly desirable religious experiences.

COMPETITION IN A SHARED WORLD

The three forms of Persianate Sufi social practices I have discussed in this chapter—emphasis on etiquette, hierarchies embedded in the world, and lineage as marker of authority—were significant for promoting cohesion among Sufis on one side and causing dissension on the other. In a given community formed around a particular master or family, the three practices acted as the foundations for a collective identity. But, between such communities, charges of lack of etiquette, rejection of charismatic status, and disputes over the values of various lineages and sublineages formed the grounds on which to carry out rivalries and ideological battles. The social world depicted in hagiographic narratives runs the gamut of all the possibilities of relationships between individuals and groups in this regard and presents all that one can imagine to be the case in any large-scale social discourse operating in a complex stratified society.

In historical terms, the hagiographic record indicates a gradual increase in mutual hostility between Sufi groups over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. As Devin DeWeese has suggested in his many studies of Sufis in the Mongol and Timurid periods, this rise in intergroup tension is concomitant with the hardening of communal boundaries, with a particular emphasis on lineage rather than the perceived charisma of individual masters.[38] For the purposes of my discussion in this chapter, it is worthwhile to consider briefly some narratives produced toward the end of the period that concerns me in order to see Persianate Sufism as contested domain in fullest bloom.

Over the course of the fifteenth century, various collateral lines emanating from Baha' ad-Din Naqshband constituted the most widespread and powerful group of Sufis active in Central Asia. From a sociopolitical viewpoint, the most important Naqshbandi figure of the period was undoubtedly Khwaja 'Ubaydullah Ahrar, who is the subject of numerous hagiographic narratives.[39] The most famous such work, 'Ali b. Husayn Kashifi Safi's *Rashahat-i 'ayn al-hayat* (*Dewdrops from the Source of Life*), is a composite text that relies on earlier hagiographies to give a rationalized account of the whole history of Khwajagani-Naqshbandi chains. Safi's account is quite tendentious, since he is compelled to present the history as a planned unfolding of the chain leading to the life and

work of Khwaja Ahrar, which he presents based on his own observations as well as relaying from other disciples. Safi's narrative of his own incorporation into the chain mirrors some of the themes I have already discussed. He reports that his father said that when he was born in Sabzavar in 867 AH (1463 CE) he was blessed by a member of Khwaja Muhammad Parsa's family on the very first day of his existence. He then became subject to the illness of colic (*umm as-sibyan*), but the visiting master intervened again to cure him and reassured the parents by saying that this boy is destined to do great things and the disease would not be fatal.[40]

Safi's great work, to be accomplished as an adult, was, of course, the writing of the *Rashahat*. His representation of Khwaja Ahrar's life immediately before the master took an oath with a Naqshbandi preceptor is instructive for observing the atmosphere of competition between masters and disciples in Herat. Although Safi's reports claim to represent events that occurred in the first three decades of the fifteenth century, his interpretive gloss more likely reflects the situation of competition that prevailed toward the end of the fifteenth century when his narrative was written.[41]

Safi represents Ahrar as a gifted young man who went around to the various masters in Herat while attempting to define the path he wanted to follow. Before tying himself definitively to the Naqshbandi chain through Ya'qub Charkhi, he spent time with the triumvirate of Shah Qasim-i Anvar, Baha' ad-Din 'Umar, and Zayn ad-Din Khwafi, the most influential masters in the city at the time. In later life he described Qasim-i Anvar as an exceedingly charismatic and perceptive man who had met Naqshband in his early life. Marking a somewhat ambiguous incorporation into the appropriate lineage, Safi reports that Ahrar said that, "sometimes in his [Qasim's] company it seemed that his eminence, the Sayyid, considered himself to be on the path of the Khwajagan, may God sanctify their spirits."[42] Qasim's effect on his disciples is exemplified in the story of one Pir Kil, who, although otherwise quite loquacious, would become tongue-tied in front of the master. As soon as he saw him, his face would change color, and then keep changing to a different color in each passing moment. He was so overwhelmed by respect and deference for the master in his interior that he would do a prostration after every step when walking toward or away from him. Although not fully approving of this behavior, Qasim said that this was all the man was capable of, and he saw it as his job to bring people to the fruition of their innate qualities.[43]

Compared to this show of great awe in the presence of the master directed toward Qasim, in Safi's representation, Khwafi's followers seemed to have been lacking in proper conduct. On one occasion, when Ahrar was at Khwafi's place, the shaykh went into a trancelike state (*istighraq*). Then a certain Mawlana Mahmud Hisari, who considered himself a vicegerent of Khwafi, appeared

there with some followers, desiring to study one of Khwafi's works with him. To have their way, this group proceeded to do rude things like stamping their feet and coughing so that the master would come out of his trance. When this proved unsuccessful, they decided to intervene upon him through the interior and sat down and concentrated their thoughts on the master until he awakened and gave them the lesson they sought. Ahrar found this episode to be a case of terribly uncouth behavior and reprehensible etiquette and avoided Khwafi's gathering from then on.[44]

Safi's description of Ahrar's opposing attitudes to Qasim and Khwafi are represented in a dream he saw in which he was standing in the middle of a great highway that had smaller roads leading away on the sides. Suddenly, Khwafi appeared and asked that he come along with him to his village, to which Ahrar felt disinclined. Then Qasim appeared on the highway, riding a white horse, and asked him to come with him on the highway itself, which led to the city. Ahrar climbed onto the horse and went along.[45] The relative sizes of the two roads and the habitations to which they led reflected Ahrar's estimation of these masters' stations next to each other.

Controversy Over the Ideas of Ibn al-ʿArabi

Khwaja Ahrar's experiences in Herat reflect his involvement in a general controversy that pitted Sufis against each other depending on their appraisals of the ideas of the great theoretician Ibn al-ʿArabi. In the history of Sufi thought, Ibn al-ʿArabi's work forms a watershed for the discussion of numerous topics, including the idea of a hierarchy of God's friends and the concentration of authority in a "pole" of the times. His ideas became major venues for Sufi discussion in later centuries when various authors tried to give cogent accounts of his system, often with modifications and further elaborations.[46] In the Persianate arena, nearly unconditional support for his ideas is exemplified in Khwaja Muhammad Parsa's statement regarding his two most influential works: "The *Fusus* (*Bezels*) is life (*jan*) and the *Futuhat* (*Openings*) the heart (*dil*)."[47] Prominent Sufi figures such as ʿAli Hamadani, Niʿmatullah Vali, Shah Qasim-i Anvar, Muhammad Nurbakhsh, ʿAbd ar-Rahman Jami, and Khwaja Ahrar can be shown to have held his works in high regard by writing commentaries on them or citing them in discussions reported in hagiographic narratives.[48]

Ibn al-ʿArabi's ideas were capable of generating tremendous hostility as well as admiration. Stories concerned with Zayn ad-Taybadi and Zayn ad-Din Khwafi show them as being particularly unsympathetic to his views. Taybadi's hagiographer reports that, after the master's death, his grandson Saʿd ad-Din once ran across the *Fusus al-hikam* (*Bezels of Wisdom*) and found it to be beneficial. Being aware of his grandfather's great dislike for this work, he then endeavored

to connect with his spirit during the night to see what he would say about the discovery. Halfway through the night, when he was in between the states of waking and sleeping, Taybadi appeared and looked at him with such great anger that he began to tremble. He then proceeded to hand over his walking stick to the grandson, telling him, "Whoever reads the *Fusus* or makes a study of it, hit him with this stick until he quits. This is neither the knowledge of religion (*din*) nor the path toward certitude (*yaqin*). Instead, this is the road of darkness and error."[49]

Zayn ad-Din Khwafi is shown to have held a similarly harsh view of Ibn al-ʿArabi, as evident from the story of his falling out with a man named Ahmad Samarqandi whom he initially regarded as his foremost disciple. The fact that the feeling of respect had been mutual initially is reflected in one report that Samarqandi had proclaimed openly during the Friday sermon in Herat that, just as Muhammad had been the seal of prophecy, Khwafi was the seal of God's friendship.[50] Jami reports that Samarqandi used to teach the *Fusus*, basing his practice on the claim that the Prophet had asked him to do so directly during mystical encounters.[51] Zayn ad-Din Khwafi, who had been his main sponsor among the religious classes in Herat, became upset with him when he would not desist from reciting the verses of Shah Qasim-i Anvar, a well-known proponent of Ibn al-ʿArabi, during his sermons at the congregational mosque in Herat. He then proceeded to declare him a nonbeliever and persecuted him as well as anyone who would aid him in any way. Khwafi's intense antipathy toward Ibn al-ʿArabi was based on considering the notion of "unity of being" (*vahdat-i vujud*), a doctrine associated with Ibn al-ʿArabi and his followers, among the most reprehensible intellectual movements in Islamic history.[52]

In the narrative of the *Rashahat*, Ahrar's views on Qasim and Khwafi are brought to a conclusion through the intermediacy of Baha' ad-Din ʿUmar's opinion regarding Ibn al-ʿArabi. One day, when ʿUmar asked his companions about news from the city, they replied that two things are going around: Shaykh Zayn ad-Din and his companions say that "everything is from him" (*hamah az u ast*), while Sayyid Qasim and his followers say that "everything is he" (*hamah u ast*).[53] When asked to provide his opinion on this, ʿUmar said that Khwafi's followers are correct, although when Ahrar paid close attention to the details of his justification, he seemed to be supporting Qasim's viewpoint. When he pointed this out, ʿUmar began providing even more elaborate explanations, all of which seemed to support Qasim and his followers once again despite the fact that he claimed to be in favor of the views held by Khwafi. From this Ahrar understood that ʿUmar's viewpoint was that outwardly he supported the perspective of Khwafi's followers while, in the interior, he believed in the truth of those who espoused the cause of Qasim.[54] The upshot of this was that ʿUmar was indicating that the doctrine of "oneness of being" ought not to be discussed

in public since it was a preserve of the elect, who could comprehend references to it because of their advanced understanding. Among common people, it could lead to misunderstanding because of the lack of proper preparation.

These stories about Ahrar's experiences and attitudes can be related to all the major themes I have touched upon in this chapter. As represented in the opposing actions of Pir Kil and Mahmud Hisari, proper and improper etiquette in front of masters was a primary reason for Ahrar's attraction to Qasim and his lack of enthusiasm for Khwafi. Although preferring Qasim and ʿUmar, he is shown to have given due respect to a well-regarded master such as Khwafi. There is, nevertheless, a clear sense in these narratives that, when in the position of being a disciple, Ahrar placed masters in differing positions in the hierarchy of living Sufis. Although Safi makes no mention here of formalized hierarchies of the type I have discussed, his judgments reflect the same general principle. The conflict between Khwafi and Qasim's followers adjudicated by ʿUmar references the debate on "unity of being": Khwafi was opposed to this idea, seeing God as the *source* of created being but not consubstantial with it in any way whatsoever, while Qasim espoused Ibn al-ʿArabi's belief system, according to which nothing other than God could be said to be truly existent.

It is noteworthy that the solution to the conflict between Qasim and Khwafi as seen in Ahrar's perplexity over ʿUmar's views sidesteps the problem. Instead of giving unequivocal opinions, ʿUmar and Ahrar defer the problem to an issue of perspective, deploying the familiar Sufi differentiation between the interior and the exterior to affirm and negate both sides in equal measure. I believe that the fluidity of meanings exemplified in this story provides a critical clue to understanding the social world of Persianate Sufism. While ideas regarding etiquette, hierarchies, and lineages mattered deeply in this milieu, their actual deployment within specific situations was a matter of perspective and finesse of interpretation rather than an imposition of hard and fast categories. Persianate Sufis holding many different opinions and affiliations worked within a shared world of ideas and practices. Their interpretations of these elements were necessarily quite diverse and varied based on the exigencies of particular situations. The resulting sociointellectual scene was intensely contested and quite malleable at the same time.

In Safi's narrative, Ahrar's interactions with Qasim-i Anvar, Zayn ad-Din Khwafi, and Baha' ad-Din ʿUmar prepare the ground for his eventual acceptance of the Naqshbandi path as his true vocation. A hint of this is provided in the report on Qasim, whom Ahrar clearly liked the best of the three: he is said to have met Naqshband himself and to have conveyed at least the occasional impression that he belonged to the Naqshbandi path. Ahrar's full incorporation into this affiliation occurred through his meeting with Yaʿqub Charkhi, which followed immediately after the narratives regarding the other masters discussed in this

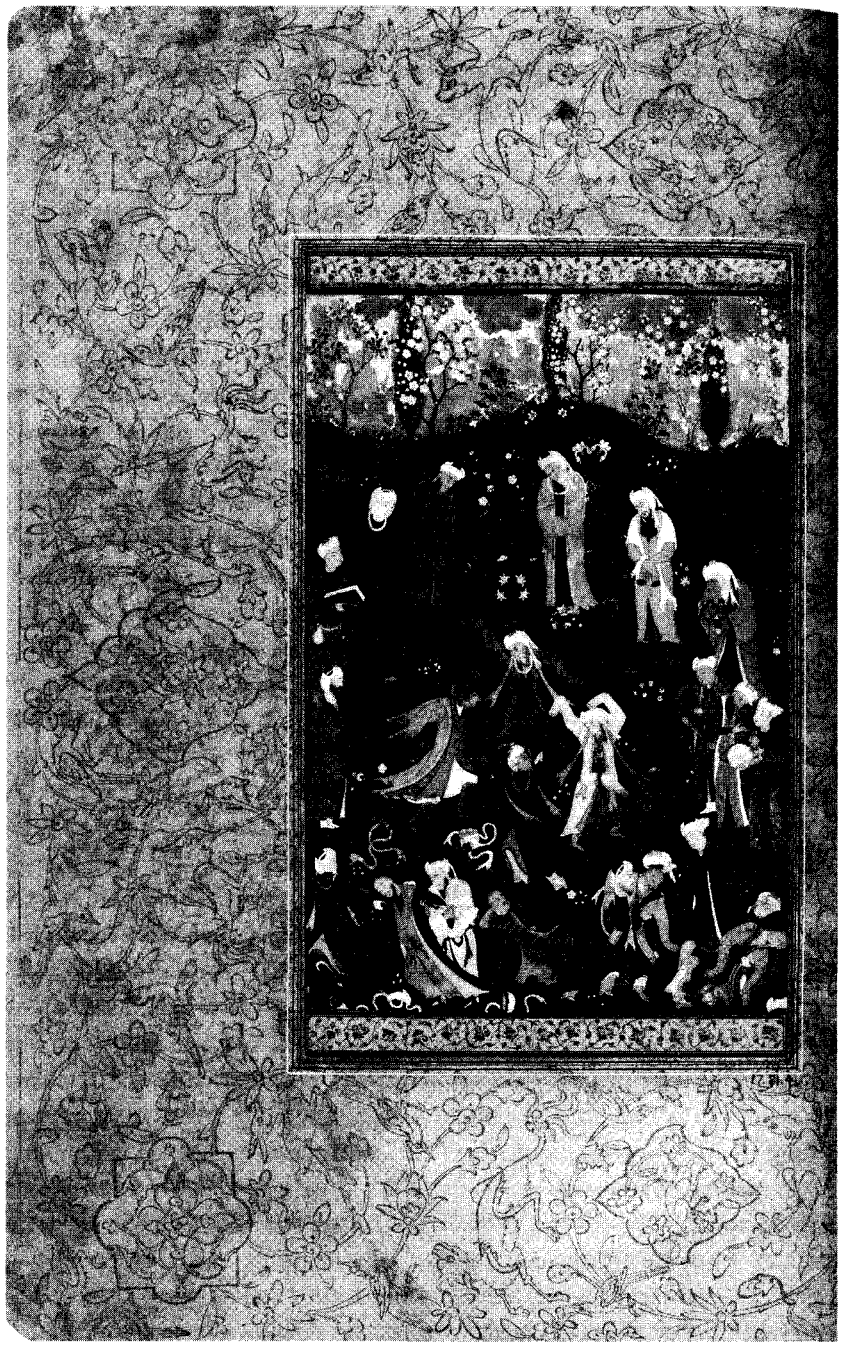
chapter. The details of that story belong in the consideration of love as the ultimate cohesive force that bound masters and disciples to each other in the Persianate context.

BODIES INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL

To end this chapter, I would like to focus on a vivid painting whose main features should be recognizable on the basis of what I have presented in the first three chapters of this book (figure 3.3). Attributed to Bihzad and dated to around 1490, the painting depicts the scene of a Sufi gathering in a garden. The painting is rich in details despite being quite small (16 x 10.8 cm), containing twenty-three human figures distinguishable from each other on the basis of functions, postures, and attire. Balanced sensitively along both vertical and horizontal axes, the image conveys symmetry as well as careful and precise construction.[55]

Moving from top to bottom, we see bodies depicted as self-consciously still, in vigorous motion, and carried limply in the hands of others. These conditions reflect the various states a person undergoes while pursuing the Sufi path, as described in theoretical works. If the body is to be regarded as a doorway between the interior and exterior realms, as I have suggested in chapter 1, the less agitation it shows during and after crossing over the threshold, the more the embodied person can be said to have mastered the transition. The two masters at the top, their bodies motionless and their heads inclining to each other, preside over the gathering. Their outer garments are in different shades of blue, matching the color of the sky above in a way that increases the association with realms beyond the earth. Their stillness is a reflection of their total control over the passage between interior and exterior realms. In comparison with the masters, the dancers placed in the middle of the painting represent Sufis progressing along the path. Their disheveled bodies show the transformative as well as disruptive effects of the process of crossing the boundary. Finally, the limp figures at the bottom, who have to be helped by others, show the aftereffects of having crossed the boundary earlier like the dancers.

