

## Conference of the birds.

A first typed English version – January the 20<sup>th</sup> , 1980

Hoopoe: One day the birds of the worlds, those we know and those that nobody knows, all gathered together for a great conference. When they were met the hoopoe, trembling with anticipation, placed herself in the midst. Dear birds, I am troubled. Wherever I look I see nothing but quarrels, desperate fights for a scrap of territory, war for a few grain of corn. This can't go on. For years I have travelled by sea and land. I have covered vast distances and I know many secrets. Listen to me. We have a King. We must find him. Otherwise we are lost.

Birds: A King! We've had enough of King. What's the use of another King.

Hoopoe: Listen, feather brains! I'm speaking of our true King. He lives behind the mountain called Kaf. His name is Simorgh. He's the King of birds. He is close to us and we are far from him. The way to him is unknown and only a man with a lion's heart dare to take it. I can't make the journey alone. But if I don't reach him, I'll die of shame.

Heron: Are we sure the Simorgh exists?

Hoopoe: Yes. On of his feathers fell on China in the middle of the night and his reputation filled the world. This sign of his existence is a token of his glory. A drawing was made of his feather and there's a trace of it on every heart. Look!

*He unfolds a piece of silk on which is drawn a feather. The birds come close to look at the drawing. Next to the feather there are a few Chinese letters.*

Dove: What's written there?



Heron: "Seek knowledge, even in China."

*Very excitedly, the sparrow cries out:*

Sparrow: Yes! Let's go! I am very impatient to know my sovereign. I'm at the bottom of a well and I'll snatch at any cord! Let's go!

*Proud, head erect, with a soldier's bearing, the falcon speaks;*

Falcon: I, the falcon, have a king's hand for a home. I'm disciplined and I perform my duties to the letter. Why should I wish to see the Simorgh, even in a dream? I do not feel called to this journey. The hand of a king is honour enough for me. My only wish in life is to stay close to him.

Hoopoe: A wise man keeps well away from the kings.

*A king enters. The hoopoe places himself beside him and tells a story.*

Hoopoe: This king gives a slave a robe of honour. The slave went through the streets wearing it. It was hot and gust of wind covered him with dust. So the slave wiped his face with the sleeve of his robe. Like this.

*The hoopoe makes the gesture of wiping his face and adds:*

Hoopoe: At once, the King had impaled.

Falcon: So?

*The hoopoe points to another <king;*

Another king learned that a beggar had fallen passionately in love with him and was proclaiming his love though out the kingdom.

*The bagger appears, chanting;*

Beggar: I love my king, I only love my king

*The king interrupts him;*

King: Hey! Come here!

*The beggar throws himself down before the king and the king says:*

King: Since you love me with such devotion, choose: either you go into exile or you have your head cut off.

*Agonised, the beggar hesitates for a moment, then says:*

Beggar: I prefer exile.

King: Cut off his head!

*One of the birds stands up and asks the king:*

First Exotic birds: But he's innocent! He loves you! Why must he die?

King: He's no true lover. He prefers his head.

*The slave's head is cut off.*

*The falcon, who has listened attentively asks the hoopoe once again:*

Falcon: I'm listening. I don't understand what you're trying to say.

*The hoopoe makes a third king appear saying:*

Hoopoe: A king had a handsome slave whom he loved dearly. He gave him the most beautiful clothes and never let him out of his sight.

*The beautiful slave enters very pale. The hoopoe takes an apple and balances it on the slave's head, saying:*

Hoopoe: Each day the slave put an apple on his head and the king practised his archery.

Second exotic bird: Why is the slave so pale?

First exotic bird: Wouldn't you see?

Hoopoe: When the arrow reached its mark, all the court applauded the king.

*The king shoots 2 arrows, which hit the apple. Everyone applauds. Each time, the hoopoe replaces the apple on the slave's head. The king shoots a 3<sup>rd</sup> arrow:*

Hoopoe: But unfortunately one day, the slave was wounded;

*The arrow wounds the slave. He sways and staggers. The king explodes angrily.*

King: Scandal! I'm the best archer in the kingdom. It's his fault. He must have moved. Finish him off.

*The slave is killed. The falcon asks the hoopoe:*

Falcon: Why do you answer me with stories?

Hoopoe: A tyrant is not a king.

*The birds flutter excitedly. The hoopoe speaks to the audience.*

Hoopoe: To escape the journey, the birds found countless excuses. And to convince them to go, the hoopoe told countless stories. But often nothing could outweigh their fears.

*The duck leaves the other birds and cries:*

Duck: No, no, no! Go if you wish. I, the duck, I'm not going. I, who am purity itself. I Who live my life in water. Who can live on water like me? I must be very special. No, no! I'm not going.

*The partridge comes to joint the duck and says:*

Partridge: Nor me neither. I'm special too! I, am a partridge, my life is precious stones. Love of jewels has lit a fire in my heart. This love has bound me to the mountain where I find my stones. Impossible to leave it.

Duck: Water's my food and water's my dwelling. When I have worries, water washes them away. I don't like dry land. How can I leave my water?

Partridge: I eat jewels and I sleep on jewels. I love jewels for jewels are eternal. Either I find precious stones or I die.

Hoopoe: Farewell duck, farewell partridge.

*The duck and partridge leave the conference. The hoopoe turn forcefully to the others:*

Hoopoe: Listen to me. The Simorgh is hidden behind a veil. When he appears outside the veil, even for an instant, his face is as radiant as the sun and he casts thousands of shadows on the earth. These shadows are birds. You. You are no more than the shadows of the Simorgh. So does it matter if you live or die? If the Simorgh had wished to remain hidden, he would never cast his shadow. But he did and as no one can look him in the face, he made a mirror so that all can see his reflection.

Dove: What is this mirror?

Hoopoe: It's your heart.

Falcon: Why do you always speak in riddles?

Hoopoe: Guess?

*The excitement and agitation grows. The heron asks:*

Heron: I'm very impatient to go, but I'm afraid. What exactly is this king? Please try to explain.

Hoopoe: Look at this princess.

*Enter a princess accompanied by a female attendant.*

Hoopoe: One day, while taking a walk, she saw a slave of extraordinary beauty and her heart was hers no longer.

*The slave appears.. The princess is very struck, but the slave does not see her. The waiting woman ask the princess (it is one of the birds that puts the questions and it is the hoopoe who answers for princess):*

Waiting woman/Dove: What it is?

Princess/Hoopoe: I am drunk with love. I'm ready to sacrifice my honour and my life.

Waiting woman/Dove: For love of a slave?

Princess/Hoopoe: Yes, it's forbidden I know. Yet if I don't speak with him I shall die in anguish.

Waiting woman/Dove: What do you wish exactly?

Princess/Hoopoe: I want to enjoy him without his knowing.

