Doctrinal Sufism in the Sensual Poetry of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s *Interpreter of Desires*:
Divine Self-Disclosure, Inherent Predisposition, and Human Love

submitted for the degree of PhD

2019

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DECLARATION

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SUMMARY


Contrary to the opinion of both Ibn al-ʿArabī’s contemporary conservative critics and even some modern scholars, the sensual poetry of his collection, Interpreter of Desires (Tarjumān al-Ashwaq), evidences important elements of Sufism (the esoteric dimension of Islam), a conclusion that this thesis will demonstrate by application of his own summa of gnostic theories as contained in Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam (Bezels of Wisdom), a demonstration possible even without reference to his own formal defence of his poetry collection.

After acknowledging Ibn al-ʿArabi’s debt to the pre-Islamic qaṣīda (ode) and its nasīḥ (erotic or melancholic prelude) section in which style he wrote, the thesis demonstrates that doctrinal Sufism is integral to the sixty-one poems of the Interpreter of Desires in three key areas:

1. Divine Self-Disclosure
2. Inherent Predisposition, Suffering, and Religion
3. Human and Divine Love: the hadith on Women, Perfume & Prayer

The primary method to prove the thesis that these doctrinal elements do, in fact, exist in the poetry, is to demonstrate the existence of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own doctrines which are accepted as “foundational” in the Sufi view. The text used to establish this theoretical template is the Shaykh’s own summa of his theoretical gnosis, Bezels of Wisdom (Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam), a work his own disciples over the centuries have used to explain Ibn al-ʿArabī’s thinking. Thus, the present project will be a highly focused application of a single, specific theoretical work to a single literary work.

Noteworthy is this dissertation’s additional contribution to scholarship in bringing order to the important doctrinal material within the Fuṣūṣ -- which is organised not in any way thematically, but by “prophet” in chapters that have overlapping thematic materials found in different chapters of the book – so that the themes of theoretical Sufism may then be considered in a more organised way and –
key for this dissertation – used as both the structure for the dissertation’s analytical sections, and the Sufi perspective on explicating the poems themselves.

The resulting analysis proves the thesis that the poetry unambiguously evidences a highly significant number of important evocations of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s theoretical gnosis. The examination of the poems from the Sufi theoretical perspective also reveals, secondarily, that the role of the Beloved in the poems shifts according to the specific doctrinal point being made in the given poetical context, so that the beloved girl can be either a human being reflecting back to God His divine Names/Attributes, or she can be a woman in whom the lover contemplates God as being a part of himself, or she can be a metaphor for God, or the Beloved being addressed can be God Himself. Explication of the poems according to the theoretical template also results in a determination that the poet is explaining to his readers that -- contrary to the lover’s understanding -- the end-point of the spiritual Path is not union with the Divine in this life, but mystical bewilderment and annihilation of the ego-self.

There has been no scholarly monograph published in English analysing Interpreter of Desires as its sole focus; the very few journal articles and book sections that discuss the work in theological terms have done so in only a cursory way. The contribution to the literature of this present project is, thus, three-fold: 1) to organise and synthesize points of the previously identified key areas of Sufi doctrine that are scattered throughout the Bezels text; 2) to expand upon the work of previous scholars by focusing on the intersection of theological expression and love poetry in the collection, and to demonstrate Sufi theology across a very large number of the sixty-one poems in the collection; and, 3) to explore a completely new perspective of the collection by application of the Bezels doctrine to reveal significant elements of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s theoretical gnosis not previously revealed in Interpreter of Desires.
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LANGUAGE TRANSLITERATION AND OTHER FORMATTING ISSUES

Transliteration and Dating

This thesis adheres predominantly to the Arabic-to-English transliteration and word spelling standard of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Christian Era (CE) dating will be with bibliographical citations.

Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Name

When using the name of the Sufi writer who is the object of this study, the following spelling will be used in the present project, unless quoting another authority: *Ibn al-ʿArabī*. This is consistent with Chittick, the primary contemporary authority on the writer. Furthermore, Ibn al-ʿArabī himself uses the definite article in his autographs and it is found in the writings of his immediate followers. (See the discussion in the biographical context section of the dissertation for more detail.) The most common alternative usage is Ibn ʿArabi (without the definite article.) Also, consistent with most bibliographic conventions, the Sufi’s name is alphabetized under “Ibn.” Many scholars also refer to the writer as the Shaykh, the Shaykh al-Akbar, the Great Shaykh, and Muḥyī al-Dīn; this dissertation will, for the sake of variety, also incorporate some of those appellations.

Qur'anic and Key Text Citations

Citations from the Qur'an will be in the following form: (sūrah:ayah).

*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam (Bezels of Wisdom)* is often abbreviated as *Fuṣūṣ*.

*Futūḥāt al-makkiyya (Meccan Revelations)* is usually abbreviated as *Futūḥāt*, or sometimes *Fut.* in citations. Citations to this work are often included in citations of other writers, in which case the volume. To simplify citations, references to the *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya (Meccan Openings)* may only be cited parenthetically in an abbreviated form within a referring citation. These references are to the following edition (cited by Chittick): *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, Cairo, 1911. Reprinted in Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, n.d. Partial critical edition by O. Yahia, Cairo: al-Hayʾat ʿĀmma liʾl-Kitāb, 1972. The capitalisation of words in the Arabic titles of these books will be as presented above, in conformity to the style used by William Chittick in his writings.
In conformity with Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own writings and the Austin translation of, and commentary on, *Bezels of Wisdom* -- and consistent with the approach taken by scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Annemarie Schimmel, William Chittick, and Sachiko Murata -- most references to the Divine, including pronouns, will be masculine and capitalised. This approach conforms also to the approach of a very recent, self-described, “feminist” critique by Sa’diyya Shaikh of the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī.¹ The capitalisation extends, under the same authority, to the Divine Names and other designations for the Divine. To help distinguish the Divine from the human, the capitalised form of Beloved will generally be used in referring to God as the Beloved, with the understanding that – in the context of the poems – the “Beloved” refers both to the girl Nizām and to God.

Poems and verses from the *Tarjumān* are cited parenthetically in the format as “P<poem number>:<verse number>.”

¹ The perspective on this gender issue is addressed by Sa’diyya Shaikh, who has undertaken a self-described “feminist critique” of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writing. Her rationale -- formulated after considering arguments for use of alternatives -- for maintaining the use of “He” when referring to God as written about by Ibn al-ʿArabī, reflects Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own usage in his texts, and is worth quoting at length here:

Despite all of these compelling arguments for using both “He” and “She” for God, I decided to stay faithful to the direct literal translation of the divine Huwa as “He” for God in Ibn ʿArabī’s texts. Thus, I use “Allāh” or “God” in all my references to the divine and use “He” when translating Ibn ʿArabī’s references to Go as Huwa. I do so for the primary reason that I want the reader to access in an unadulterated manner the multiple and nuanced ways that Ibn ʿArabī more broadly troubles normative gender categories in his God talk. Ibn ʿArabī presents complex and nuanced formulations of feminine and masculine aspects of the divine One. My presentation of Ibn ʿArabī’s theological language in its original gendered formulation attempts to adhere as faithfully as possible to Ibn ʿArabī’s intricate, fluid, and sometimes paradoxical articulation of gender. Sa’diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn ʿArabi, Gender, and Sexuality* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 31.
INTRODUCTION

I.A  Research Scope

I.A.1  Thesis Statement

This dissertation will demonstrate that the sensual poetry of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s collection *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* (*Interpreter of Desires*) evidences a significant number of highly important elements of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own perspectives on doctrinal Sufism, a conclusion that the analysis will demonstrate primarily by the application of his own *summa* of gnostic theories as contained in *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (*Bezels of Wisdom*), a demonstration possible even without reference to his own formal defence of this poetry collection.

I.A.2  Scope of Dissertation

The project is limited to study of a single poetry collection of the Sufī thinker known by the later Sufī thinkers as al-Shaykh al-Akbar -- the Greatest Master (“Doctor Maximus” in medieval Europe) -- Abū Bakr Muhammad Ibn ʿAlī Ibn al-ʿArabī (b. 1165, d. 1240 CE), commonly known as Ibn al-ʿArabī.2 The collection, *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* -- usually translated as *Interpreter of Desires* -- is a compilation of sixty-one “sensual” or “erotic” poems in the form of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda* (ode). Current scholarship dates the writing of the collection -- which the Shaykh used to the end of his life as a text for teaching Sufī concepts -- to around 1215 CE. 3

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The present work is concerned with Ibn al-ʿArabi’s contributions within the collection as a theological, mystical (including cosmological, ontological) and -- chiefly and more specifically -- Sufi thinker; the thesis is not substantially concerned with his contributions in the fields of philosophy, Islamic law, science, astrology, or numerology. Although extremely important to Ibn al-ʿArabi’s theories and the Interpreter of Desires, the subject of the imaginal is not discussed in any great detail, as the topic is outside the scope of the present work and demands its own study in relation to the poetry collection. The thesis will also provide only a brief and necessary background on the importance of the nasīb section of the pre-Islamic qaṣīda relative to Sufi doctrine or Ibn al-ʿArabi’s poems, since this is, as will be discussed, already examined extensively elsewhere in the existing literature. Finally, this dissertation is not concerned primarily with a gender or feminist critique of the Great Shaykh’s work or his theories -- including either Bezels or Interpreter of Desires -- as that work is outside the scope of this present project, and as that theoretical assessment has already been made very well by others, as discussed in the Literature Review.

As will be discussed in the section below on the dissertation’s method, evidence of doctrinal Sufism in the Tarjumān al-Ashwāq will be demonstrated primarily by the application of the Shaykh’s own Sufi gnostic theories as contained in his great summa of his Sufi thought, Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam (Bezels of Wisdom), which became the source for many other Sufi theorists and poets who followed (also discussed later in this introductory material).4 Bezels contains a wealth of theory, but it is not organised in any systematic way, but contained in chapters devoted to various Islamic prophets. One of the major tasks and contributions of this project, therefore, is to organise these theories in a systematic way so that they may be used to organise an orderly and meaningful explication of the poetry collection.

I.A.3 Dissertation Rationale

Seyyed Hossein Nasr has said that through Ibn al-ʿArabi, “what had always been the inner truth of Sufism was formulated in such a manner that it has dominated the spiritual and intellectual life of Islam ever since.”5 Ibn al-ʿArabi is also one of the

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5 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Three Muslim Sages (Caravan, 1964), 91.
most influential exponents of Sufism itself, which has been defined succinctly by Annemarie Schimmel as “the generally accepted name for Islamic mysticism,” and by Titus Burckhardt as “the esoteric or inward (hātin) aspect of Islam to be distinguished from exoteric or ‘external’ (zāhir) Islam.” More recently, Sa’diyya Shaikh has said that, [springing from the heart of Islam’s spiritual reservoir, Taṣawwuf, or Sufism, can be described as the process by which a believer embraces the full spiritual consequences of God’s oneness (taḥād). The goal of the Sufi path is to enable a human being, through the cultivation of virtuous excellence (iḥsān), to commune directly and experientially with her Creator.”

Ibn al-'Arabī scholarship developed largely in the twentieth century, led primarily by English-speaking researchers. The Sufi’s writings were paid scant attention to by early Orientalists due largely to the sheer volume of his works, written in Arabic, which were often considered too difficult or too broad in scope or too unorganized or too “mystical” to be studied at length. Indeed, the title of Greatest Master was “understood to mean that no one else has been or will be able to unpack the multi-layered significance of the sources of the Islamic tradition with such detail and profundity.”

One of his most significant works, *Futūḥat al-makkiyya -- Meccan Openings* -- fills a projected 18,500 pages in the Yahia edition; this is only one of several hundred of his books and treatises. More recent scholarship, however, has opened up as more investigators have been willing to explore writings that “preserve rationality while simultaneously transcending it,” as William Chittick states. In effect, Akbarian scholarship -- that is, the academic study of the life and works of the Shaykh al-Akbar, Ibn al-'Arabī -- on his theoretical and mystical writings has given researchers with an interest in the spirituality of Islam a fruitful course of study in an area not already given exhaustive consideration.

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7 Ernst discusses the “discovery” of Sufism and the development of European Sufi studies in some detail in Carl W. Ernst, *Sufism: An Essential Introduction to the Philosophy and Practice of the Mystical Tradition of Islam* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), 1–18.


During his own lifetime, the *Interpreter of Desires* might have been subsumed into the great mass Ibn al-ʿArabī’s other works, except for the self-ascribed subject and manner of writing the poems. As discussed in greater detail in the following section of this present project, the poems prompted criticism of their blatant eroticism from one of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s contemporaries -- a certain Islamic “jurist” who claimed that “the work dealt with sensual love and not the divine mysteries”¹¹ -- so much so that Ibn al-ʿArabī felt compelled to write an *apologia* -- the *Dhakāʾir al-aʾlāq*, henceforth, the *Commentary¹²* -- which amounted to defending the poems on a line-by-line basis as being strictly adhering to Islamic and Sufi principles and, as such, based on the Qurān and the hadiths (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). It is easy for both casual and scholarly readers to regard the Shaykh’s own *Commentary* with some scepticism, given the subject matter and his seemingly over-the-top response to his critics. Many analysts have concluded that the *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* was, indeed, foremost a collection of erotic poems inspired by the beautiful girl who first caught the eye of Ibn al-ʿArabī as he circumambulated the Kaʿba on a *hajj*.¹³

The purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate, however, that the collection does -- contrary to more superficial or uninformed assessments -- evidence very significant elements of traditional Sufi thought, especially as developed by Ibn al-ʿArabī in his own mystical works, and particularly in his significant contribution to Sufi thinking on the self-disclosure of God, inherent predisposition, and human versus divine love.¹⁴ As one scholar has said recently of the central figure of the beloved

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¹¹ Chittick, 67.

¹² Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Dhakhaʾir Al-Aʾlāq: Sharh Tarjumān Al-Ashwāq*, ed. M. ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Kurdi (Cairo: College of Arabic, al-Azhar University, 1968). Henceforth, his will be referred to as the *Commentary*.

¹³ Jaroslav Stetkevych, no admirer of the *Interpreter of Desires*, has been a modern critic who rather cynically maintains that the mystical explanations in the *Commentary* were invented by the poet as cover for the eroticism of the poems, with the symbolic meanings of the poems being, essentially, made up with no connection to the poet’s writing of the verses. He claims that the symbolic explanations in the *Commentary* were “undoubtedly … an afterthought and further search for meaning” that was not present at the writing. Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in The Classical Arabic Nasib*, 1st ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 1993), 92.

Nizām in *Interpreter of Desires*, she “traverses multiple registers within Ibn ‘Arabi’s works: she articulates core and central Sufi insights.”

Finally, the present project is taking on a subject which has not been extensively evaluated, perhaps, because of the squeamishness of some scholars in language, culture, or literature in discussing theological or mystical areas, and vice versa. This reason has been suggested by Michael Sells who has noted in the introduction to his own partial translation of the collection that “[t]he love-elegies of the *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* have been neglected by modern scholars -- in part because the artificial division in modern Arabist scholarship between religion and poetry.”

Furthermore, he says, “Ibn ‘Arabi’s commentaries on his poems make certain selected aspects of his metaphysics clear. But if they were to be taken as the full meaning of the poems, they would render the poems themselves superfluous.” One of the goals of this present project is to show how the theoretical Sufism in the poems actually enhances the reader’s understanding of the poems through the poet’s use of symbols and imagery to reveal an additional, deeper, layer of understanding of the story of *Interpreter of Desires*.

In addition to examining a poetry collection that has not been previously explicated as a whole, the contribution to the literature of this dissertation is three-fold: 1) to organise and synthesize certain points of Sufi doctrine that are scattered throughout the *Bezels* text; 2) to expand upon the work of previous scholars; and, 3) to explore a completely new perspective of the collection by application of the *Bezels* theories to reveal significant elements of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s theoretical gnosis not previously revealed in *Interpreter of Desires*. As will be discussed, almost all of the scholars who have examined *Interpreter of Desires* have reached for low-hanging fruit of the Majnūn-Laylā allegory in applying some type of theoretical analysis; those very few who have climbed higher for theological sources in the poems have discussed in a cursory way either just a few poems or even fragments of whole poems. Explicit exploration of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own Sufi theories is also extremely limited in the literature. No academic work in English examining the poetry collection as a whole according to the *Bezels* text has previously been done relating to Ibn al-ʿArabī’s

17 Sells, 35.
doctrinal gnosis. More generally, the importance of studying Ibn al-ʿArabī within the context of Sufism is underscored by Nasr:

In the Islamic world Sufism is the most powerful antidote to the religious radicalism called fundamentalism as well as the most important source for responding to the challenges posed for Islam by modernism. In the West it is the most accessible means for understanding Islam in its essential reality. Sufism also constitutes a central link between the spiritual traditions of Islam and the West.\(^\text{18}\)

Thus, in a general sense, showing -- by examining his poetry -- how the theories of one of Islam’s major theological thinkers situate the sensual life within Islam can further the understanding that certain fundamental concepts about God and divine love are not only accessible but shared by human beings from Islam and other spiritual traditions.

I.A.4 Introduction to *Interpreter of Desires*

The Arabic title of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* -- is usually translated as *Interpreter of Desires* from Nicholson’s much-referenced translation\(^\text{19}\) -- though it is also translated as *Translator of Desires*,\(^\text{20}\) *Translation of Desires*,\(^\text{21}\) *Interpreter of Ardent Desires*,\(^\text{22}\) or *Interpreter of Yearnings*.\(^\text{23}\)

One commentator has observed that, in the circumstances which influenced the writing of *Interpreter of Desires*, “Ibn ʿArabi’s dominant passions are metaphorically captured: Mysticism as reflected in its highest form in his Perfect Man, Muhammad, the holy site, Mecca, women as manifestations of divine beauty, and poetry as


illumination of human passions.” The circumstances under which the poetry collection was composed are discussed by the Shaykh himself in the preface to the collection. In the year 598H Ibn al-ʿArabī was circumambulating the Kaʿba whilst composing poetry out loud when, as he writes, “All I felt was a light tap on my shoulder, made by the gentlest of hands.” He describes the encounter at length:

I turned around and saw a young woman, a daughter of Rūm. Never have I witnessed a face that was more graceful, or speech that was so pleasant, intelligent, subtle, and spiritual. She surpassed the people of her age in discernment, her erudition, her beauty, and her knowledge. She repeated to me: “Oh, Master! What did you say? One by one Ibn ʿArabi repeated to her the verses he had uttered only a moment earlier; one by one the young Persian woman interpreted them.

The girl’s name was Niẓām, the daughter of a Meccan imām (spiritual guide) whose family had emigrated from Persia in the early Islamic period, and it was she who became the Muse for Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writing of the Interpreter of Desires. As the Shaykh says in the collection’s preface,

Whenever I mention a name in this book I always allude to her, and whenever I mourn over an abode I mean her abode…. These pages include love-poems… [in which] I point (allegorically) to various sorts of Divine knowledge and spiritual mysteries and intellectual sciences and religious exhortations. I have used the erotic style and form of expression because men’s souls are enamoured of it….

At this point in his life, Ibn al-ʿArabī would have been about thirty-eight years old and the Niẓām would have probably fourteen.

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26 Addas, 209.


It is very clear to any reader of the preface and the poems that Ibn al-ʿArabī was completely smitten by the young Niẓām. All three editions of the author’s collection included the above descriptions of the girl; the second includes the date of the original writing, 611 AH/1215 CE. The third edition, however, included significant additional material in the preface, which addressed criticism of the work levelled at from an unnamed Islamic scholar from Aleppo, who accused him of “producing an erotic work under the pretence that they were mystical poems.” It must be remembered that there was amongst some orthodox Muslims a general suspicion of poetry, deriving from the Qur’ānic condemnation of poetry. The new prefatory material written by the Great Shaykh, his Commentary -- written in the margins of the poem manuscript -- “disclosed and spelled out explicitly the spiritual meanings concealed behind expressions normally used in the language of courtly love.”

Claude Addas, in her scholarly biography of the Shaykh, terms Interpreter of Desires as “one of the masterpieces of mystical poetry in Arabic” and provides her own

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33 The Qur’ānic citation is (26:210-2, 221-7):

The shaytans (satans) have not descended with it:
It is not for them and they are not able [to do so],
For they are kept away from listening…
Shall I impart to you those upon whom the shaytans descend
They descend upon every sinful fabricator
They listen and the majority of them are liars
And the poets, the wayward pursue them
Have you [that is, Muhammad] not seen that they rave in every valley
And that they say that which they do not do
Except for those who have faith and do pious [deeds] and mention Allāh often
and assist themselves after they have been wronged.
And those who wrong will know what a reversal they will suffer.

J.E. Montgomery, The Vagaries of the Qasidah (Gibb Memorial Trust, 1997), 210–16.


translation of the most well-known lines from the collection, verses at the end of Poem 11, often anthologized and descriptive of the concept of Sufi divine love:

My heart becomes capable of all forms:
For gazelles, a meadow, for monks, a monastery,
A temple for idols, the pilgrim’s Ka’ba,
The tablets of the Torah, the Book of the Qur’an.
I profess the language of Love, and whatever direction
Taken by its mount, Love is my religion and my faith.

About the exemplary poem fragment cited above, Michael Sells makes an assertion that can be used as a statement of one of this project’s key propositions: “In Translator of Desires, the context of love poetry is most apparent, although certain verses come close to explicit intersection of the theological expression.” This dissertation, however, will extend this idea of the intersection of theological expression and love poetry more broadly to demonstrate Sufi theology across a very large number of the sixty-one poems in the collection.

I.A.5. Translation and Source Issues

For the purpose of citation and analysis of text, the writer of this dissertation has translated all cited in the dissertation (almost three hundred verses) from the original Arabic into English; each of the verses cited has been completely translated, not just the individual words that are brought into the analysis. The source for the Arabic texts is the 1911 publication of Tarjumān al-Ashwāq by Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (d. 1945), a professor of Arabic and Persian languages at the University of Cambridge who had a special interest in and lasting major influence on Islamic studies, generally, and Sufi studies, in particular. Specifically, the Kessinger Reprint edition is used (Ibn al-ʿArabī 2007); the Kessinger edition is a virtual facsimile copy of the 1911 edition published by the Royal Asiatic Society.

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37 Addas, Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ʿArabi, 211.
The objective of the translation was to develop a rendering in English that is – as much as is practicable – a very literal translation of the Shaykh’s Arabic poems. The reason for this is that the project relies to a considerable degree on looking at specific words or phrases to discern Ibn al-ʿArabī’s meaning of his poems from the perspective of the doctrinal Sufism as contained in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. The Arabic words used also relate strongly to classical Sufi language used in theoretical gnosis – much of this contained in the *Fuṣūṣ* -- but also in the tradition of the Arabic love poetry that provided metaphors for the love of God through showing love for human beings, all of which formed a basis for the development of Sufi poetry. Many translators of Sufi poetry from Arabic into English, of course, take a less literal approach to render translations that are “poetic” in form, as opposed to taking the literal approach of this dissertation. Michael Sells, for example, one of the most prolific scholarly writers on the *Tarjumān*, says that in translating this poetry, “it is a simultaneous process of ‘bringing across’ and transformation. In every moment, the heart must change to receive the new form of the constantly changing Beloved.” Sells has published his own small book with several of the important verses of the *Tarjumān* in translation, but he has taken a more “poetic” approach to translation, as opposed to a more literal approach. To make the student’s literal translations more readable – and understandable in the given context-- in English, however, words are added as needed in either brackets or parentheses. Words in brackets represent words added that are either implied or necessary for a verse to make sense in English; words in parentheses represent alternative translations of a word, or brief, helpful commentary.

Several resources were used in the translation of these verses. Foremost is the massive Arabic-English lexicon of Edward William Lane. Supplementing the Lane source are two other lexicons: Hans Wehr and Francis Steingass. All three of these lexicons were accessed primarily via the ejtaal.net website for ease of looking up words; the Wehr and Steingass lexicon entries sometimes provided a helpful shortcut to translations or finding word roots in Lane. The “Quranic Arabic Corpus” was

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sometimes used to study alternative grammatical translations of word-roots, and as an aid to transliteration.

The method for translating undertaken by the student was, first, to translate each word of the verse being explicated; all words in the verse were translated, using the lexicons plus rules of classical Arabic grammar, given the context of the poem. The translated words were then assembled into English verses, adding necessary material parenthetically (as already discussed) to make the English translation readable, though retaining as close to a literal meaning as possible. The translations of all 279 of Ibn al-ʿArabi’s Arabic verses are included in the Appendix to this dissertation. The verses translated equate to approximately half of the Tarjumān al-Ashwāq text.

To allow the reader of this dissertation to compare the translation with the Arabic, the student has left the words in the same conjugation or declension as in the original verse. This means that – with a few exceptions – the word root is not what is included parenthetically in the explication, but a transliteration of the original word found in the Arabic verse. Other authorities, of course, cite the word roots in their own writings on Sufi doctrine.

To date, no other scholar has published a translation of the entire collection from the original Arabic into English. The reason the Nicholson/Kessinger edition (rendered as Interpreter of Desires) will be used is because not only is it the only complete collection of the poem in English translation, but it is published by an authority on the subject, and the fact that other important scholars of Ibn al-ʿArabi -- most notably the French Henry Corbin in his seminal Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ʿArabi 44 -- have relied upon the Nicholson translation into English in their own work.

Only one other scholar, Michael Sells, has published any large number of translations from Arabic into English of the Tarjumān poems within; the number of his poems translated totals twenty-four (of sixty-one total), some published and explicated first in journals, then brought together into a single volume, Stations of Desire45; a discussion of the journal articles, and the other works cited in this section, are included in the formal literature review below. Maurice Gloton published in 1996 a translation


into French of the entire poetry collection along with a translation of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own *Commentary*. Other than the Sells book (a partial translation of the collection), the Gloton and Nicholson texts are the only other translations of the full collection available in a European language.

I.A.6 Exclusion of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s *Commentary*

The one text related to the *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* that Nicholson did not translate in full was Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own *Commentary* on these poems, included in a second edition of the collection produced by Ibn al-ʿArabī (along with a new preface) as a defence to charges by “devout Moslems” that the poems were “vain and amatorious”; a third edition was the same as the second, but included a statement about the circumstances that prompted Ibn al-ʿArabī to write the *Commentary*; these circumstances are discussed at length later in this introductory section. The *Commentary* was a poem-by-poem -- in some cases a line-by-line or even word-by-word -- explanation of why the poems were not “‘in the erotic style’” but, rather, poetry that refers to the “mystical sciences.” This matter of theological squabbling over the profane texts and editions, and -- as Ibn al-ʿArabī himself said in citing his moral critic -- the fact that felt compelled “‘to protect himself from the imputation that he, a man famous for religion and piety, composed poetry in the erotic style’” gave impetus to the *Tarjumān al-ASHwāq*’s first rising to prominence in Sufi literature and remaining of interest today. Indeed, the question of whether or not the collection represents a

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50 Shaikh’s perspective on the collection’s controversy is that “Ibn ʿArabi’s portrayal of Nizām, in contrast [to a traditional Islamic view of women’s roles], provides alternate imaginings of gender and female subjectivity. This type of representation of women was nonconformist and even anathema to many of Ibn ʿArabi’s male contemporaries, who accused him of dissembling erotic and sensual love to preserve his reputation…. The outcry from some of Ibn ʿArabi’s peers reflects a context in which representations of women combing and imbricating sensuality into spiritual discourse were considered immoral and cause for censure. These authorities found it difficult to see the relationship between human embodiment, sensuality, and spiritual truth.” Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn ʿArabi, Gender, and Sexuality*, 104–5.
“Sufi” text -- rather than only a collection of love poems -- is the overarching issue this project examines.

One of the reasons why the *Commentary* is not included as part of this project is that the translation is incomplete. Furthermore, the selection of which notes of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s *Commentary* that Nicholson chose to accompany his translation has been severely criticised by Chittick, on two bases. First, Chittick claims, Nicholson’s overall “attitude” to the *Commentary* was grossly flawed and subjective. In making this assessment, Chittick refers to the following passage from Nicholson’s Introduction to the collection:

> But the fact that [Ibn al-ʿArabī’s] explanations overshoot the mark is no proof of his insincerity: he had to satisfy his critics, and it would have been difficult to convince them that the poems were mystical in spirit and intention unless he had given a precise and definite interpretation of every line and of almost every word. The necessity of entering into trivial details -- an Arab in any case is apt to exaggerate details at the expense of the whole -- drives [Ibn al-ʿArabī] to take refuge in far-fetched verbal analogies and causes him to descend with startling rapidity from the sublime to the ridiculous.

After acknowledging a scholarly debt to Nicholson for his translating the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*, Chittick “questions [Nicholson’s] evaluation by asking how the Shaykh’s commentary would have been perceived by intellectuals of his day, and more particularly, by those familiar with his teachings.” Chittick then continues by noting that thousands of similar “far-fetched verbal analogies” can be found in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s *magnum opus*, the *Futūḥat al-Makkiyya* (*Meccan Revelations*), and adds that if the same comments were found in the middle of that great theoretical work, no one would even notice. Furthermore, states Chittick, “[t]he only thing ‘ridiculous’ is that Nicholson should have judged Ibn al-ʿArabī from within the cognitive blinkers of British rationalism.”

53 Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 68.
54 Chittick, 68.
Aside from Nicholson’s “blinkereted” scholarly approach and his failing to comprehend the breadth of the cosmological, theological, and Sufi meanings of the Commentary, Chittick’s second criticism of Nicholson’s approach to the Commentary relates to which specific Commentary notes Nicholson decided to include versus which he left out, as the translation is incomplete, due to Nicholson’s decision to leave in only the “interesting and important passages.” Chittick cites Nicholson’s dismissive remark, assessing it to “rest on the concerns of the scholarship of the day”:

It is sufficient to read the Shaykh’s commentary in relation to the Futūḥāt to see that in fact Nicholson left out most of what was “interesting and important” for the Shaykh and his followers and that no doubt much of what Nicholson considered as a “descent to the ridiculous” provides the key to situating his poetry within the context of Islamic thought. Everything that the Shaykh says about his qaṣīdas is firmly grounded in the Koran and Hadith, Islamic theology and cosmology, and the Muslim experience of God.

Finally, from Chittick’s perspective, he reminds us that that Nicholson did not provide any theoretical discussion of the collection, and states that, “[w]ithout a detailed analysis of the Shaykh’s concepts and worldview, it is impossible to grasp the world of meanings behind his literary forms.” The objective of this dissertation is to begin that analysis by showing some of the very important Sufi theories from Bezels supporting the poems.

The critical, over-riding conceptual reason for not incorporating the Commentary into this analysis is the same reason for undertaking this present project, as Michael Sells says: “[t]o privilege Ibn ʿArabi’s own commentaries in reading the poems is to ignore the danger of the intentional fallacies, the Platonic and Quranic point that poets are often unable to interpret what they say, and Ibn ʿArabi’s own philosophy

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56 Chittick, Imaginal Worlds, 68.
57 Chittick, 67.
58 Schimmel is also not very persuaded by the value of the Commentary to the subtle Sufism of the poems: “In many cases these elucidations destroy the charming balance between the sensuous and the supernatural inherent in the poems and tend to turn delicate wisplike verses into compendia of metaphysical scholasticism. Annemarie Schimmel, My Soul Is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam (New York: Continuum, 1997), 46.
that any commentary or interpretation can only provide a fleeting glimpse of the meaning.”

That the poems can be read on a theological level without reference to the Commentary is affirmed by Cyrus Ali Zargar’s study in which he said that, for Ibn al-ʿArabī’s students who were familiar with his work, “the original collection of poems without commentary served as an elucidator of spiritual realities.” Moreover, as Ibn al-ʿArabī himself said, there are at least seven layers of interpreting anything. This observation would certainly apply to his own poetry, leaving opportunities for explication along theological lines that are alternative or in addition to his own apologia. As Lings has correctly states, “there is a wealth of passages in which the literal meaning is clear and in which the melodious sweep of the lines compels us to be conscious of a hidden depth before we have turned to the commentary.”

I.B Situating Ibn al-ʿArabī

I.B.1 Defining Mysticism and Classical Sufism

The following is a very brief discussion of definitions of mysticism and Sufism, provided to give context to Ibn al-ʿArabī and his works.

As Sufism is considered to be a type of mysticism, the more general concept of mysticism needs first to be understood. The great translator and interpreter of Islam, A. J. Arberry, observes that “mysticism is essentially one and the same, whatever may be the religion professed by the individual mystic: a constant and unvarying phenomenon of the universal yearning of the human spirit for personal communion with God.” Annemarie Schimmel concurs with the often-quoted definition of mysticism as “the great spiritual current which goes through all religions.” Evelyn Underhill -- in her seminal, early twentieth century work on mysticism, Mysticism: A Study in Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness, defined mysticism as “the expression of the

innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental
order; whatever be the theological formula under which that order is understood."\textsuperscript{65}
(Annemarie Schimmel considers Underhill’s book to be the best general introduction to
mysticism.\textsuperscript{66}) More specifically, Underhill states that mysticism, “in its pure form, is
the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else, and
that the mystic is the person who attains to this union, not the person who talks about it.
Not to \textit{know about} but to \textit{Be}, is the mark of the real initiate.”\textsuperscript{67}

Almost a hundred years after Underhill wrote, Bernard McGinn stated his
understanding of mysticism as being “that part, or element of [religious] belief and
practice that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the effect of what
the mystics themselves have described as a direct and transformative presence of
God.”\textsuperscript{68} He notes that the term “mysticism” was introduced fairly recently (in the
seventeenth century), but the term “mystical” -- meaning “hidden” in Greek -- was used
widely by Christians since at least the late second century in reference to “the inner
message about attaining God that may be found beneath the literal sense of the
scriptural texts and stories” and that they used the phrase “mystical theology” since
around 500 CE to refer to “the knowledge of God gained not by human rational efforts
but by the soul’s direct reception of a divine gift.”\textsuperscript{69}

Schimmel -- with a view toward the love-mysticism of Sufism -- firmly anchors
mysticism in the context of spirituality and explains mysticism as being

love of the Absolute -- for the power that separates true mysticism from
mere asceticism is love. Divine love makes the seeker capable of
bearing, even enjoying, all the pains and afflictions that God showers
upon him in order to test him and purify his soul. This love carries the
mystic to the Divine Presence “like the falcon carrying away the prey,”
thus, from all that is created in time.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{65} Evelyn Underhill, \textit{Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual
Consciousness} (E.P. Dutton, 1911), xii.
\textsuperscript{66} Schimmel, \textit{Mystical Dimensions of Islam}, 4, fn 2.
\textsuperscript{67} Underhill, \textit{Mysticism}, 72.
\textsuperscript{68} Bernard McGinn, \textit{The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism} (Modern Library, 2006),
xiv.
\textsuperscript{69} McGinn, xiv.
\textsuperscript{70} Schimmel, \textit{Mystical Dimensions of Islam}, 4.
In relation to Islam, Arberry adds that, “for while mysticism is undoubtedly a universal constant, its variations can be observed to be very clearly and characteristically shaped by the several religious systems upon which they were based,” specifically noting that for the Islamic dimension, “Sufism may be defined as the mystical movement of an uncompromising Monotheism.”\textsuperscript{71} Seyyed Hossein Nasr describes Sufism as “the inner or esoteric dimension of Islam,” stating that “in the Islamic tradition, it is primarily Sufism that answers this basic existential question of who we are and through this answer provides guidance for a life full of spiritual felicity, marked by illumination and leading ultimately to deliverance from the bondage of al limitation.”\textsuperscript{72}

Rather less laconically -- more poetically, befitting the subject of this dissertation -- Martin Lings answers the question about the definition of Islamic Sufism in his book-length essay, \textit{What is Sufism?} by saying:

> From time to time a Revelation ‘flows’ like a great tidal wave from the Ocean of Infinitude to the shores of our finite world; and Sufism is the vocation and discipline and the science of plunging into the ebb of one of these waves and being drawn back with it to its Eternal and Infinite Source.\textsuperscript{73}

Carl Ernst is less willing to try to succinctly define the word Sufism, pointing to the fact that “the abstract and generalizing character of the descriptive term \textit{Sufism} should be evident from the widely varying connotations of the terms most frequently used to describe the many different kinds of Islamic mystics.”\textsuperscript{74} Ernst posits several categories -- the most important summarized below -- into which Islamic mystics may be characterized and classified as “Sufis,” consistent with how certain mystics were viewed within the cultural context of the time:

1. Worship -- Mystics who have “total and obedience and dedication to God.”
2. Ethics -- Mystics who engaged in ascetic practices.

