A Love’s Pilgrimage: From Persia to China

**Abstract**

This paper examines the enduring significance of Khajuye Kermani’s “Homay and Homayun” through the lens of Alan Palmer’s (2004) “fictional minds” framework. The study aims to analyze the construction of the narrative’s characters and the reader’s engagement with the text through the use of the archetype of journey, linguistics affordances and cultural figments. The fictional minds framework utilizes social and cognitive theories to elucidate how characters within a narrative develop a sense of future consciousness. This framework emphasizes the internalization of emotions, the evaluation of potential choices, and the pursuit of collaborative action. This study investigates how the narrator utilizes symbolism to bridge the fictional world of the heroes with broader themes of self-discovery, social responsibility, and cosmic consciousness. The study vividly demonstrates that the narrator skillfully employs symbolism and cultural cues to construct the protagonist's identity, a product of global cognitive and social forces. By providing narrative clues, the poet invites the audience to actively participate in the narrative, envision a utopian future and act accordingly to get there.

*Keywords: narrative, fictional mind, symbolism, journey, self-improvement*

# **Introduction**

Throughout history, human existence has been coupled with the power of narrative. As Barthes asserts, 'there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative; it is simply there, like life itself' (Barthes, 1982, p. 252). Narratives possess the unique ability to imbue reality with a coherence that neither the natural world nor the past can inherently claim (Cronon, 1992). Audiences craft their own identities through a dynamic interplay of being and becoming, and longing for belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Narratives, as conduits of meaning making, are inherently transformative. Individuals employ the narrative form to recall, debate, vindicate, persuade, captivate, and amuse (Bamberg & McCabe, 1998). Groups utilize stories to mobilize others and foster a sense of communal identity. Narratives also wield political influence. The social function of stories – their interconnectedness with the ebb and flow of power within the broader world – is an important feature of narrative theory (Plummer, 1995, p. 85). The audience are no longer viewed as given and natural individuals as they now construct who they are and how they want to be known. Through narratives, identities can be assembled and disassembled, accepted and contested (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999, p. 34). In narratives, rhetorical skills are summoned to equip the narration with argumentation and persuasion, to convey perspectives and catalyze collective action for change (Riesmann, 2008, p. 12).

Khajuye Kermani's Homay and Homayun is a celebrated masterpiece in Persian literature. By skillfully employing poetic devices and a nuanced understanding of his audience's cognitive, psychological, and sociological needs, Khaju opens a window into the vast potential of humanity, the pursuit of social ideals, the value of education, and the importance of setting meaningful goals. Echoing Hart's assertion that "each of us is destined for a treasure" (2004), Khaju imbues his entire poem with symbolism, elevating the protagonist's journey to a metaphysical plane. He inspires readers to believe in their own inherent magic, encouraging them to delve into the depths of reality to uncover hidden treasures. Khaju is among the earliest poets to utilize the symbolic motif of a journey to illustrate the transformative process of spiritual alchemy, wherein the base metal of the self is refined into the gold of divine union with the beloved.

To elucidate Khajuye Kermani's rhetorical strategies and persuasive techniques in Homay and Homayun, it is essential to examine the following questions:

**Thematic Journey**: How does the narrative arc of the poem utilize the motif of the journey to explore the themes of love, loss, and spiritual growth?

**Symbolic Language and Cultural Cues**: How does Khajuye Kermani employ symbolism and cultural figments to immerse readers in his didactic discourse?

**Moral and Ethical Dimensions**: How does the poet utilize the concepts of self-discovery, sacrifice, and selflessness to shape the reader's understanding of identity and social responsibility?

To address these questions, we will employ Palmer's fictional mind model, which emphasizes the interplay between linguistic devices, cognitive processes, and social interactions within the narrative. By analyzing these elements, we can gain a deeper understanding of how the poem engages and transforms its readers.

