CHESTER BEATTY MONOGRAPHS
No. 5

THE POEM OF THE WAY

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE
FROM THE ARABIC OF
IBN AL-FARID

BY
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LONDON
EMERY WALKER LIMITED
41 GREAT RUSSELL STREET
1952
INTRODUCTION

SHARAF AD-DIN Umar ibn Ali as-Sa’di, familiarly called Ibn al-Farid or the Notary’s Son, was born at Cairo in A.D. 1181, ten years after the final extinction of Fatimid rule in Egypt, and six years after the formal recognition of the accomplished fact of Saladin’s supremacy. His life of a little less than fifty-four years fell within a period of great military, political, and intellectual activity. He himself had but few material adventures; dedicated from early manhood to the mystic’s way of withdrawal from the world, he was utterly satisfied in later days to remember with ecstatic pleasure the pilgrimage he made to the Sacred Places of Arabia, and to meditate upon the union with the Spirit of Muhammad which he then experienced. When he died on 23 January 1235, he left behind him the memory of a holy life surrendered to the Will of Allah, and a small collection of exquisite poetry.

Ibn al-Farid’s greatest and most justly celebrated work is the Na’im as-suluk, the ‘Poem of the Way’ which is here translated. This has been described by R. A. Nicholson as ‘not only a unique masterpiece of Arabic poetry but a document of surpassing interest to every student of mysticism’. The original consists of 760 couplets all rhyming together upon the verse-ending -ti, a fact which explains its alternative title at-Ta’iyat al-kubra (‘The Greater Ode in T’). It was extremely rare for Arab poets to exceed even 100 couplets in a single poem; the epic length of the Na’im as-suluk is entirely without parallel, and considered only as an example of rhyming virtuosity it must be accounted most remarkable. The metre is tawil, scanned as follows:

saqatī | ḥumaiyā l-ḥub| bi rāha| tu muqlati
wa-ka’sī | muḥaiyā man | ‘ani l-ḥus|ni jallati

The great theme of the poem is the mystic’s quest for and realization of his identity with the Spirit of Muhammad, and thereby the absorption of his individual personality into the Unity of God. Ibn al-Farid brought to the treatment of this theme, the focal meditation of the Muhammadan mystic, a great wealth of metaphysical learning and poetic imagery. His
style, like that of some modern poets, presupposes in the reader a ready familiarity with a wide repertory of reference; and this fact, combined with a deliberate complexity and intricacy of syntax, often leads him into obscurity which is at times barely comprehensible. He was moreover heir to a literary tradition which prized highly extravagant embellishment of rhetoric; for example, in the first line of his poem which has been quoted above there is a conscious verbal pattern in the occurrence of the words ħumaiyā and muḥaiyā (this figure is known to the theorists as jinās maqlūb), and in the juxtaposition of rāhatu ('hand') and muqlati ('The pupil of mine eye'). Scarcely a line of the entire poem is without some ornament, and in some lines the decoration is as fine and tightly woven as filigree.

The aesthetic effect created by this sharp contrast between the repetition of strongly dominating themes and their almost endless elaboration in minute detail of patterned variation is precisely similar to the impression conveyed by a monumental building decorated with delicate arabesque tracery. The resemblance is not accidental; for Ibn al-Fārid's style, not excelled in its kind by any other Arab poet, represents the consummation of the same artistic impulse which culminated (with building materials instead of words and images) in the Alhambra's perfect balance between strength and subtlety. It obviously follows from this brief appreciation that his poetry is untranslatable, if by translation is meant the reproduction in the foreign language of not only the meaning but also the artistry of the original.

Ibn al-Fārid thus presents a peculiarly stubborn problem to one who seeks to render what he says and how he says it into another idiom. Despite the help—if that be not a euphemism—offered by the several Arabic commentaries which claim to hold the key to his frequent enigmas (and in their more candid mood the commentators admit themselves defeated not seldom, and put forward merely tentative solutions), it must still be confessed that the poet’s intentions are on occasion intellectually undiscoverable. There are passages in which he seems to write in a kind of sensual trance, fascinated by the shapes and sounds of the words with which he is playing, struggling desperately to arrange them into some semblance of sense. Even in his most opaque moods, however, he never fails to rescue his reader from total bewilderment by a following line or
two of almost transparent simplicity, so that the thread of the argument need never be wholly lost. This alternation of darkness and clarity creates a sustained tension and excitement in the reader’s mind, unfortunately not at all communicable to those unable to follow the original.

The first European scholar to attempt the translation of this poem was the German orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall. He printed an edition of the text in the beautiful nastāʾīq fount belonging to the old Imperial Press of the Hapsburgs, and he put what he understood Ibn al-Fārid to mean into rhyming German verse. This enterprise, which came out at Vienna in 1854, has been summarily dismissed by R. A. Nicholson, most charitable of scholars, as worthless; a fair verdict on a brave failure. S. I. di Matteo, the Italian amateur, made the second trial in 1917; he had the humility not to attempt rhythm or rhyme, but his scholarship was unequal to the task, and the gentle C. Nallino tore it to shreds in a very learned review. Then R. A. Nicholson marshalled his mature and experienced powers to the third endeavour; his honest literal version of three-fourths of the poem, expertly and illuminatingly annotated, forms the concluding section of his brilliant Studies in Islamic Mysticism (Cambridge, 1921). Finally, Maria Nallino found among her father’s papers after his death an unpublished prose translation, similar in scholarly austerity to R. A. Nicholson’s, of a little more than one-half of the whole; and this has now been printed.

Though I had long been fascinated by the Naẓm as-suluk and all too well apprised of its difficulties, it never occurred to me that I should chance my hand also at its interpretation, until I happened to hit upon a manuscript of Ibn al-Fārid’s poems in the library of my generous friend Mr. A. Chester Beatty, a copy which substantially antedates all other known codices; I have given a description and transcription of this manuscript elsewhere. By one of those strange coincidences which almost persuade a man to believe in destiny, I had the luck at about the same time to pick up in an obscure bookshop a copy of the very rare edition (published in the East in 1876) of the oldest and most detailed commentary on the poem, that written during the latter half of the thirteenth century by Saʿīd ad-Dīn al-Farghānī, an instrument which had not been available to R. A. Nicholson. With these two new sources of information in my hands, I felt a little less diffidence about the
possibility of taking the interpretation of Ibn al-Fārid one further stage; and having studied the evidence now before me, I resolved to make the fifth attempt.

My first essay was to render the poem into a line-for-line equivalent in a sort of loose *tawil*, so far as that lilting rhythm can be imitated in our unquantitative English; and I published a fragment after this fashion in my *Sufism* (Allen & Unwin, 1951). But it quickly came home to me that liberties like these could not well be taken with poetry so mannered and elusive as Ibn al-Fārid's. The pedestrian prose-renderings of R. A. Nicholson and C. Nallino, admirable products of high scholarship that they were, advised me against following that path if Ibn al-Fārid were ever to be read by more than a handful of erudites. Von Hammer-Purgstall had signposted a monumental warning against rhyme. There remained our great English heritage of blank verse, a medium equal to every shade of darkness or clarity the craftsman could desire; and that was the making of this try. If I have abandoned as inappropriate the line-for-line technique, at least I have striven deliberately to match obscurity with obscurity, and light with light; seeking at the same time to shadow the sustained tension which I have remarked as so outstanding a feature of the original.

This version as it stands stark is therefore frequently unintelligible without recourse to the notes appended to it. If these notes do not resolve every purposed tangle, this is because I have set myself to rival Ibn al-Fārid's own enigmas, the solutions of which are to be sensed rather than reasoned. I feel myself to have sensed solutions to every riddle, keeping always clearly in my mind the strongly dominating themes which are the poem's massive framework.
TRANSLATION

The pupil of mine eye stretched forth its hand
To grasp my bowl (her matchless countenance
Transcending mortal beauty) and therefrom
Poured me the fever and the flame of love,

While with my glance I gave my friends to think
Draining their juice it was that filled my soul
(And I intoxicated) with deep joy;
Yet having eyes to drink, I could dispense
With that my goblet, since her qualities

And not my wine inebriated me.
So in the tavern of my drunkenness
The hour was ripe that I should render thanks
To those the lads by whose conspiracy
My passion could be perfectly concealed

For all my notoriety. But when
My sober mood was ended, boldly I
Requested union with her, being now
No more inhibited by clutching fear
But wholly unrestrained in love’s expanse;

And privily, as when a bride unveils
Before her bridegroom, I disclosed to her
All my heart’s story, having none to share
And spy upon my joy, no lingering trace
Even of self-regard. So, while my state

Attested my torn passion, as between
Annihilation in discovery
Of her my love, and re-establishment
Shocked by the loss of her, I pleaded thus:
'Give me, ere love annul in me a last
30 Poor relic of myself, wherewith to look
Upon thee—give me but one fleeting glance
As turning casually upon thy way!
Or if thou willest not that I should gaze
At thee, grant to mine ear the blessed grace
Of that Thou shalt not wherein ere my time
Another once rejoiced; for I have need
35 Imperious, in my spirit's drunkenness,
Of that twice sobering, by which my heart
Except for passion were not fragmented—
And if the mountains, and great Sinai
Itself among them, had been made to bear
The burden of my anguish, even ere
The revelation of God's splendour flashed
They had been shattered—passion tear-betrayed,
Ardour augmenting those the inward flames
Whose sick-bed fevers made: an end of me.
So was the Flood of Noah as my tears
When I make moan, the blaze of Abram's fire
My passion's scorch. (Only my sighs prevent
50 My overwhelming in that surge of tears,
Only my tears deliver me alive
From my sighs' holocaust.) And for my grief,
Jacob expressed but the least part of it,
And all Job's sufferings a fraction were
Of my dire torment; as for those who loved
Constantly unto death (in legend famed),
Their final agony might scarce have served
To be the prelude of my tragedy.
Or had the guide heard in his ear my sigh
55 When in the throes of throbbing sicknesses
That tortured this my passion-wasted flesh,
Haply my grief might have recalled to mind
The critical distress of travellers
Stranded untimely, when the caravan
Is reined, the racing dromedaries strain
Unto the track. Affliction unrelieved
Hath harassed and destroyed me utterly;
Emaciation hath revealed the last
Deep-hidden mystery of my truest self.

For, drunken of my wasting, I regaled
My new-found intimate, the attentive spy,
With all my secrets, and the detailed score
Of my most private life. An abstract thought,
No more, was all that I appeared to him,

My essence being brought to such a pass
As he might not descry it, so the woes
Of burning love obliterated it;
And though my tongue spake not, the fluttering thoughts
Within my soul whispered into his ear

The secret of those things my soul had sought
The most especially to hide from him.
Thus to my thought his ear became a mind
Wherein my thought revolved, and thus his ear
Sufficed him for the lack of visual sight;

Thus he bore news to all within the tribe
Openly of my innermost affairs,
Being right intimate with my estate,
As if the angels who record all deeds
Had come down out of heaven to inspire

His heart with knowledge of whatever tale
Is written on my scroll. Nor had he known
What I was veiling, what dark mystery
Well-guarded in my bosom lay concealed,
Save that my body's curtain being drawn

Disclosed that secret of my inmost soul
It had till then most strictly screened from him.
And in my secret too I had remained
Invisible to him, but that the sigh
Gasped by emaciation's feeble lips
Divulged it: so it was the malady
Whereby I had been hidden from his eyes
Itself displayed me—truly passion brings
All things most paradoxical to pass.

But then my agony surpassed all bounds:
The whispered thoughts within my soul, like tears
That had betrayed me, smitten by that pain
Dissolved to nothingness. Had loathsome death
Purposed to seize me, it would not have known
To find me, being made invisible
By my resolve to hide my love for thee.

Torn between longing and intense desire
As now thou turnest thy back repelling me
And now revealedest thyself before my gaze,
I wholly passed away; and were my heart

Restored me from thy court, as being now
Annihilated, never had it yearned
For such a lodge of exile. This I tell
To thee in part is but the frontispiece
Of my long story, and below it lies

A sequel far beyond me to declare.

So in my impotence I hold my tongue
On many things, that never by my speech
Shall be enumerated; and did I
Open my lips, I could but tell of few.

My cure itself was nigh to perishing,
Nay, passion doomed its death: the cooling draught
That would assuage my thirst found raging yet
The fever of my drought unquenchable.
My heart was grown more ragged than the robes

Of my long-suffering, nay more, my self
Itself was linked in naughting with my joy;
So, had I been revealed in verity
Unto my visitors, and had they learned
Scanning the Tablet what was left of me

By ardent passion, nothing more their eyes
Would have beheld of me except a ghost
Pervading yet a dead man's cerements.
And since the hour my tracks were blotted out
And I became a wanderer distraught,

My mind was filled with vain imaginings
About my being, and my thought yet failed
To light on my existence. Afterwards
My spirit's state, as loving only thee,
Subsisted of itself, my proof whereof

Is that my vital spirit did exist
Long ere my frame corporeal was knit.
And so I told the story of my love
For thee, not grown impatient of my woes
Or restless in the turmoil of my mood,

But to dispel my spirit's agony:
For comely is it to show fortitude
Before one's foes, unseemly to display
Aught but incompetence to the beloved.
(And yet the excellence of my fortitude
Prevents me from complaining, though indeed
Had I protested to mine enemies
They would have satisfied my deep complaint.)
That I endure with patience, loving thee,
The burden of that love, shall issue fair

Hereafter win; but that I should endure
To lose thee, that were little praiseworthy.
Now every pain in love, if it appear
From thee, to it I offer all my thanks
And no complaining; whatsoever woe

Befalls me is a grace, let my resolve
Be but secure, my knotted vows yet tied;
Yea, though the torments of too ardent love
Assail me, they shall be for dear love's sake
Reckoned as blessings. All my misery

And tribulation, being wrought by thee,
I count a benefaction, and to wear
The garment of affliction for thy sake
Is grace abounding. That eternal bond
Of loyalty to thee hath made me view

As best of treasures what is given me
As from the worst of fellows: railing one,
The other slandering—the former seeks
To guide me into negligence astray,
The latter babbles still his jealous lies

About me and about. I stand opposed
Against the first's reproach for awe of God,
As equally by caution moved I stand
Beside the second's pettiness and spite.
And never terror of encountered woe

Deflected me from following thy path,
Nor all the malice there afflicting me.
Nor was it self-restraint that made me bear
All that beset me on thy dear behalf
To qualify me for applause, or prove

My love deserving praise: thy loveliness,
That summoneth all hearts to worship thee,
Decreed that I should suffer and with joy
What I have told, and all the furthest reach
That stretches sequel to my history.

And this was all: that thou didst show thyself
To me in thy most perfect attributes
Exceeding mortal beauty, and didst make
Affliction my adornment, free entire
For me to wear, the which, as come from thee,

Proved my most fair and glorious ornament.
He who is lured by loveliness, behold
How from the most delightful life his soul
Is yielded up to death most willingly:
But any soul that thinketh not to meet

Suffering in love, and offereth itself
To passion thus, findeth itself rebuffed.
No spirit given over to repose
Ever won true affection; loyalty
Escapes the spirit loving ease of days.

210 Ease—how remote it lieth from the life
Of constant lover! Eden’s heavenly bowers
Are set about with dreads most horrible.

215 Mine is a noble spirit—offer it
Rewards beyond the boundaries of desire
But to forget thee, yet it could not dare
To let thy memory go; be it removed
Far from thy side, by exile, hatred, scorn,
Abscission of all hope, it would not yield
The precious prize of love I call my own.

