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‘Abd al-Rahman Jami’s *Lawami*’: A Translation Study

A Dissertation Presented

by

Marlene Rene DuBois

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

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in

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The Graduate School

Marlene Rene DuBois

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the

Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend

acceptance of this dissertation.

William Chittick—Dissertation Advisor

Professor, Asian and Asian American Studies &
Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies

Sachiko Murata—Chairperson of Defense

Professor, Asian and Asian American Studies &
Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies

Ilona Rashkow

Associate Professor Emerita, Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies

Robert Hoberman

Professor, Linguistics

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin

Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

‘Abd al-Rahman Jami’s *Lawami*’: A Translation Study

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This dissertation discusses a 13th century Arabic poem, the *Khamriyya* (Wine Ode) by ‘Umar Ibn al-Farid (576-632/1181-1235) and a 15th century Persian commentary *Lawami*’: *Sharh-i Khamriyyat-i Faridiyya* (Sparks: Explanation of the *Khamriyya* of Ibn Farid) by ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami (817-898/1414-1492). It places Ibn al-Farid in a historical, religious and literary context, and discusses the imagery of wine-drinking in both pre-Islamic and Islamic thought. It addresses the philosophical connections that were made later between Ibn al-Farid and Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 637/1240), and aims to show how Jami, of the school of Ibn ‘Arabi, brings his own interpretive framework to his commentary of Ibn al-Farid’s poem, and embodies the ideals of his school of thought in the form of his commentary. In order to show Jami’s particular interpretive stance, this dissertation explains how a careful translation methodology that takes into account considerations of genre, readership and style—all of which are naturally limited by one culture’s knowledge of another’s literary and cultural history—are necessary for translation efficacy. The history of translation of Islamic texts by the West—which was fraught with the problems of Old-school Orientalism—illustrates the gradual transformation in translation efficacy, from the ideologically-driven translations of Islamic texts, to the particular issues that always exist in translating Arabic and Persian, no matter what the time period. To illustrate the subtle differences that can exist between two commentaries on the same poem by authors from a single school of thought—which can only be brought out through careful translations—this dissertation includes a comparison of Jami’s commentary to that of al-Qaysari (fl. 8th/14th c.). Finally, this dissertation presents a selection of Jami’s *Lawami*’ in translation. The chosen selection is one wherein Jami discusses the process by which ideas are “clothed in form” and how human beings use metaphoric language to convey thought about things without form. Here we will understand Jami through a translation that consults the cumulative knowledge of his school of thought and a methodology that claims limited efficacy—

insofar as technical language from Arabic can be preserved and the poesy of Persian can be conveyed.

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Introduction

A Poem and Its Commentary

The Wine Ode¹

We drank wine in the remembrance of the Beloved;
 We were drunk with it before the vine was created.
It had the full moon as a cup, and it was a sun;
 It was passed around by a crescent moon, and so many stars appeared when it was mixed!
But for its fragrance, I would never have been guided to its tavern;
 But for its resplendence, imagination could not have conceived of it.
Time has left nothing of it but a ghost,
 As if its vanishing were concealed in the breasts of the aware.
Yet if it is mentioned in the tribe, its folk
 Become drunk, and no shame on them or sin.
It has ascended from the insides of the jugs,
 And nothing is left of it but the name.
But if one day it should enter into a man's mind,
 Joys will settle down therein and grief will depart.
Had the boon companions but gazed on the container's seal,
 That seal would have made them drunk without the wine.
Were they to sprinkle a dead man's grave with its drops,
 His spirit would return to him and his body would revive.
If they threw into the shadow of its vine's wall
 Someone ill, on the verge of death, his illness would go.
If a cripple were brought near its tavern, he would walk;
 If a dumb man recalled its taste, he would speak.
If the whiffs of its fragrance were to spread in the East,
 Smell would return to someone with a stuffed nose in the West.
A touching palm tinged by its cup
 Will never be lost at night while the star is in hand.
If it were secretly disclosed to the blind man, he would come
 To see, and by its strainer, the deaf man would hear.
If riders set out for the earth of its land,

¹ This translation of Ibn al-Farid's *Khamriyya* ("The Wine Ode" or "The Wine Song") by Marlene DuBois is presented as part of this dissertation. See appendix for other translations.

And among them is one snake-bitten, the venom would not harm him.
If the sorcerer traced the letters of its name on
The brow of someone struck by the jinn, the script would free him.
And if its name were inscribed on the banner of the army,
That inscription would intoxicate all those beneath the banner.
It refines the character traits of the boon companions, so by it is guided
To the path of resolve he who had no resolve.
He whose hand knew no generosity will be munificent,
And he who had no clemency will be clement despite anger.
If the stupid man of the tribe should kiss its strainer,
That kiss would convey to him the meaning of its virtues.
They say to me, "Describe it, for you are acquainted with its description."
Yes, I have knowledge of its attributes:
Limpid, but not water; subtle, but not air;
Light, but not fire; spirit, but not body.
Beautiful traits that guide the describers to describe it,
So their prose and poetry about it is beautiful.
And he who does not know it becomes joyful at its mention,
Like the one longing for Nu'm at the mention of Nu'm.'
They say, "You have drunk sin!" Not at all—I have only
Drunk that whose abandonment would be a sin for me.
Good health to the folk of the monastery! How they were drunk with it,
Though they did not drink of it, only aspiring to do so.
I was drunk with it before I came to be.
It will stay with me forever, though my bones rot away.
So take it unmixed. If you want to, mix it—
It is wrong for you to turn away from the Beloved's mouth.
Watch for it in the tavern and seek its disclosure there
Amidst the melodies of the songs, with which it is booty.
Wine and worry never dwell in one place,
Just as sorrow never dwells with song.
If it makes you drunk once, even for the length of an hour,
You will see time as an obedient servant, yours to command.
There is no life in this world for the one who lives sober;
And when someone does not die drunk on it, resolve has passed him by.
Let him weep for himself, he whose life has been wasted
And who has never had a share or portion of it.

The *Khamriyya* and the *Lawami*'

Pre-Islamic Arabia produced a rich tradition of poetry that was carried into the Islamic era with many of its desert-flavors still intact. The cumulative tradition belonging to Islam carried them through the centuries, and mixed their flavors into new language traditions and emerging interpretive frameworks. This dissertation will discuss the above 13th century Arabic poem featuring the flavors of the pre-Islamic Arabs' desert poetry, and a 15th century Persian commentary on the poem that brings specific interpretations into its reading of the poem. I intend to show how the Persian commentator brings an interpretive framework in his commentary, and even embodies the ideals of his own school of thought in the very form of his commentary. The commentary is 'Abd al-Rahman Jami's (817-898/1414-1492) *Lawami*': *Sharh-i Khamriyyat-i Faridiyya* (Sparks: Explanation of the *Khamriyya* of Ibn al-Farid), which is a commentary on, and includes within its own text, 'Umar ibn al-Farid's (576-632/1181-1235) *Khamriyya* (Wine Ode). Through the exercise of translating Jami's text for the purpose of this dissertation, and in reading other Islamic texts and their translations, I have come to the conclusion that the West's ability to produce accurate translations has depended in part upon its cumulative knowledge of the tradition of Islam. I intend to discuss the specific problems associated with the history of the translation of Islamic texts, and then present my own translation of a portion of Jami's *Lawami*'.

The *Lawami*' discusses a poem by Ibn al-Farid, who is arguably the most famous Islamic mystical poet who wrote in Arabic. His two best-known works are the *Nazm al-suluk* (Poem of the Way)—also known as the *Ta'iyya* (poem rhyming with the letter "t")—and the *Khamriyya*. His *Khamriyya* has been much discussed in the Islamic world, and has twenty-five surviving commentaries, among them Jami's *Lawami*'. Jami is one of the most famous Persian scholars of classical Islam, and is credited with texts in diverse fields such as Arabic grammar, Persian grammar, Hadith literature, theoretical Sufism, music, poetry, and the "riddle" (literary device).² His *Lawami*' follows the traditional mode of commentary: he cites a verse or two of the Arabic poem, reverts to Persian prose to explain some key elements in understanding the basic meaning, then goes on to interpret the verses.

Chapter One of this dissertation places Ibn al-Farid, the author of the *Khamriyya* (Wine Ode), in a historical backdrop that examines his life, the genre he was working in, and also examines how the poetic traditions of pre-Islamic Arabia were transformed into the poetry of the Islamic period. In Chapter Two I will discuss the history of wine drinking in Islamic thought based on its Qur'anic roots, and how Ibn al-Farid stands with one foot in the desert tradition of odes on wine and love, but with the other foot stands in the tradition of Islamic poetry on Divine Love. I will also discuss the philosophical implications of his imagery in context with Ibn 'Arabi, the famous Andalusian Sufi, whose teaching began a wave of thought in intellectual Islam that included Jami and has continued on until the present day. The students of Ibn 'Arabi studied the poetry of Ibn al-Farid, describing his poems in the language of Ibn 'Arabi's thought, and as a result,

² Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light*, p. 113.

forever linked the *Khamriyya* to the school of Ibn ‘Arabi. Therefore, whether or not we think Ibn al-Fârid and Ibn al-‘Arabi ever met or discussed poetry or Islamic thought together, Jami’s later commentary will be best understood in relationship to Ibn al-‘Arabi.

Individual schools of thought were not always clear to scholars in the West. Chapter Three examines the peculiarities of old-school Orientalism in coming to a gradually improved comprehension of all things Islamic. Past experience with translations has shown me that Edward Said, the father of post-colonial theory, was right. Old-school Orientalism—through its examination of the “other” and the inherent alienation the terms “us” and “them” carry—has propagated (and continues to propagate) misreadings of Sufi texts and Islamic texts in general. Another thing I have learned though, through examining the translations produced by the old-school Orientalists, is that their misunderstandings were not just attitudinal problems. Even a putatively airtight translation methodology could not provide an accurate translation if there existed a general dearth of knowledge. I realized, therefore, that the state of research at the time made these translations historically inevitable.

Chapter Four attempts to examine the issues of translation on several levels—in a general sense for the sake of my own views on translation, in a more particular sense for Islamic texts, and in an applied sense for my own translation of both Ibn al-Farid’s text and Jami’s text. For the purpose of this dissertation, I have translated and annotated the *Lawami’* (a text of about eighty-four pages), including some excerpts for the purpose of illustrating some of Jami’s points, and also a lengthy passage in Chapter Six.

The first issue discussed in Chapter Four is the question of Jâmî’s interpretive framework for translating Ibn al-Farid’s Arabic verses. How does he arrive at what he says is the meaning? Jami’s interpretation becomes clear in the translation of the commentary: he interprets the *Khamriyya* in the context of the school of Ibn ‘Arabi, and uses the specific terminology of Ibn ‘Arabi to elucidate the poem’s meaning. Some translation issues discussed in this chapter have to do with the qualities of Arabic and Persian language, and how they translate into English, and other issues have to do with the infusion of Arabic language into Persian by the 15th century. At this high point in classical learning in the writings of theoretical Sufism, Persian scholars were not only well-versed in the Arabic works that guided their discussions of religion and philosophy, but had also developed a tradition of writing that incorporated the Arabic that was originally deemed the highly technical language of learning. Their own language, then, came to be a natural, somewhat Arabicized Persian, which seemed to combine the intrinsic qualities of both languages, as the Persians saw it.

Specifically, it was thought to be the grammatically complex Arabic of the Qur’an and Hadith literature that gave rise to a highly developed religious/philosophical system of thought, and the more lilting, poetic sounding Persian that gave rise to a great tradition of poetry in Persian. As the saying goes, “Arabic is the language of God, and Persian is the language of the angels.” Ironically, Jami’s *Lawami’* offers an internal text that is poetry and written in Arabic, and expository language, now much Arabicized, written in Persian. The synthesis of opposites seems complete in Jâmî: an Arabic masterpiece in poetry and a Persian text, laden with technical precision.

In translating the two languages side by side in the same text, one way of preserving differences of style between them is to use abstract, Latinate words to translate Arabic, and concrete Anglo-saxon words to translate Persian. However, there are problems with this approach having to do with Jami's intellectual school, which I will discuss. Chapter Four also offers a kind of case-study on some translations of the *Khamriyya*. I will discuss some stylistic choices that have been made on the part of translators in order to preserve style, or to give the text a high sounding King James-like quality. The intentions of the translator seemed to bear greatly on the end product, with a broad range of style in the resulting translations, calling to mind the range of translations in Chapter Three.

In Chapter Five I will compare two commentaries on the *Khamriyya*—that of Jami (Persian) and that of al-Qaysari (Arabic)—both of whom belong to the school of Ibn 'Arabi. Jami's commentary, in particular, holds the special place of one who expressed the teachings of Ibn 'Arabi in the Persian language. I found most interesting about Jami's commentary—in contrast to al-Qaysari's—is that it insists on the more inconclusive expression of what the poet may have *possibly* meant. The tentative nature of his analysis of the poem suggests that an authoritative stance on the final meaning of a particular verse would be discouraged.

Chapter Six presents a lengthy passage from Jami's *Lawami'*, wherein Jami discusses the concept of the metaphor, and more specifically the metaphoric language of wine and Divine Love. The translation presented here is (to my knowledge) the first. Although excerpts from Jami's *Lawami'* exist (one short excerpt was translated in Chittick's "Studies in Mystical Literature"), a full translation of the *Lawami'* has never been done. What I have done for the purpose of this dissertation, but which is not included here—a full translation of the *Lawami'*—has been a separate and daunting task all on its own, and will hopefully be an addition to scholarship in Persian to English translation and Islamic scholarship in general.

This dissertation's more limited scope, however, intends to situate Jami in relation to Ibn al-Farid and the larger poetic and religious tradition, and establish some of his thoughts in relation to the long-standing pre-Islamic and Islamic trope of wine drinking. Considering the place that Jami holds in the history of Classical Sufism, and in the lands of Islam, which stretch all the way to China, it seems that his work has been largely neglected by modern scholarship. It is my hope that this project may move toward righting the imbalance in some small way. In presenting this particular portion of Jami's text, I also hope to suggest that the ideas developed by the school of Ibn 'Arabi, culminating in Jami, have something to say about the way human beings think about language, especially metaphoric language, and about the function of the imaginal faculty in generating poetry in the human mind.

Chapter One

Ibn al-Farid

His Life

If there was ever a man who generated controversy, it must be Ibn al-Farid. ‘Umar Ibn al-Farid (1182-1235 CE)³ has been described as both a Sufi and an erotic poet, a saint and a heretic, both inside and outside of the Islamic world. On the one hand, Orientalists have followed his case, trying to make sense of the way his poetry fits into the landscape of medieval Islamic thought. Is he a proponent of the school of Ibn ‘Arabi? Some have described him as such, seeing within his poetry references to concepts that Ibn ‘Arabi describes more explicitly in his prose works. Some say that since the two in fact never met, one cannot draw such conclusions about Ibn al-Farid, and so even though he may be considered a Sufi thinker, he should be considered altogether separately from Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought.⁴

To understand the milieu of Ibn al-Farid’s time, and the circumstances under which Arab poetry, considered among the trappings of the *belles lettres* of the day, was composed, transmitted and taught, one must imagine a system in which there are poetry circles (*halqah*) at which poetry was read and taught, official transmitters (*rāwī*) of verse, and certificates (*ijāzah*) given for having read and studied a given work, which the transmitter in turn could teach to others.⁵ In addition to occupying himself with these studies, Ibn al-Farid seems to have studied Qur’an and Hadith literature, as he was “preoccupied with religious and ethical questions.”⁶ In examining the history surrounding Ibn al-Farid in *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint*, Th. Emile Homerin points out that poetry during the period was often used as propaganda and for legitimating Islamic dynasties, and in spite of the fact that other Arab poets might have used their poetry in political ways, Ibn al-Farid did not seem to. “No political panegyric poetry has ever been ascribed...to Ibn al-Farid. References to rules, influential amirs, or historical events contemporary with him are conspicuous by their absence from his verse. This is

³ Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, p. 164.

⁴ Scattolin cites the association to be a common mistake: “...His terms should not be charged with the philosophical contents they have in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s philosophical Sufism” (Scattolin, *The Divan of Ibn al-Fârid*, p. 8).

⁵ Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint*, p. 22.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

not to say that the important persons and events of his times did not affect Ibn al-Farid, who must have been touched by the wars, pestilence, and famine that were all too frequent in his lifetime. Yet Ibn al-Farid's poetry was of a different type, one not concerned with the fleeting desires of dynasts."⁷

There were those in his time who would have called him a Sufi. Homerin presents stories of Ibn al-Farid in "Poet to Sufi" from *Kitāb al-Wahīd fī sulūk ahl al-tawhīd* ("The Unique Book on the Journey of the Folk of Unity") by 'Abd al-Ghaffar al-Qusi (d. 708/1309) wherein the *samā*⁸ was only good if Ibn al-Farid was there and experienced ecstasy. In another story a young man applies an adverse judgment against Ibn al-Farid because of women dancing and singing in front of him. The women turn out to be Ibn al-Farid's slave girls, so even though the scene seems scandalous, it is in fact lawful. Such stories seem the stuff of legend, and have been typical of those told in retrospect to serve a lesson to the young. The stories typically involve a highly revered person as a way to lend authority to the truth of what is conveyed by the story. The reader may question the authenticity of such stories. However, the existence of the story may tell us something about Ibn al-Farid's mythic status by the end of the 14th century. In fact, in *Kitāb al-Wahid* Al-Qusi employs Sufi terminology in a familiar sense to describe the goings-on of Ibn al-Farid's life, so it seems certain that he was perceived as a Sufi already in the 14th century.

Homerin points out that the stories may say more about the *effect of his poetry* on others after his death than how he comported himself in life.⁹ In other words, since his poems have evoked the ecstatic state in later generations, the virtues of the Sufi adept may have been assumed to be those of Ibn al-Farid, retroactively. These accounts of Ibn al-Farid directly link his spiritual state to his aesthetic sensibilities and so underscore an important feature of his posthumous spiritual reputation. Dance, music, and poetry often stir human emotions, but Sufis have maintained that these feelings may be intensified and transformed within the heart of the spiritual adept. From this perspective many began to regard Ibn al-Farid as an ecstatic poet. Having heard a verse or song, a person would fall into a trance, which later served as the source for his amazing verse and supernatural powers. This view undoubtedly contributed to Ibn al-Farid's religious popularity.

Ibn al-Farid's reputation as an enlightened and inspired mystic was elaborated further by commentaries on his poetry. These commentaries contain scant biographical data, yet the terms used to refer to Ibn al-Farid, and the interpretation of his verse, reveal a deepening reverence for the poet and his work.¹⁰ It may not be far-fetched as a turn of

⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

⁸ The *samā* ("audition") is a communal prayer practice whose focus is on the chanting of a *dhikr* ("remembrance") of any one of the Divine Names. It can be moving enough to result in an ecstatic experience for its participants.

⁹ Emphasis mine.

¹⁰ Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint*, p. 27.

logic in an Islamic society to revere a person according to what issues from the mouth or pen. As Homerin points out, the Sufi commentators elevated Ibn al-Farid to saintly status according to the same logic that told the early Muslims to revere Muhammad: “Just as the Qur’an had proclaimed itself to be Muhammad’s miracle and the proof of his prophecy, so too did these Sufi commentators point to Ibn al-Farid’s extraordinary verse as evidence of his deep mystical wisdom and his exalted saintly status; his poetry had become his miracle.”¹¹

During his lifetime and after, there were criticisms of Ibn al-Farid, specifically, incarnationism, references to erotic love, and wine. According to Homerin, Ibn al-Farid already had a reputation as an extremist Sufi and/or a learned man, so these rumors did not affect his popularity.

...these sporadic criticisms of Ibn al-Farid did not check his rise in popularity, and, in fact, they reinforced the popular Sufi view of the poet. By the beginning of the fourteenth century the notorious image of Ibn al-Farid as an extremist Sufi was visibly interacting with the two prominent conceptions of him as a learned poet and an inspired mystic. A few decades later, ‘Ali, Ibn al-Farid’s grandson, would attempt to reconcile these positions with his own personal interpretation based on family sources.¹²

‘Ali’s *tadhkirah* (hagiography), entitled *Dibajah*, was intended to quell the concerns, but the controversy continued, perhaps for other reasons that seem to suggest a rise and fall of public opinion towards Sufism in general. For example, Homerin suggests that some praised Ibn al-Farid as a poet because they were poets, some praised him as a Sufi because they were Sufis, and some called him a heretic because they had claimed for their life’s work the calling out of heretics. The charges were (interestingly) beliefs in “unification,” “monism,” “incarnationism,” “infidelity,” and being like an “epileptic woman with a talking jinni in her head.”¹³ The controversy of 1469-1470, which went on heatedly for seven months, was dominated by the voice of al-Biqā’i, who criticized those who claimed *ta’wil* (a more esoteric interpretation) to be the proper method for reading Ibn al-Farid. “If such interpretations were allowed, no one could be charged with infidelity, not even the Jews and Christians, and morality would be destroyed.”¹⁴ According to Homerin, after 1469 organized opposition to Ibn al-Farid evaporated, and in later centuries, further developments in people’s opinions had to do with the rise and fall of their opinion of Sufism in general.¹⁵ In recent scholarship, Carlo Nallino, Reynold

¹¹ Ibid., p. 28.

¹² Ibid., p. 32.

¹³ Ibid., p. 64. The idea of a jinni in one’s head suggests demonic possession.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 75.

Nicholson, Muhammad Hilmi and lately Homerin himself, are notable for their contributions in making Ibn al-Farid better known in the West, and even though some scholars take more literary approaches to his poetry, Ibn al-Farid has consistently held onto the image of a Sufi poet.

In summing up Ibn al-Farid's popular influence, Homerin looks at the contemporary novelist Naguib Mahfouz's *The Thief and the Dogs* and cites influence of the wine ode, finding an actual verse from Ibn al-Farid in the novel. "From his twentieth-century perspective Mahfouz clearly does not view Ibn al-Farid's poems as the inspired oracles of an ecstatic saint but, rather, as profound descriptions of humanity's existential state."¹⁶ Homerin's conclusion is most probably the correct one: in the seven centuries between Ibn al-Farid's life and the present day, we must perhaps read the life of a human being as we might read a poem. In short, no matter how carefully the reading is done, we will arrive at more than one meaning:

[W]e have come full circle—from Ibn al-Farid the poet to the saint and back again. Like earlier admirers of the poet, whether commentators, grandson, or later opponents and devotees, Mahfouz has read Ibn al-Farid's verse in light of his own personal concerns. These varied contextual readings of Ibn al-Farid—as a poet, Sufi, and saint—have led his many interpreters to find new meanings that the original poet and his verse could have contained only *in potentia*. Such rereadings and reinterpretations of poetry, its constant application to changing needs and circumstance, determine its lasting quality and continued relevance. Thus, late in the twentieth century this thirteenth-century Muslim persists both through the power of his poetry and the belief in his sanctity.¹⁷

No doubt the poetic imagination, Sufi or not, is nurtured by the cumulative tradition and metaphors of previous poets; Sufi commentators find the spark of the ecstatic experience in Ibn al-Farid's poetry, and Naguib Mahfouz's novel draws on the power of Ibn al-Farid's imagery.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 96-97.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Pre-Islamic Arabia

To understand the cumulative tradition that Ibn al-Farid inherited, and the seeds of his own inspiration which helped to inspire seven centuries of poets, Sufis and popular culture, we look to Pre-Islamic Arabia's culture of poetry, which produced a wealth of oral tradition, amidst the nomadic desert ancestors. The pre-Islamic era is often referred to as the "Age of Ignorance" (*jahilīyya*) and said to be characterized by customs and habits that were self-serving and lacking in moral grounding. The time after the revelation of the Qur'an (7th century), by contrast, is thought to be an establishment of order, and a triumph of reason over bohemian pursuits. However, there is a subtle point that should be made in order to help us understand the virtues of the desert Arabs. As Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921) pointed out, the categories of "ignorance" vs. "knowledge" may not be the most accurate set of categories to identify how early Muslims thought of the contrast.¹⁸ Rather, since *jahīl* denotes "wild" as opposed to *halīm*, which denotes "gentle" or "mild," it may be more accurate to describe the era as the age of "wildness" or "barbarism."

Goldziher refers to examples from Arab desert poetry to illustrate his point:

The wild man amongst us is ferocious (*jāhil*) in the defence of his guest;
The ferocious man is mild (*halīm*) when insulted by him (the guest).¹⁹

In this context, *jāhil* (wildness) becomes a virtue, but what is most clear is that it is definitely not denoting "ignorance." Moreover, the general sense of the difference in Arab literary periods augments the wild versus mild categories. For example, in defining the difference between the poets of the *Jāhiliyya* period (pre-Islamic) and the '*Udhri* poets (Islamic), there is a sense that the former were barbaric and impatient in their amorous pursuits, while the latter were honorable and persevering: "Whereas the poet of the *Djāhiliyya* ... abandons a futile love affair of the past, the '*udhrī* poet perseveres in the face of hopelessness and despair. His love is preordained by fate and transcends death."²⁰ In fact, in later poetry, the stories of these poets emerge as legendary, and their characters honored, among them the famous (fictional) character of Majnun.²¹ Leading up to and including medieval Islam, the tales of the '*Udhri* poets are imbued with elements

¹⁸ Corrigan, ed. "Scripture and Tradition" from *Readings in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, p. 50.

¹⁹ Qtd. in Corrigan, ed. *Readings in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, p. 53, from *Muslim Studies, Vol. 1*, translated by C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern.

²⁰ Jacobi, Renate, "'Udhri,'" *Encyclopedia of Islam: New Edition* (Leiden Brill 1998), p. 775.

²¹ Layla and Majnūn are among the legendary lovers who strive for union. Some versions of their story portray them as finally achieving union in this world, while others portray them as achieving union in the next world.

that reflect intellectual trends in Islamic thought.²² For example, later, the tale of Leyla and Majnun is seen as an allegory for Divine Love, a most tender example of “mildness” in love, in contrast to the “wildness” of the poets of the *Jahiliyya*.

In context with the shift in the vision of love from the *Jahiliyya* to the *‘Udhri* is also the image of wine-drinking. In pre-Islamic Arabia, winedinking was a common trope for poetry. “Descriptions of wine and banquets are already found in pre-Islamic poetry...[and]... connections between the early *khamriyyât* poets and the court and town of Hîra—an ancient centre for the wine trade—can often be established....”²³ The poetry of the pre-Islamic era is clearly to be taken literally, as a celebration of a feast. Only later is the feast seen as an allegory for the feast hosted by the Divine, as is seen in the commentaries on Ibn al-Fârid’s *Khamriyya*. “In the ancient Arabic *qasida*, banquet scenes are mainly to be found in two places: in the self-praise...part in which poets...boast about having taken part in...and in the description of the beloved, where the...comparison of her saliva with wine often results in a detailed wine scene description....”²⁴ So because the poet would have been either praising his benefactor in relation to a feast, (and therefore praising himself for his connection to royalty) or euphemistically describing lovemaking (assumed to be in context with illicit liaison court poetry), the *qasida* seems to convey the general attitude of amoral thought of as the hallmark of the era, and is seen as particularly ego-centric. In the same way that the attitudes shift from barbarism to mildness, love shifts from hopelessness to hope, banquets shift from an opulent feast to the Divine Feast, the *qasida* embodies the spirit of pre-Islamic times—a celebration of self and self-indulgence—before it shifts to anything else.

In regard to poetic form, the *qasida* is a long poem that knits together on a single rhyme. In its original, basic form: “The ode (*qasîda*) is a poem seldom longer than 120 lines, composed in one of several possible meters, with a single end rhyme that remains the same throughout the poem. Its most distinctive feature is its division into three major thematic movements: the *nasîb* or remembrance of the beloved, the journey, and the boast.”²⁵ Or, in an expanded understanding of the same stereotypical form, there are five features: “...an ‘amatory prelude’: the expression of a sense of longing and loss when the former encampment where the hero and his beloved had met is discovered; boasting about amatory exploits; doting description of one’s riding beast, whether horse or camel; praise of one’s patron and derision of his enemies; and, finally, a tour de force description of something....”²⁶

²² Ibid.

²³ Schoeler, G. “*khamriyya*,” *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, p. 433.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Sells, Michael, *Desert Tracings*, p. 4.

²⁶ From “Scripture and Tradition,” *Readings in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. John Corrigan, p. 46.

Many's the fair veiled lady, whose tent few would think of seeking,
I've enjoyed sporting with, and not in a hurry either,
slipping past packs of watchmen to reach her, with a whole tribe
hankering after my blood, eager every man-jack to slay me,
what time the Pleiades showed themselves broadly in heaven
glittering like the folds of a woman's bejeweled scarf.²⁷

²⁷ Qtd. in *Readings in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. John Corrigan, p. 48, From "Mu'allaqa of Imr Al-Qais," in A. J. Arberry, *The Seven Odes: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature*.