*The servant goes to the slave and illustrates the story which continues/*

Waiting woman/Dove: I went in secret to the slave and asked him, as if in play, for two cups of wine. I poured a strong narcotic into his cup and he soon swooned away. When night came, we carried him secretly to the princess.

*The slave's face is covered with veil.*

Waiting woman/Dove: We put him on a golden throne and placed a coronet of pearls upon his head. At midnight he opened his eyes.

*The veil is drawn. The slave is astounded. The falcon speak for him:*

Slave/Falcon: Where am I? What is this place? These carpets. These candles scented with amber? This music?

*At this moment, the princess enters. The slave is struck by her beauty.*

Slave/Falcon: Who are you? I'm dazzled by your beauty.

*The princess comes to him and takes him in her arms:*

Slave/Falcon: I'm amazed. I've neither wits nor life. I'm no longer in this world nor yet in another.

Princess/Hoopoe: Are you thirsty,

Slave/Falcon: My mouth's on fire.

Princess/Hoopoe: Here's wine.

*They drink. Then they lie on the bed and make love whilst the waiting woman continues:*

Waiting woman/Dove: All night long the wine glowed like a sun in the candle light. All night long, the eye of the slave never left the princess' brow. All night long as she made love to him she swept.

*The princess slowly draws away from the slave.*

Waiting woman/Dove: The slave stayed in this kind of vision until dawn. Then another potion put him to sleep again and he was taken back to where he had been before.

*He wakes up beside another sleeping slave. He cries out. The other slave wakes with a start and asks.*

2<sup>nd</sup> Slave: What's the matter? What is it?

Slave: Where are we?

2<sup>nd</sup> Slave: What do you mean, where are we?

Slave: What's happened? Help me!

2<sup>nd</sup> Slave: The night's over. Why are you shouting?

Slave: Alas, alas!

2<sup>nd</sup> Slave: What's got into you. Calm down!

Slave: What I've seen no one will ever see, no one!

2<sup>nd</sup> Slave: What have you seen? Can't you speak?

Slave: I can't. I've lost my mind. What I've seen, I've seen in another body. I heard nothing, but I heard everything. I saw nothing yet I saw everything.

2<sup>nd</sup> Slave: You've been dreaming!

Slave: I don't know if I've been dreaming, I don't know if I was drunk.

*The slave gets up.*

2<sup>nd</sup> Slave: Where are you going?

Slave: I don't know where. But I must go. I must go.

*He leaves rapidly.*

*The birds are wildly excited by this tale; They walk in all direction and some begin to fly, as if they were already preparing to leave.*

*At this moment, the parrot cries out:*

Parrot: Just a minute! Just a minute!

Hoopoe: What is it, parrot?

Parrot: Some vile people have locked me in a cage, because I'm so charming.

Hoopoe: So?

Parrot: I long to touch the Simorgh's wing but I can't. I'm in cage.

*The hoopoe opens the cage. The parrot comes out and discovers freedom. He sings for a moment. Then he meets the peacock, takes fright and goes back into his cage.*

Parrot: Every morning they bring me sugar. I've a gold collar. My cage is all I need. I like my cage.

Hoopoe: You have no idea of happiness. You think you have the almond but all you have is the shell.

*The peacock, who has just appeared opens his tail. The hoopoe asks him:*

Hoopoe: And you?

Peacock: What me?

Hoopoe: You want to come?

Peacock: Never. I'm not a bird like the others. I was driven from my kingdom. I'm waiting in exile for the generous soul that will give me back my throne. What's the Simorgh to me? Look my hundred thousand colours!

Hoopoe: I see your hundred thousand colours – and your two ugly feet!

*Ashamed of his feet, the peacock tries to hide them. All the birds burst out laughing; He slinks away, followed by jeers. As he leaves, the hoopoe adds:*

Hoopoe: Your kingdom is hardly a drop in the ocean. So, why not have the ocean?

*Seeing the sparrow trying to vanish discreetly, he stops him:*

Hoopoe: Where are you off to, sparrow?

Sparrow: Me?

Hoopoe: Yes, you. You, who were so eager to leave.

Sparrow: Oh, me I'm too weak. I'm as frail as a hair. I haven't the strength of an ant. Of course, I long to see the Simorgh, but how can I weakling like me make the journey? I'd die on the way.

*A man enters, walking slowly. The hoopoe points to him.*

Hoopoe: Do you remember this man?

Sparrow: He was a saint, more perfect than words can utter. In him, science and wisdom shared an equal place. In the world he like a banner – an incomparable example to mankind. When he was about to be executed, he only spoke this words: “ an all hak”” “I am the Truth”. So to punish him, they cut off his hands and his feet. Blood poured from his body and he grew pale. But at once this man drew the stumps of his wrists across his face saying: Bloods gives colour to man's cheeks. I will use my blood today to make my face blaze. I do not wish to appear pale to anyone. They might take it for fear. I want to be red. When the executioner turns towards me, he will see before him a brave man. The world is no more than a spineless corpse. Why should I be afraid?

*The man goes in silence. The birds are silent. The hoopoe speaks again, exhorting them:*

Hoopoe: So? You've no more to say? Are you so afraid of death?

*The birds do not reply. They lower their heads. The hoopoe goes from one to the other.*

Hoopoe: This bird only cares for his cage. That one won't leave his pond or his mountain. This one takes himself for an ant, that one for a king. This carcass of a world is seething with creatures, all of them saying: why give up our peaceful pleasures, But what does the heart say?

The last excuses.

*Convinced by the hoopoe the birds seem on the point of leaving. Then suddenly they hear a nightingale sing. All stop and listen fascinated by its song. Once more the hoopoe addresses the audience:*

Hoopoe: Just when the birds were quivering with excitement at the idea of leaving, they heard the nightingale sing. A world of secrets is hidden in its song. When he sang of these mysteries the other birds fell silent.

*The nightingale speaks to the birds:*

Nightingale: The secrets of love are known to me. All night I repeat my song of love. All the time I teach new mysteries. Whoever hears me loses his reason.

*He shows the rose, which he had held concealed:*

Nightingale: When spring comes and the rose breathes her gentle perfume into the world, my heart open with joy. My sorrows vanish. When she doesn't show herself, I keep silent. Not everyone knows my secrets, but the rose knows them all. So deep in love am I with the rose that I haven't a thought for myself. I desire nothing but the rose. The journey to the Simorgh is beyond my strength. The love of the Rose is enough for the Nightingale. How could I spent a single night away from my love?

Hoopoe: Do you know the king's daughter smile to the dervish?

Nightingale: No.

*The hoopoe turns to the dove.*

Nightingale: Tell!

Dove: A king had a daughter as fair as the moon, loved by all the world. Her look was remote as though filled with dreams, or sweet visions and it awakened passion wherever she went. Jealousy of her lips made rubies of the first water dry away, while if sugar had tasted her breath, it would melted from shame.