220 I have no other way that I may go
Going from love away, and if I swerve
One day therefrom, I shall forswear my faith;
Or had a stray desire for other love
Than thine chanced in my mind though unawares

225 Then were I proved apostate, self-condemned.
Thine be the arbitration in my case:
Do what thou wilt, for never have I yearned
To turn away, but only unto thee.
Now by that firm-knit love between us twain

230 Wherein no fancy ever intervened
Of abrogation (O most solemn oath);
And by the covenant of holy troth
Which thou didst take, what time I had not yet
Appeared in manifest and outward guise

235 As of a spirit clad in my clay’s shade;
By that primeval pledge, unaltering
Since first I took it, and the latter bond
Too sacred to be loosed by ardour dimmed;
By the uprising of those lights that shine

240 Upon thy countenance, before whose gleam
Resplendent every moon is lost to sight;
By that thine attribute of absolute
Perfection, whence the loveliest, shapeliest form
In all creation manifest derives;

245 As by thy quality of majesty
That doth my torment unto pleasure turn
And make my very slaying seem most sweet;
As by the secret of a loveliness
Thy emanation, the sole origin
And perfecting of every elegance
In all the world for ever visible;
As by a beauty every intellect
Leadeth into captivity, my guide
Unto a passion wherein grace most fair

255 My humbling was, for thy exalting’s sake:
As last by an idea in thee (the which
Transcendeth beauty) through itself I viewed,
Too subtle to be seen by vision’s eye—
Thou truly art my heart’s desire, the goal
Of my long quest, the far and final end
Of my soul’s search, my choice and chosen one.
It is my bounden duty to cast off
All modesty, for thy sake (though my kin
Scorn to draw nigh me), yea, immodesty

260 Is now my sacred law; and no true folk
Of mine they are, while they will disapprove
My recklessness, and manifest their hate,
And see fit to abuse me, for thy sake.
Nay, those my kindred are (within the fold
Of love’s religion) who do truly love
And, loving, are content with my disgrace
And my dishonour deem most excellent.
Then let who will be wroth, save only thee:
It cannot hurt, so be it they approve

270 Of me who are the nobles of my tribe.
If but some part of thy fair attributes
Be thought as apt ascetics to enchant,
The whole of thee my fascination is.
I never was bewildered, till I chose
Thy love to be my faith; and ah, if thou
Wert not the cause of my bewilderment,
How great would my bewilderment have been!
'Nay, thou hast sought another's love, not mine',
She answered. 'Thither blindly purposing
Thou didst forsake my straight and narrow way:
Dupe of a soul puffed up with vain desires,
Prey to imposture, in whate'er thou saidst
Thou puttest on the infamy of a lie,
Daring to covet the most precious boon
And thine a wayward soul that passed its bounds
In arrogant aggression. How indeed
Shouldst thou attain affection's best, my love,
By mean pretence, the worst of qualities?
Shall dim Suhá be seen of eyes born blind,
Confused into oblivion of their goal?
'Twas thy vain hopes deceived thee, until thou
Hast taken up thy stand upon a point
Transcending thy true rank, what time thy foot
Exceeded not its small environment;
Thou wast ambitious to attain a height
How many folk have stretched their necks towards
And been struck off! Thou camest unto tents
Not to be entered upon netherwards
Whose doors are barred against the like of thee
Come knocking. Thou wouldst whisper privily
Into mine ear, for which high privilege
(A glory scant indeed to realize)
Thou broughtest for thine offering empty gauds,
Aye, and with shining face, not letting slip
The least part of the honour thou wouldst hug
In earth and heaven, seeking my pure love
Thou camest to me thus. If thou hadst been
A thin-drawn line marking the vowel i
Beneath the dot of b, be it through me,
Thou shouldst have been exalted higher far
Than thy unaided strength might struggle to,
There to perceive not worth a single thought
What formerly thou thoughtest of account,
And all thy preparation scarce enough
To count provision. Clear the roadway runs,
For all who are right-guided, unto me:
'Tis men's desires for ever blind men's eyes.
Now it is time that I disclose to thee
The nature of thy passion, and for whom
Thou languishest, as so thy false pretence
To love me is disproved. True, thou art sworn
To ardour; but thy ardour is thyself,
Whereof in demonstration I would cite
Thy sparing of thyself an attribute
Yet to survive. Till thou hast passed away
Wholly in me, thou hast not loved me true,
And till my form is manifest in thee
Thou hast not passed away. Then have thou done
With false pretending love; summon thy heart
To other occupation; drive away
Thy error with that state more excellent.
Avoid the courts of union: far indeed
True union is, and never was as yet
Thou livest: if thou art sincere, then die!
For such is love: thou gainest never goal
In love, except thou die. So choose thou that:
Die, or let go my love, and leave me be.'
Whereat I said to her: 'Behold, my soul
Waiteth upon thee; it is thine to take;
What matters it to me, that it should hap
Within my hands? I am not one to hate
Death for dear love; faithful unto the end
Is still my wont; all else my nature scorns.
And what might now be said of me, except
"Such a one died of love"? Or who is there
Can guarantee me this, my soul's desire?
Yes, it would please me well to have my term
Determined, yearning yet and union yet
Not mine, if so my lien on thy love

Be shown well-founded; or if I should fail
In fact to prove some claim on thee (too high
Such honour being), it sufficeth me
For boasts to be suspected of thy love.
And if I die, unsuspect, of my grief

Yet shalt thou not have wronged me, since my soul
Delights in martyrdom; enough for me,
If thou shalt shed my blood and I not count
As martyr, that the motive of my doom
Be known to thee. My spirit, as I think,

Scarce merits to be spent as price to win
Union with thee, for any difference
Betwixt reserve and prodigality
With so slight asset. I am well at ease
Before the threats of death, whose terrors else

Shake down the fragile pillars of man's joy.
Thou didst not wrong my soul in slaying it;
Rather thou gav'st it succour, if thereby
Thou didst destroy my life-blood, and if true
This omen is, thou hast exalted me,

Enhanced my worth, marked up my market-price.
Lo, I invite thy doom, and bid thee work
Thy pleasure: I seek not my span of days
To be prorogued. Whate'er thou threatenest
I take as fairest promise, which fulfilled

Fulfils the aspirations of a friend
Who standeth firm before whatever blow
Save to be sundered far from his beloved.
So I have come to hope what other men
Shrink from in fear: succour therewith the soul

Of a dead man prepared for endless life!
Now let me be her ransom, by whose grace
I did aspire to love, treading the path
Of them who went before me, and refused
All laws of life but mine. In every tribe

How many fell her victims, slain by grief,
Who never won upon a single day

Even one glance at her! How many men
Like me she slew of passion, and had she

Gazed in compassion on them, every one

Had stood revived! Now if she make my blood

Lawful to shed, and that I loved her well,
Upon the heights of exaltation, yea

The pinnacles of honour she hath set
My rank secure for ever. By my life,

If I do lose my life in loving her
I win the bargain; if she waste my heart

Yet shall she after heal it whole again.
I was humiliated in the tribe
Through her, until I found myself, in their

Esteem, too mean-aspiring to attain
The least worth striving; my subservience
To them debased me to obscurity
Matching my feebleness, so that they deemed
Me too contemptible to serve their will.

So I have fallen, after all my pride,
Down from the heights of glory to the deeps
Of degradation; lost my self-respect,
Men no more press my gate, nor put their hopes
In my authority; no neighbour comes

To me for shelter from the world’s despite.
It is as if I had been never held
In honour by my fellows, but was still
Despised, alike in hardship and in ease.

Had any asked, ‘Whom lovest thou?’ and I

Boldly declared her name, they would have said,
‘He means another, surely’, or ‘Poor man,
A demon madness hath assailed his brain!’

But had it not been possible to be
For her abased, passion would not have been
So sweet to me, and had I never loved,
Abasement would have never been my joy
And glory. Now my state, because of her,
Is thus adorned: the reason of one crazed,
The health of one oppressed by malady,
Humiliation's pride. In secrecy
My spirit whispered to my secret heart
How it desired to love her, where my mind
Could not be spy; for I did fear the tale
Might so transport my rest, that my shed tears
Would babble in their fashion and declare
My precious secret. Thus one part of me
Sought to deceive another, guarding close
This thing within me, though in truth my lie
In hiding it proved my veracity.
And then, as my first thought refused to show
This secret to the ribs within my breast,
I kept it from my meditating heart;
I strove my all for its concealment, and
So well that I forgot it, and was moved
Quite to forget concealing this same thing
My spirit whispered to me. Now if I
In planting these desires shall pluck the fruit
Of suffering, O wonderful the soul
That in desiring suffers! Of all hopes
Moving the loving soul, that is most sweet
Whereby the one who caused it to recall
And to forget doometh its suffering.
She took a part of me and set it guard
For her against me, watching my heart's thoughts
If they drew near with love; and if they steal
From my imagination secretly
Into my mind, naught hindering, in awe
And reverently I cast down my head.
Mine eye is closed, if I essay one glance,
And be my hand stretched out familiarly
To touch her, 'tis restrained; in every limb
Of me is a like eager reaching out,
And a like fearful drawing back by force
Of veneration. So my mouth and ear
Exhibit in me all the jostling signs
Of rivalry, that manifest as in
Self-sacrificing mercy on my soul:
As when my tongue recites her name, if then
Mine ear displays its quality thereto
And is not deaf, my tongue straightway is stilled,
Or if my tongue bestows upon my heart
The mention of her, being not the slave
Of silence, then mine ear becometh stopped.
Jealous am I for her, being distraught
With love of her, yet knowing my poor worth
I do disown my jealousy. My soul
Is rapt thereafter in an ecstasy
Of perfect joy in her, though even yet
I cannot hold my spirit innocent
Of inwardly conceiving a desire.
Mine ear beholds her, far indeed though she
Be from mine eye, in the pale visitant
Of phantom blame, the while I lie awake;
Or let her name be mentioned, then mine eye
Deemeth mine ear too lucky, and my rest
Envieth that she did efface in me.
I led my leader, in reality,
And all mankind behind me stood arrayed:
Whither I faced, there my true facing was.
My sight saw her before me as I prayed,
My heart meanwhile beholding me *imam*
Of my *imams*; and this scarce wonder was
That he who led the prayer led towards me,
Since she, the *qibla* of my *qibla*, lodged
Within my heart; and all directions six
To me had been directed, and therewith
All acts of piety and pilgrimage
Greater alike and lesser. (Unto her
At Abram's station I perform my prayers
And therein witness that to me she prayed:
We twain are one at prayer, prostrating one,
United, to his own reality
In each prostration.) None had prayed to me
Except myself, neither were my prayers said
In every genuflexion save to me.
Then how long shall I hug to me my veil?
Lo, I have rent it, as 'twas in the bond
Of my primeval compact I should loose
The curtain's locks. This gift of loyalty
To her was given me upon that day
When no day was, ere she appeared to me
At the high covenant, in my primalcy:
This loyalty I gained neither by sight,
Nor hearing, nor acquiring, nor the pull
Of nature, but I was distraught with her
In the supernal world of the Command
Where naught is manifest: I drained the cup
Of high intoxication, ere by birth
In this created world. The attributes
Dividing us, whereof none there survived,
Love here annulled and naughted utterly.
And I discovered with my inward eye
That which I had rejected from myself
Issuing unto me, and out of me
Proceeding forth; and I did contemplate
Myself by those same attributes whereby
I from myself was veiled, alike when I
Was present, and in occultation too;
And I was whom I loved without a doubt,
That same for whom my soul had to myself
Referred me; while my self myself had loved
Distractedly and unawares, although
In contemplation not in ignorance
Of where the truth resides in this affair.

And now the time is come that I should tell
In more particular what I have said
Succinctly, and more briefly summarize
What I have detailed, that I may spread forth
My wider scope. My taking her to love,

Thanks to our unity, bestowed on me
Rare subtleties and most exceptional
To lovers' habitude. The slanderer
Slanders me to her, but for my own sake,
While he who blames me on account of her
Manifests in her presence and through her
The goodly counsel he intends for me.
I give her thanks abounding (and before
She never hated me), while she accords
Me bounteous kindliness because my love

Was proved sincere. I offered up myself
To win her favour, counting it for her
Alone, and hoping for no recompense
From her; but she did draw me nigh to her.
Forthwith I proffered all that should be mine

In my hereafter, with whatever she
Might think to give me; in sincerity
I left behind me all regard for that,
Being unwilling my self-interest
Should be the beast to bear me unto her.

In poverty I sought her, yet was rich
In having poverty my attribute,
Wherefore I cast away impoverishment
Alike and riches. When to jettison
My poverty and wealth assured to me

The merit of my quest, I thrust aside
My merit also, and therein appeared
Evident my good fortune: she who would
Reward me (and naught else) became my prize.
And now through her, but never through myself,
Continued I to guide to her all those
Who of their own sweet will had gone astray
From passion's path; and she the true guide was.
Leave then to her, my friend, thy heart's desire;
Give her thy leading-rope, a soul at peace
In her. Be empty of all selfish whims;
Rise from thy slough; thereafter stabish thee
Firm-fixed, and thou shalt flourish mightily.
Keep on the way of righteousness; draw nigh,
Hold firm to her; direct thee unto her
Obedient, with the goodly penitence
Of a true, contrite heart. Return right soon;
Answer her (for she calleth), and refrain
To say, ‘Tomorrow I will gird my loins
In earnest resolution to arise’.
Be sharp of edge as trenchant Time itself,
For hatred lies in ‘haply’; and beware,
Say not ‘Perchance’, that is a malady
Most perilous. Rise up to please her well;
Labour, nor seek for respite or relief;
Yield not to weaknesses that let the hour
Of duty pass. Though thou art palsied, walk,
And rise, though thou be broken; for thy lot
Is worthlessness, if thou defer resolve
Unto the day of health. Go boldly forth;
Put forward all for sake of which thou sat’st
Among the laggards; issue from the chains
Of idle heeding of the idle show.
Cut with the sword of resolution strong
‘I shall’; if thou run swiftly in the race
Thou shalt win respite; giving of thy all
Thy soul shall win to fortune infinite.
Turn thyself unto her: to her direct
Thy steps, in utter bankruptcy: herein
I have comprised (if thou wilt but accept
My testament) all counsel that I know.
No rich man ere drew nigh to her, for all
His striving, nor remote from her thereby
Any remained who poverty preferred:
Such is the law of love, which all obey
Who have to do with love—a band of men
Fulfilled their compact, and were paid in full.
When blows the gale of self-sufficiency
It strips the man of substance; had it fanned
His poverty, the tender plant would thrive.
The right hand richest in prosperity
Reaps the reward of cutting knives, if it
Be outstretched eagerly in love, to clutch
At union. Whatsoever works are pure
And pious, let them all be unto her
Wrought, and escape thereby from self-regard
In that thy poverty. Do thou oppose
The promptings of vain talk, and free thyself
From the impediments of empty claims
Whose purpose is in truth the quest of fame:
The tongues of those men call most eloquent
Of gnostics, having given voice to all
Expressible in words, are fallen dumb.
What things thou hast not uttered, thou thereof
Art apt possessor, but so long as thou
Speakest, a stranger: wherefore hold thy peace!
In silence lies a way wherein resides
The dignity of a remainder; yet
Whoever deems that dignity the best
Object of silence, doth become its slave.
Then be thou sight, and see; ear, and retain;
Be thou a tongue, and speak; since union is
The most direct of paths. Follow thou not
Him who is led into a vain conceit
By his base soul, that thereby takes control
Of all his actions, waxing powerful. Leave all but her, and set aside thy soul Which is among her foemen; refuge take Against it with the doughtiest of shields. My soul ere now reproachful was; when I

Obeyed it it rebelled, let me rebel And it obeyed me. So I brought it down To drink of what the easier draught were death, And wearied it, till it might give me ease. And it became disposed to bear what loads

Soe’er I charged it with, and was sore grieved If I should lighten them; I tasked it well, Nay, I took care my soul should task itself And found strange fondness for my suffering, Forsook all pleasures in amending it

And strove to set it far from its old wonts, Until it was at rest. No more remained Of terror yet before it, but I rode Boldly upon it, for so long as I Witnessed my soul was still unpurified.