Poetic Shifts

The poetry of the Pre-Islamic period continued its already-established genres in the form of bacchic poetry, and especially in the poetry of Abu Nuwas.²⁸ The year 622 CE, however, marked a revolution of sorts in Arab thought and traditions. This was the year the early Muslim community moved to the city of Yathrib (Medina) and began a different kind of worldview, in which the rule of the desert was no longer sufficient: the amorous odes of the desert retreated, and the poesy of the Qur'an became central. "The ten years in which the Prophet lived in Medina was a period of consolidation. By the time of his death, Mecca had surrendered to the Muslims without bloodshed—"poetry" had won another battle—and all of Arabia had embraced the new religion."²⁹ The Islamic tradition began with recitation, very much like the poetry of the day, and a system of transmission that resembled the oral tradition Arabs were already familiar with. The Arabic word *qur'ân*, which means "recitation," recalls the single-worded command given to Muhammad from God by way of the angel Gabriel: "*iqra*.'" It was a command to "recite."³⁰ The command for Muhammad to "recite" was in context with the eloquent poetry that was the established reputation of the Arabs. His response, "I cannot; I am not one of the reciters," was his admission that he did not have the tools of the poet: not the spring of inspiration that gives rise to creative lines of verse, or the ability to memorize the inspired verses of the poets of the past, or the ability to synthesize them into what is new and unique.

The Qur'an itself, though it now exists as a book that can be handled and read silently, was originally meant to be recited. In fact, the first written versions implied orality; there were no diacritical marks above and below the lines of script. The reciter used the written text only as a guide, having already learned the proper recitation at the foot of a master. Curiously enough, the absence of diacritical marks in these early editions of the text have given some modern scholars the idea of carving a new niche, clearly outside the tradition of Islam itself, in which one returns to the skeleton-text and re-interprets what remains when the oral tradition has been stripped away. To do so is to do what Muslims themselves have never done: ignore the process of the transmission of the text by early Muslim scholars.³¹

²⁸ According to Ewald Wagner, in "Abû Nuwâs" (*The Encyclopedia of Islam* 1960) "Abû Nuwâs is at his best in his songs on wine and pederasty. He is not only able to sing in ever fresh accents the delights of both, but also depicts with humorous realism his adventures in this field" p. 144.

²⁹ Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, p. xxii.

³⁰ Sometimes translated "Read."

³¹ See Patricia Crone, and others, for a "return to the text" approach that ignores the cumulative tradition of Islam.

Hadith, the body of literature that narrates the sayings and doings of Muhammad, was, like the Qur'an and the poetry of the desert, also an oral tradition. *Hadith* means "news," "a tale," "a story" or "report." All of these definitions imply orality. In fact, much of Islam's hadith literature was an oral tradition until it was recorded during the ninth century.³² Even then, scholars discouraged their students from consulting texts on Hadith: "...Strive eagerly to obtain traditions and get them from the men themselves, not from written records, lest they be affected by the disease of corruption of the text."³³ Women, incidentally, (most notably the youngest wife of Muhammad, Aiysha) were included in these chains of transmission, and hence called "men" in the science of religion.

Within the milieu of this world of transmission of texts was the difference between a "revealed" text and "inspired" text. This distinction is important because the Qur'an itself was always considered separate and distinct from the words of the poet. A useful place to begin to understand the worldview that defined the difference is *sûra* 26 of the Qur'an, which draws attention to the concept of poets who can mislead people, and whom the Qur'an calls 'the satans.'

Shall I tell you on whom the Satans come down?
They come down on every guilty imposter.
They give ear, but most of them are liars.
And the poets—the perverse follow them;
has thou not seen how they wander in every valley
and how they say that which they do not?³⁴

What appears at first to be harsh words for *all poets* may not actually be. The words of *sura* 26 address the idea that "revelation" is different than "inspiration" and the two should not be confused. Revelation in the context of Islam means specifically the words of God revealed to the Prophet through the angel Gabriel [*wahy*], namely the words of the *sura* just quoted. Inspiration, on the other hand [*ilhâm*], is understood to be that which arises from within the human heart, as in dreams and imagination, and is the domain of human poetry. Revelation is understood to be an "idea-word" that came upon Muhammad's heart, from a transcendent, divine source, namely God. According to Hadith, there is no new revelation after Muhammad.

The words of the *sura* calls to mind how, in Pre-Islamic Arabia, the strong oral tradition in poetry was greatly prized, and there were poets who looked for the aid of a muse-like creature, a *jinn*, for inspiration. It becomes hard to separate the influence of the muse from the workings of the poet's own creative imagination, yet the Qur'an asserts that its words are different from both of these. In short, it is not the product of a *jinn*-

³² William A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, p. 1.

³³ M. Houtsma, et al. "Hadith," *First Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. III, p. 194.

³⁴ Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Qur'an are taken from Arberry's *The Koran Interpreted*.

inspired poet. As many scholars have pointed out, the Qur'an is self-conscious of how it may be misperceived, and the words of *sura* 26 point to both the relationship between revelation and poetry, and the difference between them. "...It cannot be denied that the words of *sura* 26 point to an important truth, namely the strong tension between the words of revelation and the words of poetry."³⁵ In fact, Muhammad suffered the same criticisms that Ibn al-Farid did when his detractors called him a "woman with a talking jinni in her head."

The distinction between the words of the poets and the words of the Qur'an was important because the Qur'an was considered to be a miraculous appearance: a supreme example of "divine poetry" that surpassed the highly sophisticated Arab poetry of the time. Most importantly, it was a work of eloquence far beyond the capability of the man from whose mouth it issued forth. It was original, in that it gave the old stories that people were familiar with from the rich oral tradition new twists. For example, the familiar story of Moses pitted against Pharaoh, which is known in general to the Abrahamic tradition, is also in the oral tradition of the Arabs. It appears in the Qur'an and successive commentaries as an allegory for the struggle that takes place within the human heart, between the essential nature of the human being to do good and the ever-present inclination towards evil. The Moses/Pharaoh conflict is just one of the ways the Qur'an takes existing stories as food for provocative thought. It also suggests a metaphor, Moses representing the intellect and Pharaoh representing the soul in its tendency to incite evil acts, a battle of two greats over a "people" in the larger desert of the soul.

Ibn al-Farid employs a metaphor in a similar fashion, when he takes the familiar tropes of the desert poetry, and takes them far beyond what would normally be expected. For example, in the *Khamriyya*, Ibn al-Farid uses the familiar image of wine; he explains the special qualities of the vine, the fragrance of the wine, its dregs, the seal of its container, the tavern that is its source, and even the stain of the cup on one's hand, all the while citing the miracles that would occur by one's coming into contact with them alone, and not even the wine itself.

That seal, without the wine, had made them drunk.
Sprinkle a dead man's grave with drops of it,
His spirit would return, his body quicken.
If in the shadow of the wall where spreads
Its vine they laid a man, mortally sick,
Gone were his sickness; and one paralysed,
Brought near its tavern, would walk; the dumb would speak
Did he its savour recollect. Its fragrance,
If wafted through the East, even in the West,
Would free, for one berheumed, his sense of smell;
And he who stained his palm, clasping its cup,
Could never, star in hand, be lost by night.³⁶

³⁵ Schimmel, Annemarie. *As Through a Veil*, p. 13.

³⁶ From Martin Ling's translation of the *Khamriyya*.

Ibn al-Farid's description of the wine follows the *qasida* pattern of the time. First is the poet's taking a stand of opposition, either to those who would criticize their enjoyments, or a rebuttal of some kind to those who would begin their *qasida* by bemoaning the absence of a lover at an abandoned encampment, as the older poets had done. Then the poem's speaker voices satisfaction in indulgence, by describing the experience in great detail, in this case, the indulgence in wine: "...its appearance (comparisons with light, precious stones), its scent, its age and its effect on the drinkers. Much space is also taken by the description of the male or female cup-bearer who serves the wine, of the male or female singer who entertains the drinker, of the flowers with which the inn is decorated or the garden in which the banquet takes place."³⁷ Ibn al-Farid's following of the form of the *qasida*, in its extensive description of the wine, while employing that image wine as a metaphor for Divine Love, was a kind of syncretism that must have been pleasing to the ear for those familiar with the tradition. Another of Ibn al-Farid's translators from the 20th century, A.J. Arberry, who was himself well-acquainted with the poetic traditions of the pre-Islamic Arabs, imagines how Ibn al-Farid's poetry must have been received by his fellow Arabs: "...The listener...will surely have thrilled to recognize...[familiar images]...torn from their original contents..."³⁸

My spirit loved it, was made one with it,
 But not as bodies each in other merge.
 Wine without vine; Adam my father is.
 Vine without wine, vine mothereth it and me.³⁹

Listeners may also have been thrilled by another reference in the poem, taken from the context of the Qur'an. It is the story of God's creation of Adam and his wife from the dust of the ground mixed with water. In the Qur'an is a very important caveat of the story that we must imagine occurring after Adam's form is completed, but before the drama of human interaction takes place. God takes the seed of Adam in his hand and addresses it directly concerning its creation: *And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify concerning themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we testify' (Q 7:171).* It is this question "Am I not?" (*alastu*) that gives this verbal exchange its name: "The Covenant of Alast." It is the primordial covenant between God and all of Adam's descendents, when all of humankind acknowledges God as Lord. The story suggests that every human being, even before its creation, responded to God and spoke directly to God in the same way that, according to the mythic narrative, Adam and Eve spoke to God in the Garden. It is a 'time' so

³⁷ G. Schoeler, "khamriyya," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, p. 434.

³⁸ A. J. Arberry, *The Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Fârid*, p. 11.

³⁹ From Martin Lings's translation of the *Khamriyya*.

removed from our experience in the world that we can no longer remember it. The basic human problem, therefore, according to Islam, is forgetfulness, and the solution is to remember.

The classic form of the *qasida*, the ode of the desert, also lends itself to the Qur'anic theme of remembering, however, the memory is of a former lover, beautiful and passionate. The traveler in the desert searches out the lover, and when the deserted campsite comes into view, which is evidence of the now-absent lover, memories flood back to the speaker of the poem. This is the erotic poetry that the Arabs are famous for. Those who merge this erotic poetry with the idea of Divine Love are creating a metaphor that both is and is more than what is described.

There is something about the amorous ode, with its theme of remembrance, that resonates with the mythic narrative of the Covenant of Alast from the Qur'an, so that Ibn al-Farid's *Khamriyya*, or "Wine Ode" can itself become a new twist on both the desert ode and the Qur'anic story, in which God addresses the seed of Adam: "And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify concerning themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we testify.'" (Q 7:172) According to Annemarie Schimmel, the *Khamriyya* is the "first full description in Arabic of the wine of love, which was offered to the souls on the day of the Covenant." Although it is indeed a full description, it should be noted that Ibn al-Farid's was not the first. He was one of many authors who picked up on the resonance between the Qur'anic story and the themes of Arab poetry. The theme is picked up on and expanded in later poetry, making Alast not only the story of the sharing of a miraculous wine, but also a banquet, in which God shares his bounty. In the later tradition, the Persians call the covenant "The Banquet of Alast."⁴⁰

Homerin, in his *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint* suggests that the first lines of the *Khamriyya* may even be referring to a specific Sufi ritual practice: "...Several early Sufi authorities asserted that *dhikr* ("remembrance") properly performed, returns the mystic to the day of the primordial covenant, and Ibn al-Farid may allude to such a belief in the opening verse of his *al-Khamrīyah*...."⁴¹

We drank wine in the remembrance of the Beloved;
We were drunk with it before the vine was created.⁴²

⁴⁰ Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil*, p. 44. Schimmel's reference to Ibn al-Farid's *Khamriyya* as being "the first full description in Arabic on the wine of love" is not entirely correct, but can be seen as representing the state of research at the time, and serves as an example of what will become clear as an issue in translation: the presenting of texts from a culture and worldview that has yet to be explored.

⁴¹ Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint*, pp. 10-11.

⁴² *Khamriyya*, p. 130, from my translation.

He cites medieval commentators as making these ‘intriguing interpretations’ concerning *dhikr*. “...These commentators have read the *al-Khamrīyah* as an account of the spiritual effects resulting from the controlled repetition of the first portion of the Muslim profession of faith...”⁴³ The first part of the profession of faith is *La ilaha ila-llah* (There is no god but God). It is the statement that declares the oneness of God, and the two corollaries to the oneness: there is no existence outside of God, and God is in all that exists. Even today it is a common Sufi practice to repeat this statement of faith in communion, which often induces a trance-state for those involved. Even those who have had more secular interests have found such suggestions intriguing. So, as Ibn al-Farid hearkens back in his *Khamriyya*, recalling the sweet experience of union, his hearkening is back to that primordial wine of the Covenant that symbolizes unity with God and the sweet consciousness of that unity, which is the basic origin of human reality. In sum, mythic narrative in the Qur’an (the story of the Covenant of Alast) gives rise to visionary experience, which gives rise to poetry, which aids *dhikr*, which gives rise to more visionary experience.

When Jāmi explains the first line of the *Khamriyya*, he refers to this very idea, saying that the communal experience of the “we” is the key to understanding what Ibn al-Farid might have been talking about.

Hence, it may be that in “we drank” and “we became drunk” using the pronoun that denotes more than one speaker was to allude to the mentioned all-comprehensiveness without taking into account those who share in this drinking and drunkenness. It may also be that it was to take into account this sharing, for the entities and spirits of the perfect human beings, the Solitaries, and the Poles⁴⁴ share and participate with the poet in the drinking and drunkenness of this wine.

I am not alone in worshipping wine because of your love.

Who—You tell me Yourself—has been delivered from this wine?

On the day I took this wine in hand,

there were the wine-worshipping comrades of Alast!⁴⁵

What is most intriguing about the writings of all poets who have been deemed “mystical” is that thing that provides the richest reservoir of poetic inspiration: the

⁴³ Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ The “Solitary” (*fard*) is a perfect human being standing at the rank of a “Pole,” who performs the function of ruling the cosmos, yet the Solitary does not come under the rule of the Pole. Ibn ‘Arabi draws a distinction in levels of awareness between most people, and those who are a Muhammadan Pole or a Solitary. For a discussion on this awareness, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 377.

⁴⁵ *Lawami*, Trans. DuBois, p. 135.

mystical experience itself, understood to be given as a gift from God, which provides inspiration for a poet in terms of appropriate metaphors. For example, one may wonder if Ibn al-Farid did not witness, during ecstasy or in a dream-state, a scene wherein lovers shared a wine, and it came to him that the wine stood for the Covenant. One can only speculate on such things.⁴⁶ Jami himself seems to be suggesting the vision of a communal experience in his poetry that serves as commentary on Ibn al-Farid's verses. The mystical experience itself is inexplicable, as any visionary will attest. The person who has not experienced a mystical state, for example, is like someone who has never tasted an apple. "What does an apple taste like?" he asks. The one who knows can try to explain, yet can never do so adequately. Words cannot describe a taste. This is why in Arabic, the word for mystical experience is often "tasting" [*dhawq*]. How appropriate, then, is the image of wine, or a banquet, where taste and sensory experiences abound. The following examples are drawn from various writers of theoretical Sufism in the centuries after the advent of Islam but before Ibn al-Farid, and illustrate the imagery of wine and banquets that was common in describing the Sufi's experience of the Divine:

I am intoxicated by you.
 I am free from the draught and goblet.
 I am your bird. I am free of the grain and the snare.
 You are what I seek in the Kaaba and the idol-temple.
 Otherwise, I am free of both these states.⁴⁷

The lover's food is his image of the Beloved
 not Union itself. One strand of her hair
 is too heavy for him—but he himself
 is no more than a spoonful for her.⁴⁸

If you have not tasted the desire that [true] human beings have tasted,
 Then by God, oh empty husk, do not defame us!⁴⁹

The most notable feature of the writings of theoretical Sufism, as opposed to the writings of dogmatic theology or philosophy, has been its ability to infuse religiosity—

⁴⁶ Nicholson has no doubt about the poetry being a direct result of the mystical experience; he speculates only whether it was written during a state of ecstasy, or afterwards, when sobriety had returned.

⁴⁷ Khwaja 'Abdullah Ansari (d. 481/1088), Trans. Thackston, W., from *Intimate Conversations*, p. 189.

⁴⁸ Ahmad Ghazali (d. 520/1126), from *Sawânih*, Trans. Wilson & Pourjavady, in *The Drunken Universe*, p. 86.

⁴⁹ Abu Madyan (d. 594/1197), from "The Qasîda in Nûn," Trans. Cornell, Vincent, in *The Way of Abû Madyan*, p. 158.

which is sometimes dry abstract concepts, like sticks on the ground—with a fire that catches them unawares. The sticks come to life, crackling and snapping, and they are illuminated, providing a light for others to see by. The experiences of Islamic theologians-turned-Sufi in the history of Islam tell us that they saw their experience with Sufism this way, and oftentimes when they expressed their experiences in words, poetry was the result. Such language, poetic as it is, provides a kind of metaphor for the kind of knowledge that Sufis deem most useful in verification of what is otherwise “received knowledge”: *ilm yaqîn* (“certain knowledge”). It is one thing, they say, to hear about fire, another thing to see fire, and quite another to be thrown into it. When one is thrown into it, there is no question that one will know what fire is. What is this knowledge, and how does one come to acquire it? It is direct knowledge of God that God himself provides, and it is called by many names: unveiling (*kashf*), in which God pulls aside the veils between the human being and Himself⁵⁰; tasting (*dhawq*), in which the human being “tastes” something of the Divine; witnessing (*shuhûd*), in which he witnesses something for himself; and insight (*basîr*), in which his inner sight is piercing.

It is referred to as knowledge that is “unveiled” when God pulls the veils aside one by one “tasted” when God causes one to experience something that is indescribable to another, “witnessed” when God displays proof of what is otherwise intangible, and finally, it is knowledge that is seen in the mind’s eye, when God himself makes things clear. The primary word for the direct knowledge revealed by God is derived from the same root as the first *sura* (chapter) of the Qur’an: that which opens (*fâtiha*). The word is *futûh* and it means “the act of opening,” as in God’s act of opening up divine knowledge to the human being. It is this word that Ibn al-‘Arabi uses for the title of his most famous work, based on knowledge of this kind, “opened” to him while he was circumambulating the Kaaba: *al-Futûhât al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Openings). The opening to divine knowledge beyond the received text of the Qur’an, (which can itself be called an opening, since it was originally revealed to Muhammad) is different from that knowledge that can be acquired through rational inquiry; it is a gift that is given by God after a person has struggled to purify his/her own soul by discipline on the spiritual path. When an opening occurs, there is an impulse to express, to describe, or to share it. Sometimes the resulting expression is prose, and sometimes it is poetry. It almost always begins with an image. The most effective kind of expression is through metaphor, which lends itself to qualitative expression, however impossible it may be to express in full.

There is a paradox in the speech of these poets, you say. How does one express what is inexpressible? One cannot. Well then, why does one even try? One longs to. The answer lies again in the metaphor of food and tasting. Once one has tasted good food, the impulse to describe the qualities of the food to a willing listener is hard to contain—and one always wants the food again. More than one poet has described the feeling: a thirst

⁵⁰ The hadith concerning God’s unveiling to the human being is found in Ibn ‘Arabi’s works, as quoted in Chittick’s *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, and has different versions: “God has seventy”—or “seventy thousand”—“veils of light and darkness; were they to be removed, the Glories of His Face would burn away everything perceived by the sight of His creatures,” p. 401, n. 19.

that never dies. Schimmel describes this yearning: “It is this thirst that made the poets create. Words die when union has finally been achieved, but the never-ending yearning for the beloved made talkative those who were well aware that mystical experience cannot properly be communicated through words.”⁵¹ Rumi, of the generation following Ibn al-Farid, speaks of this futility of words:

My poetry is like Egyptian bread: Night passes, and you cannot eat it.
Eat it while it is fresh, before the dust settles on it!
Its place is in the tropics of the awareness—it dies in this world because of
the cold.
Like a fish, it flops a moment on dry ground. A while later you see it lifeless.
If you eat it imagining it to be fresh, you will have to paint many fantastic
images.
You will devour your own imagination, not these ancient words...⁵²

Not only do the words seem insufficient once they are uttered, but there is also the more basic problem wherein the heart is full and the mouth is unable to speak. The experience is a universal one. Dante, born several decades after the death of Ibn al-Farid, describes in a letter to Can Grande that precedes his *Divine Comedy* the mystical experience of beauty or truth that words fail to express. As Dante explains, he who has the experience “neither knows how nor is able to relate” his experience because, as he says “we see many things with the intellect for which there are no verbal signs.” The phenomenon is one he also recognizes in the way Plato uses metaphors. According to Dante, Plato “saw many things by the light of the intellect which he was unable to express in the appropriate words.”⁵³

In the Islamic tradition’s history of discussion of the visionary experience, it is an “opening” that often inspires a poet to write—an opening to Divine knowledge. But no matter what one sees, and no matter how adept any writing is, it cannot express what the Sufi experiences when he sees God. Human speech, according to Jalaladin Rumi, can only express the Divine in an extremely limited way. “Meaning in verse can only be haphazard, for poetry is like a sling—it is not completely under control.”⁵⁴ Of course whatever control there is of it, belongs to God, Rumi would say. Inspiration [*ilhâm*] is the source of the genius. In other words, however apt the metaphors are in Rumi’s poetry, they are from God, he says. “As far as he [Rumi] is concerned, his poetry was given to him by God. In other words, he does not manufacture or devise his imagery, but he receives it from the World of Imagination, within which the Beloved manifests Himself

⁵¹ Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil*, p. 79.

⁵² From *The Divan of Rumi*, Trans. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p. 271.

⁵³ Dante Alighieri, “The Letter to Can Grande,” p. 110.

⁵⁴ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, p. 276.

to lovers in ‘imaginal’ forms.”⁵⁵ Rumi’s explanation is not unusual in the context of Sufi thought in general.

The imaginal form gives birth to the idea of a metaphor being a “bridge” from the visible world to the unseen world, or rather, from the unseen world to the visible. “When we ask about the nature of wine, we must remember that for the Sufi poets, the world and everything within it are loci of theophany for the Divine Reality. But by the very nature of things, certain loci display that Reality more clearly than others. Among its more direct manifestations are ‘wine, women and song’. Each is an image and symbol of higher realities, and eventually of the Highest Reality. Each can be a bridge from the visible world to the Unseen.”⁵⁶ Jami makes the point that reality itself shows in forms that are metaphorical compared to The Real (*al-Haqq*), and so, metaphor serves an important role in Sufi thought, as it expresses the idea that corporeal reality is something to be seen beyond; it is merely a likeness of what is truly real:

Many saw the faces of the fine beauties,
and fell into burning and melting from the brand of love.
They became the intimate of the mysteries and sat with the Folk of Tasting,
drinking the wine of reality from the cup of metaphor.⁵⁷

For those who “sit with the Folk of Tasting,” Jami says, to speak in metaphor is to speak of an understanding that metaphor has a natural function for human beings, in that we are accustomed to comprehending things through our five senses, and then imagining possible realities based on what we have seen or understood in a tactile manner. He even goes so far as to say that if a human being attempted understanding something without employing the senses, he would more than likely not have the capacity to comprehend at all. He concludes that since God is the author of being as it stands, it would be ontologically cruel, in the final scheme of things, for Him to expect human beings to be able to see clearly when He lifts the veils between Him and themselves; they are incapable of sight without the veils of metaphor:

The point of expressing the meanings in the clothing of forms can be several things. (1) One is that at the beginning, human beings arrive at intelligible objects from sensory ones and at universals from particulars by means of applying the tools of sense perception and imagination. Hence, the perception of meanings other than in the midst of forms is not customary for their souls or familiar to their natures. If they should do otherwise, it is

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 278.

⁵⁶ Chittick, “Jami on Divine Love and the Image of Wine,” in *Studies in Mystical Literature*,” pp. 195-196.

⁵⁷ Jâmi, *Lawami*’, trans. DuBois, p. 117.

possible that their understanding will not be strong enough to reach it and they will not have the capacity to perceive it.

Even though you're not aiming for cruelty
and have no wish to torment the heart,
Don't come toward your lover without a veil,
for he won't have the capacity if you lift it.⁵⁸

To Jami, there seems also to be a general usefulness in metaphor, since he says only some types of people are inclined toward "meanings without forms." Intellectualized language is in the capacity of some but not others, while metaphorical language, because it employs images that are a shared sensory experience among all human beings, can be used to describe ideas so that all can understand:

(2) Also, only the Folk of Meaning can profit from the expression of the meanings without the clothing of forms. But, when they are expressed in the clothing of forms, the benefit will be general and the usefulness complete.

It is meaning that steals the heart as well as the religion,
it is meaning that increases love as well as hate.
But, it is disclosed in the clothing of form
so that the eyes of the form-seer will also profit.⁵⁹

According to Jami, metaphor also pulls human beings from the world of forms to the world of meanings, making the person's ability to comprehend sharper, and creating in them the desire to live apart from the world of form, and in the world of meanings:

It often happens that a form-worshiper, having heard certain meanings expressed in the clothing of form, begins to have an inclination. The beauty of meaning casts a ray from behind the curtain of form, making the person's understanding keen and his secret heart subtle: he flees from the form and clings to the meaning.

Many have suffered in vain in traveling
until their feet step on the treasure in the path.
Many have split open mountains aiming for stone
until the mine of jewels makes them into jewelers.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 127.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 127-128.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 128.

The other function of metaphor, according to Jami, is to limit access to a world of expression that is second-nature to the Folk of Tasting, who dwell in the world of meanings, but whose language is uncomfortable or unpalatable to those who live in the world of form. So by using a language that is conventional and acceptable to all, those who are within the circle can discuss at ease that which would normally be only whispered in secret:

It is also the case that not everyone is a confidante of the secrets of reality, or aware of the states of the Folk of the Path. Therefore, to conceal those secrets and hide those states, they borrow the terms and expressions that are in common use and well-known for metaphorical purposes in the conversations of the Folk of Form so that the beauty of those meanings remain far from the sight of strangers, and concealed from the gaze of the non-confidantes.

Last night that moon combed the curls of her locks,
and placed over her face her amber-fragrant tresses.
With this trick she hid her comely face,
so that whoever is not a confidante would not recognize her.⁶¹

Next Jami asserts that the language of metaphor and allusion can be somehow more powerful than the verses of the Qur'an. This point is related to his first, that human beings find understanding through sensory experience, and so, a description of a sensory experience can be powerful, too. It may be that certain Qur'anic verse relate meanings without the "clothing of form" and so require a different level of understanding, which is beyond the capacity of some listeners, whereas the language of poetry and metaphor does not ask this level of understanding of its listeners. It approaches its listener and reveals itself, according to Jami, sometimes with a surprising result:

It is also the case that the tastings and ecstatic findings of the Lords of Love, and the secret sciences of the possessors of gnosis, when mentioned in the language of allusion, have a greater effect on the souls of the listeners than if they were clearly expressed. Consequently, the state of many of this group will not change when they listen to the verses of the Qur'an and the words of the Furqan,⁶² but after listening to one or more couplets in Arabic or Persian containing a description of the tresses and the moles of beautiful women, or the coquetry and winking of loved ones, or the mention of wine, taverns, goblets, and cups, their state changes and they fall into turmoil.

When she with a fairy-like face divulges her beauty,

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² "The discernment," usually the Qur'an.

the lover's mind is at ease from her blandishments.
When she secretly glances with coquetry and winks,
she changes the state of the hapless lover.⁶³

Verses like these showcase the strength of metaphors of wine and love, and so Jâmi's point is made clear: metaphor is useful because (1) the human being's entrance to comprehension is naturally by way of the five senses, (2) it is a universally understood language, as opposed to intellectualized language, (3) it pulls the human being toward the world of meanings, (4) those who are not inclined to the world of meaning (for example, the 'Folk of Form') will not be privy to the conversations of those who are, and (5) it can be more powerful in affecting the listener than the Qur'an itself.

⁶³ Jami, *Lawami'*, pp. 128-129.

Chapter Two

The Language of Ibn al-Farid

The Language of Wine and Love

Ibn al-Farid's language of metaphor in the *Khamriyya* is, according to Jami, a re-interpretation of the same themes used conventionally by the "Folk of Form." Though the imagery of wine was commonly used by poets of the pre-Islamic era, Ibn al-Farid would have wanted his readers to drink "the wine of reality from the cup of metaphor" (Jami), or to look for the river of wine of paradise in the next world, as wine was prohibited in the context of Islam. However, his imagery is also Qur'anically based, as will be discussed. We will see that his metaphor served Sufi thought well, since it promoted wine-drinking as a more universal motif and an apt analogy for the human being's partaking in the divine. "The motifs of wine poetry (like those of love poetry) undergo a new interpretation in the poetry of the mystics. With them, wine becomes a symbol of divine love and drunkenness becomes mystical ecstasy."⁶⁴ In fact, Ibn al-Farid's *Khamriyya*'s is called 'the most famous example' of this imagery.