The painting is also the representation of a ritual event, the Sufi samaʿ aimed at cultivating friendship with God discussed in chapter 2. Although they appear to represent states of abandon, the four dancers in the middle are part of an orchestrated performance with specific preparation and predictable outcomes. External inducements, represented by the small party of musicians on the right and the young man reciting poetry on the left, constitute well-acknowledged aides to achieve the corporeal states depicted in the painting and their purported spiritual concomitants. Taken together, the twenty-three human figures mark the occasion as a social scene in which the different bodies convey their



3.3 Sufi sama' in a garden. From a copy of Hafiz's *Divan*. Bihzad in Herat, circa 1490. Painting: 16 × 10.8 cm. Image copyright © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund, 1917 (17.81.4).

characteristics not in isolation but through comparison with those that surround them. The postures of the human figures, and their relative positions on the vertical axis, reflect the implementation of principles of Sufi etiquette, the cornerstone of Sufi social life that I have discussed in the present chapter. The scene joins those present into a community participating in an event that marks their interdependence and solidarity.

What I have said so far amounts to noting the painting's formalistic features, corresponding to frameworks for approaching Persianate Sufism from the perspective of embodiment. But the painting also represents matters beyond structures and can be read more deeply than this. The scene of overlapping bodies at the bottom indicates the crossing of bodily boundaries within the represented community. In hagiographical materials, such interpenetration of bodies is tied closely to the effects of love and desire on the senses and body parts. It is noteworthy that the painting contains only male bodies, including beardless boys, young men with dark facial hair, and older men with grey or white beards. These figures' interrelated presence in a single scene indicates intergenerational mimesis between male bodies, a significant theme in Persian hagiographic narratives in the later medieval period. The absence of female bodies indexes the fact that, in this milieu, girls and women could not be represented intermingling publicly with unrelated men in the way shown in the painting. While female bodies do appear in hagiographic narratives, they are burdened with significant ambivalence in terms of socioreligious valuation. Their exclusion from the painting is, therefore, a marker of their marginality to the idealized world that forms the scene.

In addition to religious affect, the painting can be read to reflect the place of Sufism in the politics of Persianate societies. The figure on the top left leaning on a staff may represent the vizier 'Alishir Nava'i (d. 1501), an accomplished poet who was the chief sponsor of the cultural efflorescence associated with the reign of the Timurid king Husayn Bayqara in Herat between 1469 and 1506. This identification is possible on the basis of the figure's similarity to a portrait of the vizier dated to circa 1500.[56] Irrespective of a positive identification, the very fact that this precious painting ever came into existence marks the currency of Sufi ideas and practices in the highest echelons of society. Miniature painting was a private art, kept in books and albums, accessible to the very few able to afford such luxuries, and representing their ideals and aspirations as a class. Bihzad was first and foremost a court painter, paid to deploy his art in the interests of the Timurid and Safavid dynasties. The pervasive presence of Sufi themes in this art reflects the prestige held by Sufi men and lineages in this sociohistorical context. The likeness of Nava'i in a painting depicting a Sufi community is symptomatic of the way Persianate Sufi actors were enmeshed in structures of power and authority in the society in which this painting was produced.

Bringing matters like love, desire, gender, intergenerational transitions, and political power into the reading of texts and paintings allows us to put Sufi bodies in motion. Such considerations enable us to lift still images from two-dimensional pages and make them multidimensional in space and time. In attempting to do so in the remainder of this book, my overall aim will be to reconstruct the socioreligious imagination that I see reflected in sources left behind by Sufis active in the Persianate world.

II. SUFI BODIES IN MOTION

4

BONDS OF LOVE

Love came and began flowing like blood, under my skin, in my veins;
pushing my self out of me, it filled me up with the friend.
Now the friend has so gripped all parts of my being,
all that is left to me of myself is my name, the rest is all him.

—POPULAR SUFI QUATRAIN

In Persianate societies during the centuries that concern me, being a Sufi implied that one had come under the spell of love. This is readily evident in the period's linguistic usage where words meaning lover and beloved are used ubiquitously to designate Sufis in prose and poetry alike. The ultimate object for Sufis' love was God, after whose beauty poets such as the famous Jalal ad-Din Rumi pined away while lamenting their own shortcomings revealed as a consequence of their passion. By this period the accumulated corpus of Sufi writings in Arabic and Persian contained extensive discussions on the necessity of loving God, who was himself characterized as a being who loved his creation.[1]

While Sufi understandings of love for God have been the subject of a number of studies, much less attention has been paid to the fact that medieval Sufis also considered love to be the primary force underlying human beings' intimate relationships with each other. Hagiographic narratives resound with the rhetoric of love as it pertains to human relationships, providing ample evidence that bonds based on love constituted the bedrock of Sufi communal life in these societies. My discussion in chapter 4 addresses this lacuna in our understanding by treating the general patterns as well as the social effects of the Sufi discourse on love as witnessed in literature produced during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The material I cover here is complemented by discussions to come in chapter 5 that complicate the idealized Sufi notion of love by paying attention to gender and the problem of seduction that may lead to non-Sufi ends.

The focus on love feeds into this book's overall aim of using body-related themes to understand the functioning of Persianate Sufi communities in two ways. First, the question of love is front and center in the original sources, and highlighting stories that invoke the rhetoric of love conveys the overall social atmosphere that comes across when one reads hagiographic literature. Since love is intimately tied to corporeality in this context, uncovering the mechanics of love relationships provides a window into the imagination of the body. The second significance of love connects to the fact that human relationships described in terms of love produce obligations and expectations that are open to manipulation by those involved. The modulation of love relationships is intimately tied not only to affection but also to domination, submission, and control; concentrating on the way such relationships are represented in the sources provides a sense of the way power operated in a social milieu conditioned by Sufi ideas and practices.

The chapter is divided into sections that treat, successively, the bases, distinctive patterns, and social consequences of the medieval Sufi view of love. I begin by mapping out the general properties associated with love as a force and with lovers and beloveds as stock characters in Islamic discourses. This discussion centers on Persian poetic paradigms that acted as models for Sufi social relationships in the period. I argue that although medieval Sufi hagiographers relied heavily on the poetic rhetoric of love, their overall perspective on love saw it as something more than a fictional abstraction manipulated by poets to showcase their ingenuity. While poets' ultimate aim was to highlight the nuances of characteristics associated with lovers and beloveds, Sufis used the poetic love tale to underscore forces that acted upon Sufis as they were striving to live up to their religious ideals. For Sufis the fiction of love as elaborated upon in Persian poetry acted as a kind of flexible script they utilized to articulate their mutual relationships.[2]

Hagiographies narrating the full life stories of major Sufis work through a cycle of love that I have divided into three phases. Persianate Sufis destined to achieve great spiritual and social status are most often shown to begin their paths in earnest when they fall in love with masters. Descriptions of these events rely heavily on the language of "love at first sight," and, in a number of cases, the development of a relationship with a master goes hand in hand with coming of age and leaving the natal home. The middle periods of Sufis' lives, when they are on the path but have not reached perfection, show them tormented by their passion for masters. Sufis in this phase of the love cycle actively seek to transcend their bodies and minds in order to unite with masters and, through them, God. Stories concerned with this phase show masters and disciples acting upon each others' bodies in dramatic ways to exemplify uncontrollable passion

and unexplained domination. The hagiographic love cycle ends when students become masters in their own right, attaining the aim of the most promising disciples. Fulfillment of this destiny is indicated in stories where the bodies of masters and disciples become indistinguishable from each other. This transmutation of bodies is the ultimate symbolic representation of the social mechanism through which groups of Sufis linked to each other through love might be understood as a single "social" body. Echoing themes discussed in chapter 3, this social body was both spread across space in the form of a community devoted to a specific religious path (*tariqa*) and continued beyond individual lifetimes through a Sufi intergenerational chain (*silsila*). The end of the chapter presents a work that argues that corporeal attraction is a necessity for falling in love and progressing along the Sufi path.

Stories of love that I retell in this chapter underscore the intensity of personal bonds between Sufis that ultimately guaranteed the cohesiveness of Sufi communities in the Persianate context. The primacy of corporeal exchanges in these stories indicates that the authors who produced them perceived the body as the primary locus of a person's self, which had to be deployed strategically before other bodies for the sake of spiritual as well as social goals. To excel in the Sufi milieu in this period, a person had to be able to become the subject as well as the object of love. That is, Sufis who climbed all the way up the ladder of spiritual hierarchy to be regarded as friends of God did so by forming relationships with other Sufis in which they sometimes acted as lovers and at other times as beloveds. This interchangeability of Sufi masters' functions within the context of love constituted one of the primary means through which they acted as powerful social mediators in the Persianate context.

THE PARAMETERS OF LOVE

Love in medieval Islamic literatures is considered a force known through its causes and effects. It is provoked by beauty, the hallmark of the beloved, which has a radically transformative effect on the lover. In lyric poetry the discussion of love takes place through the poet's play on a number of stock characters, metaphors, and scenarios with which the reader is presumed to be familiar. Chief among the characters are love personified as an active agent, the lover, and the beloved, each of them invoked through well-known properties. Poets usually write in the voice of lovers, who ruminate on their own state and its cause, the force of love unleashed by the beloved's beauty. Poets' ingenuity lies in their ability to manipulate the established vocabulary of love with the aim of saying something familiar in a new way or highlighting a nuance hidden away within

hackneyed metaphors.[3] The essential framework of this poetic vocabulary of love can be summarized through a couple of representative examples from the Persianate context.[4]

In his narrative poem *Sifat al-ʿashiqin* (*The Qualities of Lovers*), Hilali Jaghataʾi (d. 1529) uses direct exhortation as well as aphoristic stories to highlight love's status as the preeminent human emotion. After customary praises of God, Muhammad, and the art of poetry, he begins his discussion of love in earnest with the following eulogy:

The world is but a drop in the ocean of love,
heaven is but a plant in the desert of love.
There is no station higher than that of love,
its foundations are devoid of any flaw.
No vocation is better than the work of love,
no preoccupation greater than the madness of love.
One who is captive to love does not want release,
even when dying from sorrow, happiness is not what he seeks.
Worldly losses and gains are equally meaningless,
all that is there in the world is love, nothing else.
Although love would throw up everything in turmoil,
all liveliness in the world stems from its sorrow and pain.
No wilting ever comes to mar the spring of love,
passion's wine never relinquishes its headiness.
Heart, throw yourself on the candle like a moth!
Become branded with its love mark, and burn!
Be the beggar of love, who nonetheless is the assembly's king!
Go, be the sultan of your own times!
When love comes, do not be sad, sit happy;
feel yourself liberated from the world's sorrows.[5]

Given the significance of love as described here, to be in love is a highly desirable state. The fact that love brings turmoil and pain to one's life is deemed inevitable, but those who fall in love are urged to take the long view of the situation since they have, by virtue of being smitten, entered the most worthwhile arena of human experience. What is most significant about love is that it stirs up human beings in a way more potent than any other force that can act upon their bodies and minds.[6]

As already mentioned, poets usually write in the lover's voice and portray themselves as victims of the beloved's beauty. Their descriptions of the state of being in love decry the fact that they have fallen in love involuntarily, though, if the love is true, nothing in the world is able to pry them off from the beloved.

While most words and actions described in poetry belong to lovers, beloveds are shown as the powerful party in the affair because their sheer presence grips the lovers' mental states at all times. The following ghazal by Shah Qasim-i Anvar captures the contrast between the lover and the beloved as seen in this paradigm:

Of your beauty and comeliness, what can be said?
A cypress tree, an idol, tuliplike cheeks—what can be said?
You have etched sorrows and happiness on my heart's page.
For what reason you have done so, my heart and life, what can be said?
We count ourselves among the dogs of your alley.
If you refuse to deem us one of them, what can be said?
Your sorrows we carry in our heart, day and night.
If none of ours finds a place in your heart, what can be said?
What is to be done with me: a heart-giver, a madman, a profligate!
Of your being a beautiful, heart-ravishing trickster, what can be said?
Upon remembering you my heart blooms like a fresh rose.
Of the qualities of such a spring wind, what can be said?
Friend, see, his work is to melt the heart of poor Qasim.
As to what may be the purpose of all this, what can be said?[7]

This ghazal contains common poetic themes, like the comparison between the beloved's form and the cypress tree, the company of dogs, the beloved's dismissive demeanor. These are also reflected directly in paintings, such as figure 4.1, which accompanies an anthology of poetry produced in Shirvan in 1468. The refrain "what can be said" (*cheh tavan guft*) in this poem is emblematic of the position of the poets/lovers, who feel unable to convey the full impact of the presence of the beloved upon themselves but are nevertheless compelled to speak of it endlessly. Beloveds are described in the form of entrancing pictures whose vision tethers lovers to them forever upon first sight. The greater a lover's attraction to the beloved, the less he becomes bound by the mores of ordinary society. Although caught helplessly in this way, lovers are also marked by bewilderment as exemplified in the last verse of this poem: the initial attraction and the relationship's eventual destiny are ultimately beyond rationality, so that there is no way for lovers to extract themselves from the situation by reasoning through it.[8]

The contrast of opposites between the lover and the beloved can be extended much further than what is given in this ghazal. Typically, lovers are active seekers while beloveds attempt to evade lovers' attentions, lovers give voice to their longing in poetry while beloveds are usually silent, lovers' bodies whither away due to self-neglect while beloveds are pictures of beauty and rude health, lovers

4.1 An ardent lover and a dismissive beloved from an anthology of poems by various authors. Shirvan, 1468. Opaque watercolor. Copyright © British Library Board. MS. Add. 16561 fol. 85b.

are marked by frustration while beloveds are shown to be self-satisfied, and lovers are always in earnest while beloveds are playful and trivialize the attention directed at them. These differences between the two parties produce a constant tension that lies at the heart of the premodern Islamic rhetoric of love. The love relationship continues as long as this tension is unresolved; without it, love either dies or is consummated in a full union that leaves little to talk about. Classical Persian poets, masters of the rhetoric of love, play upon this tension to bring out the nuances of love relationships.

As in poetry, hagiographic narratives depict most connections between Sufis in the form of dyadic relationships between masters and disciples who have different roles and expectations assigned to them. In parallel with the discourse on etiquette discussed in chapter 3, these relationships mimic the kind of differentiation between the lover and the beloved described in poetry, which the hagiographers cite very frequently to make the point. However, poetry in its own context is different from Sufis' use of poetry: in hagiography the overarching framework for Sufis' interrelationships derives from Sufi socioreligious imperatives rather than poetic conventions. In poetry read without reference to a particular poet's intentions within his context, the beloved is eternally beautiful, the true lover always hopelessly infatuated. Sufis progressing through their lives in hagiography are shown to occupy the positions of both lovers and beloveds at various points depending on periods of life and specific situations.

The mutability of Sufis' position in the discourse of love is most clearly visible in extended hagiographies that narrate the whole life spans of particular masters. As young disciples, gifted Sufis find themselves in the position of lovers whose Sufi journeys begin when they become infatuated with older masters. As they become more mature, however, they increasingly come to occupy the position of their masters' and others' beloveds because of their future function as subsequent links in intergenerational chains of Sufi authority. This transformation has corporeal markers, as evident in the following anecdote about Qasim-i Anvar:

> They say that in the end of his days, Amir Sayyid Qasim lived a life of comfort and had become fat, ruddy, and fair. An elder [once] asked him: "what is the mark of a true lover?" The sayyid replied, "decrepitude and sallow skin." The man said, "but you look much different than this!" He replied, "Brother, there was a time when I was a lover, but now I am a beloved." Then he recited the following verse from the Masnavi:
>
> While a beggar, I lived in that pit of a house.
> Then I became a king, and every king has to have a palace.[9]

4.2 Shaykh ʿIraqi bidding farewell to a beloved friend. From a copy of Mir ʿAli Shir Navaʾi's *Hayrat al-abrar*. 1495. 14 × 10 cm. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. MS. Elliott 287, fol. 34a.

The contrast between bodies represented in this report is also depicted in miniature paintings of the period, such as the scene showing an older and dishevelled Shaykh Fakhr ad-Din ʿIraqi (d. 1289) consumed by grief upon taking leave of a young beloved companion who looks upon the scene with considerable equanimity.[10]

In hagiographic narratives great Sufi shaykhs come across as masters of love because they know when to be beloveds and when to be lovers. While a great poet manipulates the vocabulary of love to make new meanings out of familiar tropes, Sufi masters use the same rhetoric to modulate social relationships between human beings in which love acts as a catalyst for change and development. Sufi masters' efficacy as spiritual guides derives from their ability to manipulate the tension induced by love for the sake of the larger purpose of leading the disciple on the Sufi path. Interhuman love in the Sufi context does not pigeonhole particular individuals into defined characters with consistent expectations. Instead, the discourse of love helps steer the course of close relationships that shift continually depending on situations and the passage of time. The full significance of this social use of the rhetoric of love will become clear through the hagiographic cycle of love traversed in the following pages.

FIRST MEETINGS

As in poetry, the starting points of Sufi love are first meetings between two individuals who become tied to each other in a hierarchical relationship. A number of hagiographic narratives depict these meetings in considerable detail, employing many tropes of love familiar from poetry. Unlike the usual situation in poetry, however, the identities of the lover and the beloved are reversible in these stories. On the surface of the texts, disciples are identified as lovers who fall in love with masters after being told of them or upon meeting them. In the larger contexts of the stories, however, masters are shown to transform themselves for the sake of becoming objects of love for worthy disciples. Since it is the masters' desire that drives the narratives, the subtext of the stories marks them as lovers who utilize their powers to attract young beloveds. This cross-cutting dynamic is reminiscent of Sufi discussions of human beings' love for God: while developing unconditional love for the divine is an imperative for Sufi novices, God is himself acknowledged as a lover of his creation.