Each station I traversed upon that way Was an ascetic exercise, the which I fully realized in servanthood. Till now I had been passionate for her; But when I yielded up what I desired

She did desire, and love me, for herself. So I became a loved one, nay, in love With my own self, yet not upon the mode I said before my soul is my beloved; Through her I issued from myself to her

Nor to myself came back; and one like me Holds not to any doctrine of return. Generously I set my soul apart From my forthgoing, and consented not That it should ever more consort with me;

For all, while I was made unconscious of
My soul’s detachment, in such fashion that
No manifesting of an attribute
Jostled me in my presence; and when she
Appeared, ’twas given me to contemplate
My occultation, and I found myself
There to be she in the unveiling of
My privacy; my being was effaced
In my beholding, and I was detached
From my beholding’s being, blotting out
And not establishing. And I embraced
(In the sobriety that subsequent
To my intoxication came on me)
That I had contemplated, even in
The blotting-out of what was to behold,
What time it was to be beheld anew.
In the sobriety that followed on
The blotting-out, I was not else but she;
When she unveiled herself, my essence took
My very essence for investiture.
And now I will display my origin
In that my unity, and bring to end
My final ending in the bending low
Of my high exaltation. In the time
When she unveiled herself, she did unveil
All being to my gaze, and I did see,
Self-seeing, her in all things visible.
My attribute, since we are not called two,
Is likewise hers, my aspect, seeing we
Are one, her aspect. When her name is called
I answer, and if I am summoned she
Replies to him who calls me, crying Lo
Labbaika! If she speaketh, it is I
Who do converse, as likewise when I tell
A history ’tis she that doth narrate.
Removed between us twain has been the ta
That marks the second person, and in its
Removal stands my raising up above
The sect who separate the one from one.
But if (it being to deliberate
A matter so remote) thy mind refuse
To take as feasible and to affirm
The possibility to see two one,
I will unveil and demonstrate to thee
Hints to this view erst hidden, that shall prove
Plain as expressions unequivocal.
Now to this matter. Since it is no time
For ambiguity, I will expound
In words sufficient strange the truth thereof
With twofold explanations, drawn the one
From hearing, and the other one from sight.
I will confirm my speech with evidence
Citing the parable of one who speaks
The truth (and my sole stay is verity)—
A cataleptic woman, by whose mouth
Another (she by madness being touched
And of a devil seized) informeth thee:
In language that upon another’s tongue
Proceedeth, evidences of the proofs
Of what we say stand proven clear and true,
Since it is known for certain that the one
Who uttereth the strange things thou dost hear
Is other than herself, though in the sense
Of sense, true, she herself did utter them.
Hadst thou been one, thou wouldst have come to feel
By mystic intuition this I said
As true; but (didst thou know it) thou art prone
On secret polytheism, with a soul
Far-strayed from truth’s right-guidance, and in love
Whoso to union with the one he loves
Impediment discovers, falls to burn
A polytheist in the consuming flames
Of separation from his heart’s beloved.
'Twas only otherness did mar in thee
This high estate; if its pretension were
Truly effaced from thee, thou shalt stand firm.  
So was I for a while, before the veil
Of that confusion was removed, not yet
Released from dualism: now by loss
In contemplation reuniting me,
Now scattering me in discovery
Of being. Whilst my intellect, attached
To my self-preservation, separated me,
My deprivation (being rooted out
In my self-absence) joined me up anew.
I thought sobriety my lowest point,
And drunkenness my ladder up to her,
And my annulment the remotest reach
Of my approach to the lote-boundary;
But when I cleared the cloud from me, I saw
Myself recovered, and the eye in me
Refreshed by the essence; and no more
Stood I in need of drunkenness, since I
Was now recovered (being separate
A second time); henceforth my union is
One with my unity. (Then labour thou
Within thee, and thou shalt behold of thee
Beyond what I have pictured a great peace
Born of a calm secure.) So, after I
Had laboured, I beheld that I beheld
Contemplatively, and that guided me
To me, was I, nay, I myself was proved
Mine own ensample: when I stood, I stood
Before myself, nay, when I turned I turned
To me, as likewise to myself I prayed
And I was my own Kaaba. Be thou not
Entranced by thy sensation or beguiled
By thy self-admiration, dedicate
To the confusion sprung of heedlessness.
Forsake thou separation's error, since
Union produceth guidance, as that sect's
Who after oneness strained in rivalry.
Boldly proclaim, Beauty is absolute,
Nor deem it finite as awhile bemused
By tinsel ornament. Whatever youth
Is comely, or whatever maid is fair,
Their beauty of her loveliness is lent
For them to wear; of her was Lubna's Qais
Distraught, nay, every lover—as Majnūn
Laila's poor madman, or as Azza's fond
Kuthaiyir—each and every one of them
Yearned after her ambiguous quality
Clothed in a form of beauty, radiant
In beauteous form. Nor was there other cause
Save that she showed her in phenomena
They thought were other, yet she did reveal
Herself herself in them. She showed herself
By veiling, and herself concealed from view
Through manifest phenomena, by way
Of variable tints in every time
Of issuing upon the stage of life.
Thus at the first creation she appeared
To Adam in the outward guise of Eve
Before the rule of motherhood began,
And he desired her ardent, that he
Through her might be a father, and the rule
Of sonship (through the husband and the spouse)
Might be established: thus the origin
Of mutual love between the outward forms
While yet was there no opposite, with hate
To stand between them. Ceased she never since
To manifest (and hide) for various cause
According to the times, in every age:
In every form of ambiguity
She showed herself to lovers, wondrous fair
Her shapes of beauty. Now as Lubna she Appeared, now as Buthaina, and again She was called Azza, Azza well-beloved. Other than she these were not, nor became Other: in her transcendent loveliness

She hath no partner. So by virtue of Oneness (as she displayed herself to me In all her beauty, clad in others’ forms) I too appeared to her in every swain Swayed by sweet love for beauty of a youth

Or maiden fair, bewitching; nor were they Else than myself (though they preceded me In passion), since through all the ancient nights I went before them. In my love of her The folk are no way other than myself;

But I appeared through them in every shape Ambiguously—this time I was Qais, Anon Kuthaiyir, and again Jamil Buthaina’s lover; I to outward eye Revealed myself in them, yet inwardly I veiled myself in them. Then if thou wilt Marvel at this unveiling by a mask! No idle fancy this: those the beloved And these the lovers—men and maidens all Were our appearances, wherein we showed Ourselves in all our love and beauty bright. Each youth who ever loved, that youth was I, And she was his beloved, whoe’er he be, All being names of vestures, nothing more— All names, whereby myself in truth was named, And I myself unto myself appeared Through a self-hidden spirit. Evermore I ceased not to be she, and she was I Without distinction; nay, my essence loved My essence. There was naught in all the world Beside me, save myself; besidedness
Never occurred to my sagacious mind.
Now by this hand I swear: it was not that
My soul had fear of other than myself
Or hoped for any other’s charity,

Nor that it did anticipate the shame
Of some obscuring of my high renown
Or sought the glory of men’s faces turned
In gratitude to me, but solely this
I purposed—by my valour to repel

The adversary come to make assault
On the high stations of my succouring friends;
And for this cause alone I turned again
To the accustomed acts of piety
And took for my accoutrement the states

Meet for discipleship. I had recourse
To my old godliness again (and I
Had flung aside all modesty long since);
Abandoning the gay abandon of
My wild dilation, I betook myself

To the contraction of a chaste reserve.
I fasted all my day as one who hopes
For a reward in heaven; all my night
I watched in prayer, as fearing chastisement;
I occupied my hours with litanies

(Waiting on inspiration), silently
(As meet and proper), in devout retreat
(So reverence required). I went apart
From my familiar haunts, as one who breaks
Migrating links of old companionship,

And chose my own society, alone.
I meditated scrupulously on
What lawful was to strictest abstinence,
Guarding my strength, no more, in setting right
My provender; I spent abundantly

The riches of contentment, satisfied
With a mere minimal sufficiency
Of worldly pleasure. Thus I trained my soul
With discipline, proceeding to unveil
What sensual habitues had overlaid:

Thus I fulfilled my high resolve, to live
Detached in utter abstinence, preferred
In my devotion to attain the rank
Of answered prayer. Yet when did I recant
My statement ‘I am she’? Or when should I

Profess—far be it from the like of me!—
She came to dwell in me? I do not seek
To pass thee over to some occult thing,
To some absurdity that would imply
Negation of all perspicacity:

How should such tales of error me affright,
Seeing my certitude remaineth based
Squarely upon the Holy Name of Truth?
Behold, the faithful archangel, when first
Our Prophet’s inspiration came on him,

Came to our Prophet in the fleshly form
Of Dihya: tell me then, was Gabriel
This Dihya, when he manifested thus
To our true Guide to guidance? That he knew
Beyond contention the identity

Of him he saw, proveth superior
His consciousness to theirs who stood him by.
He saw an angel that revealed to him;
The others saw a man, full reverend
As one who kept the Prophet’s company.

In the more perfect of these visions twain
I have an indication, which acquits
Of all pretences incarnationist
My simple creed. ’Tis not to be denied
The Scripture speaks of covering, and I

Go not beyond the twain authority
Of Holy Book and Apostolic Word.
This much of knowledge I have given thee:
If thou desirkest its unveiling, come
Seek thou my path, and make beginning now
Of following my Law; for Sadda’s fount
Springs from a water whose abounding well
Is found in me; tell not to me the tale
Of some mirage a-shimmer in some waste!
Behold the ocean, wherein I have plunged
While those aforetime halted on its shore
Guarding the locus of my sanctity:
*Draw ye not nigh the orphan’s property*—
That is a reference to a hand held back
When it was stretched to take it; and none else
Beside me ere attained to aught of it
Except a youth, who never ceased to tread
Upon my steps in hardship or in ease.
Then stray not from the traces of my path,
And fear the cloud that shadows o’er the heart
Who chooses other than myself; strive on
Upon my very road; her friendship’s vale,
O friend of heart serene, runs in the march
Of my command, and enters ’neath my sway.
For lo, the kingdom of love’s high degrees
Is my possession; the realities
My army are, and lovers every one
My subjects. Youth impassioned! I have gone
Apart from love, as one who deemeth love
To be a veil (for passion is beneath
My grade), and I have overpassed the bounds
Of amorousness; love is now become
Even as hate; henceforth my journey takes
For starting-point the terminus of my
Ascension unto oneness. Then be glad
In passion: thou hast seized supremacy
Over the best of creatures, who serve God
In every nation. Gain these heights; be proud
Surpassing the ascetic, whose ascent
Was won by outward works, and by a soul
Self-purified. O’ertake the heart oppressed
By its great load of ancient precedents
And intellectual wisdom, which cast off
'Twould make but little weight. Take unto thee
The heritage love’s kinship hath secured
Of the sublimest gnostic, whose chief care
Was to prefer his aspiration leave
Its mark upon mankind. Be haughty; sweep
The clouds beneath thee with thy lover’s skirts
Trailed o’er the topmost of heaven’s Milky Way
In pride of union; wheel thou round about
The grades of oneness, neither turn aside
Unto a squadron that have spent their lives
To other end. The solitary sword
Of oneness is himself a mighty host,
The rest a rabble vanquished by a proof
Most eloquent; seek its significance
To win thee nigh, then live therein, or die
Worn out upon the quest, still following
A folk who strove before thee to that goal.
For thou art worthier of this glory high
Than he who labours zealously in hope
And fear; no wonder, if thou shake thy sides
Swaggering past him in supreme delight
And sweetest joy, seeing the qualities
Thereto attributed, and the names thereof—
How many men that were obscure before
Those have elected, and these lifted up!
Yet thou, there where thou art, art still afar
From me: the Pleiades do scarce consort
With lowly Earth. Thou hast been step by step
Led to thy Sinai, and hast attained
Beyond thy sphere, whither thy soul ne’er dreamed
To adventure: here thy limit is: here stay,
Or if thou do advance beyond this term
Soever little, thou shalt be consumed
With flaming brands. Exalted is my rank
Beyond e'en envy's emulating grasp:
High o'er thy range soars my beatitude.
All men are Adam's sons, but I alone

Among my brethren have attained supreme
Sobriety of union; for mine ear
Is Moses' ear, my heart intelligenced
By the most glorious vision of an eye
Ahmadian. Of every spirit mine

The Spirit is; whate'er of beauty thou
Beholdest in the universe doth flow
Out of the bounty of my natural clay.
Leave then to me the knowledge that was mine
Especially ere I was manifest

(And my companion-prophets knew me not
Yet in the seed); assign me not the name
Desirer in that company, for he
Yclept Desired-of-her (as being rapt)
Hath need of my protection. Banish all

Such names of honour from me; mouth them not
Babblingly; they are signs all fashioned forth
By one I formed. Withdraw my soubriquet
Of Gnostic; for the Holy Book declares
If thou approvest bandying of names

Thou shalt be hated. My least follower
Received in his heart's eye in nuptial joy
The virgin-brides of gnosis; he hath plucked
The fruit of mystic knowledge from a branch
Of understanding that by following me

Flourished (and springeth of my nature's root),
So, being asked of any concept, he
Answereth wondrous sayings which transcend
All comprehension, yea, too subtle are
To be imagined. Neither call thou me

The One Brought Nigh (out of that company),
Which epithet I hold (in virtue of
Union achieved) most sinful severance:
My joining is my separating, my
Approximation is my distancing,
My love is my aversion, and my end
Is my beginning. For her sake indeed
(By whom I have equivocated on
Myself, yet I intended none but me)
I have stripped off my name, my epithet,
My style of honour, and advanced beyond
Where those aforetime halted, and such minds
As by material gains were led astray
Perished. There is no attribute in me
(For mere description is all attribute
As name is but a sign); if therefore thou
Desirest to allude to me, make use
Of styles of honour, or of epithets.
And then I mounted up from 'I am she'
To where is no unto: all being I
Perfumed with my returning. I came back
From 'I am I' for inward wisdom's sake
As for those outward ordinances I
Established for my calling. The far goal
Of those enraptured neophytes of her
Passion, and the extremest reach of these
Passion desired, is where I stood before
Before I turned: the apogee of them
Who (as they thought) outstripped me is in truth
The lowest depth of earth that bears the trace
Of my tread's fall: the topmost pinnacle
Beyond allusion, whence in higher climb
None may ascend, is where my foot first fell.
None knoweth, save he knoweth of my grace,
Nor any speaketh in existence all
Except upon my praise. No wonder then
If I am master over all who went
Before me, having grasped the firmest stay
To Taha. My saluting her is thus
But metaphorical; my greeting is
From me unto me, in reality.
Now the most excellent I found in all
My loving her, when passion first began
(And that my passion every marvel showed)
Was my appearing (and I first concealed
My state) reciting in exultant joy
For her, my state no longer being hid:
'She stood revealed before me, and I saw
True resolution in the breaking of
My erstwhile penitence; the agonies
I suffered for her sake were fair excuse
As judged my reason; my security
Against my body's wasting of her love
Was the desires of hope, the which at first
She freely gave, but after miserly.
The body's restoration (sickness-won
In loving her) is health indeed thereto:
The soul's destruction is true chivalry.
My death in passion's ecstasy for her
Is sweetest life, and if I do not die
In love, I live for ever in death's throes.
Then O my heart, in amorous transport melt,
And O my ardent pains, dissolve me so;
O fire within my vitals, straighten by
Thy flames the curvatures of my bent ribs;
O my fair fortitude, unfaltering
Accord thee with her pleasure whom I love,
Nor succour Fate to triumph over me.
O my long-suffering, as obedience
Unto her love requireth, still endure
(May faintness overpass thee!) every woe;
O wasted body, seek oblivion
Of any cure; O liver, who will be
My warrant thou shalt not be wholly crushed?
My sickness, let no single gasp survive

1110 In me, for I have scorned the indignity
Of living on, that so I may be spared
To live with her in glory. O my health,
Our old companionship hath come to end,
And thy association with one dead

1115 Among the living is as banishment.
O all that languor yet hath spared of me,
Depart: no refuge in my crumbling bones
Remains for thee. O any part of me
I haply might imagine to address

1120 With O the vocative in my heart’s heart,
I am become familiar now to be
Estranged from thee. Whate’er thy pleasure is
(And death itself be lighter to endure)
I am content therewith, since love aflame

1125 Hath made me so contented. For my soul
Was vexed not love destroyed it all in pain,
Since such impatience had been following
Ensample not mine own. In every tribe
Whatever living man because of her

1130 Is as one dead, believeth to be slain
Of passion is most gloriously to die.
In her are all desires united; none
Thou seest but is ardent for her, naught
But ardour knowing. If upon a day

