

*Persian Literary Studies Journal (PLSJ)*

Vol. 3, No. 4, Spring- Summer 2014

ISSN: 2322-2557

pp. 57-71

## **Barthesian Narrative Codes as a Technique for the Analysis of Attar's 'Sheikh San'an'**

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### **Abstract**

Mystic literature (Irfān) in general and Sufi literature in particular have always been alluring to scholars working in such different fields as literature, religion, philosophy, history and many other areas that have little in common. Among Sufi theologians, Farid ud-Din Attar Neishabouri is one of the unique figures to have embellished Persian literature with unprecedented mystic ideas and sufi images. Attar is a prolific author but, among his works, *Mantiq al-Tayr*, or *The Conference of the Birds* (Darbandi and Davis, 1984) is generally known as his magnum opus which has earned him a worldwide reputation. Though all the tales of this book are artfully well made in their own right, the story of 'Sheikh San'an' is undoubtedly the best. Recently a large number of scholars have tried to interpret the tale with the aid of various methods, both traditional and modern, in order to give a better understanding of its implications. The researchers intend to investigate 'Sheikh San'an', this time, in terms of Roland Barthes's five codes of narrative (proairetic, hermeneutic, semic, symbolic and cultural). The main reason for choosing this approach is because it claims that different factors--social, cultural and aesthetic--should interact for an artistic work to be actualized. Barthesian codes, then, provide a comprehensive method of assessment whereby we can deconstruct an aestheticised product so as to explore it from different angles and

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Received: 01/26/2013

Accepted: 11/22/2013

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reach its building blocks and uncover the concepts which might have still remained untold.

**Keywords:** Mystic literature, Sufi literature, Farid ud-Din Attar Neishabouri, ‘Sheikh San’an’, Roland Barthes

### Introduction

‘Sheikh San’an’ is the longest tale in *Mantiq al-Tayr*, one of the most debated in Persian literature, which has drawn the attention of a growing number of scholars both inside and outside Iran. The story is a parable depicting the Sufi doctrine of man’s relation with his God. It is simply about the spiritual quest of a leading light, among Muslims, whose pride stands in the way of his love of God. He is destined to renounce his Self paradoxically through his passionate love for a young Christian girl in order to reach the “Truth”. The renunciation of the self is interestingly portrayed through a sensational love-and-pain relationship in the context of religion which seems to have been an appealing subject to Attar. The present paper, however, tries to see the story from a post structural perspective with special regard to the five narrative codes proposed by Roland Barthes.

The story starts out with introducing Sheikh San’an as a highly celebrated “man of his time”, haunted by a dream in which he sees himself in Rome, bowing down before an idol. As the dreams are being repeated several times, he decides to depart for Rome to understand the secrets behind them. Accompanied by his four hundred disciples, San’an travels around Rome where he suddenly comes across a Christian maiden and falls in love with her at first sight. The girl first ridicules Sheikh for being old but, later, she also takes interest in his pure love and wants him to prove it by drinking wine (forbidden in Islam), tending her herd of swine (being considered as taboo in Islamic ideology) and converting to Christianity; Sheikh is so passionately in love that he eventually accepts to do all. The disciples, dismayed at and ashamed of what has befallen their master, try to reason with him but he listens to none. So they leave him and return to Mecca where they find one of the other disciples who had not gone with them to Rome. They relate to him what has happened to Sheikh. The disciple reproaches them for abandoning their master and wants them to rush back to Rome and join him in praying for the Sheikh. The prayers continue for forty days and are finally responded by the disciple’s dream of

prophet Mohammad who says there had been, for a long time, a “thick cloud of dust” between Sheikh and the Truth, the dust has been cleansed and Sheikh is free now. The disciples go to see Sheikh and find he has already changed his Christian cloak while his knowledge of Islam has returned back to him. Watching Sheikh's sufferings and true love, the Christian maiden also becomes one of his disciples, after having a dream in which Jesus wants her to join him, but she dies a few minutes after she embraces Islam.