*At this moment, a dervish appears. He sees the princess and is rooted to the spot. The dervish speaks:*

Dervish: As Fate would have it, a poor dervish saw this glittering moon and was instantly overcome. The poor man had in his hand a little round loaf which he dropped in the dust.

*The princess stops for a brief instant in front of the dervish, smile at him and says:*

Princess: Seeing the dervish, the princess smiled. Then like a flame she was gone.

Dervish: At the sight of her smile the dervish fell to the ground. He could no longer sleep, neither by day nor night. Love of the princess had ravaged his soul.

*He falls on the ground and covers his head with dust. Then he cries out:*

Dervish: Is this night everlasting, will I never know more days? Where is the lamp of heaven? O Lord, what is the meaning of this darkness? It's as long and as black as her hair. In this night my love runs wild and devours me. Where is my life, to offer it up in anguish? Where is my patience? Where is my reason? Where are my stars to draw me to my desire? Where is my hand, to put dust on my head? Where is my foot, to walk to my love?

*The princess appears at this moment and calls/*

Princess: Psst!!

*The dervish does not look up immediately.*

Princess: You, asleep there .... Here..... raise your head.....

*He lifts his head, see the princess and trembling prostrates himself before her.*

Dervish: Princess ....

Princess: Go away. Listen to me.

Dervish: I can't. No. Don't send me away.

Princess: My people are sick of seeing you there. They want to cut off your head.

Dervish: The day I fell in love with you, I washed my hands of life. I am ready to sacrifice my life for you, if you wish it. Without you, I'm a friendless, frightened, often alone. I've cast away the world as well as my life. Open your door and let me in.

Princess: Your breath is cold. Your desire are vain. Wrap yourself in your shroud. You can't inspire love. Go away!

Dervish: Every night I play away my life at the end of your street. You are the sun, I am the shadow. How can I exist without you?

Princess: Nothing is possible between us. Nothing. I've told you. So go away.

Dervish: Nothing?

Princess: Nothing. Save your head and disappear.

Dervish: Reply at least to one question.

Princess: What question?

Dervish: When we met, you smiled at me?

Princess: Yes.

Dervish: Why?

Princess: When I saw you, I knew you were going to make the fool of yourself, so I smiled.  
But it wasn't from love. It was from pity. Farewell ignorant one.

*She disappears.*

*The dervish stays on the ground, shattered.*

*The Hoopoe adds for the benefit on the nightingale:*

Hoopoe: The rose never smiles. Each new spring the rose laughs at the nightingale. Choose a love that doesn't die.

*At this moment the owl hoots. The hoopoe says to him:*

Hoopoe: Ah! Owl! What's your excuse?

Owl: Me? Oh, me, I live alone in a house that's falling apart. I was born in ruins. I enjoy them. I'm at home there. I know hundreds of inhibited places but they are full of confusion and hatred. If you want to live in peace, find a ruin.

Hoopoe: You live like a wretch in your ruins because you hope to find buried treasure.

Owl: Treasure? Yes, no doubt. Treasures always buried in ruins. I love gold. I can't go after the Simorgh. I only like ruin and treasure.

*Two thieves suddenly rise up.*

1<sup>st</sup> Thief: Well?

2<sup>nd</sup> Thief: I smell fear.

1<sup>st</sup> Thief: Me too. Fear at night has a special smell.

2<sup>nd</sup> Thief: Two men are coming this way.

1<sup>st</sup> Thief: The smell of fear is coming too.

2<sup>nd</sup> Thief: A very strong smell.

*Indeed, two men are coming up the mountain path. When they draw level, the two thieves leap out at them.*

1<sup>st</sup> Thief: Halt! Your money! Your belongings!

1<sup>st</sup> Traveller: Let me pass. I have nothing.

*The two thieves sniff the first traveller, then let him pass without searching him.*

2<sup>nd</sup> Thief: Pass!



*They ask the 2<sup>nd</sup> Traveller:*

2<sup>nd</sup> Thief: And you?

2<sup>nd</sup> Traveller: Nor me. I've nothing.

2<sup>nd</sup> Thief: Nothing?

2<sup>nd</sup> Traveller: Nothing.

1<sup>st</sup> Thief: Yet you stink of fear. Let me feel you.

*The thief frisks the man and finds nothing.*

2<sup>nd</sup> Traveller: I told you I've nothing. Let me pass like my friend.

2<sup>nd</sup> Thief: Take off your clothes!

2<sup>nd</sup> Traveller: My clothes?

2<sup>nd</sup> Thief: Hurry!

*Under compulsion he begins to undress. They help him roughly. There are still no signs of riches.*

2<sup>nd</sup> Traveller. You see I've nothing! I told you. Why tear my clothes?

1<sup>st</sup> Thief: Then why this smell of fear?

2<sup>nd</sup> Traveller: Smell of fear? What smell of fear?

2<sup>nd</sup> Thief: We need an answer before you go. You're afraid. If you've nothing, why are you afraid?

2<sup>nd</sup> Traveller: I'm not afraid!! I'm not ....

*Suddenly, a long loud fart.*

*The two thieves look at the travellers rear.*

1<sup>st</sup> Thief: So that's where you've hidden it?

*He draws out a chain of golden coins. The hoopoe takes this coins and throws them at the owl, saying:*

Hoopoe: Gold is like a lame ass. It has weight, but no value. Go back and bury yourself in your ruins.

*The 1<sup>st</sup> Traveller says to owl:*

1<sup>st</sup> traveller: One day, I earn two pieces of silver. I put one piece in one hand and one in the other. If I had put both pieces in one hand I wouldn't slept a wink.

*The hoopoe turns to the birds.*

Hoopoe: You're still not sure?

*The birds do not answer.*

Hoopoe: A man made a journey to Persia. When he came home, he was weak, penniless, half blind. His friends asked him "What happened?" He replied: "I was walking past a house. The door was open. Inside, I saw silent men. They were pure and each of them had a flask of cloudy wine. That's all I know, except that I lost everything"; Then his friends asked him "What did they do to you?" The man replied: "They simply said "Enter!"

*This story is received in astonished silence.*

Bird/Flacon: What's the meaning of this story?

Hoopoe: They simply said "Enter!"

Heron: Why must we give up our lives?

1<sup>st</sup> Exotic bird: Why this need for a terrible journey.

Heron: Where will we find the strength?

Hoopoe: Birds without ambition!

*Struck by the tone of his voice, they fall silent and listen.*

Hoopoe: Button up your beaks. Stop calling yourselves ants and beggars. Swallow your excuses. Love loves difficult things. It set fire to each harvest. Don't hesitate, let childhood go. Put your best foot forward and beat your wings. If everyone burns we'll burn too.