Safi ad-Din Ardabili and Zahid Gilani

One of the most elaborate accounts of the first meeting between a Sufi master and a disciple occurs in the hagiography of Safi ad-Din Ardabili. Although a

widely influential Sufi master in his own times, Safi ad-Din is best known in history as the progenitor of a line of genealogical successors who turned the Sufi lineage into the Safavid dynasty of Iran in the early sixteenth century.[11] He is the subject of one of the longest surviving medieval Persianate hagiographies dedicated to a single master, *Safvat as-safa'* (*The Essence of Purity*) by Tavakkul b. Isma'il Ibn Bazzaz Ardabili (d. 1371). This work has a complicated history in that portions of it were modified on the orders of the Safavid king Shah Tahmasp (d. 1576) to make Shaykh Safi's genealogy fit better with Safavid dynastic claims. Changes to the text are, however, not difficult to identify based on both variation in manuscripts and the blatant political intent of the later additions. Moreover, stories from Shaykh Safi's early years that concern us here were of little interest in the political realm and can be presumed to go back to the narrative completed approximately in 1358.[12]

Ibn Bazzaz Ardabili relates that Shaykh Safi was born in a village near Ardabil, Azerbaijan, the fifth child in a family with seven children. His father passed away when he was six so that his mother was his main caretaker as a child.[13] He was naturally inclined to religious pursuits from the beginning and had a number of experiences as a child that made him aware of future events. When his special qualities became apparent to his mother, to benefit from his charisma, she began to break her fasts by drinking the used water left over from his ablutions before prayers. He was uncomfortable with this and tried to dissuade her, but she was able to persist for twelve years, sometimes acquiring the water stealthily when he thought that it had been poured on the ground.[14] As Safi ad-Din grew mature, he realized that he needed a Sufi master to guide his instincts, but his mother was unable to part with him, and he could not begin his search. He eventually persuaded her to let him go through a ruse. Two of his older brothers, traders, had gone toward Shiraz; the eldest died there while the second married a woman there and had settled down. He asked his mother's permission to seek this brother, and she finally agreed because of her continuing sorrow over the death of her oldest child and her desire to see the second son, from whom not much had been heard for a while.[15]

Unknown to him at this stage, Safi ad-Din's separation from his mother through this journey was the beginning of his attachment to his eventual mentor, Shaykh Ibrahim Zahid Gilani (d. 1301). While staying with his brother in Shiraz, Safi became well known to local Sufis who were impressed by his innate religious aptitude and told him that only one person, a certain Amir 'Abdallah, was capable of guiding him. When he went to this man and told him his condition, he said that Safi was already more advanced than him and that the only person in the world who could guide him was Shaykh Zahid Gilani. Upon further questioning, Amir 'Abdallah described the exact location and physical setup of Shaykh Zahid's hospice in Gilan along with the following detailed

physical profile: "He is a short man with a bright complexion, a black mark near his mouth, black eyes, flat brow with receding hairline, and a sparse but wide beard."[16] Shaykh Safi returned from Shiraz to Azerbaijan some time after this encounter and spent four years thinking about and visualizing Shaykh Zahid. No one mentioned the shaykh to him during this period, but his great ardor was known to Zahid himself in Gilan who would tell his disciples that "a young man in Ardabil who wears felt is confounded with desire for us; if he were to come here, his affair would be taken care of in a single day."[17]

Safi had given up normal life after his return from Shiraz and his four years of waiting to meet the guide were spent mostly in religious pursuits. The matter eventually came to a head through the intermediacy of a native of Safi's village named Muhammad Ibrahiman who went to Gilan on a trip to buy rice. After his business transaction, he visited one of Shaykh Zahid's two homes, which was nearby, and was so impressed by him and his followers that he took an oath of repentance on his hands and donned clothes marking his affiliation with this community. He then started on the road home but ran into trouble because of a snowstorm that left him and his entourage stranded near his village. A group from the village, which included Safi, set out to help him, and, when they met, the future master noticed immediately that Ibrahiman had changed his clothes and outer form. When questioned, he told Safi that he had become Zahid's disciple and then described the shaykh's outer form minutely in words that matched exactly what Amir 'Abdallah had told Safi earlier in Shiraz. Upon hearing this, Safi was completely beside himself and immediately got on the road to Shaykh Zahid despite his companions' warnings about the weather.

Ibn Bazzaz Ardabili writes that Shaykh Safi had a wet dream every night during the journey to Gilan, which caused significant hardship in the winter because he was then required to perform a full bath in the morning in order to pray. Every night after the event, Shaykh Zahid appeared to him wearing a green woolen coat and asked an accompanying servant to give Safi warm water to perform the bath. He used the water but was uncertain in the morning whether a "visionary" bath truly satisfied the legal requirement. To be safe, every morning he also took a real bath, although he had to use cold water because he was reticent to trouble people to warm it for him. But bathing in extreme cold with freezing water caused him to develop severe fatigue in all his outward senses. This led to a gradual diminishing of his hearing, sight, and sense of smell, so that "he trod on the path of love while trampling the world of sense objects under his feet."[18] The minimizing of the senses represents Safi ad-Din's gradual dying to the material world that becomes available to consciousness through sensory contacts.

Safi ad-Din eventually reached Shaykh Zahid's place during the month of Ramadan when it was the shaykh's habit to remain in seclusion, neither listening

to disciples' experiences nor interpreting their stations or providing guidance. Safi entered the hospice and went to one corner to pray. Shaykh Zahid, who had been aware of his travels through mystical intuition, then asked the hospice's attendant to light a fire, even though the building was already warm. The heat of the fire slowly penetrated Safi's body as he stood praying so that, eventually, sweat began to pour from his nose, ears, and the pupils of his eyes. The three senses associated with these organs were then fully restored, and Shaykh Zahid asked an attendant to bring Safi to him. He kissed Zahid's hands and feet when he saw him, finding him exactly as the image he had carried in his mind for over four years. Shaykh Zahid then asked him why he had come, and he replied, "to repent," referring to the first step on the Sufi path, undertaken when someone becomes attached to a master. He then asked him if he had parents, and when he replied that he had only a mother, Zahid told him, simply, "welcome." Then, contrary to his custom during Ramadan, he called all his disciples to come together and told them that this was the man from Ardabil who had been seeking him for four years and that "there was only one veil left between him and God, and even that has now lifted."[19] Zahid then gave Safi his own clothes to wear and installed him in a special place of seclusion where normally only he himself performed Sufi exercises. From that point on, Safi became a permanent fixture at Shaykh Zahid's side, gaining from his guidance and, eventually, becoming his most prized disciple and successor.

Ibn Bazzaz's rendering of the young Safi ad-Din Ardabili's journey toward Shaykh Zahid is peppered with citations of Persian and Arabic verses that correlate the different phases of his progress to themes in the idealized love tale elaborated upon by poets. The story begins with Safi's desire for an attachment, which leads to his hearing about the remarkable master who lives far away and is the sole person in the world deserving of his love and devotion. The first informant takes care to describe Zahid's face and body in detail, and the image becomes imprinted on Safi's mind to act as the unceasing reminder of the beloved for a long period. His desire spills over the boundaries of rationality when the second informant confirms the correspondence between the real person and his mental image, and he begins the actual journey to the master heedless of practical difficulties. The path to the beloved is arduous and painful, but here too the beloved appears in visions that provide relief and keep him on the path. The deprivations of the journey are designed to empty his body of its existing content: he loses lust, as in the image of recurring wet dreams, and his other senses are reduced to a minimum because of the cold.

This is all reversed when he reaches the master and, in effect, acquires a new body. His senses come back to life from the heat of the beloved's home, and he acquires a new outward skin in the form of Shaykh Zahid's own clothes, which he puts on. While there is much left to happen in the relationship between the two in subsequent years, a sense of what is to come can be had from Zahid's statement that now there is no veil left between Safi and God. The implication here is that Safi fused with Zahid's body, which already had unrestricted access to God because of his spiritual attainments. The union of the earthly lover and beloved, the Sufi disciple and master, thus presages the fulfillment of ultimate love that lies at the end of the Sufi path.

As we see it enacted in this narrative, Shaykh Safi's extraordinary potential as a Sufi is fulfilled when he seeks and finds a master worthy of his desire. It is noteworthy that his attachment to Shaykh Zahid matures as he becomes increasingly distant from his mother, his initial caretaker in the hagiography. First, he hears of the master when he is away from the mother, after having concocted a ruse; second, his mother disappears from the narrative when he returns to Ardabil and remains obsessed with the master's image for four years; third, at the moment of union with the master, the latter pointedly asks him about his parents. Shaykh Zahid's saying "welcome" to him after hearing that his mother is alive marks a kind of change of guards in the text where the master takes on the mother's caring and loving functions. The transition is in fact not just of caretakers but of modes of love altogether. Shaykh Safi's connection to his mother is based on filial love, since he is a product of her body and has been nurtured by her. His affiliation with Shaykh Zahid, in contrast, is established through the kind of sensual love celebrated in poetry. The connection between Safi and Zahid is, in the long run, a link in the chain of Sufi spiritual authority that mimics an actual genealogy. Many of the functions of the two types of love are shared, but their material basis with respect to the body is different.

Khwaja Ahrar and Ya'qub Charkhi

Khwaja Ahrar is a towering personality in the history of Sufism during the fifteenth century, and I have already discussed his early years in search of a master in the previous chapter while commenting on competition between major masters in Herat in the early decades of the fifteenth century. To pick up the story from there, after spending quite a bit of time in Herat, Ahrar came to the Naqshbandi path through his encounter with Naqshband's student Ya'qub Charkhi. The story of his first meeting with Charkhi depicts, once again, a lover coming to the doorstep of a beloved in a stylized narrative reflecting poetic paradigms.

The meeting is described quite similarly in three lengthy hagiographies dedicated to Khwaja Ahrar's life.[20] The narratives from Ahrar relate that he initially came across Ya'qub's name in the village of Chihildukhtaran just outside Herat on his very first visit to the city. He saw a man sitting in the doorway of a Sufi hospice in the village and thought that he was doing the Khwajagani silent zikr.

He asked him where he had learned this and was told, from Mawlana Yaʿqub in Halghatu who was a direct disciple of Naqshband. Ahrar was impressed by what this man said of Yaʿqub's qualities but decided to proceed on his way to Herat where he spent four years in the company of various Sufi masters. After this delay he finally made his way toward Halghatu, to meet the shaykh as part of his quest for Sufi guidance in this early period of his life.[21] Just before reaching his destination, he developed a fever from the winter weather and had to spend twenty days in a village where some residents spoke ill of the shaykh. His enthusiasm for meeting the shaykh waned somewhat when he heard this, but he eventually decided to go ahead with the plan since he had already come all this way. The shaykh greeted him warmly the first day, but the next day he was angry and behaved harshly. Ahrar realized that he had become aware of the hesitation that had affected him just before his arrival and had been displeased by this. However, the next day Yaʿqub was again very kind and related the story of his own first meeting with Naqshband in which the master had accepted him as a disciple only after he had received an indication from the unseen world.

After recalling this crucial moment, which established his own place in the Naqshbandi chain, Yaʿqub extended his hand toward Ahrar and invited him to take an oath of affiliation. But, at that very moment, Ahrar saw a white mark on Yaʿqub's forehead, which seemed to be a disease and produced in Ahrar a feeling of repulsion. Yaʿqub sensed Ahrar's disinclination and quickly took away his hand, but he then transformed his appearance immediately, almost as if he were changing his clothes. He appeared in such a form that Ahrar felt drawn to him compulsively and, just when he was about to uncontrollably fling himself on the shaykh, Yaʿqub again extended his hand and said that Naqshband had grasped his hand and had said that whoever grasps it in the future grasps my hand. Ahrar then took the hand with all willingness and became a part of the Naqshbandi chain.[22]

It is striking that, in this story, Ahrar's initial revulsion and eventual attraction to Yaʿqub occur on a corporeal basis. As with Shaykh Safi, Ahrar also discovers the prospect of discipleship with the master by hearing of him from someone, although, in this case, he is first drawn to the possibility by seeing someone do zikr instead of receiving an image to carry in his mind. Just prior to reaching the master, he suffers from an illness that partially incapacitates the body, a theme that is reflected in stories about Shaykh Safi as well. In the end Yaʿqub's body in its actual physical presence is the ultimate mediator of Ahrar's incorporation into the Sufi community. Yaʿqub's competence as a master lies in his ability to sense Ahrar's hesitation and then change his form to make himself compulsively attractive. His statement at the end of the story signifies the idea that his body is a channel for the presence of Naqshband so that by taking the hand Ahrar was coming into bodily contact with his eminent predecessor. The oath incorporating Ahrar into the Sufi chain is then undertaken based on unbroken bodily contact between masters and disciples spanning generations. Ahrar's life's work from this point onward was to propagate the path so that, like Yaʿqub before him, his body becomes a vehicle for the manifestation of the teachings and powers of the illustrious ancestors.

Ahrar's first meeting with the master presents a complicated picture regarding who among the two is the seeking lover and who the sought after beloved. In the straightforward reading of the story, Ahrar is the one who makes the journey to the master's hospice after nursing the possibility of the meeting in his mind for four years. But, in the end, it is the master who changes his form to make sure that he falls in love with him. The consummation of the story is thus driven by the master's desire to attract Ahrar. Ahrar seems to have taken this aspect of the master's role for granted in later life; a work devoted to him relates in his own words that, whenever he wanted to establish a relationship with another Sufi, he would put on the "dress of external form" (*kisvat-i vujud*) of a beloved so that the other party was forced to fall in love with him.[23] Once this occurred, the disciple would become beholden to him in the way a lover is helplessly attached to a beloved, which allowed him to direct the disciple on the Sufi path. In Ahrar's words, the disciple must fall in love with the master corporeally because "the master's form (*surat*) contains his reality (*haqiqat*), which, in turn, includes the totality [of existence] (*jamʿiyyat*). The path to God is preceded by the disciple becoming affected by the totality through his concentration on the master's form."[24]

The principle at work here is reflected in a work dedicated to Ahrar's antecedent Baha' ad-Din Naqshband as well. One day he asked his disciples whether it was they who had found him or vice versa. When they responded that they had been the seekers, he suddenly disappeared from view and later reappeared to prove that their capacity to find him depended, in the first place, on his power to make himself available and apparent.[25] Similarly, Niʿmatullah Vali is credited with the verse "To every friend that I see worthy of love / I show my beauty and seize his heart."[26] In the underlying ideological bases of hagiographic narratives, the interchangeability of masters and disciples as lovers and beloveds was a crucial prerequisite for the production of Sufi chains of religious authority whose significance goes beyond the depictions of first meetings.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF FALLING IN LOVE

Hagiographies written in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries consist largely of vignettes in which great masters interact with disciples on a one-to-one basis. Since the narratives mostly show two individuals in action, it is easy to

read the characteristics associated with poetic lovers and beloveds in almost all interactions among Sufis described in these texts. The power of the poetic love paradigm for the fashioning of social relationships and their literary representation is evident from the near total presence of this pattern throughout Persianate hagiography. In this section of the chapter, I concentrate on dramatic instances of corporeal interactions between Sufis who are already in master-disciple relationships. The general tenor of relationships considered here follows from what I have described already, although the kind of imagery employed in these instances provides greater texture to representations of the maintenance of love in Sufi dyads that aggregated to form powerful Sufi communities.

Love's Grip on the Heart

Some of the most dramatic stories I have encountered that show masters' control over disciples' bodies following the establishment of their relationship of love are found in ʿAli b. Mahmud Abivardi Kurani's *Rawzat as-salikin* (*The Garden of Travelers*), written around 1505.[27] This work repeats some material from earlier sources, but most of the detailed stories are told in the words of Sufis whom the author met personally during the second half of the fifteenth century. The descriptions are particularly striking for their ability to convey the fact that being in love is simultaneously an exhilarating and an imprisoning emotion.

Although the *Rawzat as-salikin* purports in the beginning to be a history of the Naqshbandi chain, the vast majority of its stories are concerned with the life of the author's own master, the Naqshbandi shaykh ʿAlaʾ ad-Din Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Muʾmin Abizi (d. 1487).[28] Kurani reports that when Abizi became a disciple of Saʿd ad-Din Kashghari (d. 1456) in Herat after traveling to the city from his native Quhistan, the master's first instruction to him was to discontinue all his studies to concentrate solely on duties assigned by him. Abizi stopped all his quests except his study of hadith, which he was pursuing at the time under another teacher who lived outside a gate to the city. When it came time for the lesson, he went on his way to the teacher but was faced with an extraordinary circumstance when he reached the gate. As soon as he put one foot outside the city wall, iron shackles appeared on his feet out of nowhere, impeding his speed and rattling as he took further steps. Then with each new step, parts of his attire began flying off his body. He first lost his turban, then his outer clothes and his undershirt, then even his shoes. Just when all that was left was his underwear, he decided to stop in order to save himself from the disgrace of being completely naked in public. He then turned back and each piece of his attire returned to his body at the exact same step at which it had been removed. Finally, the shackles disappeared as soon as he put his feet

inside the city gate. Perceiving this experience to have been related to his new religious affiliation, he decided to go and see the master. When he went to the mosque where Kashghari usually stayed, he found the master sitting alone in meditation. As he entered, the master raised his head to gaze at him briefly and then dropped it again to concentrate on his meditation. Abizi understood this momentary acknowledgment to be a warning that made clear the meaning of his earlier experience: he was to obey the master completely after having begun his relationship with him or he would face severe consequences.[29]

While in this story Abizi found himself in the position of being a lover imprisoned by the beloved's desires, most tales in this hagiography portray the later years of his life when he was himself a master and a beloved. In one evocative account the author reports from a "lover" (*muhibb*) that one day as he sat at home he was suddenly overcome with the desire to see Abizi and immediately got on the road. On the way he felt as if he were simultaneously being pulled by a rope around his neck and prodded by a stick at his back to get to the master as soon as possible. Walking very quickly, and even running at certain points, he arrived at his destination to see the master sitting in the middle of a room. Confused and surprised, he sat down in front of him and, imitating him, put his head down on his chest. He then thought that it would be better to raise his head and perform a few rounds of zikr before sitting like this. But, however much he tried, he could not lift his head and became frightened that perhaps it had become stuck in this position.