\textsuperscript{71} Arberry, \textit{Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam}, 12.
\textsuperscript{72} Nasr, \textit{The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam’s Mystical Tradition}, 5,12.
\textsuperscript{73} Martin Lings, \textit{What Is Sufism?} (University of California Press, 1975), 11.
\textsuperscript{74} Ernst, \textit{Sufism: An Essential Introduction to the Philosophy and Practice of the Mystical Tradition of Islam}, 27.
3. Knowledge -- Mystics who professed a special “gnosis that transcended ordinary rationality.”

4. Travelling -- Mystics who were on a special spiritual path (tariqa); also, mystics who travelled great distances in search of gnosis or as an ascetic discipline.

5. Love -- Mystics who emphasized love and matters of the heart.

6. Intoxication -- Mystics who were “fools for God” who “lost normal rationality and appeared mad.”

7. Sainthood -- Mystics who were especially intimate with God.\textsuperscript{75}

Somewhat in the same vein as Ernst, Julian Baldick claims that “it seems better to avoid attempting dictionary-style definitions, and concentrate instead on isolating specific elements which the label ‘mysticism’ covers,” adding that “mysticism in Islam is not limited to the Sufi tradition.”\textsuperscript{76} Baldick is correct, for example, in pointing out that there are overlapping elements of Sufism and Shi’ism, but they are definitely not the same, noting that “the Shi’ite mystics have tended to cut themselves off from the Sufi quest for God by looking for a supreme experience of self-identification with their Leaders.”\textsuperscript{77} Rather cynically, Baldick also asserts that “Sufism is a mystical tradition which, when compared to Christian and European institutions, could be put somewhere between monasticism and Freemasonry.”\textsuperscript{78} This is, perhaps, true in regard to formal Sufi orders, but trivializes the centrality of the Sufi’s relationship to God, as the noted Sufi writer Abu Naṣr al-Sarāj (d. 378/988) states regarding encountering God: Sufism “refers to the heart’s unmediated experience of certitude and witnessing of the realities of faith in the realm of mystery.”\textsuperscript{79} Certainly Ibn al-‘Arabi himself would chafe at Baldick’s characterisation of Sufism along organizational lines as the Shaykh was appalled to see how spirituality had been institutionalized when he left the Islamic West of Andalusia and North Africa for the Islamic East of Turkey and Iraq.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{75} Ernst, 29–30.


\textsuperscript{77} Baldick, 4–5.

\textsuperscript{78} Baldick, 3.


\textsuperscript{80} Addas, \textit{Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabi}, 163.
Whether succinct or poetic, any definition of “Sufism” should encompass spirituality -- the antithesis of that cynicism -- and acknowledge one of the key Qur'anic sources for the Sufi’s mysticism: “He loves them and they love Him” (5:54). As Seyyed Hossein Nasr says in explaining the Sufi’s path, the journey “requires not only acquiring and realizing unitive knowledge, but also being immersed in love and attracted to beauty at its highest level.”\(^{81}\) Explaining further, Nasr states that

> The path to Truth results in discovery of the Truth, which means knowledge of It. Moreover, the Truth is such that one cannot know It without loving It. And that love leads finally to the embrace of God, Who in turn loves those among His servants who love Him. In the metaphysical sense, however, it is God’s love that precedes Human love.\(^{82}\)

The origin of application of the Arabic word “sūfī” to Islamic mystics is not settled academically. Scholars, such as Lings, assert the word’s literal meaning -- “woolen" -- was applied to some small group who practiced Sufism (*taṣawwuf*, meaning, literally, “the process of becoming a Sufi”\(^{83}\)) who wore a woolen garment, which Lings claims the wearing of which was indicative of spirituality even in the pre-Islamic era, and later mentioned by the Prophet Muhammad in stating that Moses wore wool when spoken to by God.\(^{84}\) Scholars still disagree on the Sufis’ debt to other religious traditions. Carl Ernst notes that nineteenth century Orientalists “believed that any genuinely mystical reverberations in Islamic culture were necessarily imported from an external source, generally Christianity, yoga, or Buddhism” so that “Sufism was a term often viewed in a positive light, precisely to the degree that it was understood to be contrary to Islam.”\(^{85}\) Schimmel acknowledges the difficulty in assessing external influences, but reminds readers that many important scholars have shown the influence of various traditions, including the Greek and early Christian

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\(^{82}\) Nasr, 60.


Neoplatonists, Christian Syrian monks, and Hindus/Indians; Schimmel notes the “even rather far-fetched possibility” of early Chinese Taoist influences. Reybold Nicholson (also cited by Schimmel in this regard) examines many of these specific claims of external influences, but concludes that “the powerful currents of thought discharged through the Mohammedan world by the great non-Islamic systems … gave a stimulus to various tendencies within Islam which affected Sufism” -- Sufism would have arisen within Islam even if Islam had been completely shut off from other religious and philosophical influences as the “seeds” for some type of mysticism were already in existence.”

This purely Islamic influence is referred to by James Morris who -- in a wide-ranging analysis of different types of Islamic mystical writings -- asserts that an enormous amount of what is now considered to be mystical or Sufi writings are, in reality, part of bedrock Islamic traditions, firmly grounded in the Qur’ān and Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad): “Time and again, when one looks at the actual historical contexts, it turns out that what have often been identified as ‘mystical’ practices or writings were in fact integrally embedded in the wider Islamic humanities.”

The period of time generally under consideration when speaking of “Sufism” in this dissertation is the “classical” Sufi period: from the beginnings of Islam up through the Islamic seventh century. Michael Sells, in his Early Islamic Mysticism, further classifies this classical Sufi spirituality into four periods:

1. The pre-Sufi phase includes the Qur’ān, the central ritual elements of Islam, and the accounts of Muhammad’s Mi’raj.

2. The early period of Sufism includes the sayings and writings of the early Sufi masters such as Hasan of Basra, Dhu n-Nun of Egypt, Rabi’a of Basra, Bistami, Muhasibi, and Junayd of Baghad, the legacies of whom have come down to us largely through collections of their sayings in the works of later writers. This phase extends from the time of Hasan of Basra (d. 110/728) to that of Niffārī (d. 354/965).

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86 Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 18–19.
3. The formative phase of Sufi literature shows Sufism as a self-conscious mode of spirituality embracing all aspects of life and society. This phase begins with Sarraj (d. 378/988) and extends to Qushayrī (d. 465/1074).

4. The Sufi synthetic works of the seventh century of Islam by ‘Attar, Rumi (d.672/1273) and Ibn ‘Arabi.89

Thus, it is within this last period of classical Sufism in which Ibn al-'Arabī not only work, but helped to define. As will be discussed in this project’s later section on “Situating Ibn al-' Arabī within Sufism,” Ibn al-' Arabī was to make full use of the Sufi writers coming before him, synthesizing their work and developing a Sufi doctrine and language as part of his creative interpretations of the Qur ān and Hadith traditions.

I.B.2 Biographical Context

Scholars generally cite one of two biographical works on Ibn al-' Arabī: Claude Addas’ Quest for the Red Sulphur,90 or Stephen Hirtenstein’s The Unlimited Mercifier.91 At the time of publication of Addas’ work, there was no “dependable and detailed” study of his life available.92 Her work is arguably the more scholarly of the two biographies in terms of delivering a comprehensive and well documented chronology. Hirtenstein’s biography contains more thematic material that is useful for the purpose of critical analysis and synthesis of the Shaykh’s works, and includes more of the Shaykh’s own writings. It also has an often-cited list of Ibn al-' Arabī’s major works in the appendix.

Ibn al-' Arabī was born in Andalusia in 1165CE, entered into the Sufi path as a youth, began his spiritual and geographic wanderings (siyāha), and travelled throughout the Muslim world before settling in Damascus where he spent the last seventeen years of his life before dying in 1240.

Hirtenstein lists the full name of the Sufi as found in early sources as the following: Muḥyī al-dīn Abū ‘ Abd Allāh Muḥammad bin ‘ Alī bin Muḥammad bin

89 Michael Sells, Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic and Theological Writings, 1st Printing (Paulist Press, 1995), 17–18.
90 Addas, Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabi.
91 Hirtenstein, The Unlimited Mercifier: The Life and Thought of Ibn ‘Arabī.
Ahmad bin ‘Abd Allāh bin al-‘Arabī al-Ṭā‘ī al-Ḥātimī al-Andalusī. The significance of the Shaykh to not only Sufism but Islam is indicated by the portion of his name that assigns to him the name “Reviver of the Faith” (Muḥī al-dīn). Hirtenstein includes the following comment in his essay about the name:

He has become known as Ibn ‘Arabī rather than the more exact Ibn al-‘Arabī for various reasons: firstly, his teaching was taken up in the Turkish and Persian worlds where definite articles were often dropped, and secondly, the shorter form quickly distinguishes him from another well-known Andalusian with a similar name, who was his near-contemporary, the muhaddith Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī al-Ṯāfirī (d. 1148).94

The *Encyclopaedia Iranica* asserts that Ibn al-‘Arabī used the definite article in his own signatures, and this usage is found in the writings of his immediate followers, which includes Muḥammad al-Qūnawī, his stepson, through which much of the Shaykh’s thoughts were transmitted into the Persian-speaking world.95

A few telling incidents from the life of the Great Shaykh are noteworthy as background, as Corbin states, the Shaykh’s life was “so intimately mingled with his work that the events of his inner experience are projected upon his work and in it raised to the level of symbols.”96 And -- as the dissertation will show -- the concept of “symbols” is one of the key signifiers of the Divine in the poetry of Interpreter of Desires, as it was in the life of the poet, the symbols being “a plane of consciousness distinct from that of rational evidence.”97

Ibn al-‘Arabī does not record the reason but, as a youth of possibly fifteen, he had felt moved to begin engaging in a series of spiritual retreats alone. It was during one of these retreats, perhaps staying in Seville in the cemetery (to which he returned many times over the years for retreats), that Addas claims the Shaykh began his spiritual journey -- which led him to entering his vocation as a mystic -- receiving “an

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94 Hirtenstein, 110 fn 3.
97 Corbin, 14.
immediate *fath* or illumination, or more precisely … a *jadhba*, the state of being drawn out of oneself in ecstasy as the result of a divine intervention which is direct and abrupt; and that he obtained this illumination straightaway and without any prior effort.”

It was during this time that the Shaykh began to have a series of prophetic visions, receiving guidance from Muhammad, Jesus, and Moses. “’It was a consequence of this vision that I returned to God,’” Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote of his conversion as he began his journey on the Sufī Path; “returning” to God is an Islamic/Sufi term signifying “turning” to God in this life. It was subsequent to one of his retreats that Ibn al-ʿArabī met the Aristotelian philosopher, Ibn Rushd (known as Averroes in Europe) and indicated to the already famous, and much older man that “rational investigation was not sufficient to attain complete knowledge of God and the world.”

This much-recounted meeting was emblematic of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s mystical, spiritual approach, which was at odds with the rationalism and intellectualism of the West and even of most of the Islamic philosophers and jurists.

Throughout his life, Ibn al-ʿArabī studied with a large number of mentors, studying the Qur ān and hadiths under various spiritual directors throughout his wanderings and -- strongly affirming elements of his mystical life -- relying upon supernatural advisers, including the aforementioned Islamic prophets and the enigmatic Khīḍr, the Qur ānic Moses’ guide, a “hidden spiritual master” for whom being a disciple invests the acolyte with a “personal, direct, and immediate bond with the Godhead.”

From these mentors he took on a variety of spiritual practices, most importantly the Sufī spiritual invocation, or remembrance -- *dhikr* -- which takes its name from the phrase, “Remember God often,” repeated throughout the Qur ān (33:41). For the Sufis, however, this phrase took on special significance, especially in relation to the Qur ānic verse, “Everything upon the earth passeth away, save His face” (55:26). Arberry, in his study of Sufis, states that this is the jumping off point for the key

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99 Addas, 42 citing fn. 33, Fut. II, p. 491 for quote.
100 Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 1.
Islamic mystic concepts of annihilation of human attributed (fanāʾ), and eternally abiding with God (baqāʾ) beginning in this life.¹⁰³

Addas notes that Ibn al-ʿArabi wrote many books on the subject of sulūk, the Sufi ways that a precept must take upon himself or herself to begin the Path, based on traditional Sufi manuals written prior to his time. These rules indicate the Shaykh’s own conduct in regard to spiritual practices, including, above all else, strict observance of sharīʿa -- the “whole body of rules and regulation set down by the Koran and the Prophet” Muhammad for all Muslims to conduct their lives according to “right activity” -- acquisition of chivalric virtues, asceticism, and dhikr.¹⁰⁴ The Shaykh’s own dhikr practice changed over the years, from reciting “Allah” as a meditative focus, to repeating the first half of the formula of the shahāda, the Islamic profession of faith, lâ ilâha illâ Ilâh” -- “There is no God but God…. “¹⁰⁵

To help convey Ibn al-ʿArabi’s position relative to a popular form of Sufism that is still widely recognised and practiced even today, an example of his strict moral standards -- even within the world of those on the Path -- is illustrative. The Shaykh was adamant in his condemnation of the samāʿ (“hearing”), the communal ceremonies of some Sufi orders in which the participants sing, or play music, or dance, as in the Mevlevi order which engages in the famous whirling dance as part of the corporate dhikr.¹⁰⁶ The Shaykh notes that, “‘This practice was never appropriate for Sufis and has only been introduced recently by libertines…. [E]xamination of all the references to samāʿ made by all Sufis from the first to the last shows that the practice only serves to satisfy the appetites of the senses in spite of the fact that from a legal point of view it is perfectly acceptable activity.’”¹⁰⁷

It is important to note that after his many years of wandering in the Islamic West and becoming known as a learned and devout Sufi through his teaching and

¹⁰³ Arberry, Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam, 22.
¹⁰⁵ Addas, Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ʿArabi, 164.
¹⁰⁶ Schimmel says that samāʿ was a divisive issue among different Sufi orders. “There were complicated problems as to whether ‘listening to music’ and ‘dancing movement’ are genuine utterances of mystical states or illegitimate attempts to gain by one’s own effort a state that can only be granted by God.” Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 179.
¹⁰⁷ Addas, Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ʿArabi, 163.
writing, he made his pilgrimage to Mecca in 598/1202. At the time he was thirty-six years old, representing the midpoint of his life; the subsequent thirty-six years were spent in the East. In Mecca he extended his stay to two years, but before even the first two months had passed, several momentous events moved him in new directions, spiritually as well as geographically. It was there where he had a vision that led him to begin writing the *Meccan Revelations*, a “complete esoteric exposition of the Book of the Quran”; there was a second vision that unambiguously confirmed for him an earlier vision as his unique role as a saint of Islam -- the “Seal of Muhammadian Sainthood” who “is the one who exposes the meanings of the Way of Muhammad, synthesizing them and integrating them from the point of view of their spirituality, in the same way that Muhammad had synthesized and integrated all the prophetic ways before him.”

For the purpose of this present project, however, it was the meeting of Nizām during his circumambulation of the Kaʿba that year that is the most significant event of his *hajj*. Hirtenstein rightly assesses the impact of this event in that the “love that Nizām had within the heart of Ibn al-ʿArabī led to an outpouring of yearning.” The biographer claims that this was the first time that the Shaykh had been “moved” by the love of women. The key take-aways from the Nizām event were two: Ibn al-ʿArabī saw this effect on himself, and deemed it as the effect of divine love, not merely the impact of the sensual; and, the encounter prompted him twelve years later to pen the verses of *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*, the Interpreter of Desires.

The pent-up desire would finally find expression in the ode to divine love as symbolised by desire for this girl who inspired him for the rest of his life. Nicholson notes the intensity of the Shaykh’s ardour -- divine or otherwise -- in the Preface to the poetry collection: “I have put into verse for her sake some of the longing thoughts suggested by those precious memories, and I have uttered the sentiments of a yearning soul and have indicated the sincere attachment which I feel, fixing my mind on the

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109 Hirtenstein, 149.
110 It is reported that it was his wife Maryam al-Bajiya who introduced the Shaykh to meditation and contemplation, helping him to discover both profane and mystical love. “She certainly nourished his soul, thus enabling him, in experiences that were certainly very rare, to combine orgasm with [mystical] ecstasy.” Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 1998), 121.
bygone days." To understand his feelings about females about this time, a passage from the *Meccan Revelations* reveals that

> Of God’s creations, I was one of the most averse to women and to sexual intercourse when I first entered this Path, and I remained in this condition for approximately eighteen [lunar] years…. This aversion left me when I came to know the Prophetic tradition that God made women worthy of love for his Prophet.\(^{113}\)

He maintained in his Preface to the collection, of course, that the sentiments were purely “‘sublime allegories’” and that -- in the Sufi way -- he “‘attached a mystical significiation to the words used in ordinary speech’” in the poems.\(^{114}\) Meanwhile, shortly after being aroused by the young Nizām, Ibn al-ʿArabī was married in Mecca, and soon thereafter had his first child, a son.\(^{115}\)

The importance to which even the Shaykh attached to *Interpreter of Desires* cannot be understated. The primary disciple in his lifetime, his son-in-law Muḥammad al-Qūnawī (1207-74 CE), indicates the key role of the collection in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s transmitting Sufi and Islamic knowledge and theories. Very importantly for this present project, as Sells asserts, “near the end of his life, when Ibn ʿArabi was conscious of passing on his legacy to his school of disciples in Damascus, he made the reading of the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* a regular part of his sessions and it is the *Tarjumān* that Ibn ʿArabī, of all his works, chose to recite in person, rather than having one of his student recite it."\(^{116}\) It is easy to imagine the aging Shaykh in his twilight years, remembering fondly the *ḥajj* and the life in Mecca where he met and spent time in the company of the erudite, beautiful, and beguiling young Nizām who inspired an entire collection of

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\(^{115}\) All that is known about the woman he married was that she was probably from an important family; the Shaykh dedicated the first draft of the *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* to this son. Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier: The Life and Thought of Ibn ʿArabī*, 150.

romantic poetry symbolic of divine love, and left him with an undying yearning across the decades for God and the girl.

**I.B.3 Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Major Texts**

As Ibn al-ʿArabī had done, the Sufi masters preceding the Shaykh had spoken mainly in theoretical terms, as opposed to focusing on practical issues, and the subjects of his discussions would have been very familiar to thinkers of his own day. It is important to note that Ibn al-ʿArabī “was firmly grounded in the mainstream of the Islamic tradition” -- meaning, relying upon the Qurān and Hadith as the basis for his thinking-- though, having said that, the literature generally accepts that “he was enormously original, and he was fully aware of the newness of what he was doing.”

Time again, Ibn al-ʿArabī reminds the reader that everything he communicated in his works and teaching were not only divinely inspired, but based “on the ‘‘Qur’ān and its treasures to which I have been granted the key of understanding.’’

Regarding the Shaykh’s seemingly highly esoteric and technical language -- one of the reasons that Chittick concludes dissuaded Nicholson from understanding and translating the full *Commentary to Interpreter of Desires* -- Addas states that Ibn al-ʿArabī was “transposing and extending the meaning of terms already used in the Sufism of earlier centuries” so that “by no means can he be accused of rashly coining new words: of the nine hundred or so terms and expressions listed by S. Hakīm, the majority are already attested in earlier texts. Ibn ʿArabī also went to the trouble of defining these terms, basing his definitions largely on scriptural authority and etymology.”

The breadth and depth of the Shaykh’s written works have already been discussed. Two specific books of the Shaykh deserve special attention. The first is *Futūhāt al-Makkīyya (Meccan Openings, or Meccan Revelations)*. The title of the work refers to the “opening” already discussed that the young Ibn al-ʿArabī experienced in Mecca in a vision. He began writing the book the following year and did not complete

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the first draft until twenty-one years later in Damascus.\textsuperscript{120} As with all of his works, the words were not the result of intellectual reflection, but “bestowed by the Divine Presence”; as he stated in the \textit{Openings}:

\begin{quote}
My heart clings to the door of the Divine Presence, waiting mindfully for what comes when the door is opened. My heart is poor and needy, empty of every knowledge…. When something appears to the heart from behind that curtain, the heart hurries to obey and sets it down.  \textsuperscript{121}
\end{quote}

As already discussed, this work will eventually fill a projected 18,000 pages in Arabic in Yahi’s critical edition. Chittick describes \textit{Meccan Openings} as “a vast encyclopedia of Islamic sciences within the context of tawhīd, the profession of God’s Unity that forms the core of Islam.”\textsuperscript{122} To put the breadth of the work into perspective as context for the present dissertation, Chittick’s summarizes the wide-ranging contents of the work:

The book includes 560 chapters, several of which would be major books if published separately. Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses in copious detail the Koran, the Hadith, events in the life of the Prophet, the detailed rulings of the Sharīʿa, the principles of jurisprudence, the divine names and attributes, the relationship between God and the world, the structure of the cosmos, the make-up of the human being, the various human types, the path by which human perfection may be attained, the stages of the ascent to God, the ranks and kinds of the angels, the nature of the jinn, the characteristics of time and space, the role of political institutions, the symbolism of letters, the nature of the interworld between death and Resurrection, the ontological status of heaven and hell, and so on.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{120} The first complete version of \textit{Meccan Openings} was finished in 1231. James W. Morris, ‘Introduction’, in \textit{Meccan Revelations: Volume 1} (New York: Pir Press, 2005), 8.

\textsuperscript{121} William C. Chittick, \textit{The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-ʿArabi`s Metaphysics of Imagination} (State University of New York Press, 1989), xv.

\textsuperscript{122} Chittick, xi.

\textsuperscript{123} Chittick, xi.
Chittick has translated key parts of Meccan Openings into English, including several whole chapters of the Openings. The two major contributions Chittick has made in his translating and interpreting Meccan Openings are found in Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-ʿArabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination; William C. Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn Al-ʿArabi’s Cosmology, SUNY Series in Islam (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

A team of scholars (Chodkiewicz, Chittick and Morris) has also begun an ambitious project to begin translating the Futūhāt al-Makkiyya into English, completing the first volume (1988) which had as its objective the inclusion of twenty-two chapters focused on the Sufi doctrines of Ibn al-ʿArabi. Chodkiewicz edited a second volume (2004) that focused on translations of additional chapters relating to Islamic law and the mystic properties of the Qurān.

Such a complex work as the Futūhāt al-Makkiyya benefits greatly from researchers such as Chittick and others who have translated and determined the essence of the Futūhāt al-Makkiyya, and have shown the path to other scholars who wish to apply that hard-won learning to other aspects of the Shaykh al-Akbar’s literary production. Not all of the Openings is concerned directly with Sufi concepts, and not all of the Sufi ideas in the massive work apply to the Tarjumān al-Ashwāq in ways appropriate for this present work.

The second major work of Ibn al-ʿArabī is Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam (Bezels of Wisdom). Ralph Austin, the translator of the entire book into English most used by other scholars, writes that this book, composed in the last ten years of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s life, “was clearly intended to serve as a summing up of the Andalusian master’s mystical teachings and, as such, it is undoubtedly one of his most important works, dealing, as it

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does, with all the major themes of his highly original and enormously influential thought.” Being a “synoptic” work and significantly shorter than the monumental Meccan Openings, though, it is greatly concentrated yet “provides more immediate access to an understanding of the overall scheme and pattern of his doctrine.” Nasr says that Bezels was groundbreaking and “foundational to the whole tradition of theoretical gnosis in Islam.”

Chittick states that in the Sufi tradition following Ibn al-ʿArabī’s death, the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam “became the main text that was studied in order to gain first-hand access to Ibn ʿArabī’s perspective.” More than on any other work of the Shaykh, a very large number of Sufi commentaries were written through the centuries on Bezels of Wisdom, indicating how important the work was to the mystical communities; Chittick puts the number of these commentaries on the book at over a hundred.

A reader first approaching the writings of the Great Shaykh is confronted with a very apparent lack of organisation of his theological thoughts into any discernible system. This is specifically true for Bezels. As Alexander Knysh says, “[a]lthough he occasionally did use syllogistic reasoning, he considered it to be incapable of expressing the dizzying fluidity and dynamic that characterize his vision of reality.... Little wonder that his works often strike his reader as a mishmash of themes and topoi operating on several parallel discursive levels ranging from poetry and mythology to jurisprudence and speculative theology.” Specific to Bezels, Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writing “is particularly (perhaps deliberately) arcane, presenting the reader with a tangle of disparate theological and metaphysical propositions cast in mythopoeic parables and recondite terminology,” the effect sought being to carry the reader outside of the work.

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131 William C. Chittick, Ibn ʿArabi: Heir to the Prophets (Oneworld, 2005), 7.
itself which is “achieved through breaking the shackles of habitual human perception by a kaleidoscopic change of perspective.”

Austin explains that the title *Bezels of Wisdom* means that “each prophet, after whom each chapter is entitled, is the human setting in which the gemstone in which each kind of wisdom is set, thus making each prophet the signet or sign, by selection, of a particular aspect of the wisdom of God.” (The title may be rendered in contemporary language as “pearls of wisdom,” though the original title better captures the Shaykh’s intended meaning for his intended audience who were familiar with Islamic and Sufi theories and references.) The *Bezels* is in essence a “mystical exegesis” of the Qur’ān, but -- as Austin notes -- Ibn al-ʿArabi approaches the Qur’ānic texts in a way different from that of the more familiar exoteric commentators” and deals with the texts on the premise that every verse of the Qur’ān has many more meanings than the one that might be obvious to the ordinary believer, who sees merely the surface of things. Beneath the surface, according to the Sufis, is an ocean of meaning, both subtle and spiritual, that is accessible only to those whose inner eye is open, whether by divine grace or by proper training. In this way, the Sufi considers that the qur’ānic text acts, so to speak, as a mirror to the reader, in that the latter will perceive in it only what his own spiritual state permits him to see.

This is the distinctive Sufi approach to not only texts, but personal life and the cosmos, seeking the hidden -- symbolic -- meaning. It is this secondary meaning in the words of the *Interpreter of Desires* poems that this dissertation will be demonstrating, and showing also that those meanings represent important Sufi concepts and theories. As discussed below in the Literature Review, Corbin used *Bezels* as the basis for his analysis of Ibn al-ʿArabi’s theories of the self-disclosure of God and the imaginal, the theories used later as a template by Chittick in his assessment of the *Meccan*.

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133 Knysh, 11.
134 Austin, ‘Forward and Introduction’, 16.
Openings.\textsuperscript{137} Also, discussed in more detail below, Toshihiko Izutsu uses *Bezels* as the basis for his own seminal study of the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī.\textsuperscript{138}

In the last chapter of *Bezels of Wisdom*, Ibn al-ʿArabī makes a fascinating assertion, discussed at length in the final chapter of this dissertation -- the type of statement that often got him into trouble with the conservative Islamic establishment (concepts just as “dangerous” then, as now) -- that relates directly to the subject matter of *Interpreter of Desires*’ explication and the role of the female in human beings’ relationship to God, especially the male’s perspective in what has been termed a heavily male-dominated religion such as Islam: “[I]t is in woman that man may most perfectly contemplate God.”\textsuperscript{139} In words such as these, written after the poems of *Interpreter of Desires*, it seems that Niẓām -- that Beloved girl and what she symbolised-- must have always been on his mind.

I.B.4 Situating Ibn al-ʿArabī in Sufism

As this project is primarily concerned with Ibn al-ʿArabī as a Sufi, it is essential first to establish his Sufi credentials, then to indicate his own contribution to Sufism.

Chittick says that the Shaykh is “probably the most influential author of works on Sufism in Islamic history.”\textsuperscript{140} Although -- unlike his near-contemporary Rūmī -- he did not found a Sufi order, “his influence spread quickly beyond his immediate disciples to all Sufis who expressed their teachings in intellectual or philosophical terms.”\textsuperscript{141} Ibn al-ʿArabī influenced even the commentators on other Sufi writings -- such as those of Rūmī for whom the Shaykh provided a vocabulary and intellectual foundation to explain that other great poet’s works.\textsuperscript{142}

As has been discussed in the general comments on Sufism, the Qurān -- in addition to the hadiths -- is the primary source for all Muslim philosophy and certainly

\textsuperscript{137} Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*.


\textsuperscript{139} Austin, ‘Forward and Introduction’, 19.

\textsuperscript{140} Chittick, ‘Ibn ʿArabi and His School’, 49.

\textsuperscript{141} Chittick, 49.

\textsuperscript{142} Chittick, 56.
Sufi spirituality. Chittick cites Chodkiewicz\textsuperscript{143} in stating that “it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the Koran as Ibn ‘Arabi’s source of inspiration,” claiming that “far more than either the theologians or the philosophers, [Ibn al-ʿArabī] dedicated his efforts to absorbing God's word and being absorbed by it, and his writings are suffused with quotations and terminology from the text [of the Qurān].”\textsuperscript{144} God's speech is not only in the Qurān, but in the cosmos and in the heart of humans.\textsuperscript{145}

Chittick sees in Ibn al-ʿArabī an innovative creative force in interpreting the Qurān: “It is precisely his ability to stick to the transmitted sources and simultaneously bring out new meanings … that has convinced the later tradition of his exceptional mastery.”\textsuperscript{146} More specifically, Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote that

\begin{quote}
the author of the Koran intends every meaning understood by every reader, and he reminds us that human authors cannot have the same intention. Moreover, he tells us that if someone re-reads a Koranic verse and sees exactly the same meaning that he saw the previous time, he has not read it “properly” -- that is, in keeping with the ḥaqq [the Real] of the divine speech— for the meanings disclosed … are never repeated.\textsuperscript{147}
\end{quote}

Thus, to read the Qurān -- as is the case with Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own works, including his poetry -- is to find new meanings with every new reading.

As already noted, Ibn al-ʿArabī made extensive use of the wide tradition of Islamic thought, and “borrowed extensively from the written and oral tradition of Sufism that had been developing for several hundred years,” though his testimony of his own spiritual life and “the very nature of his writings and influence show that his unveiling and mystical perception gave new form to the raw material with which he worked.”\textsuperscript{148} It was the Great Shaykh who gave the terms and concepts of earlier Sufis “a precise usage and granted them ‘citizenship’ in the language of Sufism.”\textsuperscript{149}


\textsuperscript{144} Chittick, ‘Ibn Ṭarabī’.

\textsuperscript{145} Chittick.

\textsuperscript{146} Chittick.

\textsuperscript{147} Chittick.

\textsuperscript{148} Chittick, ‘Ibn Ṭarabī and His School’, 57.

\textsuperscript{149} Chodkiewicz, An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn ʿArabī, the Book, and the Law, 6.
Some scholars claim, though, that the Shaykh al-Akbar’s major “methodological” contribution was to reject the stance of the kalām authorities -- characterised by some scholars to be those authorities who stress “the importance of accepting the literal text of the revelation" for whom tashbīḥ (declaring God similar to creation) was a heresy -- heresy meaning, literally, shirk, “to share, to be a partner,” and in theological terms, “to give God partners and by implication, to worship them along with God or exclusive to God” -- and to make tashbīḥ the necessary complement of tanzīḥ (declaring God incomparable with creation). The central implication of the Shaykh’s methodological approach is that it “leads to an epistemology that harmonizes reason and unveiling.”

Nasr is clear about Ibn al-ʿArabī’s contribution to Islam and his importance within Sufism, saying that it is “his formulation of the doctrines of Sufism and in his making them explicit. More specifically -- and in concord with the idea that Ibn al-ʿArabī helped to bring a more balanced view of tanzīḥ and tashbīḥ to Islam -- Nasr writes:

150 Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam: The Foundations of Muslim Faith and Practice*, 238. Chittick also addresses the subject of Ibn al-ʿArabī and the kalām authorities: [M]ost rational thinkers -- the Kālam authorities in particular -- insist upon interpreting (taʿwil) scripture in accordance with their own understanding of what can properly be attributed to God. As a result, they refuse to accept any description of God that suggest that He is somehow similar to the things in the cosmos.” Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn Al-ʿArabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, 24.

151 “The influence of ‘pantheistic’ ideas in the wake of Ibn ʿArabī’s teachings and the ambiguous symbolism of -- mainly Persian -- poetry and the decadence that was its result … were ‘more dangerous for Islam than the hordes of Attila and Genghis Khan.” Iqbal, Foreword to Muraqqa’-i Chughtay, a collection fo paintings by Abdur Rahman Churghtay, cited in Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (State University of New York Press, 1994), 213.