### Selected Review of Literature

The long-lasting importance of 'Sheikh San'an' in Persian literature of the twenty first century is far from ambiguous if we simply take a look at the bulk of essays being written during last few years, some of which have been referred to here with respect to the limited scope of the study. Gholizadeh, for example, has interpreted the tale based on Mula Sadra's *Asfar-Al-Arbaeh*<sup>1</sup> (The Four Journeys) written in the 17th century. In Gholizadeh's analysis, Mecca stands symbolically for the physical world because it represents the superficial and formalistic religion whereby Sheikh has earned fame and respect. Rome, however, refers to the spiritual world where he transcends his individual self through his second journey, depicted in his passionate love for the Christian girl. It is in Rome that Sheikh experiences spiritual rapture during which he abandons reputation and experiences union with his God. The third journey is when Sheikh has eventually made the rediscovery of the Divine Beloved and has regained his wisdom and illumination. The last journey which shows his ultimate return to God takes place when he returns to Mecca with his disciples (2008). This interpretation is in contrast with that of Atashsoda who has had a symbolic interpretation of the story. In his essay, the theme of the work is seen

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<sup>1</sup> The first journey, according to Mula Sadra, is from the World to God (*min al-khalq ila'l-haqq*), the second is from God within God (*min al-haqq ila'l-haqq bi'l-haqq*), the third is back to the world from God, but with God (*min al-haqq ila'l-khalq bi'l-haqq*), while the fourth related to the second to an extent, since it is within the creation or the world (instead of being within God) but it is with God (*min al-khalq ila'l-khalq bi'l-haqq*).

as the destiny of mankind, in general, who has been expelled from Eden. According to him, Sheikh San'an and the Christian maiden stand for Adam and Eve respectively; Mecca is Eden and Rome the earth. The journey that Sheikh undertakes from Mecca to Rome has been interpreted as the fall of Adam and Eve for which both should suffer till God forgives them and lets them back to heaven (2012).

Davoodi Moghadam, however, believes that 'Sheikh San'an' is a collection of binary oppositions which allegorically and symbolically put Sufism in contrast with heroism resulting in a paradoxical relation between language and meaning, hence the defamiliarization.

In his analysis, Davoodi Moghaddam has tackled oppositions like sedentary lifestyle in Mecca versus sudden journey to Rome, Islam versus Christianity, old age versus youth etc. (2009). In a comparative study "From Kaaba to Rome", Taghvai tries to highlight the similarities between "Sheikh San'an" and Goethe's *Faust*. Taghavi, in this essay, argues that despite the fact that Attar and Goethe have been geographically and historically far from each other, they have employed similar elements and structures in dealing with similar considerations and doctrines which might be due largely to Goethe's familiarity with Islamic-romantic mysticism through Hafez (2010). Besides, there has been another comparative analysis between 'Sheikh San'an' and Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* in which the structural elements such as the main theme, narrator, characters, and frameworks, language, main and minor challenges are dealt with. Apart from discussing major similarities and some differences, the paper concludes that the major elements they have in common is actually the theme which in both works centers around a spiritual quest for Truth and self renunciation through passionate and profane love (Moshaveri and et al, 2012). Jamshidian and Noroozpour also raise a question that why 'Sheikh Sa'nan' has earned such a worldwide fame throughout history while the theme of a highly celebrated old man falling in love with a beautiful lady and losing his face among his disciples is not something new and has been very often repeated in mystical literature. In their essay, they claim what makes 'Sheikh San'an' strikingly different from other similar literary works is in fact the narrative technique, imagery and the social relations epitomized in dialogues between Sheikh and his disciples and also between Sheikh and the Christian girl artfully

rendered by Attar (2012). In another work carried out by Borzorg-e-Bigdelli and Pourabrisham, 'Sheikh San'an' has been interpreted based on Carl Jung's Principles of Individuation. The haunting dreams that goad Sheikh into taking the journey are actually dormant tensions in his collective unconscious, now brought out into consciousness through his inner conflicts. They also refer to the archetypal criticism in which the story of Sheikh San'an is seen as the representation of archetypes in the life of a pious Muslim who undergoes transformation through the process of individuation and becomes independent and different by the end of the story when the process is completed (2011).

Rohani and Shobklayee also have used A. J. Greimas's Actantial Model in their interpretation of the story of 'Sheikh San'an'. The story is broken into three pairs of oppositions of actants brought at the two ends of three axes: 1) The axis of desire: subject/object, 2) The axis of power: helper/opponent, 3) The axis of transition: sender/receiver. The analysis reaches the conclusion that all parts of the story are essential to move the story forward and that stories such as 'Sheikh San'an' have interpretable structure, therefore, their archaic and folk structure should be taken into account when interpreting them. Revealing the coherence and consistency among the elements of the story, they briefly state that that Greimas model is appropriate for interpreting Persian archaic tales. The analysis of this tale also shows the important role the reader plays during the process of reading in which he/she should make the final judgment about the roles of actants (2012).