1135 Of festival she casteth off her veil,
The eyes of every tribe crowd eagerly
To view her beauty; for their spirits yearn
To glimpse the meaning of her loveliness,
What time their pupils in a garden dwell

1140 Filled with her beauty. I count every day
My festival, whereon I contemplate
With jocund eye the loveliness of her
Sweet countenance; and every night, if she
Draw nigh, is that miraculous Night of Power,
And holy Friday every day we meet.
My running to her is a Pilgrimage,
And every standing suppliant at her door
Equals a standing on Mount Arafat.
Whatever of God's lands is her abode

I count it not (so fair 'tis to mine eye)
But Mecca. Whatso place embraceth her
Is Sacred Precinct; every house she dwells
Within I deem a House of Holy Flight,
Where she inhabits a Jerusalem

Whose joyous vision cools the fever of
My burning heart. Where'er she trails her robe
There is my Furthest Mosque, my fragrant scent
Whatever sod her feet have trodden on.
Haunts of my joys, watch-tower of my desires,

Boundaries of my longings, safe retreat
From all my fear—such are the loved abodes
Where Fate came not between us, neither Time's
Vicissitudes us parted treacherously,
Nor did the days endeavour to disperse

Our union, nor the nights doom cruelly
Our sundering. No sudden overthrow
Calamitous assailed us at the dawns,
No accidents of Fortune spake with us
Upon disaster. Not with blasphemy

Discoursed the slanderer anent repulse
And banishment, nor the reviler spread
His slimy whisperings of severance
And consolation. Waked not watch'er's eye,
Nor ceased mine own to watch me for her sake

And love's account. No time was singled out
For joy above another: all my times
Were seasons of rejoicing and delight.
My day was all a vespers, if its first
Soft hours exhaled a sweet response from her
Unto my greeting; and my night therein
Was dawn entirely, when the redolence
Of a sweet breeze was wafted unto me
From her within those hours. If e’er at night
She came to me, my month was all through her
Converted to a wondrous Night of Power
Exultant in her visitation: if
She ventured nigh my dwellings, all my year
Was temperate Spring in meads luxuriant.
If she be pleased with me, my life is all
A season of sweet fancy, and the age
Of amorous youth. Truly, if she unites
The sum of beauties in a single form
All subtle meanings I behold therein:
Truly, my heart has gathered all desire
For them, a passionate glow informing thee
Of every youthful ardour. Why should I
Not vaunt myself (on her account) above
All who pretend to passion? Why should I
Not overleap all limits in my boast
Of such high honour and felicity?
For lo, I have obtained from her above
What ever I expected, or could hope
Such near propinquity, and sundering’s self
Humiliated by her grace o’erwhelming me
With benefits surpassing all desire.
At morning as at evening I was seized
With love for her, and in what beauty she
Went forth at dawn, so came she back at night:
Had she bestowed on all humanity
Save Joseph of her beauty but a part
In no prerogative excelled he them.
I brought and laid upon her beauty’s hand
The whole of me, and her benevolence
Accepting the exchange doubled to me
My every union; every particle
Of me beheld her beauty, and therewith
In every glance rotated every eye;
My every subtlety applauded her
On every tongue prolonged in every word;
I drew her perfume in with every nerve
Comprising every nostril breathing in
All wafts of air for ever; every part
Of me (wherein was every ear contained
Of every listener attentive) heard
Her words; my every portion kissed her veil
With every mouth whose touch held every kiss.
Had she dissolved my body, she would see
In every separate atom every heart
Inhabited by every human love.'
And now the thing most strangely excellent
I found in her, and the munificence
Of revelation lavished upon me
(And that unveiling drove away all doubt)
Is that with union's vision I behold
My every adversary is in truth
My true confederate, and his repulse
Even as affection: he that did revile
Loved (and reproached) me (all of jealousy),
And he who slandered was distraught for her
And therefore wronged me, spyng upon me.
'Tis seemly then I thank the slanderer,
While the reproacher well her goodness knows,
And all are marks of my beneficence.
Others than I praise others; others turn
(Not I) from self to others gratefully;
I thank myself; the goodness springs from me
Unto myself; my self alone concerns
Itself with this my being one with her.
And there be matters veiled, the veil whereof
Through a recovering sobriety
Was wholly raised for me, yet they remained
Concealed from all beside me: none may noise
These things abroad save forfeiting his blood,
What though allusion a significance
Possesses that expression ne’er defined.
The mystic comprehends me when I speak
Obliquely (not requiring what I say
Should be explicit) lest one trip me up.
Now the beginning of my exposé
Is those same twain who sought to be the means
Of parting me (though union doth defy
My separation): they are one with us
In union’s inner truth, albeit we
In outward segregation count as four.
For truly she and I are essence one;
The twain who slandered her, and turned away
From her, are attributes self-manifest.
The one the theatre of spirit is
Guiding contemplatively to the rim
Of its uprising, manifest in mould
Spiritual; the other succoureth
The soul, the which he urgeth with a song
To her companions existentially
In form material; and he who knows
Like me the figures as they truly are,
No infidelityconfuses him
Upon his guidance, when he would remove
Doubt’s grave perplexities. My essence then
Embraces with delights particular
And general the sum of all my worlds
In broad replenishment of unity.
Bounteously it poured its overflow
While yet was no capacity to gain,
And ere the world was ready to receive
It was prepared to give. So in the Soul
The forms of existentiality
Rejoiced, while in the Spirit were refreshed
The spirits of the world contemplative.
My state of contemplation (as between
The slanderer who to his rising runs
And the reproacher succouring his friends
With goodly counsel) witnesseth my state
In mystic ecstasy, the twofold draw
Of the decree of my eternal home

And of that place wherein my judgement is
Enacted; and the correspondence of
The twofold images the senses five
Impart confirmeth by proof positive
The negative of ambiguity.

Before my purpose, listen while I tell
The mystery my spirit secretly
Received from them, and did communicate.
Whenever the idea of beauty in
Whatever form appeareth, or the voice
Of one bowed down by grief is lifted up
In loud lament to text of Holy Writ,
My thought beholdeth her with fancy’s eye
And with the ear of my intelligence
My memory heareth her; my faculty

Imaginative as in pictured thought
Presents her to my spirit, sensibly
My understanding deems her at my side.
Then I do marvel at my drunkenness
Withouten wine, and very inwardly

I maken joy, rejoicing of my self;
Danceth my heart; the tremble of my limbs
Clappeth as one who chaunteth, and my soul
Melody maketh. Still my spirit was fed
With manifold desires, my faculties

For all their weakness striving to their goal
Till they were fortified. Herein I found
What things soe’er had being did conspire
To aid me (though the aid was of myself),
So that my every organ might unite
Me with her, and the root of every hair
Comprise my union; that the robe of our
Estrangement might be stripped (yet found I it
Naught other than familiarity).
Now note (and turn away from formal lore)
How sense transmits to soul what she reveals
By inspiration unpremeditate:
Whene'er a breeze borne through the night from her
Wafteth at dawn sweet-scented, to my soul
It bringeth her remembrance, and mine ear
Respondeth joyfully when doves do sing
And warble through the forenoon on green boughs
The selfsame message; if at eventide
The lightning-flashes recollect her tale
And do convey it to my heedful sight
Mine eye is gladdened; that sweet memory
The wine-cups lavish on my lips and throat
Touching and tasting when the bowl comes round
To me at night; and so my heart conveys
Her recollection (as an inward thing)
Unto my ribs through this external means
Delivered by my members' messengers.
And he who in the assembly chants her name
Brings me before her, and the while I hear
With all my being I do gaze on her:
My soul soars to the heaven whence my soul
Was breathed in me, what time my theatre
Soul-fashioned stoops unto its earthly kind.
So part of me is drawn to her, and part
Draws to itself, and in each draw a tug
Of mortal agony: the cause whereof
Is but my spirit calling back to mind
Its essence true as from her spirit breathed
When she inspired it. So my spirit yearned
To hear the allocution all alone
While in the barrier of this dust confined
And each was tugging, tugging at my reins.
An infant will inform thee of my state,
Though he grow up a stupid, by some sort
Or revelation inspirational

And native insight; in his swaddling-clothes
Tight-wrapt he whimpers, longing fretfully
To be delivered from excessive pain;
Soothed by soft lullabies, he lays aside
All weariness that had afflicted him

And listens to his soother silently
Harking; the sweet speech sways him to forget
His bitter grief, recalling to his mind
That secret utterance ages long ago.
So by his state he illustrates the state

Of mystic ecstasy, proof positive
Confirming to the dance the negative
Of imperfection; when the lullaby
Stirs him to yearning, till he fain would fly
Unto his primal home, rocked to and fro

He is appeased, the while his nurse's hands
Swing him a-cradle. I myself have felt
In ecstasy that agonizing tug
(As when the chanter's modulated tones
Bring her to mind, or the shrill singer's notes)

He knows, who in life's final agony
Is cruelly wracked, the messengers of death
Dragging unto themselves his soul a-gasp.
So he who being driven to depart
Suffereth anguish, comparable pain

Knoweth to his distressful ecstasy
Who yearneth for his comrades; as the soul
Of that one leaneth after that whereby
It manifested, so my spirit soared
To its high origins. My spirit passed

The gate that barred my trespassing beyond

47
Union, and soared whither no union's veil
Remaineth. Whoso chooseth in my train
That gate to be his quest, let him like me
Ride resolute in purpose masterful.

1400 How many an unfathomable deep
I plunged into (ere I did penetrate
That gate), whereof the meanly suppliant
For wealth was never sprinkled by so much
As one short gulp! Now I will show thee it

1405 Within the mirror of my words, if thou
Art resolute: give heed to what I say:
Unstop the hearing of the inward eye.
And I spat out all boastful utterance
(For jealous scruple), all self-interest

1410 In whatsoever action, all regard
In any deed for goodly recompense,
All preservation of my ghostly states
From stain of self-adornment, all my fine
Sententious eloquence—I banished all

1415 With true resolve disinterestedly,
As likewise my rejecting all regard
For my rejecting in whatever part.
Therefore my heart a temple is, wherein
I dwell; before it, as from out of it,

1420 The manifesting of my attributes
(As of my occultation), and of these
My right hand is a pillar, kissed within
Myself and, for wise purpose, in my mouth
The kiss proceeding from my qibla falls.

1425 About myself in spirit and in truth
My circumambulation is; I run
From my Safá unto my Marwa, all
My face's sake; within a sanctuary
(That is my inward) all my outward part

1430 Is safe, what though my neighbours round about
Are in dire danger to be snatched away.
By solitary fasting from all else
But me my soul was purified, and gave
As alms my grace's superfluity.

The doubling of my being in my state
Contemplative became, when I awoke
Out of my slumber, in my unity
Single; as in the duties general
Of Holy Law my travel is, so too

Is the night-journey of my inmost soul
Unto myself from truth's particular.
For all my godhead I do not neglect
The ordinances of my theatre,
Neither forget I in my manhood him

Who made my wisdom manifest. From me
The bonds were firmly knotted on the soul,
By me the boundaries of sense set up.
There came to me a messenger from me
Sore troubled by my wilfulness, concerned

Compassionately for my well-being;
Therefore I executed the command
Given me by my soul upon my soul
Which, taking over charge of its affairs,
Turned not its back. Since that primeval time

Of the High Covenant, before the age
Of my created elements, before
The warning was delivered men should be
Ready for resurrection, to myself
I was a messenger myself dispatched

Unto myself, my essence being led
By my own signs to me. When I transferred
The soul from the possession of its earth
(By right of purchase from her) to the realm
Of Paradise—and well the soul had fought

And died a martyr's death for the beloved
And, having paid in full, had won the joy
Of covenanted contract—then my soul
Soared with me (since my union was complete)
Beyond its heavenly immortality

(Neither was I content to lean towards
The earth of my vicegerent); how indeed
Should I consent to enter underneath
My own possession, like my kingdom's friends,
My followers, my party, my true train?

For neither is there heaven, but therein
An angel from the light within my heart
Bestoweth guidance by my sovereign will,
Nor any territory, but thereon
Out of my outward's superfluity

Falleth a drop, from whence the clouds outpour.
Beside my dawn the far-diffusing light
Is but a flash; great Ocean like a drop
Beside my fountain-head. All me all me
Each seeks the other and is turned toward;

Part me part me is drawing as with reins.
He who is over under, over all
Under him being, to his guiding face
Is all direction turned submissively;
Earth's under is the ether's over since

That I did cleave is closed; and cleavage of
The closed is but the outward of my way.
Confusion is not, since that union is
Certainty's essence; nor direction is,
For space is separation's difference;

Nor number is, since numeration cuts
Like a sword's edge; nor time, for limiting
Is polytheism of determinant;
Nor any rival, this world or the next,
Dooming destruction unto that I built

And whose commandment ruleth my command
In exercise of judgement; opposite
None in both spheres of life, for thou shalt see
Among created beings not a sign
Of incongruity in equal shape

And form of being. From myself appeared
As to myself what I unto myself
Rendered ambiguous, and whatsoe’er
Appeared through me from me to me was made
To come reverting; in myself I saw

Those bowed in worship to my theatre,
And so I realized myself to be
The very Adam unto whom I bowed;
Among High Heaven’s angels I discerned
The spiritual rulers of the earth

Equal alike in rank. My comrades craved
From my horizon nigh their guidance true.
Yet from my second separation was
The union of my unity shown forth;
And in the swoon whereby my sense was crushed

My soul fell down before me, to revive
Ere Moses’ penitence. There is no there
After reality is realized,
Since I recovered out of drunkenness
And since the cloud that veiled reality

By new sobriety was cleared away:
The end of self-effacement after which
Was my conclusion being as the first
Of a sobriety, both circumscribed
By a like finitude. In one same scale

I measured one obliterated (rapt),
Erased, annihilated, against one
Cut off and severed in sobriety
(Of sense): the dot upon the ghain of ghain
(The cloud) was wiped from my sobriety,

The vigilance of ‘ain (the eye) of ‘ain
(The essence) cancelled out my blotting-out.
Whoever in sobriety doth miss,
In blotting-out discover, is not apt
(Due to his alternation) to be fixed
In true propinquity. Equal alike

The drunk and sober are, as qualified
Respectively by mark of presence or
By brand of hemming; not my folk are they
On whom successive fall the attributes

Of ambiguity, the vestiges
Of any remnant; who inherits not
From me perfection, he imperfect is,
A turner-back, and bound for chastisement.
Naught is in me conducive to disguise

Of any remnant, shadow none is mine
To doom me to returning: and yet what
May heart deliver in the form of thought
Or tongue give mouth to in the mould of speech?
Extremes all reconciled were met in me,

The carpet of all other evenly
Rolled up by rule of all-equality;
Annihilated the duality
Of being existential, so became
My existentiality (in the

Continuance of my unicity)
Being contemplative. What is above
(The Primal Emanation) reason's range
Is like to what remaineth underneath
(The final fistful) dogma's Sinai:

It was for this the Best of all mankind
Forbade us to prefer him (worthy though He was) to Jonah. I have signified
By all the means expression yields; and what Was covered up, I have made wholly clear

By the last subtlety. The Am I not
Of yesterday not other is to him
Who cometh on tomorrow, since my dark
Became my dawning and my day my night:
The mystery of Yea—to God belongs

The glass of its unveiling, as to affirm
Union's reality is to deny
All withness. Now no darkness covers me,
No wrong have I to fear: the bounty of
My light hath quenched the fire of my revenge.