153 Knysh notes that Ibn al-ʿArabī’s contribution to Islam was to bring this balanced view of tashbīḥ and tanzīḥ, and not just a focus on tashbīḥ (similarity) alone: “In rejecting the one-sided view of the Greatest Master, revisionist scholars point out that the topics of many of Ibn ʿArabī’s “esoteric” treatises are in fact quite traditional.” Those traditional treatises were based on Ibn al-ʿArabī’s reading of the Qur’ān and the Hadith. Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam*, 10.

Through Ibn ʿArabī Islamic esotericism provided the doctrines which alone could guarantee the preservation of the Tradition among men who were always in danger of being led astray by incorrect reasoning and in most of whom the power of intellectual intuition.... Through Ibn ʿArabī, what had always been the inner truth of Sufism was formulated in such a manner that it has dominated the spiritual and intellectual life of Islam ever since.¹⁵⁵

Nasr also writes of the Great Shaykh’s very profound influence on Sufism, saying that “[w]ith Ibn ʿArabī we suddenly encounter a complete metaphysical and cosmological, as well as psychological and anthropological, doctrine of monumental dimensions.”¹⁵⁶ Chodkiewicz evaluates to the history of Sufism and its institutions beginning in the thirteenth century, specifically the orders, finding that there was a “doctrinal ‘updraught’” for which Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings -- contrary to those Sufi writings produced before him -- provided “an answer for everything … a trusted guide” for Sufis in the realm of “ontology, cosmology, prophetology, exegesis, ritual,” all this even though Ibn al-ʿArabī himself never founded a Sufi order.¹⁵⁷ Nasr says that before Ibn al-ʿArabī, the Sufi writings were largely related to either spiritual praxis or collections of sayings of various other Sufis; unlike the Shaykh’s own writings, these earlier Sufi works contained “little theoretical exposition of metaphysics aiming in any way to be total and complete.”¹⁵⁸ It is true that these previous Sufi masters spoke to certain doctrinal matters but it is not until Ibn al-ʿArabī that

the doctrines of Sufism, which up to his time had been contained implicitly in the sayings of the various masters, became explicitly formulated. He thus became the expositor par excellence of gnosis in Islam. Through him the esoteric dimension of Islam expressed itself openly and brought to light the contours of its spiritual universe in such a manner that in its theoretical aspect, at least, it was open to anyone

¹⁵⁵ Nasr, Three Muslim Sages, 91.
¹⁵⁶ Nasr, 90.
¹⁵⁸ Nasr, Three Muslim Sages, 90.
having sufficient intelligence to contemplate, so that he could in this way be guided toward the path in which he could come to realize the metaphysical theories in an “operative” manner.¹⁵⁹

The contribution of Ibn al-ʿArabī to Islam, generally, and to Sufism, in particular, can thus be summarised as three-fold: he expressed Sufī doctrine explicitly in theoretical form, also providing a language to speak of doctrinal matters; he emphasized a balanced view of God’s similitude (tashbīḥ) and incomparability (tanzīḥ); and he found new, creative meanings in the reading of the Qurān and Hadith.

Finally, Henry Corbin, one of the leading authorities in Islamic and Sufi thought, who also needed to establish Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Sufi orientation, offers a way for contemporary readers of the Shaykh’s works -- and commentaries such as this present project -- to help situate Ibn al-ʿArabī properly within Sufism. Corbin prefaces his seminal study -- *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ʿArabi* -- by confirming the Shaykh al-Akbar as “a spiritual genius who not only one of the greatest masters of Sufism in Islam, but one of the greatest mystics of all time.”¹⁶⁰ In order to evaluate properly Ibn al-ʿArabī’s mystical works, Corbin asks the reader to assume a like mindset: “The only means of understanding him is to become for a moment his disciple, to approach him as he himself approached many masters of Sufism. What we have tried to do is to live his spirituality for a moment with him.”¹⁶¹ In essence, Corbin pleads that the reader approach the Shaykh’s material unlike how Chittick claims Nicholson approached it, that is, with blinkered rationalism. Instead, to orient Ibn al-ʿArabī correctly, the reader must be spiritually receptive to the Shaykh’s cosmology and ontology and be prepared to join those “who seek an encounter ‘alone with the Alone’” and to remain open to new, alternative, esoteric readings of the Great Shaykh’s works, including the *Interpreter of Desires.*¹⁶²

**I.B.5 Key Themes in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Work**

¹⁵⁹ Nasr, 90–91.


¹⁶¹ Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*, 5.

¹⁶² Corbin, 6.
Most of the following discussion of the key concepts of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s themes that are relevant to this project are based substantially on William Chittick’s categorization and analysis (one of several written by him, but primarily from his contribution to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,\footnote{Chittick, “Ibn ʿArabi.”} as Chittick is the most authoritative scholarly source on the subject of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s ontology and cosmology and other topics that flow from them. Chittick has stated of the Shaykh that, in Islam, “probably no one has exercised deeper and more pervasive influence over the intellectual life of the community during the past seven hundred years.”\footnote{Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-ʿArabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination, x.} The following themes serve to provide further context to the discussion of Interpreter of Desires that follows this overview.

The starting point in examining the thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī is the same point as for any Muslim or Sufi: the monotheistic God. In Chittick’s review of the key theoretical aspects of the Great Shaykh’s work, the scholar states that the concept of “Tahqīq” -- Realization --“is indeed the cornerstone of Ibn ʿArabī’s vast corpus.”\footnote{Chittick, ‘Ibn ʿArabi’.} The term shares a word root with ḥaqq, which means “real” or “true” in relation to cosmology and is also one of the names of God (al-Ḥaqq) as well as a central concept of Sufi doctrine. Ibn al-ʿArabī’s view of Tahqīq is informed by the Prophet’s saying, “Everything has a ḥaqq, so give to each that has a ḥaqq its ḥaqq,” meaning, “everything in the universe, society, and the soul has a rightness and an appropriateness, and the human task vis-à-vis each thing is to act rightly and appropriately.”\footnote{Chittick.} Chittick cites the first part of the shahāda, the Muslim proclamation of faith, referencing another hadith that explains that “the primary ḥaqq, upon which all other ḥaqqs [sic] are based, is that “There is no god but God,”” which is to say that there is nothing truly real but the Real, there is nothing truly right but the Right.”\footnote{Chittick.} The “realizers” (muhaqqiqūn)” -- another term given to Sufis -- “are those who fully
actualize the spiritual, cosmic, and divine potential of the soul.”¹⁶⁸ To the Great Master, there was no Real Being but God, and everything other than God is unreal being.¹⁶⁹

The concepts of the Real and Realization are a reference to the central Islamic notion of *tawhīd*, “the acknowledgement of [divine] unity.”¹⁷⁰ Closely related is the important -- and, sometimes in Islam, the virulently contested -- Sufi idea of Oneness of Being (*wahdat al-wujūd*). This is often the point of entry into any discussion of al-Shaykh al-Akbar, as the Oneness of Being, or Unity of Existence, is the foremost concept for which he is more generally known, though Chittick claims Ibn al-ʿArabī never explicitly used this phrase.¹⁷¹ Ibn al-ʿArabī is recorded, however, as regularly reciting a prayer which began: “Enter me, O Lord, into the deep of the Ocean of Thine Infinite Oneness.”¹⁷²

As a key Sufi aspect of the concept of God’s self-disclosure, Ibn al-ʿArabī discussed how God’s words -- and the associated effect of them in the cosmos -- are being spoken constantly, “at every breath” (*maʿ al-anfās*),” so that “everything other than God” (the standard definition of the cosmos) is re-created at each instant (*tajḍīd al-khalq fi ʿl-ānāt*) and all things undergo constant change.”¹⁷³ Says Chittick,

> The notion that “There is no repetition in [God’s] self-disclosure” (*lā takrār fi ʿl-tajallī*) is a basic principle of Ibn ʿArabī's thought. He sees it as a straightforward application of *tawhīd*. By acknowledging the unity of the Real, we recognize that it is one and unique in its every act, which means that each created thing and each moment of each thing is one and unique; nothing can ever be repeated precisely because of each thing's uniqueness and the divine infinity.¹⁷⁴

Chittick notes the importance in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s cosmology of the Qurʾān’s speaking of the many “names” (*asmāʾ*) of God, but Chittick claims it is not the traditionally cited “ninety-nine” Most Beautiful Names of God but a number actually

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¹⁶⁸ Chittick.
¹⁶⁹ Chittick.
¹⁷⁰ Chittick.
¹⁷¹ Chittick.
¹⁷² Lings, *What Is Sufism?*, 11 (citing British Museum Ms. Or. 13453 [3].
¹⁷³ Chittick, ‘Ibn ’Arabī’.
¹⁷⁴ Chittick.
between seventy and around two hundred, depending on the criteria used in counting. The names, which are really God’s “attributes” (sifāt) are important to Ibn al-'Arabi’s ontology. The word the Shaykh uses for Essence is al-dhāt, an abbreviation of dhāt al-asmā’, meaning “the possessor of the names.” Humans have the ability to know the attributes, the qualities, of God -- as evidenced by His names written in the Qurʾān -- but not his true Essence. As Chittick explains,

About that one can only know “that it is” (the fact of its existence), not “what it is” (its quiddity). Inasmuch as the names correspond to the Essence, their meanings remain unknown, so they are simply markers of transcendence or “incomparability” (tanzīh). Inasmuch as they denote an added quality, such as mercy, knowledge, life, forgiveness, or vengeance, they indicate God's immanence or “similarity” (tashbīh). In short, Ibn 'Arabi’s theological vision combines the apophatic and kataphatic approaches.

Though he never used the term, Ibn al-'Arabi’s thinking on the topic of self-disclosure relies heavily on the imagination (khayāl) and what Corbin first termed as the “Imaginal.” Chittick explains that “properly disciplined imagination has the capacity to perceive God's self-disclosure” and that “the symbolic and mythic language of scripture, like the constantly shifting and never-repeated self-disclosures that are cosmos and soul, cannot be interpreted away with reason's strictures” alone, citing what Corbin termed “creative imagination” as a necessary complement to rational perception. Chittick summarises well the key implications of the concept of the imagination and the imaginal in Ibn al-'Arabi’s thought:

In Koranic terms, the locus of awareness and consciousness is the heart (qalb), a word that has the verbal sense of fluctuation and transmutation (taqallub). According to Ibn ‘Arabi, the heart has two eyes, reason and imagination, and the dominance of either distorts perception and awareness. The rational path of philosophers and theologians needs to be

175 Chittick.
176 Chittick.
177 Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi.
178 Chittick, ‘Ibn ’Arabi’.
complemented by the mystical intuition of the Sufis, the “unveiling” (kashf) that allows for imaginal -- not “imaginary” -- vision. The heart, which in itself is unitary consciousness, must become attuned to its own fluctuation, at one beat seeing God's incomparability with the eye of reason, at the next seeing his similarity with the eye of imagination. Its two visions are prefigured in the two primary names of the Scripture, al-qur'an, “that which brings together,” and al-furqān, “that which differentiates.” These two demarcate the contours of ontology and epistemology. The first alludes to the unifying oneness of Being (perceived by imagination), and the second to the differentiating manyness of knowledge and discernment (perceived by reason) … In effect, with the eye of imagination, the heart sees Being present in all things, and with the eye of reason it discerns its transcendence and the diversity of the divine faces.¹⁷⁹

The divine faces reference is to the important Sufi concept contained in the Qur'ānic verse “Whichever way you turn, there is the face of God” (Sūra 2:115).

In relation to the imaginal, Ibn al-'Arabī uses the term barzakh, which Chittick translates as “isthmus, barrier, limit” and states that the term originates in the Qur'ān as “that which stands between the sweet and salty seas (Sūra 25:53, 55:20) and prevents the deceased soul from returning to the world (Sūra 23:100).”¹⁸⁰ Chittick further says that Ibn al-'Arabī “employs the term to designate anything that simultaneously divides and brings together two things, without itself having two sides, like the “line” that separates sunlight and shade.”¹⁸¹ As it is used in discussing Akbarian cosmology, it is the barzakh that separates the “absent” world from the “witnessed world” that is called the “world of the imagination.”¹⁸²

I.B.6 Literature Review: Major Studies on Ibn al-'Arabī

Chittick notes that “most of Ibn 'Arabi’s works remain unedited, unpublished and/or unstudied” and points out that even with a new critical edition of Meccan

¹⁷⁹ Chittick.
¹⁸⁰ Chittick.
¹⁸¹ Chittick.
Openings being published, “years of effort on the part of a large number of scholars would be needed before a thorough analysis of its contents could be carried out, and there are still remain his other works.”\(^\text{183}\) This is the reason that “all scholars who have attempted to explain Ibn Arabi’s thought have pointed out the tentative nature of their endeavours.”\(^\text{184}\) Chodkiewicz has remarked on the Great Shayk’s works that “this massive corpus is not only reputed to be obscure; in Islam it has also been regularly denounced as heretical for more than seven centuries, and these polemics continue at present with the same vigor.”\(^\text{185}\)

Though Seyyed Hossein Nasr published his introductory *Three Muslim Sages* in 1963, which included a discussion of Ibn al-'Arabi, Chittick states that “not until books by Henry Corbin (1958) and Toshihiko Izutsu (1966) was the Shaykh recognized as “an extraordinarily broad-ranging and highly original thinker with much to contribute to the world of philosophy.”\(^\text{186}\) Chittick notes that both of these scholars limited their focus almost exclusively to the Shaykh’s *Bezels of Wisdom*, a relatively short, though highly influential, work, as already discussed.\(^\text{187}\) These two monographs effectively brought Ibn al-'Arabi to the attention of contemporary Western scholars and gave impetus to a growing body of translation and assessment of the Sufi master over the last fifty years.

Burckhardt remarked in 1981 that (at that time) Izutsu’s study, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts*,\(^\text{188}\) was by far the best book on Ibn al-'Arabi’s system of thought, especially relative to *Bezels*.\(^\text{189}\) Chittick says (in 1975, before he had begun publishing his investigations of the thought of the Shaykh as contained in the much longer *Meccan Openings*) that he used in his own research terminology developed by Izutsu in this book, and stated that it was “a brilliant study of Ibn ‘Arabi, … probably the best work in European languages for explaining the intricacies of Ibn ‘Arabi’s doctrine.”\(^\text{190}\)

\(^{183}\) Chittick, ‘Ibn ‘Arabi and His School’, 57.

\(^{184}\) Chittick, 57.


\(^{186}\) Chittick, ‘Ibn ‘Arabi’.

\(^{187}\) Chittick.

\(^{188}\) Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*.

\(^{189}\) Austin, ‘Forward and Introduction’, 13.

Before making the Sufi-Tao comparison, Izutsu posits the world-view of Ibn al-
ʿArabi as being the same as that of other mystical traditions: “The opposition of the
Absolute and the Perfect Man,” two concepts which represent “an ontological Descent
and Ascent” which Izutsu’s book examines along with the key related concepts of
Being and Existence. Izutsu concludes his book by stating that “the whole world of
Being is represented as a kind of ontological tension between Unity and Manifestation”
and that the “relation between the two terms of the ontological tension is that of
Unity.”

As already mentioned, Izutsu uses as the basis of his analysis Bezels of Wisdom
(describing it as the Shaykh’s magnum opus due to its influence on other Sufis
throughout the centuries that followed its writing). Izutsu rightly limits his exploration
of Ibn al-ʿArabi to this single work, cautioning other researchers working on the
Shaykh that “it is not only irrelevant but, even more, positively dangerous to try to note
everything the author has said and written on each subject over a period of many years”
because “one might easily drown oneself in the vast ocean of concepts, images and
symbols that are scattered about in utter disorder throughout the hundreds of his works,
and lose sight of the main line or lines of thought and the guiding spirit that underlies
the whole structure.” Furthermore, Izutsu asserts that it is “more profitable to
concentrate on a work in which [Ibn al-ʿArabi] presents his thought in its maturest
form.” To help explain Ibn al-ʿArabi’s complex views in Bezels -- often expressed in
highly symbolic or very succinct language (that assumed a great deal of knowledge on
the part of the reader of Bezels of Wisdom) -- Izutsu relies heavily upon ʿAbd al-Razzaq
al-Qāshānī (d.1330), the writer of one of the most famous commentaries on Bezels and
a disciple of the Shaykh’s thought who was in the direct line of transmission from Ibn
al-ʿArabi’s closest interpreter and disseminator of his views, Qūnāwī (through al-
Jāndi).

As the title may suggest, the other major book to which Chittick refers that
helped to spur research in the West, Corbin’s Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn

192 Izutsu, 473.
193 Izutsu, 3.
194 Izutsu, 4.
Arabi,\textsuperscript{196} contains a vast amount of information and analysis pertinent to the subject of the imaginal. (Indeed, it was Corbin’s book -- which also used Bezels of Wisdom as its primary source material to develop its theories -- that became the basis for much of Chittick’s later work on the self-disclosure of God, which extended Corbin’s work on the “imaginal” to Chittick’s translation and exploration of Meccan Openings.) Parts of the book were first published in French in the mid-fifties with an English translation appearing in 1969. Corbin termed those Sufis of love-mysticism (as opposed to the ascetics) Fedeli d’amore -- a name Dante and his followers called themselves, meaning “faithful (ones) to love” -- explaining that “the experience of a cult of love dedicated to a beautiful being is the necessary initiation to divine love.”\textsuperscript{197} Corbin states that “this group [of Sufis] is dominated by two great figures: Ibn 'Arabi, the incomparable master of mystic theosophy, and Jalāluddīn Rūmī, the Iranian troubadour of that religion of love whose flame feeds on the theophanic feeling for sensuous beauty.”\textsuperscript{198} In the specific case of Ibn al-’Arabī -- citing “the young girl [Nizām] who was for Ibn 'Arabī in Mecca what Beatrice was for Dante … a theophanic figure.”\textsuperscript{199} (Addas, in her biography of the Shaykh, notes a “highly controversial” study by Miguel Asin y Palacios which claims that the writings of Ibn al-’Arabī were the source of inspiration for Dante’s Divine Comedy.\textsuperscript{200} This work of Corbin contains not only a general application of the concept of the imaginal to the works of Ibn al-’Arabī, but includes an extended chapter that specifically addresses the Interpreter of Desires in which Corbin makes the Beatrice analogy. Though Corbin does not explicate much of the specific poetry in the collection, he does point the way for the current project, masterfully drawing out the Beloved-Lover/God-Human analogy, showing (quoting the Meccan Openings) that

\begin{quote}
It is He who in every beloved being is manifested in the gaze of his lover … and none other than He is adored, for it is impossible to adore a
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{196} Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi.
\textsuperscript{197} Corbin, 100–101.
\textsuperscript{198} Corbin, 110.
\textsuperscript{199} Corbin, 100.
being without conceiving the Godhead in that being … So it is with love: a being does not truly love anyone other than his Creator. An approach similar to Corbin’s will be applied in this dissertation’s chapter on human and divine love (Chapter 3) according to Ibn al-ʿArabī’s *Bezels* chapter on the hadith on women, perfume, and prayer (the *Bezels* chapter on the Prophet Muhammad).

In 1989, William Chittick published *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination*, the first introduction to the massive *Meccan Openings* in English. The subtitle suggests the debt to Corbin’s interpretation of the Shaykh and interest in the Imaginal -- the imaginal world -- about which Chittick says, “the mundus imaginalis is realm where invisible realities become visible and corporeal things are spiritualized,” a place which later Islamic scholars saw as “the locus wherein spiritual realities are seen in visionary experience and all the eschatological events described in the Koran and the Hadith take place exactly as described.”

The saliency for the academy of the concept of the imaginal is that “by granting an independent ontological status to imagination and seeing the visionary realm as the self-revelation of God, Islamic philosophy has gone against the mainstream of Western thought.”

Though acknowledging Corbin’s immense contribution to Islamic scholarship, Chittick says that, in Corbin’s “zeal to revive the honor due to the imaginal realm, Corbin tended to de-emphasize the cornerstone of Islamic teachings, *tawhīd*, or “declaration of God’s Unity.” Also, this new work was the first to move major scholarly analysis away from the more succinct expression of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s thought as found in *Bezels of Wisdom*.

The publication of Chittick’s book was a very important event in Islamic and Sufi scholarship. The eminent Islamic scholar James Morris’s review of the Chittick book notes that one of the strengths of the work is that it focuses on Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own objectives in *Meccan Openings* without attempting to interject Chittick’s own creative or theological agenda:

Previous scholarly works on Ibn ‘Arabī, including the classical studies by Nyberg, Asin-Palacios, Corbin and Izutsu, have typically sought to

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201 Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*, 146, citing Fut. II, 326.
203 Chittick, ix–x.
204 Chittick, x.
present what those authors believed to be most relevant or interesting to their own diverse modern audiences. Whatever the merits of those different approaches, only readers already well acquainted with the Arabic texts can judge how adequately they have succeeded and to what extent their interpretations (as is almost inevitable) have taken on a creative life and direction of their own.\textsuperscript{205}

Morris correctly concludes that one of the highly important -- and lasting -- contributions that Chittick’s book made is that it contains a common language which may be used by other scholars (in English translation) so that Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought may be discussed across his entire range of writings: “the very difficult opening theological and philosophic discussions do provide the common language (primarily Qur'anic) and conceptual framework that is assumed throughout Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings; and this is certainly the aspect of his work most unfamiliar to virtually all modern readers."\textsuperscript{206} Furthermore, Morris writes in situating Chittick’s book that Chittick “has especially emphasized and carefully identified the Islamic scriptural framework and inspiration of all of Ibn ‘Arabī’s writing (sometimes neglected in earlier presentations).”\textsuperscript{207}

Almost a decade after publication of Chittick’s work on \textit{Meccan Openings}, he published a follow-up volume, \textit{The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Cosmology} (1998).\textsuperscript{208} In this book, he reminds readers that “one of the reasons for Ibn al-‘Arabī’s extraordinary stress on the importance of imagination is its attempt to make people aware of the disservice to understanding done by rational extraction and abstraction.”\textsuperscript{209} Readers often struggle with Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writing because his approach to articulating his ideas is the Sufi approach:

Too often, in the case of studying Ibn al-‘Arabī, “getting to the point” is to kill. To get to the point is to bring about closure, but there is no closure, only \textit{disclosure}. Ibn al-‘Arabī has no specific point to which he


\textsuperscript{206} Morris, 602.

\textsuperscript{207} Morris, 602.

\textsuperscript{208} Chittick, \textit{The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn Al-‘Arabī’s Cosmology}.

\textsuperscript{209} Chittick, xi.
wants to get. He is simply flowing along with the infinitely diverse self-disclosure of God, and he is suggesting to us that we leave aside our artificialities and recognize that we are flowing along with him. There is no “point,” because there is no end.\textsuperscript{210}

This second Chittick book does, indeed, concentrate on the Shaykh’s teachings on \textit{tawhīd} and the self-disclosure of God.

The other stand-out monograph on Ibn al-ʿarbī’s thought that has had a substantial impact on the Sufi scholarship was Michel Chodkiewicz’s \textit{An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn ‘Arabi, the Book, and the Law} (1993), a major exposition of the influence of the Qurʾān and Hadith on the Shaykh’s teachings.\textsuperscript{211} Chodkiewicz quotes a sixteenth-century apologist of Ibn al-ʿarbī who asserted that the Shaykh’s writings are “a fatal poison” for most men … due to the subtlety of their meanings, the delicacy of their allusions, and the abstruseness of their structure.”\textsuperscript{212} The crux of Chodkiewicz’s argument is that Ibn al-ʿarbī -- as all Sufis -- grounded his thought firmly in the Islamic tradition, relying especially on the Qurʾān. Many Islamic scholars of his day -- and for centuries afterward -- were extremely antagonistic toward Ibn al-ʿarbī, as they were toward Sufism, in general, as actually being contrary to the Islamic tradition as a whole, and regarding the Qurʾān and Hadith, in particular. Chodkiewicz states that

\begin{quote}
A close look at the writings hostile to the Shaykh al-Akbar from the thirteenth century up to the present day, however, shows the regular appearance of another accusation: sacrilege. The sacrilege in question is \textit{tahrīf maʿāni l-qurʾanʾān}, the “twisting of the meaning of the Qurʾan.”\textsuperscript{213}
\end{quote}

Some non-Sufi Islamic authorities must have thought Ibn al-ʿarbī “too clever,” but he addressed his critics by unambiguously asserting that “everything of which we speak in our meetings and in our writings comes from the Qurʾan and its treasures.”\textsuperscript{214} Chodkiewicz, though, cites Corbin who “often admiringly presented the Shaykh al-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{210} Chittick, xi.
\item \textsuperscript{211} Chodkiewicz, \textit{An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn ‘Arabi, the Book, and the Law}.
\item \textsuperscript{212} Chodkiewicz, 1 citing Ibn al-ʿarbī Hajar al-Haytāmi, al-fātāwā al-hadīthiyya (Cairo, 1970, p. 296).
\item \textsuperscript{213} Chodkiewicz, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{214} Chodkiewicz, 20.
\end{itemize}
Akbar as the man of bātin, the hidden sense” -- as a man who “shatters the rigidities of the Letter in order to attain, by means of a free esoteric interpretation, a taʾwil, new meaning of Revelation.”215 It is not such a long jump from “free esoteric interpretation” to dangerous innovations in the minds of many conservative Qurānic jurists who would cite the verse, “Have you seen him who has taken his own caprice to be his god?” (25:43). Chodkiewicz’s task in his book is to show how Ibn al-ʿArabī did, indeed, form his theology on a solid reading of the Qurān, even if it were not the same exoteric reading undertaken by the jurists.

Another book providing a substantial theoretical framework for understanding Ibn al-ʿArabī is Michael Sells’ Mystical Languages of Unsaying (1994), a major study on the apophatic language and transcendent theology (as opposed to a theology of immanence) utilized by mystics of both the Christian and Islamic traditions.216 Though Ibn al-ʿArabī’s theology is clearly a balance of transcendence (tanzīḥ, “declaring incomparability”) and immanence (tashbīḥ, “affirming similarity”),217 Sells demonstrates how the transcendent aspects work in the mystical tradition for the Shaykh. Sells explains the paradox of the concept of the transcendent:

The transcendent must be beyond names, ineffable. In order to claim that the transcendent is beyond names, however, I must give it a name, “the transcendent.” Any statement of ineffability, “X is beyond names,” generates the aporia [unsolved dilemma] that the subject of the statement must be named (as X) in order for us to affirm that it is beyond names.218

Sells explains that this is commonly termed a “negative” theology “in the sense that it denies that the transcendent can be named or given attributes”; the language used in this type of discourse is apophasis (speaking-away), as opposed to kataphasis (affirmation, or speaking-with).219 Sells’ analysis in his book is that in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s confronting the theological issues relating to the concept of God’s image in humans -- and humans

215 Chodkiewicz, 20.
216 Michael Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsaying, 1st ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 1994).
218 Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsaying, 2.
219 Sells, 2–3.
reflecting God’s image -- the Shaykh uses the analogy of the polished mirror to explain the concept of divine names in Sufi thought and the concept of the moment of mystical union where “the duality between human and divine is transcended.”

Sells draws heavily upon the Bezels manuscript to explain Sufi practices -- such as dhikr, contemplative remembrance of God, and sama’, the musical “audition” of Sufi song and dance -- and concepts of time in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s general thought and in certain verses in Interpreter of Desires.

Though relatively new, the monograph by Sa’diyya Shaikh -- Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn ‘Arabi, Gender, and Sexuality -- promises to become a major contribution to Ibn al-‘Arabī scholarship. This work contains highly insightful analysis of gender issues in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings and theory, including important discussions of theories in the Bezels text, as well as some material relating to the character of Niẓām in Interpreter of Desires.

From the outset of her examination of Ibn al-‘Arabī, Shaikh makes it clear that hers is a feminist critique -- viewing the Great Shaykh’s works through “a feminist lens” -- undertaken “to address gender questions at a deeply rooted level of religious meaning.” She states that her book “attempts to recoup a usable past for Islamic feminists, dislodging some of the dominant readings of the tradition by using critical feminist tools that open up an alternative horizon of possibilities for future readings of Sufi texts.” She insists that she uses a “hermeneutics of reconstruction” that uncovers alternative egalitarian gender narratives within texts,” the objective being “both redressing the broader silences and marginalization of women’s lives and retrieving powerful and empowering images of women.”

With such an introduction to her own perspective on traditional Islamic texts, the reader might expect that Shaikh’s analysis of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s own writings would yield results remarkably unlike what other scholars have said of Muhyī al-Dīn’s writings regarding gender and how they handle the subject. Certainly she disagrees with some aspects of the approach to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works by such prominent Ibn al-

\[220\] Sells, 68–69.
\[221\] Shaikh, Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn ‘Arabi, Gender, and Sexuality.
\[222\] Shaikh, 10–11.
\[223\] Shaikh, 26.
\[224\] Shaikh, 27.
ʿArabī as Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Sachiko Murata, but Shaikh’s discussion of gender issues is, in fact, highly sympathetic to Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own view of women and gender in many ways. To begin with, as already stated, after considering “feminist” alternatives, she translates Huwa (he) in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s texts as “He” when referring to God so that the reader can “access in an unadulterated manner the multiple and nuanced ways that Ibn ʿArabī more broadly troubles normative gender categories in his God talk, presenting “complex and nuanced formulations of feminine and masculine aspects of the divine One.” Shaikh further explains the use of gender by Ibn al-ʿArabī -- who largely relies upon the Qur ān as the basis for his own doctrine -- in her characterising the Qur ān as containing a theology that is “radically iconoclastic” in that “God is not simply beyond gender but also beyond all anthropocentric imagery and similitudes. The Qur ān introduces instead the concept of divine attributes as a way for humanity to relate to the One God.” The role of the divine Names and attributes, of course, figures prominently in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s cosmology. Shaikh actually is in agreement on this critical aspect of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s theories, admitting that “[b]oth ‘activity’ described as ‘masculine’ and ‘receptivity’ depicted as ‘feminine’ are necessary and complementary modes of being that are determined by the needs of a particular situation and relationship ... Despite the gendered use of these spiritual postures, they apply in equal measure to men and women on the spiritual path who generally share the assumptions, framework, and goals of Sufi psychology.”

As already mentioned, Shaikh is highly sympathetic to Ibn al-ʿArabī’s relationships with females in his personal life in his roles as both a teacher and pupil of

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225 Shaikh says that though “Nasr maintains the idea of a shared humanity between men and women, he argues for fundamental ontological differences between them. His work features a pervasive notion that men and women microcosmically embody and reflect different divine qualities that are complementary.” Shaikh, 204.

226 Shaikh terms Murata, like Nasr, a “traditionalist” thinker who “presents a far more complex and nuanced view of Sufi gender constructs [than Nasr]....” Shaikh acknowledges a major debt to Murata, then says that, “[i]n much of her interpretation, Murata argues that gendered differences are foundational in Ibn ʿArabī’s works while maintaining that biological men and women are not always correlated with the categories of male/masculine and female/feminine as well as their relevant discourses. Throughout her work however, she embraces patriarchal stereotypes implicit in traditional constructs of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ and the related ideologically embedded nature of language as mediator. Shaikh, 209.


228 Shaikh, 29.

229 Shaikh, 39.
women. Like a dervish, Ibn ‘Arabi whirs with traditional narratives of women, thereby transforming dominant gender tropes in unanticipated ways. At times he uses the established patriarchal image of female deficiency and then skilfully spins them into stories of love, complementarity, identity, and spiritual synergy between man and women. At his most subtle and revolutionary, he infuses narratives of female power, strength, and capacity, presenting unique conceptualizations that value women and the “feminine” in surprising ways -- indeed, at times, even iconoclastically positing a female “degree” over men.

Shaikh’s feminist assessment of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings is generally highly favourable in terms of his treatment of females in his works.

Though Shaikh claims that the feminist critique of her book is “particularly focused on unearthing the problematic ways in which patriarchal assumptions from the past still find currency in the social present,” her discussion of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s theoretical works has much to offer in supporting what previous scholars have found in his writings relating primarily to theology. Her findings enhance the understanding of the role of gender in the Great Shaykh’s theology that there are important and valid male-female distinctions in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s doctrine, including the existence of both the female and male aspects of God, especially when viewed as being complimentary, such divine attributes being apparent in both male and female human beings. Shaikh makes additional contributions specifically to the Interpreter of Desires, a discussion which is taken up in the following review of literature specifically relating to Ibn al-ʿArabī’s poetry.

The above references are the exceptional scholarly book-length works and significant chapters on the thought of al-Shaykh al-Akbar; many other books and chapters are devoted to Akbarian teachings, of course. He is also discussed -- to greater or lesser degrees -- in many general books on Sufism. This includes many of the classic

230 Shaikh, 102.
231 Shaikh, 151.
232 Shaikh, 26.

In 1993, the Shaykh’s biographer Claude Addas remarked on how publishing interest in Sufism and on Ibn al-ʿArabī, in particular, had grown “considerably” in the preceding few years.241 Since that time, any current bibliography of the master would indicate that scholarly interest in Ibn al-ʿArabī has continued to grow even further, with most contributions being made in peer-reviewed journal articles. The shorter analysis approach actually suits Ibn al-ʿArabī scholarship well, given the non-systematic structure of his own writings in which different topics are introduced suddenly in an exposition -- as the result of a flash of inspiration during the writing process -- then explored sometimes briefly before the Shaykh moves on quickly to another subject.

By a very long distance, the primary peer-reviewed journal for articles on the Shaykh is the *Journal of the Ibn ʿArabi Society* which has been publishing twice a year since 1982. Almost all of the major scholars working on the Shaykh al-Akbar currently publish there, presenting both analysis as well as translation, and virtually all new scholarship on Ibn al-ʿArabī is published in the *Journal*.

In reviewing dissertations, of special interest to this present project is the publication of Muhammed Haj Yusef’s dissertation under the title, *Ibn ʿArabī -- Time*.

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235 Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*.

236 Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*.

237 Lings, *What Is Sufism?*


239 Ernst, *Sufism: An Essential Introduction to the Philosophy and Practice of the Mystical Tradition of Islam*.


and Cosmology. Yusef has drawn out Ibn al-'Arabī’s discussions relating to time and the Shaykh’s principle of Oneness of Being in the Meccan Openings. Though the material in the book might be extremely useful for the analysis of the concept of time in Tarjumān al-Ashwāq, Yusef brings to the general topic a physicist’s point of view more than that of a theologian or literary explicator with those particular sensitivities necessary to assess a collection of sensual poems.