The language of wine and Divine Love together took some time to develop in the Islamic context. It is the Qur'an that illustrates the attitudes toward wine in early Islam, and also provides the root of its aptness for use in describing love of God. Wine drinking in the pre-Islamic era was not prohibited, and with the advent of Islam comes a gradual introduction of the prohibition on wine. Several Qur'anic verses illustrate the position that the revelation prompted Muhammad to take with his community. One speaks to the relative benefit and loss that comes with certain acts that had been familiar to the community: wine and gambling. "They will ask thee concerning wine and gambling. Answer, in both there is great sin and also some things of use unto men: but their sinfulness is greater than their use." (Q 2:216) The worshipper's focus on God seems to be the intention behind the prohibition in another Qur'anic verse, as it emphasizes self-possession and awareness when performing the ritual prayer. "O true believers! come not to prayers when ye are drunk, until ye understand what ye say." (Q 4:46) Another verse seems to indicate that wine drinking, gambling, idol worship and fortune-telling were among the habits of the Arabs that were considered items to be addressed in terms of reform. "O true believers! Surely wine, gambling, stone pillars and divining arrows are an abomination, of the work of Satan; therefore avoid them that ye may prosper." (Q 5:92)

⁶⁴ Schoeler, G. "khamriyya," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, p. 434.

In Hadith literature—the compilation of reports on the sayings and doings of Muhammad transmitted by the Companions—is related the narrative of the Prophet’s Night Journey (*mi’râj*), in which Muhammad is taken by the angel Gabriel up through the seven heavens, and—among other things—is shown four rivers and three containers of drink. Muhammad follows Gabriel’s lead. “There ran four rivers, two were hidden and two were visible, I asked, ‘What are these two kinds of rivers, O Gabriel?’ He replied, ‘As for the hidden rivers, they are two rivers in Paradise and the visible rivers are the Nile and the Euphrates.’ Then Al-Bait-ul-Ma’mur⁶⁵ was shown to me, and a container full of wine, and another full of milk, and a third full of honey were brought to me. I took the milk. Gabriel remarked, ‘This is the Islamic religion which you and your followers are following.’”⁶⁶ The hadith can be seen as descriptive of temporal events, prescriptions for his community to come, or a combination of both. In other parts of the *mi’raj* narrative Muhammad performs the ritual prayer with all the prophets from the beginning of time until the present. He is also given instruction by God to fix the times of prayer to five times per day for the new Muslim community. The story of the *mi’raj* is to be taken literally, for, according to scholars, when Muhammad returns to his own bed, it is ‘still warm’ according to the hadith. So the ascent, descent, and all events in between are taken to have happened in an instant, or rather, they are taken to have happened in another mode of reality. And so, there is much discussion on the significance of the ‘rivers’ and the containers of ‘drink.’

For one thing, they are reminiscent of the four rivers spoken of in the Hebrew scripture (Genesis 2:10) that flow from the idyllic Garden of Eden. However, the Qur’an also mentions rivers, and clarifies their significance—as part of the recompense for those destined for Paradise:

Give thou good tidings to those who believe
and do deeds of righteousness, that for them
await gardens underneath which rivers flow. (Q 2:23)

What, is he who is upon a clear sign
from his Lord like unto such a one
unto whom his evil deeds have been
deked out fair, and they have followed
their caprices?
This is the similitude of Paradise
which the godfearing have been promised:
therein are rivers of water unstaling,
rivers of milk unchanging in flavour,
and rivers of wine—a delight
to the drinkers,
rivers, too, of honey purified;

⁶⁵ “the house of the commanded”

⁶⁶ Hadith, Bukhari 58:227.

and therein for them is every fruit,
and forgiveness from their Lord—
Are they as he who dwells forever
in the Fire, such as are given to
drink boiling water, that tears their
bowels asunder? (Q 47:15-17)

According to these verses, those who do deeds of ‘righteousness’ and who are ‘godfearing’ (or ‘god-wary’) are promised a Paradise with rivers of ever-fresh water, ever-delicious milk, *rivers of wine—a delight to the drinkers*, and pure honey, and every kind of fruit. Among those things promised to the believer, only one is prohibited in this world, and that is wine. And so, part of the contract for the believer is to *not drink* wine in this world, so that he may be given the wine of the next world.

In another place where wine is mentioned in the Qur’an, it is part of the dream that Joseph interprets for one of his prisonmates.

And there entered the prison with him
two youths. Said one of them, ‘I dreamed
that I was pressing grapes.’ Said the other,
‘I dreamed that I was carrying on my head
bread, that birds were eating of. Tell us
its interpretation; we see that thou art
of the good-doers.’ (Q 12:36)

Fellow-prisoners, as for one of you, he shall
pour wine for his lord; as for the other,
he shall be crucified, and birds will eat
of his head. The matter is decided
whereon you enquire.’ (Q 12:41)

Wine is also mentioned in another sequence of dream interpretation, in which the king sees seven fat cows and seven lean, Joseph responds that there will be seven years of plenty and seven years of want, then a year of plenty will come after:

‘...Then thereafter there shall come a year
wherein the people will be succoured
and press in season.’ (Q 12:49)

Dream interpretation in Islam depends, in part, on the cultural significance of the imagery in the dream, and also on the subject who is dreaming. In the case of Joseph’s dream interpretation, it is understood that the *Shariah* (Divine Law) at the time did not prohibit wine, and so here wine clearly indicates good fortune and bounty.

The most significant mention of wine in the Qur’an, in regard to Ibn al-Farid and Jami, is the one that speaks cryptically of ‘a wine sealed whose seal is musk’:

Surely the pious shall be in bliss,
upon couches gazing;
thou knowest in their faces the radiancy of bliss
as they are given to drink of a wine sealed
whose seal is musk—so after that [wine] let the strivers strive. (Q 83:20-25)

These verses mention the recompense, again, and a reward of wine for the pious—but the verse also bears great resemblance to the very idea that appears in Ibn al-Farid's *Khamriyya*: a 'striving' to acquire not the earthly wine, but the wine of Paradise—and to experience even the pleasure of smelling the musk of its 'seal.' This verse seems to afford most of the basis for the Qur'anic interpretation of the poem. What is even more determinate in fixing a Qur'anic interpretation is the Qur'an's mention of the 'seal' (*khitâm*) of the wine in this verse. From the same root comes the 'seal' of a seal-ring (*khâtam*) which is one of Muhammad's titles in the Islamic tradition: "Seal (*khâtam*) of the Prophets."

The language of wine and love has precedents in Judeo-Christian thought and metaphorical applications attached to that language (although in those traditions, wine is not forbidden). "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine, your anointing oils are fragrant, your name is perfume poured out; therefore the maidens love you. Draw me after you, let us make haste. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine; rightly do they love you." (Song of Solomon 1:2-4) What is unusual here (in the Biblical context) is the appearance of the feminine voice in a tradition where the masculine perspective is the dominant one. The Song gives voice to the female describing the attributes of a male beloved. The New Revised Standard Version biblical commentary cites the text as one describing women's ability to attract men, with its imagery serving well to personify love and wisdom: "The woman's voice of love in the Song suggests that love and wisdom draw men powerfully with the subtlety and mystery of a woman's allurements."⁶⁷ The commentators see the text as a description of the power of love and wisdom, understood through its likeness to sexual attraction, which is tangible and well known. As a metaphor, then, it serves as a comparison between an earthly object of affection and God's own love (and wisdom).⁶⁸

The basis of the love-metaphor in Islam draws a different comparison. Because its roots are in the oral traditions of the desert, in the Arabic *qasida*, which almost exclusively employs a male voice, describing both the wine and his female beloved, and in the tradition of Arab desert poetry, there is no doubt that the *qasida* in its traditional form refers to a human beloved. However, the Qur'an suggests a new paradigm for love: that God loves human beings, and they return His love. "He loves them, and they love Him." (Q 5:54) Arabic offers several words for love: *hubb*, *wudd*, and *'ishq*. Of the three,

⁶⁷ *New Revised Standard Version Reference Bible*, p. 752.

⁶⁸ "The Song of Solomon" almost exclusively represents the 'beloved' as the bridegroom.

hubb and *'ishq* are used most in the texts we are discussing here (although *'ishq* is not Koranic). *Hubb* conveys the more encompassing kind of love, in contrast to *'ishq*, an excessive love which is more akin to “passion.” Passion, of course can have a worthy object, but also an inappropriate one.

Yet there be men who take to themselves compeers
apart from God, loving them as God is loved;
but those that believe love God more ardently. (Q 2:165)

And expend in the way of God;
and cast not yourselves by your own hands
into destruction, but be good-doers; God
loves the good-doers. (Q 2:195)

Say: ‘If you love God, follow me, and God
will love you, and forgive you your sins;
God is All-Forgiving, All-compassionate.’
Say: ‘Obey God, and the Messenger.’ But
if they turn their backs, God loves not
the unbelievers. (Q 3:31-32)

Similarly, God loves those who are patient in adversity (Q 3:146), and those who act equitably (Q 49:9), but not the evildoers (Q 42:40), those who are given to arrogance (Q 16:23), the boastful (Q 31:18), or those bereft of gratitude (Q 22:38). Why would people want God to love them? The Qur’an answers (with the words of the prophet Shuaib): “surely my Lord is All-compassionate, All-loving” (Q 11:90), and “those who believe and do deeds of righteousness—unto them the All-merciful shall assign love” and “He is the All-forgiving, the All-loving” (Q 85:14).

The Qur’an makes clear that however else it may be described, the relationship between human beings and God includes a love-relationship. Moreover, the basis of the human being’s striving after God’s love is clear: it is because God’s own love for the human being is clear. References to God’s love for human beings are not only in the Qur’an. The famous *hadith qudsi* that provides an explanation for the reason behind the creation of human beings also elaborates on this relationship: “I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known. So I created the creatures that I might be known.”⁶⁹ It is that God was not known, and He wanted (loved) to be an object of knowledge, so He created human beings as creatures who could know him, and return His Love. Therefore, love for human beings becomes the motivating force behind creation. The image of the lover and the beloved is common in Sufi poetry, usually with the human being as the lover, and

⁶⁹ This hadith is not considered sound (or “reliable”) on the basis of transmission, yet quoted in many works, perhaps because Ibn al-`Arabi has said it is “sound on the basis of unveiling, but not established by way of transmission” (qtd. in Chittick’s *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 391). In other words, visionary experience has confirmed its soundness, but its chain of transmission cannot be verified.

God as the Beloved—the object of desire. Another hadith about human and divine love that has played a large role in the development of Sufism, and one that Jami makes reference to in his *Lawami'* is the hadith that describes the gradual closeness that can develop between the seeker and God. According to the famous *hadith qudsi*: “My servant draws near to Me through nothing I love more than that which I have made obligatory for him. My servant never ceases drawing near to Me through supererogatory works until I love him. Then, when I love him, I am his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his hand through which he grasps, and his foot through which he walks.”⁷⁰ There is an increasing of closeness between God and the human being here, and finally, a merging of the two, lover and beloved.

⁷⁰ Bukhari, Riqaq, also Bukhari; cf. Graham *Divine Word*, pp. 173. Also for an explanation of supererogatory works (as opposed to obligatory works) according to Ibn ‘Arabi, see Chittick’s *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* pp. 329-31.

Ibn al-Farid: Desert Poet *and* Islamic Thinker

No doubt some would never waver in their conviction that the subject of Ibn al-Farid's *Khamriyya* is Divine Love. However, some would also never waver in their conviction that the subject of Ibn al-Farid's *Khamriyya* is human love—or that it must be both. Ibn al-Farid's *Khamriyya* takes the form of the *qasida*, yet it departs from the tradition inasmuch as it can be seen as tending toward religious thought, since the form, in its typical expression, does not address religious themes. "Ibn al-Farid's skill in using the Arab poetic tradition for such religious ends is readily apparent in his shorter formal odes. The classical ode (*qasida*) normally begins in an elegiac mood, as the poet expresses feelings of grief and loss amid the ruined campsite abandoned by his former lover. Often the poet recalls the days of blissful union with her, but he leaves this past and the ruins to cross the blazing desert on his sturdy she-camel. The tone of the poem then turns heroic as the poet completes his quest and arrives at his tribe or patron, whom he praises."⁷¹ In noting how well Ibn al-Farid conforms to the classical ode of his day, Homerin explores whether or not it is possible to read some of Ibn al-Farid's poetry as purely secular, and whether it can be conclusively decided whether or not his poetry even belongs on the shelves of a student of Islamic mystical thought.⁷² If not, then it belongs rather on the shelves of a student of Arab poetry, because it is representative of the literary tradition of the desert: boastful and amorous odes, wine poetry and songs.

There have been some Western scholars of Islam, particularly Annemarie Schimmel, who have recognized the ease with which Ibn al-Farid uses the literary modes of his time, yet suggest that the mystical element of his writings has far outweighed whatever other elements that can be seen in his life's work. "Ibn al-Farid was a lover of beauty in every form, and his love was sometimes also kindled by beautiful human beings. For instance, he wrote a verse in popular style about a handsome butcher boy, as Ibn Khallikan remarks. However, his fame rests exclusively upon the highly refined odes which are, along with the poems of Hallaj, the only true great mystical poetry in Arabic."⁷³ Other scholars, most importantly R. A. Nicholson, who was one of Ibn al-Farid's early translators, have not been so confident that the mystical element is not necessarily very clear in any particular work. In fact, Nicholson has suggested that the intention behind the lines may not be so apparent, even to the writer. "...The models of Arabic mystical poetry are the secular odes and songs of which ...passion is the theme; and the imitation is often so close that unless we have some clue to the writer's intention, it may not be possible to know whether his beloved is human or divine—indeed, the question whether he himself always knows is one which students of Oriental mysticism cannot regard as impertinent."⁷⁴

⁷¹ Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint*, p. 5.

⁷² Ibid. Homerin suggests that Suzanne Stetkevych considers the idea as plausible.

⁷³ Schimmel, *As Through a Veil*, p. 45.

⁷⁴ Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 163-4.

However, he maintains that a mystical element cannot be denied, even if a poem seems to follow entirely the conventions of form—in this case the form of the *qasida*—because even if the author intended to convey a mystical truth, it would be natural for him to express it in a form familiar to him. “Since the form of such automatic composition will largely depend on materials stored within the mystic’s brain, and on the literary models with which he is familiar, we need not be surprised if his visions and revelations sometimes find spontaneous utterance in an elaborately artificial style.”⁷⁵ Nicholson is suggesting that more often than not, it will be impossible to pin down a definitive meaning that excludes either the secular *or* the mystical reading. “...God...is the Beloved whom the poet addresses and celebrates under many names—now as one of heroines of Arabian Minnesong, now as a gazelle or a driver of camels or an archer shooting deadly glances from his eye; most frequently as He or She. The Odes retain the form, conventions, topics, and images of ordinary love-poetry: their inner meaning hardly ever obtrudes itself, although its presence is everywhere suggested....”⁷⁶ The difficulty established, one may wonder whether or not Ibn al-Farid’s *Khamriyya* offers any moments of clarity, in which the reader can say beyond the shadow of a doubt, whether the ode must be considered one or the other.

A. J. Arberry notes that in particular, the *Khamriyya* employs the language and imagery of the bacchic poet. Of the poem, he says, Ibn al-Farid uses “...symbolism not employed by him in his other poems; whereas his models for them were drawn from the erotic and panegyric, here he follows the conventional language and imagery of the bacchic poets, and especially Abû Nuwâs.”⁷⁷ Noting that the language is conventional is important here, because to take this imagery at face value would be to believe that Ibn al-Farid indulged in activities that would have been hypocritical in terms of an Islamic worldview. However, not only was the language and imagery typical, this type of imagery was also used by Sufi poets. And so, the question is whether Ibn al-Farid is like the rest of the Sufi poets in having allowed the *Shariah* (Islamic Law) to take primary importance in his life, and merely used the metaphors of wine and love to convey his thoughts on deeper truths. If this is the case, he would have avoided physical intoxication, the way he would have avoided pork, illicit sexual relationships, or anything else forbidden by the law, like the majority of Sufi poets who also wrote about love and wine. The key to understanding the difference would be in finding key words that clearly indicate Qur’anic themes, especially if they make connections between those themes and love or wine-related metaphors.

Rumi is the best-known example of this use of metaphor in Sufi writings. Here, he explains the variety of wine that he and other Sufi poets are drinking as being different from other wines, so that his metaphor is clearly a metaphor:

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 167.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 168-169.

⁷⁷ A. J. Arberry, *The Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Fârid*, p. 84.

Oh Cupbearer! Fill the soul from that pre-existent Cup,
that thief of the heart, that ambusher of formal religion.

Fill it with the wine that springs from the Heart and mixes
with the Spirit, the wine whose bubbling intoxicates the God-seeing eye.

That grape wine—it belongs to the followers of Jesus; but
this Hallajian wine, it belongs to the followers of the Quran.

Vats of this wine, vats of that: until you break that vat, you
will never taste this wine.

That wine frees the heart from sorrow for an instant; never
can it snuff out sorrow, never can it uproot malice.

One drop from this cup will turn your work into gold—
may my soul be sacrificed to this golden cup!

When this state (of wine-drinking) comes, mostly it comes
in the pre-dawn hours, to him who scatters his bed-roll and pillow (and
spends his time in prayer).

Beware lest the bad companions (your own lower self)
deceive you through whisperings—never break the covenant with kings
(*Sharīah*) through weakness.⁷⁸

Ibn al-Farid's *Nazm al-Sulūk* (Poem of the Way), similar to Rumi's verses about 'this vat' and 'that vat'—which make clear that he is drawing out a difference as well as a similarity—consciously takes his classical imagery to another level, while making it clear to the reader that he is doing so. He makes use of two conventional figures in classical Arabic love poetry. They are two "bad companions," the 'railer' and the 'slanderer.' The railer and the slanderer are, in Arabic poetic tradition, characters who seek to destroy one's love for one's beloved. However, when God is the Beloved and the human being is the lover, the railer and the slanderer seek to destroy the human being's love for God, in preventing contemplation and preventing union. Nicholson explains that in mystical poetry, the railer is "a type of the Devil, suggesting evil and inspiring doubt, of sensual passion, and of all that lures the soul away from Divine contemplation" and the slanderer "represents the logical and intellectual faculty, which cannot pierce beyond the outward forms of things."⁷⁹

That [the slanderer] appears to the spirit guiding to its region
for the sake of a witnessing that is in a shaping of meaning.
That [the railer] makes manifest to the soul urging its company
for the sake of a being that comes in a coloring of forms.
The shapes of being enjoy the soul,
while the spirits of witnessing take pleasure in the spirit.

⁷⁸ Chittick, "Studies in Mystical Literature," p. 198.

⁷⁹ Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 178-79.

The state of my witnessing is between one heading to its faraway region [the slanderer]

and a frightening railer whose company is sincere advice.

Witnessing my state in the audition (*samâ`*) is due to two pulling things:
the decree of my abode and the passing of my sentence.⁸⁰

The railer and the slanderer are used here to indicate forces that are ‘pulling’ him in two different directions. Yet he identifies them in association with the *samâ`* (or *dhikr*), a common enough Sufi practice that identifies his poetic expression as metaphorical. His description is a metaphor for what can be called a “two-way pulling,” which is the pull between God and creation.’⁸¹

Part of me is pulled toward Her, while it pulls toward itself.

And the pulling-out of the agony of death is in every pull.⁸²

The reference to the Divine as feminine is not unusual in Islam, and so the love-metaphor carries an even stronger imagistic draw in Islamic poetry, of God as the beautiful, alluring female lover.

⁸⁰ From Scattolin’s translation, as qtd. in Kazuyo Murata’s “A Study on Ibn al-Fârid’s *Nazm al-Sulûk*,” pp. 22-23.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 22.

⁸² Ibid., p. 23.

Ibn al-Farid and Ibn ‘Arabi

Because Ibn al-Farid and Ibn ‘Arabi were contemporaries, it is sometimes assumed that they knew each other. It is also assumed by many—since the later school of Ibn ‘Arabi comments on Ibn al-Farid’s works—that Ibn al-Farid’s work must lend itself to those commentaries by being compatible to the work of Ibn ‘Arabi. Ibn ‘Arabi (560-638/1165-1240) is perceived by most to have been unique in the intellectual history of Islam, having given alternative, philosophical and theological explanations of Sufi imagery. His generally Qur’anic-based explanations gave the more experiential, symbolic thinking of the Sufis visible roots in philosophical or theological principles. If Sufism before Ibn ‘Arabi was expressed in more practical ways, after Ibn ‘Arabi it could readily be expressed in a more theoretical fashion. “Like all Sufis, Ibn ‘Arabi was inspired by an experimental and symbolic religiosity. He expressed this in language through his unique metaphysics; this radically altered the meaning of the experiential in Sufism, through the ‘intellectualization’ of experience. Mystical ‘knowing’ would now be intellectual in a certain way, in a new expression of the inspirational state and the unitive experience.”⁸³ This systemized thinking could be expressed using Qur’an and Hadith, which had always been used to explain the metaphysical world in Islam. However, Ibn ‘Arabi employed terminology that made his expression of these concepts unique.

He was able to explain, in language that was Qur’anically sound and acceptable to general Islamic scholarship, what Sufis had known, but had expressed primarily through their practices, how God was the Real, and that God manifested himself in and through the world. R. L. Nettler describes the significance of Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings in this way: “Dependent on the notion of ‘absolute being’ (*al-wujud al mutlaq*), which metaphysically connoted God (*Allah, al-Haqq*), [*al-Haqq* meaning “the Real”] Ibn ‘Arabi’s metaphysics evinced a whole vocabulary designed to explicate this idea. Here was a ‘system’ of great subtlety, employed with studied ambiguity to transform Islam’s personal God into the principle of absolute being. Here, all is God and God is all, with humankind occupying a central role as theophany.”⁸⁴ In summing up Ibn ‘Arabi’s work this way, it is not quite clear to me what Nettler means by “all is God and God is all” or what a “theophany” would mean in this context; however, it is true that Ibn ‘Arabi describes “Being” in a way that seems to make God’s relationship to human beings more clear. The enigma of Sufism’s Hallaj (b. 244/858), whose declaration of “*Ana al-Haqq*” (“I am the Real”) has become legendary, becomes a point of theoretical discussion, rather than simply a scandal for Muslims to shake their heads over.

There is a seemingly mythic connection between Ibn al-Farid and Ibn ‘Arabi. However, Nicholson points out “The two seem never to have met.”⁸⁵ Homerin also notes that there is no direct link between them, and that they never met, but that Sadr al-Din

⁸³ R. L. Nettler, “Ibn al-‘Arabi” *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, p. 311.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, p. 164.

Qunawi, Ibn ‘Arabi’s disciple, commented on Ibn al-Farid’s poetry, and since the poetry of both Ibn ‘Arabi and Ibn al-Farid have seen much in the way of commentary, they have been understood through, and have influenced the cumulative tradition a great deal by way of their commentators. Ibn ‘Arabi, in fact, seems to have undergone a “postmortem metamorphosis” like Ibn al-Farid, in that today students of theoretical Sufism tend to attribute the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of existence) to Ibn ‘Arabi, even though he never mentioned this phrase.⁸⁶ His disciple Sadr al-din Qunawi and Farghani after him used the term, and although it came to be understood quite differently in later times, the concept is still thought to have come from Ibn ‘Arabi. However, the task of extricating the man from the myth becomes easier in the case of Ibn ‘Arabi, since his writings are voluminous, and one can more easily cite differences between his writings and the writings of his commentators, ie., Qunawi.⁸⁷ Giuseppe Scattolin sees commentators’ connections between Ibn al-Farid and Ibn ‘Arabi as a common mistake, and particular problem because he does not believe Ibn al-Farid’s poetry carries those meanings: “his terms should not be charged with the philosophical contents they have in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s philosophical Sufism.” It is true that there were many technical terms later introduced by this school of thought that had a specifically philosophical bent, and we will see how Jami himself endows Ibn al-Farid’s writing with those meanings, as received from Qunawi.⁸⁸

The voluminous commentary on a poem like the *Khamriyya* is valuable to those who are interested in the evolution of ideas in theoretical Sufism, but those same commentaries loom dangerously in the minds of those who appreciate their work for the sake of literary value. “Particularly noteworthy is the mystical poetry of such poets as Ibn al-Farid...and Ibn al-‘Arabi...whose vibrant lyricism has been obscured by the heavy-handed approach of later commentators, who sought to reduce their use of a vocabulary rich in allegory and symbol to the level of a ‘lexical code’ expressive of points of Sufi doctrine....”⁸⁹ Reynold Nicholson also faulted the Sufi commentators for having pinned ‘doctrinal specificity’ onto the *Khamriyya*, but his concern was also for the reader’s ability to understand ‘correctly’ Ibn al-Farid’s meaning, in addition to mourning the loss of attention to the poesy.⁹⁰ The disagreements regarding the translation and commentary no doubt existed early on, as Ibn al-Farid did not offer his own commentary.

Nicholson’s opinion was that despite any mistaken attributions that might be made on the part of any commentator, there is a certain amount of common ground shared between those who come from a Sufi readership. In other words, he thought that Sufis, no

⁸⁶ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 79.

⁸⁷ Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint*, p. 29.

⁸⁸ Giuseppe Scattolin, *The Diwan of Ibn al-Farid*, p. 8.

⁸⁹ “Sufism,” *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, p. 741.

⁹⁰ Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, p. 169.

matter what their intellectual school, share the same world-view, and see how Qur'anic language can take form in their lives. This idea may help us to imagine how two men, having never met, could have discussed the same concepts in their work, because they both saw things in what Nicholson calls "the ideal world from which he [Ibn al-Farid] drew his inspiration." In the world of Islamic thought, the assertion that there is this ideal world is a truism that no Muslim would deny. Both Ibn al-Farid and Ibn 'Arabi were seen as Muslims first, and in transcending what some might have seen as disparate Sufi orders with distinct teachings, their writings spoke to everyone. In the *Khamriyya*, Ibn al-Farid refers to a world that most Muslims would recognize immediately. It takes for its citizens those who occupy their minds with the text of the Qur'an and its breadth of possible meanings, and those who are initiated into the mythic worldview of Islam through the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet.

Chapter Three

The Orientalist Problem

Textual Consequences

Disdain for a religious heritage permanently marks a literary tradition. We see it in the history of translations of Islamic texts by Westerners, and in their commentaries on them. We even see it internally, from the mouths of Arab authors themselves, in one of the unfortunate side effects of postcolonial attitudes on the colonized culture. The life of the novelist Naguib Mahfouz⁹¹ (1911-2006) is a testament to the difficulties experienced by Arabs in expressing their own national or cultural identity. His translator sums up the problem in his introduction to *The Thief and The Dogs*:

The work of Mahfouz...reveals many of the changes of aspiration and orientation of Egyptian intellectuals over the span of his lifetime. In the thirties, a time when Mahfouz was emerging from Cairo University with a degree in philosophy, Egyptians were struggling for equilibrium between the contradictory pulls of pride in Islam or in ancient Egypt. Their dilemma was compounded by their awareness of the attitude of foreigners toward their national heritage. They witnessed every day in the streets of Cairo the enthusiasm of archaeologists and tourists for the treasures of their ancient tombs and pyramids but they also knew of the glories of their religious, architectural, cultural, and, above all, language heritage from Islam and the Arabs. And they were only too aware of the disdain of foreigners for the state of their contemporary government and society.⁹²

Mahfouz's struggle, connected to Western attitudes toward the religion and culture of his homeland, is an old one, in which outsiders pick and choose which parts of a culture they will be fascinated with and which parts they will condemn. Dante Alighieri's (14th century) vision in the *Inferno* is of Muhammad in the hellfire, while he sees Avicenna and Averroes—philosophers with whom he is familiar and admires—in paradise, and clearly sees their virtues. In other words, while he appreciates philosophers, Dante does not appreciate or recognize Islam. He sees Avicenna and Averroes, but doesn't realize

⁹¹ Naguib Mahfouz is incidentally somewhat of an indicator of the enduring presence of Ibn al-Farid in popular writing in the Arab world, since he mentions Ibn al-Farid's poetry in his novel, *The Thief and The Dogs*.

⁹² Trevor Le Gassick, from Introduction to *The Thief and The Dogs*, pp. 5-6.

they are actually Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, Islamic philosophers who followed the practices of Muhammad.

In the history of texts originating from Islamic lands, the trouble begins when those who were not initiated into a Qur'anic worldview took to studying and translating texts produced by those who belonged to a Qur'anic worldview. These translators' lack of knowledge concerning what they were studying produced much misunderstanding, and now the West has been plagued by ideas about the East that have been permanently preserved in translations. Those misunderstandings have persisted, it seems, even into the 21st century. The Western study of things "Eastern" began to shed a dim light on the lands of Islam around the 17th century, with the appearance of a French translation of the Qur'an (Andre du Ryer, 1647) and an English version following it two years later (1649).⁹³ A. J. Arberry, in the preface to his own translation of the Qur'an (1955) quotes from the title-page of the first English version: "The Alcoran of Mahomet, Translated out of *Arabick* into *French*. By the *Sieur de Ryer*, Lord of *Malezair*, and Resident for the *French King*, at *ALEXANDRIA*. And Newly *Englished*, for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the *Turkish Vanities*. To which is prefixed, the Life of Mahomet, the Prophet of the *Turks*, and Author of the Alcoran. With a Needful Caveat, or Admonition, for them who desire to know what Use may be made of, or if there be danger in Reading the *ALCORAN*." Thus began the ideologically-driven translations of the Qur'an that opened the door to old-school Orientalism.

