Introduction
Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī is famous for his many writings on mathematics and astronomy, as well as for his treatises on ethics. He is less known for his writings on poetry, which, though relatively modest in size, are a full part of his philosophical works. Naṣīr al-Dīn was probably the first author to appropriate the concepts developed by Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā in their commentaries on Aristotle’s *Organon* and to express them in Persian. A logician and a psychologist, he sought to account for the nature of poetic discourse and its action on the human soul in terms drawn from his teachers.

The present paper aims to shed some light on Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī’s contribution to “that art whereby the poet arranges imaginary propositions.” Defined as a part of logic, poetry is distinguished from all other possible schemes of rational discourse—be they demonstrative, dialectical, rhetorical or sophistical—by the fact that it cannot claim to affect the audience by winning its assent (تصديق). Poetry works, rather, by stirring the audience’s imagination (تخيل). Following Avicenna, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī considers imagination to be irreducible to illusion or deliberative reason. To imagine, therefore, is not merely to be deceived by improbable representations, nor to argue about their truth or falsehood with respect to reality; according to the philosophers, imagination is akin to what could be termed a non-assertive type of thought. We shall therefore question...
the special features that characterize imagination and its *modus operandi* in poetry according to Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī. If poetry is indifferent to truth, how does it relate to reality? And in what way can it affect the human soul? Evocative rather than persuasive, imaginative discourse appears as the only discourse capable of prompting the listener to action by stirring passions in his soul. Because of the wonder and pleasure (تَعَجُّبَ وَالْتَدَأُ) it provokes, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī even attributes to poetry a power of conviction superior to that of the naked truth. However, insofar as it meets the standards of rational speech, poetry lends itself to a systematic analysis in terms of means and effects, as is evident from Naṣīr al-Dīn's discussion of the "poetic syllogism." His philosophic account of poetry further implies a formal interpretation of tropes and figures of speech which we shall aim to elucidate.

As if breaking through a wall of rationalist thought, philosophical poetics allows for the specific powers of fiction to be conceptualized. Indeed, it is a well-established fact in literary history that, as long as poetry was efficacious, the poet’s discourse could be credited with an undeniable political role. We shall first recall one special instance of this power of poetry, recorded in Niẓāmī ʿArūḍī’s *Four Discourses*.

**The Scent of the Mūliyān, or the Effectiveness of Poetry**

The scene takes place at the court of Amīr Naṣr II ibn Aḥmad (regn. 914–943). In the 4th century of the Muslim calendar, or the 10th century A.D., Transoxiana was subject to the prosperous Samanid dynasty. Though the seat of power was in Bukhara, the prince used to spend the warm months of summer with his attendants in a city in Khurāsān before returning to his capital at the start of winter. One day, he took up residence in Herat. Spring was coming to a close, and this was a suitable place for the army to rest. The weather was splendid, the landscape entrancing, and nature prodigal; the autumn feasts had passed and the court had not struck camp. The prince was enthralled by his new resort. Citrus fruits ripened after grapes. That winter, the court did not return to Bukhara. Spring blossomed anew. "And when summer came and the fruits again ripened, Amīr

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