### Discussion

Roland Barthes (1915-80) is one of the most prominent French theorists of 1960s and 1970s who, under the influence of Derrida and Lacan, shifted from structuralist constraints to the post structuralist theory and practice of meaning – producing reading (Lodge and Wood, 2000:145). In 'The Death of the Author' (1968), he rejects the traditional view that the author is the origin and the only source of meaning in a text (Selden et al, 2005:149). Reader, to Barthes, is no longer a consumer with a passive role but an active, attentive producer of the text. In his next influential work *S/Z*, written two years after 'The Death of the Author', he postulates five codes which provide the reader with a practical way to go through a text to extract meaning. According to

Barthes, ‘these five codes create a kind of network, *topos* through the entire text passes’ (20) and ‘each code is a voice out of which a text is interwoven’ and “in their interweaving, these voices (whose origin is "lost" in the vast perspective of the already-written) de-originate the utterance: the convergence of the voices (of the codes) becomes writing, a stereographic space where the five codes, the five voices intersect’ (21). In addition, each code looks at the tale from a different perspective as follows:

1. The voice of truth (the Hermeneutic code): any question, puzzle, enigma or discrepancy distinguished, suggested, formulated and held in suspense in the narrative which should be disclosed in the end.
2. The Voice of Empirics (the Proairetic code): other major structuring principles that build interest or suspense on the part of the reader or viewer. This code applies to any action that implies a further narrative action. It is a series of the actions which finally form the plots of the text. A distinction should be made between the proairetic and hermeneutic as the former create suspense in terms of actions and the latter creates suspense on the part of the reader who wishes to find an answer to mysteries.
3. The voice of Symbols (the Symbolic code): it deals with the semantic meanings reflected in the most frequent pairs of the binary opposition in a text.
4. The voice of person (the Semic code): any element in a text that suggests a particular and additional meaning by way of connotation. This code helps to build up ‘the quality and depth of a character or an action’ and understand ‘the dominant motifs of personal characters (2007).
5. The voice of Science (the Cultural Codes): this code refers to the common body of knowledge shared by a community; it is actually the moral voice of the community.

Together, as mentioned before, the above-said codes or voices develop a network whereby the reader can approach a piece of text from different angles to generate meaning. Also, in the current study, these five codes have been used as a conceptual framework, by which we go through Attar’s ‘Sheikh San’an’, dismantle it, and try to see it from different social, cultural and aesthetic perspectives.

### **Application of Barthesian Codes to 'Sheikh San'an':**

**The hermeneutic code:** This code, as explained before, refers to the hidden attitudes present in a narrative like enigma, complications, riddles, puzzles and whatsoever to engage the reader's attention throughout the story. It raises questions that demand explication which is usually held back as far as possible in order to increase suspense on the part of the reader and to keep him/her interested so as to bring the text into an end. There are a lot of such puzzles in the story under investigation. The repetitive dreams, which are the sources of the hero's intense irritation forcing him to take a journey, initiate a question why such a person has been chosen for this quest. What is a sheikh? Why has Rome been chosen for the place of the quest? Why does Sheikh fall in love with the young maiden despite all differences between them? Why a young Christian maiden has been chosen to challenge a Muslim mystic? Why does the maiden target Sheikh's faith through her requests? Why does a man like Sheikh who has been devoted to religious laws of Islam throughout his life, violates them all simply upon the maiden's request? Why do the disciples accompany Sheikh in his journey? Isn't it ridiculous to imagine an old man accompanied with four hundred pupils to travel to a new country to interpret a dream? What is the role of dreams in this narrative? Why are such dreams so powerful that they force Sheikh to take a journey after fifty years? How can a dream cause such a dramatic shift in the maiden's attitude toward Sheikh, his love and faith? Also what is the real relationship between Sheikh and his disciples? Why does the maiden want Sheikh to herd her swine? Why does the maiden die? Wouldn't it be better if she would stay alive and would return with Sheikh to Mecca? These questions remain unanswered by the author and are left to the reader to understand by means of the other two codes of symbolic and connotative.

**The proairetic code:** This code, as Barthes formulated it, refers to the sequence of actions, the plot events, or any minor and major action in a piece of writing, supplying the reader with further information about the narrative. In other words, this code 'is used to examine the verbs in the narrative' (Tohar et al, 2007). The following twelve actions, given in the following sequence, constitute the total plot of the text under study.