Edward Said defines Orientalism as "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the European Western experience,"⁹⁴ and du Ryer's title-page supplies us with an example of this. His readership, it is assumed, would have known what is meant by "Turkish Vanities." Not being familiar with them myself, I had to consult The Middle English Dictionary for a meaning closer to what was meant by it in the era that du Ryer was writing. "Vanity" was not "excessive pride," but rather "That which is worthless, transitory, or illusory; also that which has no purpose; (b) the pursuit of that which is worthless or transitory, frivolousness; also, idleness, wastefulness...."⁹⁵ Of course no Muslim would have thought of the Qur'an in this way, and so the text is clearly a representation of what du Ryer thought of the "other." He describes Muhammad as the "Prophet of the Turks" and "Author of the Alcoran." No Muslim readership would admit such titles for Muhammad. They might, at the most, have called him the "Prophet of the Arabs," referring the specific language and culture from which the Qur'an arose. However, they would never have called him the "author" of the Qur'an. To say this would be to deny the divine source of the text. Therein lies the point, of course: Orientalism is the study of the Orient only as it exists in European Western eyes. It is not something everyone can share—and it is especially not for Orientals. They would not understand.

⁹³ A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, p. 7.

⁹⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 1.

⁹⁵ The University of Michigan, *Middle English Dictionary*, "vanity."

Most specifically, as Said describes Orientalism, it is a “style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and...’the Occident.’”⁹⁶ Once this distinction is established, one begins to look at the Orient as the “other,” and understanding notably takes a back seat. Curiously enough, in reading texts that speak of the “other,” one can find out more about the author and his/her readership than about the proposed “subject of study.” For example, in du Ryer’s title-page, one can gather that du Ryer and his readership readily believe and expect to continue believing that the Turks *have* vanities, and may both frown and delight as du Ryer points them out. The ability to speak of the inherent inferiority of the “other” is a result of an ever-present hegemony of ideas about the Orient. The cultivation of the hegemony results from the repetition of these ideas, “reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness, usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical thinker might have had different views on the matter.”⁹⁷ In writing especially, the hegemony becomes even more carved in stone.

My own experience in dealing with such early translations was while doing my own translation of a text by ‘Aziz al-Din Nasafi, *Maqsad al-Aqsa* (The Furthest Destination), for a Master’s thesis in 1997. This particular work was a medieval (late 13th c.) Persian Sufi text, and was one of the first to be translated into Western languages, albeit in a very loose fashion. The difficulties with the English version (*Oriental Mysticism*, 1869) were vast, having to do with the general misunderstanding concerning the origins of the ideas presented in the text. For example, the translator, E. H. Palmer, saw the framework of ideas as representing what he theorized was the “Primaeval Religion of the Aryan race.”⁹⁸ Not recognizing Islamic ideas or a Qur’anic worldview in the text, he attributed what was fascinating about the text to an ancient system of thought that no longer existed in his contemporary Persia. To many Muslims, Sufism was simply the full expression of Islam, which was founded only in the 7th century, and not at all “primaeval.”

In the end of the examination of Palmer’s presentation of “Oriental Mysticism,” I found that there was little resemblance between Nasafi’s text and Palmer’s presentation of it. Correspondences between sentences were few and far between, and entire passages were either left out or glossed over with a sentence or two of Palmer’s own summary of the ideas he believed Nasafi was implying. Additional paragraphs of his own found their way in, by reason of explanation, so it was difficult to ascertain where the original text ended and where Palmer’s ideas began. The following is an example:

The body of man is like a lantern, the Vegetative Spirit is the lamp, the Animal Spirit is the wick, the Instinctive Spirit the oil, and Spirit of Humanity the fire that kindles all. “Verily its oil would almost shine even though no fire kindled it.” (Cor. cap.24, v.35). In other words, the Instinctive

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 2.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

⁹⁸ Edward Palmer, *Oriental Mysticism*, p. x.

Spirit should feed and supply the Spirit of Humanity, as the oil feeds and supplies the flame in a lamp. The Traveler must aim at completing this lamp, so that his heart may be illumined, and he may see things as they really are. When the Spirit of Humanity a “light upon light” (Cor. cap.24, v.35) has thus kindled the Instinctive Spirit, God “guideth whom he pleaseth to His own light” (idem), that is, to the divine light of his own nature, reaching which the Travellers’ Upward Progress is complete; for “from Him they spring, and unto Him return.”⁹⁹

The single paragraph of Palmer’s represents a collapsing of ideas from two paragraphs of Nasafi’s text. For comparison, I offer my own translation, which maintains sentence order, and is for the most part, a literal translation of the original:

O dervish, the form of the human being is like the glass. The animal spirit, which is in the heart, is like the wick. The psychic spirit, which is in the brain, is like the oil, and the human spirit is like the fire. The lamp has become complete. The work of the wayfarers is to complete the lamp so that they reach the perfection of self.

Now that you have come to know these preliminaries, now know that the psychic spirit, which is in the brain and is like oil, wanted to brighten the inside of the human being so that it could know and see things as they are. If the fire was not connected to it, meaning if the psychic spirit was not connected to it, the human spirit, which is called the Attributed Spirit, would become connected to the psychic spirit, “Light upon Light.” [24:35] thus He says, “God guides to His Light whom He will.” [24:35] this “to His Light” is the Special Light, and the Special Light is the Essence of God. If someone is given this happiness and reaches the Essence of God, he has reached the perfection of the human being and has completed the circle. “From Him is the origin and to Him the return.”¹⁰⁰

Palmer’s intention, as he puts it in his introduction to *Oriental Mysticism*, was not to translate, but rather, to “give a clearer and more succinct account of the system than would have been afforded by a mere translation.”¹⁰¹ Yet in the case of this particular passage, not only does clarity seem to suffer in his presentation, the text is transformed from a medieval Islamic style of writing and terminology, into a text with a medieval Western philosophic style of writing and terminology. His readership may well have appreciated the resulting text, but what of the original? Once deemed translated, it is lost to the attention of general readership, like the correction notices that follow an error in a

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 63-64.

¹⁰⁰ Marlene DuBois, from ‘Aziz al-Din Nasafi and “The Furthest Destination.”

¹⁰¹ Palmer, p. ix.

newspaper article: “Mr. Smith, whose picture appeared in yesterday’s obituaries, is not actually dead.”

Even texts that are deemed positive advances on understanding the “other” like Palmer’s text *Oriental Mysticism* certainly do more harm than good. James Morris notes the damage done by Palmer’s text, describing the sort of impact its publication has on important texts on Islamic thought in general: “The reprint publisher’s assertion (on the jacket) that “Some works stand the test of time better than others” and that this one “is still an indispensable tool for Islamic scholars” is an ironic illustration (among the multitude that could be cited by any teacher in this or other areas of Islamic thought) of the lasting damage that can be done by inadequately prepared and annotated translations of important works, not least by discouraging any subsequent attempt at more adequate treatment.”¹⁰²

The problem of the enduring nature of these types of “translations” is something that Morris says can “be cited by any teacher in this or other areas of Islamic thought.” It is indeed pervasive and obvious to anyone familiar with translations from this period. Any translation project, even if attended to in a painstaking manner, results in the types of inadequacy that are troublesome enough as it is, for example, words that imply a range of meanings are inevitably whittled down to one meaning in the intended translation, and that choice of meaning is decided by the translator for various reasons—because it sounds the best poetically, because it will carry the literal meaning most accurately, and so forth. However, rearrangements of passages, and omissions of passages, such as is the case in *Oriental Mysticism*, compounds those distortions that would naturally—and necessarily—take place even if one were to try to translate word for word.

Palmer’s book, the full title of which is *Oriental Mysticism: Sufiistic and Unitarian Theosophy of the Persians*, has been reprinted again in 2008, in paperback, with the following from the publisher, Forgotten Books: “Forgotten Books: Publishers of historical writings from a passed age, which are still as much value today as they were in antiquity. Authors of the past defined our society and their contributions must never be forgotten.” This writer begs to differ—as anyone should, who has seen the lasting effects of misinformation in print.

¹⁰² James Morris, “Ibn ‘Arabi and His Interpreters,” p. 746.

Sorting Out Misunderstanding from Fact

The history of Islamic studies had begun with translations of the Qur'an in the 17th century that were ideologically hostile, and later evolved into a more appreciative attempts (still misguided) to understand Sufi texts in the 19th century. The late 19th century marked a turning point in the history of Islamic thought, as gradually more and more texts were studied and translated. Scholars came to see how texts originated from different periods, cultures (Persian, Arab, and so on), and schools of thought, and had qualitative differences that needed to be described. In addition, the later periods of commentary on Islamic thought in the West, from the beginning of the 20th century onward, gave way to a new generation of scholars with a greater awareness of what kinds of observations an outsider versus an insider to a culture might make, and what the consequences of such observations might be on the culture in question.

One problem that appeared with the first translations of Sufi texts, which were from Persia, was that Persians were initially seen to be intellectually superior to the Arabs, and hence their writings were inherently more respectable. The crux of the belief lies in the fact that the Persians were seen as the descendants of the Aryan race, and the Arabs are not. The following excerpt comes from Charles Morris, *The Aryan Race: Its Origin and Its Achievements* (1892). "It is our purpose briefly to outline the history of the Aryan Race – that great and noble family of mankind which has played so striking a part upon the stage of the world; to seek it in its primitive home, observe the unfoldment of its beliefs and institutions, follow it in its migrations, consider the features of its intellectual supremacy, and trace the steps by which it has gained its present high position among the races of mankind."¹⁰³ After reading such un-tempered praise of the Aryan race, one can understand how anyone could have been excited to offer additional theories about the origins of the race, including the discovery of the "primaeval religion of the Aryan race" as E. H. Palmer thought he had done.

Of the Arab Muslims, however—the occupants of Morris and Palmer's contemporary Orient—there is nothing so nice said of them. Morris sees them as a later, non-indigenous breed of people: "The later Semitic creed, that of Mohammed, is a medley of pre-existing thought...the Koran is full of extravagant fancies, but devoid of original ideas. It is the outcome of the Arabic type of mind, in which fancy is exceedingly active, but in which the higher powers of the reason seem undeveloped."¹⁰⁴ It is not only the "mind" of the Arabs that was deemed inferior, but even the language. It was considered unattractive. Edward Said summarizes: "As for the Semites, whose language was agglutinative, unaesthetic, and mechanical, they were different, inferior, backward."¹⁰⁵ The designation of the present day Arabs to "lesser peoples" was as much a result of scholars romanticizing the past as it was an uncritical examination of the present: "...the 'good'

¹⁰³ Charles Morris, *The Aryan Race: Its Origin and Its Achievements*, p. iii.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹⁰⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 98.

Orient was invariably a classical period somewhere in a long-gone India, whereas the “bad” Orient lingered in present-day Asia, parts of North Africa, and Islam everywhere. ‘Aryans’ were confined to Europe and the ancient Orient...”¹⁰⁶

Since the Persians were known at that time as descendents of the “ancient Aryan race” (and the religion of the Persian Sufis represented the vestiges of the “ancient religion” of the Aryan race), the descriptor was the unfortunate result of one academic generation’s excitement in being able to map out a complex system of sophisticated thought found in Persia among the Sufis, which was until then not known or described. In Palmer’s day, the connection between Sufism and normative Islam had yet to be discovered, and so, in speaking excitedly about the “other” whose writings he was presenting to his English-speaking readership was much further away from his understanding than he thought. He had fallen into the hegemonist’s trap, convinced that what he found, because it looked somewhat brilliant, must be a forerunner to what, in his day, was also considered brilliant—his own culture (European superiority vs. Oriental backwardness). He was drawn into associating everything “good” with the “Aryan race.”¹⁰⁷

The social and political implications of cultural hegemony aside—since many have dealt with those issues—what may be most useful to consider in the present discussion is how even the best of intentions can contribute to the misunderstanding of a religious tradition. It was, of course, the most pervasive problem of old school Orientalism, and a factor which greatly affected the Western study of Sufism: the tendency to discuss the religion of Islam outside of its own well-established tradition, insisting upon interpretation from the Christian standpoint.

Norman Daniels suggests that an initial misunderstanding, combined with an unsympathetic stance, results in a representation that may only slightly resemble the original: “By misapprehension and misrepresentation, a notion of the ideas and beliefs of one society can pass into the accepted myths of another society, in a form so distorted that its relation to the original facts is sometimes barely discernable. Doctrines that are the expression of the spiritual outlook of an enemy are interpreted ungenerously and with prejudice, and even the facts are modified—and in good faith—to suit the interpretation. In this way is constituted a body of belief about what another group of people believes.”¹⁰⁸ Daniel’s words, first published in 1960, can explain the post 9-11 world—both the fear those in the West entertain in their thoughts about Muslims today, and the dislike some Muslims may have of the West in general. They both suffer from the myths that have been passed on to them in a distorted form, masquerading as the actual ideas and beliefs of the “other.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 99.

¹⁰⁷ Here is one instance where it seems that one of the most exciting theories of Orientalism in the 19th century heralded the most horrifying atrocities of the 20th century.

¹⁰⁸ Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West*, p. 12.

There is a tip-off to this distortion that Daniel is describing, and it is the nature of the presentation that provides the clue. It is when the ideas and beliefs of the “other” are said to be very different from what they would say themselves, without allowing them to speak for themselves. “A ‘real truth’ is identified: this is something that contrasts with what the enemy say they believe; they must not be allowed to speak for themselves. This doctrine about doctrine is widely repeated, and confirmed by repetition in slightly varying forms. The experts, perhaps because being close to the facts is a constant stimulus to their zeal, contribute most to the process, and they are themselves of course wholly convinced by it.”¹⁰⁹ Unless the “other” is allowed to speak for himself/herself, the situation will remain ambiguous. Even more advantageous to the expert is the claim that the truth is far from what the “other” will express; the expert remains safe from reproof by his/her believing public, no matter how many times refutation rears from the other’s camp. However, the safety of the expert’s position depends entirely upon one thing: the inadmissibility of the words of the other. In short, as long as the general readership is satisfied with what they read, or at least satisfied with the way the presentation matches with their existing prejudices—as du Ryer’s readership was satisfied with his presentation of the Alcoran—the “doctrine about doctrine” that Daniel describes will persist. Unfortunately, though, the “doctrine about doctrine” sometimes becomes so central to those who maintain it, that they will admit no heresies—and will perhaps even begin an Inquisition of their own.

One prolific translator and scholar who allowed the “other” to speak for himself was Reynold Nicholson, who produced translations of key works of the Islamic world from Arabic and Persian to English and was very much aware of his effects on a greater understanding of the larger culture. He expressed his motives in translation in this way: “As is well known, the doctrines and speculations of the Sufis affected Islam powerfully. To some extent they provide a common ground where men of diverse faiths, while remaining loyal to the creed they profess, can meet in a spirit of tolerance and mutual understanding and thus learn to know and like each other better. If my work has helped in any way towards such an understanding, it has not been done in vain.”¹¹⁰ Nicholson, unlike his predecessors, allows for the superior insight of the insider, and does credit to himself in downplaying his interpretive role.

By the end of his life, Nicholson had produced many important texts: a critical edition of, translation and commentary on Jalaludin Rumi’s *Masnavi*; a translation of Rumi’s *Divan-i Shams*; a translation of Muhammad Iqbal’s *Asrar-i-Khudi*; and Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*. Nicholson’s clearly sympathetic view of Islamic civilization, combined with his extensive studies, make his descriptions of the traditions of Arabic and Persian Islamic literature ones that have followed much study, careful thought, and most especially, consideration for the effects of his work on readers’ attitudes towards Islamic civilization.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Arberry, A. J. “Professor Reynold A. Nicholson, Litt.D., LL.D., F.B.A.” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, p. 91.

As more texts were translated during his lifetime, and both Arab and Persian Sufis became known to the West more in context with their relationship to Islam—instead of outside of it—there were more descriptions and comparisons of different types of thought within the tradition. Nicholson writes: “While the Persian sees a pantheistic vision of one reality in which the individual disappears, the Arab dwells on particular aspects of the relation of that reality to himself.”¹¹¹ Interestingly, Nicholson sees Ibn ‘Arabi as a cross between Persian and Arabic tendencies and in an effort to describe the confluence, calls Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought “pantheistic monism.”¹¹² Annemarie Schimmel, who also made great contributions to the Western study of Islam, describes “Persianate” qualities in Ibn al-Farid’s poetry: “This poetry [*Khamriyya*] is like Persian miniature painting, which combines an inspirational quality with the minutest detail work so as to lead us into an enchanted garden in which we finally discover deeper and deeper mysteries that go far beyond the “real” figures and extend into the spirits of leaves, flowers, and even rocks.”¹¹³ The descriptions of Islamic works by this new generation of Islamic scholars are attentive to the specificity of each culture’s characteristics without being pejorative, more attentive to each author’s writing, and are far from the hostile ideologies of the 17th century translations and commentaries.

Along with the very specific descriptions that came out of this period, is Nicholson’s observation of the differences between the poetic traditions in Persia and Arabia. Having read much of both traditions, he sees the tradition of Persian mystical poetry as being greater than that of Arab mystical poetry:

One of the deepest differences between Arabs and Persians shows itself in the extent and character of the mystical poetry of each people....Whether quantity or quality be considered, the best part of medieval Persian poetry is either genuinely mystical in spirit or is so saturated with mystical ideas that it will never be more than half understood by those who read it literally. When we turn to Arabic poetry of the period subsequent to the rise and development of Sufism, what do we find? No lack of poets, certainly, though few of them reach the first rank and their output is scanty compared with the opulent genius of their Persian contemporaries....seldom they possess the note...of mysticism.¹¹⁴

This description might at first be mistaken for another one of the old-school Orientalist biases. I myself had such an impression upon first reading. However, Nicholson and others by then had read a great many works, and could speak without bias. Islamic studies had changed. Attitudes had shifted, making it possible to allow the “other” to

¹¹¹ Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, p. 181.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹¹³ Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil*, p. 78.

¹¹⁴ Nicholson, pp. 162-3.

speak for himself (or herself) through translations, and it was the diligence of individual scholars whose intention was to maintain fidelity to the original texts that made it so. Although the problems of old-school Orientalism remain—as when current scholars choose to ignore the internal logic of Islamic thought in producing translations—the potential for sorting out the misunderstandings is clear. It is found in the works produced by scholars like Nicholson and Schimmel. The key will be to continue the positive trend, and to recognize and acknowledge the difference between the two approaches.

Chapter Four

Translation Issues

An Overview

Here I hope to outline several levels of translation issues, from the most general ideas about translation theory, to the very specific application of methodology in translating Arabic and Persian. Differences in genre are the first thing to consider when working across literary traditions. Although many of the 20th century Western scholars of Islamic literature struggled to see and understand the works they were reading in Arabic and Persian—no easy task, with so little intellectual history documented in Western languages—they did seem to grasp intuitively that they needed to view and measure the “kinds” and “categories” of literature from the point of view of Arab (or Persian) readers themselves. With the gradual burgeoning of knowledge in the West of Arab and Persian writings, and the gradual increase in translated works, categories emerged by which that literature would be described and classified naturally had to be introduced. Works had to be “described,” in effect, even as they were being translated, since translation is a kind of interpretation. To a new audience of readers, their interpretations would be taken as gospel (as it were). The systems of classification were to a certain extent open to include genres that did not conform themselves to a Western system, and early translators made their decisions, either consciously or unconsciously.

Lois Giffen acknowledges the decision-making process concerning the genres as late as 1971, in her *Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre*. With this work, she is beginning an effort to a specialized category of works dealing with “love” that would be called “profane love” in contrast to “mystical love.” Such a genre exists, she says, only when one finds enough manuscripts to support it, and she claims to have found enough to be able to do it. The categories of literature, she says, clearly cannot be determined from outside of the culture, as the bodies of literature are always so different. Between cultures, for example, even the description “literature” itself differs. “One difficulty in the transfer of terms from one literary tradition to another is that what is ‘literature’ in one tradition is not ‘literature’ in the other. Indeed, all that Western scholars of the Islamic world (e.g. Gibb, Nicholson, and Brockelmann) [xiv] have called ‘Arabic literature,’ ‘Persian literature,’ etc. would not be ‘literature,’ in the strict sense, in the eyes of modern scholars of Western literatures.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre*, pp. xiii-xiv.

The point here is that in an Arab or Persian educational setting, from which Western scholars of the Islamic world have drawn their experience, what constitutes the canon of literature bears little resemblance to the texts that constitute the Western canon. They can be non-fiction, philosophical, and theological texts, that may not strike a chord with the litterateurs of the West. “To them, the distinguishing traits of ‘literature’ are fictionality, invention, or imagination. This is intended as a descriptive not an evaluative distinction. What is not ‘literature’ is classified as rhetoric, philosophy, political pamphleteering, theology, economics, and so forth.”¹¹⁶ Whatever may have happened to genres in the Arab and Persian-speaking world since she wrote (the rise of the novel, etc.) Giffen is right to point out that at the time when Western Islamic scholarship was beginning to translate works of Islamic literature—18th century and onward—there was a distinct difference in what “literature” was viewed to be from the perspective of the two centers of culture, and this was simply because of developments of “taste” in both. In particular, she defines the European view on literature—valuing those works of “fictionality, invention or imagination”—as a product of the Renaissance experience there, and points out that those same works would be given low status by the Arabs and Persians. “[T]his [particular] view of literature is based upon the canons of taste prevailing in Europe, where, since the Renaissance, the role of the imagination has been exalted in literary theory. Among the Arabs, imagination ranked low as a desideratum in literary effort.”¹¹⁷ Recognizing what a culture values, it may be granted, takes place after considerable exposure to a culture and its texts. So as an issue in translation it seems a weighty issue—one that a translator needs to make room for in terms of his or her approach to a new text.

Although a broad view on the theory of translation and a general understanding of genre is important for any translating task, just as important is a two-fold attitude toward the act of translating: both idealistic in its goals, and ambivalence about a final product. As for an ideal, many have been offered, but the most optimistic—and therefore the most useful—is Barry Hoberman’s definition of translation: “to convey fully the meaning of the original text.”¹¹⁸ The translator *must*—according to the very definition of “translation”—believe that he or she is conveying, as much as possible, the meaning of the original text. Otherwise one would not call the work a translation. This *belief* of the translator is essential to the practice of translation. The other aspect—ambivalence about a final product—is also absolutely essential. The translator needs to have a kind of openness to shifting ideas or notions about the text—its placement in a particular genre, for example, as discussed above—and a less-than-confident attitude toward the ultimate success of the translation, in the sense that every possible translation will be deficient in the conveyance of meaning.

There are very good reasons to be pessimistic (or realistic) about the act of translation. Linguists know that every language, however systematic, is complex. The

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. xiv.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Barry Hoberman, “Translating the Bible,” pp. 43-58.

non-native speaker, and especially the native speaker, will find it difficult to see exactly what is systematic about the language, because of unconscious or even undocumented features every language has. The regional variations and general diversity of a language also contribute to the difficulties. For example, when one consults the opinions of a single community of speakers as to a final “meaning” of a word or phrase, one may be relatively confident of a translation. However, how does one consult the opinions of every other community of the speakers of that language? In short, it is impossible. Ironically, it is in the midst of an overwhelming sense of the impossibility of the task—after one has considered the obstacles and is content with ultimate failure—that one begins. This attitude, this belief, has been cited as an essential element for translations of sacred texts, especially the Bible. “Only one who is profoundly convinced of the impossibility of translation can really undertake it.”¹¹⁹ Granted, sacred texts may be the most difficult to translate, in view of the ancient, far-removed original readership, the varied readership of today, and the strong opinions of that readership, however, it is the most difficult tasks of translation that provide the models and exemplars for less-complex tasks.

In the history of translation theory, there was a sense of confidence in the equivalences between languages—somewhat akin to scientism—that was perhaps related to the optimism of an age before the advent of deconstructionist thought. “Translation thinking was that of equivalence, which was gradually to lose its authority over the next forty years. It is not hard to see that any approach to translation dominated by equivalence is likely to focus on the word as the unit of translation, since words can be pronounced equivalent to other words more easily than sentences can be pronounced equivalent to other sentences, paragraphs to other paragraphs, or texts to other texts.”¹²⁰ Translation practices based on “equivalent words” and eight-step processes¹²¹ were—and still are—in use, but post-modern thinking has at least saved the world of translation theory from the bane of overconfidence.

The issue of confidence and overconfidence, by Greenstein’s reckoning, is the very crux of determining whether or not one is capable of translation. Consider “Stage Two” of Robert Bly’s *Eight Stages of Translation*, on the translation of a poem.¹²² This stage entails finding out what the poem means after first doing a literal translation that captures the basic thrust of the poem. He says if one cannot *accept* certain ideas found in a work (emphasis mine), one should put the poem down. The refraining from translation seems an ethical act, and also results in low efficacy in the act of translating while one is in the position of disagreement. If we disagree with the ideas, he says, “we will resist them as a

¹¹⁹ Edward Greenstein, “Theories of Modern Bible Translation,” p. 118.

¹²⁰ Andre Lefevere. *Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context*, p. 7.

¹²¹ Referring to Robert Bly’s *The Eight Stages of Translation*.

¹²² Robert Bly, *The Eight Stages of Translation*, p. 86.

translator and do a poor job translating the poem.”¹²³ It is an admirable recommendation, and it calls to mind a whole history of ideologically-driven hostile translations, including anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic ones. But what happens when a translator believes he or she is in accordance with what is in the original text, but does not even recognize the foreign ideas. Or the idea is a subtle one, and he mistakes it for something else? What happens when one is ignorant of one’s own misreading? Greenstein might have added an additional step before all the others: *be not confident* in your well-thought out process.

This is a subtle point, of course, in the face of the history of translation in general. Being “faithful to the text” would be a relatively sappy-sounding sentiment to the translators of Islamic texts in the 17th century. Early translations were done intending to remove fears of “the enemy” by revealing Islam’s sacred text as a concocted group of heresies, and to confirm the true beliefs of Christendom.¹²⁴ Later, there would be the more kindly rearrangement of the chapters of the sacred text, so they might make more sense, and finally, there would be a more post-colonial consciousness in which the translator does his or her best in remaining cognizant of ideological influences, and practice cultural immersion to avoid even the appearance of a hostile ideology. There is very much a “moral” element to the theory of translation of texts, especially those texts related to religious thought. Understandably, readers of such translations have wondered whether the translator is intending either to propagate or to undermine the religious tradition. Bible translation was the same, as the power of translation gave people the power to promote an ideology, namely an anti-Semitic one. In “Hebrew Bible Translations and the Fear of Judaization,” Ilona Rashkow outlines the hostile translations of Renaissance Bible translators who sought to remove the Jewishness of the text, as they were the inheritors of a virulent anti-semitism from the Middle Ages.¹²⁵ Early translators of the Qur’an also inherited an anti-Islamic sentiment from the Middle Ages and therefore produced hostile translations for those in the non-Muslim world to read.

Today translation theory seems to have graduated from the attitudes of the Medieval period, but perhaps because of its sordid experience with ideologically-driven, hostile translations, it retains a hint of the language of morality. The Czech translator, Jiri Levy, insists that any contraction or omission of difficult expressions in translating was “immoral.” He believes the translator is responsible for finding a solution to these most difficult problems of translation.¹²⁶ Attitudes vary on how to get from an original text to a translation text, and attitudes vary from allegiance to a source text’s “original intent” to a devotion to presentation in the “target language” of the translation. But even in the midst of technical linguistic discussions of translation theory, one cannot escape the language of morality. Susan Bassnett describes the temptations of the translator: “[T]he

¹²³ Ibid., p. 70.

¹²⁴ A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, p. 7.

¹²⁵ See Ilona Rashkow’s “Hebrew Bible Translations and the Fear of Judaization.”

¹²⁶ Susan Bassnett, “Central Issues,” *Translation Studies*, p. 22.

translator should not be tempted by the school that pretends to determine the original intentions of an author on the basis of a self-contained text. The translator cannot be the author of the SL [source language] text, but as the author of the TL [target language] text, has a clear responsibility to the TL readers.”¹²⁷ The translator’s responsibility to the target-language readers can be interpreted to mean many things, from an accurate translation on the literal level to an accurate translation on the basis of style. But it seems certain that today, no one would have the audacity to flagrantly disregard the “translator’s responsibility” as Medieval translators did.