I.B.7 Literature Review: The Poetry of Ibn al-'Arabī and the Interpreter of Desires

Considering Ibn al-'Arabī’s reputation as a fine poet, it seems almost nonsensical that -- as Claude Addas has noted -- while there has been a growing body of Ibn al-'Arabī scholarship, there is a gaping hole because “no comprehensive study has yet attempted to deal with Ibn 'Arabi's poetic work as a whole.” She says further that “whatever work has been accomplished has failed to comprehend the eminent place that poetry occupies in Ibn 'Arabi's work, and it has been even less successful in understanding the tremendous role that he gives poetry in support of his teachings.”

As referenced earlier, this could be -- as offered by Michael Sells -- that scholars are uncomfortable in devoting efforts to explaining poetry that straddles the line between religion and literature.

Ralph Austin (translator into English of Bezels of Wisdom) has approached Ibn al-'Arabī’s poems in several journal articles. He has translated two poems from the Great Diwan, discussing a poem written on the occasion of the death of one of the Shaykh’s daughters; this explication provides some useful perspectives for the present project in terms of the use of symbols. (Austin’s other translations of poems from the seventy-eighth chapter of Meccan Openings includes only notes and no useful explication.) A very general discussion of the divine in Ibn al-'Arabī’s poetry is found in a short book chapter by Peter Bachmann; Bachmann explicates a few verses of

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a manuscript which he refers to only as *The Diwan Ibn 'Arabī* (and citing the Arabic original manuscript).²⁴⁶

Addas does make some general observations about the Shaykh’s poetry in her discussion to the preface to the *Collection of Divine Knowledge* (which she suggested was part of Ibn al-'Arabī’s *Great Diwan*, hypothesized to be his *summa poetica*) and notes that

Ibn 'Arabī sets out to prove that the rules upon which Arabic poetry is based come forth from Divine Wisdom, and that they are ubiquitous in Creation for whoever has eyes to see. God constructed the universe, he emphasizes, according to the same principles as those that form the framework of the bayt al-shī'r, the verses of a poem … [T]he world is a work endowed with rhyme and rhythm. Moreover, he adds, God placed the jewels of spiritual knowledge, and the secrets of the Lord, in language. He then entrusted this treasure to the 'ārifūn, the gnostics, who, for fear of it being plundered, hid the secrets under the veil of poetry, disguising them with allusive and symbolic terms. And on top of all that, Ibn 'Arabī observes at the end of this unusual khutba [preface], is the Prophet not referred to as the Master of language and the holder of the 'sum of words' (*jawāmi' al-kalim*)? Two main ideas stand out in this passage. First, in words completely devoid of any ambiguity, Ibn 'Arabī is making a statement about poetry's relationship to wisdom and divine providence: that its fundamental principles are divinely instituted. And second, that the language of poetry is used as the privileged support of spiritual and divine knowledge, the perpetuity of which it reserves for the exclusive use of gnostics.²⁴⁷

As Addas remarks, Ibn al-'Arabī first established not only the legitimacy but the actual necessity of mystics’ use of poetry, then the Shaykh affirmed this collection of poems was divinely inspired.²⁴⁸ The legitimacy, the necessity, and the divine inspiration are

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²⁴⁸ Addas, 12.
aspects of Ibn al-ʿArabi’s poetry that he emphasizes in all his writings that include verse.

Though neither of Chittick’s monumental works on the *Meccan Openings* discusses Ibn al-ʿArabi’s poetry to any great extent -- though each of the 560 chapters of *Meccan Openings* begins with verse that al-Shaykh al-Akbar has insisted was essential to what follows -- Chittick does explore the Shaykh’s poetry from the perspective of the imaginal and divine self-disclosure.249 This Chittick chapter is the foundation upon which other aspects of his in-depth understanding of Ibn al-ʿArabi’s thoughts will be brought into the analysis of the poetry in the *Interpreter of Desires*.

There is, thus, very little academic writing available on the general subject of Akbarian poetry. With few exceptions, most of the scholarly output in this regard has focused on the popular *Tarjumân al-Ashwāq (Interpreter of Desires)*. Most of the references to the *Interpreter of Desires* found in surveys of Sufism or Ibn al-ʿArabi are rather cursory and unoriginal views of the collection. As already noted (and confirmed by Chittick), Nicholson’s own translation of the *Tarjumân al-Ashwāq* lacked an adequate explanatory introduction -- relying almost totally upon the Shaykh’s own prefatory remarks -- or theoretical context.250

There are several notable exceptions to the general rule of the paucity of attention given to both Ibn al-ʿArabi’s poetry in general and, specifically, to the *Tarjumân al-Ashwāq*. Most of the secondary sources in this regard are found in journal articles, though there are two monographs of special note. Certainly, Corbin’s *Creative Imagination* must be the starting point for any serious investigation of the poetry collection. In addition to the large amount of references to the Islamic tradition, and in addition to the highly important theories of the imaginal that he posits, Corbin’s general discussion of the *Interpreter of Desires* as a collection provides a theoretical basis for applying his thoughts on the imaginal to individual poems and to a whole series of overarching Sufi themes and concepts evidenced in the collection. (Indeed, much of the rest of Corbin’s book’s approach can be applied to the poems.) Corbin points the way to viewing the “sensual” poems as theophanic visions, and the beguiling and beautiful Nizām as an “apparitional figure” whom Ibn al-ʿArabi explains as “yearning for the


vision of divine Beauty which appears [mystically] at every moment in a new form. Though outside the scope of this present project, Corbin’s work provides a very useful template for examining how the concept of the imaginal that can be used to evidence important aspects of Sufism in the Tarjumān al-Ashwāq in terms of the poet’s task (rather than the focus on the theories of the poet evidenced in the poems, which is the central concern of this dissertation).

The second -- and only other -- book specifically addressing the Tarjumān al-Ashwāq at length is Michael Sells’ Stations of Desires. The book not only provides contemporary translations of twenty-four of the sixty-one poems in the collection, but provides a jumping off point regarding viewing the Tarjumān al-Ashwāq in the context of the pre-Islamic qaṣīda. Sells provides an extended introduction to the melancholy nasīb section of the qaṣīda, discussing the key poets who developed this tradition, and explaining how the Beloved-lover analogy became the source of inspiration for many Sufi writers, including Ibn al-ʿArabī, and provided a language of love and a source of symbols to be used to describe the yearning of a lover traumatized by the memory of his beloved over whose abandoned desert campsite he engages in deeply romantic and Sufi remembrance. Sells recounts the pre-Islamic legends of the love-mad seeker wandering the desert in search of his lost Beloved and introduces the reader to the poet Qays who reportedly lived in the time of Muhammad and took on the persona of Majnūn (literally, “jinned” or made mad for) Layla. As Sells says of Qays,

The poems attributed to him and the legends surrounding him have epitomized the notion of the poet-lover as a martyr to love. Majnūn’s life is finite, his longing infinite. It is little wonder, then, that Sufis those Islamic mystics wandering in the infinite reaches in search of the one they love, have also taken him as a model. When the mystic lover is thinned away and broken down, when he can no longer hold onto his self or his thoughts, when he is emptied of his own words and arguments, the beloved reveals herself.

For Majnūn this is the moment of love-madness. For the Sufis in general and Ibn al-ʿArabī in particular, love-madness is analogous to the mystical-bewilderment (ḥayra) that occurs as the normal boundaries of

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251 Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi, 139,148.
identity, reason, and will are melted. The self of the lover passes away. In this “annihilation” (fanā’) he becomes one with the divine beloved.  

The Sells introduction points to many major pre-Islamic and Islamic themes and Sufi concepts in the nasīb section of the qaṣīda and shows how these relate to the themes of the Interpreter of Desires.

As with Ibn al-ʿArabi’s poetry in general, scholarly work on the Interpreter of Desires is scant in books, with most authors drawing upon the observations of Nicholson or Corbin or relying upon the Shaykh’s own preface(s) to the collection. Perhaps because tackling translation issues is easier on a more limited basis, some writers have focused on individual poems in the Tarjumān. Sells first published some of the translations collected in his Stations of Desire in journals, along with some extended explication. Austin also contributed an insightful article on the Niżām of the Interpreter of Desires, showing her to be an allegorical manifestation of Love and Knowledge and -- with echoes of Corbin yet pushing the divine self-disclosure aspects of the poems -- comments that the “secret of the Lady Nizam as an image of Love lies primordially in the eternal yearning of God to know Himself, to reveal the hidden

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253 Sells, in his review of Jaroslav Stetkevych’s book, Zephyrs of the Najd, cites the following as key elements of the nasīb section of the qaṣīda, saying that Stetkevych searches out “the myth behind the word” within five major elements of the nasīb:

1) the atldl (ruins of the beloved’s campsite) as sign of both her presence and her absence,
2) the za ‘n theme (the lingering remembrance and imagination of the beloved’s departure with the women of the tribe),
3) the pasturing of the stars (the sleepless poet gazing at the stars and comparing them to flocks) as a central clue to the combination of elegiac and pastoral mood,
4) lost cities and civilizations as the urbanized counterpart to the abandoned campsite, and finally,
5) the multivalent, always partially concealed, senses of the lost paradise that inhabit the ruins of the campsite, particularly in the mode of idyllic reverie when those ruins are transformed by the poetic imagination into verdant meadows.

treasure of Himself to Himself, to release Himself from the aloneness of His uniqueness and to experience the bliss of enjoying Himself in all His infinite possibility, to release the potentialities of His latent Being into the becoming of actuality.”

Other journal articles referencing the *Tarjumān* address the collection in largely insubstantial ways.

Two scholarly monographs have been published recently which discuss *Interpreter of Desires*. The first is Cyrus Ali Zargar’s *Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ʿArabi and ʿIraqi* (2011). This work takes as its impetus Zargar’s conclusion that there has been a failure of scholars “to consider the mystical significance of ambiguous erotic verse.” The study focuses on the subject of mystical perception and the vision of human beauty, and includes an in-depth review of the associated theories of Ibn al-ʿArabī (primarily from *Meccan Openings* and *Bezels of Wisdom*) applied to an explication of a small number of poems from *Interpreter of Desires*. One of the key points Zargar makes in the study is that the concept of “beauty” in these doctrinal works corresponds to “lovability,” defined as “the extent to which a perceived object evokes love in its perceiver.” Zargar asserts that “the truly beautiful is the divine” and that “for the gnostic, the beautiful is the Real,” though the human being cannot perceive God outside of the immanent form.

Zargar places the relevance of the theory in the context of finding theology in the seemingly erotic or sensual poetry of Islamic mystical poetry in saying,

> It was not a matter of usurping beautiful poetry; rather some commentators expressed cosmological reverberations that they actually beheld in such poetic imagery. Such is definitely the case for Ibn ʿArabi’s commentary on his own collection of amorous verse, the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see why those exposed to Ibn ʿArabi’s love poems had and still have their doubts,

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257 Zargar, 3–5.
especially considering the saint’s earnest and sometimes even raw expressions of human-to-human love.\textsuperscript{258}

Zargar asserts that the most significant artistic expression in Sufism is poetry, “particularly erotic or amorous lyric poetry, because of its relationship with beauty and the human form.”\textsuperscript{259} The underlying theoretical premise to his study is that

That which most people see ... corresponds to their sense of reason but does not correspond to reality. The various planes of existence are infused with meaning, communications from God, and symbolic significance -- yet only those granted mushahadah/witnessing have awareness of the true state of things.\textsuperscript{260}

Throughout his work, Zargar reminds the reader that Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writing of the human form in his love poems “betrays a reluctance to make a distinction between human and divine beauty,” the value given to human beauty assuming “an understanding that, just as the visible world is a divine mirror, the human form ... reflects divine beauty more completely than any [other] locus of manifestation.”\textsuperscript{261}

Zargar’s study is an important addition to interpreting Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Interpreter of Desires by the application of the Great Shaykh’s own gnostic theories.

The second recent scholarly monograph published recently that speaks to the Tarjumān al-Ashwāq is Ibn ʿArabī’s Mystical Poetics, by Denis McCauley.\textsuperscript{262} McCauley acknowledges the importance and fame of the Interpreter of Desires, but uses as the foundation of his analysis poems from other sources, such as those contained in the prose work, al-Futūḥat al-Makkiyya, and poems from the Dīwān al-Maʿārif, all contained in a collection of his poems from these and other sources published as the al-Dīwān al-Akbar in 1855.\textsuperscript{263} McCauley’s contribution to the poetics of Ibn al-ʿArabī are incorporated into the body of this project’s analysis, so an extensive review of this book will not be undertaken here to avoid redundancies.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Zargar258} Zargar, 7.
\bibitem{Zargar259} Zargar, 9.
\bibitem{Zargar260} Zargar, 13.
\bibitem{Zargar261} Zargar, 45.
\end{thebibliography}
Important, however, is to situate McCauley’s research as a resource for evaluating the 
Tarjumān.

McCauley offers several reasons for using al-Dīwān al-Akbar as the source for 
his analysis, especially as an alternative to concentrating on the Tarjumān al-Ashwāq. He first introduces the Tarjumān in saying that readers in the West were generally 
introduced to the poetry of the Shaykh and to this poetry collection with the publication 
of the Nicholson translation in 1911. McCauley chooses, however, to explore the 
Shaykh’s poetry by fathoming poems from the much larger, and less known Dīwān 
which contains approximately seven hundred poems, compared to the sixty-one poems 
in the Tarjumān. As will be discussed late in this dissertation, relatively scant scholarly 
attention has been given to the poetry of al-Shaykh al-Akbar. The mystical poems – 
which comprise a large portion of Ibn al-ʿArabi’s poetry production – require the 
scholar to engage with not only literary forms but a wide range of Sufi doctrine, which 
has put off some scholars. For those with an interest in the metaphysical writings of Ibn 
al-ʿArabi, the Shaykh’s prose works have been the focus on most of the substantial 
 scholarly output, even though the prose includes poetry. When poetry has been 
approached, it has been primarily as a source of theoretical gnostics, and largely ignoring 
some of the usual tools of explication such as rhyme, meter, and imagery. It is these 
avenues of poietical explication that McCauley focuses his own work. Specific to the 
Tarjumān al-Ashwāq, McCauley makes only a few references to the love poetry. One 
of McCauley’s central points about the Tarjumān is to highlight Nicholson’s own 
disparagement of the Commentary, in repeating Nicholson’s assertion of the general 
lack of usefulness of the Commentary in getting at what Ibn al-ʿArabi was trying to 
accomplish in the Tarjumān since the Commentary was written as a response to critics 
who saw the collection as, primarily, erotic verse, to which the Shaykh responded by 
providing almost a line-by-line, word-by-word, explanation of all the poems, thus 
bleaching most of the literary merit as well as subtle doctrinal Sufism from his 
sensually inspired work in which qualities of the Divine are seen in the spiritually, 
physically, and intellectually enchanting Niẓām. McCauley, does, however provide

264 McCauley, Ibn ʿArabi’s Mystical Poetics, 2.
265 McCauley, 3.
some fresh insights into the Shaykh’s poetry in *Tarjumān*, which is included in this project’s analytical sections.\(^{266}\)

Finally, in terms of published scholarship on Ibn al-ʿArabī’s poetry, the monograph by Sa'diyya Shaikh -- *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, already discussed generally in relation to her feminist view of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings -- contains a small amount of useful material regarding Nizām’s role in the *Interpreter of Desires*. Shaikh does not actually explicate any of the *Interpreter of Desires* poetry, but does draw several conclusions from the poetry, in general, and from Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writing about Nizām in the collection’s preface in which the poet explains the circumstances of their meeting. The girl, about whom Shaikh says “serves as a signifier of ways in which images of women glimmer at the borders of canonical discourse,”\(^{267}\) is a character whose attributes the scholar seems to adore as much as does Ibn al-ʿArabī:

Ibn ʿArabi celebrates not only Nizām’s spiritual mastery, wisdom, and intellect but also her enchanting beauty and sensuality. Nizām’s distinguishing qualities that so profoundly affected Ibn ʿArabi -- wisdom, beauty, intelligence, a magnetic presence, an exalted spirituality, and eloquence -- together represent a very powerful image of womanhood in particular and of humanity in general. In Ibn ʿArabī’s depictions, Nizām epitomizes some of the most significant ungendered attributes of human refinement while being a real embodied woman. In such comprehensive descriptions, integrating dimensions of intellect, spirituality, and physicality, Ibn ʿArabi collapses some of the patriarchal stereotypes that isolate and bind women solely within the realm of the body. Simultaneously, however, he recognizes and celebrates in her the beauty and power of the female form.\(^{268}\)

As already discussed, Shaikh’s primary contribution to Ibn al-ʿArabī scholarship in regard to the application of the Bezels theories to *Interpreter of Desires* is to support the conclusion of other scholars who have written about the existence and importance of


\(^{268}\) Shaikh, 104.
gender in relation to the subject of male and female attributes of God that are reflected back to Him by human beings, all humans having both male and female qualities.

In terms of unpublished postgraduate work on the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*, there are two (unpublished) master’s theses specifically on the topic of the poetry collection. The first, *Mystical and Poetic Expression in the Tarjuman al-Ashwaq of Muhyi’ddin Ibn Arabi* (1971), explores some of the themes of the present project but in a very cursory way (the thesis being only seventy-five pages) and without access to the scholarship on Ibn al-ʿArabī and the pre-Islamic ode that has been published since that time; the most relevant chapter of the thesis -- “The Mystical Authenticity of The *Tarjumān al-ashwāq*”-- which is the central issue the current dissertation investigates, is only forty-five pages, the balance of the thesis being a review of the Shaykh’s thoughts and a section on “an aesthetic evaluation” of the poems.269 The second thesis, *Ibn Arabi’s Sufi and Poetic Experiences Through His Collection of Mystical Poems Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, (2005), attempts to show the influence of al-Ḥallāj and Ibn al-Fārid on Ibn al-ʿArabī’s poetry and addresses the Sufi aspects of the collection, but only analyses some of the poems in the collection; the body of the study’s text is written in Arabic and relies on mostly primary and secondary sources in Arabic.270

The review of scholarly literature has thus shown that very few academic researchers have examined the *Interpreter of Desires* from the perspective of Sufi doctrine, and certainly no one has previously undertaken a study of the Akbarian theories in *Bezels of Wisdom* as evidenced in the poetry collection as a whole.

I.B.8 Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Poetry

The Shaykh al-Akbar wrote poetry at a very high artistic level. Nasr asserts that Ibn al-ʿArabī was “one of the greatest Sufi poets of the Arabic language,” and recognizes the *Interpreter of Desires* as one of the Great Shaykh’s major works.271 The centrepiece of his poetical output is, of course, the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*. Michael Sells 269 Mustafa Kamal Hingary, ‘Mystical and Poetic Expression in the Tarjuman Al-Ashwaq of Muyi’ddin Ibn Arabi’ (University of Chicago, 1971).


says about the *Interpreter of Desires* that the collection “can be read with the finest love poems of the Middle Eastern tradition” and “[a]s high literature the poems of the *Tarjumān* embrace and bring to life centuries of classical Arabic poetic tradition.”

Chittick notes that Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings include much poetry (in addition to the *Tarjumān*), including three stand-alone diwans (“a collection of poems which have been sanctioned by the writer”) and thousands of verses found inserted into his prose works. The prose works include verses inserted at the beginning of each chapter at the beginning of monumental *Meccan Openings*. As Chittick says, Muḥyī al-Dīn, as “the greatest theoretician of imagination ... [was] able to utilize -- with perfect awareness of what he was doing -- the possibilities of poetic expression gained through imaginal perception.” Chittick points out how important verse was to Ibn al-ʿArabī, quoting Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own remarks on the subject in *Meccan Openings*:

> Pay close attention to every versification at the beginning of each chapter of this book, for it contains the knowledges of the chapter in the measure that I desired to call attention to it there. You will find in the verses what is not fond in the text of that chapter, and you will increase in knowledge of what the chapter contains through what I have mentioned in the verses.

Translations of poems from the *Futūhāt al-Makkīyya* are scattered among the various translations by Chittick and Chodkiewicz of the work’s chapters and sections; Ralph Austin has also translated a few poems from *Meccan Openings* for the *Journal of the Muḥyiddīn Ibn Ῥaḥīm Ibn Arabī Society*.

Fundamental to the understanding of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s poetry -- and absolutely critical for the purpose of this present project -- is the essential underlying assumption about the Shaykh’s verses that what he presents in his writing is always firmly grounded in a religious -- and Sufi -- context. Indeed, this underlying assumption is what will be proved relative to the *Interpreter of Desires*. Chittick again provides a

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276 Austin, ‘Two Poems from the Diwan of Ibn Ῥaḥīm’. 
translation of a key passage of *Openings* that indicates the absolute importance of poetry to Ibn al-ʿArabī:

Though no one loves any but his own Creator, he is veiled from Him by the love for [women], the world, money, position, and everything loved in the world. Poets exhaust their words writing about all these existent things without knowing, but the gnostics never hear a voice, a riddle, a panegyric, or a love poem that is not about Him, hidden beyond the veils of all forms.277

Ibn al-ʿArabī well understood the place of poets in the minds of many Muslims, as enunciated in the Qurān, and he wanted to clearly differentiate himself from those types of poets about whom the Qurān spoke in negative terms. In her exploration of mystical poetry in Islam, Schimmel explains at length the background of the sentiment and the sensitivity that the Shaykh confronted in offering his own poetic works:

The last verses of Sūra 26 … in the Koran contain a sharp criticism of the poets “who wander distracted in every valley and say what they do not do.” To be sure, this criticism was directed against the pagan poet-soothsayers with whom the Prophet Muhammad was sometimes compared by his adversaries (an allegation rejected in another place in the Koran); yet, the Koranic verdict has inspired much criticism of poetry among orthodox Muslims. It was greatly supported by a number of alleged traditions in which the Prophet condemned poetry as nafīth ash-shaitān, “what Satan has spit out,” or told his followers: “Verily it would be better for a man to have his belly filled with pus until it destroys him than to fill himself with poetry.” Such remarks were interpreted as pertaining to poetry in praise of sensual love, of the charms of women (and later, youthful boys), or of verses of singing of the enticing beauty of the “daughter of the grape,” i.e., wine -- things strictly prohibited by Islamic law.278


This passage clearly explains the mind-set of the conservative critic of the apparent sensuality of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s *Interpreter of Desires* and the Shaykh’s seemingly over-the-top response in writing the extended *Commentary* as an *apologia* as he attempted to refute the judgement against the poetry collection as written “in the erotic style.” It is also true that a benefit of writing in verse is that poems, in the traditional (conservative) Islamic context, “also have the advantage of giving acceptable expression -- since it can be imputed to poetic license -- to ideas that might appear suspect or even blasphemous if presented in a discursive form.”

Chodkiewicz notes that Henry Corbin characterized Ibn al-ʿArabī as being a man of hātin, “the hidden sense -- he who shatters the rigidities of the Letter in order to attain, by means of a free esoteric interpretation, a *taʿwil*, new meanings of Revelation.”

Other than the *Interpreter of Desires* and the poetry contained in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s major prose works, there seems to be some confusion among Akbarian scholars as to the existence of -- and nature of -- another major corpus of the Shaykh’s poetry. Claude Addas has concluded that two supposedly large poetical works are actually two parts of a greater opus. The first manuscript is entitled the *Dīwān al-maʿārif al-ilāhiyya* (*Collection of Divine Knowledge*). Addas states that:

when he set out to compose the *Dīwān al-maʿārif*, the Shaykh al-Akbar's intention was, according to what he said at the beginning of the text, to gather together into a *Summa Poetica* the totality of the verses that he had composed, and had either written copies of or could remember. However, the completion of this colossal project, one to which he was unable to devote all of his time, took a number of years. Partial copies of this *Summa* began to circulate while the project was still in progress; some of the partial copies are from the early part of the work, these being what we now know by the title *Dīwān al-maʿārif*; the others are its continuation, and these are what was printed in Bulaq as *Dīwān al-Shaykh al-Akbar*. The results of my research show these collections, considered to be two distinct works up to now, to be in reality the two


280 Chodkiewicz, 20.
main pieces of the Dīwān kabīr, the 'Great Dīwān' planned by Ibn 'Arabi.  

Roger Deladiere has attempted to define the content and location of various manuscripts relating to the Great Diwan; the result of this exercise is chiefly to confirm the extraordinary confusion over what is and what is not part of this supposed single manuscript, authorized by Ibn al-ʿArabī as a collection of his poetical work. To date, though, neither the Collection of Divine Knowledge (nor the more comprehensive Great Diwan referred to, to which it is a part, has been translated from Arabic or critically edited. Also, the relatively few verses at the heads of chapters of Meccan Openings have only been translated and interpreted as the individual 560 chapters have been made available in English. Roger Deladriere has stated that the 560 chapters of the Meccan Openings contain include 1,428 poetical “pieces,” totalling 7,102 verses.

I.B.9 Situating Ibn al-ʿArabi’s Poetry within Sufi Poetry

Seyyed Hossein Nasr has observed that poetry is among the most important legacies of the Sufi tradition in that Sufi poetry provides an exposition of both the doctrine and practice of Sufis in the context of the spiritual universe in which it operates, in language more accessible than that found in abstract treatises on doctrine or expositions on Sufi mystical-spiritual practices. Ibn al-ʿArabī had a firm commitment to this “lyrical mode” as an instrument to communicate doctrinal Sufism in an easily relatable and memorable way in support of his prose works on the same subject. As Denis McCauley states in his monograph on the poetry of Ibn al-ʿArabī, the Shaykh saw poetry as a “crucial part of his [Islamic and Sufi intellectual] message, so to discuss Ibn al-ʿArabī without mentioning his poetry is to miss half of the picture.”

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282 Deladrière, ‘The Dīwān of Ibn ’Arabi’.
283 Deladrière, 52.
Of all of the Shaykh’s poetry, Lings has declared that “the full flowering of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s poetic gift is … found in his Tarjumān al-Ashwāq.”287 Within this collection, McCauley identifies Poem 11 from in Tarjumān as being the poem most often cited even by many scholars when referring to the Shaykh’s poetry. The poem is easily remembered for its inclusion of the Sufi device of using the language of human love to explain Sufi theological ideas. More specifically, the poet-Lover connects in its most famous verse the concepts of “love” and “religion” when he affirms that, “I profess the religion of Love.”288 This simple and direct statement of faith is a jumping-off point for spiritual and scholarly enquirers into Islamic mystical love who then find further Sufi writings which introduces them to the mind-set of Sufi poets who utilise allusions and symbols drawing upon the archetypal poetry of the Arab, that is, the pre-Islamic odes which depict the lover following his Beloved through the desert.

This simple example from the Interpreter points to a useful way of situating Ibn al-ʿArabī as a poet within the Sufi tradition, which may be accomplished by viewing his poetic orientation along two axes. The first axis is the degree to which his poetry is influenced by pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, which also heavily influenced other Arab and Persian Sufi poets, versus, on the other end, symbols and language derived from the profane. The second axis is the degree to which his poetry incorporates, at one end of the axis, theosophical concepts included to elucidate upon Sufi doctrine, versus, at the other end of the axis, experiences that are primarily emotive, spiritual, mystical, or autobiographical experiences, but lacking didactic intention. Each of these ways of reading the Shaykh’s poetry in light of other relevant Sufi poets is addressed below.

The Influence of Pre-Islamic Arabic Poetry

The first Sufi poets whose works have survived wrote in Arabic. The great mystics such as poetess Rāb`ia of Basra (d. 801), the Egyptian saint Dhūʾn-Nūn (d. 861), and al-Ḥallāj of Baghdad (executed in 922) are held up as prime examples of


288 McCauley, Ibn ʿArabī’s Mystical Poetics, 1. This famous poem will be discussed later in much more detail. Nicholson’s oft-quoted translation is, “I follow the religion of love,” though a more faithful translation is “I profess…”, as the root [d-t-n] relates to the idea of owing allegiance to, or being indebted to, or submissive to something. Lane (p. 942 onwards) does, however, make reference to “follow” as a possible translation, and in the context of the wandering metaphor, “follow” is the more poetic rendering in English – and not inaccurate.
sacrificing of the self for love’s sake. Early mystics such as these worked with the richly textured Arabic language to develop a language for divine love. Sells notes that the “extraordinary role of the Quranic revelation in forming a template for that mode of expressing the inner being and its relationship to God.

In his study of early Islamic mysticism, Sells has demonstrated that another subtle and resonant literary mode created by Arab poets – the pre-Islamic Arabic odes – share important continuities with early Sufi poetry. Among the principal Sufi poetic forms – the ode (qasīda), the lyric (ghazal), the quatrain (rubāʾi), and the epic (masnāvī) – the ode was the major form of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, and it is commonly thought that the ghazal derives from the erotic prelude (nasīb) with which the qasīda generally began.

Ibn al-ʿArabī termed his poems of the Tarjumān “qasīdas”, although they differ from the classical qasīda. As Sells summarises, the classical pre-Islamic qasīda was composed of three, relatively independent sections: the remembrance of the Beloved (nasīb), the journey or quest, and the final boast. After the nasīb the poet would set off on a journey through the desert, along, by camel-mare, confronting the heat of the day, the terror of the night, hunger, exhaustion, mortality, and fate. In the pre-Islamic qasīda, there was always a strict distinction between the journey of the Beloved away from the poet, and al-ẓaʿn (“the departure”, implying here the departure of the caravan on a journey), which always occurred in the nasīb) and the journey of the poet/lover (which occurred in the second section of the qasīda). The poet’s quest or journey would end with him returning to his tribe boasting of the tribal values of generosity and

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290 Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic and Theological Writings*, 3.
291 Sells, 3.
294 ‘elegant amatory mentioning of a woman ... at the beginning of a poem.’ Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2787.
heroism, and the poem would conclude with either a personal boast or
the praise of a tribal prince.

The Tarjumān poems certainly contain most of the specific elements of the classical qaṣīda, but there is no clear delineation of sections and the collection lacks the tribal boast. The Shaykh’s poems may be more closely likened to the nasīb section of the qaṣīda in which the Lover-poet remembers his Beloved, combined with the second section’s journey through the desert. The content of the Interpreter poems also resemble the ghazal -- a description which means “love words”, “flirting”, or “love poetry” -- a form of poetry which grew out of the qaṣīda. Several motifs deriving from these poetic traditions were incorporated into Sufī verses. These included love-madness and perishing, which were combined by the Sufis with mystical bewilderment (hayra) of reason on contact with ultimate reality, and the annihilation (fana’) of the ego-self (nafs) in mystical union.

In common with many other Sufi poets who made use of the pre-Islamic ode form, Ibn al-ʿArabī makes use of imagery and metaphors common to Sufis who draw upon the profane world to use well-known symbols that suggest certain aspects of the Sufis’ mystical relationship with God. The deliberate use of these symbols implies that the writing of poetry is a deliberate act of encoding.” for some, but not all, Sufis. McCauley observes that Ibn al-ʿArabī was writing at a point when Sufi poetry had been developing for some time, and Sufi poetry cannot be considered completely in isolation from the secular, profane, love poetry from which it’s sprang. Many Sufi theoreticians, such as Ibn al-ʿArabī, made full use of the possibilities of imagery, symbolism, and storytelling, and hence there were able to speak even to those not familiar with theosophical vocabulary.

295 Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, 788; Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 2255.
296 Sells, Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’ān, Mi’raj, Poetic and Theological Writings, 69.
297 McCauley, Ibn ʿArabī’s Mystical Poetics, 46.
298 McCauley, 55.
**Autobiographical versus Theosophical Poetry**

Alexander Knysh, in his history of Islamic mysticism, notes that “poetic language, no matter what form it takes, is marked by its open-endedness.”\(^{300}\) This statement calls to attention the issue of interpretation of poetry. Within Sufism, the intention of different poets means that the mystical poetry can be interpreted usually as having one of two purposes: first, as autobiography, a document relating personal, individual, or inner experience; or, second, as exposition of Sufi beliefs, relating underlying theosophical doctrine that is in a literary form with didactic content consistent with previous Sufi understandings of the use of metaphors and symbols and what they mean.\(^{301}\)

In the case of the first purpose, mystical experience, under certain conditions poetic expression and autobiographic mystical experience may well be complementary, even identical. Both poetry and autobiographical mystical experience carry emotional, rather than factual content. Both are types of self-expression; the Sufi mystical experience, however, has self-annihilation in the divine mystery as a necessary component. Their affinity, though, springs from their common use of symbol as a means to convey subtle experiences that are not possible to convey in a rational discourse, which by its very nature requires lucidity and inclusion of a relation between the signifier and the signified.\(^{302}\)

Mystical poetry, however, cannot be seen as a simple recreation of mystical experience.\(^{303}\) The weight of authority supports the understanding of Sufi poetry as a literary form that is an exposition of Sufi theosophy: that, although some Sufi poets incorporated their own mystical experiences into their verses, the subject matter – like the forms of rhyme and meter – had to follow strict conventions to win acceptance as a discernible Sufi poem.\(^{304}\) The idea that poetry was validly Sufi poetry required that the verses of Sufi poets should be understood as part of the literary tradition that uses

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\(^{302}\) Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*, 150.

\(^{303}\) Knysh, 151.

conventional symbols than as individualistic mystical autobiography.\textsuperscript{305} Indeed, Sufi manuals instructed the novice to interpret all poetry, of whatever origin, along fixed metaphorical lines, so that, for example, the Beloved is God, the desert ruins equate to a spiritual station, and wine is a metaphor for spiritual intoxication.\textsuperscript{306} Ibn al-ʿArabī was a Sufi poet who adhered to these precepts, and is the preeminent example of using poetry to relate doctrinal Sufism without incorporating his personal experiences into verse, although he was certainly inspired by autobiographical events, such as meeting and being infatuated with the beauty and religious insight of Niẓām, which was the inspiration for the \textit{Tarjumān al-Ashwāq}; his commentary to the collection proves this point, as does the many examples of this present dissertation, which demonstrates his inclusion in the collection of theosophical ideas from \textit{Fusūṣ al-Hikam}.

### Comparison to Two Major Contemporaries: Ibn al-Fārid and Rūmī

Two influential Sufi poets were writing nearly contemporaneously with Ibn al-ʿArabī: the poet ʿUmar Ibn al-Fārid (d. 1235), who wrote from the perspective of the Arabic culture and language, and the poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207-1273), who wrote from the Persian perspective. Discussing these two poets in relation to Ibn al-ʿArabī serves to demonstrate some of the key similarities and differences between the Arab and later Persian Sufi poets.

Ibn al-Fārid was a contemporary of Ibn al-ʿArabī who played an exceptional role in the later history of Islamic theoretical gnosis.\textsuperscript{307} In his \textit{al-Ṭāʾiyya} (poem rhyming in Ṭāʾ) is contained what Nasr considers to be a complete exposition of the doctrines of gnosis (ʿirfān) expressed in sublime poetry, which is the subject of several

\textsuperscript{305} Ernst, 164.