1. Sheikh's peaceful life is disturbed by recurring dreams of similar content.

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2. Sheikh decides to take a journey to Rome to find out the mystery behind his dreams.
  3. Sheikh falls in love with a Christian maiden, for whose sake, he not only converts to Christianity, but also violates the most basic laws of Islam.
  4. Sheikh's disciples give him advice to stop loving the girl.
  5. Sheikh agrees to herd the girl's swine for one year to compensate for dowry he cannot afford.
  6. Disciples return to Mecca and relate to one of Sheikh's close companions what happened to him.
  7. The close companion admonishes disciples for abandoning Sheikh and wants them to go with him to Rome and begin to pray for him.
  8. After day-and-night prayers, the close companion dreams that Sheikh has been freed.
  9. Disciples return to Sheikh and find him in Muslim clothes while his illumination has returned.
  10. The maiden is inspired in a dream to follow Sheikh and accept his faith.
  11. The maiden runs after Sheikh and converts to Islam but dies in his arms.
  12. Sheikh, accompanied with his disciples, returns to Mecca.

The main hero's moves begin from Mecca and end in the same place, but these two points are not symmetrical in that there is a massive inner change between the sheikh we are told about in the beginning and the sheikh we leave in the end. In other words, the acts are completed in such a way to show the kernel theme of the story which is the maturation of a mystic. Sheikh is tasked to plunge headlong into the most obvious meanings of life he has always been deprived of. Sheikh's act of journey, after fifty years during which he comes in touch with other religions, other countries and other genders is 'a rare medieval openness, a standpoint, an attitude that encourage openness towards the Other' (Yaghoobi, 2012:101). This process of maturation is also observed inside the young maiden who joins the dialogue with Sheikh and finally comes to love him and accept his faith.

The only characters who remain passive throughout the narrative are the four hundred disciples whose actions are in opposition to the theme of the tale. Through the story they are illustrated to remain biased and imprisoned within



the superficial and formalistic rituals. The words of advice and admonition they offer to their master, and their act of forsaking him when he is in trouble, stand symbolically for a religion-ridden society Sheikh has brought with him to Rome and has to get rid of in order to be liberated and saved. As soon as he sends them away and begins shepherding maiden's pigs, we have him freed from fetters of fame, praise, respect, conceit and whatever which has put some distance between him and Truth.

The phenomenon of dreaming is also very interesting in this piece of work as it functions as a force that moves characters forwards, resulting in dramatic changes not only in their own beliefs but also in those around them. However, such dreams seem to be a mystical experience, shared by only a few people of high spiritual status such as Sheikh, the close companion and the maiden.

**The Symbolic Code:** This code is concerned with the meanings of a text that come from the binary oppositions. There are a lot of binary-based materials in the tale of 'Sheikh San'an. First, a famous mystic with full 'knowledge of theory, practice and mystery of great age', living in the center of the world of Islam, highly respected by all, having four hundred disciples by his side, introduced at the beginning of the tale is in sharp contrast with the sheikh we see as the story moves forward- an old man, a wanderer, a puzzled, drunken and forsaken, with a new mission to herd a flock of pigs. Such a significant change, in the fate of Sheikh, is because of another kind of binary opposition inside Sheikh; he has arduously and devotedly tried all his life to build up his relation with God, while, at the same time, he has been unconsciously in need of people for their admiration. This binary opposition is symbolized ironically in the worldly success he has achieved through formalistic religious rituals; he can attain spiritual success when he can surpass his inner conceit and do the lousy jobs considered beneath his dignity.

Attar forces his hero toward such a destiny because, to him, "no other relation matters compared with the relation of the soul to God, and so mysticism aims at the attainment of an immediate, direct apprehension by the human of the Divine, in which the soul shall in truth become one with God" (Smith, 1932:19). Attar's solution for surpassing such binaries is Love. As a matter of fact, Attar's religion, manifested in this tale and in his other works, is the religion of Love. He believes that God can be known only through love and ecstasies, for these are His own gifts, and in them He reveals Himself. The love,

as we see, helps Sheikh to pass away from himself and cut off all ties which bind his soul to this material world (1932:25). The paradox is that Sheikh's earthly love for the Christian maiden and the maiden's love for Sheikh seem the only doorway to spiritual love; a conception which evolved in the medieval Sufi literature and Attar was the one who espoused and articulated it more than others (Yaghoobi, 89).