However, consider the case of Edward Fitzgerald, as late as the 19th century, who produced the famously celebrated *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1859), a collection of quatrains only tangentially related to the original, causing Omar Khayyam, better known in the Persian world as a mathematician and philosopher, to be forever known in the West as an agnostic and particularly hedonistic poet. Also, E. H. Palmer’s *Oriental Mysticism: Sufiistic and Unitarian Theosophy of the Persians* (1869), with its wildly imaginative treatment of the text (previously discussed), caused and continues to cause far-reaching misunderstandings about Sufism. One sees a great deal of creative license today. Coleman Barks, who publishes translations of Rumi, does not speak Persian. He renders the works of other translators into his own English versions. For this, Tehran University has awarded him an honorary doctorate (in 2006). Clearly, his work is valued. However, his methods are not far from E. H. Palmer’s or Edward FitzGerald: “[W]hile the original Persian poetry of Rumi is heavily rhymed and metered, Barks has used primarily free verse. In some instances, he will also mix lines and metaphors from different poems into one ‘translation.’” The anonymous author who describes Bark’s methods in the Wikipedia article knows enough to use quotations marks around the word “translation.” No one seems to be bothered by it. The most common reason cited by those involved with scholarship on Rumi is that Barks’ translations lead more people to be interested in Rumi.¹²⁸

There seem to be other reasons to make allowances for poetic license, though, having to do with the inherencies of the task of translation. One is because there is an acknowledged creative urge in the translator. George Saintsbury, who introduced the fourth edition (1900) of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, praises FitzGerald’s creativity in translating Khayyam’s quatrains: he clearly credits the poesy of some particular lines to FitzGerald. “[H]ere Omar—not at all merely because he is put into doggerel—is prose and FitzGerald is poetry...”¹²⁹ As the “doggerel” of the original lines are distinguished from the “poetry” of the translated lines, one cannot help but realize that any translator translating *bad* poetry would naturally strive to produce a translation of the

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

¹²⁸ Huston Smith, from Margaret Doyle’s “Translating Ecstasy: Coleman Barks on Rumi with a Side of Curry”: “If Rumi is the most-read poet in America today, Coleman Barks is in good part responsible.”

¹²⁹ Edward FitzGerald, *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, p. 16.

lines that makes them sound *better*. That is not to say that Omar Khayyam's poetry was bad. It is only to say that FitzGerald, in feeling the urge to make it "better" felt free to do so, and disregard the sense of the original.

It is true that every translator/author has the urge to create a text of his/her own. It is an urge that must be kept in check, because it may lead the translator to misrepresent the source text. Assuming that the translator has remained faithful to the original text, it can still be said that when a translated text stands on its own, it represents the work of the individual translator as much as it represents the source text. Octavio Paz explains the dual character of the potential text that faces the translator: "Every text is unique and, at the same time, it is the translation of another text. No text is entirely original because language itself, in its essence, is already a translation...Every translation, up to a certain point, is an invention and as such it constitutes a unique text."¹³⁰ And so, the creative invention of a unique text is a kind of authorship. Combine the creative urge of authorship with the urge to judge the resulting poem from the perspective of the canonized aesthetics of Western modernism, and you have a perfectly understandable reason for translators of poetry to be (to a certain extent) "irresponsible" toward both the source text and the target language audience. After all, it is a human impulse to excel in creative endeavors. More profound than the acknowledgment of what is simply human nature, there is also a kind of tension in the act of translating, between self-effacement and self-articulation, between speaking for oneself and speaking for someone else. Between the two is a veritable battle between the reader's demand for literal fidelity and the "translator's desire to make a poem out of the translation." However, fidelity to the literal meaning of a poem results in an act of surrogacy, in which the translator volunteers to give birth to another's child. The birth is driven by the translator's desire to create a poem of his her own and a sense of obligation "to make out of the intertextual encounter someone else's poem."¹³¹

The complexity of the role of the translator increases when one considers that translators also have the desires of authors, in that they may possibly wish to affect their readership in some way. Returning to the idea of scriptural translation, whose history of translation witnessed the same controversy regarding "poetic license" in translating, there has been argument until this day concerning whether idiomatic expressions should be translated to their modern "equivalents," thus providing an easier entrance to the text, or whether those expressions should remain as they are. The question is really whether the translation should attempt to effect increased receptivity to the text by sacrificing fidelity to the literal meaning of the words. The American Bible Society favors idiomatic literary translation to make the reader's job easier, while Buber and Rosenzweig favors transforming the audience to "lead them to the text."¹³² Buber and Rosenzweig believe

¹³⁰ Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, p. 38.

¹³¹ Vinay Dharwaker, "A. K. Ramanujan's theory and practice of translation," from *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, p. 119.

¹³² Edward Greenstein, "Theories of Modern Bible Translation," from *Essays on Biblical Method and Translation*, p. 97.

the link to the source text and fidelity to the literal is important, and they also have a desire to effect a kind of receptivity, but theirs is a desire to transform the reader into one who understand the original idiomatic expression, and become a “native speaker,” as it were. “A translator hopes not only to translate a text, but hopes (against all odds) to translate a non-native reader into a native one.”¹³³ Buber and Rosenzweig’s goal is not to make the readers’ job easier, but to challenge the reader. “It may be true that idiomatic translation can bridge the common ground among cultures, but it is the literal mode that brings out the distinctive topography.¹³⁴ Their concern in bringing out the unique features that can only be conveyed in the literal mode can be seen as a kind of fidelity to the text, but also as completely necessary to the preservation of an entire genre of texts that share the same expressions or images and may be built around or in keeping with that text.

Such is the case with Biblical translation, and also with Islamic text translations, which are built on a Qur’anic worldview. Qur’anic language, imagery and expressions carry over into many genres of Islamic literature, not just theological and philosophical texts. Poetry, for example Rumi’s poetry, is full of Qur’anic language, and translations that forego that language—either by choice or by ignorance—in favor of Western idiomatic expression, lose the “distinctive topography” of the Qur’anic worldview.

It is important to understand that the imagistic, mythic language of the Qur’an is non-negotiable. One cannot, for example, argue the idea of whether or not God has a “throne”¹³⁵ in the context of a Qur’anic worldview, or that the Devil (Iblis) exists.¹³⁶ One may interpret these images away, but they do exist in the Qur’an, and as they appear again repeatedly in other works that draw from the Qur’anic worldview, they will likely represent something beyond what a single translator can imagine them to mean. The best way to understand the mythic language of the Qur’an is as ahistorical—or rather, trans-historical, because it connects ideas across time, and peoples over the course of history. Mythic language, according to Levi-Straus, is a timeless pattern of speech that explains past, present and future. “...a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago. But what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future.”¹³⁷ Ibn al-Farid’s *Khamriyya* illustrates the operational value of a myth when it describes an event

¹³³ Ibid., p. 119.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 91.

¹³⁵ “His Throne comprises the heavens and earth” (Q 2:255).

¹³⁶ “We created you, then We shaped you, then We said to the angels: ‘Bow yourselves to Adam’; so they bowed themselves, save Iblis—he was not of those that bowed themselves” (Q 7:10).

¹³⁷ Claude Levi-Straus, “The Structural Study of Myth,” from *Structuralism, Semiotics, and Deconstruction*, p. 837.

as taking place in the past, present and the future, and its effect occupying a space even before creation:

In Memory of the beloved
We drank a wine;
We were drunk with it
Before creation of the vine.¹³⁸

Another translation reads:

Rememb'ring the beloved, wine we drink
Which drunk had made us ere the vine's creation.¹³⁹

The image of the winedinking is a kind of metaphor, that allows for many interpretations. It is because mythic frameworks are built on concrete imagistic language, like metaphors and poetry in general, that they can be so rich and connotative. In the history of religious events, every figure, every object, every act, and every place can take on this kind of metaphorical value. When this mythic investment happens, and when the event is written about afterwards *as* a myth, it is important to recognize the change. It is a special characteristic of religious literature, that it contains this feature. W. A. Graham recognizes the possibility of a myth—or story, as it were, if one came across it and did not know the difference—having the double significance of history *and* myth.

With the passing of time, every event of religious significance gradually takes on a mythical aspect. This does not mean that the “mythologization” of an historical event represents a distortion of reality. On the contrary, “myth-making” or “mythologizing” is the process by which an historical reality is recognized as having ultimate, transhistorical meaning. The myth founded upon an historical reality can be threatened by its tie with history (when historicism prevails), whereas a so-called “cosmic” myth without palpable historical nexus (and therefore inaccessible to the methods of historicism) cannot; but the “historical” myth carries for the man of faith the double force of history *and* myth, of temporal *and* eternal reality.¹⁴⁰

The translator’s job is doubly complex, because he or she has to decide whether the story in the text represents history *combined* with myth in order to create the temporal and eternal reality of which Graham speaks, or if it is merely one or the other. Knowledge of

¹³⁸ Translation by Th. Emile Homerin. See appendix for full text of translation.

¹³⁹ Translation by Martin Lings. See appendix for full text of translation.

¹⁴⁰ W. A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, pp. 20-21.

the surrounding works in the cumulative tradition would be essential, in that case, and one could never pick up a single text and be able to determine it.

The power of images and imagistic language has already been seen, in the romantic sets of images of “the Orient” that Edward Said described and worked so hard to expose. The old-school Orientalists created myths that damaged people and their cultural identities. As man-made myths, they can also be taken down and destroyed: “[The] ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’ are man-made. Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other.”¹⁴¹ In context with the damaging effects of the phenomena of “Orientalism,” then, it would seem that whatever images arise from a community, in literature *about itself*, seem appropriate to preserve, while images that arise from outside a community in literature *about another*, seem inappropriate to preserve. However, the job of the translator is at once to translate accurately and also to decide what images absolutely must be preserved at all costs and what images can find equivalents in the target language. Imagistic language is a strong force, whether in a mythic framework that elucidates the role of human beings in a cosmic scheme, or in a mythic framework that grants power to an imperialist force over a colonized people—and since Orientalism is indeed built on images and imagistic language, translators will always play a large role in either the building up of misunderstandings about another culture or the dissolution of those same misunderstandings.

¹⁴¹ From the Introduction to *Orientalism*, quoted in “Edward W. Said” from *New Historicism and Cultural Studies*, p. 1279.

The Case at Hand

In the case of the Arabic of the Qur'an, which is the root of the religious imagery of Islam, there is a very important issue concerning imagery that is discussed by Ibn 'Arabi, the intellectual progenitor of Jami. Ibn 'Arabi, who wrote in Arabic, felt strongly that the Arabic of the Qur'an needed to be understood on many levels, including the very concrete, and he disagreed with those who "interpreted away" those concrete, imagistic meanings in spite of the fact that the Arabic called them to mind. Ignoring the image meant that things could only be understood rationally, or abstractly, which is merely one mode of thought. His insistence on multiple understandings, including the concrete, was one thing that got him into trouble with both scholars of his time and some scholars today. According to William Chittick, Ibn 'Arabi considered the stripping of the concrete meaning from the text a kind of distortion that is a serious one. "Understanding the Koran exclusively in rational terms is precisely the type of distortion that Ibn al-'Arabi is most concerned to criticize—and this is another reason that certain of the traditional ulama and many of the moderns have considered him a heretic."¹⁴² Calling Ibn 'Arabi a heretic today may be the equivalent of criticizing the Buber/Rosenzweig school of thought, the one that asks that the reader be led into the world of the text and to experience the "distinctive topography" of it.

Ibn 'Arabi has reasons for wanting to preserve the concrete understanding of Qur'anic language, though, having to do with another power that he says imagistic language has, which is the power to see God. He would say that the faculty of the mind that holds the power to think in the rational modality and contemplate abstractions is an important one. It separates and defines one idea as different and separate from another. It is the "rational faculty," and it judges and discerns how things are different. He would say that also that there is another faculty of the mind that holds the power to think in the concrete modality and imagine concrete things, called the "imaginal faculty." It joins ideas and helps one see how things are similar, making it possible for metaphor to do what it does, as when one understands why "happiness is like a butterfly." One knows with one's rational faculty why happiness is *not* like a butterfly, but one also knows with one's imaginal faculty why happiness *is* like a butterfly. So, according to Ibn 'Arabi, if one wanted to know *what happiness is like* one would need to consult with the imaginal faculty and not the rational.

Ibn 'Arabi explains the limits of the rational faculty (ironically) by personifying it: "Then God addressed the rational faculties with the declaration of similarity established by the senses and imagination. The rational faculties listen and become bewildered. They say, 'We have nothing of that in our hands.'"¹⁴³ Ibn 'Arabi's point is usually that one needs both of these faculties to function in the world, but if it is God that one seeks, one *cannot* ignore the imaginal faculty: "...it is in the world's concrete realities that God is

¹⁴² Chittick, "The Translator's Dilemma" from *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* p. xxxvii.

¹⁴³ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 74.

found, not its abstractions.”¹⁴⁴ In short, when it comes to human beings and objects of knowledge that they seek, abstract language has a distancing effect, while concrete language brings the object closer. Qur’anic language allows for the concrete language that aids in understanding, and in so doing, demonstrates how God discloses Himself to human beings on a very concrete, imagistic level. For Ibn ‘Arabi, to ignore the imaginal mode of interpretation is to leave human beings far away in their understanding, and take away a vital connection that human beings would otherwise have access to in any other form of communication. There is a long-standing joke among old-school Orientalists about the Arabic language—that any given word has multiple meanings; one of them inevitably has to do with sex, and another has to do with a camel. No doubt the saying illustrates the language’s inextricable connection to desert life. However, according to Chittick, Ibn al-‘Arabi would hold that “the imaginal mind finds the self-disclosure of the Real in the sex and the camel.”¹⁴⁵ Finally, there is something we can agree upon with the old-school Orientalists.

On the level of translation, one can be sure that it would be appropriate to convey every image that is called upon by Ibn ‘Arabi, and when his text employs Qur’anic images, it would be *imperative* to preserve that image. However, when one is translating into English, there is another issue—that of the cumulative effect of Latin and Greek words entering English. Chittick points out that decisions have to be made in translating Arabic to English that have to do with shifting sensibilities about words, and the fact that when words enter one language from another, they change in meaning and connotation, for example, those words that travelled from Latin and Greek into English and suddenly became abstractions because people were no longer familiar with their original meanings: “...[T]he learned language, extracted largely from Latin and Greek, employs words that are now understood as abstractions, even if the original terms were concrete. In contrast, the Arabic of the Koran, which Ibn al-‘Arabi is constantly uncovering, always has a concrete side to it, and this is true of Arabic in general...”¹⁴⁶ What this means is that any translator of Arabic (especially one translating Ibn ‘Arabi) should prefer concrete English words over abstract English words, and avoid Greek or Latinate words, if possible. In sum then, one of the texts discussed here, Ibn al-Farid’s poem, should prefer the concrete in order to convey the sense of the original language and also convey the full effect of the mythic language contained in them.

For translating Persian, on the other hand, Greek and Latinate words can have a different function. Since Arabic in the middle of a Persian text has a heavy feel, like Greek and Latin words in English, Greek and Latin-rooted words can be appropriately used for abstract terms or any passage that sounds technical or scientific, in particular

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. xxxvi.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. xxxv. ‘The Real’ is one of God’s names in Islamic thought, and indicates in this case the necessity of encountering whatever exists and is ‘real’ through the intermediary of the senses.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

when translating Arabic words in a Persian text. So, in translating Ibn ‘Arabi, words need to be understood as concrete and imagistic, and so one should prefer Anglo-Saxon rooted words. However, if those same words appear in Jami’s text, they should be translated with Greek or Latin-rooted abstract terms to get the meaning and feel of the word as it appears in the Persian.

Returning to the general issues of translation, the texts will be discussed according to Barry Hoberman’s ideal of translation (“to convey fully the meaning of the text”) keeping in mind that ultimately, the translation will fail on some level. Practically, the issues to consider, according to Hoberman, are (1) the canon, that is, what determines a text’s entry into the “accepted” group of texts; (2) the textual basis, that is, what the origin of the text is; (3) the interpretation, that is, who interprets, and what the guidelines of interpretation are; and (4) English style, that is, how word choices are determined. Though there are many views about what translation is, such as transference of a text from the source language to the target language, or a substitution, through semiotic consideration, of the signs of a text in one language, to the signs of that text in another language, Hoberman’s definition is to be preferred here. It does not presume to claim success in equivalence, as “transference” implies. And it does not involve a specific set of rules to guide a translator through the process of translation, as a “substitution” method does. Putting forth a claim of equivalence between two texts seems entirely misleading, since readers (especially readers of a text of this kind) know that there is always something lost in translation.

Most often, in the attempt to create a sense of “equivalence,” it is precisely the meaning of the text that is lost, and if one values the source text in its historical context, that context (“distinctive topography”) is exactly what seems most important, especially when it comes to the elements of a mythic narrative. Although a “new text” for a “new reader” may call for a search for cultural equivalences to make a concept more clear, what seems to be required in the conveyance of meaning is an attempt by the translator to bring the reader into the world of the text as it existed before he/she arrived. In doing so, one may feel stifled by either a formulaic approach, which may require one to consider sentence structure, syntax, or grammatical features. Having been set free to focus only on meaning, with no claims of equivalence, one may hope to come as close as possible to the source text. However, in the end, claims of equivalence in conveyance of meaning must be limited.

The canon being the first thing to consider, according to Hoberman’s guiding principles of translation, it seems clear at least that the text belongs to the canon of texts on theoretical Sufism, and more specifically, those written in Persian. The origin of the text, the second thing to consider, is easy enough to see, as Jami himself points out in the course of the commentary that he is writing from within the intellectual tradition of Ibn ‘Arabi. The technical terms Jami uses in the course of the commentary are in keeping with the school of Ibn ‘Arabi. The entry of this text into a canon of Sufi texts in general is also determined by its treatment of the *Khamriyya* that was also commented on by many Sufi masters, as they considered Ibn al-Farid a Sufi thinker. There were many Sufis who also thought of Ibn al-Farid as being in line with Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought, and studied his work in that context. There is a group of texts already translated and available to

scholars who have been interested in the school of Ibn ‘Arabi, and this commentary of Jami’s will join those texts in a separate genre of texts written (in either Arabic or Persian) in the tradition of the school of Ibn ‘Arabi.

Jami himself points to his intellectual school as his guide in understanding Ibn al-Farid, and so I in turn have used the school of Ibn ‘Arabi to guide the translation of Jami. I have held to the standard of literal meaning from the source text, as far as possible. In doing so, I am also tied to Jami’s understanding of Ibn al-Farid, whether or not Jami understood Ibn al-Farid’s text. As Hoberman points out, the translator determines “the relationship between the source text and the new text.” Jami, in a sense, has determined my own relationship, as a reader, to Ibn al-Farid’s text, and I in turn determine the relationship of English readers to Jami’s text. The translator also determines the relationship between the old readers and the new readers. For example, if the new readership of Jami in English find appeal in the text for the same reasons the readership of Jami in Persian find appeal, those two readerships will be somewhat united. However, if the translation creates a different kind of appeal, then the two readerships will be as different as the two readerships of Omar Khayyam—one in Persian who understands him as a poet and a scholar, and one in English who understands him as a hedonist with flowery language habits. I have tried to avoid that result.

Style is difficult to consider. The particular word choices that make up the sound and tone of the text make the issue a complex one. The two languages in use within the text, Persian and Arabic, are very different in sound and effect on a readership. Flowery, poetic Persian can dominate the sound of the text, but when Arabic is used, either to convey a verse of the Qur’an, Hadith, or in explication, the text begins to sound dense and abstract. The interpretation of the text is therefore guided by both attention to the meaning of the text and the style of the Persian and the Arabic. Generally speaking, when there is a choice to be made by an author, between either a Persian or Arabic word, when the subject requires the language of Islamic scholarship, the choice will be the Arabic word. It is usually because the author intends to make a connection to another text, such as the Qur’an or Hadith, or any number of other commentaries written in Arabic. In the case of Jami, he is usually making a connection to other groups of thinkers, but especially to Ibn ‘Arabi.

In translation of technical terms that come directly from Ibn ‘Arabi’s lexicon and have Arabic roots, I have first looked at the Arabic root for guidance in word choice, as Arabic has a relatively mathematical precision in the relationships between words that share the same root. If the word is related to another merely by root, that is usually enough reason to translate the word as a technical term consistent within the range of meaning of that other word. If the word does not bear the significance of a technical term (ie., it does not have an Arabic root) I have considered the sense of the word in English. In that case, there can be a word choice that retains faithfulness to the literal Persian meaning, with a loss in clarity in English, or there can be a word choice that retains no faithfulness to the literal Persian, yet has a sense of clarity in English. This choice frequently has no perfect solution, and usually arises with the idiomatic expressions that are common in Persian. However, what is most troublesome about the abundance of idiomatic expressions in both Persian and English, the source and target languages, is the

decision regarding a conveyance of cultural ambiance. Does one convey a sense of cultural ambiance in the literal translation of an idiomatic phrase by bringing the new reader into the Persian world? Or, does one convey a sense of cultural ambiance by selecting an equivalent phrase in English? I tend to follow the former approach, with the aid of footnotes, simply because as a translator, when the choice between conveyance of style and conveyance of meaning appears, my choice is for conveyance of meaning.

One of the issues that is important to consider in translating a text that contains both Persian and Arabic is that Persian and Arabic belong to two different language families. Persian, like English, Spanish, French and Italian, is an Indo-European language, while Arabic belongs to the family of Semitic languages found in the Middle East: Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic. The two language families have two entirely different methods of building words.

In the Indo-European languages (such as English and Persian), words are built up, by means of prefixes, suffixes, phonetic changes, etc., from roots which may at one time have existed in some form as words, but which have only rarely survived as such, and are of little practical value so far as the study of the modern language is concerned. The Arabic root is exactly the opposite; it is purely theoretical (as will be seen, it consists entirely of consonants), but it is of the greatest grammatical importance. Once the root is isolated, a whole series of words, with fairly well-defined shades of meaning, may be formed from it according to precise ‘mathematical’ formulae...[t]hus from the basic root k-t-b, containing the idea of ‘writing’, may be derived:

<i>kataba</i>	he wrote.
<i>yaktubu</i>	he is writing.
<i>kitâb</i>	book.
<i>maktab</i>	office, school.
<i>maktûb</i>	letter.
<i>kitâbat</i>	writing.
<i>kâtîb</i> , pl. <i>kuttâb</i>	writer, clerk. ¹⁴⁷

Persian, on the other hand, has no such complex structure. However, it has other complexities that are less systematic and therefore harder to master without being immersed in the culture of the language. According to W. M. Thackston, “Persian is remarkably simple in terms of formal grammar: no gender, no noun inflection, no adjectival agreement, and no irregularities in verbal conjugation. However—and rather like English in this respect—what it lacks in inflection it more than makes up for in syntactic and idiomatic complexity....”¹⁴⁸ As for Persian idiomatic complexity, here is

¹⁴⁷ W. M. Thackston, “The Arabic Element in Persian” in *An Introduction to Persian* 157.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. xi-xii.

one example: “Abraham expired and died.” Do these two words have the same meaning? Or are they two words for which the reader should strive to discover a difference? For Hebrew (Semitic) language Biblical exegesis, and also for Arabic exegesis, it is appropriate to consider the two words as having separate meanings, and being significant entirely unto themselves. However, Persian synonyms found closely in proximity to each other are a convention that exists for the sake of poesy, and so in translating, one can use synonymous words that contribute to lyricism without being very concerned about meaning.

It should be noted that the classical form of Arabic has not changed significantly from Ibn al-Farid’s time until today. Persian, also, has changed very little since the time of Jami, according to W. M. Thackston. “...[W]ith the exception of certain items of vocabulary and a very few features of grammar and syntax, [Persian] has changed remarkably little since the tenth and eleventh centuries.”¹⁴⁹ It is worthy of note, also, that Arabic and Persian both had classical forms that were the preferred forms for writing in the very specific genres of poetry and mystical works: “In its classical form, Persian became the language par excellence of poetry and mystical expression and, especially after the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century, was the medium of culture and literature throughout the non-Arab Islamic world. From Constantinople to Bengal and from Central Asia to the south of India, Persian reigned for centuries as the language of high culture and belles-lettres.”¹⁵⁰

One consideration in translating Persian, though, is the fact that Arabic, when inserted into a Persian conversation or a text, tends to sound especially erudite, since Arabic was the preferred language for theologians and philosophers. The previous point concerning Ibn ‘Arabi’s preference in preserving the concrete language of the Qur’an, has another caveat when Persian enters the picture: in Persian, Arabic sounds abstract while Persian sounds more concrete. So choices in English translation sometimes come down to whether the style of the Persian (with occasional Arabic words and phrases) sounds earthy or not, and whether there is a point being made about the “concreteness” of an image that arises from an Arabic word.

Also in the matter of translating Persian to English in the case of Jami, is the number of synonyms that are used for “wine” in Persian, and only one readily-understood word in English. Therefore, in Jami’s commentary on wine and winedinking, the slavish use of multiple words for “wine” in English to match the Persian might indicate to the reader a technical significance for each new word. As it is, Persian’s variety of words for wine supply Jami with a wealth of poetic expression, not to be confused with technical words, as it might have seemed if the words were Arabic words. In the translation, I have not singled the words out for special attention, as they would not have been singled out for attention by Persian readership. Rather, no matter how many words for “wine” in Persian are being used, I have used the single word “wine” to translate. On the other hand, Arabic words that have come into Persian received special attention, because their appearance usually indicated a technical word from Ibn ‘Arabi’s lexicon, which would have come up

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. xi.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

repeatedly in the text, or its root would have. Students of theoretical Sufism, especially non-native speakers, find the consistent translation of a single word extremely helpful, and sometimes essential, in understanding a text. For that reason, I have tried to remain consistent with any technical terms. These decisions have created a text that has a distinctive style, and prefers a literal, rather than a cultural translation, yet aims for both.

In general, literal translation tends to preserve accuracy from the side of the source language, and sounds awkward in the target language, while cultural translation may lose accuracy from the source language side, yet will sound smooth, or carry a certain desired tone or effect, in the target language. In looking at the choices made by some of the translators of the *Khamriyya*, Martin Lings and Th. Emil Homerin, the effect of both the literal and the cultural translations can be seen. In Lings' translation, there is little preservation to the form of the ode, which divides lines into two. In its disregarding of the form, one might expect that the conveyance of a literal meaning is the goal of the translation. However much of the literal meaning is preserved, it is expressed in a King James-style of English, which gives the sense of an elevated text.

Since the poem is highly regarded in the Sufi tradition, both Arab and Persian, such a translation conveys the effect of Arabic on non-Arabic speakers:

If in the shadow of the wall where spreads
Its vine they laid a man, mortally sick,
Gone were his sickness; and one paralysed,
Brought near its tavern, would walk; the dumb would speak
Did he its savour recollect. Its fragrance,
If wafted through the East, even in the West,
Would free, for one berheumed, his sense of smell;
And he who stained his palm, clasping its cup,
Could never, star in hand, be lost by night.¹⁵¹

What is notable about these lines is that Lings uses the word "berheumed" to express the condition of one who has a cold and whose nose is stuffed up. While the word does express the literal meaning, the inaccessibility of the poem in English increases with such words. More importantly, though, the poem conveys the effect of Arabic on non-Arab speakers, but not the effect of Arabic on Arab speakers. Martin Lings suggests that his translation and commentary (in the form of footnotes) indicates the general understanding of the poem at the time.¹⁵² There is some allowance, then, made by the translator, for new information to change the understanding of the poem over time. He may very well have approved of the newer translation by Homerin.

Homerin, in contrast to Lings, preserves the groupings of lines in the original (but not as couplets, like the original), and stays as close to the literal meanings as possible while using simple Anglo-Saxon rooted words (avoiding Latinate and Greek). In so

¹⁵¹ For the full text of the poem rendered by Martin Lings, see the appendix.

¹⁵² Lings, *Studies in Comparative Religion*, vol. 14, pp. 131-34.

doing, he conveys the more concrete effect of Arabic on Arabic speakers. It may be that in the time that passed between Lings and Homerin's translations, the familiarity of Arabic in the West had increased, so that the sound of Arabic in non-Arab speaking settings no longer had the same effect on the readership. In effect, Homerin's sounds like an "everyday" Arabic:

Could they fling
Into the shadow of its trellised vine
A sick man on the point of death,
Disease would flee him;

Could they bring a cripple
Near its tavern, he would walk,
And from mention of its flavor,
The dumb would talk.