And time is not, except where time is not
(As time is reckoning by crescent moons),
Ready to reckon up the being of
My being; one imprisoned in the bounds
Of Time beholdeth not what lies beyond
His Hellish dungeon in the Paradise
Of immortality. The heavens turn
On me: stand thou, and marvel at their Pole
Encompassing them, not a central point
(No more) as poles materially are!
No Pole was there before me unto whom
I should succeed (transcending three degrees),
What though the Poleship of the Pegs derives
From Rank of Substitution. Trespass not
Beyond my straight-drawn line, for mysteries
Lurk in the angles: seize this fairest chance.
From me in me love's loyalty appeared
Within the seed; for me of me the milk
Of union's breasts was poured abundantly.
And the most wonderful of all I saw
In the beloved's presence (and it sore
Amazed me) (and my heart's amazement sprang
From the inbreathing of the Holy Ghost)
(And she had shown her beauty to my gaze
So that I was confounded of my mind
Nor did maintain through my bewilderment
My outward ornaments) most wonderful
I say of all I saw was this: that I
Through her became oblivious of myself,
To such a point that I presumed myself
Other than me, nor sought the path direct
Leading to my presumption of myself.
And my (in her) oblivion baffled me,
And I recovered not my consciousness
Nor followed my desire, because of my
Presumption; I became distraught for her,
Engrossed with her; and whomsoe’er she makes
Distraught in occupation with herself
She renders too unmindful of himself.
So occupied was I, that I forgot
My first preoccupation to forget
Myself: if I had perished for her sake
I would not have so much as been aware
Of my transition. Of the marvels of
That ecstasy distracting in desire
Bewildering my reason this is one:
Enslaving robbery oblivion-like.
I asked her of myself, whenever I
Encountered her, and inasmuch as she
Bestowed on me my guidance, she misled
My questing steps; I sought her from myself,
Though she was all the while beside me; I
Marvelled how she was hid from me by me.
And I ceased not from going to and fro
With her within me; for my senses were
Intoxicated, and the wine they drank
Her beauties; still I travelled on and on
Through certainty’s degrees—its knowledge first,
Second its essence, third the truth thereof—
Reality my trail and travail’s end.
I quested me from me, that I might guide
Myself upon my tongue to that which sought
Guidance of me, in my unceasing quest;
I begged myself to shift the barrier
By lifting up the veil, for I myself
Found in myself my only means to come
Unto myself; I looked into the glass
Of my own beauty, that I might behold
The loveliness of my own being in
My contemplation of my countenance.
And if I mouthed my name, I leaned towards
Myself attentive, silent, all desire
For who might make me hear my name pronounced
By my own utterance; I clapt my hands
Upon my bowels, that perchance I might
Embrace her in my laying on of hands
Self-clasping; I ran eagerly towards
My very breaths, that haply I might find
Myself (and I desirous they should pass
Me by) within them, since they passed my way.
Until at last there flashed upon my sight
From me a lightning-gleam; my dawn shone forth
In splendour; all my darkness fled away.
Here I attained a height the intellect
Recoils before, and here my junction was,
And my uniting, to myself from me.
I beamed with joy (for I had reached myself)
Full of a certainty protecting me
From the necessity to bind my pack
And saddle to a journey. I myself
Guided me to myself (as of myself
Had been my quest) and unto me my soul
Showed me the way by means of my own self.
The curtains of the shroud of sense when I
Uncovered (and it was the mysteries
Of my fore-ordination had rung them down)
I shifted the soul's barrier from her
By lifting up the veil, and she it was
Answered my quest. The cleansing of the glass
Of my own essence (polishing away
Of my own attributes the rust) was I
Myself, the rays encompassing that glass
Likewise from me proceeding. I myself
Made me behold myself, since there was naught
Beside me in my being, to decree
Intrusion of my being's unity.
And when I named my name, my names made
Me hear it; and my soul (with banished sense)
Listened attentive, and pronounced my name.
And I embraced myself, yet not by way
Of limbs attached to ribs; nay, I embraced
My own identity. I made myself
Perceive my spirit, and the fragrance of
My exhalation did perfume the breaths
Of the bruised ambergris. The whole of me
Transcended all association in
The quality of sense, yet in myself
Stood my transcendence, since I unified
My essence: to applaud my attributes
Because of me assists my praiser to
Extol me, for my attributes to praise
My self is to condemn me. Therefore who
In my companion sees my quality,
And thereby sees me, never shall alight
At my abode; for I do veil myself.
Likewise through me to recollect my names
Is waking vision; to remember me
Through them, the dream of night light-slumbering.
So he who through my actions knoweth me
Knoweth me not, but he who knoweth them
Through me possesseth knowledge of the truth.
Accept thou then the knowledge of the signs
Of these the attributes most principal
(Attached to outward waymarks) from a soul
Well versed in it; take the intelligence
Of those the names of the essence (that reside
In the inward worlds) a spirit offereth
That giveth indication of the same
Thereby. As metaphorically said
The manifesting of my attributes
Out of my members' names (whereas my soul
By true arbitrament is named thereby)
Is marks of knowledges traced on the veils
Of forms, illuminating what resides
Beyond the sense-perception in the soul.

Again, the manifesting of the names
(Said actually) of my essence from
My heart's ribs' attributes, for mysteries
Whereby the spirit was rejoiced, is hints
Of treasures shadowing the inward truths

Of mystic reference, set all about
By secrets hidden in the heart's profound.
And their effects in all the world at large
Together with their knowledge (and the things
Existing by possession of the same

Not independent are of those effects)
Are item that there is a gathering
Of fair renown through powers of control,
Item the spectacle of reaping praise
For favours universal. Theatres

Are these for my displaying: I appeared
In them (though never from myself was I
Hidden) before the physical abode
Of my epiphany. For be it speech
(And all of me a tongue that tells of me),

Or sight (and all of me in me an eye
For observation meant), or ear (and all
Of me an ear attentive to the call
By vocative) (and all of me a hand
Strong to repel destruction)—all these four

Were inward meanings of such attributes
Establishing what lies beyond the garb,
Names of an essence that divulged abroad
What sense reported. The control of these
By one who guarded first the Covenant

(That with a soul that watches over them
With loyal love) is proved in carollers
Of vaunting song, in necks outstretched to rouse
From slumber, in signs manifest of joy,
In rainclouds charged with hoped-for bounteousness.

Their dedication by the one who last
Tied firm the Compact, with a soul that scorned
The arrogance of scorn, is brought to light
By gems of information, radiances
Of junction, outward tidings, vanquishers

Of violence. Their outward making known
From one who sought for prudence illustrates
The nature of a spirit generous
With its own being: doubled litany,
Meanings of true nobility, abodes

Of deep enigmas, bases of a fact.
Their exaltation inwardly by one
Sincere of purpose proves the turning back
Of a soul well-content to contemplate:
Noblest of signs, marvels of purity,

Most coveted of goals, battalions
Of martial valour. To the garb of flesh
From them (by virtue of attachment in
The station of Islam arising from
Islam’s sage ordinances) there ensue

Arrows of ordinances, subtleties
Of wisdom, reinforcing verities,
Diffusion’s delicacies. To the sense
From them (by virtue of true-proving in
The station of true faith arising from

Faith’s active signs) are given cloistered cells
For meditations, flashing lights of thought,
Temples enshrining traces visible,
Subduers of unthinking. To the soul
From them (by virtue of assumption in

The station of good deeds arising from
Traditions of the Prophet) are vouchsafed
Nice informations, bounties generous,
All scrolls informative, successors to
Godly regard. To the all-unity
(From the beginning ‘As if thou’ unto
The end ‘If thou dost not’ arising from
The sign of visionhood) eventuate
Showers of grace reactionary, troops
Of high transcendence, unions’ incidence,
Lions of battle-order. Their resort
In the world visible (that makes demand
Upon the sense) is what the soul of me
Perceives: as chapters of expressive speech,
Receipt of greeting, taking in of hints,
Roots of donation. In the world unseen
Their rising-place is the repeated gifts
Of bounty from myself unto myself
I have discovered: joyous tidings of
Confession, intuitions of regard,
Secrets of outward traces, treasuries
Of propaganda. In dominion’s world
Their locus is my being rapt by night
Particularly (what no other was
Of all my family): academies
Of Holy Scripture, emulation’s keeps,
Seed-beds of exegesis, cavaliers
Invincible. Their lighting area
Uprising out of revelation’s east
(A revelation dazzling to the sight)
Within the world of high omnipotence
Is thrones of unitarian belief,
Attainments of approximation, paths
Of glory-crying, angels strong to aid.
Their fountain-head of overflowing grace
In every world, to fill a spirit’s need
Rich in recovery, is benefits
Of inspiration, seekings after ease,
Profits of benefaction, tables spread
With generous abundance of good things.

The whole of me performing what the Path
Provideth, in the manner that the Truth
Of me required, when I had joined the rift
So that the cracks that split the unity
(Through difference of attribute) (no more
Dispersed) were closed, and naught remained (to cause
Estrangement) as between myself and my
Firm trust in love’s familiarity,
I realized that we in truth were one
And the sobriety of unison

Confirmed the blotting-out of scatteredness.
My all: a tongue, an eye, an ear, a hand:
To speak, to see, to hear, to seize withal.
Mine eyes conversed, the while my tongue beheld,
My hearing uttered, and my hand gave ear;
My hearing was an eye considering
Whate’er appeared, mine eyes an ear to heed
Silently if the folk broke forth in song;
Upon my benefits my tongue became
A hand, as too my hand became a tongue
For converse and for preaching; so my hand
Became an eye, to see whate’er appeared,
Mine eye a hand outspread wherewith to strike;
Mine ear became a tongue in my address,
My tongue an ear for silent listening;
The smell too had its rules agreeable
To general analogy as in
The fusion of my attributes, or by
Reversal of the case. No limb in me
Was specialized as being singled out
To the exclusion of the rest for one
Description, as to wit a seeing eye:
My every atom, notwithstanding its
Own singularity, itself comprised
The sum of all the organs’ faculties,

Whispering and attending, consequent
On contemplation of one taking charge
(By virtue of a hand omnipotent)
Disposing of his whole totality
In one brief moment. So it is I read

The various knowledge of all learned men
Summed in one word, and with a single glance
Reveal to me all beings in the world:
I hear the voices of all men at prayer,
And every language, in a space of time

Less than an instant’s flash: I summon up
Before me, what could scarcely be conveyed
From its far distance, ere mine eye can wink:
So in one inhalation I breathe in
The perfumes of all gardens, and the scent

Of every herb clutching the breezes’ skirts:
And I review all regions of the earth
Before me in one thought, and with one bound
Traverse the seven layers of the skies.
Bodies of those in whom no more remains

The barest remnant, unified with me,
Become as light as spirits, being all
Encompassed by that union; whosoe’er
Is sovereign, or charitable, or
Mighty in onslaught, only through my aid

And subtle contact to that power attains;
Nor walked he on the waters, neither flew
In air, nor plunged his body in the flames,
Save by my will possessing him; and he
Whom I have aided of my very self,

Through such a subtle contact, in a trice
Disposes of his own totality.
Thus, he who with his whole totality
Followed my union, in an hour or less
Recited the Koran a thousand times
From end to end: had but a breath of grace
From me possessed one dead, straightway his soul
Would have been given back, restored to him.
Such is the soul: if it throw off desire
Its faculties are multiplied, and give
To every atom its activity.
Let union then suffice thee—not by way
Of separation bi-dimensional,
Videlicet space measured, finite time.
Thus Noah rode the tempest, and was saved
With such his kinsmen as with him escaped
In the Ark; for him the flooding waters sank
Responsively, and he their billows clave
To Mount al-Judi, where the vessel berthed.
Thus Solomon with his two armies swept
Above the face of earth, the wind’s broad back
Beneath his carpet; and before the eye
Might quiver, Bilkis’ throne from Sheba far
Was wafted to his presence toillessly.
Thus Abraham subdued his foeman’s fire
That by his radiance was transformed for him
Into a flowering field of Paradise;
And when he called the birds (and they had been
Slaughtered) from every mountain-peak, they came
To him obediently. Thus Moses’ rod
Cast from his hand swallowed those terrors of
Enchantment that pressed hard upon his soul;
And at a blow therewith out of the rock
He made those fountains gush that watered all
Continuously flowing, to the sea
Cleaving their course. Thus, when the messenger
Cast Joseph’s shirt upon old Jacob’s face
Declaring he should come to him again,
He saw him with those eyes that sorely wept
(Ere his approach) in longing for his son
Till they were blinded. Thus among the folk
Of Israel a table was sent down
From heaven (Jesus praying), and was spread;
He made the blind to see, and healing hands
Laid upon leprosy’s contagion, and

Turned with a breath the clay into a bird.
(The secret of that inward potency
To which reacted outward things is this
My fashioned words (permitted as by God)
Communicated to thy heedful ear.)

And in the time when prophecy had failed
The secrets of all these another brought
To us revealing, and to be a seal
On them; nor any one of them, but called
His people by our Prophet’s grace, and as

Our Prophet’s follower, unto the Truth.
Our doctor is a prophet such as they,
And he among us who his fellows calls
Unto the Truth in true apostleship
Labours: in this our time Ahmadian

Our gnostic is as one of them, endued
With firmness, holding to God’s ordinance.
And what in them was called a miracle
After our Prophet’s age became a grace
Bestowed on his vicegerents and his saints.

His family sufficed the race of man,
With his companions, and their followers
The leaders of the faith in after time,
So that they needed not new Messengers.
Their graces were a part of his bequest

To them, exclusively, to be their share
In every excellence. Of such as rose
(After the Prophet’s death) to the defence
Of true religion: Abu Bakr made war
Against that false Hanifa’s family;

And Sáriya by Omar was besought
(Although the Dwelling was by no means nigh)
To refuge in the mountain; and Othmán
Was not distracted from the Book he read
What though the people passed to him the cup
Of death to drain; and Ali set out clear
What texts were difficult to comprehend
By exegesis, that in virtue of
A knowledge won him as executor;
And all the rest like stars, whoever chose
To follow any of their guiding lights
Was led to safety by his counsel wise.
Saints who believed on him, although their eyes
Never beheld him, are elect in true
Affinity, as kin of brotherhood;
Their spiritual nearness unto him
Is as his yearning after them in form—
Then marvel at a presence that prevails
In absence! Those the people who received
The Spirit, called the peoples in my name
To tread my road, and thereby overcame
All who derided and denied my proof:
They all, dependent on my prior truth,
Revolve upon my circle, or descend
Along the pathway of my watering-place.
And though in outward form I be a son
Of Adam, yet within him is a truth
Bearing me witness to my fatherhood.
My spirit, being voided of the bar
To showing forth in all maturity,
Was nurtured in illumination's breast:
My cradle-meditation was upon
*The Prophets*; while my elements were formed
My tablet was Preserved, my favourite text
*The Victory*; ere I was weaned (and yet
A little while and the religious dues
Should bind my outward form) I set the seal
On the expositors of every law
Religious by my code—for they, and those
Who held their doctrines, were upon my track
Nor any way transgressed the path my steps
Now trod: the blessedness of those who called
The former generations unto me
Lieth in my right hand, as in my left
The ease of them who followed latterly.