## Story

Kamal al-din Abu-ata, celebrated under the pen name Khaju, was born in 1290 CE in Kerman, one of the cultural epicenters of Persia and passed away in Shiraz in 1352 CE. Khaju's poetry is deeply rooted in Sufism, reflecting his multifaceted life as a philosopher, physician, mathematician, astronomer, and ascetic. His works exhibit a profound interweaving of these diverse scholarly pursuits. Moreover, he was a vocal critic of the prevailing political structures and boldly challenged the pronouncements and actions of religious authorities through his poetry. The underlying motive for employing poetry as a vehicle of critique against the governing regimes is to circumvent confrontation with the dominant, yet deceitful, minority holding reins of power (Ahmadi & Khatami, 2018).

The poet commenced Homay and Homayun at the age of thirty around 1319 CE and, as he himself has stated, completed it in 1331 CE, after twelve years of dedicated labor. The extended duration of composing this work is attributed to the poet's extensive travels through Iraq, Arabia, Syria, Egypt, and his eventual return to Persia via Turkey and Minor Asia. This monumental composition encompasses a staggering 4407 verses.

The poem Homay and Homayun is a love story that employs the rich symbolism of Persian culture and mythology. The King of Sham, Menoshang, after many years of marriage, fathered a son named Homay. As a child, Homay mastered all the sciences and skills of his time. One day, while hunting with his soldiers, Homay pursued a deer and found himself at a magnificent palace. There, he saw the portrait of Homayun, the daughter of the Chinese Emperor, and fell deeply in love with her. Lost in the captivating allure of the painting, an inner voice beckoned him to journey to China.

Homay sent his horsemen back to his father with a message and, accompanied by Behzad, the son of one of his father's ministers, set off for China. On their journey, they encountered a sea guarded by a demon named Samandoon, who captured them. However, they managed to escape. Caught in a violent storm, they were washed ashore on an unknown coast. A nearby army brought them to a splendid palace. The king of this land had died, and according to an ancient custom, the first person to land on the shore would become the new king. Thus, Homay became the ruler of the East.

One night, Homay dreamed of climbing a tree to reach a fine apple. In this vision, Homay professed his love for Homayun and she replied that if he wanted her, he must give up his kingdom. Undeterred, Homay continued his journey east. Along the way, he met Saadan, an Iranian merchant, who told him about the Golden Fortress and the sorceress Zendjadu, who had imprisoned the princess Parizad, the daughter of the Chinese Emperor. Homay ventured into the Golden Fortress, broke Zendjadu's spell, and rescued Parizad. With her help, he gained entry to the court of the Chinese Emperor. The next day, Homay asked for Homayun's hand in marriage. The Emperor, displeased with this union, devised a plot to make Homay believe that Homayun had died, and banished him to the wilderness. Parizad, knowing the truth, informed Homay. Enraged, Homay returned to the Emperor's palace and, after a fierce battle, rescued Homayun. Homay then brought Homayun back to Iran and held a grand wedding ceremony.

## Review of literature

The formal study of narratives gained significant momentum in the 1960s, driven by sociolinguistic research aimed at capturing authentic, unmonitored speech. This initial focus on vernacular language led to foundational work on the structural organization of narratives (Labov & Waletzky, 1967). Building upon this, scholars began to explore the social functions of narratives, examining how they perform and evaluate cultural identities (Goffman, 1959, 1979) and employ evaluative devices to shape meaning (Polanyi, 1989). These early studies established narratives as multivoiced productions, reflecting the complex interplay of social and cultural influences (Koven, 2015). Riessman (2008) further refined this understanding by outlining four distinct methods of narrative analysis: thematic, structural, dialogic/performance, and visual, emphasizing the power of storytelling to reveal both our differences and interconnectedness (Victor, 2009).