Could breaths of its bouquet
Spread out in the east,
One stuffed-up in the west
Would smell again;

And were a touching palm
tinged by its glass,
one would not stray at night,
a star in hand.¹⁵³

My own translation, like Homerin's, seeks to preserve the everyday Arabic language effect, but also preserves the couplets of the original poem. If the phrasing of the couplets falls into a slightly awkward pattern in English, or the line ends at an awkward point in English, the stilted effect is retained, according to the poetic license commonly afforded any author, but more importantly, in an attempt to "make English do what Arabic does." Just as Rosenzweig believed in the notion of "speech-thinking" in the context of Biblical translation, and forcing non-Hebraic language to speak in Hebraicisms "not as German had but as German *could*."¹⁵⁴ I am not attempting to fall in line with an already-established style of poetry, but rather to express in English those Arabisms that *can* exist, after they are expressed in English. As Rosenzweig pointed out, any language can be more than what it is, the more people stretch its capacity for expression: "The more that people with something to say say it strikingly, the more language will fulfill its potential to express all that can be expressed. It follows, then, that no language can increase its expressiveness without growing, without incorporating the features of other

¹⁵³ For the full text of the poem rendered by Homerin, see the appendix.

¹⁵⁴ Emphasis is mine.

languages.”¹⁵⁵ It seems likely that the resulting translation, even in its apparent awkward phrasing, will express the speech-thought:

If they threw into the shadow of its vine’s wall
Someone ill, on the verge of death, his illness would go.

If a cripple were brought near its tavern, he would walk;
If a dumb man recalled its taste, he would speak.

If the whiffs of its fragrance were to spread in the East,
Smell would return to someone with a stuffed nose in the West.

A touching palm tinged by its cup
Will never be lost at night while the star is in hand.¹⁵⁶

The translation as it appears here is how it appears within Jâmî’s text, which I have translated in full from Persian but have not included in this work. As an exercise, it presented a challenge both as a simple translation from Arabic to English and also a translation of a foreign-sounding Arabic poem within a larger Persian work. Because of the preserved awkwardness of the phrasing, it both conveys the sense of poetry’s license and the strangeness of a foreign-sounding tongue, however “everyday” the Arabic may sound. As such, it is hoped that a balance has been struck between the concrete language of images that proceeds from Qur’anic Arabic, and the stretch of language capacity that Persian-speakers have come to expect from their Arabic-infused Persian. In translating this way, though, I have kept in mind two readerships, one being the original Arabic readership— who would have appreciated the concrete-sounding imagistic Arabic, and could have thought of the poetic language as conveying both image and theoretical underpinning as Ibn ‘Arabi did—and also Jami’s readership, who may have felt the difference in style between Arabic and Persian but would have been concerned about Ibn ‘Arabi’s intellectual school of thought, which Jami was preserving through his work.

¹⁵⁵ Edward Greenstein, “Theories of Modern Bible Translation,” from *Essays on Biblical Method and Translation*, p. 114.

¹⁵⁶ For the full text of other translations, see the appendix.

Chapter Five

Commentaries on the *Khamriyya*

Jami's Commentary

On the whole, poetry invites multiple readings, but it has been reported that Ibn al-Farid, when speaking on behalf of his poetry, did more than that. The story goes: “An eminent scholar came to Ibnu ‘l-Fárid and asked permission to write a commentary on his masterpiece, the *Nazmu ‘l-Sulúk*. ‘In how many volumes?’ ‘Two.’ The poet smiled. ‘Had I wished,’ said he, ‘I could have written two volumes of commentary on every verse of it.’”¹⁵⁷ The point of the story is that the verses were thought of at the time as being fraught with the unspoken, and that there was much opportunity for commentary. Mystical commentaries alone have proliferated, especially when Sadr al-Din Qunawi, Ibn ‘Arabi’s foremost student, commented on and adopted the poetry of Ibn al-Farid into the education of his students. The intellectual heritage, beginning with Qunawi, has often been called by Western scholars “the school of Ibn ‘Arabi.”¹⁵⁸ Among Ibn ‘Arabi’s most important followers was Sharaf al-Din Dawud al-Qaysari,¹⁵⁹ whose commentary on Ibn al-Farid’s *Khamriyya* (in Arabic) will be considered here alongside the commentary on the *Khamriyya* by Abd al-Rahman Jami (in Persian). In the second half of the 15th century, one of the major authors of the school of Ibn ‘Arabi’s was the Persian Jami, and it will become clear that his commentary on Ibn al-Farid’s *Khamriyya* is only truly accessible to those familiar with the school of Ibn ‘Arabi.

Jami’s *Lawami* (“Sparks”) begins with a lengthy (fifteen pages) commentary on different kinds of love that one may see in the world, and the lovers who manifest these kinds of love. There is, for example, love for the Essence of God, for the divine names and attributes, and for the divine “traces.” The lovers of the traces are further divided into kinds—from those who see God in the things of the world but have not reached the level of love for the attributes, to those who take up with “metaphorical beloveds,” which are corporeal realities that merely symbolize the true Beloved, which is an otherwise invisible reality that lies beyond manifestation.¹⁶⁰ The invisible reality is the one referred

¹⁵⁷ “Preface to the *Díván*,” 11, 1.1 foll. *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, p. 169.

¹⁵⁸ See Chittick’s article in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, “The School of Ibn al-‘Arabi.”

¹⁵⁹ Others important followers, besides Qunawi and al-Qaysari, include Sa’id al-Din al-Farghani, Mu’ayyid al-Din al-Jandi, and Kamal al-Din ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani.

¹⁶⁰ The physical reality as a symbol that corresponds to an invisible reality is similar to the Platonic idea of “forms” and “archetypes.”

to in the famous saying, which Jami mentions in his *Lawami'*: “The metaphor is the bridge to the reality.” He specifically points out that wine is an appropriate metaphor for love, since there are striking similarities between them. However, he also points out that the prohibition on wine makes it clear that the one who takes an exalted view of the literal (physical) reality of wine is gravely mistaken. The physical reality is merely a symbol (or metaphor) for the real wine, just as physical love is merely a symbol (or metaphor) for real Love.

The invisible realities can be understood through the different “modes of knowing” that have been employed in the intellectual tradition,¹⁶¹ including the study of the text of the Qur’an, philosophical inquiry, and the direct unveiling (*kashf*) of the realities by God, but according to Jami’s description in the *Lawami'*, the reality of Love is only understood through unveiling, and concealed from everyone else who has not had the experience:

Until one tastes it, one does not know, and once one knows, one cannot explain. So, expressing it is concealed from other than its finder, and making it manifest is hidden from other than its taster.

Everyone who catches the scent of love’s wine
moves his bedroll from the lane of wisdom to the tavern.
And when someone has not savored that wine in the mouth of tasting,
his understanding will never reach that wine’s secret.

Last night in bewilderment to the old man of the Magi
I said, “Give me a symbol of the wine in secret.”
He said, “It is a reality of finding.
O soul of your father! How will you know it if you don't taste it?”¹⁶²

In Jami’s introduction to the *Lawami'*, he places Ibn al-Farid firmly within the tradition of theoretical Sufism—making reference to the symbolism of its verses and how those verses describe the realities of divine love—and he describes the poem as being well known, having been passed down by masters in Sufi teaching.

Now to begin: These are a few pages on the explanation of the words and expressions, and on the unveiling of the signs and allusions, of the Ode of the Letter “M,” Ibn al-Farid’s *Khamriyya*—may God sanctify the secret heart of its versifier! In describing the wine of love, which is the noblest thing to be sought, it is arranged in the subtlest style; and among the lords of gnosis and the possessors of tasting and finding, it is well disseminated and complete in fame.

¹⁶¹ The intellectual tradition in Islam is the philosophical tradition that looks back to the Greeks, theoretical Sufism, and to some degree Kalam (dogmatic theology). These traditions are to be distinguished from the transmitted traditions of the science of Hadith and jurisprudence.

¹⁶² Jami, *Lawami'*, trans. DuBois, pp. 108-109.

Because of these verses, which are an ocean of pearls,
the horizons are filled with the sound of the stories of love.
Every verse is like a room, and every word in it
is a container full of wine from the tavern of love.¹⁶³

As is typical throughout his commentary on the *Khamriyya*, Jami adds his own quatrains (four hemistiches: two lines with two half-lines) to help explain. The quatrains echo the original poem—both in substance and effect—in that not only does Jami’s explanation of Ibn al-Farid become clear through the lines, the new verses also seem to demonstrate the lucid effect of the poetry on Jami’s own soul.

In his introduction, Jami also explains the structure his work will take, that it will undertake the description of the knowledge unveiled to a particular group belonging to the tradition of Sufism, and he will identify each new illumination with the word “spark.”

Since it seemed that one cannot set out toward this goal without undertaking to define and classify love and to explain its roots and branches, a few of the words of this group regarding these affairs have been mentioned and written. Each independent section of these comprehensive words is introduced with the word spark in order to indicate that it is among the sparks of the lights of unveiling and witnessing upon the hearts of the lords of tasting and finding. And God gives the success to correctness, and from Him is the origin and to Him the return.¹⁶⁴

Jami takes the time to explain, after finishing his comments on love in the intro, the difference between the wine he is discussing—Love of God—and physical wine.

One of these points is that wine makes the person who drinks it, and love the person who possesses it, open-handed and generous, even if they had been avaricious and miserly. However, the fruit of the liberal generosity of the drunkard is gold and silver, while the liberal generosity of the lover is everything that exists. The one intoxicated with wine gives away silver and gold, while the one intoxicated with love gives away the coin of both worlds at once.

If generosity moves the hand of the drunkard,
he can give no more than dinars and dirhams.
When the steed of ambition carries the one drunk with longing for You,
he empties his sleeves to disperse the two worlds.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 105-06. “From Him is the origin and to Him the Return” is cited as if hadith, but not found in the standard sources.

One of these points is that both those drunk with love and drunk with wine are brave and reckless, void of the attributes of cowardice and fear, bold in dangerous places, and in times of peril, they have had their fill of life. But the valor of one is because his foresighted reason has been overpowered. The boldness of the other is because of the predominance of the light of unveiling and certainty. The one results in perdition in the two worlds, and other in eternal life.

We are drunk and debauched, yet slyboots and clever—
in love, our foot is placed in the battlefield of perdition.
If we are killed by the arrow of longing a hundred times,
that is the source of eternal life. What fear is there in that?¹⁶⁵

In the very first spark, Jami explains the *Khamriyya* by using two technical terms that he draws from the school of Ibn ‘Arabi. He discusses both the “tasks” of God (and their varieties), and the “disclosures” of God. These ideas are ones that seem to arise organically from the text of the poem, as Jami explains them. However, they are peculiar to the intellectual school of Ibn ‘Arabi. The tasks are the things that will be manifested in the world, but which at their primary level of existence, are not witnessed by anyone but God Himself.

Spark

The Presence of Majesty and Bounteous Giving¹⁶⁶
in Eternity without Beginning
when “God was, and nothing was with Him.”¹⁶⁷

There where there was not yet Tablet or Pen,¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 124-5.

¹⁶⁶ Incorrect in mss.; should read: *ifdal*.

¹⁶⁷ Ibn ‘Arabi points out concerning this hadith: God is “not accompanied by thingness, nor do we ascribe it to Him. Such is He, and there is no thing with Him. The negation of thingness from Him is one of His essential attributes, just as is the negation of “withness” (ma`iyya) from things. He is with the things, but the things are not with Him, since “withness” follows from knowledge: He knows us, so He is with us. We do not know Him, so we are not with Him” See Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 88 ff.

¹⁶⁸ The Pen and the Tablet are basic concepts in Islamic cosmology. The Qur’an describes itself as having been written on the Tablet: “Nay, but it is a glorious Koran, in a guarded tablet” (Q 85:21-22) and the Qur’an refers to the Pen in the first verses revealed to Muhammad: “Read: And thy Lord is the most generous, who taught by the Pen, taught man what he knew not” (Q 96:1-5). See Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, for discussions of the Pen and the Tablet.

all the entities were in the concealment of nonexistence.

He knew Himself in Himself, and He saw his own essential beauty and perfection in Himself. By this very knowing and seeing He knew and saw all the varieties of the tasks and attributes that had been rolled up and inserted into the unseen He-ness of the essence without the impurity of needing the manifestation of the other and otherness.¹⁶⁹

“Tasks” (*shu’ûn*) is an important technical term for Jami, as he uses it to refer to that in God which gives rise to the things of the universe. In a more narrow sense, the tasks can be seen as “fixed entities” or the “divine attributes” and “relations” which can potentially embrace manifest forms on another level of existence. Jami’s description of “the tasks” is a step back in concreteness from Ibn ‘Arabi’s explanation of them, which involve allusions to the Qur’anic verses that describe God’s habits in creativity: “No indeed, but they are in confusion as to a new creation (*khalq jadîd*)” (Q 50:15) and “Each day He is upon some task (*sha’n*)” (Q 55:29). The two Qur’anic verses together point to the non-repetitive nature of God’s self-disclosure (*tajallî*) and the infinite number of possible things that can be brought forth in creation. Essentially, when the “tasks” change, the creatures also change. The same is true in Jami’s description of the tasks.

However, Ibn ‘Arabi describes changes in manifest things that contribute to the human being’s difficulty in discerning those changes. He likens the changes to the colors of a chameleon. “The factor that separates two similars among things is difficult to perceive through witnessing, except for him who witnesses the Real or who verifies his witnessing of a chameleon, since there is no animal that shows more clearly that the Real possesses the property of ‘Each day He is upon some task’ than the chameleon. So no attribute and no state in the cosmos remains for two moments, nor does any form become manifest twice.”¹⁷⁰ Here Ibn ‘Arabi employs the chameleon as a similitude, just as Ibn al-Farid and many others before him had done with similitudes like wine and winedrinking. The tradition of similitudes is a common one among Sufi shaykhs, not simply because of the tradition of metaphors, but because of the tradition of the Qur’an: “God is not ashamed to strike a similitude even of a gnat, or aught above it” (Q 2:26). Another term Jami introduces in the first spark is “disclosure,” which is God’s manifestation of Himself in the cosmos, the “other.” This manifestation requires the engendering of a creation, through which God witnesses Himself.

But within that essential perfection He was witnessing other name-derived perfections that are dependent on taking others into account, even if only in a certain relation and respect, and that are named in the common usage of this group “the perfection of disclosure and seeing the disclosure.”

¹⁶⁹ Jami, *Lawami’*, trans. DuBois, p. 106.

¹⁷⁰ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 99.

The perfection of disclosure means His manifestation in the engendered levels and creaturely loci of self-disclosure in keeping with those tasks and respects, distinct in properties and diverse in traces, spiritually, imaginally, and sensibly.¹⁷¹ The perfection of seeing disclosure means that He witnesses Himself in these same levels such that, just as He had seen Himself by Himself in Himself in the station of the gathering of unity, so also He sees Himself through other than Himself in Himself, or through Himself in other than Himself, or through other than Himself in the other, in the levels of differentiation and manyness.

It is love that shows the face of good and evil.

It has deceived the pattern of acceptance and rejection.

In disclosure “He is every day at some task” (Q 55:29).

He wants to see Himself in all the tasks.¹⁷²

Jami also discusses “disclosure” and “seeing the disclosure” in other places, where it becomes clear that he means God’s witnessing of Himself in every respect possible, both with a creation and without one. For example, in the *Lawa’ih* (Gleams), in the 17th Gleam: “The goal of all this is the realization and manifestation of the ‘Name-derived Perfection,’ which is the perfection of disclosure and seeing disclosure. ‘The perfection of disclosure means His manifestation in terms of these respects. ‘The perfection of seeing disclosure’ means His witnessing Himself in terms of these same respects.”¹⁷³

In the second spark, Jami introduces the concepts of “entification,” which is the next level of created things becoming manifest in the world, and “delimitation,” which is the way the things become manifest as separate and discrete from each other. First is God’s awareness, and second is a rushing to entify, through delimitation:

After that awareness of the name-derived perfections, there rises up a movement, an inclination, and a seeking towards its realization and manifestation. This inclination, seeking, and wanting are the wellspring of all passions and the leaven of all loves. All passions, loves, friendships, and inclinations are the forms of its entifications and the levels of its delimitations. In the same way, all the loveliness, beauties, bounties, and perfections are the branches of that Perfection and the radiance of that Beauty—high indeed is His greatness and holy are his names!

O You whose stature the tunic of loveliness adorns!

¹⁷¹ The three levels of perception of the human being, corresponding to the three levels of reality: the spiritual world, the imaginal world, and the sensory world.

¹⁷² Jami, *Lawami’*, trans. DuBois, p. 107.

¹⁷³ Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light*, p. 162.

The clothing of love fits our body from You.
Just as everything's beauty is the reflection of Your face,
so everyone's love rose up from You on the first day.¹⁷⁴

The word entifications (*ta`yyunât*) derives from `ayn, “entity,” and is an important technical term, as Jâmî outlines the levels of entification—from undifferentiation to full differentiation in the world—resulting in a doctrine of the “Five Divine Presences.”¹⁷⁵ Jâmi describes the entifications in other places,¹⁷⁶ and there gives a better sense of the systematic nature of his discussion, for example, in *Lawa`ih* (Gleams), wherein Jami describes the first entification in Gleam 17: “The First Entification is an unmixed oneness and a sheer receptivity that comprises all receptivities, whether the receptivity for disengagement from all attributes and respects, or the receptivity for being qualified by all.”

Fakhruddin `Iraqi, also of the school of Ibn `Arabi, describes levels of entification in his *Lama`at* (*Divine Flashes*) by using the imagery of the lover and beloved. He explains how the First Entification is preceded by a level of undifferentiation that is called “Love.” The First Entification is brought about by the lover and the beloved. His explication begins with a summary: “On the fact that Love is the origin of the lover and the Beloved, how these two grow out of Love in the First Entification, and how each of them is in need of the other...’Lover’ and ‘Beloved’ are derived from ‘Love,’ but Love upon Its mighty Throne is purified of all entification, in the sanctuary of Its Reality too holy to be touched by inwardness or outwardness.”¹⁷⁷

Along with the First Entification comes the delimitation that differentiates the “loves” or the things. So “delimitation” (*taqyîd*) is an important technical term here. It is the opposite of “non-delimitation” (*itlâq*), which is a quality of God, and it is also a quality of things in the universe, since by their delimitation, they are able to exist in a single distinguishable form. It is God Himself, in his Nondelimitedness, who can delimit: “But the Nondelimited delimits Itself if It wills and does not delimit Itself if It wills. For that is one of Its attributes through being Nondelimited: Its will (*mashî`a*) is nondelimited.”¹⁷⁸ Ibn `Arabi’s discussion of God’s nondelimitation provides a basis for understanding why passions, loves, friendships, and inclinations should be seen as “delimitations” here for Jami. They are manifestations that can only find definition in their existence by their being separated out from other qualities of the soul, like apathy,

¹⁷⁴ *Lawami`*, p. 107.

¹⁷⁵ Chittick, “The Five Divine Presences: From Al-Qûnawî to al-Qaysarî,” p. 107.

¹⁷⁶ See Murata’s *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* p. 120 ff. for more on Jami’s explanation of the entifications from his *Lawa`ih*.

¹⁷⁷ Chittick, *Fakhruddin `Iraqi: Divine Flashes*, p. 73.

¹⁷⁸ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 110.

hate, animosity, and aversion. Passions, loves, friendships, and inclinations, as specific delimitations, can also illustrate the relationship of the “tasks” (*shu’ûn*) to the specificity of the delimitations: “In the view of the Verifiers, the Real is too exalted to ‘disclose Himself in a single form twice or to two individuals.’ The Real never repeats anything, because of His nondelimitation and the Divine Vastness, since repetition amounts to constraint (*dîq*) and delimitation.”¹⁷⁹ The “entifications” and varying levels of “delimitation” are among many of the specialized concepts that come from the intellectual school of Ibn al-`Arabi which also make an appearance in Jami’s *Lawami*.¹⁸⁰

Jami also introduces the idea that among those who share in the knowledge of the realities unveiled, there are those called “Solitaries” and one who is called “the Pole,” who has the function of ruling the cosmos. The “Solitary” (*fard*) is a perfect human being standing at the rank of a “Pole,” who performs the function of ruling the cosmos, yet the Solitary does not come under the rule of the Pole. Ibn `Arabi makes reference to these types. He draws a distinction in the levels of awareness between most people in the world, and those who are either a Muhammadan Pole or a Solitary.¹⁸¹ The rank of Pole indicates awareness along with a function, while the Solitary indicates an awareness without a function. For example, Jâmî also refers to the idea that the full moon in the *Khamriyya* is the “Muhammadan Reality” or the spirit of Muhammad. There can be only one light in the sky bearing the function of the moon, while at the same time there can be many stars.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁸⁰ Also, *mâhiyyat* and *mizâj*.

¹⁸¹ For a discussion on this awareness, see Chittick’s *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 377.

Al-Qaysari's Commentary

In contrast to Jami's commentary on the *Khamriyya* is the commentary by Dawud al-Qaysari (fl. 8th/14th c.)¹⁸² called the *Sharh Khamriyat Ibn al-Farid* ("The Commentary on the Wine Ode of Ibn al-Fârid"). It is one of the more important commentaries in Arabic from the school of Ibn 'Arabi on the *Khamriyya*, and one that will serve well to compare against the commentary of Jami. Al-Qaysari is probably most famous for his commentary on Ibn 'Arabi's (d. 637/1240) *Fusus al-Hikam* ("The Ringstones of Wisdom").¹⁸³ One interesting element to al-Qaysari's commentary is that like Jami, al-Qaysari omits the eight verses numbered vv. 23-30 in many editions of Ibn al-Farid's *Diwan*, and subsequently translated in many English versions, including Nicholson's, Arberry's and Lings'. Homerin notes that the verses were not included in the version of the poem as collected by Ibn al-Farid's grandson, 'Ali, who apparently knew of them but considered their authenticity suspect.¹⁸⁴ It is presumably for this reason that Homerin did not include the verses in his own translation of the poem. I have also excluded the verses in my translation.¹⁸⁵

Al-Qaysari's interpretations of Ibn al-Farid's Wine Ode in the body of his commentary seem to Homerin to be in line with Ibn 'Arabi's school of thought, and Homerin suggests that his training was in keeping with Ibn 'Arabi, through the intellectual heritage of al-Kashani: "Al-Qaysari's theosophical introductions to the *Wine Ode* clearly reflect Ibn al-'Arabi's mystical teachings, which were undoubtedly reinforced by al-Qaysari's studies with 'Abd al-Razzâq al-Kâshânî, a third generation student of Ibn al-'Arabi."¹⁸⁶ In fact, others mention al-Qaysari as part of the direct line in the intellectual school, notably in Chittick's article "The Five Divine Presences: From al-Qûnawî to al-Qaysari"¹⁸⁷ in which he traces the idea of the Presence of God being manifested in the world in varying levels of differentiation. Both al-Qaysari and Jami's writings mention the presences in explaining how God discloses Himself to human beings. Homerin notes that many of al-Qaysari's explanations involve ideas that do not seem to be explicitly related to the *Wine Ode*. "Al-Qaysari's mystical and philosophical doctrines are strongly echoed in his reading of the ode and, many of his ideas do not

¹⁸² Homerin, *The Wine of Love and Life*, p. xiii.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. xviii-xix.

¹⁸⁵ All translations of the *Khamriyya* mentioned here, including my own, are found in the appendix of this work.

¹⁸⁶ Homerin, *The Wine of Love and Life*, p. xx.

¹⁸⁷ Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences: From al-Qûnawî to al-Qaysari."

appear to be derived directly from Ibn al-Farid's poem."¹⁸⁸ Like Jami, al-Qaysari also reads the "boon companions" of the poem to be human spirits before the creation of the world and the wine they drink to be the wine dispensed by God. He "regards the poet and his various companions in the Wine Ode as standing for all of the pre-eternal spirits of human beings, while the vine represents the world of manifestation. Thus, the wine drunk before the vine's creation can only be the wine of Paradise."¹⁸⁹ Consistent with that metaphor, al-Qaysari reads the entire ode.

[He] reads the ode as a sustained allegory...he interprets subsequent themes and images as portraying the emanation of God's love throughout limited creation...the wine is a metaphor for true love, divine gnosis, and eternal life...while the tavern-mates, and other persons and objects connected in some way to the wine, symbolize the prophets, saints, and Sufi masters who dispense mystical wisdom. By contrast, those who are dead, dying, or in some way crippled in mind or body, represent the spiritually ignorant, incapacitated by their lusts and desires, and so in desperate need of guidance (vv. 8-20).¹⁹⁰

The basic structure of al-Qaysari's commentary includes a three-part introduction: "first, on the reality of love, second on its divisions, and third on its effects."¹⁹¹ It follows Ibn al-Farid's poem line for line in the same manner as Jami, but there are elements of difference in the interpretation of the lines. One element of al-Qaysari's commentary that is not at all present in Jami's is the interpretation of the crescent moon and the cup-bearer of the wine being 'Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad. Al-Qaysari is very specific on this interpretation; he expounds on the relationship between Muhammad and 'Ali as being parallel to Moses and his brother Aaron, and makes reference to Muhammad's own words to 'Ali:

"You ['Alî] are to me as Aaron was to Moses, for 'Alî and I are of one light!" for during the time of God's apostle, may God bless him and give him peace, there was a full moon illuminating [the Prophet's] spirit with the Muhammadan Light. Then, after him, ['Alî] was a perfect full moon illuminating the hearts of those traveling the spiritual path, and a cup-bearer bringing the wine of gnosis to the spirits of perfect people, until the Judgment Day. [The Prophet] made him the cup-bearer for the Cistern and al-Kawthar [in Paradise], and for this reason, the spirits of the perfect saints and spiritual

¹⁸⁸ Homerin, *The Wine of Love and Life*, p. xxii.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

axes coming after [‘Alī] have attached themselves to him like no other among [the Prophet’s] closest companions, may God be pleased with all of them. The secrets of unity are revealed only by him!¹⁹²

This focus on ‘Ali as the the cup-bearer is not unusual, since nearly all Sufi orders trace their intellectual heritage through ‘Ali to Muhammad, but Jami does not mention this particular reading of the line. It may be because Jami was well known as a Sunni of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, and while Shi’ites were gaining power in Persia they may have been emphasizing the role of ‘Ali too much for Jami.

Another difference in the interpretations of Jami and al-Qaysari is on the “mixed” and “unmixed” wine mentioned in the *Khamriyya*. Jami reads the exhortation to “drink it unmixed” as being addressed to the prepared ones on the path, who can love God without requiring the trappings of beauty and love in this world. The optional “mixing” of the wine is for those unprepared, who need to mix into their love for God a love for “parasitical beloveds” and “metaphorical goals.” However necessary it may be, it is not desired. According to Jami,

The poet says:

So take it unmixed. If you want to, mix it—
it is wrong for you to turn away from the Beloved’s mouth.

He says, “You should try to drink that wine unmixed, but if you cannot and you want to mix it, then mix it with the limpid drops that you suck from the lips and the teeth of the Beloved. If you turn away from that, you will throw yourself into the darkness of wrongdoing and iniquity.”

Though the cup of pure wine, O wine-drinker,
is bitter, do not put it down because of the bitterness.
And, if you are not able to drink that bitter wine, it is better
to season it with the sweet lips of the Beloved.

It may be that the poet means: O passionate lover and sincere disciple, you should love and take as your beloved the Presence of the Transcendent Essence, without regard to the attributes of beauty or majesty and without examining the emergence of traces and acts, for a love that is stirred up for the sake of other than the Essence per se and becomes mixed with the contamination of accidents and compensations is not, in reality, connected to the Essence, but rather to one of the affairs connected to the Essence. What could be a more dreadful defrauding or a more lonely loss than that you put aside the Root Beloved and True Goal and you turn your desire toward parasitical beloveds and metaphorical goals?

How long, O heart, will you make do with the brand of deprivation

¹⁹² Ibid., pp. 17-18.

and throw yourself far from the sanctuary of union?
The Beloved has unmasked her face—
you come and fall in love with the mask.

Even if your preparedness is not sufficient for the manifestation of Essential Love and even if the path agreeable to you is not pure of the opacity of attachment to that which is below the Essence, still, do not turn away from love for the names and attributes, which, in one respect, are identical with the Essence. Do not make your inward reality defective through the contamination of attachment to acts and traces.¹⁹³

Al-Qaysari's interpretation of the "mixed wine" is the blend of "true gnosis" that is the Sufi adept's experience of the Divine and the "knowledge" that is his rational faculty. The two together afford an experience that can be beneficial, because one can only assess the significance of an experience properly with one's rational faculty intact. Al-Qaysari suggests that one *not drink* the wine unmixed, because one must not make the mistake of being overcome by the experience:

What is meant here is that when the drink of true gnosis is blended with the water of knowledge, there arises rational meanings and indisputable gnosis that may be perceived by spiritual vision, just as the stars may be perceived by the eyes. [This blend] enables those possessing rational perceptions and pure spiritual capacities to receive and drink [the wine] by their perception of it. For if [the wine] is unmixed, it destroys its drinker, making him appear in the form of an apostate and heretic, just as grape wine, if it is strong, will destroy the drinker who takes it straight. Therefore, it must be mixed.¹⁹⁴

The difference between Jami and al-Qaysari here is that Jami reads the line as one that lays bare the nature of reality, in that it is not the *apparent beauties* of creation that is should be the object of one's love, but rather that which is *beyond those beauties*. Al-Qaysari reads the line as one that refers to the faculties that are employed by the human being to perceive the Divine, in that it is a warning about the possibility of those faculties being overcome.