Another opposition observed in the tale is rooted in the philosophy of Attar when he comes across the labels and classifications produced by religions. Mecca, for example, regarded as the holiest place in the religion of Islam should be abandoned if Sheikh wants to be united with God. On the contrary, Rome, considered as a place of Idolatry in the poem, is where Sheikh's soul finds room to break his habits and set aside his ingrained prejudices to reach God. This thought, as mentioned above, is strongly manifested in Attar's ideology because he believes that " Evil is non-existent", everything comes from God, and what we call good and evil are both from Him, therefore, everything is good and nothing should be regarded as evil (1932:21).

One more antithesis, in the text under study, is the face-to-face confrontation between two religions of Islam and Christianity which has always been the source of adversity among their followers. In the present text, these two religions are represented symbolically: one in the form of a young beautiful maiden and the other in the form of an old mystic. The two religions adamantly challenge each other till both come to understand that they should put aside the age-old enmity and be united. The reconciliation is dramatized in the death of the maiden; hence God is revealed to be beyond any ritual or religion they have wrongly fought for all their lives. The essence of Attar's mysticism, therefore, might be that there is no difference between Mecca and Rome, Sheikh and Maiden, Muslim and Christian as far as man's relation with God is concerned. In other words, all people, regardless of their nationalities, religion, age, sex, and color are equal.

The last distinction observed in the story is between the disciples who apparently accompany Sheikh during his journey but abandon him in the midst of his miseries, and the one who has not gone with Sheikh but remains as the 'close companion' to the last moment Sheikh is freed. Such a bond between

the disciples and their master may be likened to Sheikh's bond with God before his journey. When in Mecca, his bond with God was so fragile that the lure of a woman could simply break it.

**The Semic Codes:** In accordance with semic codes, we should search for the recurring motif and patterns reflected, by means of connotation, throughout the tale. The central motif which predominates the other minor ones, in the present story, is the 'religious biases' of a group of people resulting in national egotism, a one-sided outlook toward the world and underestimation of anybody who does not belong to them. This code is enhanced by the selective use of religious signifiers such as 'prayer', 'pilgrimage', 'mortifying', 'Kaaba' in the first scene which shows these formalistic rituals are the main values of this society according to which people are judged. In the same scene, before Sheikh's journey, the picture we are given of Rome, is fraught with pain, darkness, vexation, 'well of need', imprisonment and problems. The signifiers begin to change as soon as the hero leaves his native land behind and walks into the new land. Henceforth, we see him described in a markedly different tone using words such as 'impiety', 'shame', 'hopeless', 'no faith', 'Christian's slave' and 'weeping', 'starry dog' 'fool', 'camphor' and 'death', whereas there is a sense of brightness and lightness in all the scenes where the young Christian maiden appears, enhanced with the aid of signifiers like 'Sun', 'lovers', 'daffodils', 'musky', 'breeze', 'Jesus'.

Having been located in the new establishment, Sheikh's inner world finds an opportunity to be exposed and his conceit finds expression interestingly in the way he addresses his beloved; quite imperative in tone and sometimes rude (1312-1315).

لاجرم دزدیده دل دزدیده‌ای	شیخ گفتش چون زبونم دیده‌ای
در نیاز من نگر، چندین مناز	یا دلم ده باز یا با من بساز
عاشق و پیرو غریبم درنگر	از سر ناز و تکبر درگذر
یا سرم از تن ببر یا سر درآر	عشق من چون سرسری نیست‌ای نگار

Restore the heart you stole, or let me see  
Some glimmer in your heart of sympathy;  
In all your pride find some affection for  
The grey-haired, lovesick stranger at your door.

Accept my love or kill me now -- your breath

Revives me or consigns me here to death (Darbandi and Davis, 1984:37)

Conceit and egotism, therefore seem to be the hamartia Sheikh has to overcome. Sheikh who has confined himself to the rituals of his religion, and has not taken any adventure other than praying and pilgrimage, walks into the real world he has always underestimated, where the ideology he has always espoused changes simply by a love for a young girl (Lines 1506-1510).

مصطفی گفت ای به همت بس بلند      رو که شیخت را برون کردم ز بند  
در میان شیخ و حق از دیرگاه      بود گردی و غباری بس سیاه  
آن غبار از راه او برداشتم      در میان ظلمتش نگذاشتم

The Prophet answered: 'I have loosed the chain

Which bound your sheikh -- your prayer is answered, go.

Thick clouds of dust have been allowed to blow

Between his sight and Truth -- those clouds have gone;

I did not leave him to endure alone (1984: 43).