Expanding on the social functions of narratives, contemporary research has highlighted their role in cognitive development and social learning. Carpenter, Green, and Fitzgerald (2019) and Mar and Oatley (2008) posit that narratives serve as social simulations, allowing individuals to explore diverse scenarios and perspectives. This aligns with Zunshine's (2006) argument that narratives facilitate the development of a 'theory of mind,' enhancing our ability to understand others' mental states. Silver and Slater (2019) further emphasize the role of character attachment in fostering empathy and perspective-taking, thereby enhancing social learning. Gilbert, Tafarodi, and Malone (1993) contribute to this understanding by comparing the functions of fictional and real-world situations in social learning, demonstrating their shared effectiveness.

Connecting these broader theoretical frameworks to the specific context of classical Persian literature, Ashtiany (2020) demonstrates the enduring significance of narratives in Iranian culture. He argues that narrative production has been a "perennial activity" since ancient times, with major poets and writers drawing upon wise figures as sources of profound stories (p. 697). This tradition, as Golchin and Mohammadi (2022) illustrate, prioritized storytelling and didacticism over historical accuracy, granting authors considerable creative license. This emphasis on creative expression, rather than objective reporting, highlights the unique role of Persian narrative traditions in shaping cultural understanding. Thus, from the initial structural analysis of vernacular speech to the exploration of cognitive and social functions, and finally to the specific application within Persian literature, this body of research demonstrates the evolving understanding of narratives as multifaceted tools for social and cognitive engagement.

## Research method

The narrator endeavors to situate both the characters and the audience in the context of joint emancipatory action, where individual creative agency can thrive. This requires establishing a community through a convergence of perspectives, mutual learning, and the transparent sharing of needs, dreams, and aspirations (Deszcz‑Tryhubczak, 2018). The centrality of the community is reflected in the emphasis on interdependences among community members and in the perspective of the participant/observer narrators, facilitating readers’ understanding of communal life (Zagarell, 1988).

Alan Palmer’s *fictional mind* vividly asserts the primacy of social cognition in narratives and provides a powerful tool for understanding and analyzing narratives of communities (Von Contzen & Alders, 2015; Kukkonen, 2017). Palmer argues that “fictional minds, like real minds, form part of extended cognitive networks” (2010, p. 26) that “lie behind the physical behavior and form part of the philosophical concept of action” (2004, p. 107). Palmer (2010) contends that an internalist perspective alone fails to fully appreciate the significance of social thought embedded in narratives because this perspective is “inner, introspective, private, solitary, individual, psychological, and detached” (p. 42). For Palmer, attention should be paid to both approaches, “because a major preoccupation of novels is precisely this balance between public and private thought, intermental and intramental functioning, and social and individual minds” (ibid).

Throughout a narrative, protagonists encounter a multitude of choices. Given these options and the prevailing narrative conditions, audiences evaluate the decisions made and anticipate hero’s future. By examining the consequences of rejected alternatives and the benefits of the chosen path, readers become active agents in the unfolding story striving for “futures consciousness” (Ahvenharju, Lalot, Minkkinen, & Quiamzade, 2021). As Palmer explains (2004, p. 141), “the fictional text is primarily seen not as the representation of an objective story world, but as the interconnection of all of the subjective embedded narratives of all the characters who inhabit that fictional world.”

Based on the author’s overall vision for the narrative, certain influential characteristics of the protagonists are meticulously detailed to provide readers with clear benchmarks for decision-making and evaluation. The dynamic evolution of these characteristics serves to heighten reader engagement. This means that understandings of the past are relevant to understandings of the future (Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013).

The narrator maintains a commitment to honesty, revealing the vulnerabilities, doubts, uncertainties, and values that motivate both heroes and villains. This nuanced and realistic portrayal of the human condition highlights the capacity of social actors to shape socio-technical change (Ehgartner & Welch , 2024). Consequently, readers recognize that the narrative is populated by social actors whose interactions and social relations influence the various imagined futures presented (Mische, 2014) and how their interrelatedness feeds into different imagined futures.

The story celebrates the power of human agency, as characters actively pursue their goals and ideals. Through their intentional actions, they become architects of their own destinies rather than passively accepting their fate (Mische, 2009). These volitions are representations of processuality and causality in the narrative and help the reader understand the present and transition into imagined futures (Poli, 2017).