*The hoopoe places himself in the lead, saying:*

Hoopoe: Away.

*The birds form up behind him. All together they take to the air.*

*IN THE DESERT.*

*They fly for a while, slowly, in silence. Then the hoopoe tells us:*

Hoopoe: At first they had to cross an endless desert where the scorching wind never drew breath. Sometimes the earth seemed to groan beneath them, at the other times the only sound was silence.

*While they fly, the birds put questions.*

Heron: Why is the way so bare?

1<sup>st</sup> Exotic bird: What will we eat and drink?

Sparrow: I'm hot. My eyes ache.

Dove: Tell us what to expect tomorrow and the day after.

Double bird: Describe to us life at the Simorgh's court.

Falcon: How should we behave? Tell us if you know.

1<sup>st</sup> Exotic bird: The wind's making me cry. I can't see past my wings.

*One of the birds lags behind saying:*

Guilty bird: I give up. I'm ridden with guilt.

*The hoopoe flies to his rescue.*

Hoopoe: Come, fly, don't despair.

Guilty bird: I can't. I'm rotten to the core.

*The hoopoe forces him to fly. At once another bird says:*

Sparrow: Me too. I'm quitting. I feel I'm quitting.

Hoopoe: Why?

Sparrow: Why? You ask me? Haven't I told you. I'm effeminate and unreliable. All I ever do is hop from branch to branch. One day I let myself go, the next day I pull myself together. And besides, I'm not sincere.

Hoopoe: Who is? Your heart's full of rust. Flu and clean it.

Sparrow: Sometimes, I get drunk.

Hoopoe: And so?

Sparrow: At the other times I only drink water. I don't know why.

Hoopoe: What will you drink in the desert?

*And as the bird does not answer, the hoopoe adds:*

Hoopoe: Your blood, perhaps.

*Another bird drops to the ground saying:*

Double bird: I can't go any farther.

Hoopoe: Why not, bird.

Double bird: Because I'm my own worst enemy; don't you see? I've a thief inside me. I don't know him but he is there. I can feel him. If I go any farther he'll attack me and I'll die.

*The double bird is silent. The Hoopoe tells him:*

Hoopoe: I knew a very old gravedigger and I asked him: You've spent all your life digging tombs. What marvels have you seen, I've only one marvel, he answered. I've dig tombs for 70 years but I've never once buried my desires.

*The double bird is thoughtful. It grows dark.*

Dove: It's growing dark.

Hoopoe: Let's stop for the night.

*They land, while night falls. Suddenly a bat swoops amongst them, asking:*

Bat: What are you doing there?

Dove: We're resting.

Bat: Why are you resting? Do I ever rest?

Dove: We're tired.

Bat: Have you any news of the sun?

Heron: No, not since last night.

Bat: Then get up. Go back! Quick! You're in great danger. Come on! Get up!

*Birds are alarmed.*

Dove: What danger? What are you talking about?

Bat: Come on! Up! I know what I'm saying. I haven't seen the sun for ever so long. I've been flying for years and years always in the dark. I've flown so long I've lost my wings and feathers and I tell myself: perhaps I've flown beyond the sun.

Sparrow: What conceit! You're out of your mind. You've quite simply lost your way.

Bat: Lost my way? Me? I've searched so hard in the dark for news of the sun that I've come out on the opposite side.

Dove: You're dreaming. You say you've lost your wings and your feathers looking for the sun. But in the dark you couldn't even see the way. How could you go anywhere? You're like an ant at the bottom of a well hoping to reach the moon.

Bat: If you want to sleep, then sleep. The night is waiting for me. I'm going into the dark to ask for news of the sun.

*It flies off and disappears. The birds sleep. Some birds are afraid and they steal away;*

Hoopoe. At first, they were many hundreds and hundreds of birds. The birds that set off filled the world. But many fell by the way. Others left secretly during the night.

*The night is over. The lights return.*

Hoopoe: Each morning those that remained took off again.

*The birds wake, shake the feathers and fly off.*

Hoopoe: One day from high in the sky they saw a little speck, motionless in the desert. As they drew nearer they saw it was a hermit.

*They fly above the hermit. The hoopoe calls out.*

Hoopoe: Oho!

Hermit: Oho!

Hoopoe: Oho!

Hermit: Oho:

*The birds settle around him. He is a hermit with a long beard. The Hoopoe asks:*

Hoopoe: You're still here?

Hermit: Yes, still here.

Hoopoe: Tell me, have you found the answer?

Hermit: What answer?

Hoopoe: To your question.

Hermit: No, I haven't found the answer.

Heron: What's the question?

Sparrow: Yes, what's the question?

Hermit: You really want to know?

*The birds make affirmative noises.*

Hermit: Very well, listen.

*They fall silent;*

Hermit: I was ..... , I think, a fairly honest man. I had a wife, children. For some time, I suffered from a gigantic longing for aubergines. The desire to eat aubergines never left me, day nor night. At the same time I told myself – something told me that if I ate aubergines a disaster would occur. I tried to think of other things. About my work, my family, oranges sheep. But I always ended up with aubergine. Aubergine.

*He stops for a moment. The birds are careful not to put questions/.*

Hermit: In the end, you can imagine my desire triumphed. My mother bought me an aubergine, she cooked it very well and I begin to eat. But I had hardly eaten half the aubergine when there was a knock at the door. A man came in and put my son's head on the ground. They'd just cut off the head of my son.

*Deep silent.*

Hermit: So I decided I would spend the rest of my life trying to find the connection between eating aubergines and the chopped-off head of my son. I gave up everything, absolutely everything, came here and since that day I'm searching for the answer.

Heron: And you've found nothing?

Hermit: Nothing.

2<sup>nd</sup> exotic bird: In the mean time how do you live in the desert?

Hermit: As you see, I ruminate.

*He stays in silent for a moment, combing his ling beard with a crudely made comb.*

*Suddenly the dove begins to laugh. The hermit looks at her in surprise and asks:*

Hermit: Why are you laughing?

Dove: I am laughing because I know why.

Hermit: Why what?

Dove: Why you haven't found the answer.

Hermit: And why haven't I found the answer?

Dove: Because you don't think about your question.

Hermit: What do you mean? I think of nothing else!

Dove: You are wrong. You only think about your beard.

*The hermit stops combing his beard and says:*

Hermit: You're right. I see that you're right. You're absolutely right. Listen. One day, I'd only been here a few months – year perhaps – suddenly, on the ground I saw something shining. A shiny stone. I picked it up. Look. Here it is. It's a piece of mica. When I look at myself in the mica, I had a magnificent beard. So I a flash I got a piece of wood, cut it into a comb and I began looking after my beard in hand, combing it, nursing it.

*As he talks he gets more and more carried away, furious with himself.*

Hermit: And you're right! I only thought of my beard. Before it was an aubergine, and tucked away in the desert it was a beard. My whole life was devoted to my beard.