Immersed in his panic, he then saw that the shaykh's chest opened up and a wrist and fist appeared from it that had strings attached to it. The fist began traveling toward him while he could observe that folds of the strings attached to it were sitting within the shaykh's chest. At this moment, he reminded himself that this was not a vision; rather, he was observing what was happening with his normal eyesight. The fist appeared in front of his own chest, which had also opened up in the meantime, and went inside to expand into a palm that grabbed his heart. He then felt a tremendous pain in his chest and when he looked down, he saw that the fist was squeezing his heart tightly so that parts of it were protruding from between the fingers in the way dough squelches out of the hand in the process of kneading. The fist then returned to the shaykh's heart, leaving him bewildered and impressed with the powers of this master. He looked toward the shaykh and saw him staring at him with great intensity and heard him recite the following quatrain:

When the command of my gaze falls in your direction,
do not think that I have chosen myself for this job.
In my face is to be seen God's beauty,
I reckon God's perfection in the copy that is my being.[30]

As reflected in these verses, Abizi's divinely ascribed beauty and perfection compel the disciple to be present in front of him. The organ reaching out from his chest that captures the disciple's heart represents the beloved's power over the lover in a most literal and graphic manner.[31]

The master's total control over disciples is reflected in stories from the life of Baha' ad-Din Naqshband as well. At one point he told one of his disciples that he had such power that, if he wanted, a slight movement of his sleeve could compel all the people of Bukhara to leave their preoccupations and follow him. Just as he said this, he pulled his hand inside his sleeve and the disciple noticed the movement. He immediately lost consciousness and, upon returning to his senses, felt that love for the master had completely overpowered his heart forever.[32]

The stories I have highlighted so far show the painful or restrictive side of love as it pertains to the position of the Sufi disciple as a lover. Even here it is possible to see that disciples put up with the pain of love for the ultimate pleasure of the master's company and, through them, proximity to God. Their situation is seen as being preordained for the human condition as stated in the following verse reported in a work dedicated to 'Ali Hamadani:

> Celestial beings have love, but not pain;
> in creation, the human is the only being joined to pain.[33]

In hagiographic narratives, disciples are caught in the web of love and pain, but their persistence in continuing with the existing scheme of things is essentially voluntary and stems from both the actual pleasure of the company of the charismatic masters and the ultimate religious award. Kurani reports that Abizi related from one of his own masters that a true lover is like a person standing on a high mountain, who dives when called to do so by the beloved even when he knows that the valley below is like a forest of sharp nails pointed upward. It is only when a lover shows this much devotion and selflessness that the beloved catches him before he reaches the ground and saves him.[34] The same message is reflected in Naqshband's advice to his disciple Shaykh Amir Husayn: as long as his desire was that he was with him as the beloved, he would find him in his company as a protector no matter where he went.[35]

Masters as Lovers and Beloveds

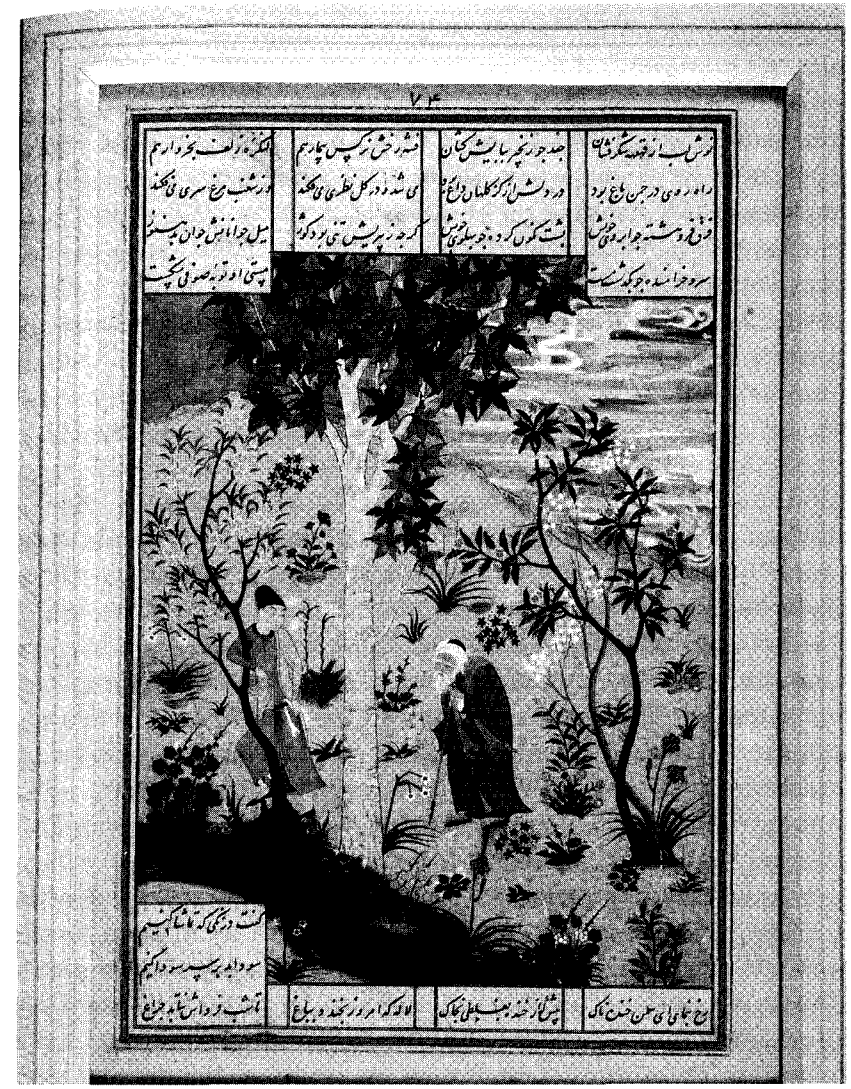
Stories from the saintly lives of the great masters that I have related in this section underscore the restrictions impinging on a disciple who becomes the lover to a master and is bound by the master's desires. But, as I remarked earlier, the subtexts of hagiographic narratives indicate that Sufi masters deliberately made themselves "beautiful" in order to attract disciples who would fall in love with them. By this token, the masters ultimately occupy the positions of lovers in search of young Sufis who would become attached to them and, in time, continue their chain of initiation.

'Ali Hamadani's views as they are reported in the *Khulasat al-manaqib* give this aspect of the master's self-understanding concrete form. He is supposed to have said that Sufis who reach the stage of being the pole (*qutb*) of the Sufi hierarchy embedded in the world are simultaneously lovers and beloveds. If they appear to be beloveds, they are so externally, while their interior aspects have the properties of lovers; and if they show themselves to be lovers outwardly then they are beloveds on the inside.[36] The form they take in the exterior world (*zahir*) is significant in that it corresponds to how they relate to other human beings. Those who are outwardly beloveds attract others and become responsible for teaching the path. They are given total power over their followers and will not face any questions on the day of judgment even if they kill a thousand persons every day. In contrast, those who are outwardly lovers are interested solely in their own salvation; they must observe all rules of conduct and will have to answer for any infractions they might commit in the accounting of good and bad deeds after death.[37]

Although Hamadani's distinction here mentions two types of Sufis, being a lover or beloved on the outside could also be seen to refer to phases in the life of a given Sufi. At the beginning of the path, the Sufi is a lover of a master on the outside, although in the interior it is the master who has chosen him as the beloved. Later, for those who climb the spiritual hierarchy and become teachers in their own right, the situation reverses. They then become beloveds on the outside while being the lovers of their disciples on the inside. The interchangeability of roles is reflected in miniature paintings' depictions of Sufis from the period as well, where we find examples of compositions showing masters as beloveds and disciples as lovers and vice versa (figs. 4.3 and 4.4). The first image, dated circa 1470, shows a king bowing in front of a dervish after realizing that he represented a higher station despite living in the wild and being unsure of his subsistence on a daily basis.[38] Conversely, the second image, dated to 1485, shows a young man being pursued by an old Sufi in a scene of dazzling natural beauty.[39] Poetic rhetoric, hagiographic stories, and representations in paintings combine to present extensive evidence for the salience of this pattern in the Persianate environment.

Whether acting as beloveds or as lovers, the great Sufi masters come across in hagiographic narratives as controllers of the power of love. Their efficacy as religious adepts lies in the ability to change their form to keep alive the tension of love in order to drive disciples along the Sufi path. When a disciple is flagging, they appear as awesome beloveds who compel the disciple as lover

4.3 A king bowing to an ascetic in a scene of nature. From a copy of *Khamsa* of Nizami. Iran, ca. 1470. Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper. Text and illustration: 25.1 × 16.4 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Purchase—Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, S1986.61 fol. 101b.



4.4 An old Sufi man pursuing a young man. From a copy of the *Matlaʿ al-anvar* of Amir Khusraw Dihlavi, 1485. 20 × 15 cm. Copyright © Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin. MS. 163, fol. 38a.

to become more steadfast. And when the disciple is wrongly infatuated, they distance themselves as a kind of lesson until the correct balance is reached. During both processes they act as beloveds outwardly while inwardly seeking the disciple's allegiance and betterment as lovers.[40] The Sufi master's persona as it pertains to the discourse of love contrasts interestingly with the poetic

paradigm of love. There the beloved is corporeally powerful because her or his beauty entrances and enslaves the lover. However, the power of words in poetry belongs to lovers. In the Sufi context, as I have shown, the mutability of lovers and beloveds places both power in the hands and tongues of the masters within narrative representations. However, it should be recalled that it was the disciples, and not the masters who are shown speaking, who produced these texts. Mutability of roles is, therefore, an inherent part of this whole discourse. The masters' excellence in this role is measured by what the disciples attribute to them in terms of their dexterity in managing the power of love for the sake of Sufi religious and social goals.[41]

LOVE'S END: MELDED BODIES

As I have mentioned previously, the two ultimate aims of the Sufi path from the earliest systematic expositions of Sufism as a prescriptive system were annihilation in God (*fana' fillah*) followed by subsistence in divine reality (*baqa' billah*). The Sufi's road to God represented a lover's progress toward the beloved, and the achievement of the ultimate states meant the elimination of all distinctions so that the lover, the beloved, and love itself all became one. As I have shown in this chapter, Sufi love pertained not just to the relationship between the human and the divine but also to the interconnections between Sufis themselves. In this vein the ultimate step for the consummation of the relationship between Sufis in the positions of lovers and beloveds was their subsumption into each other.

A number of hagiographic narratives I have cited in this chapter present the fulfillment of the relationship of love between masters and disciples through stories in which their bodies become mutually indistinguishable. Ibn Bazzaz Ardabili reports that as Safi ad-Din Ardabili became closer to his master Zahid Gilani, following their initial meeting, his body began to acquire the properties of the master. Their eventual merging into each other is reflected in the verse:

> Between the same veins, brain, and skin,
> one friend became colored with the same qualities as the other.[42]

To prove this point, he relates a story in which Safi ad-Din experienced the same thing as his master even when they were a long distance apart. He states that Zahid suffered from ailments of the eyes by the end of his life, and one day in Gilan his eyes began to burn painfully when he put in some medicine. At this very moment Safi ad-Din left the companions he was sitting with and, much to their surprise, jumped into a pool of water for no apparent reason. They recorded the time of this event and realized later that this had occurred exactly

when Zahid had felt his eyes burning from medicine. The burning sensation that originated in the experience of one body was thus felt in the other because of their identity.[43]

The interchangeability of Sufis' bodies is eventually predicated on the idea that individuals who either have natural religious aptitude or have reached high stations can act as mirrors for others. From the early years of Shaykh Safi's life, Ardabili reports that one day, as he sat in a mosque, a man appeared and told him that he should put his affairs in order because he was scheduled to die in exactly three days. Safi believed him and came to sit in the same place after three days with a heavy heart, awaiting his end. Then another man appeared and told him that the man who had initially told him about his impending death had himself just died at the appointed moment. The explanation for this lay in the idea, derived from a hadith report, that a true believer is like a mirror for another believer. The man who had informed Safi of his death had in fact seen his own death in a vision, but the bodies had been interchanged because Safi's body could act as a mirror for that of others.[44]

A similar phenomenon is described in Ja'far Badakhshi's memoir of 'Ali Hamadani, who reports that once when the master had just left Badakhshan for Khuttalan, one of his disciples went into his room and saw him sitting there. But when he was about to ask why, and when he had canceled the trip, the image of his body disappeared. He then figured out that the image of Hamadani's body had become so firmly lodged in his vision that he was liable to see it even when the master was gone. Badakhshi states that the ultimate example of this kind of vision of the master was when he himself would first see Hamadani's face upon looking into a mirror, the image then changing to his own face after a few moments.[45]

The ultimate effect of this kind of identity between the bodies of masters and disciples was to ratify the transmission of Sufi authority through an unbroken intergenerational chain. In effect, showing that the body of the disciple was interchangeable with that of the master was the most emphatic means of legitimating succession. Works on Ni'matullah Vali report that, in his youth, he was greatly puzzled why the famous Uvays al-Qarani, who became devoted to Muhammad despite never having met him, proceeded to break all his own teeth upon hearing that Muhammad had lost some teeth in a battle. Uvays then appeared in a dream to him and said that breaking the teeth was the equivalent of digging a treasure, since by acting thus upon his own body he had created a connection to the body of the Prophet.[46] Similarly, a disciple reported that sometimes when he looked at Khwaja Ahrar he would see the face of Muhammad that he had earlier seen in a dream.[47]

In addition to the interchangeability of bodies, a number of sources reflect this imperative of the Sufi social milieu in reports that, toward the end of their

lives, masters would start referring to their chosen successors with the name of their own earlier masters. In a case where the Sufi genealogy parallels actual descent, the Khwajagani master Sayyid Amir Kulal is said to have referred to his son and successor Amir Hamza as "father" (*pidar*).[48] Such a presumption of continuation over generations was especially potent in cases where the masters were, like Amir Kulal and Hamza, sayyids claiming descent from Muhammad and ʿAli. This is reflected also in the prominence of genealogy in hagiographies devoted to Shah Niʿmatullah Vali and ʿAli Hamadani, two other shaykhs with sayyid ancestry.[49]

Reflecting a situation where masters and disciples were not related, a number of links in the Kubravi chain are shown exhibiting this phenomenon in different hagiographic narratives. Badakhshi provides stories in which the master ʿAlaʾ ad-Dawla Simnani (d. 1336) treated his student Akhi ʿAli Dusti as his master.[50] ʿAli Hamadani inherited his Kubravi affiliation from Dusti and Mahmud Mazdaqani (d. 1365), another disciple of Simnani. Badakhshi's own claims with respect to Hamadani are couched in the incident of his looking into a mirror, and the pattern continued in later Kubravi links. Muhammad Nurbakhsh claimed that his master Ishaq Khuttalani (d. 1424) would often confuse him with his own master, Sayyid ʿAli Hamadani. The very same claim is made in a hagiography deriving from the lineage of Sayyid ʿAbdallah Barzishabadi (d. 1468), who was a rival to Nurbakhsh for the claim of being Khuttalani's successor.[51] And Nurbakhsh's praise for his own son and successor Qasim Fayzbakhsh includes the comment that there was no difference between the two of them save the fact that he was older than the son.[52]

The melding together of Sufis' bodies as represented in these reports worked to substantiate and solidify Sufi communities both synchronically and diachronically. When invoked for a master-disciple dyad, the process ratified the significance of the idea of the Sufi path (*tariqa*) shared by all who were part of the living Sufi community surrounding a master. And when appealed to for the connection across multiple generations, the process sanctioned the chain (*silsila*) that lay at the base of the Sufi construction of religious authority. As I have emphasized before, the path and the chain together constituted the two crucial factors in the formation of powerful and widespread Sufi communities in the Persianate world.

LOVE AND EMBODIMENT

The stories I have discussed in this chapter can help us understand the salience of the rhetoric of love in hagiographic narratives. Persianate Sufis in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries articulated their strongest bonds with each other

using the language of love, and this love was produced, sustained, and consummated corporeally. In Sufism's doctrinal logic, the ultimate purpose of these relationships was to lead disciples to God, though Persianate hagiographic narratives convey a clear sense that for most, if not all, this ultimate goal could be achieved only through the intermediary of love directed at a human guide. As I have shown in previous chapters, pursuing the Sufi path required Sufis to negotiate the physical world whose availability was contingent on the bodily senses. The emphasis on love, which connected human hearts to each other through the intermediacy of bodies, represented a continuation of this significance of the body beyond personal experience to the social sphere.