Narratives facilitate meaning-making by allowing audiences to forge new connections between disparate experiences. By cultivating a mental pool of narrative information, audiences can shape their worldview, projecting past experiences onto future life trajectories (Palmer 2004, p. 160). Fictional mind approach integrates linguistic devices for textual coherence with social-interactional and cognitive representational functions (Bouizegarene et al., 2024). Narratives, thus constructed, generate accurate individual predictions and coordinate group action by facilitating shared predictions about collective behavior (Hutto, 2017). Narrative capacity, probably an evolutionary adaptation, has primarily been a tool for information exchange and knowledge sharing, offering cognitive and social adaptive advantages for early humans by enabling more efficient storage and transmission of information among members of a group (Boyd, 2017). This mechanism achieves optimal performance when the system reaches a state of equilibrium, minimizing the difference between what was expected and what was experienced.

Narrative parsing allows audiences to follow the narrator's chain of reasoning, enabling them to construct coherent episodes from diverse experiences. Compared to previous episodes, subsequent episodes often require increased mental and physical exertion from the protagonists, demanding deeper immersion and more careful inference-making from the audience to decipher causal relationships between episodes and anticipate future events (Keven, 2016). To facilitate this process, narrators compress information into discrete events with clear beginnings and ends (Wang, Bui, & Song, 2015).

A significant aspect of the fictional mind approach is its pursuit of eudaimonia through narrative. In addition to entertainment, narratives can cultivate a deep sense of purpose, meaning, and fulfillment in the lives of their audiences (Habermas & Köber, 2015). This profound sense of well-being and gratitude is often facilitated through the development of global identities. McAdams (2018) posits that identity is an ever-evolving narrative that situates the self within a temporal framework by reconstructing the past and envisioning the future. Narrative identity provides meaning and coherence to one's life (McAdams, 2001). By immersing themselves in a narrative, audiences can empathize with characters, anticipate their actions, and vicariously experience the reinforcement of positive values. This process cultivates a sense of implicit satisfaction and contributes to a deeper understanding of the human condition (Palmer 2004, p. 138).

## Discussion

From the outset of the narrative, Khaju endeavors to ground his characters and audience in a rich web of social and psychological contexts. To establish a sense of identity for his protagonists and to legitimize their actions, he positions their endeavors within the archetype of human idealism and the pursuit of a utopian society. Khaju's masterful use of symbolism in Homay and Homayun enhances the thematic depth of the poem, adding layers of meaning and enriching the reader's understanding of its central themes (Fereydooni and Razaghpoor, 2023). Through a range of symbolic elements, Khaju explores the complexities of modern existence, the spiritual crises, and the potential for renewal. Khaju weaves moral threads into the fabric of his tale, imparting wisdom with every turn of the plot, especially in the opening verses where he extols his God:

*To some, you grant the wings of flight,*

*Inviting them to join your light.*

*To others, wealth you do bestow,*

*And bid them from your presence go* (Khajuye Kermani, 2000, p. 12)

This couplet employs vivid imagery to convey deeper symbolic meanings. Khaju focuses on the contrast between spiritual and material pursuits. In Persian literature, “wings” symbolize flight, freedom, spirituality and the ability to transcend earthly limitations. The “Invitation to oneself” represents a divine call, a desire for connection with a higher power, or a longing for belonging. “Wealth” typically symbolizes material prosperity, surrender to earthly pleasures and alienation. The act of “dispelling” also suggests a separation, rejection and turning away from a humane self. The poet presents his audience with a stark choice: a life of spiritual connection and human interaction or one of isolation and mundane routine.

Having established the initial framework, Khaju immerses the reader in the narrative. The episodes are structured using universal cognitive and sociological concepts familiar to the audience, inviting the reader from the outset to delve into the deeper cognitive and philosophical structures embedded within the narrative through the use of symbolism. Symbols, particularly those that endure, can be seen as the visual manifestation of archetypes. The greater the appeal and attraction of such symbols, and the longer that attraction endures, the more likely it is to connect to the deepest levels of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1969, p. 287).

