

**THE LOVES OF LAILÍ AND  
MAJNŪN: A POEM FROM  
THE ORIGINAL PERSIAN  
OF NIZÁMI**

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The loves of Lailí and Majnún: a poem from the original Persian of Nizámi by James Atkinson

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**JAMES ATKINSON**

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THE LOVES OF  
LAILÍ AND MAJNÚN



The course of true love never did run smooth.

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
More than cool reason ever comprehends.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE LOVES OF  
LAILÍ AND MAJNÚN

A POEM FROM THE ORIGINAL  
PERSIAN OF NIZÁMI: BY  
JAMES ATKINSON, ESQ.

OF THE HONOURABLE EAST-INDIA  
COMPANY'S MEDICAL SERVICE

EDITED BY

THE REV. J. A. ATKINSON

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

My father's translation of Nizami's poem, *Laili and Majnun*, was published by the Oriental Translation Fund in 1836.

Nizami, Nizam-ul-din-Aba Muhammad Ilyas B. Yusuf, is said to have been born in the year of the Hegira 535, either at Tafnish, in the province of Kum, or at Ganjah, a town of Arran, now Elisabetpol. The greater part of his life was spent at Ganjah, where he died in A.H. 599 – A.D. 1202, in his 64th year.

His writings are called the 'Panj Ganj,' 'The Five Treasures :'

1. *Makkan-ul-Asrar* = The Storehouse of Mysteries. Moral and religious maxims, illustrated by anecdotes, written about A.H. 570.
2. *Khosra and Shirin*, A.H. 576.
3. *Laili and Majnun*, his masterpiece, written

at the request of the Shirvān Shāh, Akhsatān, son of Minūchehr, A.H. 584 = A.D. 1188, consisting of four thousand couplets, which were completed in four months.

4. *Haft Paikar* = The Seven Images. Seven tales told by the seven favourites of the King, Bahrām Gur. A.H. 593.
5. *Iskandar Nāmeh* = The Book of Alexander. In two parts: the career of Alexander (1) as Conqueror, (2) as sage and prophet. A.H. 597.

Sir William Jones says: 'The beautiful poem on the loves of Laili and Majnūn by the immortal Nizāmi (to say nothing of other poems on the same subject) is indisputably built on true history, yet avowedly allegorical and mysterious; for the introduction to it is a continued rapture on Divine Love; and the name of Laili seems to be used in the *Masnavi* and the *Odes* of Hafiz for the Omnipresent Spirit of God.'

The late Sanscrit Professor at Oxford (Horace Hayman Wilson) referred to my father's translation as a 'poetical version of the celebrated poem of Nizāmi on the loves of Laili and Majnūn,

mystified as the reciprocal affection of body and soul. This is perhaps the most carefully finished of Mr. Atkinson's translations, and conveys a pleasing and sufficiently faithful representation of the original.'

The fame of Nizami's poem in the East, and my father's version being a 'sufficiently faithful representation of the original,' has induced me to prepare a new edition, with a view of introducing it to the general reader, the publications of the Oriental Translation Fund having had only a limited circulation.

The MS. of *Laili and Majnun* used by my father is in my possession. Dr. Charles Rieu, of the British Museum, says: 'The text is evidently due to the pen of an accomplished Persian calligrapher; it cannot be later than A.H. 971 = A.D. 1563, for that date appears on a seal facing the first miniature. The miniatures are in the most highly finished Indian style. The subjects are:—1. The father of Majnun takes him to the Kâba. 2. Laili going to the palm-grove. 3. Noufal attacking Laili's tribe; Majnun throwing stones at Noufal's troops. 4. Majnun redeeming the deer from the huntsman. 5. Ibn Salâm in