To end this chapter, I introduce a work that stridently exemplifies the patterns relating to love I have discussed in the preceding pages. The necessity of human love as a prelude to divine love is advocated most emphatically in Kamal ad-Din Gazurgahi's compendium of brief biographies entitled *Majalis al-ʿushshaq* (*The Assemblies of Lovers*) completed in the first decade of the sixteenth century.[53] This work presents heavily reworked versions of the biographies of Sufis and others whom the author describes as extraordinary lovers. The cast of characters consists of Sufis from the past as well as the author's own times, prophets, lovers of poetic legends (such as Majnun and Farhad), and famous poets, rulers, and viziers. Although most of the information presented in the work is not seen in other sources, it is distinguished by the author's single-mindedness in infusing history with the spirit of human love mediated by corporeal contact. Its significance lies not in being a source of information but in containing the most categorical presentation of a cultural topos prominent during the time it was composed.

All of Gazurgahi's biographies work according to the formula that a protagonist is identified for having a special capacity for love, which leads him to become infatuated with another person as a prelude to realizing his love for God. The most cogent explanation of this theme occurs in his entry on the great Sufi author Ibn al-ʿArabi whose significance for Persianate Sufism I have discussed in earlier chapters. Unlike other Sufi authors, Gazurgahi's interest in Ibn al-ʿArabi is not based on appreciating his writings and ideas. His entry on the master portrays him as a lover of his young and beautiful disciple Sadr ad-Din Qunavi (d. 1273–74). His obsession with the young man is depicted in numerous illustrated manuscripts of the *Majalis al-ʿushshaq* that were produced during the sixteenth century (figure 4.5).[54] The narrative surrounding the image states that one day, when Ibn al-ʿArabi was astride an animal, he ran into Qunavi, and the latter showed obedience to him. Ibn al-ʿArabi in turn got off the steed and fell on the ground in front of the young man, begging him to ride the animal. Qunavi refused, which led other people to praise Qunavi and condemn Ibn al-ʿArabi, calling him an unbeliever and a heretic. This embarrassed Qunavi, but

4.5 Ibn al-ʿArabi encountering Sadr ad-Din Qunavi. From a copy of Gazurgahi's *Majalis al-ʿushshaq*. Bibliothèque nationale de France. MS. Suppl. Persan 1559, fol. 103b.

Ibn al-ʿArabi told him, "Do not be ashamed; instead, expend effort so that you cut your relationship to created beings and become attached to the Truth."

Gazurgahi writes that Qunavi's shame over this incident led him to ensconce himself in his home for a few days, which caused Ibn al-ʿArabi to grow beside himself from desire. A companion then tried to distract him by suggesting that he visit the beautiful sights of Damascus. When Ibn al-ʿArabi indicated that nothing in the world was beautiful when the beloved was not around, the companion suggested that he should seek God directly rather than through an earthly intermediary. Ibn al-ʿArabi's purported reply to this criticism is worth citing in detail since it captures the main point of the general attitude I see reflected in much of Persianate hagiographic literature:

> The beauty of traces connected to metaphorical love is the shadow and extremity of essential beauty that is linked to true love. As in the proverb "metaphor is the bridge to reality," one is the means for acquiring the other and the road toward reaching it. The fact is, that a given person has limited innate ability for the love that is occasioned by the beauty of the Essence in itself . . . and much of it remains hidden behind dark veils. If a shadow from the light of that beauty makes itself apparent when it takes shape in the tapestry of clay that is the heart-ravishing, well-proportioned beloved, then:
>
> Gentle manners, being well-spoken, and nimbleness
> are wound-dressers on every heart's mark of sorrow.
> [From them, the heart] acquires the pure hem of a new blown rose,
> which is boldly free of all contamination.
>
> [Once this has occurred], the bird of the lover's heart promises itself to the beloved and spreads feathers and wings in the desire for requiting love. It becomes captive to the beloved's food and prey to his snare, and it renounces all purposes and indeed knows no purpose other than him:
>
> From the mosque and the hospice (*khanqah*) he moves to the tavern,
> he drinks wine and arrives drunk at the beloved's door.
> Whatever is not love for the beloved despairs him,
> he comes shopping for it with a thousand lives.
>
> Love's fire and desire's flames become lit within him and result in the burning away of the curtains of secrecy. [Love and desire] lift the veil of ignorance from his spiritual sight and clear the mist of multiplicity from the mirror of truth [within him]. Then his sight sharpens and his heart comes to discern the truth. Everything he passes, he recognizes and everything he lays his eyes on,

he sees. Every moment he turns his face to the attester within him (*mashhud-i khud*) and says:

> You were hidden in the breast, and I was oblivious.
> You were apparent to sight, and I was oblivious.
> My whole life I was seeking a sign of you from the world,
> you yourself were the entire world, and I was oblivious.

> When [the lover] reaches this place, he knows that metaphorical love had been the equivalent of a smell from the tavern of true love, and the love of traces had been like a shadow from the sun of the Essence. However, if he had not smelled that smell he never would have reached that tavern and if he had not found that shadow he would never have had a share from that sun.[55]

As reflected in Gazurgahi's work as well as the rest of the material I have presented in this chapter, Persianate Sufis were in search of beloveds who could help them progress further on the Sufi path. For Sufis beginning their religious conditioning, beloveds were those acknowledged as the great living masters of the day, whose bodies acted as sites of beauty that invited love and desire, forming the ineluctable intermediaries between the human and the divine. But, hidden from ordinary perception, the great masters were also lovers in search of beloved disciples whom they wanted to compel into falling in love with themselves. The pursuit of disciples was as much of an imperative for the masters as the desire for a master was for novices, and everyone's fulfillment was predicated on being caught somewhere in the net of love. Love encompassed the circle of youth and old age, of life and death, which is why it thoroughly permeated the world of customary interactions depicted in most stories recorded by Sufi hagiographers.

5

ENGENDERED DESIRES

It is likely that the account I have given in chapter 4 makes Persianate Sufism appear as a world in which ideology and social patterns combine effortlessly to enable Sufi masters and disciples to pursue each other as lovers and beloveds. This impression flows in part from the idealizing tone characteristic of hagiographic narratives that are my main sources. Persianate hagiography and miniature painting are cognate genres in this regard. Both present human figures and interactions in abstracted forms that convey established conventions. Understanding the conventions provides us access to the authors' idealizations, which can, in turn, be regarded as symptoms of social ideologies. As I have argued in the introduction in the context of discussing embodiment as an analytical tool, conventional images regarding love or other matters cannot be taken as descriptions on face value. Instead, these images reflect patterns that we can interpret using phenomenological, sociological, and hermeneutical methods to arrive at judgments about the workings of society.

Stylized though they certainly are, hagiographic texts also provide substantial details that exceed the genre's didactic and prescriptive intent. On this score, texts are different from paintings since, first, the fund of material available to us is much larger, and second, verbal narratives have a higher capacity for accommodating incidental or peripheral details in comparison with highly condensed images that have to fit on pages of manuscripts. In this chapter I aim to exploit materials that occur at the margins of hagiographic narratives and allow us to complicate the story beyond understanding the authors' own invest-

ments. I see chapter 5 as a necessary companion to chapter 4; the two should be read in conjunction to see the overall picture I wish to convey in this book.

My rubric for discussion is the question of desire and its connection to the construction of gender in the milieu depicted in Persianate Sufi literature. Desire is a matter deeply interwoven through Sufi ideas from the earliest periods. In Sufi theoretical discourse, praiseworthy desire that has God or a master as its object is referenced under the term *irada*. The centrality of such desire to Sufi social practice is evident from the fact that the standard term for a disciple is *murid*, the one who desires, and the master is designated as *murad*, the one who is desired.[1] As stories discussed in the previous chapter can attest, *irada* as desire is the driving force behind love relationships between masters and disciples. However, along with providing the details of desire that leads to idealized love between masters and disciples, hagiographic narratives register the functioning of other types of desires in the context of human relationships that stand in tension with "proper" behavior. Represented as blameworthy, or at least of ambiguous value, such desires are nevertheless critical in defining normative or recommended behavior.

Desire is a multifaceted topic, and I should clarify that I am concerned here with it only in the narrow sense in which it finds representation in Persianate hagiographic literature. A treatment of desire as a general subject pertaining to these societies would require bringing in other materials as well as a consideration of methodological questions regarding gender, sexuality, and social history as a whole that are beyond my present scope. Such explorations are virtually nonexistent for the sociohistorical context I am discussing and would be welcome additions to the literature.[2]

I treat the operation of desire in Persianate Sufi discourse in four sections. I begin by considering an extended narrative poem composed in the fifteenth century that allegorizes desire and love through the entanglement of characters named Beauty and Heart. Comprehending the allegory's intent and internal details provides us a framework for understanding Persianate Sufis' view of the way sense perception of beauty in the form of the human body could lead to the production of desire and love among human subjects. In addition to being an anchor for the present chapter, this treatment of desire should help provide further depth to the stories I have discussed in chapter 4.

In the second section of chapter 5 I concentrate on Sufi representations of inappropriate desires, which play out differently when the parties involved are solely men or men and women. The available sources were all written by men and do not provide any information about women's homosocial contexts. Situations involving reprehensible love between men arise largely when one party is perceived to be religiously corrupt and responsible for leading a Sufi on a path away from a master. In hagiographic narratives there are occasional hints

at proscription of male homosexual desire, but love as an emotional attachment, whether proper or improper, comes across as being a far more significant concern than sexual contact. My observation in this regard matches what has been said on this topic in other recent evaluations of various types of materials produced in pre-modern Islamic contexts. In particular, it is significant to note that what we find in these sources is not affirmation or condemnation of "homosexuality" as a mode of behavior but judgments based on the relative positions occupied by the parties. Any proscription of male-to-male desire proceeds not from a condemnation of homosexual acts but from the way the acts may signify the presence of a socially improper relationship between the men in question.[3]

While sexuality among men is a matter of hints, indirect reference, and the question of power, it appears front and center in the representation of relationships between men and women. The ubiquity of the dyadic construction of desire and love in which the lover and the beloved have different characteristics has significant repercussions for women's participation in the authority structures that governed life in Persianate Sufi communities. Almost all medieval Sufi thought takes men as its standard and, by implication, excludes women as significant Sufi actors. This exclusion pertains to the arena of love as much as it does to other spheres since males can occupy all the different positions available in the paradigm of love vis-à-vis other men. In addition, Persianate poetic paradigms that provide the overall framework for the articulation of Sufi love relationships largely presume both the lover and the beloved to be male.

When it comes to the question of representing male-female relationships in formalized literature, the critical concern that defines hagiographic authors' limitations is the possibility, or lack thereof, of marriage between the two parties. A woman married to a man could be shown interacting with him since their interactions provoke no legal censure. Similarly, there is no problem showing women interacting with their fathers, brothers, sons, and married uncles since such men are categorically prohibited from marrying them. Beyond these two possibilities lies the status of being *na-mahram*, which applies to men and women standing in such positions with each other that they could be married but are not.[4] Any interaction between such persons that involves desire has strict legal limits that work to exclude men and women from each others' social spheres. Since hagiographic and other Sufi literature is largely about men, its representation of women not tethered to the identities of men portrays the women in a particularly disadvantageous light. In this situation the question of power between the two parties parses differently than between men alone since it is presumed within the gender difference rather than being negotiated in the context of the mutual relationship between lover and beloved. Hagiographic narratives provide evocative stories that criticize acts involving contact across the gender line committed by male disciples in the beginning stages of the path.

In the third section of the chapter I concentrate on women and men in relationships that allow unrestricted social contact between them. This includes representations of Sufis' mothers, who are shown to compete with masters for the affection and allegiance of their sons who become Sufi disciples. In contrast with mothers, wives of celebrated masters sometimes appear as accomplished Sufi disciples and at other times as concupiscent and disrespectful persons who constitute trials for the masters and remind them of the low value of the material realm. The chapter's last section treats the exceptional but important case of a woman who appears as an accomplished Sufi master able to guide another highly regarded male master. The contrast here concerns social intercourse, and the representation of this woman's interactions with Sufi men is valuable for assessing the Sufi view of gender in the Persianate context.

The vast majority of Persianate hagiographic stories and representations concern men alone, with women making marginal appearances, usually in supporting roles. Nevertheless, my argument in this chapter is that gender is a critical place to look within this material to understand the social world reflected in the texts. One overarching reason for this is the pervasive tendency among Sufi authors to map the interior-exterior divide onto the presumed inherent difference between male and female. The following statement attributed to the Kubravi master ʿAli Hamadani summarizes this tendency: "Only women are interested in the physical world because this is the place of colors and smells."[5] Although this is a common enough sentiment in the literature, the details of hagiographic stories provide an abundance of evidence for great Sufi *men*'s seduction by the colors and smells of the physical world. The actual narrative material available to us thus dissembles from the stated ideology, indicating a more complex view on both gender and the material world than what first meets the eye when we read Sufi texts. Here again we see the thorough entanglement of what are portrayed as interior and exterior aspects of existence rather than the enforcement of a clear dichotomy. Desire and gender, my two foci in this chapter, therefore act as wedges that allow us to pry open some hidden recesses of the social and textual worlds being examined in this book.

SIGHT AND SEDUCTION

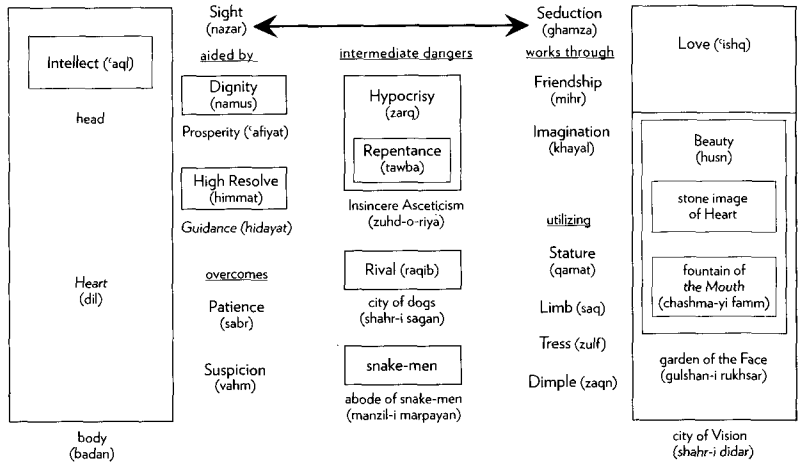
Citing an unnamed earlier source, the hagiography of Shaykh Ahmad Bashiri provides the following description of how love affects the human body:

> The heart is like a fire whose flames denote love. Arising conditions and premonitions (*ahval va ilham*) are like the wind that makes the fire blaze. When the wind stokes the fire, if the flames reach the eyes, it cries; if they reach the mouth, it moans; if they reach the hand, it moves; and if they reach the foot, it dances. These conditions are called "finding" (*vajd*), because although love is in the heart, it is not really known until it is exteriorized. When the wind flares the fire, the traveler finds the way he had lost.[6]

To get a fuller sense of the complexities involved in Persianate Sufi notions regarding relationships between love, the senses, and aesthetic value hinted at in this pithy description, we can turn to the allegorical masnavi *Husn-o-dil* (*Beauty and Heart*) composed by Muhammad Yahya b. Sibak Fattahi (d. ca. 1448) in 1436. This work is a grand summation of the paradigm in question and underscores the centrality of desire and love in the Sufi religious quest. The narrative poem is around five thousand verses long and is so complicated and full of nuances that the author himself was compelled to write a prose explanation for it under the title *Dastur al-ʿushshaq* (*The Confidant of Lovers*). Between the two versions we get a useful window for understanding desire, love, and human sensory faculties.[7]

I have laid out the details of the allegory in chart 2 in order to provide a sense for the multilayered nature of the narrative. However, it would be a considerable distraction to go into all the details in my main narrative of this chapter. The story—in brief and excluding the minor characters—goes like this: a king of Greece named Intellect has a son called Heart, whom he keeps imprisoned in the castle of Body. Heart's companions tell him of the Elixir of Life, which bestows eternal life, and he becomes obsessed with obtaining it in order to live forever. His servant Sight volunteers to go look for the elixir and discovers, on the way, that it is to be found in a fountain called Mouth, which is within a garden called Face, which lies within the city of Vision. This city is the abode of a princess named Beauty, daughter of a king named Love. Sight undertakes the arduous journey to reach this garden, and when it arrives there after overcoming numerous opponents, it is greeted by Seduction, a protector of Beauty who turns out to be his own long-lost brother. Seduction takes Sight to Beauty, who welcomes it and tells of a stone statue in her treasury whose identity is a mystery to her. Upon seeing it, Sight informs her that this is a likeness of Heart. At this point in the story, Sight and Seduction have become united and have discovered a filial relationship, and Heart and Beauty turn out to have been seeking each other without knowing it themselves.