In his youth, Homay acquired all extant knowledge and skills, especially martial arts:

*He faced the chess titans, their prowess unmatched*

*But their pieces were captured, their kingdom dispatched*

*On fields of war, a raging elephant’s might*

*Can vanquish dragons, seven-headed and bright* (Khajuye Kermani, 2000, p. 27)

Khaju underscores the pervasiveness of struggle, positing that the emotional and psychological trials of life are as arduous as any physical conflict. These couplets serve as a poignant wake-up call for every reader. He purposefully and deliberately confronts the reader with this question: "But what of yourself? Are you prepared to confront the challenges that lie ahead?"

The narrative hinges on the pivotal moment when Homay encounters the image of Homayun in a palace. This is the first significant episode, wherein Homay heeds an inner calling, embarking on a journey to reclaim what he perceives as lost. Homay's immediate acceptance of this call, even at the cost of familial ties, presents a compelling enigma to the reader. Despite his royal status and intellectual prowess, Homay's impulsive decision underscores an underlying emotional void and existential crisis, a condition mirrored in the experiences of both the protagonist and the audience. Khaju subtly suggests that true happiness transcends material possessions and societal success. By placing Homay in a state of emotional, spiritual, and cultural desolation, Khaju evokes a sense of existential angst that resonates with the reader. The desolate landscape that Homay traverses serves as a tangible metaphor for the internal decay afflicting society at large.

Narratives have been the lifeblood of humanity, serving as a means to impart cultural wisdom, delight the imagination and forge shared vision and unanimity (Boyd, Blackburn, & Pennebaker, 2020). As the narrative unfolds, cognitive tension intensifies, necessitating the narrator to integrate private thoughts and introspective mentalities into the broader network of social and cognitive interactions, as theorized by Palmer (2010, p. 42).

Inviting the readers to predict the future of the characters, their current state, and to justify their agency is a fundamental characteristic of the fictional mind approach (Palmer, 2004, p. 141). In this case the reader is part of the narrative, simultaneously mediating and interpreting the “other” in dialogue with the “self” (Riesmann, 2008, p. 24). This synchronicity and companionship between the story’s protagonist and the audience is established through the “resonance between the words and the worlds that surround them” (Charon, 2006, p. 113). To achieve this goal, Khaju utilizes the archetype of sea and its monstrous guardian and employs symbolism to elucidate their socio-cognitive functions. Thus, the reader becomes a co-combatant with the hero, engaging in a struggle against the sea and its guardian.

On their journey eastward, Homay and Behzad encounter a sea guarded by a fearsome dragon known as Samandoon. In Persian literature, the sea stands for unconscious mind, a place of mysterious desires, fears and memories (Sarfi & Mazdani, 2015). The sea embodies the chaotic interplay of life and death, the fleeting nature of time and eternity, the menacing allure of the unknown and the sublime beauty. The sea with its intimidating infinity has always been alien and as such dwarfs our human doings (Ferber, 2017, p. 191). Cirlot believes that the sea is associated with the water cycle: evaporation from the sea creates clouds, which pours down rain, which collects in rivers, which flows into the sea. These waters in flux are the transitional and mediating agents between the non-formal (air and gases) and the formal (earth and solids) and, by analogy, between life and death (Cirlot, 2001, p. 281). Homay’s voyage across the vast sea is a symbolic exploration of his inner self, a quest to identify and overcome the psychological obstacles that hinder his path ( Fereydooni & Razaghpoor, 2023).