*He gets up, begin to pull out his beard, throwing the hairs right and left;*

Hermit: But it's over! You'll see! I'm going to tear you out, vile beard! I rip you off. I give you to the wind. Go beard, gone. Not a hair left! Not one!

*At this moment the Dove begins to laugh again.*

*The hermit stops, dumbfounded, looks at her and asks:*

Hermit: Why are you laughing?

Dove: Why I am laughing? Because even now you're only thinking of your beard!

*All the birds burst out laughing. They leave the hermit alone in the desert, in the midst of the debris. The hoopoe says:*

Hoopoe: Come birds. The wind is joyful, pull yourself together and spread your wings. Come lazy birds, come, you curious birds, away!

*They resume their flight across the desert.*

Dove: If we reach the Simorgh, what should we ask him?

Hoopoe: Ask him to grant you your dearest wish.

Dove: My dearest wish is to see him.

Hoopoe: Then ask for nothing.

Heron: Tell me, what present can we bring?

Hoopoe: Take to the land of the Simorgh what can not be found there already.

Heron: He knows everything, he has everything.

Hoopoe: Then take your love and your suffering.

Falcon: Look. Down there.

Sparrow: Where?

Hoopoe: Isn't it a bird walking?

*A bird appears walking slowly across the desert. The birds settle around him.*

Dove: Where are you coming from?

Sparrow: Are you alone?

Falcon: Why don't you use your wings?

*The bird answers without stopping.*

Walking bird: I took a vow to cross the desert on foot. Walking. I wanted to see the Simorgh

....

Sparrow: And you saw him?

Walking bird: .....So I set out on foot and I crossed the desert.

2<sup>nd</sup> Exotic bird: It must have been painful;

Walking bird: I walked for 14 years.

1<sup>st</sup> exotic bird: And you come to the end of the desert?

Walking: Yes.

1<sup>st</sup> exotic bird: Is it still far?

Walking bird: On foot it's hard to tell.

Falcon: And you've seen the Simorgh?

Heron: What's he like?

Walking bird: The Simorgh? No. No. I haven't seen the Simorgh. When I got to the end of the desert, I said to myself: Here's the Kingdom that I've been praying for so fervently. I've kept faith with my vow. I decided to turn back.

Heron: You abandons seeing the Simorgh?

Walking bird: I couldn't perfect myself farther. I've reached my limit. It was useless to go on.

Heron: And you'll still walking?

Walking bird: Still walking. I must be true to my vow. Bon voyage.

*He goes. The birds resume their flight. A storm hits them. They are weaker, near to death.*

Heron. Look at those bleached bodies beneath our wings. They were once brave birds, like us.

Dove: Death was waiting for them just here.

2<sup>nd</sup> exotic bird: The farther I go, the more I'm afraid to die.

1<sup>st</sup> exotic bird: I think the next obstacle will finish me;

Hoopoe: Don't you know that all life long or short is only a breath; If you're born, you die.  
You turn into earth and the wind blows you away. You are just earth and a drop of water.

*At this moment, an old man appears from the desert and cries:*

Old man: What do you know about death?

*The birds turn to him astonished and he adds:*

Old man: No man, old or young, has ever put his finger to death.

Sparrow: How do you know? Who are you?

Old man: I live here at the far end of the desert. I've retired from the world. I see foolhardy travellers pass by and I say to them: Give me your bag of bones. Where you are going, you wont need it.

*He tries to grab the birds, who resist.*

Dove: Is this where we die?

Old man: If you want to continue, something's got to go. You see, I've seen the phoenix die.

*He makes to go. The birds catch hold of him.*

Dove: The phoenix?

Sparrow: You've seen the phoenix?

1<sup>st</sup> exotic bird: The phoenix exists?

2<sup>nd</sup> exotic bird: The phoenix dies?

Old man: Yes. I've seen it. It's an extraordinary bird. Its beak is amazingly long and hard and it's pierced with holes like a flute. Each of this hole makes a sound and has its own special secret. When he makes music with his beak, this excites the birds and the fish. The most ferocious animals are in rapture – then they all fall silent. The phoenix lives about a thousand years and knows precisely the hour of his death. When his time comes, he gathers around him a heap of leaves and from the deepest recesses of his pure heart he draws put cries of grief.

*As he speaks, he lays out on the ground a long black cloth.*

Old man: All the birds come to watch this sight. All follow his example and accept to die.

*Silence.*

*One by one, the characters place on the great black cloth their bird forms. When they have finished, the old man resumes:*

Old man: When the Phoenix is close to his last breath he opens his wings and ruffles his feathers. This makes fire. The fire lights the leaves. Soon, bird, wood, everything is reduced to living coals and then to ashes. But when the last spark has flickered out a tiny phoenix appears in the middle of the burning ash.

*In the silence that follows, they all lift their eyes slowly toward the sky as though watching the new phoenix in flight.*

Old man: All my life I've measured the wind. When this life leaves me, bury me where you wish and goodnight.

*He disappears. Suddenly one of the birds stands up. It is the falcon.*

Falcon: Look!

*The other surrounds him trying to see.*

Sparrow: What do you see?

Falcon: Over there! A mountain. And the way into a valley. Do you see?

2<sup>nd</sup> exotic bird: No. I can't see nothing.

Falcon: Yes. Straight ahead.

Sparrow: Yes I see it.

Heron: Over there.

Falcon: We've arrived. We've crossed the desert.

Hoopoe: Steady birds. Keep calm. Make no mistake. We haven't arrived. The journey's not over.

Dove: What're you saying?

Hoopoe: The desert is only an ante-room.

Dove: But all our wounds?

Hoopoe: If you have wounds, don't tell anyone. The real suffering start here.

Sparrow: I'm off. I'm going back.

Hoopoe: No bird has ever crossed the desert a second time alive.

Heron: We can't go any further. And we can't go back.

Hoopoe: Chase all terrors from your soul. Listen to me. We have seven valleys to cross, one by one. In each valley there's a secret we've got to understand. No one crossed the seven valleys has ever returned, so I don't know exactly what's waiting for us on the other side.

Heron: Do you know the name of the valleys?

Hoopoe: The first is the valley of quest.

*They stay upright, motionless;*

*Music.*



The seven Valleys

*When the music quietens, the Hoopoe says:*

Hoopoe: Enter. Search. You'll need great patience to be patient.

*A man appears, singing, and obstinately sifting earth through a sieve. The birds watch him for a moment with curiosity, then the Dove asks:*

Dove: What are you looking for?

Man: I am trying to find my way.

Dove: Is this how you hope to find it?

Man: I must look everywhere if I want to find it somewhere.

*The man goes away still searching.*

Hoopoe: Most people go no farther. But we've risked everything to grasp the perfection of an atom.