Think not the matter stands without me: none
Ever attained to leadership of men
Except he joined my service. But for me
No being existential would have been
Brought into being, none contemplative

Existed, never loyal covenants
Would have been known. None lives, except his life
Derives from mine; and every willing soul
Obey my will. None speaks, except his tale
Is fashioned of my words; none sees, except

With my eyes’ sight; none listens silently
Except he heareth with my ears; none grasps
Save with my strength and might. In all the world
Created nothing speaks or sees or hears
Save me alone. In this compounded realm

I manifested a reality
In every form, that thereby was adorned
In beauty; and where my phenomena
Revealed not such reality, therein
I yet was imaged incorporeally;

And what clairvoyantly the spirit sees
Unveiled, there I was subtly hidden from
The overburdened thought. In merciful
Expansion I am all desire, whereby
The hopes of all who dwell upon my earth

Are wide-expanded; but in terrible
Contraction I am reverential awe
Entire, and wheresoe’er I turn mine eye
All things revere me; yet where these twain states
Unite, I am all nearness. Wherefore come,
Draw nigh to these my bounteous qualities!
And in that place where in is at an end
I cease not to discover of myself
Through the perfection of my natural
Predisposition all the majesty
Of my self-contemplation; in that place
Where in is not I ever contemplate
The beauty of my existential self
Yet not with vision ocular. If thou
Be mine, seek union with me, and blot out
The separation of my fragmenting,
Nor unto nature's darkness swerve aside.
Receive the signs my wisdom hath inspired
To shift from thee the vain imaginings
Of sensual conjecture. Be thou free
Of him who to metapsychosis holds
(Albeit proving in his proper self
Souls may migrate to occupy the flesh
Of animals), and hold thyself aloof
From his false theories; leave him to his claim
That human spirits do inhabit plants—
If it were true souls move to minerals,
Such would be his appropriate habitat
In every cycle everlastingly!
Now this my coinage of parables
Time and again, to illustrate my state
For thee, a favour is I thee accord.
Consider as-Sarúji's picaresque
Makámas; ponder well how he disguised
Himself, and thou wilt surely find it good
To take my counsel; thou wilt recognize
Whatever outward shape or form the soul
Assumes, the soul is inwardly disguised
In sense. If as-Sarúji's author wrote
Fictitiously, yet truth speaks parables
Thereby, what though the soul be frivolous. Wherefore be understanding; justice do Unto thy soul, whilst with thy sense regard Thy acts phenomenal. If thou wouldst have Thy soul unveil itself, then contemplate

What thou beholdest indisputably Shown in the burnished mirrors: is it else Than thou appears in them, or dost thou look Upon thyself through them, the visual rays Being reflected? Listen how thy voice

After it dies to silence is returned To thee anew by lofty castle-walls: Is it another that there talks to thee, Or hearest thou words from thy echo voiced? Tell me, who passed his learning unto thee

The while thy senses had been lulled in sleep? Ere thy today, thou knewest not what chanced Upon thy yesterday, nor what shall hap Tomorrow; yet this morn thou art possessed Of knowledge what befell men long since gone

And mysteries of others yet to come, And boastest of thy ken. Supposest thou It was another that conversed with thee In slumber’s sleep upon the divers kinds Of noble knowledge? Nay, ’twas but the soul

Busied with her own world, oblivious To mortal being’s theatre the while: Itself unveiled itself unto itself In the unseen: assumed a sage’s guise Who guided it to comprehension of

Ideas most wondrous. For the sciences Were graven on the soul, and it was taught Their names aforetime, and therewith inspired By ancient fatherhood: the soul was not Blessed by such knowledge as deriveth from

Otherness’ separation, but enjoyed
The things itself dictated to itself.
And if the soul ere sleeping had been stript
Thou wouldst have contemplated it, like me,
With a true eye: its normal stripping (first)

Confirms its being (secondly) stript off,
To wit, in the hereafter: so hold fast,
Be not of those much study hath made mad,
Sapping their reason, and unsettling it.
For far beyond all lore traditional

There lies a knowledge, that is far too fine
For soundest understandings to attain
In their remotest reach; which I myself
Received from me, and from myself derived,
My soul with my own gift supplying me.

And be thou not all heedless of the play:
The sport of playthings is the earnestness
Of a right earnest soul. Beware: turn not
Thy back on every tinselled form or state
Illogical: for in illusion's sleep

The shadow-phantom's spectre brings to thee
That the translucent curtains do reveal.
Thou seest forms of things in every garb
Displayed before thee from behind the veil
Of ambiguity: the opposites

In them united for a purpose wise:
Their shapes appear in each and every guise:
Silent, they utter speech: though still, they move:
Themselves unluminous, they scatter light.
Thou laughest gleefully, as the most gay

Of men rejoices; weep'st like a bereaved
And sorrowing mother, in profoundest grief;
Mournest, if they do moan, upon the loss
Of some great happiness; art jubilant,
If they do sing, for such sweet melody.

Thou seest how the birds among the boughs
Delight thee with their cooing, when they chant
Their mournful notes to win thy sympathy,
And marvelling at their voices and their words
Expressing uninterpretable speech.

Then on the land the tawny camels race
Benighted through the wilderness; at sea
The tossed ships run amid the billowy deep.
Thou gazest on twain armies—now on land,
Anon at sea—in huge battalions

Clad all in mail of steel for valour’s sake
And fenced about with points of swords and spears.
The troops of the land-army—some are knights
Upon their chargers, some stout infantry;
The heroes of the sea-force—some bestride

The decks of ships, some swarm the lance-like masts.
Some violently smite with gleaming swords,
Some thrust with spears strong, tawny, quivering;
Some ’neath the arrows’ volley drowm in fire,
Some burn in water of the flaming flares.

This troop thou seest offering their lives
In reckless onslaught, that with broken ranks
Fleeing humiliated in the rout.
And thou beholdest the great catapult
Set up and fired, to smash the fortresses

And stubborn strongholds. Likewise thou mayst gaze
On phantom shapes with disembodied souls
Cowering darkly in their dim domain,
Apparelled in strange forms that disaccord
Most wildly with the homely guise of men;
For none would call the Jinnis homely folk.
And fishermen cast in the stream their nets
With busy hands, and swiftly bring forth fish;
And cunning fowlers spread their gins, that birds
A-hunger may be trapped there by a grain.

Ravening monsters of the ocean wreck
The fragile ships; the jungle-lions seize
Their slinking prey; birds swoop on other birds
Out of the heavens; in a wilderness
Beasts hunt for other beasts. And thou mayst glimpse

Still other shapes that I have overpassed
To mention, not relying save upon
The best exemplars. Take a single time
For thy consideration—no long while—
And thou shalt find all that appears to thee

And whatsoever thou dost contemplate
The act of one alone, but in the veils
Of occultation wrapt: when he removes
The curtain, thou beholdest none but him,
And in the shapes confusion no more reigns.

And thou dost realize when he reveals
That in thy darkness thou wast guided by
His light to view his actions. Even so
I too was letting down the curtain of
The spirit’s obscurcation in the light

Of shadow as between myself and me,
That in my work creative now and now
Again I might appear by slow degrees
To my sensation, to accustom it;
Conjoining to my task the play thereof

That to thy understanding I might so
Bring nigh the targets of my far-off aims.
A mutual resemblance links us twain
In our two theatres, although in truth
The showman’s case resembles not my own.

His figures are the media (with the screen)
Whereby his action is made manifest:
When he appears, they vanish and are naught.
So in its acts my soul resembles him;
My sense is like the figures; and my screen

The body’s vesture. So, when I removed
The curtain from myself, as he raised his,
So that my soul appeared to me unveiled—
And now already risen was the sun
Of the contemplative, and full of light
The existential; now already loosed
By me the knots of my soul's tethering—
I slew that lad, the soul, whiles setting up
The wall to guard my laws, and staving in
My ship; I turned with my replenishment

O'er all created life at every while
According to the actions then required.
But for my veiling in my attributes,
The things wherein my essence is displayed
Were burned to ashes in my glory's gleam.

The tongues of every being (if but thou
Hast ears to hear) bear witness I am one
In ceaseless eloquence. There hath come down
(Touching my oneness) a Tradition sure
In whose transmission by successive mouths
No shadow of infirmity resides,
Telling God loves His creatures, after they
By labours supererogatory
Or due performance of religious rite
Draw nigh to Him; the point that reference

Bids men observe is clear as noonday's sun
In the Divine 'I am to him an ear'.
I used all means to that uniting, till
I found myself united; and indeed
The intermediation of the means

Was one among my guides; I unified
Thereafter touching those the means, and so
I lost them; and the link of unity
Of all approaches did avail me best.
And then I stripped my soul of both, and it

Became a unit (that had never been
In truth at any time aught else but one).
I dived into the seas of union—nay
I plunged in them, in all my loneliness,
And brought to surface every peerless pearl,
That I might hear my acts with seeing ears
And look upon my words with listening eyes.
So if the nightingale amid the grove
Lamenteth, and the birds in every tree
Warbling respond to her; if flautist play
Upon the pipe harmonious to the strings
Swept by the singing-girl, the while she chants
Tenderest verses, and at every trill
The spirits thrilled ascend to Paradise—
Then I delight me in each masterpiece
Of my creative art, declaring free
My union and sweet intercourse from all
Association with all otherness.
The gathering of recollective praise
Through me converteth to a reader’s ear;
For me the vintner’s tavern gapeth still
Open as a scout’s eye; no hand but mine
Tied virtually the girdle infidel,
Or be it loosened in acknowledgement
Of me, my hand performed the loosening.
And if the mosque’s mihrāb be lighted up
By the Koran, no church’s massive pile
Is wasted with the Gospel open there,
No synagogue wherein the Torah’s scrolls
Moses delivered to his chosen folk
Are nightly read by rabbis at their prayers.
And if in idol-house the devotee
Bows down to stones, rush not in zealous rage
Beyond the disavowal faith requires:
Many a one unspotted by the shame
Of polytheist idol-mongering
In spirit worships Mammon. Every man
With ears to hear, to him my warning voice
Hath come; in me the pleas of every sect
Are proved acceptable. *The eyes strayed not*
In any faith, the thoughts ran devious
In no denomination. Those who yearned
Heedlessly for the sun lost not the way
Seeing its shine deriveth from the light
Of my unveiled effulgence. Or if fire
2300 The Magians worshipped (and, as tales report,
Its flames were quenched not in a thousand years),
They meant not aught but me, what though their quest
Went other ways, and manifested not
A vowed endeavour: they had once beheld
2305 The radiance of my light, and did suppose
It was a fire, and so they went astray
From the true guidance, following its rays.
But for the veil that wraps existence round
I would have said—But my observance of
2310 The laws that govern all phenomena
Keepeth me silent. 'Tis no idle sport;
The creatures were not made, to wander off
At random, though their actions go not straight;
According to the branding of the names
2315 Run their affairs; the wisdom that bestowed
Upon the essence divers attributes
Drives them conformably to God's decree,
'I care not, and I care not'—by these words
Disposed into two handfuls, one for bliss,
2320 The other unto misery consigned.
So let the soul be known for what it is
Or not: the clear discrimination in
This issue is recited every morn.
Indeed, the knowledge of the soul derives
2325 Out of itself: so did my soul dictate
Unto my senses all I hoped to know.
Had I declared all one, I would have swerved
And sloughed my union's signs, my handiwork
Associating equally with me.
2330 I am not blameworthy, if I proclaim
My gifts, and on my followers bestow
My grand endowment: that dispenser of
The mystic union, when he greeted me
At Yea or nearer, pointed me a bond

2335 Of spiritual kinship. From his light
The lantern of my essence shone on me;
My eve in me was radiant as my morn.
And I was made to see myself, myself
Yet here; and I was he; and I beheld

2340 That he was I, that light my radiance.
In me the holy vale was sanctified,
Where I bestowed my putting off of shoes
On my companions, an unstinted gift.
And I beheld my beams, and was their guide—

2345 O wondrous soul, that shines upon that light!
I founded firm my Sinais, and there
Prayed to myself, and all my wants fulfilled:
My essence was my interlocutor.
My moon set not; my sun ne’er sank from sight;

2350 By me are guided all the shining stars
Upon their courses; all the planets swim
About my heavens as my will controls
All things I own; my angels prostrate fall
Before my sovereignty. And in the world

2355 Of recollection still the soul doth own
Its ancient knowledge my disciples pray
That I bestow on them. Haste then to my
Eternal union, wherein I have found
The greybeards of the tribe as little babes!

2360 For these my fellows living in my age
Drink but the dregs that I have left; and those
Ahead of me, the merits men in them
Applaud are but my superfluity.
NOTES

'And when thy Lord took of the sons of Adam from their loins their seed, and made them to witness against themselves, Am I not your Lord? They said, Yea, we witness it . . .' (Koran vii. 171).

For the Muhammadan mystic after the teaching of al-Junaid (who died in A.D. 910) and of his later contemporary al-Ḥallāj (whom the lawyers crucified in A.D. 922) the spiritual life of the individual began before the dimensions of space and time were ever fixed, at the first projection by God from Himself of a category of being external to Himself, subsistent in and through Himself. So the Sufis interpreted the words of the Koran which have been quoted above: on that pre-eternal occasion Man entered into a covenant with God to acknowledge Him as his only Lord, and to deny all other masters and loyalties.

Thereafter God created the Idea of Muhammad, a Sufi counterpart of the First Intelligence of the philosophers; a Tradition affirmed that Muhammad was in existence at a time when Adam was as yet 'between water and clay', that is to say, unfashioned in the physical world. Out of the Idea of Muhammad, the Reality of Realities, the entire material universe was created; in that Idea, all things external to God have their being.

The Sufi's great quest is to realize in this limited world and this life of finite being his identity with the Spirit of Muhammad; once that quest has been achieved, he inevitably passes away from his creaturely attributes and attains to full recognition of the Unity and Unicity of God. This completes the cycle of his individual history; he has then returned to 'the state in which he was before he was'. Yet he is not annihilated as an individual; rather his individuality has become transformed; whereas formerly it was a temporal attribute, thenceforward it is as eternal as the Attributes of God. It is not the case that God dwells in him; that view would be condemned as incarnationism; on the contrary he dwells in God, and is aware that he subsists only through God.

This union with God does not, however, continue with the mystic throughout the remainder of his earthly life as a continually conscious experience; it is a brief moment of glory, a sudden glimpse of celestial bliss won in ecstasy. If the body could perish in that instant, the soul might survive at once and for ever united with its Creator; but the body does not die, and the flesh reassumes its dominion over the spirit inhabiting it. The lover is separated a second time from his Beloved, and all the rest of his days he is yearning passionately for renewed, eternal union.

Such in brief is the background to the opening scene of this poem. The mystic, surrounded in the circle of meditation by his fellow Sufis, focuses his thoughts upon the incomparable beauty of the Beloved. The inward eye of contemplation, in that interplay of the internal organs of spiritual sensation which is a favourite theme of the poet, becomes a hand to pour into his soul the wine-fever of ecstatic love; the bowl containing the wine is the Beloved's beauty. He reveals the nature of his emotions to his friends, pictured conventionally as handsome youths, trusty guardians of the secret of his
tremendous passion; yet it is not the kind of beauty they understand and represent, physical beauty, but the perfect spiritual beauty of Muhammad which is the true cause of his rapture (1–15).

As his spiritual inebriation more and more masters his self-control, he puts fear aside and, with all consciousness of his companions’ presence blotted out, addresses himself directly and nakedly to the Beloved; but as yet he has not wholly passed away from awareness of his own individuality, which ever and again obtrudes itself to stand between him and complete self-surrender (16–28).

In this state of violent agitation he begins his colloquy. He begs the Beloved to look just once upon him, that he may now be assured of Her regard for him before he is annihilated. This lover’s prayer, imitating the stock vocabulary of the erotic poets (who are ever fearful of wasting away to death ere knowing that their passion is reciprocated), recalls to his mind a like plea addressed to God by Moses, who did not indeed see the Creator but was rejoiced to hear His Voice declaring ‘Thou shalt not see Me’ (Koran vii. 139) as if in a momentary recovery of consciousness, before the blinding light of the Divine Presence shattered Mount Sinai (29–40). The poet declares that the burden of his lover’s suffering would have crushed the mountains even before God’s revelation destroyed them. Bethinking him of his surging tears and burning sighs (which, by a favourite poetic figure, in the conflict of the elements cancel out each other’s destructive qualities), he compares the former with the Flood of Noah and the latter with the fire into which (according to Koran xxi. 68) Abraham was cast by the idolaters. In this same mood of scriptural reminiscence he likens his grief to that of Jacob bereaved, as he supposed, of his beloved Joseph (Koran xii. 84), and his torment to the sufferings of Job; and of all those lovers famed in Arab story as having died of their unrequited passion (41–58).

His distress is similar to that of travellers stranded in a desert and refused a place in the departing caravan. So emaciated is he as a result of his sufferings—a familiar theme of poetic hyperbole—that the deepest recesses of his inmost heart stand revealed; in the intoxication of overpowering grief he discloses his lover’s secret to his most dangerous enemy, the Spy. (Thus the poet introduces the first of the traditional dramatis personae of erotic verse.) That passion which his true friends had loyally kept guarded (as we remember from lines 13–15) thus became known and notorious to all the tribe: the poet weaves an intricate pattern of metaphysical subtlety to describe how the Spy has won intimacy with all his thoughts, and how it is his passion itself which has betrayed him (59–103).

