

‘Attar

The Parrot and the mirror

I have heard tell how, to begin with, men  
will place a looking-glass before a parrot,  
and when the parrot in that mirror peers  
he sees forsooth a thing most like himself;  
then someone speaks in a melodious voice,  
the sound contriving from behind the glass,  
and the delightful parrot therefore deems  
the voice he hears comes from another parrot.  
Listening word by word, his heart is glad  
and very gently he repeats the sounds.  
Your mirror Being is, a glass concealed;  
not-being is the frame that holds the glass,  
and every form, deficient or complete,  
within that mirror as an image shows.  
Since you see nothing else but the reflexion  
and stand and sit as the reflexion does,  
you come to think that every sound and act  
belongs to the reflexion, which you know;  
but when you sit within the mirror's mirror  
you see no more the mirror, but the Face.

(Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, 133)

Since I am unaware of my own soul,  
how could I know anything of God's Abyss?  
He has kept the soul in such a deep mystery that  
never He told the soul's secret to anyone.  
Your body is alive through the soul but the soul is hidden,  
you live through the soul but you do not know the soul.  
The soul has no knowledge of the soul so [as to know] what the soul is,  
nor is the body aware of the body so [as to know] what the body is.

(*Asrar-nama*, trans. Landolt in *Attar and the Sufi Tradition*, 16)

I am now neither an unbeliever (*kāfir*) nor a Muslim,  
but one lost in blessed perplexity (*ḥayrān*), somewhere between the two

(*Mantiq al-tayr*, 4624, trans. Stone in *Attar and the Sufi Tradition*, 107)