This warning speaks to the Sufi adept as more of a practical concern, and that is one of the interesting caveats of al-Qaysari's commentary—that he seems to dwell less on the more elevated themes, and rather delves into a more practical mode of explanation. For example, in one section, al-Qaysari explains different kinds of thoughts and their origins, and how the Sufi adept may recognize the categories and use that knowledge to his advantage:

¹⁹³ Jami, *Lawami'*, trans. DuBois, pp. 178-179.

¹⁹⁴ Homerin, *The Wine of Love and Life*, p. 18.

Thoughts may be merciful, angelic, personal (*al-nafsânîyah*), or satanic. Each type has signs, which the spiritual traveler recognizes from experience, and, so, he intellectually distinguishes them. If the thought draws the heart toward the Real, and gives it joy and pleasure in worship, and unveils to it the religious sciences and gnoses, and insight into the realities, then it is merciful. If it gives comfort and joy in acts of worship, and incites the soul to pious and righteous acts, then it is angelic. If [the thought] gives delight regarding what is permitted to a person concerning eating, drinking, and wives, then it is personal. But if it gives delight regarding what is legally forbidden and corrupt, and leads to the acquisition of blameworthy qualities and the perpetration of satanic depravities, then it is satanic (134a).¹⁹⁵

This information on categories of thought can be put to practical use, which seems to be one of al-Qaysari's concerns in his commentary.

Another difference in the two commentaries has to do with the "vine," the "wall" upon which it grows, and its "shadow." Jami's interpretation is that the vine is the heart of the gnostic, from whom the seeker can derive great benefit, and that the wall is the corporeal body of the seeker. It is this wall (his body) that prevents him from arriving.

The poet says:

If they threw into the shadow of its vine's wall
someone ill, on the verge of death, his illness would go.

He says that if they were to throw into the shadow of the wall surrounding the vine of that wine a sick person, fallen on his death bed, surely in the shadow of that wall the weakness of illness and sickness will leave the body of that afflicted one.

If someone drunk with the wine of love goes to the market,
upon seeing him, the grief of the wise ones will go away.
In the shadow of the wall of the vine from which comes that wine.
The sickness of death goes away from the sick body.

It may be that what is meant by "vine" is the delightful gardens of the hearts of the gnostics and the perfect ones, for the wine of essential love is the extract of the fruits of the sciences and the quintessence of the yield of gnosis. And what is meant by "wall" is their corporeal existence and material form in respect of encompassing and containing the vine and hindering others from arriving there. In other words, if someone ill with the sickness of ignorance and the malady of sloth has come near to the nullification of his innate preparedness to be enlivened by the good life of essential love, and if he should be conveyed to the sanctuary of the protection and the shadow of the solicitude of the arrived gnostics and perfected perfect ones—those who,

¹⁹⁵ Homerin, *The Wine of Love and Life*, pp. 24-25.

like Jesus, heal a hundred sick people with one breath, or rather, who bestow life on a thousand dead people with a single breath—surely through the auspiciousness of the companionship and the blessing of the company of those possessors of good fortune, that disease will disappear from him and he will be immediately healed from that malady.

[There is] an old man¹⁹⁶ whose work is selling wine—
 seek the road to the sanctuary of his paradisaal banquet!
And if you are not given access to his sanctuary, in any case
 take yourself to the shadow of its wall.

Those who travel the road of love with manliness—
 each in healing is another Messiah.
When they gaze with the eye of gentleness and mercy
 they take away a hundred-year sickness with one breath.¹⁹⁷

Al-Qaysari also refers to the story of the orphan's treasure lying hidden under a wall, from the Qur'an¹⁹⁸:

He used the term “*trellis*” as a metaphor for [the gnostic's] body, beneath which is the treasure of gnoses and knowledge belonging to the two orphans: the heart and spirit. This is referred to in the saying of Him, most high: {“As for the wall, it belonged to two young orphans of the city, and beneath it was a treasure belonging to them. Their father had been a pious man, and so your Lord willed that the two boys would reach maturity, and uncover their treasure as a mercy from your Lord.”} [18:82]. The [heart and spirit] are orphans because of their separation from the true heavenly father and their being veiled from him, as is indicated in the saying of Jesus, peace be upon him: “Verily, I am going to my and your heavenly Father!”¹⁹⁹

In spite of these types of differences, Jami's and al-Qaysari's commentaries share many similarities in interpretation. One line in which the interpretations of Jami and al-Qaysari are similar is the line of the *Khamriyya* concerning “what remains” of the wine in

¹⁹⁶ i.e., a shaykh.

¹⁹⁷ Jami, *Lawami'*, trans. DuBois, pp. 156-7.

¹⁹⁸ Homerin uses the word “*trellis*” to translate, while “*wall*” is another valid translation, and perhaps the preferred one in this case, since al-Qaysari is making a parallel between the two stories.

¹⁹⁹ Homerin, *The Wine of Love and Life*, p. 28. Homerin also notes that the hadith corresponds to John 20:17: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

this day, and the “vanishing” of its “concealment.” Jami refers often in his commentary to the idea of a thing “manifest” as the thing “clothed by form” so that it can be seen, which is the difference between the manifest thing and the unmanifest thing. The manifest is that which *has been clothed by form*, and the unmanifest is that which *has not been clothed by form*, and so as things appear and then are concealed, the Divine Names of “Manifest” and “Nonmanifest” take their turns in predominating over creation.

He says:

Time has left nothing of it but a ghost,
as if its vanishing were concealed in the breasts of the aware.

He says that the passing of the days and the turning of night and day have left nothing of that wine—which is like the soul of the souls, while souls are for it like bodies—other than a remnant of soul, such that one might say its hiddenness has become concealed and hidden in the breasts of the intelligent.

Alas and sorrow! Again in the lane of the Magi
the winedrinkers find neither name nor sign of wine.
It has become so hidden that for the people of the world
its becoming hidden has also become hidden.

Spark

The Presence of the Real has contrary names. Each of them has a dominion and empire in keeping with the manifestation of properties and traces. When the turn of its dominion and empire arrives, its properties come to be manifest and its contrary properties nonmanifest and vice versa—all of this because of the demand of the Real’s all-inclusive knowledge and perfect wisdom—each [property] in its own place, in the utmost perfection and the furthest extreme of beauty.

If you disclose your face brighter than the moon,
or you comb your locks, full of twists and curls.
Or you bend your eyebrows like a bow by a string—
in truth, each is more beautiful than the next.

Among the contrary names are the two names “the Manifest” and “the Nonmanifest.” Manifestation and multiplicity, like nonmanifestation and unity, demand each other, for manifestation consists of reality being clothed by the forms of the entifications; and nonmanifestation consists of the lack of that. This being clothed is the same as multiplicity, and the lack of it is the same as unity. There is no doubt that in multiplicity the properties of that

through which distinction occurs predominate over [those of] that through which unification occurs, and in unity there is the opposite.

Therefore, whenever the Presence of the Real discloses itself through the name “the Manifest,” the properties through which distinction occurs must predominate over the properties through which unification occurs. It is clear that knowledge, recognition, love, and their likes are all among the ruling properties through which unification occurs—between the knower and the known, the recognizer and the recognized, and the lover and the beloved. So, when the properties of that through distinction occurs predominate, they are in the station of hiddenness and nonmanifestation, and their possessors are behind the veil of curtaining and obscurity.²⁰⁰

Like Jami, al-Qaysari in his commentary cites the couplet as referring to “the Manifest” and “the Nonmanifest” as names of God that create effects upon created things, causing appearance and concealment. Al-Qaysari is bit less demonstrative, but he is making very much the same point.

In this time or ours, time has left nothing behind of the drink of love or its effects, save a tiny thing. It is the remainder by which abides the life of the Gnostics veiled from the eyes of difference and change. What remains [of the wine] was concealed and hidden from sight and insight, to the degree that its being concealed was hidden, too; so, no one knew of it or its concealment. Know that appearance and concealment are two effects of the names the Manifest (al-zâhir) and the Unmanifest (al-bâtin). For, according to the appearance of the properties, the divine names possess a rule and authority, as I have explained in the introduction to the commentary on the al-Fusûs [of Ibn al-‘Arabî].²⁰¹

What is also worthy of note here is that al-Qaysari refers the reader to his commentary on the *Fusus al-Hikam* for more on the idea of the names “the Manifest” and “the Nonmanifest.” Here, he makes it clear that he sees Ibn al-Farid and ‘Arabi as expressing the same ideas in their two respective works, the *Khamriyya* and the *Fusus al-Hikam*.

Another place where Jami and al-Qaysari meet in their commentaries is on the couplet that mentions “the tribe.” Both agree that what is meant by “the tribe” is the macrocosm, the totality of the cosmos, and the microcosm, the perfect human being (*insân al-kâmil*). However, Jami points out and explains three possible meanings (beyond the literal): the tribe is the macrocosm, or it could be the “Lords of Love,” or it could be the “totality of the existence of the perfect human being.”

He says:

²⁰⁰ Jami, *Lawami*, trans. DuBois, pp. 142-143.

²⁰¹ Homerin, *The Wine of Love and Life*, p. 20.

Yet if it is mentioned in the tribe, its folk
become drunk, and no shame on them or sin.

He says that if that wine is mentioned in the environs of the “tribe,” who are the tribe of the favorites and living-hearted ones, the folk of the tribe will become intoxicated. Because of their intense intoxication, they will lose themselves, and their state will be such that there will be no shame for them in the intoxication, nor any dust upon them from the sin of worshipping wine....²⁰²

[1] Thus it is likely that what is meant by *hayy* [the tribe] in this couplet is the macrocosm. Calling it *hayy*, even though what is meant is “tribe,” points to the pervasion of life [*hayât*] throughout all parts of the cosmos, whether minerals or animals. In this case, what is meant by the “folk” [*ahl*] of the tribe is the group who have the “aptitude” [*ahliyyat*] to drink the wine of love and the receptivity to receive the secrets of recognition, for, other than this group, all have the property of nonexistence, or rather, they are much less than nonexistence....²⁰³

[2] It is also likely that what is meant by “tribe” is that tribe who are the Lords of Love and that family who are the Companions of Affection and Friendship, for, in this tribe, it is they who are truly alive and worthy of true life. If, for example, one of them is in the East and another in the West, they are joined with each other and together have one face and one heart....

[3] It is also likely that what is meant by “tribe” is the totality of the existence of the perfect human being, and what is meant by “folk of the tribe” is [his] spiritual and corporeal spirit, heart, soul, and faculties, for, within the perfect human being’s existence, each of these, having heard the mention of the wine of love, has another kind of intoxication and a more complete selflessness.²⁰⁴

Al-Qaysari agrees with Jami on the level of macrocosm (the cosmos as a whole) and the microcosm (the human being), and mentions the “worthy ones” who are the “Lords of Love” of Jami’s second meaning:

Possibly, what is intended by “the tribe” is the macrocosm (*al-‘âlam al-kabîr*), and its “worthy ones” to be those with the capacity to receive the divine epiphanies. In his use of the *hay* [“tribe,” but also “alive”], then, there is a suggestion that the entire world, whether inanimate or animate, is alive. As a term, *hay* means “tribe,” and possibly it is intended to be the human

²⁰² Jami, *Lawami*, trans. DuBois, p. 144.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

microcosm (*al-‘âlam al-saghîr al-insânî*), and its worthy ones to be the spiritual and corporeal faculties.²⁰⁵

Al-Qaysari’s “worthy ones” are the faculties of the soul of Jami’s “Lords of Love” who he says excel over all other things in the world in their capacity to be “alive.” Al-Qaysari’s explanation is dense, and requires unpacking, while Jami seems more intent on unpacking the thought in a more demonstrative way.

Jami and al-Qaysari both came from the same intellectual lineage, specifically the school of Ibn ‘Arabi, so it is not surprising that their commentaries should overlap at many points. However, Jami’s commentary is heavy with his own quatrains, which he uses to explain in poetic form what cannot be explained in prose. In particular, he uses poetry to say how some things can be *like* other things, and how (as in the verses above) a shaykh can be like Jesus. His commentary is much more demonstrative and illustrative. It may be the language of Jami’s poetry that seems to take his commentary much further than al-Qaysari’s—the poetic license that he takes in interpretation—but it may be much more than that. Jami seems to take authorship much more to heart, and in producing an explanation, attempts to reach the reader in as many ways as possible—through both the philosophical language of delineation of opposites and the metaphoric language of poetry’s images that can bring together opposites.

²⁰⁵ Homerin, *The Wine of Love and Life*, p. 21.

Conclusion

Al-Qaysari and Jami are merely two of the commentators on the *Khamriyya*. Reynold Nicholson, one of Ibn al-Farid's translators from the 20th century, had seven centuries of literature written in both Persian and Arabic to take into consideration when he had this to say concerning the interpretation of Ibn al-Farid's poetry: "The more interpreters, the more interpretations, as those who have given time and labor to the study of mysticism well know. Poetry of this kind suggests more than it says, and means all that it may suggest."²⁰⁶ His statement seems to imply a great generosity in interpretation. However, Nicholson is particularly concerned about the polemics involved in claiming Ibn al-Farid's poetry as expressing the ideas of a certain school of mystical thought, and so he emphasizes caution in reading commentaries that seem to have an agenda in mind. "We cannot do without the commentators," he says, "and they will help us a good deal if we learn to use them discreetly. When they handle their text like philologists and try to fasten precise mystical significations upon individual words and phrases, the process is as fatal to poetry as the result is likely to be far from truth."²⁰⁷ The crime he speaks of is that of interpreting the poetry according to one's own agenda, which, in cases of interpretation by Sufis, means an attachment to a particular set of terms or concepts peculiar to the order. One must always beware of the possibility that one is "gazing through rose-colored spectacles."

Homerin's study of the history of interpretation of Ibn al-Farid's work seems to suggest that interpretation of it has followed the reader's own individual inclinations, no matter if it is a Sufi reader or a modern-day reader looking for a more secular interpretation. Nicholson, on the other hand, does have an implicit confidence in the Sufi commentators' interpretations, by virtue of the fact that they belong to the same cultural landscape as the poet, while he himself is admittedly the outsider. In spirit, then, Nicholson is far from being the dreaded cultural hegemonist translator. He does his best to take into consideration his own biases as a European. According to Nicholson, Sufis belonging to other orders may try to interpret Ibn al-Farid, and they may err in their interpretation, but whatever meanings the Sufi commentators may be overzealously and mistakenly applying to Ibn al-Farid's poetry, their errors are outweighed by their intrinsic advantage of being immersed in a worldview that they shared with the poet. "...They have the immense advantage of being Sufis, that is to say, of knowing through tradition and their own experience what Europeans can only acquire by study and perceive by sympathy. They are the poet's fellow-citizens in the ideal world from which he drew his inspiration; they have dreamed his dreams and traveled on his path towards his goal; they do not miss the main drift of his allegory even though they err in some of the details."²⁰⁸ In spirit, then, Nicholson clearly takes the side of those who believe in a moral obligation of the translator to maintain a link to the original text through fidelity to the text and its

²⁰⁶ Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, p. 169.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

author. It would be the act of an intentional cultural hegemonist to translate without this fidelity in mind, knowing very little of the worldview of the source text—or perhaps even knowing the worldview, yet having disdain for it. No one dealing with the texts here seems to have that problem.

However, in considering the two commentaries in light of contemporary translation theory, one can see the potentiality of two very different tasks. Al-Qaysari, writing in Arabic, may have seen his task as more straightforward, something like creating “notes” on a text, while Jami, writing in a different language tradition and drawing from a significantly different cultural language, may have taken on more of a responsibility as an “author” in creating a new text. His work was a kind of translation, and therefore presented him with all the trappings of the issues discussed in the previous chapter on translation issues. His decisions on “canon” may have been easily decided, as it may have been clear to him that the text belonged in the canon of texts studied by the school of Ibn ‘Arabi, but the issues of interpretation and style set him free to create his own text, in one sense bearing great responsibility toward his new readership in Persian. His situation, in introducing the text to a Persian readership, is incredibly faithful, compared to those texts that first introduced Islamic texts to a Western readership, like FitzGerald’s *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1859) and E. H. Palmer’s *Oriental Mysticism* (1869), noted above. These works—which presented themselves as “translations” yet owed much more to the translators’ imaginations than would be standard today—are rather a record of Western imagination. They are romantic at times, but more often injurious to the source texts’ cultural history by overshadowing it and engulfing it. While praising the text, they make it disappear. On the other hand, Jami’s presents his *Sparks* as an *interpretation*. Though he clearly employs great creativity and imagination, he does not present his text to the reader as an annotated *translation*. Rather, his text stands alongside al-Qaysari’s interpretation of the *Khamriyya* in providing an intellectual history of Ibn ‘Arabi’s school of thought.

In considering also how Jami relies heavily on images that derive from his own imaginal faculty in order to explain Ibn al-Farid’s poem, it may be useful to recall Ibn ‘Arabi’s ideas concerning the imaginal faculty and how “the imaginal mind finds the self-disclosure of the Real in the sex and the camel.” As a student of Ibn ‘Arabi (however far removed in time) Jami seems to favor commentary on the *Khamriyya* using both his rational faculty, as he explicates with technical terminology, and his imaginal faculty, as he uses images to illustrate an idea. Ibn ‘Arabi described the practice of using both these faculties simultaneously as “seeing with two eyes.” He compares the eye of the imaginal faculty and the eye of the rational faculty to two eyes that ought to work together. Ibn ‘Arabi talks about the Qur’anic roots of the idea, and the ramifications of possessing the two eyes for the human being’s perception of his own self, the one which ‘brings together’ and the other which ‘differentiates’: “Hence we come to know that there are two eyes, as God said: ‘Have We not appointed for him two eyes?’ (90:8) One eye is that through which he who undergoes transmutation is perceived, while the other eye is that through which the transmutation itself is perceived. These are two different paths which God has made clear to the Possessor of Two Eyes, as He said, ‘And guided him on the

two highways' (90:10), that is, made clear for him the two paths..."²⁰⁹ It is the best description of what I feel Jami does in his commentary. He explains Ibn al-Farid's couplets using both the prose of philosophical language and poetry of his own that employs the imaginal faculty. It is almost as if he sees Ibn al-Farid's poetry with two eyes—eyes that see depth—and can't help but explain what he sees without employing the language of those two eyes. It is almost as if he knows that one eye working alone will not perceive depth, and anything seen by only one eye will seem flat when it is not.

²⁰⁹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 362.

Chapter Six

A Passage from Jami's *Lawami'*

Introduction

Much has been written about Jami in the Persian language; however, only two of his works have been translated fully into English. *Durrat al-Fâkhira* has been translated as *The Precious Pearl* by Nicholas Heer (1979). The *Lawa'ih*, has been translated once by E.H. Whinfield and M.M. Kazvînî as *Lawâ'ih: A Treatise on Sûfism* (1906), and again more recently as *Lawa'ih* by William Chittick in *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* (2000), in which Sachiko Murata presents for the first time the English translation of a Chinese version of Jami's text (*Lawâ'ih*) by Liu Chih (c.1670-?) called *Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm*. This particular adaptation of Jami's text may serve to illustrate just how far-reaching his influence has been as one of the great representatives of Islam. Murata names only four texts as having been translated from Islamic languages (in this case, all Persian texts) into Chinese before the twentieth century, and Jami's *Lawa'ih* is one. Chittick has also translated an excerpt of the text that I am concerned with at present, the *Lawami'*, in "Studies in Mystical Literature" (1981).

The following passage contains Jami's discussion of metaphors that are physical realities and his description of the act of "clothing the things with forms" from pages 127-141. Although the full translation of Jami's *Lawami'* is not offered here, this passage affords a continuation of the section of text previously translated by William Chittick in "Studies in Mystical Literature."

From the Lawami'

Sparks: An Explanation of the *Khamriyya* of Ibn Farid **By 'Abd al-Rahman Jami**

Spark

The point of expressing the meanings in the clothing of forms can be several things. (1) One is that at the beginning, human beings arrive at intelligible objects from sensory ones and at universals from particulars by means of applying the tools of sense perception and imagination. Hence, the perception of meanings other than in the midst of forms is not customary for their souls or familiar to their natures. If they should do otherwise, it is

possible that their understanding will not be strong enough to reach it and they will not have the capacity to perceive it.

Even though you're not aiming for cruelty
and have no wish to torment the heart,
Don't come toward your lover without a veil,
for he doesn't have the capacity for you to lift it.

(2) Also, only the Folk of Meaning can profit from the expression of the meanings without the clothing of forms. [128] But, when they are expressed in the clothing of forms, the benefit will be general and the usefulness complete.

It is meaning that steals the heart as well as the religion,
it is meaning that increases love as well as hate.
But, it is disclosed in the clothing of form
so that the eyes of the form-seer will also profit.

It often happens that a form-worshiper, having heard certain meanings expressed in the clothing of form, begins to have an inclination. The beauty of meaning casts a ray from behind the curtain of form, making the person's understanding keen and his secret heart subtle: he flees from the form and clings to the meaning.

Many have vainly suffered in traveling
until they stepped on a treasure in the path.
Many have split open mountains aiming for stone
until the mine of jewels made them into jewelers.

It is also the case that not everyone is a confidante of the secrets of reality, or aware of the states of the Folk of the Path. Therefore, to conceal those secrets and hide those states, they borrow the terms and expressions that are in common use and well-known for metaphorical purposes in the conversations of the Folk of Form so that the beauty of those meanings remain far from the sight of strangers, and concealed from the gaze of the non-confidantes.

Last night that moon combed the curls of her locks,
and placed over her face her amber-fragrant tresses.
With this trick she hid her comely face,
so that whoever is not a confidante would not recognize her.

It is also the case that the tastings and ecstatic findings of the Lords of Love, and the secret sciences [129] of the possessors of gnosis, when mentioned in the language of allusion, have a greater effect on the souls of the listeners than if they were clearly expressed. Consequently, the state of many of this group will not change when they

listen to the verses of the Qur'an and the words of the *Furqan*,²¹⁰ but after listening to one or more couplets in Arabic or Persian containing a description of the tresses and the moles of beautiful women, or the coquetry and winking of loved ones, or the mention of wine, taverns, goblets, and cups, their state changes and they fall into turmoil.

When she with a fairy-like face divulges her beauty,
the lover's mind is at ease from her blandishments.
When she secretly glances with coquetry and winks,
she changes the state of the hapless lover.

Spark

Building on the directives and preferences concerning the explication of meanings in the clothing of forms mentioned in these two Sparks, the poet displayed the meaning of love and affection in the robe of the wine of form. Among the terms and expressions that are employed in this subject, he chose "*mudâma*" (wine) in order to suggest constancy (*mudâwama*) and perseverance in drinking it. Which constancy can be greater than that the drinking should begin in eternity-without beginning and extend to eternity without end?

Saki, pour me wine from that enormous cup!
Don't stop—give it to me constantly.
Since wine in Arabic is *mudâm*,
O Persian Moon, you also, give me *mudâm*.²¹¹

Given that the perfect ones of the Tribe have realized the essential love that is connected to [130] the [Divine] Essence, and the word "essence" is feminine; and given that whatever the truthful lover says he says in correlation with his beloved and whatever he seeks he seeks in conformity with his sought one, the poet uses as a metaphor the feminine form of the word, *mudâma*, rather than the [masculine form] *mudâm*, to refer to essential love.

Everyday, walking in the garden is my custom—
perhaps tulips and roses will console me.
Wherever I see a rose, its color, its fragrance,
I smell that rose and pick that rose in the garden.

The shaykh, Sharaf al-Din Abu Hafs `Umar ibn Ali al-Sa`di, known as Ibn al-Fârid the Egyptian, said:

²¹⁰ "The discernment," i.e., the Qur'an by another of its names.

²¹¹ Both "wine" and "constantly."

We drank wine in the remembrance of the Beloved;
We were drunk with it before the vine was created.

He says that we drank; and, in the remembrance of the Friend, toward whom is directed the face of everyone's love, we drank a wine to our mutual love [a wine] by which we became drunk. Rather, because of a whiff of it we lost ourselves; and this was before the creation of the vine, [131] that is, the grape tree, the stuff [matter, material] of the well known wine, full of mischief and tumult.

On the day when the heavens and spheres were not yet turning,
when water, fire, and dust were not yet mixed,
I was drunk in remembrance of you, a worshipper of wine—
even though there was no trace of wine and vine.

It is we who are the draft-drainers from the cup of your love—
pass by your draft-drainers—pour a draft!
In remembrance of you, we drank the morning cup—that morning
when there was no trace of the vine or the vine-planter.

Spark²¹²

The Presence of the Real has two self-disclosures. (1) The first is unseen in [the divine] knowledge. It consists of the manifestation of the Real Existence to Himself in the Presence of Knowledge though the forms, receptivities, and preparednesses of the entities. In this self-disclosure, the entities are not qualified by entified existence; the perfections of the entities, like their knowledge, gnosis, love, affection, and the like are concealed and hidden inside them.

(2) The second is an ontological, visible self-disclosure. It consists of the manifestation of the Real Existence in accordance with the preparednesses and receptivities of the entities, whether spiritual, imaginal, or sensory. This second self-disclosure is put in order by the first self-disclosure, and is a locus of manifestation for the perfections that were incorporated into [the entities'] preparednesses and receptivities by the first self-disclosure.

From the beginning You gave us seeking and need;
then in keeping with that seeking you also made the vine.
What is all this? For you to make the Hidden Treasure
apparent for the people of the world from the treasure-house of Mystery.

²¹² This spark is similar to Jami's *Lawa'ih* ("Gleams"), the 36th Gleam. See Chittick's translation in Murata's *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light*.

Hence, it may be that what is meant by “wine” is essential love; by “drinking [132] the wine” the reception of the preparedness for that love on the level of the fixed entities; and by “the remembrance of the Beloved” His own unseen self-disclosure through knowledge in the Presence of Knowledge within the forms of the entities and the receptivities. In this case, ascribing remembrance to the Beloved is an ascription of the verbal noun to its subject. What is meant by “being drunk” is the preparedness of drunkenness in that level or²¹³ the reality of drunkenness in the other, lower levels; and by “vine” ontological, entified multiplicity. In other words: We became receptive and prepared—near to the Real’s unseen self-disclosure through knowledge in the form of our fixed entities in the Presence of Knowledge—for the wine of the attribute of essential love, which is the cause of our preparedness for drunkenness in that level or the reason for the reality of drunkenness in the other levels. This receptivity and preparedness was prior to the manifestation of ontological, entified multiplicity.

Happy is he who, outside the world of the secret and the divulged [this world],
 has seen neither the comfort of the spirit, nor the troubles of the body.
 Having made my homeland in the hermitage of the concealment of nonexistence,²¹⁴
 it was me and your love, your love and me.

It may be that what is meant by “drinking the wine” is the realization of the attribute of love in the World of the Spirits. In this case, ascribing remembrance to the Beloved is an ascription of the verbal noun to its object.²¹⁵ What is meant by “being drunk” is the reality of drunkenness, which would be the bewilderment and rapture that belongs to the spirits of the perfect in witnessing the beauty and majesty of the Real. In other words: We drank before the spirit fell in love with the body and before it became attached to the body, in remembrance of the Beloved, the wine of a love through which our spirits became drunk and bewildered in the witnessing of His beauty and majesty.²¹⁶

[133]

Before the Khidr of the spirit fell into the darkness²¹⁷
 and the water of life began to flow in the fountain of the spirit,
 We drank the wine of love from the tavern of the essence,

²¹³ Reading yâ for bâ.

²¹⁴ The fixed entities dwell in “nonexistence.”

²¹⁵ In other words, "we drank while the Beloved was remembering us."

²¹⁶ In the second sense, "while we were remembering Him."

²¹⁷ Khidr, the companion of Moses in the Qur’an, demonstrates knowledge beyond the corporeal realm: “Whom We had taught knowledge from Us” (Q 18:65). Also, the water of life is said to be found in darkness.

without mouth or palate, from the cup of the names and attributes.

Question. Someone may say: The second explanation depends upon the existence of the spirits before the bodies, but that cannot be granted, for the position of the philosophers is that the spirits come to exist after the actualization of the constitution and the proportioning of the bodies. Imam Hujjat al-Islam [Ghazali] agreed with them; interpreting the famous report, “God created the spirits two thousand years before the bodies,” he said that by “spirits” is meant the angelic spirits, which are the origins of the chain of existence and which, in the language of the philosophers, are called “intellects” and “souls”; by “bodies” are meant the bodies of the cosmos, which are the Throne, the Footstool, the spheres, the stars, and the elements.