The discovery of the statue's identity makes Beauty want to meet Heart and she sends Sight back to him with her message and a confidant named Imagination. When the two get back to Body, Imagination creates a likeness of Beauty, and Heart falls in love with her immediately. At the same time, one of Intellect's soldiers named Doubt informs his master that Heart may escape Body because of his ardor for Beauty, leading Intellect to imprison Heart, Sight, and



5.1 Chart 2: Schematic diagram showing the narrative of the allegory *Husn-o-dil*.

Imagination. Sight manages to escape using a ring given to it by Beauty that can make it invisible to humans and arrives back at the city of Vision after another difficult journey, which involves overcoming various opponents. Beauty is incensed by this state of affairs and calls upon her aides to overcome Intellect. Her helpers in this endeavor are her father Love and their combined forces, which include Friendship, Seduction, Stature, Limb, Tress, and Dimple. This she eventually accomplishes, following the scene depicted in a manuscript painting in which Heart and Sight capitulate to Friendship and a sword-wielding Seduction (figure 5.2). In the process, however, Intellect is able to turn Heart against Beauty. The victorious Love then decides to imprison Heart in the castle of Separation for a while after his defeat by Love's forces. This situation is corrected through the intervention of High Resolve, who convinces Love to bring Intellect back into the fold as the vizier of Body and to accept Heart as Beauty's husband.[8]

In the conclusion of the allegory, Heart comes to live in the garden of the Face and is permanently united with Beauty. He finally acquires the Elixir of Life from the well of Mouth, desire for which put the whole narrative into motion. Near the vegetation of the soft Down that surrounds Mouth, he meets Khizr, the prophet famous for eternal life based on a Quranic story. Khizr tells Heart that eternal life was his destiny because his status was always beyond being imprisoned in a body made of elements. Heart's drinking the Elixir of Life is therefore a fulfillment of his fate. Beauty and Heart have many children, one of whom is the narrator of this tale.

The four main characters in this allegory—Heart, Beauty, Sight, and Seduction—are particularly relevant for my discussion since they pertain to the

5.2 Heart and Sight in front of Friendship, with Seduction holding a sword. From a copy of Muhammad Yahya Fattahi's *Husn-o-dil*. Copyright © British Library Board. MS. Or. 11349, fol. 45b.

production of desire. Although separated in the beginning and joined at the end, Heart and Beauty are shown to have subterranean connections throughout, as evident in Heart's desire for the Elixir of Life in the first place and the idea that Beauty has a likeness of him in her treasury. The union between Heart and Beauty comes about through Sight and Seduction, their aides who go forth from the abodes of their masters to do their bidding. Importantly, Sight and Seduction are long-lost brothers who overcome their alienation to work together toward the narrative's overall fulfillment. Sight is an agent endowed with bravery, loyalty, and perseverance while Seduction deploys Beauty's warriors Stature, Limb, Tress, and Dimple to accomplish its job.

The story's allegorical message presents heart as an organ in search of beauty, where beauty carries the possibility of acknowledgment from the heart within itself. Heart's desire for beauty can be quenched only through sight, a sense that issues outward from the body to search in the external world. In its turn, sight can get to beauty and carry its news back to the heart only by being seduced by external forms such as face, stature, limbs, tresses, and dimple. Beauty is an abstraction encompassed by these physical elements, which sight must apprehend before approaching it. In the final analysis, then, heart and beauty are meant for each other, but they can be joined together only through the intermediacy of sight and seduction—a sense extending outward and a force pulling inward—that operate in the material world.

The aesthetic theory summarized in this allegory pertains to both material and nonmaterial forms. Although heart and beauty occupy pride of place, they are clearly dependent on apprehensions in the material sphere to come into contact. Sight is an agent of the heart's desire that finds certain material forms seductive and compelling. The beauty of external forms is a kind of natural force that arrests and seduces sight and the other senses and, through them, the heart. The interdependency of heart and beauty, on the one hand, and sight and seduction, on the other, should be reminiscent of the circle of love I described in the previous chapter. In this allegory, and in stories about great masters and disciples, heart's conjunction with beauty is a wholly desirable end. However, the inherent connection between sight and seduction as elaborated in the allegory also provides the possibility of their improper functioning: sight can be seduced by deceptive objects, leading the heart to fall for improper beauty.

The gender dynamic between the four main characters is particularly significant since it hints at different roles for male and female. The prince Heart is entombed in a negatively valued body, which his foremost servant Sight overcomes through its escape to Beauty. The primary aide to the princess Beauty, on the other hand, is Seduction, who works in conjunction with body parts. Male and female bodies get mapped to lover and beloved with opposite connotations: one is to be escaped from, while the other is to be displayed. This gender dynamic does not map directly to Sufi hagiographic representations of men and women. There, beauty is equally likely to be found in men and women, and those who possess beauty adopt the characteristics associated with it in this allegory irrespective of their gender identity.[9]

In the overall theory, beauty is both the ultimate objective on heart's true path and a disruptive force that can lead into error. Similarly, heart must rely on sight to get to true beauty, but it can get entranced by improper beauty as well. In considering this allegory as a guide for understanding Sufi hagiographic stories, it is important to keep in mind not just the beginning and the end of the narrative but also the various processes that unfold in the middle. Sufi narratives about the lives of masters and disciples provide ample examples for the many possibilities registered in the allegory regarding the creation, management, fulfillment, and denial of desire mediated through material senses and bodies. While the allegory works toward ideal ends, hagiographic stories convey desire's ability to induce proper love as well as to lead astray.

BODIES DESIRING AND DESIRABLE

Echoing a theme central to *Beauty and Heart*, the Naqshbandi master ʿAlaʾ ad-Din Abizi is reported to have told his disciples that God has endowed human beings with three preeminent organs: eyes for seeing, ears for hearing, and the heart for loving. These three organs operate without reference to volition: the eye sees whatever comes in front of it, the ear hears whatever sound enters it, and the heart falls in love when impulses from the external senses alert it to the presence of a beautiful being. Just as Sufis have to guard their eyes and ears from being in situations where they may be subject to reprehensible sights and sounds, they have to guard their hearts from beauty that can lead astray. The surest way to do this is to enter the orbit of a Sufi master so that one's capacity for love becomes occupied in the religious pursuit.[10]

This formulation of the role of senses is helpful for seeing the way the connection between sensations and emotions works in the Persianate Sufi context. Although Abizi puts the heart on a par with eyes and ears, it is clearly a sensing organ of a different type and scale than the other two. For one, the heart is dependent on impulses from the external senses to recognize its object. Moreover, love is an emotion that can come to preoccupy one to the utmost, whereas sensations that take shape in the eye and ear are momentary and can be disrupted through blocking the organs or turning away from the scene. As described in the allegory, beauty and its capacity to invoke desire and love in the heart are

more complex matters than sight and sound pure and simple. To see some of the complexities involved here, I will treat hagiographic stories concerned with the operation of desire between men and between men and women.

Men as Subjects and Objects of Desire

The connection between beauty and desire is evident in stories where great Sufi masters are shown to have heightened sensitivity to beauty irrespective of the object's status. For example, ʿAli Hamadani's hagiographer states that the master himself related that when he was a young man traveling to find his vocation he lost consciousness when he saw a beautiful young man in the bazaar in Isfaraʾin and became a spectacle for the crowd. A disciple of the master Muhammad Azkani who was present there went and told him the tale of someone who had swooned upon seeing beauty. The master asked that Hamadani be brought to him immediately, and this message was delivered to him when he regained consciousness. That night Muhammad appeared to Hamadani in a dream and told him to take on oath on Azkani's hand, and, when Hamadani met the master the next day, Azkani told him that Muhammad had delivered him the same instructions. Hamadani and Azkani thus became joined by one Sufi understanding the other's spiritual capacity through the report on his reaction to beauty. Here the beautiful man himself has no relevance to the story apart from being an object with a remarkable external appearance.[11]

Other stories involve young men who are affected by beauty but have to be helped away from improper associations through masters' intervention. Abizi's hagiographer provides proof for the master's views on the heart as an organ I cited earlier by relating actual incidents, such as the case of a disciple who reported that he had become infatuated with a beautiful young man. One day when he appeared in front of the master after having spent time pining after this beloved, the master was angry and told him that he was going down his own path, which was negating his guidance. He then sat with the master and was, through his presence in his company, gradually relieved of his desire for the other man.[12] In a similar story, the master Shams ad-Din Ruji reported that once, when he had become a disciple of Saʿd ad-Din Kashghari, he fell in love with a beautiful man such that he could neither give up the infatuation nor get rid of his shame and embarrassment in front of the master for the situation. Eventually, Kashghari arrived in front of him by himself and absolved him of the love by putting his hands on his chest and working on his interior.[13]

Kashghari is himself featured in a story reported by his son Khwaja Kalan. It is said that when Kashghari was seven years old he accompanied his father on a trading trip where the party also included a most beautiful boy of Kashghari's own age with whom he became infatuated. One night when the lamps had been

extinguished and the two boys were sleeping next to each other, Kashghari got the desire to take the other boy's hand and rub his eyes on it. But he had barely extended his hand when one corner of the room opened up to reveal a formidable figure with a lamp who came toward him rapidly, crossed over, and then disappeared into a cavity that had opened up at the opposite corner. Kashghari said that he was terrified by this experience and took it to be a warning that dissipated his desire for the relationship.[14]

Shah Qasim-i Anvar

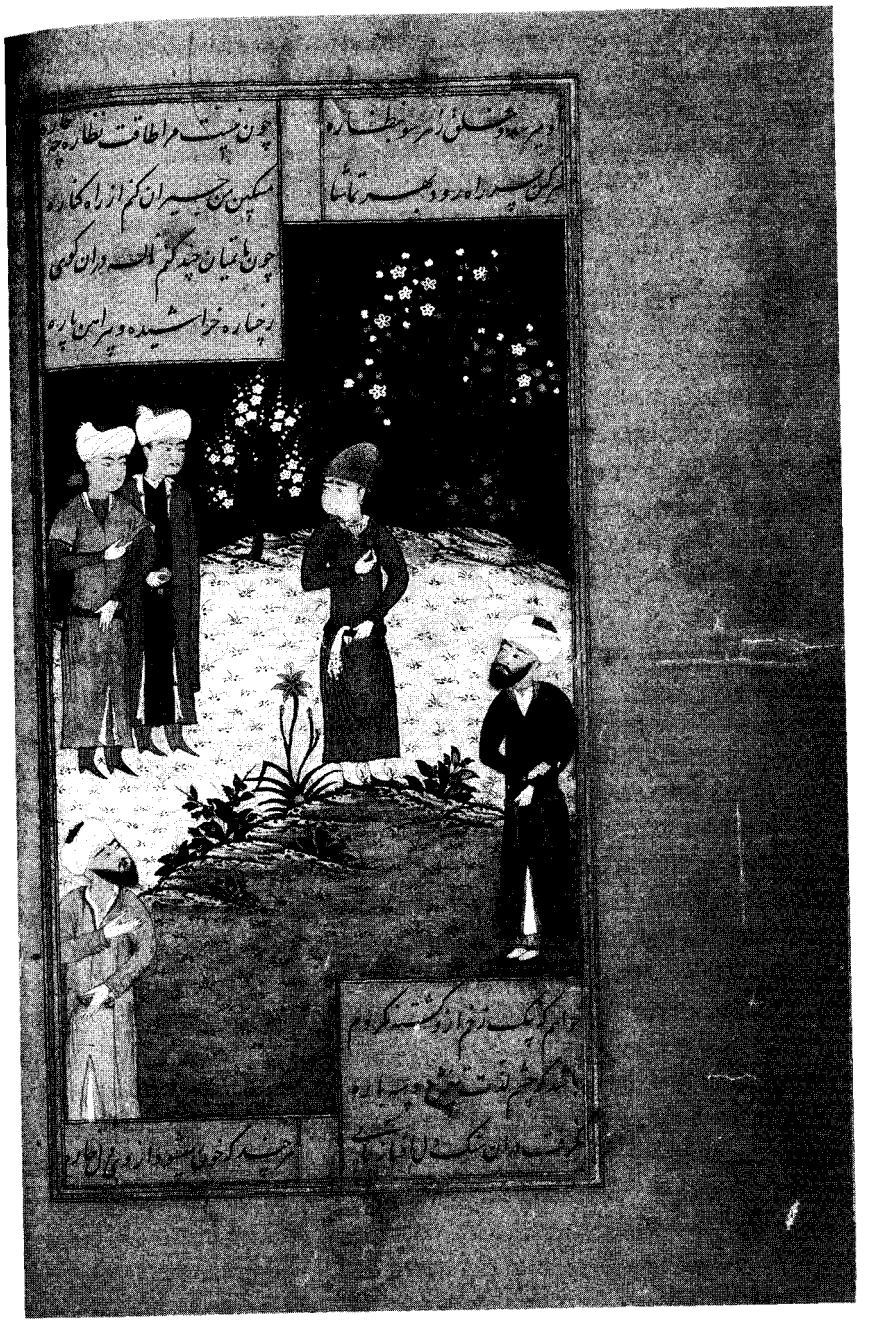
In hagiographic materials relating to the fifteenth century, the most prominent case of relationships between Sufi men that are hinted at as being improper involve the master Shah Qasim-i Anvar, who is remarked upon as a man of high spiritual attainment but unable to properly control those attracted to him. The charges against his entourage are always left vague, and some of the criticism may reflect either inter-Sufi rivalries or Qasim's purported sympathy for the apocalyptic Hurufi movement that had him expelled from Herat after a failed attempt on the life of the Timurid ruler Shahrukh (d. 1447) in 1427.[15] A hagiography of Khwaja ʿUbaydullah Ahrar states that, even in his old age, this Naqshbandi master considered Qasim-i Anvar the most charismatic Sufi he had met in his life. He reported that whenever he had gone before him he felt "that the whole world circles around him to eventually descend into him and disappear [within him]."[16] Although he was clearly a remarkable man of his age, Qasim's hagiographic profile is marred by the fact that a number of authors pointedly criticize some of his disciples. ʿAbd ar-Rahman Jami writes that he had personally met some of Qasim's followers and considered them outside the pale of Islam altogether. One follower, whom Jami considered a worthy Sufi, told him that Qasim himself told him not to stay with him because of some of his other followers. Jami's explanation for the contrast between Qasim's own undeniable excellence and the waywardness of some of his followers is that he was too generous a person to shun anyone who came to him because of his innate attractiveness. People inclined to worldly pleasures took unjust advantage of this by deriving meanings from his words that he did not intend.[17] In Ahrar's words, as his hagiographer reports them, people explained Qasim's situation in two ways. They believed that he was either aware of his disciples' corruption, but suffered it as his fate, or these disciples were like the thorns put on top of walls around an orchard that keep thieves and animals away from the fruit. The prize protected by the thorns in this case was Qasim's true spiritual station, which he wanted to keep hidden from strangers.[18]

The same source that reports this provides the most detailed description of the activities of Qasim-i Anvar's followers. It reports that Ahrar said that once,

when Qasim had come to Transoxiana, his followers got together and went around the bazaar to collect beardless young boys (*pisaran-i amrad*) with whom they began to establish relations. Their explanation for this behavior was that they were observing the beauty of God in the beautiful forms of these boys. As this was going on, Qasim asked after his followers by saying, "where have those pigs of mine gone?" Ahrar indicated that this meant that, to Qasim, these men appeared as pigs when he saw with his spiritual sight (*nazar-i basirat*).[19] The practice of contemplating young boys as beautiful forms that represent divine beauty is usually known through the term *shahidbazi* and has a controversial history in Sufi contexts. It is the chief defining feature of the work *Majalis al-ʿushshaq*, which I have discussed earlier. While it is difficult to substantiate *shahidbazi* as a widespread social practice, such "looking" is a common feature of Persian poetic rhetoric. The theme is reflected also in the painting that is a part of an anthology and is accompanied by the verse of ʿAbd ar-Rahman Jami. (figure 5.3).

In Ahrar's view, to act amorously toward beings who were only outwardly beautiful was a grave error. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ahrar's own story of attachment to the master Yaʿqub Charkhi involved falling in love with a master described as having a beautiful form. This, however, was a case of a person with a high spiritual station being able to control how he appeared to others in order to attract and guide them. His and others' criticism of Qasim-i Anvar's followers stems from the fact that they took physical beauty by itself as a legitimate object of love without reference to its deeper meanings. For a man to fall in love with a man deemed outwardly beautiful was not a problem in itself; the difficulty occurred only when the subject and object of desire were not part of a larger framework tethered to Sufi ideology.

While reports about Qasim absolve him from being responsible for the unnamed corrupt behavior of some of his followers, it is clear that he was seen as somewhat of a failure as a Sufi master. His attractiveness is remarked upon by one and all, but his unwillingness or inability to control the disciples is seen as at least an unwitting weakness. The ultimate cause for this was his incapability to manage the desires of those connected to him. His personal charisma was such that people were attracted to him, but unlike the truly consummate masters, he could not adequately control and manipulate the relationships established on the basis of this attraction. This flaw in his personality was at least in part responsible for the fact that he did not initiate a long-lasting Sufi community despite acknowledgment that he surpassed his contemporaries in charisma. This lack of a dedicated community meant that he never became the subject of an extended hagiography dedicated solely to his miracles and achievements, and narratives regarding him have to be culled from works devoted to others.



5.3 Men contemplating a beautiful youth. Shirvan, 1468. Opaque watercolor. Copyright © The British Library Board. MS. Add. 16561 fol. 79b.