\textsuperscript{306} Ernst, 161.

\textsuperscript{307} Concerning \textit{Meccan Revelations}, a story was told that Ibn al-ʿArabī once wrote to Ibn al-Fārid asking permission to comment on the Poem of the Sufi Way, to which Ibn al-Fārid is said to have replied, “Your book entitled Meccan Revelations is a commentary on it”… It highlights the close association of the two mystics within the later Sufi tradition. This was largely the result of commentaries written on the Poem of the Sufi Way and the Wine Ode by several of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s followers, who read and analysed the poems in terms of their master’s teachings on exisgence (wujūd) and the perfectly realized human being (al-insānal-kāmil). This common link aside, there is little evidence that al-Fārid and Ibn al-ʿArabī even knew of each other, not to mention corresponded Emil Homerin, ‘Introduction’, in \textit{Umar Ibn al-Fārid: Sufi Verse, Saintly Life}, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 35.
commentaries that are themselves important texts on gnosis. Schimmel remarks that “it has become customary to mention the name of Ibn al-ʿArabī along with that of his contemporary Ibn al-Fārid – as different as the two great thirteenth-century masters of Arabic Sufism were.” While Ibn al-ʿArabī’s influence derives chiefly from his enormous number of his prose works, Ibn al-Fārid’s output was but a small number of Arabic odes of exquisite beauty in the style of Arabic poetry, and he wrote no prose at all.∗

Contrary to the Sufis in earlier times, whose language carried hardly any reminiscences of classical love poetry, Ibn al-Fārid employed the whole heritage of traditional Arabic poetry: the address to the journeying beloved, the description of the desert landscape, and the images of animals, flowers, and other vegetation the were metaphors for concepts relating to mystical love that were used by other Sufi poets. The Divine, for example, is hidden behind the names of Salma and Hind, allusions to whom are also found in the Shaykh’s Tarjumān. Ibn al-Fārid was a master of the poetry of love and wine, containing strong allusions to the classical tradition combined with clear references to Sufi practice. His longer compositions, particularly the famous “Wine Ode” (Khamriyya) and the “Poem of the Way”, became mainstays of Sufi interpretation and performance.∗

Michael Sells has concluded that Ibn al-Fārid is the the Arabic poet who brought the stations of pilgrimage, of love, and of mystical experience together most strongly. Schimmel declares that Islamic poetry, which developed from simple ascetic songs of the early mystics into “chaste and lucid verses” verses which speak of the eternal love between man and God, reaching the climax of classical Arabic poetry in the odes of Ibn al-Fārid. His verses were later interpreted by Sufis in a systematic way in light of the metaphysics of the school of Ibn al-ʿArabī.

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309 Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 274.
310 Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 41.
311 Ernst, Sufism: An Essential Introduction to the Philosophy and Practice of the Mystical Tradition of Islam, 155.
314 Ernst, Sufism: An Essential Introduction to the Philosophy and Practice of the Mystical Tradition of Islam, 156.
The firm support for the view of Ibn al-Fārid as a poet whose verses are composed in conformity with the conventional expectations of containing metaphors speaking of doctrinal Sufism is balanced against those seeking “sincerity” in the content of medieval Sufi poetry – meaning, an autobiographical voice – who found such a voice in the poetry of Ibn al-Fārid. Carl Ernst agrees that the main early interpretation of Ibn al-Fārid’s poetry was through the the lens of the theoretical gnosis of Ibn al-ʿArabī, but acknowledges that this emphasis on the poet’s doctrinal aspects has drawn attention away from the poetry itself considered as literature, and asserts that other major interpretations have viewed his works mainly as a record of personal mystical experience.  

McCauley notes that critics such as Nicholson were eager to demonstrate the the Ṭāʿīyya was composed in a trance and the poetry romantically inspired. This is in contrast to the didactic intent of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own poems, not only in his theosophical treatises but, as the central thesis of this dissertation demonstrates, as an important part of his Tarjumān, inspired – though it was -- by his infatuation with a beautiful and theologically articulate girl who became the Beloved-Divine.

Nicholson said that unless there were clues to the poet’s intention, it actually might not be possible to determine whether his beloved is human or divine. He goes on to say that Ibn al-ʿArabī is among the few Arabs who have excelled in this ambiguous style, though its supreme master is al-Fārid. Nicholson adds further by saying that Ibn al-Fārid’s 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 by a strange exaltation of feeling, fine-drawn phantasies, and if Ibn al-Fārid had followed the example of Ibn al-ʿArabī and written a commentary on his own poems, it might have added considerably to our knowledge of his mystical beliefs.” Emil Homerin asserts that, whichever view is taken on the intention of the Ibn al-Fārid’s verses, it is certainly true that the writings of both mystics convey a strongly similar view of a “unified reality”, whose self-disclosure occurs on the Day of the Covenant (referred to in Sūra 7:172, when God posed the question, “Am I not your

315 Ernst, 156.
Both poets convey the idea that as the seeker progresses upon his spiritual path, he is able to witness this self-disclosure in Creation and, once enlightened, the seeker may become an active conduit of gnosis. Homerin concludes by saying that, despite these important similarities, several recent studies have pointed out key differences in the mystical terms used by Ibn al-Fārid and Ibn al-ʿArabī and his disciples, which strongly suggests that ideas common to the works of Ibn al-Fārid and Ibn al-ʿArabī did not result from direct influence between the two men but from their shared Sufi heritage, which included the works of al-Tustarī, al-Junayd, al-Ghazalī, and many other well-known Sufi masters.319

A.J Arberry declares that Arabic Sufis stressed the philosophical side of mysticism, giving special attention to constructing a stable theosophical system. He contrasts this with the Persians Islamic mystics who developed an aesthetic approach to poetry that rose high above pure speculative theology.320 The Persian Sufis took over the ghazal from the Arabs and utilised metaphors to convey in a highly literary fashion Divine love and the Divine’s self-disclosure in his Creation.321 As with Arabic Sufi poetry, a number of the subjects and themes of mystical poetry were taken over wholesale into Persian from the profane literary tradition and the images found in Persian poetry is a mixture of pre-Islamic and Islamic referents.322 It was at about the same time as Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ibn al-Fārid wrote that mystical poetry in Persia reached its apex in Rumi’s work, and the Sufi orders, which were just beginning to solidify, carried the message of Divine love into the lands of Islamic influence.323,324

As Arberry notes, Rūmī in Persian – in the poet’s Mathnawī (a type of poem rhyning in its half-verse which was the standard form of Rūmī’s mystical poetry) --

321 Arberry, 113.
322 Ernst, Sufism: An Essential Introduction to the Philosophy and Practice of the Mystical Tradition of Islam, 157–58.
324 Nicholson notes that there are several reasons why Ibn al-ʿArabī’s poetry has been comparatively neglected in scholarly research. On a basic level, there are biases and quirks of individual scholars and of early Orientalism, not the least a certain reluctance to engage with Arabic Sufi poetry as a whole. Nicholson, for one, held that “racial endowment” made Persians more suited to writing mystical poetry than Arabs: ‘[t]he Arab shares with other Semitic peoples an incapacity for harmonising and unifying the particular facts of experience.’” Nicholson, Studies in Islamic Mysticism, 163 cited in; McCauley, Ibn ʿArabī’s Mystical Poetics, 4.
accomplished what Ibn al-ʿArabī had done in summing up and memorialising in a single system all that had been said on Islamic mysticism in Arabic before him, both poets spanning the entire range of Sufi speculation. Chittick notes, however, that for Rūmī, like many other Sufis, God is the only ontologically real being. Rūmī thus does not set out in his *Mathnawī* to theorise about the relationship between the Divine and human beings, or the nature of the Divine being: the *Mathnawī* is not systematic theosophical exposition. As William Chittick points out, “Rūmī’s goal is not primarily to explain, but to guide.”

Schimmel agrees with Chittick’s assessment. She has remarked that nothing could be more alien to Rūmī than a systematisation of his thought, particularly when this systematisation is undertaken as in hundreds of commentaries up to our present day through Ibn al-ʿArabī’s theosophy, which was being taught in Konya by Rūmī’s colleague, Šadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Qunāwī, himself Ibn al-ʿArabī’s foremost interpreter. The *Mathnawī*, with its nearly 26,000 verses contains an abundance of mystical lore, but it lacks a systematic structure, and some of Rūmī’s Persian contemporaries chided him because he did not enter into any theoretical discussions or use the technical vocabulary of the Sufis. Rūmī was not interested in the theosophical aspects of mysticism which developed under Ibn al-ʿArabī’s influence. If any summary of Rūmī’s *Mathnawī* can discerned of a theosophical goal, it is the single phrase that lies at the heart of Islam: “There is no God but God.”

Arberry observes that the age of Ibn al-Fārid, Ibn al-ʿArabī, and Rūmī represents the climax of Sufi lyrical achievement, both theoretically and artistically. Although the Sufi orders were growing due to the patronage of sultans and princes in Islamic lands, he states that the signs of decay appeared more and more clearly, especially related to the cult of saints, against which orthodox Islam protested without effect. The lasting impact of Ibn al-ʿArabī on Sufism is, of course, his creation of a

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328 Schimmel, 93.
metaphysical vocabulary by which God can be discussed. His work became a significant part of the larger trend towards the intellectualisation of Sufi experience. Ibn al-ʿArabī’s works in prose -- as in his Tarjumān al-Ashwāq -- became, as Schimmel says, the “spiritual staple of the Sufis because they offered a very logical world view which was condensed by most poets to the simple phrase “Everything is He.”

I.C Dissertation Method and Organisation

As Chittick has already indicated, “[t]oo often, in the case of studying Ibn al-ʿArabī, ‘getting to the point’ is to kill” and “[t]o get to the point is to bring about closure, but there is no closure, only disclosure.” Yet this present project must attempt to enclose a small portion of the Shaykh al-Akbar’s vast output for the purpose of examining his words and his ideas, much in the same way that Qūnāwī and his other disciples and synthesizers provided “reasoned” commentaries on Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings as a way of unpacking and explaining the symbols and esoteric knowledge consistent with the Greatest Master’s Sufi doctrine.

As previously stated, the thesis of this project is that -- contrary to the opinion of both Ibn al-ʿArabī’s contemporary conservative critics and even some modern scholars -- the sensual poetry of Interpreter of Desires evidences a large number of highly important elements of Sufism, a conclusion that may be reached apart from reference to from the Great Shaykh’s own formal defence of his work.

The method of this present project is to focus on two primary texts of Ibn al-ʿArabī, explicating the poems of Interpreter of Desires according to the template of theory devised from his summa of doctrinal Sufism, Bezels of Wisdom. Izutsu’s previously discussed cautions about the Shaykh’s corpus are highly relevant to selecting Bezels as the single theoretical template for the analysis as Izutsu reminds other scholars working with the Great Shaykh’s texts that “it is not only irrelevant but, even more, positively dangerous to try to note everything the author has said and written on each subject over a period of many years” because “one might easily drown oneself in the vast ocean of concepts, images and symbols that are scattered about in utter disorder throughout the hundreds of his works, and lose sight of the main line or

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331 McCauley, Ibn ʿArabī’s Mystical Poetics, 14.

332 Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 37.

lines of thought and the guiding spirit that underlies the whole structure”334; Izutsu says further that it is “more profitable to concentrate on [Bezels] in which [Ibn al-ʿArabī] presents his thought in its maturest form.”335

The rationale for focusing primarily on the Shaykh’s own texts -- as opposed to incorporating the vast body of his disciples’ or scholars’ later commentaries -- is shared by Zargar in his very recently published monograph; that is, the intense and almost exclusive focus of the thesis must be on source texts [that reflect] the premise that the keys of interpretation for Sufi assertions, practices, and expressive undertakings lie in their own contemplative writings. This has been the case not in order to diminish other valid approaches to Sufism, Islamic studies, or literary studies, but because of the postulate that mystical experience resists external rational methods and can only be discussed ... though the language used by such mystics.336

Thus, the primary evidence proving the thesis comes from the texts themselves, and not from secondary literature. This is an especially credible approach given the great paucity of secondary literature on the topic of Interpreter of Desires, especially in relation to theology within these poems. The central work of the present project’s analysis is to show how specific verses of the poems themselves offer evidence that may be interpreted as consistent with the Great Shaykh’s doctrine.

The analysis of the doctrinal content of the poems is organised around three major themes, derived from the Bezels text:

1. Divine Self-Disclosure
2. Inherent Predisposition, Suffering & Religion

These three major themes were selected after a thorough analysis of both the Bezels text and the Interpreter of Desires text to determine what the major overlapping themes are. The majority of text from each of the twenty-seven Bezels chapters (from the Austin translation) was reorganized according to major themes. All of the approximately 1,200

334 Izutsu, Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts, 3.
335 Izutsu, 4.
336 Zargar, Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ʿArabi and ʿIraqi, 8.
verses from *Interpreter of Desires* (from the Nicholson translation) were classified and grouped according to major themes within the poetry collection. The resulting matrix allowed for grouping of verse-themes by the *Bezels* themes. Obviously, there is interesting material not included in the above major themes, but each major theme allows for a considerable number of sub-themes, as discussed more fully within the analytical chapters of this dissertation. The structure of each analytical chapter is that the theoretical framework is first synthesized and organised from the various *Bezels* chapters relating to the concept being examined, then the theory will be applied to the poems to demonstrate how the theory is evidenced in the poetry. The reader will notice that in applying this method to the poetry, some verses are examined in more than one section, as application of different doctrinal points to the same verses often yields differently nuanced understandings of those poems from a theoretical perspective.

As already discussed and justified, the evidence for Ibn al-ʿArabiʾs theoretical gnosis will be derived solely from the poems, without reference to Ibn al-ʿArabiʾs own *Commentary*. Generally, commentaries on *Bezels* by other Sufis will not be incorporated, as one of the objectives of this thesis is to prove that the theory in *Bezels* -- though compact -- is sufficient to explicate the *Interpreter of Desires* poems according to Ibn al-ʿArabiʾs theosophical themes. Admittedly, a different approach to investigating the Sufi doctrines in the poems would be to incorporate other traditional commentaries in addition to incorporating Ibn al-ʿArabiʾs own writings on the same topics from his *Meccan Openings*, but this is far too broad an approach in such a focused project. Also not within the scope of the present project, and not explored in depth, are those subjects already thoroughly examined by other scholars. Two of these subjects include the general background and symbolism of the *qaṣīda/nasīb* forms of poetry, and Ibn al-ʿArabiʾs theories of the imagination/imaginal/ *barzakh*; the latter is discussed in *Bezels* but not examined in this present project or applied to the *Interpreter of Desires*. It is important to note, also, that this dissertation is not a critique of the theories of *Bezels*, but an application of those theories to the *Interpreter of Desires* poems.

Finally, as this is not a translation project, the present project relies substantially upon the two highly reliable English translations of *Bezels of Wisdom* (Austin) and *Interpreter of Desires* (Nicholson). The reliability of both of these texts -- and their use by previous scholars -- has already been demonstrated.
I.D Speaking About the Beloved: God, Mirror or Metaphor?

Before presenting the major exploration of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s theories and explicating the poetry according to his own doctrinal gnosis, the subject of how symbolism versus metaphor and similitude in the poetry works needs to be briefly examined, especially in relation to the Beloved. This consideration affects not only the way in which the poet presents material in the collection, but in how this present project must deal with the issue.

I.D.1 Alternative Meanings and Symbolism

Part of the issue revolves around the general approach to looking for alternative meanings in both theological and literary texts. Nasr discusses the issue in relation to interpreting the Qur ān. He says that the Qur ān may be read on many levels of meaning; some Sufis maintain that there are seven levels, the highest level known only to God. Looking for these inner meanings -- a process called tawil -- is to take the Qur ān back to its origin, moving from the outward meaning to deeper inward meanings. Ibn al-ʿArabī’s approach to theological issues was certainly to look for the inner meanings in the Qur ān and hadiths, largely to find meanings that would present an immanental view of God as a balance to the traditional reason-based transcendent view in Islam. Poetry, of course, is also very much concerned with reading alternative meanings to words and combinations of words, so that in Interpreter of Desires there is the opportunity to interpret the deeper meanings of the verses in light of the deeper meanings the Qur ān and hadiths as contained in Sufi doctrine. As discussed, that approach to interpretation is the foundation of the method of this present project. What follows is first a discussion of symbolism and image, then a more specific discussion of the Beloved in the poems.

Assessing symbolism and images -- encompassing simile and metaphor -- is important both to tawil and explicating the poetry. Though one writer has said alternative interpretations to text may wander too far away from original meaning, saying that “[s]ymbolic language points to a hinterland of meaning,” one of the formal qualities of Sufism listed by Junayd, one of the early Persian Islamic mystics, is

“capacity to communicate by symbolism.” Critical to the understanding of the *Interpreter of Desires* text in terms of Sufi/Islamic theology is the fact that, as Burckhardt says, “[s]ince Sufism represents the inner aspect of Islam its doctrine is in substance an esoteric commentary on the Qurān.” As already stated, there is in the Taʾwīl approach not a single meaning to the Qurān but, as Muhammad said, “the Qurān contains in each part several meanings.” The explication of the poetry is analogized to the exegesis of the Qurān where the symbol is a highly valuable and valid device for understanding the many meanings of the text. Burckhardt says further in this regard that

Sufi commentators know that the anthropomorphic and … ingenuous form of the sacred text not only answers to a practical need -- that of being accessible to the whole of a human collectivity and so to every man, but also corresponds at the same time to the process of Divine Manifestation in the sense that the Divine Spirit loves as it were to cloth Itself in concrete forms that are simple and not discursive; herein lies an aspect of the incommensurability of God, who -- as the Qurān puts it -- ‘is not ashamed to take a gnat as a symbol’ *[Sūra 2:26]*. This means that the limitation inherent in the symbol cannot lower Him Who is symbolized: on the contrary, it is precisely in virtue of His perfection -- of His Infinity -- that He is reflected at every possible level of existence by ‘signs’ that are always unique.

The doctrinal Sufi approach to the Qurān and to Islam is to acknowledge the many levels of interpretation available to appreciate God in both his immanence and transcendence; the variety of interpretations gives rise to a variety of voices in Islam and within Sufism, of which Ibn al-ʿArabī is one. As Lings says, Sufis change their “plane of utterance” even more so than the Qurān.

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One of the import contributions of Sufism has been to call attention to the signs of God to those in Islam who might otherwise focus primarily on God’s ineffability. “Poetry ... does not ‘explain’, it points. It expresses the precedence of mercy by evoking an experience and calling forth love, and it does this by the magic of beautiful language, enticing imagery and intoxicating rhythm.”\(^\text{343}\) As Murata and Chittick state,

> Many Sufi theoreticians made full use of the possibilities of imagery, symbolism, and storytelling, and hence they were able to speak to everyone. Anyone can understand a story, even if the point of the story is a subtle theological or metaphysical teaching, but very few people can understand the abstract reasoning involved in the typical arguments of the Kalam specialists and the philosophers. Moreover, Sufi authors used poetry to great advantage.... They employed their poetry to celebrate the presence of God in all things.\(^\text{344}\)

The symbolism of the Qurān and Hadith -- revealed by the poet in the *Interpreter of Desires* -- benefits from “the indeterminacy of language about the sacred, which [is a] characteristic of symbolic language, [which] argues not only against literalism, but in favour of a continuing rather than completed symbolisation.”\(^\text{345}\) Some critics even say that “systems of belief and doctrine are secondary or tertiary phenomena.... to the primary symbols which express the belonging of man to the sacred.”\(^\text{346}\) The same writer says forthrightly that the “idea of God, in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s way of thinking, is a symbol rather than an exact representation of ultimate reality.”\(^\text{347}\) The Great Shaykh is known for his image-making throughout his works, not just in his poetry, but in works that are primarily prose, such as *Meccan Openings*. In this regard, Ibn al-ʿArabī succeeds in evoking personal images that resonate with his reader, the result being that “[o]ne of the remarkable features of Ibn


\(^\text{346}\) Esmail, 16.

\(^\text{347}\) Esmail, 27.
al-ʿArabī’s thought is its sustained fusion between concept and image. He thinks logically and poetically at one and the same time.”\(^{348}\)

I.D.2. Symbolism in *Interpreter of Desires*

More specific to the *Interpreter of Desires*, Martin Lings is insistent that the poems do include important theological symbols. He notes that Niẓām’s name means for the poet “harmony of union with God,” which is “her central significance in these poems; but, being for him as a semi-transparent veil between this world and the next, her beauty was also his means of beholding the various divine aspects, whence the frequent references to a plurality of loved ones.” Lings specifically references the “symbolism” in the collection, noting its complexity, but also saying that “many of the poems are simple enough to be enjoyed without any recourse to [Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own] commentary, which can be replaced by the general knowledge that, for the mystic, the divinity is always the ultimate object of love.”\(^{349}\) Nicholson adds, in regard to the collection, that “the Sufis adopt the symbolic style because there is no other possible way of interpreting mystical experience. So little does knowledge of the infinite revealed in ecstatic vision need an artificial disguise that it cannot be communicated at all except through types and emblems drawn from the sensible world, which, imperfect as they are, may suggest and shadow forth a deeper meaning than appears on the surface.”\(^{350}\)

Chittick specifically addresses the issue of why Ibn al-ʿArabī would use poetic imagery to speak of God in *Interpreter of Desires*. The central question is why he would present his doctrinal views in the form of poetry. Chittick’s views are worth quoting at length as he is writing explicitly in relation to the poems of the collection:

> If his poetry refers to God and not to beautiful women, why does he disguise the fact? There are a number of answers to this question. One is that these are divine self-disclosures, not visions of God in Himself. By definition we are dealing not with God as God, but with God inasmuch as He shows Himself. Hence the adept speaks in terms of his perception of God’s showings, and this perception takes place within

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348 Esmail, 27.


a formal medium. This is the level of the divine similarity to the soul, and similarity can only be grasped in relation to created things. Hence creation and self-disclosure determine the points of reference.

Second, the poet wants to convey his vision to the reader in a language that the reader will be able to understand. He cannot use the rational and abstract language of dogmatic theology, since it is unable to express the divine self-disclosures. The perception of God’s self-disclosures takes place within the imaginal realm in terms of the five senses. What has been perceived can only be expressed by langue that describes concrete, sensory objects. Abstract explanations of the imagery would take the reader further away from the reality of the self-disclosure, not closer to it.\footnote{Chittick, \textit{Imaginal Worlds: Ibn Al-ʿArabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity}, 78–79.}

Chittick’s third reason is that voiced by Ibn al-ʿArabī himself, in that it is easier and more interesting to express these theological matters in the language of erotic love.

Finally, the fourth reason is the concept of Sufi courtesy (\textit{adab}) which prefers to refer to God less directly, as the Shaykh does in the poetry, in using similitudes for God when they are available.\footnote{Chittick, 78–79.}

One especially significant discussion -- meriting separate consideration -- of the issues of symbols in Sufi poetry and the status of the Beloved has been taken up by Jaroslov Stetkevych in his very important work on the \textit{qaṣīda}, \textit{Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasīb}.\footnote{Stetkevych, \textit{The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in The Classical Arabic Nasib}.} It must be stated at the outset that Stetkevych is no great admirer of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writing in \textit{Interpreter of Desires}, characterizing it as a “poetically undistinguished lyrical collection.” At the heart of his criticism, though, is the poet’s \textit{Commentary}, which Stetkevych says “appears trapped in its own hermeneutic logic, detached and esoteric.” Stetkevych says that the Commentary stands alone as text, “treating the poetry merely as a ‘point of departure,’ and the poetry, going its own traditional ways, never quite manages to warrant the flights of the symbolic imagination of the commentary.” Oddly -- considering that Ibn al-ʿArabī was a Sufi and that the \textit{Interpreter of Desires} is unambiguously a Sufi poetry collection written in the Sufi \textit{nasīb} tradition -- Stetkevych remarks that, “[a]llmost
wholly unconnected with the possible levels of reading of underlying verses and even contrary to their mood, words of important classical-cultural, poetically imbedded connotation are reduced to mystic states or theological concepts.” Seemingly in support of the rationale for this present project in not relying upon the Commentary for a Sufic theoretical template, Stetkevych says that Ibn al-ʿArabi’s mystical explications in his Commentary “ought to have been derived from within the poem [emphasis added] as true imagist and symbolic resonances that are in harmony with their poetically activated semantic base” as to do otherwise, as Stetkevych suggests the poet does, “a mystical-symbolic commentary that refused to be bound by the poem that has engendered it degenerates into an exercise in capricious mystical hermeneutics entirely at the expense of its primary semantic matrix, which is the poem.”

In other words, Stetkevych says that the poems themselves should be the sole basis for explication along theological lines without reliance upon the Commentary. This thesis will demonstrate that, completely contrary the Stetkevych assertion that the collection contains only a “modest amount of mystical substance,” the Interpreter of Desires contains a very large amount of highly important mystical material, which is evident even without the aid of the Great Shaykh’s own Commentary. The primary semantic base -- the poems -- actually does form the matrix upon which the theological symbolism which resonates for the intended readership of the collection, that is, other Sufis knowledgeable -- or adepts learning about -- theoretical gnosis. Stetkevych’s mistake, as will be shown in this present project, is that he does not assess the value of the doctrinal Sufism contained in the poems themselves and, instead, views the poems largely through the clouded lens of the Commentary, which was written by Ibn al-ʿArabī for those -- such as Stetkevych -- who did not fully understand or appreciate the symbolic mystical concepts in the poems.

I.D.3 The Beloved and the Sufi-Lover in Interpreter of Desires

Finally, in relation to the topic of symbols and images, the subject of the Beloved of the Great Shaykh’s poems must be generally assessed, even before the more

354 Stetkevych, 92.
355 See Zargar’s own more extended critique of Stetkevych in which Zargar concludes also that Stetkevych’s error is in his approaching the poetry collection and the Commentary separately and in his not considering other of the Shaykh’s texts in relation to Interpreter of Desires. Zargar, Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ʿArabi and ʿIraqī, 124.
specific explications according to the Bezels’ Akbarian theories. This subject merits particular consideration due to the several ways in which the Beloved may be interpreted and touches upon practical considerations in writing about the Beloved in this present project.

In one sense, on a psychological level, Ibn al-ʿArabī believes that the object of love -- the Beloved -- does not even exist. Chittick explains that “[w]hen people love something, they desire to achieve a nearness or a union with the object of their love. As long as they have not achieved the object of their desire, it does not exist in relation to them.” Chittick quotes the Shaykh: “It is characteristic of the beloved to be nonexistent, and necessarily so. The lover loves to bring the non-existent thing into existence, or for it to occur within an existent thing.”356 The Sufi-lover of the poems wants to come to proximity with God -- and it is this objective to which the Sufi-lover of the poems strives, without success -- as will be shown.

Sells confirms in his introduction to the qaṣīda form of Sufī poetry that the incorporation of the “beloved” and related concepts is integral to Sufī doctrine. Specifically,

The Sufis did not borrow the poetic themes of the loved beloved, the intoxication of wine, or the “perishing” out of love for the beloved to use as a vehicle for expressing ideas and sensibility developed independently from the poetry. Rather, the refinement of theme, mood, emotion, and diction within the poetry was from very early on in Sufism an integral aspect of the mystical sensibility.357

Camille Adams Helminski, in Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure, says that, on the “profoundly relational” Sufi path, God is the real “Beloved” of human beings.358

More specific to the Beloved of Interpreter of Desires, Sells says that Ibn al-ʿArabī


does not spend time identifying or delimiting the beloved as earthly or heavenly. Such distinctions to the lover would be obtuse, given that the one who is loved is beyond all categories and cannot be excluded from any aspect of reality. Even to raise the question about the identity of the beloved would be indiscrete, a violation of adab or the proper conduct of the lover.\textsuperscript{359}

Austin deems the character of the Beloved Niẓām as “one of the most important archetypes of religious and mystical experience.”\textsuperscript{360} He clearly establishes in his important assessment of the girl Niẓām according to the last chapter of Bezels -- the chapter in which Ibn al-ʿArabī examines the hadith about women, perfume, and prayer -- that the status of the Beloved definitely includes being an “image” and being the “personification” of divine attributes:

Niẓām is for Ibn ʿArabī a wonderful image of the divine treasure, the divine need to know and love that treasure, the creational beauty which elicits and attracts that love and the innate identity which promises reunion and bliss. In other terms, she is the personification of the very mercy of becoming and actuality which promotes and fulfills the divine love, just as again it might be said that she manifests ‘the garden’ in which the Names might sow themselves and realise their potentialities.

On both the Cosmic and the human level, the delightful lady of Isphahan is an image of the divine Love and of that human love which is its reflection.\textsuperscript{361}

This view of Niẓām is especially telling in that it does indicate that the Beloved is not just a human being who reflects back to God His own attributes. She also works in the poems as a personification of God Himself. Other interpreters claim that the Beloved is a metaphor for God, in saying, “[i]n his erotic-mystical verses, [Ibn al-ʿArabī] claims that his beloved Niẓām is but an epiphanic of the One.”\textsuperscript{362}

\textsuperscript{359} Sells, ‘Love’, 155.
\textsuperscript{361} Austin, 40.
Corbin’s own approach to this question of the Beloved’s status in the poems is that Niẓām is “a being apprehended directly by the Imagination [who] is transfigured into a symbol thanks to a theophanic light, that is a light which reveals its dimension of transcendence. From the very first the figure of the young girl was apprehended by the Imagination on a visionary plane, in which it was manifested as an “apparitional Figure” of Sophia aeterna,” a figure of eternal wisdom. Corbin additionally says that the entire collection “may be regarded as a celebration of [Ibn al-ʿArabi’s] meeting with the mystic Sophia or as an inner autobiography moving to the rhythm of his joys and fears.”

Significantly, Sells asserts the possibility that the Beloved of Interpreter of Desires can be viewed as the female God, explaining that “while Sufis frequently used the love poem to represent the deity in the feminine, Poem 2 (“Armies of My Patience”) is one of the most brilliant and extended treatments of God in feminine form ever composed in an Abrahamic tradition.” Certainly, Sells’ bold assertion regarding the poet’s treatment pulls the issue of the feminine God in Ibn al-ʿArabi’s writing to the forefront by reminding the poems’ readers that the Beloved of the poems -- especially as God, and not just a metaphor or simile -- can, indeed, be feminine. Schimmel’s perspective is not dissimilar. She points out that, although the poems of Interpreter of Desires have the characteristics of a classical nasīb, Ibn al-ʿArabī included in the verses “a deeper mystical-philosophical dimension” which constantly confront the reader with images pointing to the divine-feminine....

The recent study by Zargar is also worth reviewing separately in relation to immanence as it has as its premise that “the form in which God’s self-disclosures are most fully witnessed is the human form.” This approach includes the assertion that specific sensual descriptions of the girl in Interpreter of Desires (such as in Poem 46) “should thwart any false assumptions that the poem or its commentary stem from a system of representations, where the beloved is a transcendent God and the expression of love mere allegory.” Zargar keeps bringing the focus of the discussion back to the

363 Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi, 139.
364 Corbin, 140.
365 Sells, Stations Of Desire: Love Elegies From Ibn ʿArabi And New Poems, 44.
366 Schimmel, My Soul Is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam, 102.
girl’s being a form of beauty that reflects the attributes of God. Zargar does, however, acknowledge parallels between “the awesome and vanquishing beauty of the beloved and the awesomeness of God.” His particular perspective on explicating the beloved’s physical descriptions in the love poetry is primarily to disavow metaphorical allusions to God’s attributes and, rather, to assert that the attributes made manifest immanently in the Cosmos are perceived by the lover and, therefore, affect him.\footnote{Zargar, 124.}

Zargar further affirms the existence of “intentional ambiguity between human and divine beloved,” citing as an example the following verses from Poem 46 (using Zargar’s translation):

\begin{quote}
Doesn’t she rise sun-like in my fantasy, and set only in my heart? 
Gone is the inauspiciousness of the moringa tree and willow! 
There is no cawing for the crow in our alighting places, 
nor can he inflict a wound in the order of togetherness.\footnote{Zargar, 123.}
\end{quote}

Zargar explicates the above, saying, “the beloved can no longer be separated from the lover because she persists in his consciousness or mind (khaladi); this accords with the definition of shahid [witnessing] that has been seen, a continuing trace that remains in the gnostic’s heart and that he enjoys witnessing in the world exterior.... Indeed, the heart might be considered the setting of the poem, a setting the expansiveness of which appears most vividly in the poet’s commentary.”\footnote{Zargar, 125.} Though the Great Shaykh’s Commentary is not within the scope of this present project, it is mentioned in this context as it should be noted that Zargar affirms that the Commentary, “aside from furthering the awareness of profundity in the amorous lyric and in the Sufi amorous lyric, and in addition to warding off misunderstanding ... also represents the significance of amorous poetry for the spiritual path and the ability of amorous poetry to exteriorize the sense of love in mystical experience.” Furthermore, the Commentary “serves as an important inducer of tashbih/similitude for the gnostics” and the “language of the commentary, therefore, in drawing connections between the language of contemplative Sufism and amorous poetry, brings into the realm of vision and love that which might still be abstract for the novice wayfarer.”\footnote{Zargar, 127.}
Zargar summarizes his method of reading the *Interpreter of Desires* poems, saying that “[f]ar from being a quid pro quo or hermetic analysis, Ibn ‘Arabi’s manner of interpretation assumes that the poem itself is a manifestation of the experience of beauty, subject to the very grades and realms of existence possessed by the human form”:

Conjoining the human beloved and the divine in forms is the gnostic’s experience of beauty. In other words, the gnostic sees the human form and therein the divine self-disclosures -- his experience brings two together, or at the very least, recognizes their unity.... The gnostic’s words do more than simply capture the human beloved and her effects; they do so through the medium of his enlightened experience. Thus the words of the poem become the form that captures meaning. This artistic form, unlike the human form, is shaped solely by the lover-perceiver. Meaning has now taken two forms, the human beloved and the recorded experience of that beloved; the first is determined by existence, the second is determined by the gnostic’s experience of existence. The delight in the poetry derives from its ability to recreate meaningful form of recorded experience in the hearts of those exposed to it. Ibn ‘Arabi’s commentary, while never directly propounding such significance to poetry, inherently elevates recorded poetic experience of love to a level of signification far beyond mere emotion or mere words. Only that which captures meaning deserves the sort of analysis that Ibn ‘Arabi offers.\(^{372}\)

Zargar’s approach to the *Interpreter of Desires* is to rely largely upon Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own *Commentary* for explicating the poetry, which is, of course -- as previously explained -- not the approach of the present project. As discussed, simply relying upon the poet’s own explanations is not always sufficient and certainly does not preclude alternative explications which may add even more theological significance to the poetry than the poet allows. Zargar’s approach is but one of many that can validly be taken to understanding God Who is presented both in His immanence and transcendence in the collection. The fact is, Ibn al-ʿArabī clearly uses many symbols in

the poetry -- as discussed herein -- to represent God. Authorities such as Arberry have noted the importance of representation in works such as the *Interpreter of Desires* in stating, “[f]ully to understand the later poetry of Sufism, especially that of the Persian school -- although this is equally characteristic of writers like Ibn al-Fārid and Ibn ‘Arabi -- it is necessary to keep in mind how fundamental in Sufi thought is this allegory of love, and how readily in their minds human and Divine imagery is interchanged.”