Samandoon, a quintessential embodiment of vice and defilement, guards the passage from dystopia to enlightenment. It represents the forces that obscure human consciousness, hindering its progress and plunging it into a state of uncertainty and ambiguity. The dragon's fall from grace is symbolized by its transformation into a monstrous form:

*Samandoon's command, a fearsome sight,*

*Forty demons, thirsting for the night.*

*From ocean depths, they rise with hate,*

*To block the queen's celestial fate* (Khajuye Kermani, 2000, p. 40)

In Persian literature, dragons often embody the challenges and obstacles that must be overcome to attain material, physical, or spiritual rewards (Shahrooyi, 2015). In Khaju's poem, the dragon symbolized a transformative process, consuming the hero’s ego and giving birth to a renewed identity. This suggests that the hero must confront and conquer the darkness before emerging into the light.

Narrators summon ‘the universal human desire for connection’ (Fiske, Schubert, & Seibt, 2017) to foster empathy between the characters and the audience. To enhance this connection, the narrators adopt a transparent approach, revealing the characters' vulnerabilities, desires, and capabilities, as argued in Fictional mind approach (Schmid, 2018). This invites the audience to actively participate in judging the characters' potential to enact social change (Bazzani, 2022). The reader's experience is thus shaped by a complex interplay of character traits, authorial intent, and individual reader identity.

To foster a heightened sense of involvement, Khaju introduces a dramatic shift in the narrative by placing Homay in a novel setting and confronting him with unprecedented challenges. The protagonist's unexpected ascension to the throne and subsequent life in a lavish palace subvert the reader's expectations. The palace, a towering structure with columns reaching towards the heavens and the depths below, is a recurring motif in Homay and Homayun. As a terrestrial bridge between the celestial and subterranean realms, the palace embodies the liminal space between the conscious and unconscious minds (moallemy & razaghpoor , 2017). Its inhabitants, particularly the king, are often idealized as possessing extraordinary qualities and powers, serving as archetypes of human potential (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 734). This potent symbol of authority, power, and societal order has captivated human imagination for centuries. In the context of Homay and Homayun, the palace and the king play a crucial role in shaping the narrative, influencing the characters' desires, challenges, and ultimate destinies.

Dreams, like ladders to heaven, are prophetic and refer to the particular situations unique to the dreamer and interpretable only in that context. Dreamers enter a deeper or truer reality than the world of consciousness or reason (Ferber, 2017, p. 68). Dreaming is hyperconnective, guided by the emotions of the dreamer and all the audience (Hartmann, 1996). In literature, dreams serve as the fertile womb from which epic narratives are born (Stona, 2018). Within tales, dreams often function as revelations, propelling heroes into journeys and subsequent adventures. After ascending throne, Homay experiences a dream featuring Homayun. Intriguingly, within this dream, Homay tells Homayun about his effort to reach a sweet apple by climbing a tree and she answer him that men have always wanted apples since paradise and happily he has some in his garden. A dialogue ensues between the lover and the beloved, wherein the beloved demonstrates knowledge of the lover's past trials and expresses her dissatisfaction with their separation.

In this context, apple symbolizes Homay’s willingness to take risk and the desire to go beyond the boundaries. The dichotomy between good and evil and conscious transition to the state of awareness of the both positive and negative aspects of existence display Homay’s evolving from a vessel shaped by fate to a sculptor of his destiny. Metaphorically, khaju’s reference to apple imparts humans desire to assert independence, control over one’s life and denigrating religious determinism.

Before this, Homay had already forsaken his parents, abdicated the throne without an heir, risked his life on perilous journeys to China through treacherous mountains and deserts, and even battled supernatural forces to prove his love. Yet, Homayun was still unsatisfied, demanding that he renounce the kingdom and continue his quest eastward into the unknown. This request can be seen as a test for love and implies the beloved’s desire for complete devotion and commitment from the lover and guarantee spiritual union between them to go beyond physical and emotional realms.

In adopting a stance toward characters and events in a story, the author implicitly structures global values of well-being, fulfillment and gratitude. These author-directed involvements and agency are what in fictional mind approach is called simulation of social experience (Palmer, 2004, p. 143). When actions create similar experiences in the minds of readers, these actions acquire signification and are recognized as epiphanies or moments of special illumination (Carroll, 2018).