But matters have gone farther than this; the lover claims to have passed entirely away, so that even death would not be able to find him if purposing to slay him. Neither has he any longer any desire to be restored to himself; nor has he any longer the power to describe his innumerable pains. The traditional Visitors (another stock figure), even though they read upon the celestial Tablet of Destiny the truth of his case, would find no more of him than a ghost (104–37). In this condition of utter obliteration he fails even in his wildest imaginings to discover any trace of his individual existence in the world of phenomena; he has returned to that state ‘in which he was before he was’, when his spirit was indeed in being, before the creation of the physical universe and of his own perishing body (138–46).
Using a succession of favourite conceits and figures, the poet justifies this recital of his agony, giving thanks to the Beloved for the woes he patiently endures: the Beloved’s gift of tribulation is indeed to be reckoned by the lover as a great benefaction and abounding grace (147-73). Remembering the Covenant into which he entered before time was (Koran vii. 171), he is grateful to be the target for the malice of those two familiar characters of the love-play, the Railer and the Slanderer—the former seeking in the guise of a sincere friend to dissuade and divert him from his passion, the latter jealously carrying lies about his sincerity to the Beloved. He indeed resists the Railer, but pretends agreement with the Slanderer in order that others may not pry into his secret joy (174–86). He endures not so as to win applause, but as a necessary condition of adoring the Beloved’s beauty, once more named as the cause of his cherished affliction (187–200). The lover of beauty must be ready to die for love’s sake, and he, as a true and loyal lover, rejects all lesser loves in entire surrender to the Beloved (201–25).

It was a convention of erotic writing that the poet should at this stage swear by all that he holds most dear that his declaration of love is sincere and true. Ibn al-Fāriḍ follows the custom in a series of solemn oaths, in the course of which he remembers once more the Pre-eternal Covenant, and also the ‘latter bond’ accepted as a follower of the revealed religion of Islam (229–38). He swears too by the threefold Divine Attributes of Perfection, Majesty, and Loveliness, each of which has its apparent effect in the phenomenal world, as also by that Spiritual Beauty which is too subtle to be apprehended by the outward vision, that his Beloved is his one and only quest (239–61). He is prepared to suffer the obloquy of men in his utter abandonment of reserve, and to cast off the last shreds of modesty (as the conventional lover does in extremes): while those of lesser passion love the Beloved for part only of Her Attributes (the poet means the Attribute of Mercy, to the exclusion of the Attribute of Wrath), he loves Her for Her Whole Self: She is the entire and only cause of his lover’s bewilderment (262–82).

The Beloved is made to reply to this impassioned declaration, and does so tauntingly after the fashion of those lovers’ dialogues which were a familiar feature of erotic poetry. She roundly denies the lover’s claim to worship Her exclusively, accusing him of lying imposture. As readily might his deluded spirit find the narrow way leading to true love, as a man born blind perceive the dim and distant star Suhá. His pretences far exceed his capacity to attain. Referring obliquely to God’s obscure prohibition against ‘entering upon your houses netherwards’ (Koran ii. 185), which the poet interprets as meaning to seek admission to the Beloved’s Presence by false claims of worthiness, She adds further (with the same Scriptural passage in mind) that the doors to that Presence are also barred against the like of him (283–305).

The truth is, She declares, that the lover refuses to surrender the least part of his self-regard. Using the language of the alphabet, she says that had he but humbled himself to become as it were the thin stroke marking the vowel i beneath the dot of the letter b (the commentators offer a metaphysical explanation of this, but perhaps the reference is rather to the opening vowel of the phrase bismi llahi, ‘In the Name of God’, with which every Sura but one of the Koran begins), this act of self-abasement would have exalted him far higher than all his pretentious ambitions. The road to attainment runs straight enough, but men’s eyes are blinded by their selfish desires (306–27).
The lover’s claim to love the Beloved is easily disposed of. His boasted love is mere self-love, as is demonstrated by the fact of his suffering even the least remainder of his individuality to survive. Total passing-away from self is proved by that mystical transfiguration in which the lover is seen to be clothed only in the Attributes of the Beloved; the poet doubtless has in mind the classic definition of spiritual union as ‘passing away from human attributes into the Divine Attributes’. The Beloved therefore bids the lover have done with false pretences: the choice before him is simple—either let him die to self, that ‘state more excellent’ (Koran xxiii. 98) and the only condition of true love, or let him abandon the quest and trouble the Beloved no more (328–42).

The lover refuses to accept this rebuke. He begs the Beloved at once to take his soul to Herself: he knows that true love means death to the lover, and his only ambition is to win the classic epitaph, ‘He died of love’. If he may not attain this highest honour of all, yet he will be content to be suspected of loving Her; still more, he will rejoice to die unhonoured, not even to wear the martyr’s crown (to which according to an apocryphal Tradition the mystic lover dying of his love would be entitled), provided the cause of his death—the fullness of his devotion—is known to the Beloved. His life is in any case too mean a thing even to be mentioned as being expended, in comparison with that prized union with the Beloved which he hopes to purchase thereby; and if the Beloved makes this the price to be paid for the supremest honour lover can dare to covet, She indeed enhances his market-value (343–76). Death holds no terrors for him: let the Beloved work Her will. As the old love-poets used to say, such a threat from the Beloved is accepted by the lover as a most fair promise. Other men shrink from death: he welcomes it, as the gateway to immortal life in union with the Beloved (377–85).

This concludes the dialogue. The poet now dilates further upon the themes of the lover’s address to the Beloved. Many others have been Her victims before him, among the tribe of devoted mystics, who died without her even glancing upon them (compare line 31). To be slain by Her would indeed be the pinnacle of renown. If he dies in loving Her, he will have won by the exchange; for he will have attained union, and the restoration of his spirit’s life into the bargain (386–402). By devoting himself to Her service he has gained the contempt and ridicule of his fellows, but he is well content with his abasement (403–27).

Love has crazed and wasted him, and brought him to such a pass that his spirit was fearful of his mind, lest his mind knowing of his secret passion should release the tears which would reveal it to others. His spirit therefore concealed its emotions from his heart; and concealed them so well that his consciousness was rendered unaware even of his spirit’s will to conceal (428–46). How sweet then are the lover’s sufferings, which the Beloved causes him to be alike conscious and unconscious of! The poet meditates upon this subtlety at length; the Beloved has set one part of him to guard against the rest, to preserve him whole for Her sake. Veneration combats desire; speech and hearing wrestle with each other; humility strives with jealousy (447–76).

So at last his soul is rapt in ecstasy; though he is still aware of a desire stirring within him. He is in a state of continuous union with the Beloved; whenever Her name is mentioned, or the recollection of Her is stirred (even by the conventional ‘ghost of reproach’ visiting the lover as he tosses sleepless through the night), his spirit is transported with joy and emulation. When he prays, he leads all mankind in prayer; the Object of his prayer
being within him, the imams who lead the faithful turn towards him as the qibla or direction of prayer; all six directions which make up space point to him. It is to him (he being now united with the Beloved) that the rites of the greater and the lesser Pilgrimage are performed: at the Station of Abraham (near the Kaaba at Mecca) he prayed to the Beloved and she prayed to him (477–505).

The poet halts momentarily this onrush of verbal intricacy, and turning back (as every now and again) to the Pre-eternal Covenant proclaims it is high time for him to rend the veil still dividing him from complete unity, that remnant of desire which he has mentioned as yet stirring within him (in lines 479–80) and which he now acknowledges as a gift bestowed on him by the Beloved before Time was, even before the Covenant was sworn—the disposition to say 'Yea' to God's challenging demand (506–12). His present loyalty is not an 'earning' (the term used by the Sufi theorists to describe the subjective 'stages' of the path in which the mystic still exercises his own will), or a natural 'attraction' (such as the philosophers urged as the cause of love), but rather that same passionate distraction, that intoxication with the Beloved which governed him in the World of Command (the immaterial universe) before the World of Creation (the material universe) came into being and he himself was born into it. Love has now annihilated all creaturely attributes in him, which did not exist in the pre-eternal world and therefore could not divide him there from the Beloved (513–22). These attributes being rejected, they are transmuted into the Attributes of the Beloved, which are and always were in reality the lover's: the attributes veiled him from his realization of identity with the Beloved, just as the Attributes veiled him from his realization of continued individuality. The Object of his love had always been Himself; as a mortal being he had been distracted and unaware of this tremendous truth, but in the contemplation proper to his immortal soul he had ever been apprised of it (523–34).

The poet here pauses, as if conscious of the extreme obscurity of his last few highly concentrated utterances, and proposes to expatiate at greater length on their contents, while reducing his complex argument to simpler terms. He takes up anew the parts of the Slanderer and the Railer (compare lines 176–83), whom he now finds both to be his allies, and in fact to be mere aspects of the single Beloved-lover relationship. He has now abandoned all self-interest and selfish desires; even poverty is an attribute, therefore he has cast it away along with riches, together with the thought of merit in so doing; and so the Beloved has become his Prize (535–68).

The transformation of the lover into the Beloved has consequently endowed the lover with the Beloved's right and power to guide other lovers who have strayed from the true path of love. The poet exploits this point brilliantly to introduce a conventional transition: he offers counsel derived from his own experiences to an unnamed companion, no doubt to be identified with any disciple who may read his poem. The relative simplicity of this passage affords a welcome relief from the long-sustained tension of the preceding scenes. The neophyte is bidden to give himself up wholly to the Beloved's will; to be truly penitent (the first stage in the Sufi scheme of regeneration); not to put off his reformation to the morrow, but to resolve today; and to labour boldly and without flagging. Let him not make weakness or sickness an excuse; the race, if swiftly run, will itself provide him with respite (569–601). In this fashion he runs through the usual themes beloved by the Sufi
moralist. Riches do not win the Beloved's favour, nor poverty deny it; poverty must not be an excuse for self-regard, and this peril is to be eluded by complete sincerity in serving the Beloved. The disciple must practise godly silence, as all gnostics have found the greatest mysteries of love to be inexpressible in speech; at the same time he should beware of seeking in silence only that dignity which silence bestowed on the handful of true mystics who observed its rules (602–34). He must become a passive instrument in the Beloved's hands; not seeing, but sight; not hearing, but an ear; not speaking, but a tongue; seeing, speaking, and hearing not wilfully, but as the Beloved directs those faculties to act. This is the direct path which leads to union; to follow the soul's whims is to go hopelessly astray (635–43). After this interlude, the poet resumes the narrative of his own progress. Hitherto his soul had still been 'reproachful' (a Sufi technical term borrowed from Koran lxxv. 2, and used by them to mean that state of inner conflict in which the mystic wrestles with his wayward impulses). He therefore set about schooling it with hard discipline: the poet has in mind that phase of the mystic's training which the theorists called ri'yādat an-nafs, 'disciplining the carnal soul'. In this way he converted his soul from being 'reproachful' to being 'at rest' (another Sufi term taken from Koran lxxxix. 27, indicating the state in which all inner conflict has been resolved). He made every 'station' upon the mystic path an ascetic exercise, performed in absolute submission to the Beloved's will; until at last he gave up the selfish passion of seeking the Beloved for himself, and found himself transformed from being desirous to being himself desired (644–65). This new climax brings the poet to another long passage of involved elaboration upon the theme of the lover's union and identity with the Beloved, which, though in places extremely subtle, can be followed without much difficulty and adds little fresh to what has been analysed already. Ibn al-Faraj is at pains to make clear the distinction between 'being' (individual existence in the phenomenal world) and 'beholding' (unitive existence in the spiritual world), a thread of meditation which runs through the whole poem (666–94). He illustrates the Beloved-lover equation with a series of eloquent examples. When the Beloved's name is called, the lover answers; when the lover is summoned, the Beloved cries Labbaika ('Here am I'); when the Beloved and the lover converse together, they do not use the second person singular form but only the first person singular, for in the mystery of mystical unity the two are One (695–720). Feeling this statement to need further explanation, the poet proposes to cite two instances (one drawn from the sensation of hearing, the other from sight) to show how in certain circumstances duality is readily proved to be an illusion; arguing his case as against a stubborn opponent whom he accuses of 'secret polytheism'. A woman in a state of catalepsy utters trance-statements not of her own volition (though it is certainly her vocal chords that produce the sounds) but at the direction and under the control of the supernatural being possessing her. This is example number one (721–50); and the poet admits that previously he was in the same confusion as his opponent, when he was in a state of alternating 'loss' and 'discovery', oscillating between 'being' and 'beholding'. He had thought the sensation of annulment induced by spiritual intoxication to be the farthest point attainable in the mystical ascent (he is using the analogy of the Prophet's Ascension referred to briefly in Koran xvii. 1; the 'lote-boundary' is a quotation from Koran liii. 9, 80
a passage taken by the Sufis to describe a mystical experience); but the state of sobriety-
after-drunkenness (that ‘twice sobering’ mentioned in line 38) found him re-established
in his transformed identity, his union with the Beloved being henceforward a true Unity
(751–70). This mention of unity leads the poet on as ever to a fresh outburst of passionate
subtlety: when he stood (on Mount Arafat at the Pilgrimage) he stood before Himself, and
when he prayed He was his own Kaaba. He urges his opponent to give up the ‘error of
separation’, to follow the right way of the Sufis who emulated one another in their quest
after ‘oneness’, and boldly to proclaim that Beauty is absolute, and not made finite by the
mortal elements in which from time to time it stands revealed. Every human lover dis-
straught with passion for every human beloved yearns in reality for the Beloved, Who at
once displays and hides Herself in the beautiful shapes She temporarily informs. In a long
passage of sustained eloquence the poet makes this point over and over again, recalling
the instances of love-poets famous in literary history for their celebration of the beautiful
maidens they adored: lover and beloved, viewed as theatres of Divine manifestation, were
in every instance identical with the Lover and the Beloved, themselves One Essence self-
loving and self-beloved (771–854).

Why then, if the lover has realized his identity with the Beloved, and was aware that
nothing else existed in all the world but the Beloved, did he submit thereafter to observe
the ceremonies and requirements of formal religion? Not out of fear for the shame which
other men’s condemnation might bring upon him did he neglect his duties, nor out of a
desire for a reputation of saintliness, but only in order to rescue his ‘sucouring friends’
(see lines 13–14) from the attacks of the wily adversary who would aim to mislead them
in their lower degree of attainment by quoting the example of the lover’s own apparent
ungodliness (855–92). This was another motive for that hard self-discipline to which he
had already referred (in lines 644–65). Nevertheless, despite his outward profession of
formal orthodoxy, he had never recanted the statement ‘I am She’ (893–9).

But neither had he at any time been guilty of the foolish heresy of incarnationism, pre-
tending that the Beloved ‘came to dwell in me’ (the poet uses the technical term for
incarnation condemned by the orthodox theologians). To prove this he now quotes the
second example which he had promised (see lines 724–5). It was well known that Gabriel,
the bearer of God’s inspiration, appeared to Muhammad several times in the guise of
a certain Dihya; yet the Prophet never confused Dihya with Gabriel—he saw the angel,
where the other bystanders saw the man. Holy Scripture described this phenomenon as
a ‘covering’ (a reference to Koran vi. 9)—a term which the poet uses elsewhere to connote
that ‘ambiguity’ whereby the phenomenal world appears endowed with spiritual attrib-
utes (899–926).

This mention of Gabriel’s appearance to Muhammad introduces a dramatic change in
the narrative; the poet now speaks as the Beloved, clearly identified as Muhammad him-
self. The fount of Sadda (a well proverbial for the sweetness of its water) draws upon the
same source as his own abounding flow—a figure for Divine inspiration, contrasted with
the mirage of intellectual conjecture. Whereas the earlier prophets冒险ed no farther
than the shore, Muhammad plunged deeply into the ocean of complete and final revelation
reserved for him the ‘orphan’ (a reference to Koran xciii. 6) whose ‘property’ of esoteric
knowledge was shared only by the ‘youth’—Ali, the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law,
believed by the Sufis to have received secret mystical teaching from the Prophet (927-42).

Resuming the part of spiritual preceptor, the poet addresses once more the unnamed disciple (see lines 569-643), whom he urges to follow strictly in his path. He himself has transcended even love, as an emotion to be obliterated in complete union. Love indeed is the starting-point of the ascent which yet lies ahead; the disciple may therefore rejoice in it, as giving him supremacy over the rest of God’s servants, the ascetics, the theologians, and the philosophers. Kinship based upon the loyalty of love secures that highest heritage of all, the mystic gnosis derived from the Prophet, whose care it was that his Divine knowledge should be of benefit to mankind (943-72). So mounting, the disciple may at length attain the lover’s goal of Unity, which the poet once more exalts in eloquent metaphor (973-84).