Heron: We must plunge like madmen, with only our folly to lean on.

*A ball rolls into sight. It is hit by a man holding a mallet. He is followed by another man, playing a violin and spinning in rhythm with the ball.*

*The falcon asks:*

Falcon: Why are you turning?

1<sup>st</sup> Exotic bird: Why are you watching the ball?

Player: Because it's in movement like he is. It's lost, like he is. They both have neither head nor foot. The ball knows him and he knows the ball. They speak to one another. But the ball is happier than he is.

2<sup>nd</sup> exotic bird: Why?

Player: Because I touch it from time to time with my stick.

Heron: What is this riddle?

Player: He is like the ball, but he suffers more than the ball. Each time I hit the ball, it and the mallet become one. But he is parted from his love. And he feels the blow in his heart.

*The two characters leave.*

*The birds remain dumbstruck. The Hoopoe tries to help them.*

Hoopoe: In this valley, you must be headless, footless and plunge into love with all your being.

*They begin to move their heads, then their arms;*

Falcon: I've never known love. Love frightens me. It lives off pain and takes blood from the heart. It puts a saw to its own throat and cuts its own body.

Sparrow: I'm afraid.

*The heron speaks to the fearful sparrow.*

Heron; My child, to be wise you need to play at love. Love kills you, but every moment it gives you strength. Don't despise yourself, because nothing is beyond your reach. All that's made by angels is made for you.

*The heron draws the sparrow into the others bird's movement; This movement becomes more and more abandoned. In the end, they drop to the ground, exhausted.*

Hoopoe: Rest a little. We have crossed the valley of love.

*The exhausted birds lie down and sleep. The first to wake is the falcon.*

Falcon: Who sent us this strange sleep?

Heron: Hoopoe, what happened while we were sleeping?

Hoopoe: In the first valley, you search. In the second you burn with love. Now, we're in the valley of understanding.

Heron: But why were we put asleep?

Hoopoe: To tell us: stay awake! You are climbing the path of ecstasy. No one agrees on the length of this path. You go forward in your own time.

Falcon: Stay on guard. Don't let anyone pass during the night without crying: "Who goes there?" Don't sleep. Watch your heart. There are thieves abroad.

*Suddenly one hears sobbing. The birds see a man enter, crying and taking something grim his eyes.*

Dove: What have you found in your eyes?

Man: I'm taking out my tears, one by one.

Dove: You keep it?

Man: Of course. Can you see they become stones? Wondrous precious stones?

*He shows her a tear holding it between two fingers.*

Man: I've quite a collection. Do you want to see them?

Dove: Please.

Man: All my tears are here. Look. Which do you like best?

Dove: They are all exquisite.

Man: Do you want one? You want this one? I can easily get more.

*At this moment, the hoopoe says to the dove forcefully:*

Hoopoe: Come, away, Dove. On

Dove: Just a moment. You have seen the beauty of this stones?

Hoopoe: Come. Don't let anything stop you. Whatever stop you become an idol.

The Dove separates herself regretfully from the stones and joins the other birds.

They enter the fourth valley.

Hoopoe: In the fourth valley a cold wind blows. In an instant this wind can ravage an immense void. Here the seven oceans are just a pool. The seven planets, a mere speck.

The seven heavens, a corpse. The seven hells, splintered ice. Here the ant has the strength of a hundred elephants and one can't tell why.

Sparrow: What is this valley?

Hoopoe: It's not as easy to cross as you might think. If you halt, you turn to stone and you die. If you continue to the end of time you hear a cry.

*They listen. A cry in the distance.*

Hoopoe: On!

*Two characters appear. One holds a board covered with sand. The other speaks.*

Astrologer. Have you ever seen –birds- an astrologer set put a tablet and cover it with sand? He traces the stars and the planets, the heavens and the earth, the zodiac. He reads omens good and bad. He finds the house of birth and of death. Then he takes the tablet by a corner and scatters the sand.

*The sand is scattered on the ground.*

Heron: I see no meaning to my existence: everything I've said and everything I've done is nothing.

Falcon: There's nothing but wind in my hand.

1<sup>st</sup> exotic bird: All that was, all that will be, good or bad, is only an atom. What does it matter if the races survive? Since hundreds of thousands of worlds are reduced to dust is it strange that our world will also vanish?

Hoopoe: We have come to the place where there is nothing. To the valley of Annihilation. But take care, even nothing has a secret.

*The hoopoe signals the birds to listen to the Astrologer again.*

Astrologer: Listen. If you saw the world burn until hearts were ashes, this would only be a dream. Even if everything were wiped away, from the fish to the moon, you would still find at the bottom of a well, a lame ant's paw. And it could all begin again. Even if the two worlds were suddenly annihilated, do not deny the existence of a single grain of sand. If there were no trace left neither of man nor of djinns, consider the secret of the drop of water.

*After a moment of silence the Hoopoe resumes:*

Hoopoe: Forward. Nothing is as dangerous as standing still. Seasoned travellers, you will perish before the goal.

Falcon: Look!

*In front of them they see three objects: a palm tree, a scorpion and a man (human), modelled in wax.*

Falcon: A palm tree, a scorpion and a man.

*They tried to understand the meaning of the display.*

Sparrow: What's the difference between these three things,

1<sup>st</sup> exotic bird: I don't know.

2<sup>nd</sup> exotic bird: Nor I.

Heron: I see it.

*He kneads the wax objects together until they make a ball.*

Heron: Listen to the secret of the wax. Although you see many people, they are in reality only a few. Only one.

Hoopoe: It's the Valley of Unity.

Falcon: And the scorpion has disappeared?

Hoopoe: The scorpion? He's in you, very well concealed. You'd think he's asleep. But if you touch him, however lightly, he'll be as strong as a hundred dragons. And he'll bite you savagely through the dust of your tomb.

*At this moment reappears the slave whom we have already seen, who a narcotic drug had taken one night to a princess. He wanders in this place, wild, in perpetual amazement.*

Falcon: Haven't we seen you before?

Slave: Yes. You saw me when I was alive. I spent a night beside a princess whom nothing can equal. I saw her and I didn't see her. I touched her and I didn't touch her. Nothing in the world is as amazing as something that is neither clear nor unclear.

*He goes.*

2<sup>nd</sup> exotic bird: Where are we?

Hoopoe: When the traveller enters the sixth valley, he disappears, as does the earth on which he walks. And he remains astonished. What can the mind do here? It stays on the threshold, like the child born blind. We are crossing the valley of Amazement.

Dove: Is there still another valley?

Hoopoe: Yes, but this one can't be described.

Falcon: I see nothing.

1<sup>st</sup> exotic bird: Hear nothing.

Heron: I am frozen with terror. Is this the valley of Death?