Viewing allegories and symbolic representations is not to deny the real physicality of the sensual descriptions or the role of the girl as a woman in whom the lover sees God. In fact, the female’s being a part of the male and his seeing God in her is discussed at length in this project’s chapter on the hadith about Muhammad’s relationships to women, perfume, and prayer. Viewing the attributes of God as reflected in the mirror of the girl Niẓām is one approach, but an analysis of the totality of the poetry collection indicates that the poet is interjecting theological concepts that are not limited to this reflection of the divine, as God is witnessed in many different ways in the imagination of the reader -- a subject that could be the focus of further investigation -- and, in the end, all approaches point to God.

At the outset of this present project, it is certainly valid to assert that the status of the Beloved of the *Interpreter of Desires* can actually be interpreted in several ways. The girl is a girl with whom the lover is in love. The girl is a mirror of the divine attributes of God, reflecting back to God those qualities and associated divine Names. The girl is a part of the lover -- physically and spiritually, as the female is in Islam a part of the male -- just as man is part of God so that there is a Muhammadan triplicity of God-man-woman, and the Subject-Object-Action of Lover-Loved-Loving discussed at length in this present project’s chapter on the women, perfume, and prayer hadith.

The girl is a metaphor for God. The Beloved is also God. Furthermore, even within a single line of the poems, the perspective can shift. The Beloved is referred to in the singular as a girl, or in the plural as a group of females. There is, therefore, not a doctrinally compartmentalized way to address the girl-mirror-part-Beloved-God, and the writing of the thesis necessarily flows in and out, back and forth, just as the writing of Ibn al-ʿArabī in his poetry. The poet cannot be tidily constrained in the overlapping

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374 The word “Muhammadan” in this context is not an anachronistic term for Islamic or Muslim, but a term used by Austin and others for a matter relating to the Prophet Muḥammad.
symbols and images and similes and metaphors -- and even Identity -- of the Beloved. The Beloved is all of these at the same time, but as this project is linear rather than multidimensional, the writing will focus on what is relevant to the specific topic being discussed, though even within that topic there will be shifts.

One helpful way to view these “choices” about how to read the role of the Beloved is to understand that there are two central voices in the poems: that of the Sufi-lover, and that of the poet himself. The poet has “perfect” knowledge of what he is writing about (setting aside the deeper issues relating to a human’s knowledge of anything or meaning outside of the poet’s limited intentions), but the character of the Sufi-lover whom the poet has created does not have perfect knowledge, but only what the poet allows him. Thus, Ibn al-ʿArabī as the poet weaves situations into the poetry and puts words and thoughts into the Sufi-lover’s mouth and mind that sometimes very clearly indicate a deeper, theosophical meaning which the character is does not himself realize. When the poet does this, it is often to develop the character of the Sufi-lover as the vehicle for a doctrinal point. Nothing in this hermeneutic approach to reading the poems negates or otherwise marginalises the lover’s sensual feelings that one human being feels for another or detracts from the erotic nasīb story that is used as a structure for the poetry collection, but only adds to the text and, as will be demonstrated, is clearly evidenced in the poems.375

To accommodate some of the problems associated with this overlapping of meanings and interpretations, throughout this present text, the word “Beloved”-- in capital form, as opposed to “beloved” -- will generally be used to designate God the Beloved who is spoken of when the poet and lover discusses the beloved in the poems. This is a practical device and one that allows for an understanding that the beloved may be either the girl with whom the Sufī is in love or the girl who is the human being who reflects the attributes/Names of God or the girl in whom the Sufī witnesses God (as being a part of Himself and is the highest form of contemplation, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī) or a metaphor for God or God Himself. As the underlying assumption of this

375 Shaikh warns against a read of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s texts -- such as in Interpreter of Desires -- that does not look for deeper meanings to traditional metaphors in works such as in the characters of the nasīb: “A too literal reading of Ibn ʿArabi’s gendered metaphors with a focus on his normative language in the absence of sufficient attention to the subtle ways in which he shifts the established parameters and meanings of accepted terminology could reduce his constructions of gender to a romantic defense of traditional patriarchy.” Shaikh, Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn ʿArabi, Gender, and Sexuality, 130.
present project is that Ibn al-ʿArabī is relating definite elements of theoretical Sufism in
the poems -- which will be proved in the course of the thesis -- the writing will very
often refer to the Beloved in terms of being God as God; this is often done in relation to
the poet’s view of the Beloved when the lover may have at that same time an
alternative view, each being valid and existing at the same moment. The reason for this
general approach should become apparent as the poems are explicated according to the
doctrinal gnosis presented in the relevant texts from Bezels. The choices the poet makes
in his words clearly indicate -- as the thesis will demonstrate -- the weaving in of key
elements of his own theories, along with many references -- which are the basis for
these theories -- to the Qurʾān and hadiths. The exception to referring to the Beloved as
God is taken up especially in the final chapter of the dissertation in its consideration of
God’s being a part of woman (who is a part of man in the Akbarian view). As Ibn al-
ʿArabī would say, the poems themselves are signs of God, so that the images and
symbols contained in the Interpreter of Desires immanently point to God.

As for the lover in the poems who is in pursuit of the Beloved, he will usually
be referred to as the “Sufi-lover” because, as demonstrated, it is clear from the
historical records that Ibn al-ʿArabī used the poetry collection to teach points of Sufi
doctrine to adepts. The lover is, in effect, an unperfected Sufi who has not yet achieved
true and perfect knowledge of God that would allow him to be characterised as a true
agnostic.
CHAPTER ONE

The Self-Disclosure of God:
Muhammadan Integration of Transcendence and Immanence

The Bezels of Wisdom begins the discussion of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s theoretical gnosis with the first Islamic prophet, Adam, and concludes with Muhammad, who is known as the Seal of the Prophets, as he is Islam’s final prophet of God. The core of the Great Shaykh’s explanations of God and His creation of the Cosmos, including human beings, is contained in this first chapter, “The Wisdom of Divinity in the Word of Adam.” In this highly compact chapter, the Great Shaykh discusses the central beliefs of theoretical Sufism necessary to understand the more detailed aspects of God’s relationship to His servants that follow in Bezels. The doctrinal Sufism in this Bezels chapter includes discussion of God’s need for Self-knowledge, His manifestation in the Cosmos through His creative Mercy, the Cosmos as a mirror to reflect the Divine attributes, and the transcendent versus immanent qualities of God.

This dissertation chapter is divided into two parts: first, discussion of theory, then explication of the Interpreter of Desires poetry exhibiting those doctrines, arranged by the two general topics of divine Self-disclosure and the transcendence/immanence of God. The major theories in the opening Bezels chapter are all evident in the Interpreter of Desires either explicitly or, more often, by way of poetical allusion, which itself is a form of the divine manifestation of God as His words are, in doctrinal Sufism, both a manifestation of God in the entified forms in the Cosmos and signs pointing to God. In this chapter will be demonstrated what Corbin notes as the symbolic text being just as important as the explicit text as the poet’s verses demonstrate how the application of Sufi theories play out in the sensual world of
the human heart and mind. The link between the sensory world of humans and the theology evidenced in the poetry is akin to Corbin’s view of *ta’wil:* “the transformation of the sensory world into symbols, into open-ended mysteries that shatter, engage, and transform the entire being of the creature. Its metaphysical grounding is provided by the experience of creation in theophany, as the realization of the Divine Compassion.”

II.A Divine and Human Love

Since one of the major, overarching concepts discussed in this project is the topic of “love,” a brief introduction is appropriate to discuss divine and human love as it relates to Ibn al-ʿArabī and the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq.* The term “love” is used by the Shaykh in several forms, using several Arabic words, indicating varied nuances of the concept. Corbin concludes that of all the great Sufi masters, it is Ibn al-ʿArabī “who carried furthest the analysis of the phenomena of love,” addressing two primary questions: “What does it mean to love God? And how is it possible to love God?”

Corbin posits that what is termed “divine love” (*hibb ilāh*) has two aspects. In the first aspect it is the Desire (*shawq*) of God for the creature, the passionate Sigh (*hanīn*) of God in His essence (the “hidden treasure”), yearning to manifest Himself in beings, in order to be revealed for them and by them. In the second aspect, divine love is the Desire of the creature for God, or – viewed differently -- the Sigh of God Himself epiphanized in beings and yearning to return to himself.

Corbin’s use of two different Arabic words points to the need to understand the differences in words that are sometimes translated as the same word into English, “love.” Corbin’s use of *hibb* is the noun form of the root verb *ḥabba,* meaning he was or became loved, or he loved, or was in love. The related nouns *hubbun* or *hibbun* mean love or affection, and *mahbūb* means “beloved.” The verb *jawa,* means to be to become “affected with amorous desire, passionately moved, or to love inwardly, or to feel grief or sorrow.” The noun *jawan* means the “inclining of the soul or mind.”

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378 Corbin, 147.


380 Lane, 491.
A much-used verb found in Tarjumān al-Ashwāq is ʿashiqqa, which means to love passionately, or with amorous desire. The noun form, ʿishqun, may be translated as passionate or excessive love, passion, or desire. The title of the poetry collection -- Tarjumān al-Ashwāq (Interpreter of Desires) -- is based on the word ashwāqun, which is the plural form of shawqun, indicating desire, excited by desire, yearning, or longing of the soul.

The Divine Name, the Affectionate, or, the Loving (al-wadūd) -- literally the loving one, or one loved, wanted, or wished for, based on the root verb wadda, to love or like or wish for something. Related nouns are waddun, widdun, or wuddun, all meaning love, desire, friendship, or amity. In usage, forms of this word have a meaning much closer to “friendship” than any time of “erotic love,” as would be the case with ʿashiqqa, which implies an amorous or excessive desire.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s understanding of the term “love” is, of course, grounded in Islamic tradition. He cites, first, the Quranic verse, “a people He loves and who love Him” (Sūra 5:54). He also cites the ḥadīth, “I was a hidden treasure; I wanted to be known. Hence, I created the world so that I could be known,” a ḥadīth that places the very cause of creation in God’s “wanting” or “loving” to be known. In both instances, the word ḥubb is used to relate God to man, as well as God to his Creation. Nasr references one of the divine names, al-wadūd, He Who Loves, but notes that the technical term used by Sufis for love was ʿishq, which he says implies an intense love.

According to Claude Addas in her examination of the subject of love in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings, the Shaykh al-Akbar was the Sufi most responsible for showing that “it is irrelevant to place the way of love and the way of knowledge in opposition.” In Chapter 178 of al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya, entitled, “Knowledge of the Station of Love and Its Mysteries,” the chapter’s translator and Ibn al-ʿArabī scholar Maurice Gloton quotes the Shaykh as saying that “love is too subtle a concept to be defined,” but helpfully – especially for explication of the Tarjumān -- he declared the “Station of

381 Lane, 2054.
382 Steingass, The Student’s Arabic-English Dictionary, 47.
383 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 2983; Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, 1240; Steingass, The Student’s Arabic-English Dictionary, 1024.
Love” to have four names: ḥubb, wadd, ‘isq, and hawā. 385 Maurice Gloton summarises this section of the chapter, saying that the first name, ḥubb, is the seminal or “love-seed,” a term derived from habba, meaning grain or seed. The second name, wadd, is strong affection or attachment, related to the Divine Name, al-Wadūd, which means peg, post, or stake, denoting rooted, faithful love. The third name, ‘isq, is passionate, extreme, distraught love, deriving from the bindweed (‘ashaqa) which winds itself in a choking spiral around a tree, smothering it. The fourth name, hawā, is translated as “love,” deriving from the term for air, and meaning “falling from above to below,” thus denoting a “sudden surge of amorous inclination.” Ibn al-ʿArabī, however, speaks of hawā not of sensual desire but of passionate love, that is eros (‘ishq), which he characterizes as a “total annihilation of the will in the Beloved.”

In the Tarjumān al-ʿAshwāq, Ibn al-ʿArabī uses a variety of terms – including those discussed above -- that can be translated as “love” of various senses of the word and various intensities. The poet also uses other terms whose word-roots that are not specifically discussed above, including (along with an exemplar verse): sabāb, meaning to become affected by “excessive love,” or “desire,” with the root meaning of to “pour forth,” “empty,” or “annihilate” (8:3); hayman, “madly in love,” from hāma, meaning to “fall in love,” or to be “ecstatic” or “crazy in love” (11:3); and, wajd, “passionate love,” based on wajada, meaning to be “impassioned” (14:3). Neither the verb wadda nor any of its forms is used in the poems.

The ambiguity in the verse and the multiple metaphors for love -- in which the reader of Sufi poems does not know with any certainty whether the Beloved is the object of the Sufi-poet’s lover, or whether the Beloved is God – is one of the elements of Sufi poetics that lifts the poems from the merely erotic to the Divine. Schimmel writes that the Sufi poet provides the bridge, that is, the metaphor, that leads to Reality. 390 The love of the human – in all its varied forms -- is the ladder which leads to the love of the All-Merciful. “Hence human love was called ‘ishq-i majāzī, 386

387 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 1638.
388 Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, 1224.
389 Wehr, 1231.
390 Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 68.
metaphorical love, in contrast to the pure, true, Divine love, ‘ishq-i haqiqi. The soul needs the wings of human love to fly toward Divine love…. The constant oscillation between the two levels of experience often makes it next to impossible to translate or even to understand a poem correctly.” It is this ambiguity between the human and superhuman levels which delights the reader and satisfies both on aesthetic, didactic, and spiritual levels.391

II.B Bezels of Wisdom: Divine Self-Disclosure and Adam as the Mirror of God

II.B.1 Bezels: Divine Self-Knowledge and the Creative Breath of the All-Merciful

Ibn al-ʿArabī begins Bezels with the chapter on Adam by stating that God wanted to see Himself, that is, to reveal Himself to Himself. God wanted to see His own Essence, made up as it is by His attributes, represented by His Names. God wanted to see Himself in another – His qualities reflected back to Himself as if in a mirror -- not just wanting to realize Himself in Himself. This concept of self-knowledge has as its basis the hadith “I was a Hidden Treasure, so I loved to be known. Hence I created creatures that I might be.”392 The Shaykh explains that the Reality (God) first gave existence to the whole Cosmos as something undifferentiated so that it was like an unpolished mirror. This undifferentiated Cosmos was made a receptive locus into which God would be able to breathe His spirit in an “inexhaustible over-flowing of Self-revelation,” according to the Qurʾanic verse “the breathing into him” (Sūra 21:9). The Divine Command – “Be!” – gave existence to the essences of the undifferentiated Cosmos, one of the results being that human beings then became the polished mirror which reflected God’s attributes.393

The expression, Breath of the All-Merciful, derives from the hadith that says, “Do not curse the wind, for it derives from the Breath of the All-Merciful.” Ibn al-ʿArabī means by this saying that the wind is a means by which God gives comfort to human beings, as he elucidates in the Bezels chapter on the prophet Shuʿayb: “God has described Himself as the Breath [nafas], form tanfis, which means to cause respite or

391 Schimmel, 68.
392 Chittick says that this hadith is not found in standard texts but is, nonetheless, found in Sufi texts which attribute it to Muhammad. Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-ʿArabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination, 291 n 14.
relief."\(^{394}\) The Shaykh also compares the Breath of the All-Merciful to the human breath as it is an instrument for God’s words -- such as was His divine Command (‘Be!’) and the words of the Qurān -- which are also part of His creation. This Ibn al-ʿArabī specifically discusses in the Jesus Bezels chapter, where he writes that “All creatures are indeed words of God ... stemming as they do from [the command] ‘Be,’ (Sūra 2:117) which is the Word of God.” Chittick writes that the Shaykh compares the Breath of the All-Merciful as an analogy for the creative process and God’s relationship to his Creation. Chittick concludes that “breath is ... the vehicle for words ... and is closely connected to the imagery of Book, verses, words, and letters provided by the Koran.”\(^{395}\)

The Shaykh explains later in Bezels that it was the Breath that created the “forms” of the Cosmos\(^ {396}\) and he explicitly states that the “Breath” is the same thing as “the Breath of the All-Merciful.”\(^ {397}\) Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Bezels chapter on the prophet Jesus further relates that “the Cosmos is manifested in the divine Breath by which God relieved the divine Names from the distress they experienced by the nonmanifestation of their effects,” adding that “He bestows favour on Himself by what He creates in His breath.”\(^ {398}\) That same chapter includes a poem that shows how human beings satisfy God’s desire to be known: “All is essentially in the Breath / ... He perceives what we speak of, / In a way that gives him a clue to the Breath. / What I say relieves him of anxiety...”\(^ {399}\) These verses speak to the human being’s condition -- “what we speak of” -- as being understood by God, such that the divine Names created by the Breath are given relief, relieving God of anxiety.

Also in the Shuʿayb chapter, Ibn al-ʿArabī explains that God’s creation is perpetual and occurring at every instant, writing that

> God is manifest in every Breath and that no [particular] Self-manifestation is repeated. They also see that every Self-manifestation at once provides a [new] creation and annihilates another. Its annihilation

\(^{394}\) Ibn al-ʿArabī, 148.


\(^{397}\) Ibn al-ʿArabī, 146.

\(^{398}\) Ibn al-ʿArabī, 181.

\(^{399}\) Ibn al-ʿArabī, 181.
is extinction at the [new] Self-manifestation, subsistence being what is given by the following [other] Self-manifestation.\textsuperscript{400}

Thus, the entire Cosmos is being continually recreated with every Breath of the All-Merciful.

II.B.2 \textit{Bezels}: The Divine Names

The Great Shaykh writes that it is through human beings “that the Reality looks on His creation and bestows the Mercy [of existence] on them.”\textsuperscript{401} It is only humans, out of all the beings in the Cosmos, in whom are manifested all of the divine Names, thus humans became the polished mirror in which God sees Himself.\textsuperscript{402} The divine Names are mentioned in the Qur\'\textsuperscript{ā}n in several places, including, “Say: ‘Call upon God, or call upon the Merciful, by whatever you call Him, for to Him are the Most Beautiful Names…’” (\textit{Sūra} 17:110), and “The Most Beautiful Names belong to God; so call on Him by them” (\textit{Sūra} 7:180). Muhammad is credited with speaking of the importance of the divine Names in saying, “Allah has ninety-nine Names, that is, one hundred minus one, and whoever believes in their meanings and acts accordingly, will enter Paradise; and Allah is \textit{Witr} (One) and loves 'the \textit{Witr}' (that is, odd numbers).”\textsuperscript{403} There are many traditional compilations of these Names, some containing different names, most based on Qur\'\textsuperscript{ā}nic text.

In the Jesus chapter, as discussed, the Shaykh explicitly links the Breath of the All-Merciful with the Names.\textsuperscript{404} Ibn al-ʿArabī explains in the \textit{Bezels} chapter on the Prophet Seth that even though there are an infinite number of Names of God, “there is but one Reality, which embraces all these attributions,” such that the Reality “grants that every Name ... should have its own reality by which to be distinguished from every other Name,” such that “[t]his distinguishing reality is the essence of the Name.”\textsuperscript{405} Ibn al-ʿArabī comments that “in emphasizing a particular Name, one names it and describes

\textsuperscript{400} Ibn al-ʿArabī, 155.

\textsuperscript{401} Ibn al-ʿArabī, 51.

\textsuperscript{402} Ibn al-ʿArabī, 53–54.


\textsuperscript{404} Ibn al-ʿArabī, \textit{The Bezels of Wisdom}, 181.

\textsuperscript{405} Ibn al-ʿArabī, 68.
by it all the [other] Names ... in that it may be qualified by all the qualities with which it is normally compared. This is because every part of the Cosmos is the totality of the Cosmos in that it is receptive to the realities of the disparate aspects of the Cosmos.\textsuperscript{406} This means that every Name is related both to God and to every other Name by way of comparison, so that every created thing is related. Chittick explains that the Divine Names are an intermediate stage between God and the universe: “The Divine Names are the \textit{barzakh} (that is, isthmus) between humans and God, and although they have no existence separate from God and cannot be understood correctly except as relationships, they provide our only means of grasping the connection between man and God.”\textsuperscript{407}

Ibn al-ʿArabī reminds his readers that even though human beings reflect back to Himself all these divine Names, there remains a distinction between God and humans, between the eternal and the contingent. He writes that anything created is dependent on that which brings it about, that is, God, and that all that is manifest by God must conform to all of the Names of the originator (God) except for the concept of God being the “Self-sufficient Being.”\textsuperscript{408} Of those attributes which human beings reflect, though, the Shaykh establishes a system by which the divine Names may be characterized and grouped.\textsuperscript{409} Ibn al-ʿArabī’s approach recognizes that any given attribute of God has a polar opposite with which it is associated. On the most basic level -- and fundamental to Sufi theosophy -- God has described Himself as being the Outer and the Inner, also termed the Manifest and the Unmanifest, in that “He brought the Cosmos into being as constituting an unseen realm and a sensory realm, so that we might perceive the Inner through our unseen and the Outer through our sensory aspect.” Similarly, Ibn al-ʿArabī also uses the example of God’s being called the First because “no temporal priority may be attributed to Him”; God is called the Last because all of reality can ultimately be attributed to Him and, thus, his Finality is implicit in His being First. The Shaykh gives further examples of the concept of polarity of Names in stating that God has attributed to Himself the opposite attributes and names of pleasure/wrath,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{406} Ibn al-ʿArabī, 191.
\item \textsuperscript{407} Chittick, \textit{The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-ʿArabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination}, 39.
\item \textsuperscript{408} Ibn al-ʿArabī, \textit{The Bezels of Wisdom}, 54.
\item \textsuperscript{409} There are numerous systems that classify the divine Names or Most Beautiful Names. See Sachiko Murata, \textit{The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 80–114.
\end{itemize}
fear/hope, and beauty/majesty. These pairings conform to the traditional contrasting concepts of *tašbih* (similarity) versus *tanzih* (incomparability), or mercy versus wrath. In support of this view of the polarity of Names, the Shaykh cites the Qur’anic verse which refers to Adam “whom I created with My own two hands” (*Sūra* 38:75) “as being His Hands devoted to creation of the Perfect Man who integrates in himself all Cosmic realities and their individual [manifestations].” Thus only in Adam – representing all human beings – does God unite the polarities of attributes and names.

II.B.3 *Bezels*: Signs Pointing to God

Ibn al-ʿArabī further writes in regard to the divine Names and His attributes that God calls attention to the things He has created as an aid to knowledge of Him by way of signs, referring to the Qur’anic verse, “We will show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves until it becomes clear for them that it is the truth” (*Sūra* 41:53). Part of these signs includes the signs that are attributes of human beings. The Shaykh writes that

He suggests that knowledge of Him is inferred in knowledge of ourselves. Whenever we ascribe any quality to Him, we are ourselves [representative of] that quality, except it be the quality of His Self-sufficient Being. Since we know Him through ourselves and from ourselves, we attribute to Him all we attribute to ourselves.... He describes Himself to us through us. If we witness Him we witness ourselves, and when He sees us He looks on Himself.411

This passage conforms to Ibn al-ʿArabī’s earlier assertion that human beings must know themselves in order to know God. The attributes that humans ascribe to themselves will be those aspects of God they witness. The Shaykh reiterates this view, writing in the later *Bezels* chapter, that human beings should look to the Cosmos, which includes themselves, to know God. This later reference, moreover, specifically ties in the knowing of God to the Breath: “Whoever wishes to know the divine Breath, then let

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him [first] know the Cosmos, for ‘Who knows himself, knows his Lord’ Who is manifest in him.  

II.C Interpreter of Desires: Self-Disclosure of God to the Lover

God’s wanting to know Himself through His Cosmos – and particularly through human beings – is one of the driving forces of Interpreter of Desires. On the most elemental analogical level, the girl is God who wants the lover to know Him, and she takes actions to draw the lover closer and she reveals her various attributes, which is analogous to God wanting the Sufi to know Him, God taking actions to draw the Sufi closer and revealing His attributes/Names. In the theosophy of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his school that followed, creation is seen as the result of “the primordial sadness of Names” which wanted to be manifested. Corbin explains this concept in speaking of the “pathetic God,” who is yearning to be known which creates in the human being a “theopathy” whose God He is. Corbin quotes the Shaykh al-Akbar in saying “it is by our theopathy that we constitute Him as God.” The “primordial sadness of the Names” is due to the Names being “anguished in the expectation of beings who will name them, although God will – in his Divine Compassion – sympathise with them who name him.

William Chittick responds to the question of why Ibn al-‘Arabī uses imagery in referring to God in the Tarjumān, and why the poet does not just refer directly to God in the poems, rather than speaking of a beautiful woman. One of his answers is that these images, metaphors, are divine self-disclosures, not visions of God in Himself. Chittick reminds readers that -- by definition -- what is being encountered is not God as God, but with God inasmuch as He shows Himself. This is the reason the Sufi-lover speaks in terms of his perception of God’s showings, and this perception takes place with the formal medium of poetry. The references to God through poetic metaphor relates the divine similarity to the soul, and the similarity can only be grasped in relation to created things.

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412 Ibn al-‘Arabī, 181.

413 Schimmel, Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam, 121.

414 Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabī, 123.

There are a few direct references or even clear analogies in the collection to the girl which takes place in the “real time” of the poems. This absence of many explicit references to the girl’s actual presence to the lover in the “present” time and action of the poems is, in fact, due to incorporation of a sensible poetic technique by Ibn al-`Arabī in that he begins the story of Interpreter of Desires in media res: the narrative begins in the middle of the larger story as the girl has already departed, indicated in the opening poem by the lover wondering where her travel-party is and wondering if they are safe or dead as they make their way through a mountain pass. The period covered in the poetry collection is between the time when the lover was previously in the presence of the girl and the time when they are -- perhaps -- reunited in the future. The references to the girl that are evident in the poems are usually in the form of flash-backs to events before the time of the lover’s narration, that is, before the time of the opening poem. The references to God’s wanting to know Himself are admittedly subtle, to be implied from the absent beloved’s actions and the lover’s responses. To be contrasted with the issue of God’s actually wanting to know Himself, of course, is the issue of how we human beings do, in fact, know Him, which the Shaykh asserts in Bezels is through knowing ourselves.

II.C.1 Interpreter of Desires: The Lover’s Knowledge of the Beloved

The girl indicates in several verses of the poetry collection her need to have her Sufi-lover know her which is, in Ibn al-`Arabī’s cosmology, analogous to God’s desire to have knowledge of Himself. After the lover complains that the girl has not responded to his greeting from afar and tells her to “Enslave (or, ‘pity’) an enamoured alien,” the girl is quoted directly for the first time in the poems, saying, “Is it not sufficient or him that I am in his heart? / He watches me at every moment (kulli waqtin). Isn’t it?” The implication here is that she actually assents to his feelings for her, that even when they are apart, she wants him to “know” her constantly – “at every moment” (kulli waqtin) -- even if only in his heart (bi-qalbihi), which is where one knows God as a Sufi; this is analogous to the God’s wanting the gnostic to behold God constantly. (P4:3b,6).

It is important to note, also, that there is also in this poem a direct reference to

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416 Ibn al-`Arabī, The Tarjuman Al-Ashwaq: A Collection of Mystical Odes (1911). As noted, the original Arabic is found in this volume that is edited and translated by Nicholson. The citations refer to the poem and verse numbers.
the Sufi concept of the mystical moment (*waqt*). Michael Sells puts this concept into the wider context by explaining that Ibn al-ʿArabī expresses the notion of “perpetual dynamism” through a play on the Sufi context of the “moment” (*waqt*), which -- in terms of mystical love -- is the experience of union with the Beloved. Ibn al-ʿArabī says that some people have one moment in a lifetime: they encounter the Real, seize it, and hold on to it for the rest of their lives. The Shaykh says that the goal is to have a moment of one breath such that with every breath the person gives up attachment to his old manifestation in Creation, is annihilated, and open to a new manifestation. This process is explained in much greater detail later in Poem 11 of the *Tarjumān*, demonstrating that – for one with a gnostic heart – the “heart is made possible of every form” (*qābil li kulli šūra*), each new moment bringing both loss and joy.\(^{417}\)

Several poems allude more directly to the issue of the girl wanting the lover to know her through the verses referring to lifting of the veil. Thus the “cheerful girls” (*ʿwānsun*) circumambulating the Kaʿba had teased the lover by lifting their veils and warning the lover about the dangers of viewing unveiled women (as discussed at length later): “Abstain! [There is] death of the soul (*mawtu al-nafsi*) in glances (*fī-(a)l-lahaẓāṭi*) [of us],” the women announcing “in our trysting place” (*fī-mūʿidunā*) promising that “there whoever indeed is being rendered emaciated (*shaffah*), he is cured / by what fills him with the perfume of women” (P7:2b,6,7).\(^{418}\) Generally, it is the girl’s coquettish behaviour that seems to indicate that the girl wants the lover to have knowledge of her, as in the poem above where after being “rendered emaciated,” he is then filled with the “perfume of women.” She accomplishes this in many ways, including with flirting (*bi-alghuniji*) and bewitchment (*al-sihrī*)” (P22:8a).

The following poem is an extended series of verses that speak to the coy behaviour of the girl who, by her “bewitchment” (*sihrīn*) of body and flirting (P29:8):

The “exciting of desire” (*al-mūʾniqāṭu*) by their laughing and smiling, the delicious kissing and sipping; (5)
The bare extremities of the body (like a branch of a tree, that is, limbs) are delicate;
a swelling breast bestowed upon him gifts; (6)
Attracting by each [of these things] by admirable bewitchment (*sihrīn*)


\(^{418}\) Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 115 The usage of ʿwānsun is plural.
ears and appariation (that is, phantom) with conversation. (7)

The hidden [faces] effacing shame (al-ḥayā maḥāsnan),

enchanting (tasbī), thereby the pious and fearful heart (al-qalba al-taqiya al-khāǰā) (8)…

O my friends, my heart-blood (that is, an oath): One who is thin-in-waist (literally, empty/hungry) caused upset to me bounties and favours! (9) (P29:5-8,13)

The poet writes that the girl had bestowed on -- “caused upset” -- the lover “bounties and favour (ayādiyan wa-ʿāzifā),” suggesting that he has had some knowledge of her previously, which happened because of her actively wanting him to know her. Her physical beauty has smitten him, her “laughing and smiling, the delicious kissing,” along with her” bare extremities and swelling breast” takes captives of those with “enchanting (tasbī)” the “pious and fearing heart” (al-qalba al-taqiya al-khāǰā). The reference to the girls effacing shame (al-ḥayā maḥāsnan), is to their covering their own faces to prevent shame, but also an allusion to the Sufī concept of “effacement” (maḥw, the infinitive noun of maḥā, meaning to “efface entirely”, or to “perish”).419 The Sufī lover is reminded by her actions that he must seek – instead of being lured into her physicality, to, instead, self-effacement of the ego (nafs). As al-Qushayrī (d. 1074) said in an essay on Sufism, “He effaces from the hearts of the knowers the remembrance of any other than God Most High, and he affirms upon the tongues of he seekers the remembrance (dhikr) of God.”420

The girl’s wanting the man to know her is also implicit in the mutuality of passion expressed in a time when they were together in the past, as the poet writes, “Had you seen us at Rāma giving [each other] cups of love without fingertips / passion is urging on a sweet and excited / joyful statement without a tongue” (P20:20,21).

Showing him her physical attributes – baring skin of the arms, ears, mouth, and letting down her hair are further ways that she indicates she wishes to be known by the lover. She must have gone even farther to seduce the lover, as he recalls from their meeting, “O smiling [mouth] (mabsīman) whose pearly teeth I loved! / And O saliva in which I tasted (thick) white honey!” (P25:4), demonstrating that she did, indeed, want him to

419 Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, 1051.

420 cited at Sells, Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic and Theological Writings, 129.
know her enough to give him a forbidden kiss. The poet admits that he is, indeed, swayed by such behaviour, in saying, “Am I not Arabian? And am I not the one [who] loves the “white” (that is, fair) ones and I desire (ahwā) the coquettes (al-ʿurubā)?” (P30:28).

That coyness is exactly what she exhibits in an effort to keep him enthralled and encouraging him to know even more about her by encouraging him to follow after her for some future time of reunion. Taken as a whole, the girl’s actions confirm to the lover that she wants him – wants him to know her -- and this is what drives him to such extraordinary acts and has such devastating effects on him that he would follow her across the desert wastelands and suffer so much for her sake. She wants him to know her, as God wants human beings to know Him, and thus she actually created him as the lover – through her actions and beauty -- who would know her attributes, qualities which she knew herself to possess, but wanting to be known by another. These poetic themes in Interpreter of Desires parallel what Ibn al-ʿArabi wrote in Bezels about the God’s knowing He was a Hidden Treasure Who loved to be known.

One of the ways in which Sufis of the Akbarian school believe God’s hiddenness becomes known to humans is through revelation by images in the poetic form. William Chittick explores this idea further and shares two issues especially relevant to poetic imagery: the descent of meanings into imagination and the symbolism of language. From the Shaykh’s perspective, he says, “meaning” is a key term in dogmatic theology, Sufism, and literary theory. The Sufis typically identify it with “the inner, invisible reality of a thing, in contradistinction to its ‘form’ which is the thing’s outer apparent reality. Hence, the Shaykh often identifies a thing’s meaning with its immutable entity, the thing as known by God.” Revelations – or messages – are sent from God which then enter the suprasensory or spiritual world, then become embodied through imagination in auditory or visual form, including poetry. Addas notes that the Shaykh observes in the preface to his Dīwān, that “the world is a work endowed with rhyme and rhythm,” adding that “God placed the jewels of spiritual knowledge, and the secret of the Lord, in language.” Addas restates the Shaykh’s point of view on Sufi poetics in saying that God then “entrusted with this treasure to the

ʿārifūn, the gnostics, who, for fear of it being plundered, hid the secrets under the veil of poetry, disguising them with allusive and symbolic terms.”