We would answer: The perfect, realized shaykh, Shaykh Sadr al-din Qunawi, has an investigation and a detailed explanation in one of his treatises. The thrust of it is that the particular human souls, which belong to the majority of human beings, come to exist after the actualization of the constitution and in keeping with it. As for the universal human souls, which belong to the perfect and the elect, they come into existence before the actualization of the constitution. He transmitted words from his own shaykh, the author of the *Fusus al-Hikam*: My shaykh, the perfect Imam, reported to me, alluding to his own state, that there are those who govern, with knowledge and awareness, the parts of their bodies before they are gathered together. Then he says: This is because of the universality of their souls, given that this would be impossible for those whose souls are particular, for particular souls do not become entified until after the constitution and in keeping with it. Hence, they have no existence before that with which to govern their bodily parts with knowledge and awareness.

What is meant by “universal souls,” as becomes clear from the words of the shaykh in this treatise, is those particular souls who have the preparedness to advance from the particular level and to shed delimited, accidental attributes such that they return to their own universalities and reach conjunction. This is because it is impossible for their particular essences, in respect of their particularity, to witness the First Origin, since all the folk of witnessing agree that they do not witness any universal [134] until they themselves become the same. Then they increase in advancement, through their conjunction with the universals in the mentioned manner, in the affair of the Ascent, stage after stage, and from each conjunction they reach a preparedness, an existence, a light, and an insight. So it continues until they reach the First Intellect, and they derive from conjunction with it that which gives them the preparedness to witness the Origin as is appropriate for the first Intellect.

Question. Someone may say that the proofs that the particular souls come to exist after the actualization of the constitution are not specific to some people rather than others. I would answer: Those proofs are incomplete. As proof of their incompleteness it is enough that the unveilings of the lords of unveiling and witnessing, which are kindled from the niche of prophecy, testify otherwise.

How can defective reason reach majestic revelation,
even if you call both of them by the name “proof”?

Though, like an elephant, a mosquito has a proboscis,
how could a mosquito have the strength of an elephant!

[135]

Spark

Every part of the cosmos is the locus of manifestation for one of the divine names, and the totality of the cosmos is the locus of manifestation for all the names, but, by way of dispersion and differentiation. The perfect human reality is the comprehensive unity of all the loci of manifestation: there is no part of the cosmos that does not have an appearance within the perfect human being, but, by way of all-comprehensiveness and bringing together. You might say that the cosmos is a differentiated and chaptered book, and the perfect human being is a selection from it, or the table of contents of its sections and chapters.

When the pen of God's beneficence wrote
the chapters of the book of the cosmos and its parts,
He wrote a table of contents on the tablet of existence
at the end of the work and He named it "human being."

Hence, it may be that in "we drank" and "we became drunk" using the pronoun that denotes more than one speaker was to allude to the mentioned all-comprehensiveness without taking into account those who share in this drinking and drunkenness. It may also be that it was to take into account this sharing, for the entities and spirits of the perfect human beings, the Solitaries, and the Poles²¹⁸ share and participate with the poet in the drinking and drunkenness of this wine.

I am not alone in worshipping wine because of your love.
Who—You tell me Yourself—has been delivered from this wine?
On the day I took this wine in hand,
there were the wine-worshipping comrades of Alast!²¹⁹

He also said:
It had the full moon as a cup, and it was a sun; it was passed around
by a crescent moon—and so many stars appeared when it was mixed!

²¹⁸ As mentioned previously in the discussion of Jami's use of Ibn 'Arabi's terminology, the "Solitary" (*fard*) is a perfect human being standing at the rank of a "Pole." For a discussion on this awareness, see Chittick's *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 377 ff.

²¹⁹ The Covenant of Alast (Q 7:172): "And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify concerning themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we testify.'"

[136] He compared the cup of wine, in its roundness and its containing something pure and abundant in effusion, to the full moon. [He compared] the wine, in its purity, luminosity, and effusion, to the radiance of the sun. [He compared] the fingers of the wine-bearer, when they take the cup, in delicacy and curving, to the new moon. [He compared] the shapes of the bubbles, in their roundness, luminosity, and small size, to the stars.

He says that the cup is a constant full moon for the wine, while it itself is a sun in effusion and brilliancy. The fingers of the new moon are like the wine-bearer, and when it is mixed with water, many shining stars appear from the shapes of the bubbles.

The cup is the full moon and the wine is the shining sun—
and that shining sun has the crescent moon passing it around.
A hundred flashing stars become manifest
when the fire of wine receives subtlety from the water.

Spark

The Muhammadan Reality—which is the form of what is known by the Essence along with the First Entification, and the form of whose existence is the Supreme Pen—has a complete parallelism with the sun of the Essence of Unity. What is actualized is a perfect contraposition, such that no level higher than it can be conceived of. In the effusing of the light of existence and its [light's] concomitant perfections, it [that Reality] has no need for any intermediary. Rather, the other realities and entities, which are seated in the darkneses of possibility, are in need of it [137] for the mentioned effusing. Hence, in the perfection of parallelism, its relation with the Essence of Unity and its intermediacy between the Essence and the possible realities in the effusion of existence and the concomitants [of existence] are exactly like the relation of the full moon's contraposition with the sun and its intermediacy between the sun and the dwellers in the night of darkness in the effusing of light and its requisites. Hence, based on this relationship, the word "*badr*," which is used to mean "full moon," can be employed figuratively for that [Muhammadan] Reality.

O spirit and heart, in the end what shall I call you?
You are both spirit and heart—by which shall I call you?
Since the night of the whole world has found light from you,
I am excused if I call you "the full moon."

Since he has given expression to that Reality with "full moon," and to love with "wine," then the thirsty ones of the desert of misguidance and loss can reach the drinking of the paradisial wine of divine love and the swallowing of the celestial drink of affection and awareness with the aid of its guidance,²²⁰ so it [guidance] can be considered the cup of that wine and be thought of as the goblet of that drink.

²²⁰ i.e., of the Muhammadan Reality.

The circle of the moon from Your face, O full moon,
is a cup from which I constantly drink the wine of love.
I have become so drunk from this wine and cup,
that I do not know which is the wine and which the cup.

Given that the one who is in charge of passing this cup can be none other than the divine names and lordly attributes, which are expressed as “fingers” in the sound hadith, “The heart of the person of faith is between the two fingers of the Merciful,” one can consider the crescent moon, which refers to [138] the fingers of the cup-bearer, as an allusion to them and one can ascribe the passing around of the cup to them.

What banquet is this? The masters of perfection
are drinking the wine of love from the cup of beauty.
See on the palm of the cup-bearer the overflowing goblet—
the full moon, passed around by the hand of the crescent.²²¹

Spark

The arrived and perfect ones are of two kinds: One group are those drawn near to the presence of majesty who, after arrival at the degree of perfection, have not had the perfecting of others turned over to them. So much of the wine of love and affection was measured out to them that they were stolen away from themselves. They were drowned in the ocean of gathering²²² and divested of the halter of intellect and knowledge. The rulings of the *Shariah* and the practices were lifted from them. They are the inhabitants of the domes of exaltation and the residents of the country of bewilderment. They are not aware of their own existence; how could they attend to someone else?

How happy the person who in this tavern
drinks wine from the vat and the pitcher, not the cup.
If a hundred times the world should be negated and come to be,
he would not be aware that there is or is not a world.

The second kind are those who, when they were stolen away from themselves, were once again given back to themselves by the controlling power of the beginningless beauty. After being drowned in the fountain of gathering and the abyss of annihilation, upon them was bestowed deliverance to the shore of dispersion and the playing field of

²²¹ Reading *chang* for *chand*.

²²² The opposite of dispersion, as in *Lawa'ih* (“Gleams”), Gleam 2. See Chittick’s translation in Murata’s *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light*.

subsistence. They returned to the rulings of the *Shariah* and the courteous acts of the *Tariqah*. The paradisial wine of attraction and love was mixed with the limpid celestial water of knowledge and gnosis. From the mixing of this water and that many-bubbled wine, the stars of the traces of gnostic sciences and the secrets rose up. Each star [139] became the guidance for the helpless ones of the darkness of the desert of misguidance and bewilderment. Surely the words of the poet— “and so many stars appeared when it was mixed!”—can be an allusion to the states of this group.

This group, freed from the limitation of customs,
is detached from the thought of states and sciences:
On their outside, the sparks of the light of guidance—
[they are] the stars of the religion, the stones against the satans.²²³

He says:
But for its fragrance, I would never have been guided to its tavern;
but for its splendence, imagination could not have conceived of it.

He says, “If the fine aroma and heart-pulling scent of the wine had not diffused, I would not have been able to take the right path to His tavern; and if the spark of His light and the ray of His manifestation had not flashed, I would not have been able to traverse the path of conceiving of His reality on the feet of imagination.”

If the scent of wine had not become the guide of the drunkards,
it would have been difficult for anyone to find the way to the tavern.
And if the eye of intelligence had not found light from it,
who could have grasped its reality, who?

Spark

Just as trace-beauty, which is taken as the object of metaphorical love, is a shadow and branch of the beauty of the Essence, which is the object of real love, so also metaphorical love is the shadow and branch of real love; and, in keeping with “The metaphor is the bridge to the reality,”²²⁴ it [metaphorical love] [140] is the path of its actualization²²⁵ and the means of reaching it. This is because, if a fortunate person, in keeping with his root creation, should have the receptivity for the essential love of the absolutely Beautiful, but he has remained in the courtyard of concealment by the

²²³ The reference here is to Qur’an 67:5: “And We adorned the heaven of this world with lamps, and We made them stones for the satans.”

²²⁴ A famous saying.

²²⁵ i.e., the actualization of real love.

accumulated, dark veils of nature; then, if all at once a ray of that beauty's light should begin to show itself from the curtain of water and clay in the form of a heart-taker with balanced qualities, proportionate members, harmonious parts, elegant stature, comely cheek, noble character traits, and good bloodlines—

You're sweet acting, fine speaking, and delicate,
you put salve on the wound of every sorrowful heart.
Like a freshly opened bud, you're pure
of the stain of anyone's impudent touch.

—surely the bird of the heart of that fortunate man will turn toward it²²⁶ and will spread its wings and feathers in the wind of its love. It will become the captive of its bait and the prey of its snare. It will turn its face away from every goal, or rather, it will have no other goal.

From mosque and dervish-house, he comes to the vintner;
he drinks the wine and comes drunk to the door of the beloved.
He becomes disgusted with everything but love for the beloved;
he buys it at the price of a thousand souls.

The fire of love and the flame of yearning begin to be kindled in his make-up, and the dense veils, which consist of the heart's being imprinted by the engendered forms, start to burn away. The covering of heedlessness is lifted from the eye of his insight and the dust of multiplicity is swept away from the mirror of his reality. His eyes become sharp-seeing and his heart comes to recognize the reality. [141] He grasps the defects and deficiencies of swift-fading loveliness and he perceives the subsistence and perfection of the Possessor of Majesty. He flees from the former and clings to the latter, and the precedent solicitude [of God] comes forth to meet him.

First the beauty of the unity of the acts becomes manifest to him. Once he becomes firmly established in beholding the acts, the beauty of the attributes is unveiled. When he becomes deeply rooted in the unveiling of the attributes, the beauty of the Essence discloses itself, and he realizes essential love. The doors of witnessing are opened for him, and he sees existence from its first to its last as one reality.

Since its manifest has disclosed itself through all of its tasks and standpoints to his inward reality, the realities of [the divine] knowledge have become distinct. Since it has become colored by the ruling properties of the nonmanifest realities of knowledge, the external entities have become entified. Whatever he passes by, he finds Him, and whatever he gazes upon, he sees Him. At every moment he turns his face toward the Witnessed One and says:

You were hidden in the breast; I was heedless—
You were apparent to the eyes; I was heedless.
For a lifetime I was seeking the world for a sign of You—

²²⁶ The ray of beauty's light; or "her," the girl with all those qualities.

the whole world was in fact You; I was heedless.

When he reaches here, he knows that metaphorical love is like a whiff of the tavern of real love, and that love for the traces is like a ray of the sun of Essential Love. If he had not smelled that whiff, he would not have reached the tavern, and if this ray had not shone forth, he would not have found a portion of this sun.

Fortunate is the one who smells the scent of the tavern;
he went off on the trail of that scent and arrived at the tavern.
A flash appeared from the tavern's lane,
and in its rays he saw the tavern's sanctuary.

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Appendix

Translations of the *Khamriyya*

The Wine Song (trans. by R.A. Nicholson)²²⁷ –1921

(1) In memory of the Beloved we quaffed a vintage that made us drunk before the creation of the vine.

(2) Its cup the full-moon; itself a sun which a new moon causes to circle. When it is mingled (with water), how many stars appear!

(3) But for its perfume, I should not have found the way to its taverns; and but for its resplendence, the imagination would not have pictured it.

(4) Time hath preserved of it but a breath: it is unseen as a thing hidden in the bosom of the mind.

(5) If it be mentioned amongst the tribe, the tribesmen become intoxicated without incurring disgrace or committing sin.

(6) It oozed up from the inmost depths of the jars (and vanished), and in reality nothing was left of it but a name.

(7) If it ever come into the mind of a man, joy will abide with him and grief will journey away.

(8) And had the boon-companions beheld the sealing of its vessel, that sealing would have inebriated them without (their having tasted) the wine;

(9) And had they sprinkled with it the earth of a dead man's grave, his spirit would have returned to him, and his body would have risen;

(10) And had they laid down in the shadow of the wall where its vine grows a man sick unto death, his malady would have departed from him;

(11) And had they brought to its taverns one palsied, he would have walked; and at the mention of its flavour the dumb would speak;

(12) And had the breath of its aroma floated through the East, and were there in the West one that had lost the sense of smell, he would have regained it;

(13) And had the palm of one touching its cup been stained red thereby, he would not have gone astray at night, the lodestar being in his hand;

²²⁷ From *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 184-88. There are many translations of Ibn al-Farid's *Khamriyya*, some of which are not included here. For more, see A. Safi's, in *the Bulletin of the School of Oriental and Asian Studies* 2:235-48, and one in French by Emile Dermenghem: "L'Èloge du vin."

(15) And had a party of camel-riders set out for the soil that bore it, and were there amongst them one bitten by a snake, the venom would not have harmed him;

(16) And had the sorcerer inscribed the letters of its name on the the brow of one smitten with madness, the writing would have cured him;

(17) And had its name been blazoned on the banner of the host, that blazon would have intoxicated those beneath the banner.

(18) It corrects the natures of the boon-companions, so that those who lack resolution are led by it to the path of resolution,

(19) And he whose hand was a stranger to munificence shows himself generous, and he who had no forbearance forbears in the hour of wrath.

(20) Had the dullest-witted man in the tribe kissed *fidâm*, his kissing it would have endued him with the real inwardness of the wine's qualities.

(21) They say to me, "Describe it, for thou art acquainted with its description." Ay, well do I know its attributes:

(22) Pure, but not as water; subtle, but not as air; luminous, but not as fire; spirit, but not (joined to) body.

(23) The (Divine) discourse concerning it was eternally prior to all existing things (in the knowledge of God), where is no form nor any external trace;

(24) And there through it all things came into being because of a (Divine) providence whereby it was veiled from every one that lacketh understanding.

(25) And my spirit was enamoured of it in such wise that they (my spirit and the wine) were mingled together and made one, not as a body pervades a body.

(26) There is a wine without a vine, when Adam is a father to me; there is a vine without a wine, when its mother is a mother to me.

(27) The (essential) subtlety of the vessels (forms) depends in truth on the subtlety of the realities; and by means of the vessels the realities increase

(28) After division has occurred, so that, while the whole is one, our spirits are a wine and our bodies a vine.

(29) Before it is no "before" and after it is no "after"; it is the "before" of every "after" by the necessity of its nature.

(30) Its grapes were pressed in the winepress ere Time began, and it was an orphan although the epoch of our father (Adam) came after it.

(31) Such are the beauties that lead its praisers to laud it, and beautiful is their prose and verse in its honour.

(32) And he that knows it not thrills at the mention of it, like the lover of Nu'm when her name is spoken.

(33) They said, "Thou hast drunk the draught of sin." Nay, I have only drunk what, in my judgment, 'twere the greatest sin to renounce.

(34) Health to the people of the Christian monastery! How often were they intoxicated by it without having drunk thereof! Still, they aspired.

(35) In me, ere I was born, it stirred a transport that abides with me for ever, though my bones decay.

(36) Take it pure! But if thou wish to temper it, the worst wrong is thy turning aside from the water of the Beloved's teeth.

(37) Seek it in the tavern, and there to the accompaniment of tuneful notes bid it display itself, for by means of music it is made a prize.

(38) Wine never dwelt with Care in any place, even as Sorrow never dwelt with Song;

(39) And, though thy intoxication with it have but the life of a moment, thou wilt regard Time as a slave obedient to thy command.

(40) Joyless in this world is he that lives sober, and he that dies not drunk will miss the path of wisdom.

(41) Let him weep for himself—he whose life is wasted without part or lot in wine!

The Wine Song (trans. A. J. Arberry)²²⁸ --1952

1. We quaffed upon the remembrance of the Beloved a wine wherewith we were drunken, before ever the vine was created.

2. The moon at the full its cup was; itself was a sun, that a crescent moon passeth round; how many a star gleams forth, when that wine is mingled!

3. And but for its fragrance, never had I been guided unto its tavern; and but for its radiance, never had the mind's imagination pictured it.

4. And Time hath not left aught of it, save a last gasp; as if its being vanished were a concealment in the breasts of human reasons;

5. Though if it be but mentioned among the tribe, the people of the tribe become intoxicated, yet guilty of no disgrace or crime.

6. From the very bowels of the vats it has mounted up, and naught remains of it in truth but a name:

7. Yet if on a day it cometh into the thought of a man, great joy will dwell in him, and all sorrow depart.

8. And had the boon-companions beheld no more than the impress of the seal upon its vessel, that impress would surely have made them drunken, without the wine itself;

9. And had they sprinkled therewith the dust of a dead man's tomb, the spirit would surely have returned unto him, and his body been quickened.

10. And had they but cast, in the shade of the wall where groweth its vine, a sick man, and he nigh to death, his sickness would have departed from him;

11. And had they brought nigh to its tavern one paralysed, he would have walked; yea, and the dumb would have spoken upon the mention of its flavour;

12. And had the breaths of its perfume been wafted through the East, and in the West were one whose nostrils were stopped, the sense of smell would have returned to him;

13. And had the hand of one touching it been stained as with henna from the cup of it, he would not have strayed in the night-time, having in his hand such a star;

14. And had it been secretly unveiled to one that was blind, forthwith would he have been dowered with sight; and the deaf would hear at the sound of its filtering;

15. And had there set forth a cavalcade seeking the soil of its native earth, and there were among the riders one stung by a snake, the poison would not have mischiefed him;

16. And had an enchanter drawn its name of the forehead of one afflicted with madness, the letters drawn would have cured his sickness;

17. And had its name been inscribed above the banner of an army, surely that superscription would have inebriated all beneath the banner.

18. It amendeth the manners of the boon-companions; and by its aid he that was irresolute is guided to the path of firm resolve;

²²⁸ From A. J. Arberry, *The Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Farid*, 2:84-90.

19. And he whose hand never knew munificence becometh suddenly generous; and he is clement in time of rage in whom no forbearance was.

20. And the fool of the tribe, had his lips attained to kiss its filter, that kiss would have endowed him with the very essence of its fine qualities.

21. They tell me, 'Describe that wine, for thou art well-informed of its description.' Indeed, I have some knowledge of its attributes:

22. Purity (yet 'tis not watered), subtilty (yet not as with air), light (and no fire there burning), spirit (not clothed in body)—

23. Beauties, the which do guide its describers aright to praise it, so that in prose and verse they tell of it with beauteous words;

24. And he who knew it not rejoices when its name is mentioned, as Nu'm's yearning lover whenever Nu'm is named.

25. More ancient than all existing things was the tale of it told in eternity, when neither was shape nor trace to be seen;

26. And there did all things subsist through it for a purpose wise, whereby it was veiled from all that had not an understanding mind.

27. And my spirit was distraught with love for it, in such manner that the twain were mingled together in unification, and not as a body is permeated by another:

28. 'Tis a soul and no wine there, when Adam is reckoned my father, but a wine and no soul there, when the vine thereof is reckoned my mother.

29. Now the subtilty of the vessels is really consequential upon the subtilty of the inward truths, and the inward truths augment by means of the vessels:

30. And the division truly has taken place, while yet the whole is one: our spirits being the wine, and our corporeal shapes the vine.

31. Before it is no 'before', and no 'after' after it; and as for the priority of all posterities, the Wine has this for a surety:

32. And ere Time's terms was straitened, then was its pressing-time: after the Wine was our father's age, itself being orphan.

33. They said then, 'Tis sin that thou hast quaffed.' Nay, but this I drank was truly, as I view, that the which it were sin to eschew.

34. Good heath to the folk of the monastery! How oft they were drunken with it; and yet they had never quaffed it, but only aspired thereto.

35. But I—I was set awirl with it, before ever I grew to manhood, and with me that rapture shall abide forever, though my bones may crumble.

36. I charge thee to take it pure: yet if thou desirest to mingle it, to turn away from the Beloved's mouth's luster, that were wrong indeed.

37. So look thou for it in the tavern, and seek its unveiling there to the tuneful notes of melodies, wherewith 'tis a noble prize:

38. For ne'er did it dwell with sullen care in the self-same place, as sorrow has ne'er cohabited with sweet tunefulness,

39. And be thy intoxication therewith but the life of an hour, yet shalt thou see Time's self become an obedient slave, and thine the command of it.

40. No joy is there in this world for him who lives sober; and he that dies not of drunkenness misses true prudence—

41. Then let him weep for himself, whose life is all wasted, and he not in all his days of the Wine taken part or portion.

**The Wine Song (al-Khamriyyah) of ‘Umar Ibn al-Farid
(trans. Martin Lings)²²⁹ --1980**

Rememb’ring the beloved, wine we drink
Which drunk had made us ere the vine’s creation.
A sun it is; the full moon is its cup;
A crescent hands it round; how many stars
Shine forth from it the moment it be mixed!
But for its fragrance ne’er had I been guided
Unto its tavern; but for its resplendence
Imagining could no image make of it.
Time its mere gasp hath left; hidden it is.
Like secrets pent in the intelligence,
Yet if it be remembered in the tribe,
All become drunk—no shame on them nor sin.
Up hath it fumed from out the vessel’s dregs.
Nothing is left of it, only a name;
Yet if that name but enter a man’s mind,
Gladness shall dwell with him and grief depart.
Had the boon revelers gazed upon its seal,
That seal, without the wine, had made them drunk.
Sprinkle a dead man’s grave with drops of it,
His spirit would return, his body quicken.
If in the shadow of the wall where spreads
Its vine they laid a man, mortally sick,
Gone were his sickness; and one paralysed,
Brought near its tavern, would walk; the dumb would speak
Did he its savour recollect. Its fragrance,
If wafted through the East, even in the West,
Would free, for one berheumed, his sense of smell;
And he who stained his palm, clasping its cup,
Could never, star in hand, be lost by night.
Unveil it like a bride in secrecy
Before one blind from birth; his sight would dawn.
Decant it, and the deaf would hearing have.
If riders rode out for its native earth,
And one of them were bit by snake, unharmed
By poison he. If the enchanter traced
The letters of its name on madman’s brow,
That script would cure him of his lunacy;

²²⁹ “The Wine-Song (al-Khamriyyah) of ‘Umar Ibn al-Farid.” From *Studies in Comparative Religion*, 14:131-134.

And blazoned on the standard of a host,
Its name would make all men beneath it drunk.

In virtue the boon revelers it amends,
Makes perfect. Thus by it the irresolute
Is guided to the path of firm resolve.
Bountiful he, whose hand no bounty knew;
And he that never yet forbore forbearth,
Despite the goad of anger. The tribe's dunce,
Could he but kiss its filter, by that kiss
Would win the sense of all its attributes.

'Describe it, well thou knowest how it is',
They bid me. Yea, its qualities I know:
Not water and not air nor fire nor earth,
But purity for water, and for air
Subtlety, light for fire, spirit for earth—
Excellencies that guide to extol its good
All who would tell of it, and excellent
Their prose in praise of it, excellent their verse.
So he that knew not of it can rejoice
To hear it mentioned, as Nu`m's lover doth
To hear her name, whenever Nu`m is named.

Before all beings, in Eternity
It is, ere yet was any shape or trace.
Through it things were, then it by them was veiled,
Wisely, from him who understandeth not.
My spirit loved it, was made one with it,
But not as bodies each in other merge.
Wine without vine; Adam my father is.
Vine without wine, vine mothereth it and me.
Vessels are purer for the purity
Of truths which are their content, and those truths
Are heightened by the vessels being pure.
Things have been diff'renced, and yet all is One:
Our spirits wine are, and our bodies vine.

Before it no before is, after it
No after is; absolute its privilege
To be before all afters. Ere time's span
It pressing was, and our first father's age
Came afterwards—parentless orphan it!
They tell me: 'Thou hast drunk iniquity'.

Not so, I have but drunk what not to drink
Would be for me iniquitous indeed.
Good for the monastery folk, that oft
They drunken were with it, yet drank it not,
Though fain would drink. But ecstasy from it
Was mine ere I existed, shall be mine
Beyond my bones' decaying. Drink it pure!
But if thou needs must have it mixed, 'twere sin
To shun mouth-water from the Loved One's lips.

Go seek it in the tavern; bid it unveil
To strains of music. They offset its worth,
For wine and care dwelt never in one place,
Even as woe with music cannot dwell.
Be drunk one hour with it, and thou shalt see
Time's whole age as thy slave, at thy command.
He hath not lived here, who hath sober lived,
And he that dieth not drunk hath missed the mark.
With tears then let him mourn himself, whose life
Hath passed, and he no share of it hath had.

Ibn al-Farid's Wine Ode (trans. Homerin)²³⁰ --2001

In Memory of the beloved
We drank a wine;
We were drunk with it
Before creation of the vine.

The full moon its cup, the wine
A sun circled by a crescent;
When it is mixed,
How many stars appear!

If not for its bouquet,
I would not have found its tavern;
If not for its flashing gleams,
Could imagination picture it?

Time preserved nothing of it
Save one last breath,
Concealed like a secret
In the breasts of the wise.

But if it is recalled among the tribe,
The worthy ones
Are drunk by morn
Without shame or sin.

From the depths of the jars
It arose, though truly,
Nothing of it remained
Save a name.

Yet if one day
It crosses a man's mind,
Then joy will dwell in him
And anxiety depart.

Could the tavern mates see
The seal of the jar,

²³⁰ From Th. Emile Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint: Ibn al-Farid, His Verse, and His Shrine*, pp. 47-51.

Without the wine that seal alone
Would make them drunk,

And could they sprinkle it
On a dead man's earth,
The spirit would return to him,
His body revived.
Could they fling
Into the shadow of its trellised vine
A sick man on the point of death,
Disease would flee him;

Could they bring a cripple
Near its tavern, he would walk,
And from mention of its flavor,
The dumb would talk.

Could breaths of its bouquet
Spread out in the east,
One stuffed-up in the west
Would smell again;

And were a touching palm
tinged by its glass,
one would not stray at night,
a star in hand.

Could it be unveiled in secret
To the blind, he would see,
And from the strainer's sound,
The deaf would hear.

Were the riders
to seek its earthly soil.
With one scorpion-stung among them
The poison would not harm him.

Could the wizard write
the letters of its name
on the brow of one struck by the jinn,
the tracings would cure and cleanse him.

And were its name inscribed
upon the army's standard,

all beneath that banner
would fall drunk from that sign.

It refines the morals
of the tavern mates
and by it, the irresolute are guided
to resolution's path;

He whose hand never knew munificence
is generous,
while one lacking in forbearance
bears the rage of anger,

And could the stupid one among the folk
win a kiss from its strainer,
he would sense the hidden sense
of its fine qualities.

They say to me; "Do describe it,
for you know its character well!"
Indeed, I have word
of its attributes:

Purity not water,
subtlety not air,
light but not fire,
spirit without body.

Lovely features guiding
those who praise it to describe it;
how fine their prose and poetry
on wine!

One who never knew it
is moved by its memory,
just as one longing for Nu`um
is stirred when she's recalled.

But they've said: "You've drunk sin!"
No, indeed, I drank only
That whose abstention
Is sin to me.

So cheers to the monastery's folk!

How often they were drunk with it
Though they never drank it,
But only longed to.

While it made me drunk
before my birth,
abiding always with me
though my bones be worn away.

So take it straight,
though if you must, then mix it,
but your turning away
from the beloved's mouth is wrong.

Watch for it in the tavern,
try to uncover it there
amid melodious tunes
where it becomes the prize.

It never dwells with anxiety
at any time or place,
just as sorrow
never lives with song.

Be drunk with it,
if only the life of an hour,
and you will see time a willing slave
under your command.

For there is no life in this world
for one who lives here sober;
who does not die drunk on it,
prudence has passed him by.

So let him weep for himself,
one whose life was wasted,
never having won a share
or measure of this wine.