Hoopoe: Birds in torment, listen to me. The last step is the most difficult. At first, a being is nourished, surrounded with care. He grows. The death comes and wipes all away. He is no more than the dust in the road. But at that instant he learns thousands of secrets that he ignored.

Dove: What secrets. What use are they?

Sparrow: Why buy them with our lives?

Hoopoe: Look.

*A figure comes with a candle. Another brings moths.*

*The first tells:*

Figure: One day, the moths met together, tormented by a longing to be united with the candle; The first moth went to a far away castle and saw inside the light of a candle. He/she came back, and told what he/she had seen. But the wise moth that presided over the meeting said: And so?

*The birds listen, very attentive.*

Figure: A second moth went closer to the candle. He touched the flame with his wings but the heat drove him/her away. He/she came back; his/her wings burnt and described his/her

adventure. But the wise moth said: So what? Then a third moth rose up, drunk with love. He clasped the flame with his/her forelegs and embraced it passionately. His/her limbs became red like the fire. He/she and the flame became one. Then the wise moth –who had been watching- from a distance said to the other: He/she has learned what he/she wanted to know. But only he/she understands. That's all.

*The two figures withdraw. The birds stay silent for a moment, then they look around and the falcon asks the hoopoe:*

Falcon: Are we alive or dead? Where is the Simorgh, Let us see him now that we've crossed the valley!

Hoopoe: The valleys? What valleys?

Dove: The seven valleys we've been through.

Hoopoe: You've gone through nothing, birds. The valleys were only a mystery, a dream. A shadow in your brains. Look! We're still in the same place.

*The birds stay motionless for a moment. The hoopoe comes forward to tell us:*

Hoopoe: The birds dropped their heads and their hearts bled. Some died on the spot. The others set off once more.

*The birds stay motionless while the hoopoe continues.*

Hoopoe: They travelled year after year and almost all perished, devoured by thirst, shrivelled by sun, thorn apart by wild beasts. Some of them stopped, petrified by what they saw on the way. Others forgot the object of their search and were lost. Only a few reached their goal, broken, worn out, old.

## THE SIMORGH

*(Thirty birds)*

*At this moment, a chamberlain appears and asks:*

Chamberlain: Where are you from, birds?

Hoopoe: We come from far.

Chamberlain: For what purpose?

Sparrow: To see the Simorgh, our King.

Chamberlain: What can he do with a useless handful of earth like you? Go away!

Heron: We have made the great journey. The King can't refuse us after so many ordeals.

Chamberlain: Addled brains, you've only complaints to offer. Go back!

Falcon: The way back means death.

Chamberlain: Your life is nothing in the universe. A thousand worlds full of creatures is like an ant at the gate of this King. Be off!!

Dove: Don't reject us! Where can we go?

1<sup>st</sup> exotic bird: We're burning with love for the King.

Sparrow: Chamberlain, open the door!

Heron: Let us see him!

2<sup>nd</sup> exotic bird: Don't reject us!

Dove: Have pity!

Chamberlain: Go!

*He closes the door and goes away, leaving the birds alone.*

Hoopoe: Even the hoopoe lost courage. Forgive me birds - he said - it was mad of me to lead you on this long journey. It's my fault that we are exhausted and lost. I was mistaken. Like you. I was fooled by my own illusion.

*At this moment the chamberlain reappears. He looks at the miserable state of the birds and says to him:*

Chamberlain: You are still there?

*They do not answer. Holding sticks, he comes up to them, saying:*

Chamberlain: I will lead you to the Simorgh. Come.

*They summon their last ounces of strength. They get up and each takes a stick. They follow the movement of the chamberlain. In the end, the hoopoe says:*

Hoopoe: A door was open to them. A hundred curtains were drawn. A dazzling light shone. At last, they saw the Simorgh and they saw that the Simorgh was themselves and that they were the Simorgh. When they look at the Simorgh, they saw that it was indeed the Simorgh. And when they turned their glance to themselves, they saw that they were the Simorgh. In fact, the two made one being. No one in the world has ever heard anything like it. Not understanding, they questioned the Simorgh, without using words; They ask him the great secret. Then the Simorgh told them – also without words- :”The sun of my majesty is a mirror. He who sees himself /herself in it sees his/her soul and his/her body. He/she sees him/herself as he/she is completely. Were you thirty or forty, you would see thirty or forty birds in this mirror. You have done a long journey to arrive at yourselves, to understand better the travellers” Then, the birds lost themselves forever in the Simorgh. The shadow became one with the sun and that is all; The way is open, but there is neither traveller nor guide.



Les sept vallées :

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| 1. La vallée de la recherche –                | Talib.      |
| 2. La vallée de l'amour –                     | Achék       |
| 3. La vallée de la connaissance –             | Ma'arifat   |
| 4. La vallée de l'indépendance –              | Istigna     |
| 5. La vallée de l'unité –                     | Tahuid      |
| 6. La vallée de l'étonnement / stupéfaction - | Haïrat      |
| 7. La vallée de la mort – dénuement, pureté,  | Facir, Fana |

The seven valleys:

1. The valley of Quest
2. The valley of love
3. The valley of understanding
4. The valley of independent & detachment
5. The valley of pure unity
6. The valley of astonishment
7. The valley of poverty, nothingness beyond which one can go no further.



Préface de Peter Brook :

Grâce à ce chemin très particulier qu'est le théâtre, nous avons accès à des couches subtiles et cachées de l'expérience humaine. Quels sont les moyens nécessaires pour s'engager sur ce chemin?

C'est pour répondre à cette question qu'en 1971 nous avons commencé un travail de groupe. Si le groupe était international, ce n'était pas dans le but d'échanger des recettes, car nous voulions surtout éviter de faire une salade de cultures. En fait il s'agissait, par des exercices et des improvisations, de tenter de parvenir à l'essentiel c'est-à-dire au champ où les impulsions de l'un rejoignent les impulsions de l'autre pour résonner ensemble.

Pour cela il fallait passer — le processus est long et difficile — de la culture extérieure à la culture intérieure—de la personnalité apparente à l'individualité. Pour rendre cette démarche un peu moins impossible nous avons commencé par une séparation arbitraire des éléments de base. Nous avons travaillé sur le corps et ses gestes, mais sans croire à l'expression corporelle comme un but en soi. Nous avons travaillé sur les sons comme moyen d'expression, sans imaginer que le langage habituel doit pour cela être éliminé. Nous avons travaillé en improvisation libre devant des publics de toutes sortes pour mieux apprendre la relation intime qui existe à chaque instant entre la vérité d'une forme d'expression et la qualité de la communication.

Notre point de départ était obligatoirement nous-mêmes. Mais pour éviter de tourner en rond dans un narcissisme dangereux, il est absolument nécessaire de s'appuyer sur quelque chose de plus grand et de plus fort venant de l'extérieur, qui lance un défi à notre compréhension et nous contraint à voir au-delà de Cet univers personnel que nous projetons devant nous à chaque instant et que nous confondons avec la réalité.