More specific to the girl Nizām in the Tarjumān, Michael Sells, has also examined the poetic symbols -- similes and metaphors -- that are descriptive of the girl and the relationship between the human beloved and the divine Beloved. He says, first, that a symbol describing the girl “touches off a chain of additional similes,” with the cumulative set of symbols eventually hiding the human beloved such that the symbols themselves are what become the referent for the divine Beloved -- not the human -- on which the similes and metaphors were originally based. The set of symbols expands from the human metaphors to include other objects and actions such as a paradisal garden or ritual ablution, thereby introducing erotic analogies for the lover’s relationship with the Divine.”

II.C.2 Interpreter: Wind as God’s Breath: Divine Comfort and Communication

The subjects of breath and wind and related topics feature prominently in the Interpreter of Desires poems and may be viewed as symbolic of the related concepts in the doctrinal Sufism as contained in Bezels of Wisdom. Creation has been compared by the Sufis to an “articulation” in relation to the Qurʾan’s speaking of the nafas – that is the “breath” of the Lord – which is infused into Adam and Mary to create a new being. This breath is, metaphorically, is held by the pure Essence (dhāt) of God – that is God in Himself without regard to his creatures – until He could no longer do so then the world appeared as nafas al-Raḥmān. The universe is created and annihilated at every moment in this breathing. The action of breathing out and returning back is manifested symbolically in the two parts of the shahadah, the Muslim profession of faith: lāʾ ilāha correlates to “things other than He” and ʾillā ilāh points to their return to Him to everlasting unity.

424 Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 268.
The poet specifically links the girl – representing God, the Beloved – to breath and, by analogy, the Breath of the All-Merciful, in saying, “Be superior (that is, have pity, looking down) / because befallen on us (or, harmed us), soon after early in the morning/ a little before the sunrise / by a white-faced, young/delicate one “having sweetness of breath” (bahnānat) / diffusing (taḍāwuʿ) sweet odours like burst musk” (P23:11,12). Setting aside for the time being any discussion relating perfume to the Breath, the poet’s references in the collection to breath and the wind can be viewed primarily along two central lines discussed in Bezels: as comfort for the human being, and as a mode of communicating, which may be interpreted in the poetry, respectively, as symbolic of God’s mercy and as a vehicle for human beings attempting to communicate with the aspects of God Who is transcendent and therefore completely unapproachable and not discursive.

The lover certainly never violates the hadith’s admonition to not “curse the wind,” recognizing, as he must, that the wind does, indeed, derive from the Breath of the All-Merciful and is, as the Shaykh writes in Bezels, a source of possible “respite or relief.” Doctrinal Sufism equates the wind with the divine Breath, and so does the poetry of Interpreter of Desires. The lover is continually looking for some kind of comfort from the wind, as he says, “Perhaps a breath (nafṣatun) from the east wind of Hājir / drives a rain-cloud towards us, / being by which quenching the thirsty souls” (P16:11,12a). In an extended section of another poem, the personified winds bring comfort to the lover who is raging into the wind, decrying his suffering caused by the girl’s departure.

I summoned wind (rīḥin) that blew (gently):

'O North wind! O South wind! O East wind! (9)

Have you news about us (hal ladīkum khabarun)?

Weariness has thrown us down concerning their departure’…(10)

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427 Steingass, The Student’s Arabic-English Dictionary, 148; Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 1810. The verb meaning to diffuse also has a sense of wind that is caused to move.

428 The subject of breath and perfume is discussed in detail relation to the Muhammad Bezels material in the final chapter of this project. Also, the focus on the topic of mercy here is in respect to the creative Breath; aspects of divine Mercy other than creative mercy/Breath are discussed in Chapter 3.
Whoever was made him sick by the illness of love (al-hawā) then [let him be] distracted by stories of being in passionate love (bi-aḥadīthi al-ṣibā) (12)

Every evil (kullu sūʾ an) in their inspiration is beautiful (hasanun) and my torment is sweetened by their approval (bi-riḍāhum).

(P30:9,10,12,16)

In the above, the lover’s intention is not specifically to try to communicate with the girl-Beloved, but is to look for comfort from the wind (rīhin) itself: “Have you news for us (hal ladīkum khabarun)?” The East wind provides this comfort by “stories of passionate love” (bi-aḥadīthi al-ṣibā), that is, the tales of other famous lovers (mentioned throughout the poetry) whose tales were, in fact, allegories about annihilation of lovers in God (as discussed in detail later). The East wind then encourages the other winds to provide more comfort to the suffering lover. The lover hears the North wind relate that even “every evil” (kullu sūʾ an) of the suffering caused by separation is good because of the passion which it inspires. The allusions in the poetry are to the Sufi’s love for God and the good that results from the pain of separation from the Divine; even “evil” is actually “beautiful” beautiful (ḥasanun), meriting “their approval” (bi-riḍāhum), that is, God’s ultimate approval. Indeed, as Schimmel notes, “followers of Ibn ʿArabi’s doctrine of the unity of being saw everything, even evil, as part of God.”

429 The type of discourse in the above extended citation also indicates the second primary reference to breath and wind in the poetry collection, which is, in theosophical terms, an attempt at communication with the transcendent God, as the lover views the Beloved as primarily remote, though -- as discussed in more detail later -- God is, in fact, always providing signs in His Cosmos that point to Him. For Ibn al-ʿArabī, the Breath of the All-Merciful is a creative articulation of creatures, including articulated words and signs.430 Thus, in terms of the Breath of the All-Merciful, any communication from the girl may be viewed as being communication from God in his creating these signs and evidencing beauty which create love in the heart of the Sufi;

429 Annemarie Schimmel, ‘Creation and Judgement in the Koran and in Mystico-Poetical Interpretation’, in *We Believe in One God*, ed. Annemarie Schimmel and Abdoldjavad Falaturi (Seabury Pr, 1980), 161.

any communication via the wind from the lover toward the girl may be viewed as both words as created entities (as they issue from the breath of human beings, which is analogous to the divine Breath), and evidence of the Sufi’s acknowledging God, who created human beings in the first place so that He might be known. The lover often bids the wind to carry a message to the girl or to ascertain her location or situation, as when the poet writes, “Then I said to the wind (li-(a)l-rīḥi), ‘head out and overtaking them / because they are residents near the shade in the thicket [of trees]; and convey to them (ballighīhim) “best regards” from a saddened ‘fellow man’’” (P6:3,4a). This is, in terms of theoretical Sufism, the Sufi trying to communicate with the transcendent God with whom he cannot speak directly; the Beloved is not present and remote. In combining intelligible meanings and sounds, he Sufi’s language pertains to the imaginal realm, thus giving rise to meaningful speech, which is the human’s most direct way of understanding the nature of the Breath of the All-merciful.

In contrast -- in the other direction, from God to human being -- the poet writes that the wind has, indeed, communicated a message from the beloved to the distressed lover:

To me the east wind related a story (that is, a “tradition”) (ḥadīthan)
from grieved [feelings, or, thoughts]… (3a)
That, “He whom you love is between your ribs (al-ladhī tahlāhu bayna ḍulūʿikum) / the breathings (al-anfāsu) turn him over side to side” (5)
So I said to [the east wind], “Convey to him
that he is that which is fireplace, the fire which is
inside the heart (al-nnāra dākhila al-qalbī). (6)
[If it be] extinguishing, [then] lasting (that is, eternal) [union],
and if it be burning, then no offense to the ‘one who poured out’
(that is, full of love).”

(P14:3a,4,6,7)

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431 For an alternative translation of this poem (as well as Poems 8, 9, 13), see Sells, ‘Selections from Ibn ʿArabi’s Tarjumān Al-Ashwāq (Translation of Desires)’, 53.
433 For an alternative translation of this poem, see Sells, ‘Return to the Flash Rock Plain of Thahmad: Two Nasibs by Ibn Al-Arabi’, 8–9.
The message, a story (ḥadīthan), from “them” is a message from the girl’s travel-party; this is an example in the poems of the Beloved being included in the plural, as previously discussed. The message from the beloved is a communication from God. As with most verses in the collection, of course, the poet is addressing not a single theological point – the Breath or wind – but alludes to several concepts at the same time. In a direct reference to the Beloved as God, the wind refers to the Beloved as “He whom you love is between your ribs” (al-ladhī tahwāhu bayna dulūʿ ikum). Here, Ibn al-ʿArabī alludes to text that he discusses at length in the Bezels chapter on Muḥammad, an allusion to the Islamic tradition of woman being created from the rib of a man, and the Shaykh’s interpretation of the ḥadīth that says, “Three things are beloved to me in this world of yours – women, perfume, and the coolness of prayer,” where the writer states that Muhammad believed that the highest form of contemplation of God was in the contemplation of God in woman.434 The poet responds to the beloved’s message but, interestingly, again addresses “him” – being God – directly, saying, “Convey to him (l-ayhi) that he is the fireplace, the fire which is inside the heart.” Sells states that – in receiving the ḥadīth through the wind, then sending back a ḥadīth through the wind -- this is the only known ḥadīth where the receiver of the message sends a response back through the chain of authorities to the original speaker.435 These words are an explicit reference to the lover’s acknowledgement that the girl-beloved is, in fact God, the Beloved. The poet-lover explicitly demonstrates that it is the creative Mercy that is responsible for the enkindling of passion in his Sufi heart, “the fire which is inside the heart” (al-nnāra dākhila al-qalbi); it is not a passion that is he created himself or that came from nowhere. God created the “fireplace” (al-mūqidu) in which the fire was liturgy that caused the Sufi to know his Creator, as evidenced by the passion within and the creature’s words, both results of the creative Breath of the All-Merciful. In an even more general sense, of course, the lover himself is a manifestation of the Breath of the All-Merciful – a “word” -- as “All creatures are indeed words of God.”436

The Shaykh’s writing in Bezels that “God is manifest in every Breath and that no [particular] Self-manifestation is repeated” is seen in the poetry collection. The

434 See Chapter 3 of this thesis for a detailed discussion of the Muhammad Bezels chapter and this hadith.
435 Sells, Stations Of Desire: Love Elegies From Ibn ʿArabi And New Poems, 44.
world of the lover is changing from moment to moment, as God recreates the situation in which he finds himself, both in terms of the physical setting and his internal feelings. The passion that is manifest in the lover fluctuates from his believing that the girl wants him, as demonstrated by their tentative union before her departure, to his feeling completely distraught because of the separation and her refusal to respond to him favourably. In addition to his internal world changing, the external is continually changing as he follows her from one abandoned campsite to another. The lover is baffled and cannot be confident of her heart or her intentions. The lover’s inability to understand God’s greater purpose seems like a deception, as when he says, “The east wind did not ‘speak the truth’ (mā ṣadaqat) / when it ‘brought forth’ the ‘deceptive ones’ (bi-al-khuda’i) (that is, the phantoms). / Sometimes when the wind (al-rīḥu) deceives (takdhibu) / you hear what is not heard” (P28:22,23). He questions his own perception, wonders at the deception, saying, “If she permeated into the innermost mind, it wounds her; /[is her] illusion [seen] by eye-sight? / She is a “plaything” (lu’ batun) – our remembering (dhakrunā) dissolves her (yudhawwibuhā)” (P44:3,4a).

The girl is neither where the lover thinks she is – as she moves from abode to abode – nor what the Sufi-lover thinks she is – as she seems to change in various ways throughout the poems and he is uncertain of her heart, which also appears to change as the Sufi-lover questions her “illusion” (al-wahmu). Sells’ perspective of this “plaything” (which he calls a “phantom”) is that in some instances in the poems it may not be clear to whom the poet is actually speaking -- the beloved in person or the East wind, the voice of the ruins, or a phantom -- all of whom may speak on her behalf or carry her message.437 (This Arabic word for “plaything” or “phantom” (lu’ batun) – as discussed later – has interesting multiple meanings, also including the sense of a “deceiver” and also “crucifix,” the latter having spiritual connotations.)438 The Sufi-lover’s emotional ups and downs and the constant movement through different landscapes are a metaphor for the Cosmos that is being recreated in every moment, with every Breath of God, in which everything is annihilated to be recreated in the next Breath of the All-Merciful.

Schimmel explains that “the predilection of mystical poets for contrasting pairs of concepts shows itself also in another frequently used phrase, namely the bipartite

438 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 2662.
profession of faith, *lā ilāha illā Allāh*. This formula has been used by many Sufi orders as *dhikr*, and has been connected by Ibn ‘Arabi with Divine breathing: *lā ilāha*, “there is no deity,” is the existentializaton of the world which is outside God, and *illā Allāh*, “save God,” is the taking back of the Divine breath into the eternal and unchangeable Divine essence.”.\(^{439}\)

Yet the girl, speaking as God, reminds him that he should be content with this constant change, as bewildering as it is, saying, “Is it not sufficient or him that I am in his heart (*bi-qalbihi*)? / He watches me at every moment (*kulli waqtin*). Is it not?” (P4:6). Regardless of his own perception or feelings or uncertainty about the girl – as God the Beloved – the Beloved is with him in each moment, during each successive Breath that annihilates his world, then recreates it. Much of the apparent redundancy of settings and redundancy of the lover’s discussing his feelings for the Beloved owe to the fact that each new description of setting and each new discussion is undertaken in each new poem as an entirely new Cosmos that God has created, after having just annihilated the preceding poem with its settings and lover’s annunciations.

II.C.3 *Interpreter: Evoking the Divine Names: The Wrathful Beloved and the Merciful Lover*

Schimmel states that “the most fascinating aspect of Ibn al-ʿArabi’s theories is the constant correlation between the names and the named ones.”\(^{440}\) She suggests that that relation between the name and the named one may have contributed to the formation of a common symbol of Persian mystical poetry, that of the “bezel” (*faṣṣ*) which is likened to the heart of sheikh onto which the divine names and attributes are inscribed; in turn the sheikh imprints these names and attributes onto his disciples, who is thought of as being sealing was into which the imprint is made.\(^{441}\) Rūmī compared the mystic who has lost himself completely in God to the many-faceted signet ring that bears God’s names.\(^{442}\) The word “bezels” (*fuṣṣūṣ*) is, of course, the word Ibn al-ʿArabi uses in the title of his great theosophical work, *Fuṣṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, Bezels of Wisdom*.


\(^{441}\) Schimmel, 271.

\(^{442}\) Schimmel, 271.
The importance of the divine Names is paramount in the Sufi doctrine that is revealed in the *Interpreter of Desires*. In one sense, the entire poetry collection is a vehicle for showing the diversity of God’s Names as reflected in human beings; thus, to demonstrate the prominent inclusion of the Names in *Interpreter of Desires* is to demonstrate the prominence of theoretical Sufism in the collection. The Names -- and the importance of their inclusion -- would have been easily recognized by readers of the poetry in the author’s day, as they derive from verses of the Qur’ān or hadith. The Qur’ān does not specify any particular list of Beautiful Names or any particular number of Beautiful Names. The Names in the poetry collection include both general and specific references to God’s Names about which Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote in *Bezels*, in saying that humans are the polished mirror which reflect the divine Names, or attributes, of God, so that God may see Himself. The majority of the references are to the Names as associated with both the girl as representing God in the poems, and to Names as associated with the Sufi-lover as being a gnostic in search of God. Analyzing the Names referenced in the poems reveals that the girl is truly a polished mirror, representing a balanced unity of polarities of active and passive attributes, whereas her lover is almost exclusively lacking in the majestic, wrathful qualities and demonstrates a large predominance of attributes associated with the passive -- and feminine -- attributes of love and perception in his role as a gnostic in pursuit of God (as symbolized by the girl).

It would actually not be difficult to demonstrate that, in some way, all of the traditional Names of God are integrated into the *Interpreter of Desires*, either as attributes of the girl/Beloved, or as reflected attributes inherent in the Sufi-lover. The Names discussed below are some of the most prominent in the collection, given as evidence for the existence of the Names in the poems as a Sufi concept. Demonstrating the inclusion of references to the divine Names is necessary to demonstrate the evocation by the poet of many of the well-known Divine Names, and to show that the Great Shaykh was, indeed, constructing the character of the girl so that she was reflective of both types of qualities of God, that is, those qualities traditionally associated with wrathful or masculine attributes, and those traditionally associated with merciful or feminine attributes. This analysis is absolutely necessary as one of the primary objectives of the poet in writing *Interpreter of Desires* is to show how God -- through the female human being -- reflects the attributes of God back to Himself, and how contemplation of God in woman is -- as Ibn al-ʿArabī says in his later chapter on
the ḥadīth about women, perfume, and prayer -- the highest form of contemplation.

Thus, showing exemplar divine Names is critical to demonstrating how the key elements of doctrinal Sufism in the Bezels chapter on the Prophet Adam are integral to the poetry collection. At this point, it is sufficient to clearly demonstrate the existence of what is obviously the poet’s incorporation of these Names in the poems -- and to give some brief context -- as the topic of the Names figures so prominently in Bezels and in theoretical Sufism; the deeper theological meaning of some of these key divine attributes and related concepts are discussed at length in later thematic sections of this project. What follows is a demonstration of how either some of the common names from the various lists of the Most Beautiful Names are incorporated into the Tarjumān, or how attributes associated with God are used. The work of this exercise is not to prove that Ibn al-ʿArabī used the exact names from these lists of the Most Beautiful Names in the poems, but to show that the concept behind some of the common names or attributes for God as found in the Qurʾan or hadith have been used by Ibn al-ʿArabī to convey the idea that the beloved or lover reflect certain attributes of God. Critical to understanding the sections that follow is the perspective of Martin Lings who states that in order to understand the deepest – and real -- meaning of the Divine Names, it is necessary to bear in mind that each of the Names of the Divine Essence comprises in Itself, like Allah, the totality of Names and does not merely denote a particular Divine Aspect. Since “the Names of the Essence are thus in a sense interchangeable with Allah,” there does not have to be an exact match of a given Divine Name from one of the list and the demonstration of the qualities that Divine Name in the poems’ text; that is, to demonstrate the existence of the incorporation of a Divine Name in a poem, another word may be used for the name, as long as it evokes that Name.443 For example, the name al-jamīl – “the Beautiful One” – is often cited as a divine name for God, but references in the poetry to related words – such as jamāl, “beauty”– speak to this same attribute, as do many other names denoting beauty, as will be discussed in detail below.

II.C.4 Interpreter: Attributes of the Beloved

Most of the overt references, or inclusion of divine Names, in the poetry relate to how the lover perceives the girl, which is – symbolically – how the Sufi perceives

443 Lings, What Is Sufism?, 64.
God. These Names relate to both the merciful and wrathful aspects of God. It is to the merciful attributes -- often associated with the feminine aspects of the Divine -- to which the Sufi-lover is drawn, of course. Of those merciful attributes, “beauty” plays a significant role, as would be expected in a collection of poems written in the form of love poetry. The attributes of God witnessed in the hadith, "Allah is Beautiful (jamīlun) and loves beauty (al-jamāla)," are present in a large number of verses.445

An early reference to beauty in the collection is the poet saying, “When my soul (nafsī) reached the collar bones (that is, reached the throat, implying when he was at the point of death), / I asked that Beauty (al-jamāla) and that Kindness (al-lutfā) for consoling [of me]” (P2:11), which the lover says in describing his grief upon the girl’s departure. This appeal to the compassionate attributes of the girl, her kindness (al-lutfā) -- as God the Beloved -- in the face of the lover’s suffering will become a recurring theme of the poetry. In the context of this poem, the term al-jamāla is better “beauty” but in the sense of being “goodly,” “comely,” or “pleasing,” attributes that are helpful to the Sufi-poet.446 The poet explains that “Surely not [anyone is] blaming [me] for setting one’s thoughts on her/ [because] the beautiful one (ḥasnā’) is loved (ma’šuqatun) wherever she may be” (P13:12). In this instance, a different word for beautiful is used (with the Arabic word root h-s-n), which implies a type of beauty combined with aspect of goodness.447 This type of beauty is actually the type referred to in Arabic when making reference to “the Most Beautiful Names” of God: al-asmū al-hus’nā (as in Sūra 17:110 and other places). Both usages of ‘beautiful’ are found throughout the poems as evidence of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s references to the Divine Names.

Cyrus Zargar makes an interesting point regarding Muḥyī al-Dīn’s use of different terms for “beauty” which has some relevance to the Tarjumān. Zargar suggests that words for “beauty” used in the context of the gnostic-Divine relationship were defined in various Sufi glossaries, giving “accurate” meaning to different terms, which also apply to Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings. For example, Zargar summarises the

446 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 462.
447 Lane, 570.
glossaries in suggesting that words with the ḥ-s-n root have the sense of “comeliness” and are applicable mainly to “essential” beauty, versus words with the j-m-l root which have the sense of “beauty” realised in instances of “belovedness.” He further defines “comeliness” (ḥ-s-n) as “what they call the collection of all perfections in one essence, and this belongs only to the Real.” This concept he differentiates from “beauty” (j-m-l) as “what they call the making manifest of the beloved’s perfections through the extreme longing and seeking of the lover.” Zargar asserts that the concept of “beauty” should also include -- less frequently found term in these poems – the term, ṭība, meaning something “pleasant, delicious, or delightful,” as in the verse, “….the “exciting of desire” by their laughing and smiling, / the delicious (al-ṭṭa‘ybiāt) kissing and sipping” (P29:5). Ibn al-ʿArabī uses all three terms cited by Zargar throughout the Tarjumān, though attributes of the Real are discerned even in the beauty (j-m-l) as remembered and longed for by the Sufi-lover.

Although Ibn al-ʿArabī used in several poems the verb šabāb, meaning to become affected by “excessive love,” or “desire,” the above poem is notable in the collection for includes the earliest use of a variation on the Arabic word aʿshqa, which means to love passionately, or with amorous desire, in saying, the beautiful one (ḥasnā’) is loved (maʿshūqatun) wherever she may be.” The Beloved’s beauty not only stirs sincere and tender love within the Sufi-lover, but inspires this type of strangling, choking love implied by forms of the verb aʿshqa. Bruijn sees in Sufi poems such as this the theme previously discussed that consists of a triangle in which three actors play their separate parts: the Lover, the Beloved, and Love, utilizing an etymological link between the partners in this triangle that is provided by the Arabic root ʿ-sh-q which respectively produces the words ʿashiqah, “(passionate) Lover,” maʿshuq, the “(passionate) Beloved’, ʿshq, “(passionate) Love” itself.”

As already seen, the study of the concept of “beauty” in the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī actually requires engaging with more than a single Arabic term for this overarching English term which Zargar says falls under a more general idea of “that

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449 Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1902.

which causes love.\textsuperscript{451} Thus the word root perhaps most associated with “beauty – j-m-l, as in jamāl (beauty) or jamil (beautiful) – is inadequate to encompass the Shaykh’s voluminous writings on this subject of beauty. The h-s-n root figures significantly – perhaps even more so than j-m-l root words -- in his poetry and theoretical writings.

Uses of these j-m-l words including the lover claiming that “… he becomes weak from knowing the cunning (al-arwaʾi) (that is, causing pleasure from being beautiful) beauty (al-jamāli)” (Sūra 28:18), a reference to the fact that even God’s beauty in its majesty is overwhelming. Indeed, the lover tells her that she is singular in the Cosmos in her comeliness in that “Beauty (al-ahusnu) attained in you is the most extreme limit (aqṣā madāhu) / another was not comprehended (mā li-wusʾi) like you” (Sūra 40:6). The Great Shaykh underscores the importance of God’s beauty by including it in the final line of the final poem in the collection in remarking that her superlative beauty even confounds itself: “Certainly beauty (al-jamālu) is overtaken by her/ and [the aroma of] the musk and the saffron diffuses” (P61:9).

In addition to the Beautiful, another traditionally feminine divine Name associated with the girl that features very prominently in the poems is the Tender (al-hannān). The Name is often used in connection with attributes of beauty in describing the physical form to which the poet-lover is drawn. Ibn al-ʿArabī uses a different term frequently, however, the rich Arabic word ṭaflatun -- meaning, tender, soft, delicate, or young -- to convey the concept of tenderness.\textsuperscript{452} For example, he depicts the girl as she travels away from him with her travel-party in the desert, as the lover declares, “By my father! (that is, an oath) [for] a playful (laʿūbun) tender one (ṭaflatun) (also implying a young girl), swaying / from among the girls tempting in the curtains [of the howdah]” (P20:3). The poet uses another term -- ghādat, meaning tender or fresh, or referring to a tender branch -- to denote the divine name the Tender in claiming that her tenderness is unique among the females, in saying that, “A fresh/tender one (ghādatun) is she, the very beautiful [girls] were torn apart (that is, confounded) by her” (P44:2).\textsuperscript{453} As will be

\textsuperscript{451} Zargar, \textit{Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ʿArabi and ʿIraqi}, 45.

\textsuperscript{452} Lane, \textit{An Arabic-English Lexicon}, 1911.

\textsuperscript{453} Steingass, \textit{The Student’s Arabic-English Dictionary}, 742.
discussed later, references to tender branches that bend \( (\text{lawa}) \) and provide shade are prominent in the poetry collection.\(^{454}\)

Ibn al-ʿArabī uses a different word for “tender” as he specifically links the attributes of tenderness and beauty when the lover exclaims, “O her beauty \( (\text{husna}) \), a tender one \( (\text{taflatun}) \)” \((\text{P48:4})\). This is the girl -- symbolic of God -- about whom the poet-lover says, “Long is my longing for [this] tender one \( (\text{lit aflatin}) \)” \((\text{Poem 20:16a})\). The word translated by Nicholson as “tenderness,” explains Maurice Gloton in his discussion of etymology of “love” words in \( \text{Interpreter of Desires} \), derives from the Arabic word \( (\text{atf}) \) for side (of the body), curvature, or fondness/affection, “refers to the divine inclination or sympathy \( (\text{atf il āhī}) \) implied in the mercy or irradiating love which is all-encompassing \( (\text{shāmila}) \) and universal \( (\text{mutlaqa}) \) which embraces everything.” Gloton also cites as releant to this attribute the Qurānic verse “My irradiating Love embraces everything” \((\text{Sūra 7:156})\).\(^{455}\)

Another feminine divine Name associated with the girl in the poetry -- also related to the concept of predisposition -- is the Guide \( (\text{al-hādī}) \). This Name has as its basis several Qurānic verses, including, “He guides whomever He wills to a straight path” \((\text{Sūra 2:141})\), and “He who guides you in the darkness of land and sea and sends out the winds bringing advance news of His mercy” \((\text{Sūra 27:65})\). As the Sufi-lover makes his way through the desert in pursuit of his Beloved, he frequently asks questions such as, “What is my doing? What is my stratagem? / Lead me \( (\text{dullī}) \), O my rebuke; do not terrify me with blame \((\text{P5:3})\). A word with the same root \( (d-	ext{l}) \) is used in reference to the scent that is symbolic of the creative Breath of the All-Merciful -- as when the lover states that “I had no sign \( (\text{dalīl}) \) for the purpose of being after them except a breath of their love [that is] fragrant” \((\text{P41:5})\) -- and is the wind “bringing advance news of His mercy” to assist the lover in his quest to find and be reunited with his Beloved.\(^{456}\) The only guide is God, represented in the person of the girl, about whom the lover asserts, “When you ask for a sign \( (\text{tastadillu}) \) you are, therefore, lost after (that is, in pursuit of) them/ except by their fragrant breeze \( (\text{bi-rīhihimu}) \), the most

\(^{454}\) Wehr, \textit{A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic}, 1038. Depending on which form of the verb is used, \textit{lawa} is used by the Shaykh to mean bend, twist, incline. Form III has the sense of joining with in a common cause, which speaks to the concept to the lover’s desired union with the Beloved.


\(^{456}\) Steingass, \textit{The Student’s Arabic-English Dictionary}, 337.
pleasant mark (al-athari) (or sign/clue)” (P39:2). Note the use of a “mark” (al-athari) as a sign or vestige left by the girl as a guide for the lover who follows her throughout the desert; this is a recurring motif throughout the poems.\textsuperscript{457} Most of the references to the Guide in the poems incorporate the concept of marks or signs, such as these.

This role of God as aiding His servant in pursuit of Himself is part of a larger theological reflection by Ibn al-ʿ Arabī on predisposition as it relates to the suffering of human beings. Many Qurānic verses refer to this divine Name, such as, “Allah is your Patron and He is the Best of helpers” (Sūra 3:150) and “Allah is Sufficient as a Helper” (Sūra 4:45). The Shaykh suggests the Divine Name, the Helper (al-nāsir), in many verses as the lover cries out for help to a nameless God whom the Sufi reader would himself assign the name, the Helper, in verses such as, “Who for the purpose of [addressing] my expression [of grief]? Who for the purpose of [addressing] my emotional upset? Point him out to me! Who for the purpose of [addressing] my sadness? Who for [addressing] an effusion of love?” (P15:5b). In another instance, the lover calls out, asking who will help by “untying” (from the root verb, ḥalla) or helping to free him from being lost in the desert (P48:10,11).\textsuperscript{458} In his discussion of the concept of proximity in the Futūḥāt, Ibn al-ʿ Arabī cites the hadīth, “The servant continues to draw close to Me by performing supererogatory acts of worship until I love him. And when I love him, I become his hearing, sight, hand, and helper.”\textsuperscript{459} In light of this hadīth, the Shaykh writes of the Sufi-lover asking that the Beloved come to him with help.

Not only does God provide, but He also restores, as the Qurān promises, “Allah originates creation, then will regenerate it, then you will be returned to Him” (Sūra 30:11). God is, thus, the Restorer (al-muʿād). Ibn al-ʿ Arabī makes a reference to the action-giving of this Name early in Interpreter of Desires in an important poem already discussed where he is clearly establishing the link between the girl and God, saying, “Her language grants life when she killed by her glance; it is like – with [that language] granting life (yuḥyā) by her – Jesus” (P2:4).\textsuperscript{460} In another reference to the restorative powers of the Islamic Prophet Jesus, the lover says that, “There whoever indeed is

\textsuperscript{457} Lane, \textit{An Arabic-English Lexicon}, 18.

\textsuperscript{458} Lane, 619.


being rendered emaciated, he is cured (*yashtafā*) / by what fills him with the perfume of women” (P7:7). As Schimmel notes, “the lip of the Beloved is a life-giving as the breath of Jesus,” the perfume wafting in as the breath of the All-Merciful.

Not only does God create, nurture, and restore His creation, but He also protects His creatures in a “motherly,” merciful way, for which He is known as the Safeguarder (*al-muhaymin*) or the Guardian (*al-wakīl*). These attributes derive from such Qur’ānic verses as, “Enough for us is Allāh, and blessed is the Guardian” (Sūra 3:173) and “He is the King, the Most Pure, the Perfect Peace, the Trustworthy, the Safeguarder, the Almighty” (Sūra 59:23). The Shaykh suggests these divine names in his poems, as at outset of *Interpreter of Desires*, when he poses the question in the opening poem about the girl and her family who have just departed: “Do you perceive them [as if] they were safe (*salimā*)/ or do you perceive them [as if] they were perished?” (*halakā*) (P1:3). Though the Shaykh unambiguously links the girl with God in the poem that immediately follows, here the poet is very directly establishing by reference to these divine attributes the two aspects of God -- the merciful and the wrathful -- as he questions whether God has deemed the girls travel-party “safe” (*salimā*) or “perished (*halakā*),” acknowledging that either condition is possible in God and are encompassed by God in relation to His Cosmos. This opening poem thus sets forth the central question of the entire collection in that all of the poems that follow are concerned with which of these two aspects of God the Sufi-lover will realize as the poems progress.

In the girl the reader also sees -- perhaps even more easily, from the perspective of the Sufi-lover -- the opposite of the feminine, merciful qualities of God just discussed. In her are, as already stated, reflected the unity of opposites, so that both the merciful and wrathful -- the traditionally feminine and masculine -- attributes of God are apparent in a human who both reflects the divine Names of God as a mirror to God who wants to know Himself, and who represents God. Ibn al-ʿArabī also shows the Beloved to be the monotheistic, majestic, glorious, omnipotent, distant God Whom the lover -- in his absolute dependency -- views as a harsh sovereign. The God of *Interpreter of Desires* is foremost the One (*al-aḥad*), or the Unique/Single (*al-wāḥid* or *al-witr*), as God says in the Qurān, “Your God is One” (*aḥad*) (Sūra 37:4), and as

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461 A poetic consonance is employed in using the word for being cured or restored (*yashtafī*) along with the word for being made emaciated (*shaffāh*), Lane, 1578.


463 Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 495; 1209.
Muḥammad said in the ḥadīth “Allah is single and loves odd numbers.” In relating these names specifically to theoretical gnosis, Nasr considers the concept suggested by the names and Qurānic verses and ḥadīth -- that is, the concept of “unity of being” (wahdat al-wujūd) -- as being the “crowning jewel of Sufism”, to be distinguish from pantheism which Nasr says some “exoteric” Muslims have wrongly labelled the idea. Though a detailed discussion of Oneness of Being is outside the scope of this project, it is helpful to note that Ibn al-ʿArabī did point in various writings to his belief in a lack of distinction between the Creator and the created, such that everything that is seen is none other than the God, that is, the Real (al-ḥaqq), and that the idea that created entities possess their own separate existence in only an illusory way. Nasr considers Ibn al-ʿArabī as being a Sufi of such high spiritual intuitiveness as to have been able to understand and write about the concept, which found its way into much Sufi poetry after his passing.