The inner chaos he experiences after his love moves him far away from the established system he has been accustomed to, and helps him move forward to face a new system he has no idea about. In this new society, the tables are turned and Sheikh's role is reversed. He is no longer the cynosure of eyes but a shadow whose existence depends completely on a new sun (lines 1330-1331).

آفتابی، از تو دوری چون کنم      سایه‌ام، بی تو صبوری چون کنم  
گرچه همچون سایه‌ام از اضطراب      در جهم در روزنت چون آفتاب

You are the sun and I a shadow thrown

By you -- how then can I survive alone? ( :۱۹۸۴۳۸)

Sheikh's inner crisis when facing the young girl is an indication of his inexperience with the true meaning of life he has always escaped in order to bask in the admiration of his society. This is why he should fall down, be lost in love, go so far as there is no trace of him left, and, consequently, be reshaped and reborn in order to be able to grasp the ultimate spiritual meaning.

**The Cultural code:** This code, according to Scholes, refers to 'what have come into existence and are recognized in the culture; the behavioral and intellectual tendencies of the people of a culture and its proverb, clichés and axioms are all to fall under the cultural codes' (quoted Saleem, 2013:111). From the very beginning, we step into a mono-religious society with Islam as the main creed of the area where a person like Sheikh San'an who has observed all the laws of Islam, to its fullest, is highly cherished and respected by all. In such a society, other religions, particularly Christianity, seem to be considered of low value and equal to idolatry.

Another moral voice heard from Sheikh's society is the attitude toward love, above all, love of an old man for a young lady which is considered shameful (lines 1230-1232).

عشق دختر کرد غارت جان او	کفر ریخت از زلف بر ایمان او
شیخ ایمان داد و ترسایی خرید	عافیت بفروخت رسوایی خرید
عشق بر جان و دل او چیر گشت	تا ز دل نومید وز جان سیر گشت

Love sacked his heart; the girl's bewitching hair  
Twined round his faith impiety's smooth snare.  
The sheikh exchanged religion's wealth for shame,  
A hopeless heart submitted to love's fame (1983: 35)

One of the most important cultural codes is the relationship between a master and his pupils, the former being considered as the unquestionable icon who must be obeyed under any conditions, even if he goes wrong, and the latter as an obedient follower, well represented in the scene where the 'close companion' seriously blames disciples for abandoning the sheikh (lines 1466-1475).

با مریدان گفت ای تر دامنان	در وفاداری نه مردان نه زنان
گر شما بودید یار شیخ خویش	یاری او از چه نگرفتید پیش
شرمتان باد! آخر این یاری بود	حق گزاری و وفاداری بود
چون نهاد آن شیخ بر زنار دست	جمله را زنار می بایست بست
هر که یار خویش را یاور شود	یار باید بود اگر کافر شود

وقت ناکامی توان دانست یار      خود بود در کامرانی صد هزار  
 شیخ چون افتاد در کام نهنگ      جمله بگریختید از نام و ننگ

‘O criminals!’ he cried. ‘O frailer than  
 Weak women in your faith -- when does a man  
 Need faithful friends but in adversity?  
 You should be there, not prattling here to me.  
 Is this devoted love? Shame on you all,  
 Fair-weather friends who run when great men fall.  
 He put on Christian garments -- so should you;  
 He took their faith -- what else had you to do?  
 This was no friendship, to forsake your friend,  
 To promise your support and at the end  
 Abandon him -- this was sheer treachery (1984:42).

As a matter of fact, Sheikh’s experience of love, which shatters his long-held beliefs and results in the disciples’ failure to perform their duty toward their master, is a reflection of the fragile ideology that the society has imposed on people. Such ideology gives them an unrealistic worldview toward themselves and toward God which not only cannot be sustained for long but also is open to fall apart easily in the blink of an eye.

**Conclusion:** In the present study, Roland Barthes’s five narrative codes have been applied, as an analytic approach, to Attar’s ‘Sheikh San’an’. It can be concluded that the five codes are quite effective in seeing the tale from different social, cultural and aesthetic perspectives. The proairetic code represented in the twelve actions showed tactically the dominant theme of the tale being the maturity of a Muslim mystic from a superficial, inexperienced sheikh to a true, humble mystic. In spite of the fact that the narrative is a mystic work, belonging to a particular coterie in a special period of time, the codes are quite effective and relevant in resolving the enigmas raised throughout the text. Cultural, semic and symbolic codes are very helpful in their own right to find answer to these enigmas. Lastly it is necessary to mention that, as far as ‘Sheikh San’an’ is concerned, Barthesian codes seem to be of the same value when they are employed to the text.

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