C'est ainsi que très tôt nous nous sommes tournés vers Attar qui appartient à une tradition où l'auteur lui-même cherche à servir une réalité plus grande que celle de ses fantasmes ou de ses idées et qui essaie de tremper les fruits de son imagination dans un univers qui le dépasse. *La Conférence des Oiseaux*, oeuvre dont les facettes et les niveaux sont sans limite représentait pour nous cet océan dont nous avions besoin.

Dans la brousse africaine, dans la banlieue parisienne, avec les Chicanos de la Californie, les Indiens du Minnesota, et aux coins des rues de Brooklyn nous avons joué de courts fragments de *la Conférence des Oiseaux* toujours dans des formes différentes - des formes dictées par la nécessité de communiquer - et toujours en découvrant avec une grande émotion que ce contenu était véritablement universel, qu'il passait sans gêne à travers toutes les barrières culturelles et sociales. La dernière nuit de notre séjour à Brooklyn, en 1973, nous avons joué trois versions différentes de *la Conférence des Oiseaux*. Celle de 8 heures du soir était du théâtre brut, vulgaire, comique et plein de vie. Celle de minuit était une recherche du sacré, intime, chuchotée à la lumière des bougies. Et la toute dernière qui avait commencé à 5 heures du matin dans le noir pour se terminer avec l'arrivée du jour était en forme de chorale où tout passait par le chant improvisé. A l'aube, avant de nous séparer pour plusieurs mois, nous nous sommes dit la prochaine fois, il faudra essayer de réunir tous ces éléments à l'intérieur du même spectacle.

Plusieurs années passèrent jusqu'au moment où il nous a semblé possible de revenir à Attar.

Et cette fois le but était double: remplacer l'improvisation par un spectacle pas nécessairement fixe, mais assez stable pour être reproduit autant de fois que nécessaire; et aussi remplacer les impressions partielles et fragmentaires données dans le passé par une tentative de capter et de raconter le poème tout entier.

Le travail des répétitions a commencé avec une question. Est-ce que l'acteur peut devenir oiseau et ensuite derviche ou princesse, uniquement avec son corps et son visage habituels ? Non. Il y a un moment où les contorsions du corps et les grimaces du visage deviennent excessives et l'autre possibilité, ne rien indiquer extérieurement, serait une solution théâtrale trop aride. Donc un outil devient nécessaire, quelque chose qui est comme une extension ou une exaltation de l'impulsion de base. Habiller l'acteur en oiseau avec un masque sur la tête serait trop lourd parce qu'il s'agit plutôt de donner une suggestion rapide qui n'encombre point l'imagination. A certains moments on a besoin de sentir davantage le côté figuratif de l'oiseau, mais moins à d'autres moments.

Techniques et expériences acquises par les acteurs dans le passé étaient à leur disposition. Entre l'instrument qui est un doigt et celui qui est un son, par exemple, ils ont pu choisir comme on fait entre un pinceau et un autre.

De cette manière, sans y penser et souvent sans le savoir, nous avons utilisé des éléments d'expression hétéroclites provenant des sources qui correspondaient à l'expérience collective du groupe. Devant chaque difficulté il y avait toujours la même référence. Chacun était profondément touché par Attar et cherchait à exprimer ce qui pour lui était concret et réel dans le poème.

Peter Brook

[Google translation](#)



Preface by Peter Brook: Thanks to this very special way of theater, we have access to the subtle and hidden layers of human experience. What are the necessary means to embark on this path? It is to answer this question in 1971 we started a group work. If the group was international, it was not for the purpose of exchanging recipes, mainly because we wanted to avoid making a salad crops. In fact it was through exercises and improvisations, to try to reach the main thing is to say to the field where the pulses meet the pulses one another to resonate together. Why you had to go - the process is long and difficult - the external culture to culture inner-personality apparent individuality. To make this process a little less impossible we started with an arbitrary separation of basic elements. We worked on the body and gestures, but without believing in the bodily expression as an end in itself. We worked on the sounds as a means of expression, without imagining that the usual language for this must be eliminated. We worked in free improvisation to audiences of all kinds to better learn the intimate relationship at any time between the truth of a form of expression and communication quality. Our starting point was mandatory ourselves. But to avoid going around in circles in a dangerous narcissism, it is absolutely necessary to rely on something bigger and stronger from outside, that challenges our understanding, forcing us to see through Beyond this personal universe that we project before us at every moment and that we confuse with reality. Thus early we turned to Attar who belongs to a tradition where the author himself seeks to serve a greater reality than his fantasies or his ideas and trying to soak the fruits of his imagination in a world that transcends it. The Conference of Birds, a work whose facets and levels are limitless meant to us that ocean we needed. In the African bush, in the Paris suburbs, with the Chicanos of California, Indians of Minnesota, and on street corners in Brooklyn we played short fragments of the Conference of the Birds always in different forms - forms dictated by the need to communicate - and always discovering with great emotion that this content was truly universal, he passed unhindered through all the cultural and social barriers. The last night of our stay in Brooklyn, in 1973, we played three different versions of the Conference of the Birds. The 8 o'clock the theater was crude, vulgar, funny and full of life. That midnight was a search for the sacred, intimate, whispered in the light of candles. And the latest that began at 5 am in the dark and ended with the arrival of the day was like when everything went through choral singing improvised. At dawn, before we separated for several months, we said next time it will try to bring all these elements within the same show. Several years passed until it seemed possible to return to Attar. And this time the goal was twofold: to replace improvisation by a show not necessarily fixed, but stable enough to be reproduced as many times as necessary, and also replace the partial and fragmentary impressions given in the past by attempting to capture and tell the whole poem. The work of rehearsals began with a question. Does the actor can become a bird and then dervish or princess, only with his body and face normal? No. There is a time when bodily contortions and facial grimaces become excessive and the other possibility, do not enter anything externally, would be a theatrical solution too dry. Therefore becomes a necessary tool, something that is like an extension or an enhancement of the basic pulse. Dress the actor into a bird with a mask on his head would be too heavy because it is rather to give a quick suggestion that clutters the point of imagination. At times we need to feel more figurative side of the bird, but less at other times. Techniques and experiences of the actors in the past were available to them. Between the instrument that is a finger and he that is sound, for example, they could choose as they do between a brush and another. In this way, without thinking and often unknowingly, we used expression elements from disparate sources that corresponded to the collective experience of the group. Before every difficulty there was always the same reference. Everyone was deeply touched by Attar and tried to express what for him was real and concrete in the poem. Peter Brook

the way  
o dromos  
la voie  
la strada  
la calle  
marga  
dojo



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