So far I have related stories in which handsome men are objects of someone's desire. A story regarding Ahrar provides a glimpse of the other side in the form of the haughty attitude adopted by a man known for his beauty. When the master returned to Herat after becoming attached to the Naqshbandi chain through Ya'qub Charkhi, he attended the house of an associate who was dedicated to the Khwajagan and greeted him with great respect. In fact, Ahrar's new association was so apparent on him that everyone present paid him great respect save one young man famous for his looks. On this occasion the host told Ahrar that although everyone had already eaten, if he was hungry food could be prepared. Before Ahrar could reply, the handsome man, who was used to being treated with deference, interjected to say that time for food was over. Noticing this rudeness, Ahrar indicated that he would teach him a lesson and proceeded to request that food be prepared for him. Then he worked on the handsome man's interior so that he fell in love with him and went out himself to make the fire for the food. His face became dirty from soot in the process, spoiling the beauty of which he had been so proud earlier. From that time onward, he forgot about his own beauty and became an absolute devotee of Ahrar. The story marked the triumph of the Sufi master's beauty over the attractiveness confined to external forms.[20]

Stories of attraction and love between men in hagiographic narrative indicate censure only in cases when lovers fall in love with beautiful beloveds whose status or moral attributes do not conform to Sufi values. The authors register no problem with the fact of a deep and abiding love between men who find each other physically attractive as long as they are appropriately positioned with respect to each other and are aware of beauty as an attribute for those truly worthy of being objects of love. This pattern contrasts significantly with cases when one of the parties is a woman not in such a relationship with a man where that would allow them unrestricted access to each other.

Desiring Women

A most emphatic example condemning a Sufi man's attraction for an unrelated woman is presented in the hagiography dedicated to 'Umar Murshidi. The master said that, during his youth in Kazarun, one day he went into the desert and on the way back heard a beautiful voice, which he greatly enjoyed. He felt tremendous desire to see the person to whom the voice belonged and could not get this idea out of his head even when he returned to his Sufi chamber and immersed himself in his religious pursuits. Then, when he was reading the Quran, he suddenly heard a voice commanding, "Look!" When he did this, he said, "I saw a woman, naked from head to foot, sitting and showing me her vagina, unhesitatingly and boldly, uncovering herself in a way that no wife would ever do in front of her husband." The voice then said, "This is the woman whose voice you had heard and taken pleasure from. Your hearing her voice is the same as seeing her vagina."[21]

This story implies the dangers of being led astray by sensory perception more strongly than anything present in narratives involving men alone. The Sufi's apprehension of a pleasant voice and the possibility of seeing a beautiful being leads to something indecent in a way never indicated for a handsome man. The critical issue that makes the difference here is that men's social relationships with women are subject to legal surveillance that does not apply to matters between men. What may seem like an extraordinary jump between Shaykh 'Umar's hearing a woman's voice to her appearing naked in front of him is a direct reflection of Islamic legal ideology in which social intercourse between men and women is regulated according to the possibility, or lack thereof, of a lawful sexual relationship between them. Since Shaykh 'Umar is neither married to the woman nor in a relationship that would make marriage impossible, his access to her has significant legal limitations. On this basis, the connection caused by her producing a sound and his hearing it laterally shifts the situation to the sexual domain immediately.[22]

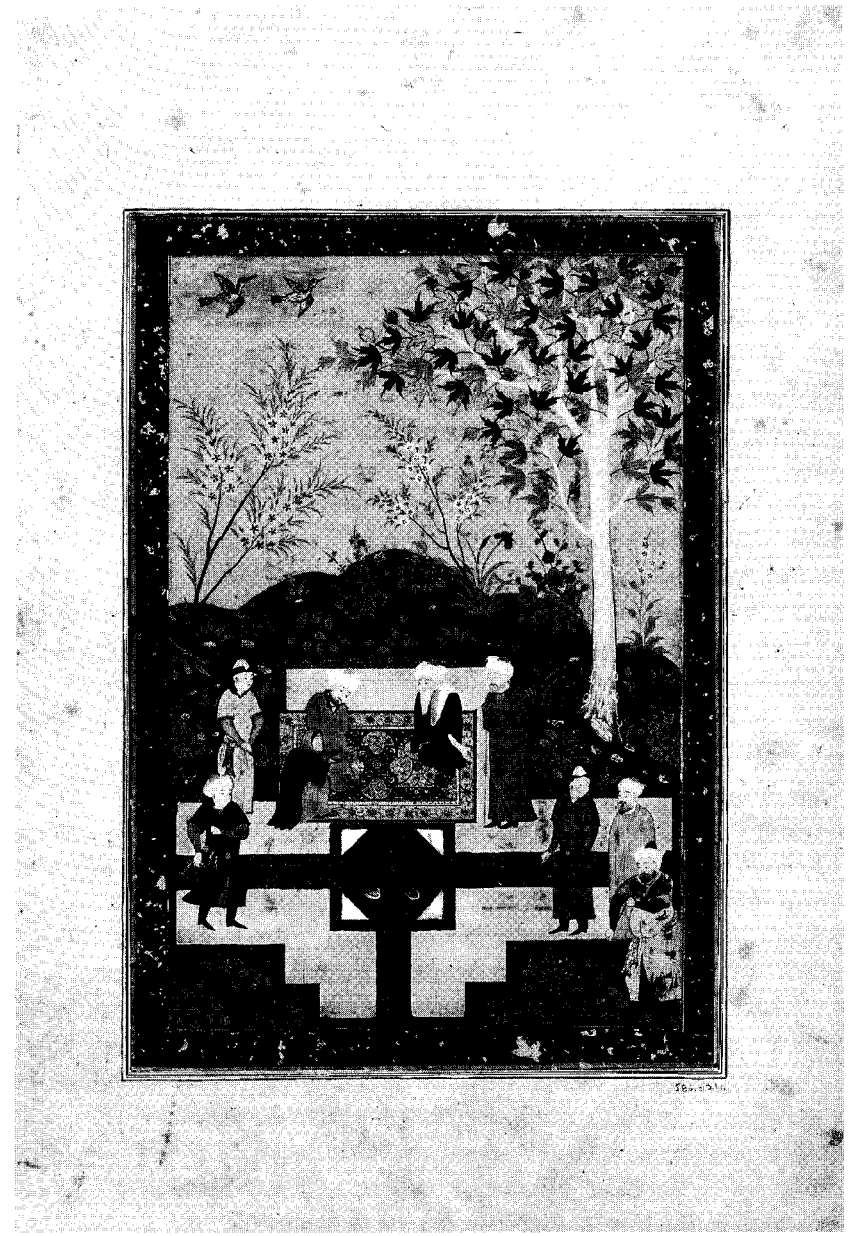
A number of other, milder examples can be added to this story to make the point. A disciple of Amin ad-Din Balyani, another master from southern Iran, said that one day, when he was in the mosque, he heard a woman's voice and was intrigued to see her. As he was walking over to take a peek, a stone fell on his foot and rendered him unconscious. Later, when he went to see the master, he told him to be glad that he had not actually seen the woman. In that case the punishment would have come to his eyes rather than his feet and could have blinded him.[23] Similarly, a man said that before he came to ask Baha' ad-Din Naqshband to become his disciple, he had spent time in an empty house with an unrelated girl with whom he talked and to whom he gave a kiss. When he expressed his intention of becoming a Sufi to the master, he replied that this did not seem to go along with his other recent behavior, which was illegal. The master's knowledge of the matter was one of his charismatic miracles.[24] Once when Khwaja Ahrar was instructing disciples on the necessity of averting the gaze from a woman because it would cause lust, a man asked what about a case where there is no lust. Ahrar got angry and said, "Even I cannot have a lust-free gaze; where have you come from that you can do it?"[25]

To these stories one can add a case involving Shaykh Safi of Ardabil, in which the direction of the gaze is inverted from female to male. As I mentioned in chapter 3, this master is known for spectacular dance when in the throes of ecstasy, during which he would leave the ground and sometimes hover over

the whole assemblage. Once, when this occurred, the walls of the room picked themselves up from the ground and joined in as well, causing the sensation of an earthquake in the area. A woman, who was a sayyid and married to a nobleman, came out of her house to see what was going on. When people told her, she waded through the crowd to get to the mosque in order to see the shaykh for herself. However, as soon as her eyes alighted on him he sat down. Some people present there realized that this was because an unrelated woman had seen him, and they asked her to leave. She complied with the request and thought to herself, "If this audition were an effect of the carnal self (*nafsani*), it would have intensified with the gaze of a *na-mahram*. But, since it was an audition of the outpouring of divine secrets (*fayz-i asrar-i ilahi*), it became illegal with contamination from such a gaze." She then became a disciple of the master and gave away a part of a village to him.[26]

It should not come as a surprise that Sufi hagiographic representations pay close attention to legal strictures regarding male-female relationships. These texts are products of the religious literati who can be expected to adhere to established conventions in such matters. There is, however, no reason to take these legal strictures as literal descriptions of reality and presume that men and women interacted very narrowly in this context. Even hagiographic narratives do contain instances of unrelated men and women connected through gazes that do not merit censure. For example, once an old and decrepit woman came to see Khwaja Ahrar and sat down close to him. He asked her why she had come and she replied, "we have come to see your beauty." To make a joke of this, he turned to an associate and said, in a soft voice so that she would not hear, "and what do we get to see?"[27] Although rare, women do make it to pictorial representations of Sufi gatherings, as in figure 5.4, which shows one as part of the company assembled around a Sufi master. While homosociality can be presumed to have been a widespread norm, a larger range of interactions and attitudes become visible as we turn to other stories involving women.

In the allegory *Husn-o-dil*, the male and female main characters are separated and interact in stylized ways according to a particular gender ideology. Hagiographic representations differ from this in that both males and females can come to occupy the place of beauty and become seductive to the sight of a lover. Moreover, in the hagiographic sphere, seduction by beauty is ubiquitously subordinated to the legal framework in which male-female interactions are subject to far greater scrutiny than those between men alone. In the remainder of this chapter, we will attempt to see whether, and to what extent, representations of females show them in the position of the heart who seeks higher beauty in the form of the great Sufi masters and God, through its sight and other senses.



5.4 A Sufi gathering in a garden. Bukhara, 1520-1530. Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper mounted on an album page, 22.1 × 14.2 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Purchase—Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, S1986.216.

MOTHERS AND MASTERS

In the previous chapter I discussed stories regarding Shaykh Safi ad-Din Ardabili's early years, in which his mother figures prominently. However, the mother disappears from the narrative once Shaykh Safi becomes a disciple of Shaykh Zahid, and I argued that the transition from mother to master represents a changing of the guard with respect to guidance and love provided by a caretaker. This pattern is evident in a number of different places in hagiographic literature and can be regarded as the distinctive view on mothers of Sufi men in this material.

The interchangeability of the mother and the master is traceable in instances where the master is shown fulfilling a distinctly maternal function. One example of this that employs striking bodily imagery comes from the early life of Baha' ad-Din Naqshband. His main hagiographer relates that after Naqshband had entered into a relationship with the Khwajagani master Sayyid Amir Kulal, he was once passing through a village that was home to a Sufi master named Shams ad-Din. This master was suitably impressed by his potential and attempted to persuade him to stay with him rather than continue the journey. Naqshband's response, which convinced Shams not to pursue the matter further, was: "I am a child of others. Even if you were to put your breast of training (*tarbi'at*) in my mouth, I would not grasp the nipples."[28] The same metaphor is used in another work dedicated to Naqshband as well, albeit from a different angle. Khwaja Muhammad Parsa reports, when Naqshband finished his training with Amir Kulal, that the master told him, "I have dried up my breasts so that the bird of your spirit may come out of the egg of your base humanness. But your bird has gone much farther than [merely] this."[29]

A story that portrays the Sufi master in a maternal role and in competition with an actual mother of a disciple is given in hagiographies dedicated to Khwaja Ahrar. Ahrar himself related from the earlier master 'Ala' ad-Din Ghijduvani that he went to join the circle of Amir Kalan Vashi at the age of sixteen. This master instructed him in the Khwajagani path and told him that he must hide his Sufi affiliation from everyone, including people very close to him. He did as he was told, but it became difficult to hide his activity when he began to grow progressively weaker as an effect of bodily mortifications. His mother noticed the change and asked him if he was sick, which he denied. She perceived the answer as recalcitrance and, as a challenge, threw open her shirt to reveal her chest and said that she would not forgive him the milk he had drunk from her breasts if he did not come clean. He then saw no way out except to tell her the truth, and she herself decided to join the Khwajagani path upon hearing of the master's instructions. However, her decision caused 'Ala' ad-Din consternation because she had not been authorized by the master. He raised the matter

with Amir Vashi, who said that it was fine and that he gave her the permission. Then one day, when he and his mother were alone at home, she asked him to get a pot of warm water. She did ritual ablutions from the water in front of him, prayed two cycles, and began doing Sufi exercises and shortly passed away.[30]

'Ala' ad-Din Ghijduvani's story matches that of Shaykh Safi in that the masters take control of the young men's bodies at the beginning of the Sufi path. In both cases women are shown as competing with the masters for their sons' affection and obedience, although they eventually acquiesce to the transfers. 'Ala' ad-Din's mother goes one step further by herself becoming a Sufi and being removed from the narrative completely through death. Both stories represent the future masters' mothers as having approved the sons' paths, even though this means losing their sons. There is no way to avoid this, however, since the young men's maturation as Sufis depends on being in love with the master over the mother.

The hagiography of Zayn ad-Din Taybadi presents a story with an alternative end to the mother-master competition over a young disciple. The author of this work relates from Zayn ad-Din's son Shams ad-Din that one day, a man unknown in the area appeared in Zayn ad-Din's gathering. The master asked him to sit down, but he first kept standing, lost in thought for some time, and then yelled loudly, fell down, and fainted. The master felt great pity for him and took care of him personally while weeping himself. When the man was completely recovered, he sent him away with the promise of remaining in touch, saying that he should go back to his mother because she greatly desired to see him. As he was leaving, people asked him how he had met Zayn ad-Din since no one had ever seen him before. He told them that he was from the region of Fars and that he had been saved when Zayn ad-Din had appeared miraculously somewhere at a moment when he had been in grave danger. He had been looking for Zayn ad-Din since that time and had realized that he had found him at the moment when he had yelled and fainted earlier.[31]

This story represents the rare case of a mother retaining her power over a Sufi son. Positing this story next to the ones I have related earlier highlights the fact that the earlier mothers are shown to have been willing participants in the paths undertaken by their sons and voluntarily gave up their control. The juxtaposition also underscores the fact that, under hagiographic conventions, a successful bond between a great master and an outstanding disciple is a fated event. When it occurs, a disciple is being incorporated into a Sufi group's self-articulation, and, when it fails to happen, the disciple is excluded from charismatic functions. The connection is essential for the continuation of the Sufi intergenerational chain of authority, which must remain unbroken in order to perpetuate a valuable mode of religious practice. The movement between the two types of love represented by the mother and the master is thus a necessary

precondition for the functioning of the Sufi mode of perpetuation of religious authority.[32]

WOMEN MARRIED TO SUFIS

The vast majority of Persianate Sufi masters whose lives form the subject of hagiographic narratives are described as married men after the early years of Sufi searching in their lives. Equated with the commencement of heterosexual relations, marriage is avoided until the time when men are thought to have overcome sexual urges likely to lead them astray from religious pursuits. Stories relating the great masters' marital alliances provide a glimpse into the valuation of women as well as men. Such stories include cases where the women are shown to be worthy companions for the masters or situations in which they are seen as trials brought upon the masters to strengthen their religious resolve. Under both options, the masters are shown to have tied the knots to the spouses willingly, but women's purported actions have different repercussions for understanding the construction of gender in this context.

Sufi Wives

In literature produced during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the most detailed example of a wife with the same values as her Sufi husband comes from a work concerned with the life of Fazlallah Astarabadi, the founder of the Hurufi movement. Written by one of his chief followers and successors, this work describes Fazlallah as a strict ascetic during the period he was just beginning to acquire fame as a master in Tabriz around 1370. His followers at this time included a vizier named Khwaja Bayazid Damghani, whose wife, also a devotee, was originally from the city of Astarabad and related to Fazlallah. This couple wished to arrange the marriage of their fourteen-year-old daughter to Fazlallah, and the mother approached him through one of his disciples. At first, she was told that the matter was difficult since the circumstances in which Fazlallah lived, incumbent on anyone who became attached to him, would be particularly arduous for a woman. She persisted by asking for the exact conditions and was told that the girl would be required to forsake all personal belongings upon leaving her parents' house; renounce any food or dress that could not be paid for by the small means of a dervish; determine never to take a single step out of the Sufi hospice where Fazlallah lived after entering it; adopt a bed made of sackcloth, a felt pillow, and a cotton dress; respect the religious community's practice of seclusion at night; and adopt the stringent collective prayers practiced daily by the community.