The true lover may well boast his superiority over the toiling ascetic still the prey of hope and fear. By this subtle transition the poet is brought to change his address to the unattaining straggler, whom he charges with having advanced beyond his proper sphere (a reminiscence of the reproach offered by the Beloved to the lover in lines 286-302): let him therefore stay where he is, for any further progress will lead to his annihilation (985-1001). He alone (speaking as one who has achieved union with the Spirit of Muhammad) has reached the supreme rank of sobriety-after-union: his ear is that of Moses (who heard God speak), his eye the eye of Muhammad (who, according to some, saw God on the night of his Ascension). In his capacity as First Intelligence and Reality of Realities, his Spirit is the Spirit of all spirits (this line especially made Ibn al-Farîd the target of orthodox disapprobation), his Beauty the source of all beauty. He possessed the prerogative of Divine knowledge before his fellow prophets ever knew of his existence-to-be. No names or epithets are appropriate to address him by; the ‘bANDING of names’ is forbidden by Holy Scripture (a reference to Koran xlix. 11). His least follower possesses a degree of gnosis enabling him to answer the most abstruse questions in language of profound subtlety (1002-34). Even the term ‘brought nigh’ (used in several passages in the Koran of the angels and the blessed in Paradise, see iv. 170, liv. 87, lxxviii. 28) does not apply to him, for nearness itself implies separation; he has transcended all such discriminations as junction and separation, nearness and farness, love and aversion. If he is to be alluded to at all, then only metaphorical terms of address may be employed (1035-52). He has surmounted the highest pinnacle of Unity, and only returned from his spiritual Ascension in order to propagate the ordinances of his religion: a reference to the legend that the Prophet was instructed on the night of the Heavenly Journey how many times daily his followers should pray. He has grasped the principle enunciated in the Sura Taha (which, see Koran xx. 7, declares, ‘I am God, there is no god but I, so worship Me and institute the prayer for My remembrance’). In greeting the Beloved, he is only greeting himself (1053-75).

So the mood changes once more, and the poet is reminded how at the beginning of the history of his passion he greeted the Beloved with a joyous Hymn to Love, which he proceeds to quote, recapitulating in still more splendid eloquence the tale of his lover’s anguish, playing with consummate mastery the entire repertory of his poet’s themes and variations. This long passage of sustained ardour contrasts delightfully in its simplicity with the intricacy of the metaphysical argument preceding and following it, and calls for
little elucidation. It may only be remarked in passing that the 'miraculous Night of Power' (lines 1144, 1185) is traditionally said to be 27 Ramadan (the phrase is taken from Koran xcvi), where the night is described as 'better than a thousand months—the angels descend in it, and the Spirit, by their Lord's leave free from every charge: greeting it is until the uprising of dawn'), and upon this night the whole Koran was first revealed. The 'Furthest Mosque' (line 1157, see Koran xvii. 1) is the Temple at Jerusalem, to which the Prophet was miraculously transported on the night of his Ascension. Those familiar characters the Slanderer, the Railer, and the Spy are mentioned once again (lines 1169-75). Joseph (line 1210) is referred to (as conventionally in mystical love-poetry) as the highest exemplar of human beauty. The interlude rises in a crescendo of rapture to the final declaration that the lover's passion, like the Beloved's beauty, is universal (1076-1229).

The poet resumes his preoccupation with the mystery of Unity. The Slanderer and the Railer are remembered from a previous mention (see lines 542-6) as the lover's truest allies rather than his enemies. In the state of sobriety-after-union there were revealed to him mysteries too great to be spoken, though allusion to them will be understood by other mystics; a clearer definition would expose the poet to condemnation by the narrowly orthodox. (This silence regarding the mysterium tremendum of the supreme mystical experience is a familiar theme in Sufi literature, especially after the execution of al-Hallaj.)

In reality the four characters of the love-play—Beloved, Lover, Slanderer, and Railer—are one, the two first being a single Essence and the two last the attributes of that Essence. The Slanderer is a manifestation of the Spirit, seeking to lure the spirit of the lover back to its origin; the Railer is concerned to urge the soul back to the lover's fellow men in the material universe (1230-77).

At this point the poet again speaks as if by the mouth of the Prophet (see lines 927-42). The Universal Soul was the source from which all the forms of material existence derived, while the Universal Spirit created the spirits which inhabit the immaterial universe (1278-88). But the lover immediately takes up once more his personal story: the twofold draw of the Slanderer-Spirit (towards the eternal) and the Railer-Soul (towards the temporal), a characteristic of mystical ecstasy, is proved by the interplay of man's 'external' and 'internal' senses. Beautiful sights and sounds, perceived by the outward eye and ear, cause the inward eye and ear to apprehend the Beloved's beauty, and a state of uncontrollable joy ensues. This fine point is developed with a rich abundance of illustration, as the poet gives rein to the wide scope of his ranging fancy; as ever when carried away by his artistic imagination he writes with masterly simplicity, and this central passage, superbly beautiful, needs no comment (1289-1407).

Rapidly Ibn al-Farid increases the tension of his thought after this extended relaxation, as he meditates once more upon the mysteries of the Unity of Lover and Beloved. He himself contains his own temple housing the Kaaba of his spiritual worship; he circumambulates himself (as the Mecca pilgrims do the Holy House); he runs from his internal Safa to his internal Marwa (the mountains without Mecca between which the pilgrims race). The Lover-Beloved duality, the accompaniment of his mystical dream (as the Prophet was carried 'between sleeping and waking' upon his Ascension), has been transformed into a single Unity in the sobriety-after-union (1408-41).
Though now arrayed in the Attributes of Godhood, he (as self-identified with the Prophet) remembers his obligations to the phenomenal world, the ordinances of his religion (see lines 1055–8). In his dual nature, Divine and human, he pictures himself as an apostle sent by Himself to himself before Adam was born; and on the other side as an incarnate being created later in time, rising out of himself to Himself in renewed Unity of the persons; this thought is elaborated in a series of subtle images (1442–85). The 'cleaving' of heaven and earth (taking the language of Koran xxi. 31 as a reference to the act of creation) has now been 'closed'. The categories of space and time have passed away, for dimensions imply 'otherness' and therefore polytheism. God's creation has no incongruity (Koran lxvii. 3), for the opposites have been resolved. He is at one with that Adam to whom the angels bowed at God's command (see Koran xv. 28–30). His fellow mystics thought to find the truth at the 'nigh horizon' (the first vision of reality, as contrasted with the 'higher horizon' of complete revelation, see Koran liii. 7), that is to say in the ecstasy of spiritual intoxication, but the true union of Unity is only proved in the sobriety-after-union, the 'second separation' (1486–1518); he uses again the symbolism of Moses at Sinai (Koran vii. 139), an experience with which he, as the Spirit of Muhammad, was intimate long before Moses was born or turned to God at all. The language of the alphabet is again found appropriate to express the idea of the blotting-out of 'otherness' (individual existence) in the all-embracing Unity of supreme attainment: the dot distinguishing the letter ghain (which is also a word meaning 'cloud') is expunged, giving the letter 'ain (a word meaning 'eye' and 'essence') which uniquely subsists after the erasure has taken place (1486–1536).

Unity transcends all difference: it is a total obliteration of every kind of separateness. The mystic has realized the identity of his 'being' with his 'beholding': Muhammad referred to his priority over all the prophets when he asked his companions (according to a Tradition) whether they did not think him superior to Jonah. The poet uses the language of God's challenge and man's response (Koran vii. 171) to re-emphasize this constantly repeated point (1537–77). A Tradition quotes God as affirming, 'My Mercy was before My Wrath', which confirms the mystic in his certainty of Paradise; Hell will declare to every true believer (again according to a Tradition), 'Thy light hath quenched my fire'; and the poet combines these two thoughts in a single concordance of esoteric interpretation (1578–86). Using the terminology of the Sufis, he declares himself (as Spirit of Muhammad) to be the Pole upon which the heavens revolve, the Pole which never passed through the subordinate degrees of Substitute and Peg, for he was not successor to any prior Pole but himself the First Pole (1587–98).

In very subtle language the poet describes the lover's bewilderment at first encountering the Beloved, an oscillation between unconsciousness of self and consciousness of Self. He passed through the three grades of certainty (as named by the Sufi theorists), until he reached complete Unity of the persons; a state which he illustrates with a further range of figures which again are not essentially difficult to comprehend (1599–1710). The tension is increased more and more, as the poet meditates upon the profound mysteries of Unity, until he finally delivers himself of a series of lines highly mannered and ornamented in an almost complete incoherence of sensual ecstasy (1711–1829). (Incidentally, the reference in lines 1795–6 is to a Tradition according to which God said, 'Worship Me as if thou

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seest Me, for if thou dost not see Me, I see thee'.) Some idea of the intricate verbal pattern of this passage may be conveyed by a transcription of a few lines.

\[
\begin{align*}
fa-\text{marji}'\text{uhā} & \text{ lil-\text{hiissi} } fī \text{ 'ālamī } š-\text{ṣahā} \\
-\text{datī } l-m\text{ujtādī} & \text{ mā } n-n\text{afsu minnī } \text{aḥassatī} \\
\text{fuṣūlu } & \text{ 'ibārātīn } \text{wuṣūlu } \text{taḥīyatin} \\
\text{ḥuṣūlu } & \text{išārātīn } \text{uṣūlu } '\text{aṭīyātī} \\
\text{wa-maṭla'\text{uhā} } & fī \text{ 'ālamī } l-\text{gāibi } mā \text{ wajad} \\
-\text{tu } & \text{min } n\text{i'amīn } \text{minnī } \text{ 'a\text{la}yiya } \text{stajaddatī} \\
\text{bašā'\text{iru } iqrā'\text{in bašā'\text{iru } 'ibratīn} } \\
\text{sara'\text{iru } 'aṭārīn } & \text{dāhā'\text{iru } da'\text{wa'tī} } \\
\text{wa-mauqī'\text{uhā} } & fī \text{ 'ālamī } l-jābārūtī } \text{mīn} \\
\text{mašāriqī } & \text{fathīn } līl-bašā'\text{irī } \text{mubhītī} \\
\text{arā'\text{iku } tāuḥyīdin } & \text{mādārīkū } \text{zulfātīn} \\
\text{masāliku } & \text{tāmjīdin } \text{mālā'\text{iku } nusratī} \\
\text{wa-manba'\text{uhā } bī-l-faīdī } & fī \text{kullī } \text{'ālamīn} \\
\text{li-fāqātī } & \text{nafsin } \text{bī-l-ifāqātī } \text{aṭratī} \\
\text{fawā'\text{idū } ilhāmīn } & \text{rawā'\text{idū } nī'matīn} \\
\text{'awā'\text{idū } in'\text{āmīn } mawā'\text{idū } nā'matī} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Resuming in a somewhat lower key, the poet refers again to the 'joining of the rift' (compare lines 1490-1), and illustrates the effect of the supreme Unity upon the senses which no longer keep their distinct functions but are fused together in a concord of total consciousness (1830-69). This phenomenon is given as the explanation of various miracles (1870-1908). Noah was thus brought safely to berth upon Mount al-Judī (the Ararat of Koran xi. 46); Solomon was borne with his army of men and spirits upon the wind (Koran xxi. 81-82), and Bilquis, the Queen of Sheba, was transported to him upon her throne (Koran xxvii. 40-42); Abraham was saved from the fire into which his enemies cast him (Koran xxii. 69), and brought the four slain and dismembered birds together and to life from the far mountains (Koran ii. 262); Moses' rod swallowed up the serpents of Pharaoh's enchanters (Koran x. 80-81), and caused twelve fountains to gush out of the rock (Koran vii. 160); Jacob was healed of his blindness when Joseph's shirt was laid upon his face (Koran vii. 96); at Jesus' prayer a table was sent down from heaven upon the Israelites (Koran v. 114-15), and he healed the blind and the leper, and made a living bird out of clay (Koran iii. 43) (1909-44).

The familiar miracles of the heroes of early Islam—equal to the prophets of old since Muhammad sealed the office of apostleship—also prove the transforming power of Unity. Abu Bakr overcame the false prophet Musailama of the Banu Hanifa; Omar saved Sāriya in battle by calling to him to take refuge in the mountain when he was many miles away in Medina; Othman was not diverted from reading the Koran when he was murdered; Ali possessed the esoteric interpretation of the Holy Writ (1945-78). So it was and is with
the right-guided and right-guiding saints after them; all are the Prophet's spiritual kindred, and the lover, through the miracle of love at one with the Spirit of Muhammad, is the father of Adam himself. Being born pure of contagion with otherness, his cradle-meditation was upon the Sura called 'The Prophets' (Koran xxi), the tablet upon which he learned to write was the Preserved Tablet laid up in heaven, his favourite reading in childhood was the Sura called 'The Victory' (or in Sufi parlance 'The Revelation', Koran xlviii). The religious code he instituted fulfilled and sealed all other systems (1980-2008). He, as Reality of Realities, is the source of all being and all activity; he in fact is the only agent in all the created world. The poet contrasts again in new interpretation the Divine attributes of Mercy and Wrath (see lines 1577–8), which he equates with the Sufi technical terms 'expansion' and 'contraction' (see Koran ii. 246); where the two states unite, there is total 'nearness' (2009–44).

The mention of Unity provokes the customary increase of tension and involution of thought, the Lover-Beloved addressing the disciple in a series of brilliant images. The poet compares this 'coinage of parables' with those diverse parts which al-Harīrī portrays the hero of his Mağmât as playing; the play is not to be disregarded, for the story it tells shadows the truth. The natural phenomena of the image in the mirror and the voice's echo are cited as further examples. The transmission of knowledge and the disposition of the mind to know make the same point; the poet calls in the Platonic theory of 'recollection' to assist his argument (2045–129). As the tension relaxes, he is carried forward to a new passage of refreshing lucidity, in which he describes the scenes of the oriental shadow-play as illustrating his point that the 'play' of natural phenomena is not to be disregarded; the sleep of illusion brings with it the veridical dream of reality. The poet offers esoteric interpretations of the strange acts performed by Moses' mysterious companion—the slaying of the lad (Koran xvi. 73), the setting-up of the wall (ibid. 76), and the staving-in of the ship (ibid. 70), (2130–237).

The poet refers to the Tradition beloved of the Sufis, that God said, 'My servant ceases not to draw nigh Me by works of supererogation until I love him; and when I love him, I am his ear so that he hears by Me, and his eye so that he sees by Me, and his tongue so that he speaks by Me, and his hand so that he grasps by Me'. This Tradition is a further proof of the truth of mystical Unity; the 'means' (the physical attributes) are themselves the means of achieving that Unity, and Unity being once attained the means disappear (2238–53).

All natural beauty delights the mystic, for in it he contemplates the perfection of His own creative art. All religions contain indications to the truth of Unity; the 'eyes strayed not' (see Koran liii. 17) in any faith. Men were not created as an 'idle sport' (Koran xxiii. 117), or 'to wander off at random' (Koran lxxv. 36). In all things God's eternal Will is fulfilled, as when He said (according to the Tradition) creating Adam, 'These (the saved) are in Paradise, and I care not; and these (the damned) are in Hell, and I care not'; and this is confirmed amply by the Koran which men recite every morning. There is no room for pantheism in this doctrine of absolute Unity (2254–329).

So Ibn al-Fārid passes into the final scene of his drama, speaking as with the voice of Muhammad, and referring to the vision of the Spirit hinted at in the Scriptures (Koran liii. 9), and Moses' putting-off of shoes in the holy valley (Koran xx. 12); his sun and moon
set not as did those heavenly bodies which Abraham rejected as objects of worship (Koran vi. 76). The heavens are in his control, and the angels acknowledge his sovereignty. The eternal wisdom still abides unchanged in the world of Spirit; this is the secret knowledge for which the Sufis pray, but those now living drink but the dregs of the cup of knowledge (so at the last the poet returns to the image with which he began), while even the boasted wisdom of the ancients was but the overflow of his abounding and infinite grace (2330–63).  
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