Having endured countless hardships, overcome numerous challenges and vanquished malevolent foes, Homay draws ever closer to the embrace of Homayun. Homay, yearning for a glimpse of Homayun, journeyed to the threshold of her palace. Yet, the beloved, suspecting his heart was divided, denied his entry. In this poignant exchange, the beloved's words were filled with reproach and complaint, while the lover's words expressed helplessness and need. The beloved accused the lover of incomplete love and dismissed his words as mere enchantment. Heartbroken and forlorn, Homay, turned away from the palace and sought solace in the wilderness and mountains. In solitude, he found companionship among the creatures of the wild. Consumed by his love for Homayun, Homay engaged in soliloquy and profound dialogues with the clouds, the wind, the snow, and the flickering flame:

*A candle's flame, a fragile sight,*

*A symbol pure, a fading light*

*Like melting wax, his life did yield,*

*A butterfly, scorched by the field*

*Love's fiery kiss, a burning brand,*

*Consumes his soul, across the land* (Khajuye Kermani, 2000, p. 99)

Using soliloquy, Khaju achieves dramatic effectiveness and helps readers better understand the exact mind of Homay. Narrators use the dramatic device of soliloquy to “create a kind of psychological depth within the character as he reveals his innermost thoughts and feelings” (Zhao, 2022).

Homay’s discourse with the fire is one of Persian literature’s most exquisite depictions of love and devotion. Traditionally, candles were crafted from beeswax, a substance symbolic of the bond between honey and wax. The inseparable union of these two elements has long represented love and companionship. When separated, the candle, ever-burning and consumed by its own flame, symbolizes the lover's enduring sorrow and longing (Shafi'e Kadkani, 2000, p. 67). Khaju’s allusion to fire and Homay’s dialogue with it highlights the depths of the lover’s despair and the unwavering sincerity of their affection. Fire, a synecdoche for all human attainments (Ferber, 2017, p. 78), has been a source of warmth and illumination. Khaju's artful use of fire implies that Homay, like a candle, has experienced the true heat of love. Moreover, the light of the fire, symbolizing wisdom, suggests that Homay has attained a new level of intellectual and emotional maturity.

The symbolic associations with the elements of nature offer invaluable insights into the poetic representations of abstract ideas in Persian literature. Khaju situates the locations of soliloquy and dialogues with nature in mountains. Mountains are near to heaven and are often the homes of gods (Ferber, 2017, p. 138). Many prophets and mythological figures often retreated to mountains, seeking solace and spiritual renewal. Mountain climbing can be seen as a metaphor for the personal journey of self-discovery, which requires perseverance and sacrifice. Mountains connote connection to higher power and a sacred site for revelations about oneself, one’s purpose and one’s place in the world. Homay's unique ability to converse with nature's elements - mountains, clouds, and animals - highlights a fundamental aspect of love: the innate human yearning for connection. Love is about unity, belonging, and reverence for all living things. It stands in stark contrast to the isolating forces of hostility, anthropocentrism (Heuberger, 2008), speciesism (Singer, 1990, p. 35), egotism, and alienation from the natural world.

After a period of introspection, Homayun, consumed by remorse, set out to find Homay. In the heart of the wilderness, she disguised herself and confronted him. A profound discourse ensued, during which Homayun, testing the depth of Homay's love, inquired, "Of what lineage are you, and what is your name?" To which Homay replied, "Nobody, I have forgotten my own name (Khajuye Kermani, 2000, p. 143)."

In realm of Persian Sufi literature, the lover has traditionally been portrayed as a seeker, while the beloved is presented as the absolute truth of God. This spiritual journey, akin to an odyssey, involves traversing various stages of awareness and self-discovery. The initial stage is characterized by the scattered "I", a state of selfishness and separation where the beloved is viewed as a means to fulfill personal desires. As the seeker progresses, they enter the stage of "we", where unity and togetherness prevail. This marks a significant transition from self-centeredness to a deeper connection with the beloved. A profound transformation occurs in the subsequent stage, "No one", where the seeker relinquishes his individual identity and all possessions and merges with the beloved. This concept, known as Fana fi'llah in Iranian Sufism, signifies annihilation in the Divine (Ghanbari & Mohaghegh, 2016). The ultimate stage, "you", represents boundless love where the seeker's individuality dissolves, and everything becomes the beloved. This transcendent state symbolizes an infinite love that surpasses all limitations.