The prospective wife's mother was glad to hear these conditions and asked the girl what she thought of them. She wholeheartedly agreed because of the spiritual return she and her parents would attain as a result of the harsh life she would lead. She first spent four months in the house of another dervish, as a kind of trial to make sure that she could withstand the difficulties, and then married Fazlallah. Her entry to the dervish community was marked by the symbolic step of putting on the distinctive green dress worn by all of Fazlallah's dedicated followers. Besides the generally harsh living conditions, she also worked alongside other dervishes to sew caps that were sold to provide for the community's food and other bare necessities. In connection with this marriage, Fazlallah was asked about the permissibility of sexual relations, and he said that they were not spiritually harmful as long as the intention was procreation and not pleasure.[33]

We do not have any further representations of the activities of Fazlallah Astarabadi's wife in Hurufi literature. However, the same follower and hagiographer who provides the story about her represents one of his daughters named Kalimatallah Hiya al-ʿUlya as his main heir after his execution in 1394.[34] Historical and hagiographic sources external to the Hurufis state that this daughter remained active later on and that she and her husband gathered a considerable following in Tabriz, which led to hostility from the local community of scholars. The Karakoyunlu ruler Jahan Shah (d. 1467) was able to resist pressure from her enemies for some period but eventually gave in and issued the fatal order that led to both her death and the massacre of more than five hundred followers in 1441–42.[35]

A story similar to that of Fazlallah Astarabadi's marriage is related from the life of Shaykh Ahmad Bashiri, although here the woman makes numerous appearances in the narrative following her betrothal. The author relates that the master's associates included a man of high status who would come and visit him often. On one occasion he found the meeting so moving that he exchanged turbans with the master and was later made to understand by a friend that that indicated the development of a family relationship. He then approached Shaykh Bashiri, offering the hand of his twelve-year-old daughter Bibi Fatima. The master was initially reluctant to agree to the match because he wanted to remain celibate, but he then had a dream in which "men of the unseen" brought a woman to him and married her to him. He took this to be a command and acquiesced to the proposal. The marriage tie had an important effect on the lives of his parents-in-law as well. They did not have a male child and asked the shaykh for an intervention. They were soon graced with the birth of twin boys.[36]

Both Bibi Fatima and her mother, Amr Khatun, are mentioned a number of times in this work, the latter designated as Shaykh Ahmad's vicegerent among women. This work is exceptional in that it explicitly describes women as equal

to men in their religious accomplishment.[37] The work iterates multiple times that women were a part of the master's inner circle of devotees throughout the various phases of his career.[38] The author mentions the procedure used for women when describing initiation into the group: at the point where the master is supposed to take the disciple's hand in his own, he offers his sleeve to the woman to hold in order not to cross the legal boundary that proscribes touching among *na-mahrams*. Interestingly, the oath of discipleship he is reported to have administered includes the promise on the part of the disciple not to look at a *na-mahram*, but this does not seem to have caused women to be excluded from Sufi guidance by the master.[39] In fact, the hagiographer makes the point that women and men dedicated to Shaykh Bashiri tended to lose their carnal desires completely: in one case, a woman who was married to a man for seven years had had so little real contact with him that she could not even recognize his face.[40]

Women as Burden

Some stories relating to the wives of famous masters show the men in states of vulnerability and powerlessness. These are rare situations since the hagiographic paradigm as a whole involves disciples and heirs representing the great masters as phenomenally powerful beings. Moreover, the total authority invested in images of masters works to justify the claims of the successors who either sponsored or wrote the hagiographies, making an indication of vulnerability counterproductive for their purposes. The way the narratives rationalize the masters' vulnerability provides an important view into the construction of gender as well as the social dynamics of Sufi communities and literary patterns in general.

The author of the *Rashahat* tells of a master named Tunguz Shaykh in Turkestan who belonged to the family of Ahmad Yasavi. A visitor to his place saw that his wife paid no attention to matters like cooking, usually associated with women. On this occasion, as Tunguz Shaykh was bending down to a fire that was refusing to light, his wife came in and gave him a swift kick such that his head went into the fire and his face was covered with ash. Much to the surprise of the visitors, he continued with his work and ignored this insult. When asked about his forbearance, he replied, "The knowledge and states that have become apparent to us have been due to our patience in putting up with the oppression of the ignorant."[41] In this instance the master's wife wholly personified the worldly burdens the Sufi must endure in order to acquire religious merits.

Detailed stories of a wayward wife of a prominent master relate to the Naqshbandi Shaykh ʿAlaʾ ad-Din Abizi, who is otherwise portrayed as having been a tremendously powerful presence in front of his disciples. The hagiographer reports that he and his wife used to fight a lot, and once she hit him so hard that his forehead was bloodied. In his anger he grabbed her head and turned it so that it went halfway around, facing backward. Seeing this terrible condition, a child of theirs of five or six pleaded with the father, so that he restored the woman to normalcy. She was then grateful, feeling remorse, and gathered the area's notables to declare publicly that she forgave her dower and any other rights owed her.[42]

This incident did not resolve all Shaykh Abizi's difficulties with his wife. Later he again appeared in company with his collar torn and a bloody forehead, prompting someone to ask why he did not just divorce the woman, particularly since she had forgiven her dower and this would not even have monetary implications. He replied that she was a sayyida and that the fault had been his own because he had been rude to her. He then went and apologized to the woman. In his more extended explanation for his forbearance, he said that she was an affliction he knew and he was afraid that if he got rid of her something worse would alight on him. Going deeper than this, he also explained that putting up with this wife and taking care of children were necessary for him to stay in this world and obey God's commands. Otherwise he would be absorbed completely in the interior reality and would not be able to perform obligations like prayers and fasting. The hagiographer states that this explanation was akin to other stories of great men: a master would ask a servant to beat him whenever he experienced a great mystical state in order to keep him in the world. The author then suggests that these instances were equivalent to the famous report according to which Muhammad would ask his wife ʿAʾisha to intrude upon his thoughts by saying, "Talk to me, Humayra."[43]

The representation of the relationship between Shaykh Abizi and his wife presents important clues for understanding gender in the context. First, the male-female difference here maps exactly to the interior-exterior dichotomy critical to Sufi thought, enforcing the notion that women are tied to lower, material forms while men have the capacity to delve into the highly valued interior. This is, then, a case of the interior-exterior difference being carried into the social sphere in a way that gives the dichotomy greater power and naturalizes the gender difference and hierarchy. Taken at face value, women appear, like children, devoted to their carnal desires even when they are sayyidas. On the other hand, men wish to ascend out of the material world toward a more noble existence. By this token, men who do not live up to their potential are like women, as exemplified in a story about a master who got very agitated when he saw a religious scholar of questionable merit approaching him and asked his disciples to lead him away. When someone suggested that this man was knowledgeable, the shaykh responded: "In my eyes he was a naked black woman with drooping breasts, showing all manner of ugliness." While this master stated this

out in the open, Ahrar opined that the most upright masters cover up such matters when they become visible to them because of their special sight rather than stating them in the open.[44] In this instance the interior-exterior division that forms the basis of abstract Sufi thought is a matter enacted in social and textual forms.

Beyond the arguments stated in the texts, stories about recalcitrant wives married to Sufi masters contain important information when we consider the frames within which they are set. The narrators are male Sufi adherents who write from the positions occupied by men who question the masters about their putting up with the women and not divorcing them. They are *murids*, those who desire the master and cultivate deep love for him, thereby competing with masters' wives and children for affection and emotional as well as material resources. One source asserts this explicitly, calling the disciple's transformation into a new body after progressing on the Sufi path a birth that is the product of a kind of marriage between the desiring disciple and the desired master.[45] My suggestion throughout this book that hagiographic narratives be seen as textual performances provides us a way to make sense of the stories that make powerful masters appear vulnerable through negative valuation of women attached to them.

WOMEN AS ACCOMPLISHED SUFIS

The contrast between praiseworthy and troublesome wives in the stories discussed hinges on the question of whether the women in question are also Sufis. When they are, their interests with respect to the masters are aligned with those of other, mostly male, Sufis, leading to positive representation in hagiographic narratives. And, when they are not Sufis, their needs and demands disrupt the largely male-to-male world of Persianate Sufism. Given these strictures, we can expect that the most laudable female characters to be found in hagiographic narratives would be Sufi relatives of the masters, including wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters. As we have already seen, this is indeed the case, and women tend to become valuable particularly when they constitute crucial links between men who are deemed important.[46]

Exchange of Women Among Men

When Shaykh Abizi fights with his wife in the stories previously discussed, one of his reasons for later self-censure is the acknowledgment that the woman is a sayyida and thereby deserving of special respect. This is particularly important since Abizi is not a sayyid himself and can allege kinship with the Prophet

only as an affine through marriage. Although Abizi's wife's relationship with the Prophet is very remote (she lived eight centuries after his death), the general respect accorded sayyids means that she occupies an intermediate role between two important men. This is the position in which we find many other women as well in hagiographic narratives.

A few examples of this pattern are helpful to make this point. Proceeding chronologically among masters discussed in the book, Shaykh Safi ad-Din Ardabili is shown to have thought explicitly along these lines. Once he had become a confidant of Shaykh Zahid Gilani, the master one day asked: "How is it that there is a master who has such a disciple that the master's station is because of his [disciple's] honor?" Shaykh Safi first thought that he was talking about the two of them, but then the master added: "The master gives his daughter to him, who gives birth to a child whose honor ratifies the station and glory of the father and the grandfather." Shaykh Safi then thought that the master was talking about another man who was his son-in-law, and he became especially attentive to him. However, at the age of seventy Shaykh Zahid eventually married another woman who gave birth to a son and a daughter. This daughter was Bibi Fatima, Shaykh Safi's future wife, who became the mother of the man who eventually became both his and Shaykh Zahid's heir.[47]

Continuing this pattern, it is reported that Baha' ad-Din Naqshband had four daughters, three of whom were married to disciples or their sons and became mothers to later members of the group.[48] Similarly, 'Abd al-Avval Nishapuri, one of Khwaja Ahrar's main successors, was also his son-in-law.[49] Importantly, Nishapuri also wrote a hagiography of Ahrar, indicating an overlap between kinship structures and textual production of the saintly figure's life. In hagiographic representations of exchanges of women, the relationship of love and desire is always between fathers-in-law and sons-in-law rather than either of the men and the woman through whom kinship is established. This characteristic reinforces the male-centeredness of the narratives in terms of both the regulation of an emotion as powerful as love and the ability to establish voluntary relationships.

Women as Exemplary Masters

Shaykh 'Umar Murshidi's hagiographer reports that the master said, when he traveled to Mecca to perform the hajj, that an old man told him an amazing story. He said:

> One day as I was circumambulating, I saw a woman who was doing the same while skipping on one foot. I asked her about her condition. She said, "I have a suckling child still in the crib. I came from my own region in order to perform

the hajj with the intention to return. As I started the circumambulation, I heard the child crying, so I started moving the crib back and forth with one foot. With the other foot, I continued to go around [the Kaʿba] and also performed the rites of running between two hills (*saʿi*), in order that neither [obligation] would be forfeited." She said that there was three months' worth of distance between the two places.[50]

The principle exemplified in this story—that space can contract for the religious elect—is a widespread motif in Sufi literature and is discussed in chapter 7. The story provides an easy way to imagine the more restricted mobility allowed to women as compared to men in the societies in question. While God is shown to allow the woman to perform the great ritual because of her spiritual station, that that does not mean absolution from her maternal duties. The double burden on this woman as compared to men was in part responsible for women not becoming major players in the Sufi social world. In material I have surveyed for this book, there is one narrative that stands out for its exceptionality when it comes to discussing the possibility of women becoming full-fledged Sufi masters. There may well be other examples of female masters in sources not known to me at present, although a handful more would not negate the general point I am making. My example pertains to Kalan Khatun (literally, Elder Lady), daughter of Sayyid Amir Hamza, the son and chief successor to the Khwajagani master Sayyid Amir Kulal. What we know of this woman comes from a hagiography of the family written by her own son Amir Shihab ad-Din. This is a man who had legitimate free access to her, so that the case does not violate the rule of hagiographers not making unrelated high-status women subjects of discussion in the "public" hagiographic sphere.

Shihab ad-Din relates that when it came time for Amir Hamza's death he asked two of his nephews, one by one, to be his successor. The older of the two declined because he was a complete recluse, while the younger preferred to serve people in other ways than being a Sufi guide. He then turned to his own children and overlooked two of his sons in favor of his daughter, saying that everyone seeking him should seek her and that, just as some people are proud of their sons, he was proud of his daughter. Shihab ad-Din states that, while his mother was the subject of numerous miracles that were well known to her close relatives, he did not consider it appropriate to relate these in the open.[51] While his ostensible reasoning for this reluctance is that this would divulge the secrets of a Sufi, this clearly pertained only to women since he describes the miracles of men in great detail throughout the rest of the text. Such an attitude automatically restricts women from becoming recognized as prominent friends of God since public affirmation of the ability to perform miracles is a crucial aspect of being accorded this status.

After registering his reluctance, Shihab ad-Din does tell one story regarding his mother's spiritual powers. The particulars of this story are revealing in that they show the additional steps a woman needed to undertake so as to act as a full-fledged Sufi master in this context. He relates that some time after Kalan Khatun's accession to her father's mantle, the prominent Khwajagani master and author Khwaja Muhammad Parsa decided to go to Mecca for the hajj and came to Amir Kulal's shrine to ask his permission. After visiting the grave, he said that he must also ask permission from Kalan Khatun since she was Amir Kulal's heir and her father had said that whoever seeks him must seek her. He proceeded to her house for the visit, which occurred without the two ever coming face-to-face with each other. Upon his arrival, she sent some simple food to him to welcome him, and then he asked her servant to go and ask her permission for his journey. When she heard the request, she asked the servant to bring a plate, which she filled with plaited cotton and sent out to Parsa, who fell into a trance upon seeing it. When he regained consciousness, he told his companions that he had just learned something critical about himself and then he proceeded to Mecca. He performed the hajj normally, but when it came time to start the return journey, he asked the leader of the caravan to wait a couple of days. He then died in Mecca before leaving the holy city and was buried in the cotton that Kalan Khatun had given him at the time of his departure.[52]

The interaction between Kalan Khatun and Khwaja Parsa in this narrative contrasts interestingly with the majority of inter-Sufi relations that pertain only to men. In terms of her religious ability to lead disciples, Kalan Khatun appears as competent as her male counterparts: she is ratified strongly by her father, who was her own guide, and she can interpret Parsa's future to be able to guide him. She also provides for Parsa's future by giving him the cotton, knowing that he would pass away while traveling. Unlike the male masters, however, her interactions with Parsa are conducted through the intermediacy of another person (the servant) and an object (plaited cotton). Because as a *na-mahram* it is socially inappropriate for her to be face-to-face with Parsa, her ability to provide guidance requires an additional step. This requirement amounts to a restriction because it makes such a relationship cumbersome. Moreover, as discussed in the previous chapter, male masters' greatest power lay in their ability to establish love relationships with disciples that began with physical contact and ended with the bodies of masters and disciples merging into each other. In contrast, a woman could not display herself in public to become an object of love, and her female body was too different, both physically and socially, to meld with the bodies of male disciples.

Kalan Khatun's case presents important contrast with the way relationships between male Sufis are shown to have progressed in Persianate societies during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The great Sufis among men became en-

meshed in intergenerational chains and extended communities: they very often inherited their authority from multiple masters, and their power as religious and sociopolitical leaders derived from their ability to convey their charisma to large numbers of disciples through relationships described in the language of love. The constrained versus open potential in the two cases was, ultimately, a function of societal attitudes toward bodies: restricted from becoming objects of love, persons embodied female remained marginal to the massive expansion of Persianate Sufi social networks during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This meant that any Sufi chain of authority likely to proceed through a female link was greatly disadvantaged from the start. Such a chain could be extended beyond the female master either through other women, with whom the female master could interact freely, or through close male relatives, such as father, husband, or son, who could have unproblematic loving relationships with her. It is then no accident that the only female master I have mentioned here is described as a Sufi with a public role in a hagiography penned by her own son. In contrast, most male masters were subjects of works written by men who were not consanguines. This fact severely limited a woman's capacity to lead a social network that included both men and women. It is, of course, possible that women had separate all-female Sufi networks that were led by women, as can be documented for modern Muslim societies. However, such networks remain obscure to us because all medieval Islamic sources at our disposal concern themselves exclusively with social arenas managed by men.[53]

I end this chapter by registering a twist regarding the story of interactions between Kalan Khatun and Khwaja Parsa that further illuminates the gendered nature of hagiographic narratives. Kalan Khatun is not mentioned in any work other than the *Maqamat-i Amir Kulal*, but two later Naqshbandi sources provide a story in which Khwaja Parsa interacts quite similarly with another *male* master. The author of the works state, on the basis of unspecified sources, that when Parsa decided to go on the hajj, he sent a messenger to Khwaja Da'ud, the maternal grandfather of Khwaja 'Ubaydullah Ahrar, to perform an augury (*istikhara*) regarding the auspiciousness of the journey. Khwaja Da'ud gave the messenger a fox's fur for himself and a pickaxe for Parsa. The man found the gift of the fur quite odd since this was during a time of warm weather, but he kept it with him, thinking that there must be something to it. Later he was once stuck in extreme cold and the fur saved his life. Parsa took the pickaxe with him to Mecca, also without knowing the reason behind Da'ud having sent it to him. When he died in Mecca, that instrument was the only thing people could find to dig his grave.[54]

The two "dueling" stories regarding Parsa demonstrate the mutually constitutive nature of gender, lineage, and the process of hagiographic narration in multiple ways. The narrators belonged to rival branches of the Khwajagani lineage—issuing from Amir Kulal in the case of Shihab ad-Din and Baha' ad-Din Naqshband in the case of Safi and Samarqandi—both of which regarded Parsa as an authoritative figure because of his literary fame. The ultimate aim of Safi and Samarqandi was to glorify Khwaja Ahrar, which made them especially attentive to Shaykh Da'ud, Ahrar's maternal grandfather. Their major difference lies in that the two stories involve important women, albeit in different roles. Kalan Khatun speaks and acts in Shihab ad-Din's version, while the unnamed woman who was Da'ud's daughter and Ahrar's mother is a critically important but silent presence in the story given by Safi and Samarqandi. Ahrar's hagiographies, in which the woman is silent, have been regarded as authoritative accounts of Naqshbandi-Khwajagani Sufi chains since the sixteenth century. Conversely, the work in which a Sufi woman speaks and acts authoritatively survives in an obscure modern lithograph edition and a handful of manuscripts. The historical fates of the texts mirror the ambivalence regarding women we see present throughout the materials that survive to give us a picture of Persianate Sufism. Concentrating on the way women are portrayed allows us to see the constructed nature of roles ascribed to female as well as male bodies.