It seems the beloved awaited this response, seeking to gauge the purity and sincerity of the lover's affection. The idea of becoming 'nameless and traceless' offers both promise and despair for Homayun. It is promising as it suggests the beloved is ascending the ladder of love, yet it also implies a sense of uncertainty as the beloved’s love may be fleeting and subject to change.

China, in Persian poetry, is synonymous with artistic refinement and the land of unparalleled beauty, especially celebrated for its charming girls (Abidi, 1981). This distant land serves as a poetic device, embodying the lover's quest for the unattainable. The journey to such a far-off place becomes a metaphor for the trials and tribulations of love, testing the lover's endurance and sincerity. The vast expanse between the lover and beloved provides poets with a limitless canvas upon which to paint vivid and imaginative landscapes. The journey itself is an archetypal motif, signifying a rite of passage for spiritual growth and metamorphosis that accompanies the pursuit of one’s heart’s desire. By selecting China as Homayun's homeland, Khaju introduces a significant challenge to the lovers. The juxtaposition of the westernmost and easternmost points of the world, represented by the lover and beloved, highlights the vast distances that love can bridge. Khaju's choice of China as Homayun's homeland serves as a powerful symbol of unity, transcending geographical boundaries, cultural difference and language barriers and affirming the interconnectedness of humanity.

In World literature, the Eastern and Western hemispheres have been associated with unique sets of ideas and imagery, influenced by their respective geographical contexts and cultural perspectives. The Far East is shrouded in mystery with fantastical creatures and extremes in which supernatural phenomena are commonplace (Azizifar & Karamipoor, 2021). In Iranian thought, orientation is the materialization of intent (Dehrami, 2023). The Orient, since it is the point where the sun rises, symbolizes illumination and the fount of life; to turn towards the east is to turn in spirit towards this spiritual focal point of light (Cirlot 2001, 244). Homay’s eastward departure is emblematic of his dedication to Homayun and his readiness to embrace the Orient. The east, as the birthplace of dawn, has been regarded as commencement and renewal and the Occident is where the sun ends its journey. In this transition, enlightenment, wisdom and liberty progress to west. Returning to the west, Homay seeks peace of hir birthplace and desire to reconnect with his roots. Yet, this homecoming also foreshadows another quest, one that transcends life itself. Marriage and giving birth to children also connote continuation of life and the perpetuation of love through future generations.

## Conclusion

Homay, the central figure of Homay and Homayun, serves as a metaphorical representation of the universal human experience of birth, life, and death. By employing iconic imagery such as roads, mountains, and seas, Khaju transforms the protagonist's journey into a microcosm of the human existential condition. Through this narrative odyssey, the poet delves into the human struggle for meaning and fulfillment. By tapping into our innate capacity for imaginative world-building, the narrative contributes to the development of social and cultural understanding. The story simulates real-life experiences, drawing on the power of observation, reflection, and emotional engagement.

Symbolism is the chain that brings the antagonists and the audience together. Readers of Homay and Homayun are encouraged to utilize their socio-cognitive abilities to trace the narrative's progression from a state of conflict and fragmentation towards a more harmonious dynamic of solidarity and shared identity. Khaju skillfully guides readers from a dystopian realm of self-centeredness to a utopian vision of interconnectedness. To achieve this, the poet emphasizes the importance of knowledge, respect for others, and a sense of humility and self-sacrifice. In Persian literature, the beloved is often associated with absolute truth, and all other entities are mere fragments of this ultimate reality. Similarly, "Homay" is a part of the greater "Homayun," symbolizing the interconnectedness of all things.

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