Examples of the Shaykh’s embracing this concept of singleness of being unique in the Tarjumān include the Beloved’s being set apart from all others by the poet’s saying, “She is untamed (waḥṣiḥyatun); indeed, not with her [is (forcibly) made] an intimate friend (mā bi-hā ansun). / In her private place (khalwatihā) -- in a chamber -- [she has] a burial place for remembrance (P2:7), a point he makes in the very important verses early in the collection in which the Shaykh is establishing the link between the girl as beloved and God as Beloved. The poet makes his point by saying that the Beloved is “untamed” (waḥṣiḥyatun), that does not have an intimate friend (mā bi-hā ansun), and that she is in her private place (khalwatihā), which also happens to be a locus of remembrance (li-(a)l-dhikri). In the poem that also reveals the girl Nizām’s age, Ibn al-ʿArabī references how the Beloved is unique, as she transcended (tasāmat) all others, as he writes that “… a girl of fourteen [rose to me like] a full moon. Indeed, she was made high (taʿālat) against Time in majesty and transcended (tasāmat) it in grandeur and glory (P40:1b-2). Martin Lings notes the relationship between the moon

465 Zargar, Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ʿArabi and ʿIraqi, 12; Zargar, Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ʿArabi and ʿIraqi, 12; Chittick, as Zargar notes, states that the term Oneness of Being did not emerge until after the Shaykh’s death, though his writings are known to address the concept Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-ʿArabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination, 226.
and transcendence in his discussion of the heart in Sufi theory. He says that the gnostic believes that the heart is the inward sun, the sun being the spirit, with light signifying gnosis.\textsuperscript{467} The moon – as mentioned in the poem above – though in night, is actually in the light of the sun, and thus analogous to the sun that transmit light to the soul. The moon in this context is, thus, representing the transcendent, just as the Shaykh indicates in the poem.\textsuperscript{468}

In a similar manner, the poet also includes references to God as the Pure (\textit{al-tāhir}). This Names speaks to God’s essence as being free from imperfection, and in the poetry the Great Shaykh states that of the God Whom the girl reflects, “A Divine Mercy from everyone burns (with love) with her / jealousy with her pureness (\textit{rāyiqhā}) that is mingled with which is in the tank of muddiness (\textit{kadari})” (P44:8,9). Her pureness (\textit{rāyiqhā}) is contrasted with the muck, the muddiness (\textit{kadari}), the dregs of humanity here. This word for pureness denotes “clear water” and is also another word for “beauty.”\textsuperscript{469} In another poem, the Sufi-lover says of the meadow in which the girl can be found that the reader should “Drink the choicest (\textit{sulāfha}) of its wine with its effect of intoxication (that is, its “hang-over”) / Be delighted in a singing one [who] recites: ‘O choicest (\textit{sulāfha}) (that is, clearest, most purified) [wine] in Adam’s time, related about the Garden of Habitation (that is, Paradise), a supported (that is authentic) tradition (\textit{ḥadīthan})…!’” (P26:7,8). Not only does Ibn al-ʿArabī refer to the concept of “pure” here in calling upon the image of the “choicest” (\textit{sulāfha}) of wine – that is, clarified wine -- but he explicitly associates it with Adam, the Perfect Man (\textit{al-insān al-kāmil}) who was created by God to be a mirror which reflected back to God His divine attributes. Furthermore, Sells notes the obvious “\textit{ḥadīth}” language of poem above, saying, “the language of hadith brings the poet into contact with a vertical dimension through a chain of authorities stretching directly back to the time of Adam and to the transcendent world of the garden of paradise.”\textsuperscript{470}

Closely related to the divine attributes of oneness and singleness is the Name, the Unequal (\textit{al-fard}) which the Qurʾān alludes to in such verses as, “So let him who hopes to meet his Lord act rightly and not associate anyone with the worship of his

\textsuperscript{467} Lings, \textit{What Is Sufism?}, 51.

\textsuperscript{468} Lings, 51.

\textsuperscript{469} Steingass, \textit{The Student’s Arabic-English Dictionary}, 396.

\textsuperscript{470} Sells, “Return to the Flash Rock Plain of Thahmad,” 10-1.
Lord” (Sūra 18:110). The poet clearly has the attribute of incomparability in mind when he writes, as noted earlier in this poem relation to her beauty, that Beauty (al-ahuṣnu) attained in you is the most extreme limit (aqṣā madāhu) / another was not comprehended (ma ilwās ‘i) like you (P40:6). A similar verse affirms that “She is higher than the sun (or, crystal) in brightness (Hiya anbā mina al-mahātuna sanān) (and sublimity), / a form not to be compared (la tuqāsu) with [any other] form” (P44:10). Quite obviously, if any being is “higher than the sun,” it is Divine. Intriguingly, Ibn al-ʿArabī had characterized the real-life Nizām as being “the incomparable one of her era. Her home is the pupil in the eye, and the heart in the chest....” This line is significant also in that it is one of the two which uses the word hiya (she) emphatically in this way, indicating the “She” in this context is of special importance.

There are, in contrast to the many attributes traditionally associated as feminine, also a great number of traditionally masculine divine attributes related to the girl concern the sovereignty of God. The Qurʾān says, “Exalted be Allah, the King, the Real. There is no god but Him, Lord of the Noble Throne” (Sūra 23:117). Again, in the early poem that establishes the divine in the girl, Ibn al-ʿArabī calls the females, who include his Beloved, “From each [peacock, from the earlier verse] (the peacock being a symbol of the girl, plus of the resurrected as well as the reviving Jesus), murderous glances and reigning (māliktin) [power] / imagining her as Bilqīs [seated upon] a throne of pearls” (P2:2). This reference to the throne of Queen Bilqīs is itself a meditation on the power and mystery of God, since the throne in this story (Sūra 27) was manifested in a way that suggests the continual annihilation and renewal of creation -- with God’s breathing in and breathing out – such that the new throne was created in the presence of Sulaymān and the old thrown in the palace of the Bilqīs was annihilated in an instant, thus being an instance of a theophany and the power of God.\footnote{Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi, 237–38.}

In one of the very few poems -- clustered near the end of the collection -- in which the Sufi-lover speaks directly to God, the Shaykh writes that “[the] might of His authority (ʾizzun lisuṭānhi) humiliated you / and if only just as He humiliated you he

\footnote{471 Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, 1251.}
\footnote{472 Wehr, 941.}
had shown coquettishness to you!” (P54:11). Here again is an example of the might of the Beloved as being the same as the might of God. In the same poem, Ibn al-ʿArabī says, “He made Himself master of me [and] I made myself master of Him (tamallakanī wa tamallaktu hu) / then each of us … for the love of it certainly possessed the other” (P54:4). The m-l-k root of this form of the verb, of course, suggests “taking possession” but the Sufi-lover’s making himself master of God is in the sense that God has come closer to his servant in response to the servant coming closer to Him.475

The Lord (al-rabb) is another wrathful/masculine Name Ibn al-ʿArabī uses -- specifically “Lord of desire” (rabbu al-hawā) (P54:8a) -- a reference to such Qur’ānic verses as, “Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. This is a straight path” (Sūra 3:50). Ibn al-ʿArabī evokes the remoteness and inaccessibility of this God in attributing to the girl the divine quality of the Hidden (al-bāṭin) in the many references to the veil and being veiled. According to Nasr, the veil (hijāb) plays a central role in Sufi metaphysics. He cites a saying of Muḥammad that there are seventy thousand veils of light and darkness that separate us from God, and that they constitute the Cosmos. The hijāb not only veils but also reveals through the act of unveiling.476

In doctrinal Sufism, bāṭin is the inward, or nonmanifest aspect of God in the sense that his Essence in Itself (dhāt) ultimately remains forever unknown to the creatures, whereas He is manifest (zāhir) inasmuch as God reveals something of his names and attributes.477 The Qur’ānic basis for this reference is often cited as “He is the first and the last, and the visible and the hidden....” (Sūra 57:3). The origin of this concept is also seen in the verse, “And some of them there are that listen to thee, and We lay veils upon their hearts lest they understand it” (Sūra 6:25). The Sufi-lover is both drawn and repelled by the “terrible beauty” behind the veil that separates himself from God.

The theme of the veil which hides the Beloved recurs throughout the Tarjumān, the poet making use of a rich variety of Arabic words available to describe or suggest the action of veiling and unveiling. This theme often includes a reference to the gnostic’s death which will occur due to the unveiling of Beloved as God, such as in the poem where the Sufi-lover recalls that

475 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 3023.
477 Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-ʿArabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination, 16.
Cheerful (girls) crowded me near [where] I touched (or kissed) the stone with reverence/

They came to the circumambulation veiled (literally, *muʿtajirātī, “with their lower faces also covered with a turban”) (1b)

They unconcealed (*ḥasarna*) [the faces] – sun-beams – and said /
to me “Abstain! [There is] death of the soul (*mawtu al-nafsi*) in glances (*al-laḥazātī*) [of us]” (2) (P7:1,2)

This poem may also be understood through Ibn al-ʿArabī own frequent assertion that his poems describe God’s “self-disclosures” which he defines as the “lights of unseen things that are unveiled to hearts” such that the vision of the divine self-disclosures provides the spiritual traveller with knowledge of God.⁴⁷⁸ The Beloved and the women in her party unconcealed (*ḥasarna*) their faces, likened to “lights of the sun” (*anwāri al-shumūṣī*) – sun-beams – warning that “death of the soul” (*mawtu al-nafsi*) awaited one who took in “glances” (*al-laḥazātī*) of their unveiled faces.

Finally, in one of the final poems of the collection, Ibn al-ʿArabī states that the lover’s goal is to be with the Beloved in a paradisal place, to experience God “[as if] a virgin (that is, bride) [who was] unveiled (*juliyat*) in the very much perfumed hall” (P56:2b). The Sufi desires an end to his arduous journey and a conclusion to the remoteness and separation from the Beloved so that he may experience union with God with the veil finally removed. The veil that separates the lover from his Beloved is the last of the seventy veils of light and darkness that Islamic tradition holds separates human beings from God. Binyamin Abrahamov comments that taking the references to annihilation of the “aspiring souls” together with the concept of the veil, it is sometimes said that as long as the lover sees his own essence in the Beloved, there remains a veil separating him from God. “Passing away from seeing his essence and passing away from this passing away (*fanāʾ-al-fanāʾ*) will cause him to contemplate his beloved as He really is.... If *fanāʾ-al-fanāʾ* does not take place, the lover will contemplate his beloved in the measure which fits his perception.”⁴⁷⁹ The poet-lover wants to experience the

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⁴⁷⁹ Binyamin Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of Al-Ghazālī and Al-Dabbāgh* (Routledge, 2003), 126.
feminine, the merciful, to realize the promise -- as written upon God’s throne -- that God’s mercy takes precedence over His wrath.\footnote{Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam: The Foundations of Muslim Faith and Practice*, 76.}

Before the veil is torn aside, however, the lover must still struggle with those attributes of God which cause him fear. God is not just majestic and remote, but sometimes more directly wrathful in relating to His servant. In one of the few explicit references to a divine Name, Ibn al-ʿArabī uses the name the Cleaver, or, the Splitter (*al-fāliq*) in speaking of the God who physically cuts the lover’s heart in two:

Indeed the seed of [my] heart (*ḥabbata al-qalbi*) (that, is the Beloved), when one who splits (*al-fāliq*), the Cleaver,

her shooting ripped [it] open with her arrows, (12)

One who looks at with an evil eye, accustomed to throwing at the entrails so none of the “slim things” (that is, arrow shafts)

“misses the mark.” (13) (P31:12,13)

As discussed earlier, the term of endearment the Sufi-poet uses – “seed of the heart” *ḥabbata al-qalbi* – uses a word (*ḥabb*) that is etymologically related to one of the terms for love: *ḥibb* or *ḥubb*. The connection with “seed” is made clearer in the Qur ānic verse from which the Name Splitter (or Cleaver) derives: “Allah is He Who splits the seed and kernel. He brings forth the living from the dead, and produces of dead out of the living” (*Sūra* 6:96) and “It is He Who splits the sky at dawn, and appoints the night as a time of stillness and the sun and moon as a means of reckoning” (*Sūra* 6:97).

God does not only make the wandering gnostic feel the anguish of separation and the pain of a broken heart, but He actually is seen throughout the poems by the lover as Divine Name, the One Who Makes Die (*al-Mumīt*). God kills, and He effects this through the girl, Niẓām. The poems’ reader who is familiar with the Qur ān will know that, when the Shaykh shows the girl as killing, he is evoking a *sūra* such as, "How can you reject Allah, when you were dead and then He gave you life, then He will make you die and then give you life again, then you will be returned to Him?" (*Sūra* 2:27). The theme of the Beloved killing the lover is one of the most prevalent in the collection. Ibn al-ʿArabī introduces this concept in the critical second poem (in which he clearly links the girl with God), in referencing the girl as a “[peacock], [with] murderous (or, assassin) (*fātikati*) glances (*al-alḥāzi*) and reigning [power], (P2:2a)” an
allusion to the girl in all her finery set upon her hawdaj as she sets out away from the lover; as discussed, the peacock also takes on allusions to God through the prophet Jesus. As has also been referenced, Ibn al-'Arabī in this same poem states that “Her language (that is, words/speech) grants life when she killed by her glance; / it is like – with [in] granting life by her – [she were] Jesus” (P2:4); this verse is a clear reference to the hadīth mentioned above in which God gives life, then takes it away, before He restores it. In this single verse the reader can readily see that the girl is a mirror reflecting back to God the polar opposites of the Names, the Restorer and the One Who Makes Die.

In addition to the warnings from the circumambulating women (previously mentioned), the poet writes of “the [large/evil] eye(d) (al-ʿīnu) [girl] / an assassin (fātikati), glancing, sickly, / her eyelids scabbards for glancing like sword-points” (P13:5b,6). The Beloved is again cast as an assassin (fātikati), and the Shaykh uses the analogy of the eye (al-ʿīnu) as killing weapons. She is, indeed, God as the One Who Makes Die, as seen by the Sufi-lover, in her also having “the blood-thirsty (al-qatūli) [eye], kohl-adorned with flirting and bewitchment” (P22:8a).

The Sufi-lover has felt the cut of her glances so keenly that it is as if she actually murders him every time she looks at him. The remembrance of her -- though it compels him to pursue her through the desert -- actually causes him to die over and over again as he thinks back to the looks she gave him. The killing eyes are the response to his desire, and the fact that she gives him murderous glances does, in fact, have the effect of annihilating him in her, annihilating him in God. This is the annihilation of the ego-self (nafs) of the gnostic in God, a key concept in theoretical Sufism. Intriguingly, rather than having moved the Sufi-lover any closer to his Beloved for reunion as the poems come to a close, Ibn al-ʿArabī has him moving closer to this death by the One Who Makes Die than to reunion. In the penultimate poem, the lover refers again to the “the ‘cutting sharp’ (ṣārimin) sword-point (zubā) from [its] twinkling, enchanting (al-sāhīri) (that is, eye) is drawing (P59:1). The Beloved is killing the Sufi-lover ego-self (nafs), which he does not yet understand is a positive action since by his annihilation (fanā’) he, ironically, is more receptive to union with God the Beloved.

The poems’ concept of the existence of a person’s ego-self (nafs) and its annihilation, is in synch with ideas about the meaning of love in mysticism which were current in medieval Islam, and which were grounded in several strains of theoretical
thought. Bruijn states that scholastic psychology acknowledged the attachment of the specifically human, or rational, soul to “lower strata,” which were called the vegetative and the animal souls. From this model, the doctrine of the realisation of the human potential through the subjection of these lower impulses to the control by the rational soul was derived.\textsuperscript{481} Thus in doctrinal Sufism, there is merit in spiritually slaying the person’s ego-self (\textit{nafs}) so that the Sufi is then in a state of annihilation (\textit{fanāʾ}), which is nullification of the mystic in the presence of God.\textsuperscript{482} The mystic who came to represent this “martyrdom in love” is Mańṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922). Ḥallāj is best known for uttering the phrase, “\textit{Ana al-haqq!” (“I am the Real”), indicating that he had achieved complete unity with God and completely annihilated his \textit{nafs} such that all that was left of him was the Divine, thus emptied of the self in mystical union. The particular difficulty of the orthodox Muslims with Ḥallāj was that this view of Sufi annihilation (\textit{fanāʾ}) is utter annihilation and “annihilation in annihilation” (\textit{fanāʾ al-fanāʾ}), leaving only one being, the Divine.\textsuperscript{483}

By the time of the last poem of the collection, the poet is effectively dead, but in the sense that Muḥammad said -- “You must die before you die” -- a reference to the concept so important to Sufis that a gnostic must not only annihilate one’s ego-self in God, but one must realize annihilation in annihilation (\textit{fanāʾ al-fanāʾ}), so that the Sufi is no longer even aware of the act of killing the ego-self because the Sufi is completely subsumed into union -- or re-union -- with God. The significance of this for the poems is that Ibn al-ʿArabī, in his introduction to the collection, explains how Nizām had challenged him as he had been circumambulating the Kaʿba in reminding him that one who is completely in union with God will not be aware of his own state because it has been completely annihilated in God. The poems in \textit{Interpreter of Desires} indicate that, contrary to the apparent non-conclusion of the final poem, the Sufi-lover’s ego-self has actually been killed by God so that he is annihilated in God. Thus without actually reaching a physical reunion with the girl, the Sufi-lover has achieved the union with God which is the real objective of the poet and the story of the poems.

II.C.5 \textit{Interpreter}: Attributes of the Lover

\textsuperscript{481} Bruijn, \textit{Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Poems}, 70.
\textsuperscript{482} Schimmel, \textit{Mystical Dimensions of Islam}, 144.
\textsuperscript{483} Sells, \textit{Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qurʾan, Miʿraj, Poetic and Theological Writings}, 267.
As already stated, though the girl reflects both the merciful and wrathful aspects of God back to Himself, the Sufi-lover reflects back primarily the merciful, feminine attributes of the Divine. In Sufi doctrine, it was never God’s intention that each individual reflects back all the qualities of God, or even a balanced set of merciful-wrathful attributes of God. Instead, the Divine Names are reflected in humanity as a whole, so that the Sufi-lover’s having a set of attributes that are primarily of one pole -- that is, of the merciful, feminine pole -- is not in contradiction to the Great Shaykh’s theoretical gnosis.

It is critical to understand how the lover is foremost reflecting the attributes of the love God. One of the Divine Names is – as has already been discussed at this chapter’s opening -- the Most Loving (al-wadūd), a Name reflected in Qur’ānic verses such as “My Lord is Most Merciful, Most Loving” (Sufi 11:90). There are, as would be expected in a poetry collection written in the form of the pre-Islamic qaṣīda, a very large number of references to love, reflecting a wide variety of meanings of that term. Ibn al-ʿArabī introduces the reader of the Interpreter of Desires to the subject of love in the very first poem, writing, “Lords of the love (ʿrbābu al-hawā) become confused / in the love (al-hawā) and they are being muddled” (or, entangled) (P1:4). The “lords of love” (ʿrbābu al-hawā) referred to here is the Sufi-lover himself. In addition to introducing the reader to the concept of “love,” this very first poem makes two references to mystical bewilderment (ḥayra) as it is the Sufi-lover himself who are confused (ḥāra) and immediately become muddled (artabakū) as soon as the girl has left him in a state of anguish from the separation. One of the founders of speculative gnosis, Dhūn-Nūn (d. 859) – in warning his fellow mystics -- alludes to the benefits of this type of bewilderment, even though the Sufi-lover cannot understand this at this point in the Tarjumān: “To ponder about the Essence of God is ignorance, and to point to him is association (shirk), and real gnosis is bewilderment.”

The Beloved as the Guide guides the lover into mystical bewilderment over the course of the Tarjumān al-Ashwāq. She is, in a sense, the “interpreter of desires.” Ibn al-ʿArabī and other Sufis parted with some of the Quranic and Islamic philosophical traditions which equated confusion as “error, failure, untruth and sin.” The fact that

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484 Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 6.
the Shaykh imbued “confusion” with such positive meaning – to the point of making bewilderment a gift from God – is a testament to his originality in interpreting such a familiar section of the Qur’an such as the Sūra about Noah (Nuh). In his doctrinal writings, the Shaykh often cites the hadīth, “O Lord, increase my perplexity concerning You.”

Chittick’s understanding of mystical “bewilderment” is that ḥayra is “not the bewilderment of being lost and unable to find one’s way, but the bewilderment of finding and knowing God and of not-finding and not-knowing Him at the same time.” Thus, when the poet says that he is confused and muddled, it is not because he is lost in a geographical sense, but because he understands that he is in “a never-never land of affirmation and negation, of finding and losing, knowing and not-knowing.”

Thus, this first poem establishes the pattern for the rest of the collection: the Sufi-lover has found his great love, but his Beloved is always outside of his grasp. He will find remnants of her, signs pointing to her, but he never achieves – in the context of the entire poetry collection – reunion with the Beloved.

The story of Interpreter of Desires is the story of love of the Sufi for God, and equally of God – the Most Loving – for the Sufi. In previously explaining the role of the creative Breath of the All-Merciful, it was demonstrated how the Beloved as God showed His wanting the Sufi-lover to know Him. The poems do not -- in the same sense as with the lover -- show the girl/Beloved as demonstrably sharing His love for the lover. The poems portray the love to be, on the surface, one-sided, though this is only from a sensual perspective, which is the limited point of view of the suffering lover. When the poet-lover says “by one who calls to Da’d and al-Rabāb and Zaynāb/ and Hind and Salma and, furthermore, Lubna and to a distant sound [listen]” (P3:9), he is invoking famous passionate lovers from the pre-Islamic odes. He is clearly miserable because of their separation, begging anyone who will listen to him: “Then I said to her, ‘Enslave (or, “pity”) an impassioned one (ṣabān), an alien (or, outcast)” (P4:3b). She herself is apparently not suffering, and even -- as previously shown -- enjoys being the coquette, which both maddens him and draws him in with even greater passion.

486 Almond, 40.
487 Almond, 42.
489 Chittick, 3–4.
The strength of the Sufi’s passion is so strong that he equates love with religion, in stating in one of the most-quoted verses, “I profess (adīnu) the belief of loving (bi-dīnī al-ḥubbī): however ‘riding camels’ (from the Arabic word for ‘stirrups’) wended their way, that is my creed and my sign” (anna tawjjihat fi al-dīnu dīna wa ʿīmāna) (P11:15). From this verse the reader easily sees that the lover is reflecting back to God the attribute of love in the most divine way in this form of a creed, which starts by saying “I believe…” (adīnu). The Sufi-lover consistently professes his love for the girl, in saying that “A rebuker (ʿadūlun) did not accuse (or, blame) me in loving her (hawaha) / and a friend did not accuse me in loving her,” such that both detractors and friends understand his feelings (P23:15). The Sufi is shown to be a lover just as God had been earlier shown to be a lover, as seen in the verses in which he declares about himself that “the separation (al-ghirirāqu) [of them] disclosed the “fervent longing” (ṣabābatī) of the sorrowful [Sufi] lover” (P13:8b), and “the rain descends from a gap of a cloud / like tears pouring, is dissipated because of separation (li-(a)fīrāqi) [from the one he loves]” (P26:6). The Sufi-lover realizes God’s working in matters of love, thus not only recognizing this attribute of God but reflecting it back to Him, asserting that “she is experiencing (or presenting), and we are experiencing (or, presenting) (tulqī wa nulqī) [that] which we are suffering from the love (al-hawā) and from misery of the testings and from feeling pain of the violent grief” (P57:6). In this verse, not only is God bestowing love to the lover, but the lover is reflecting it back directly. In the final poem of the collection the lover reaffirms the love that is a reflection of God’s attribute in asserting that “I am ‘bright in face’ (that is, radiant) (aṣbaḥtu) in ardent passion” (mushghāfan) (P61:7a). Thus, in many different uses and meaning of words for “love,” Ibn al-ʿArabī calls attention to the Beloved as the Loving One.

Another divine Name which the Sufi-lover reflects back to God is the Giver of Form (al-musawwir). The Qurān includes this Name in the verse, “He is Allah, the Creator, the Maker, the Giver of Form” (Sūra 59:24), and references His actions in recounting, “He formed him and breathed His Spirit into him” (Sūra 32:8). The subject of the form relates directly to the lover himself as he says in the most famous of the Shaykh’s verses that “Verily became my heart made possible of every form” (laqad sāra qalbī qābilā kullā šūratin) (P11:13a), which is part of a poem that explicitly links the subject of love and the form of the girl with the subject of religion and God. A

490 This famous verse of the Great Shaykh is, of course, only on its surface about love, as is discussed in Chapter 2 in the examination of the topic of predetermination.
fuller understanding of this verse moves it farther away from merely being about sensual love (as discussed in the section above concerning God as the Most Loving) or even about being receptive, which is also indicative of the feminine attributes of God, toward a much deeper view of its underlying Sufi doctrines. Primarily, however, the references to “form” are seen when the gnostic perceives the form of the girl. The girl’s beauty -- her physical form -- evokes the lover’s love on a human level. The lover reflects this Name, Give of Form, as a mirror of God’s attributes in that he perceives the form of the girl/Beloved, so that he is actually giving her form in his imagination as he recognizes her form.

Zargar explores at length what Al-Shaykh al-Akbar says about the human form and beauty. He writes:

Repeatedly the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabi affirm that no object of beauty more ably arouses human pleasure and evokes love than the human form.... The potency of human-to-human attraction is indeed so overwhelming that Ibn al-ʿArabi often compares it with the love between gnostics and God, ranking these as the two most powerful loves.491

Zargar asserts that in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s thinking, a human loves another human because that other human being is a locus of divine beauty, although not all lovers know this.”492

The following verses are exemplar of the connection with how the Sufi-lover views the girl, which is really how he conceptualizes her form -- here, beauty -- so that he reflects the divine attribute by his giving her a form:

She intended (that is, urged) my flirtation from among one of them; / [there is] not a beauty that is a sister for her from among human beings (ḥasnā laysa laha ukhtun mina al-nasharī). (5)

If she unveiled her face, she showed you brightness/ like the rising sun [which is] not without shining. (6)

Her bright forehead [is] for the sun, her ‘hair hanging in front’ for the night-time. /

491 Zargar, Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ʿArabi and ʿIraqi, 66.
More wonderful a form [is she], sun and night together! (7)

We are – through her – light of the day in the night /
and we are in the midday night from her hair. (8)

(P39:5-8)

The Beloved shows her form first incomparable beauty, there being “not a beauty that is a sister for her from among human beings” (ḥasnā laysa laha ukhtun mina al-nashari), that is, no female comparable to her own high level of beauty. She unveils her face, which showed brightness, which – plus her hair – is evidence of a form of sun and moon together, a unity of opposites, encompassing tashbīh (similitude) and tanzīh (incomparability). Zargar, in his exhaustive exploration of the concept of “form” in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī, describes this gnostic vision as “encroaching” on the incomparability of God, in which the Sufi views the Cosmos is the “form” of the Real, while knowing that it is not.493 This concept is discussed more fully in the following two chapters of this dissertation.

Finally, in relation to God as the Giver of Form, a notable line – and one of the final lines of the collection -- very directly shows how the Sufi-lover perceives the beauty of the girl’s form -- the perception which is, in effect, the reflection of God’s creating her form, in addition to the Sufi’s seeing God in his beloved – and further associates her with the contrasting feminine and masculine attributes in saying, “Because I see a form (shakhṣan), its beauty (jamāluhu) grows / -- when our meeting [happens] -- in pleasantness and magnificence (naḍātan wa-takyyurā)” (P55:3). The face – and the possibility of its unveiling -- to which the poet refers above – may be compared to the Qur’an, as Schimmel writes, since the Holy Book is a perfect, flawless beauty and continues to be the manifestation of God’s words and actions. Schimmel notes that even the eyebrows of the beloved, due to their shape, take the form of the prayer niche for lover.494 Thus, the unveiled face of the Beloved reveals the form of both tashbīh and tanzīh.

The Sufi-lover also reflects back to God the attribute of the Watchful (al-raqīb), derived from Quranic verses such as, “Allah is watchful over all things” (Sūra 33:52). The lover is ever-mindful of the girl, watching over her and her travel-party in his


494 Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 73.
imagination: “They departed, and although I did not perceive (\(\text{\textashur}\)) them, they knew that my mind (\(\text{\textdamiri}\)) guarded (\(\text{\textharis}a\)) over them” (P19:3). Still, in his mind’s eye, he sees her in the a paradisal setting, describing her in saying, “[She is] a forenoon sun in a celestial sphere, a rising thing; [she is] a branch already planted in a garden” (P25:7).

Similarly, the gnostic reflects the attribute of the All-Hearing (\(\text{\textal-sami}\)), an allusion to “Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing” (\(\text{\textSura} 2:255\)). Though he does not like what the girl says, he does listen: “I excused her when I heard (\(\text{\textsami'tu}\)) her speech / and [her] complaining as I complain with an agitated heart” (P24:8). Even in her absence, the gnostic-lover is attentive to even a faint sound that might indicate her presence or her whereabouts as he pursues her across the desert, saying that, “indeed [my] heart with them is attached wherever turns [the camels] the camel-driver by [his] chant” (\(\text{\texta'sakhah}\)) (P52:3). The Divine name \(\text{\textal-sami}\) immediately calls to mind the fact that the use of erotic metaphors was not only a literary phenomenon, but found also in spiritual rituals of the Sufis which were imitating practices of the non-religious world. The most prevalent of these practices was the “hearing” or “audition” (\(\text{\textsam'a}\)), an artistic form practised by Sufis which comprises music, dance and the recitation of poetry. The integration of these practices into Sufism was problematic, as they were derived from the type of “secular conviviality which was most objectionable to Islamic piety,” according to de Bruijn. He notes that al-Ghazālī (b. 1058, d. 1111) had determined that the aesthetic enjoyment of music and song could be helpful to “kindle the innate fire which God had hidden in the human heart.” Some Muslim scholars had determined that listening to music was like fanning the flames of a fire, and a person’s inner being – whatever that might be –, would be strengthened by music, so that music was allowed for those with a good inner being. Ibn al-'Arabī makes such a relationship between heart and \(\text{\textsam'a}\) the Tarjumān in several poems, including the one above. Nasr notes that what the \(\text{\textsam'a}\) does – here likened to the chant of the camel-driver – is to “intensify love and longing for God while carrying the soul forward in its journey” towards God. Even more explicitly, Nasr comments that the Sufi

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496 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 325.
tradition of song and poetry “speak of our separation from our Beloved and provide wind currents for the wings of the soul to fly and return to Her abode.”

In this consideration of the divine Names which are so important to Ibn al-ʿArabī’s theosophy as he introduced the topic in his chapter on the Prophet Adam, the reader can see that the Divine Names are signified by both description and action in the poems. The “vapour of the desert” through which the Beloved and her fellow travellers were seen cutting and in which they were seen as though a mirage (P18:2b) is like the unpolished mirror which was the undifferentiated Cosmos before God gave the Command (“Be!”). The two central characters of the poem – the girl/Beloved and the lover/Sufi – represent, in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s cosmology, the God who wanted to know Himself and the man (as the differentiated, polish mirror) in which He would see His attributes reflected back to Himself, human beings being the only creature in whom all divine Names are manifest. Carl Ernst discusses the Sufi concept of the polished mirror in relation to Interpreter of Desires which he claims must be fully understood symbolically. Ernst concludes that the poet “employs what is apparently the lovers’ repartee to discuss how the divine presence seeks passionate love from humanity; when a human becomes a perfect slave of God, then God becomes the eye and ear of that person, who becomes all light and a perfect reflection of God’s qualities.”

Generally, the Names associated with the girl encompass both poles of the traditional merciful and wrathful attributes; she is thus a human in whom is united the polarity of attributes about which Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote in Bezels. This situation is in sharp contrast to that of the Sufi-lover who demonstrates almost exclusively the merciful-type attributes; it is as a gnostic that he complains of the pain of separation he suffers, repeatedly asking the girl -- as God -- why He allows his continued suffering. It is to the girl’s merciful attributes to which the lover is drawn, and against her wrathful attributes which he bitterly complains.

The Names attributed to the girl -- though she ultimately represents God, the Beloved -- are also Names attributed to a human being, so every Name that is associated with her as divine are, by virtue of her being a woman, also associated with

498 Nasr, 146.
499 Ernst, Sufism: An Essential Introduction to the Philosophy and Practice of the Mystical Tradition of Islam, 155.
500 The theory behind the suffering and complaints to God of the Sufi-lover are discussed in detail in the Chapter Two.
her as a creature of God and a polished mirror in whom are manifest by God attributes, showing Him Himself as He wishes to be known. The girl functions in this way in a dual role: as both possessor of divine attributes (Names) and reflector of the attributes. Thus all of the many Names discussed above as applying to God are reflected in the girl as a human being, and not only as the girl as God the Beloved. The two central characters of the poetry collection, therefore, both are the polished mirror in which God sees Himself, though they do so in very different ways.501

II.D Bezels of Wisdom: The Prophet Noah -- Combining Transcendence and Immanence

As the discussion of the Divine Names and attributes has shown, the concept of opposites -- and the unity of polarities -- is important to Ibn al-ʿArabi’s theosophy. Of particular importance is the pairing of the Names the Inner and the Outer (or the Unmanifest and the Manifest) to which the Great Shaykh introduces the reader in the Bezels chapter on the Prophet Adam. These two Names are closely connected to two other Sufi concepts that would have been very well known in the Shaykh’s time, incomparability (tanzīḥ) and similarity (tashbīḥ), also often termed transcendence and immanence. The Sufi viewed the Qur’ānic reference to God’s making Adam from His two (right) hands as meaning that the Cosmos was created to encompass creatures that reflect back to God His own attributes of incomparability and similarity. The Shaykh al-Akbar writes in Bezels that “He has expressed this polarities of qualities [Sūra 38:75] as being His hands devoted to the creation of the Perfect Man who integrates in himself all Cosmic realities and their individual [manifestations].”502 Ibn al-ʿArabi’s particular contribution to theoretical gnosis in this regard was to insist that God -- and His Cosmos -- cannot be viewed or truly known purely, or even primarily -- from the pole of incomparability, as was -- and still is -- the view of many non-Sufi Muslims and Islamic scholars, but must be viewed as a balance between both incomparability and similarity.

Chittick notes that Ibn al-ʿArabi constantly alternates between these two points of view, saying that the Shaykh maintains that true knowledge of God and creation can only come through combining the two perspectives. The terms associated with these

501 Chapter Three of this project discusses in detail the role of contemplating God in the female.
concepts as the declaration of God’s incomparability (tanzīh) and (the declaration of His) similarity (tashbīh). Ibn al-ʿArabī describes tanzīh as being “to declare that God transcends any attribute or quality possessed by His creatures” and tashbīh is “to maintain that a certain similarity can be found between God and creation.”

II.D.1 Bezels: Balancing Incomparability and Similarity

Ibn al-ʿArabī expands on his views on this topic throughout Bezels, including his belief about the need for this balance between tanzīh and tashbīh to which he introduces his reader forthrightly in the later Solomon chapter:

[D]o not know Him in one context and be ignorant of Him in another, nor affirm Him in one situation and deny Him in another, unless you affirm Him in an aspect in which He affirms Himself and deny Him in an aspect in which He denies Himself, as in the verse in which denial and affirmation of Himself are brought together. He say, *There is nothing like unto Him* [Qur ʿān 42:11], which is a denial, *And he is the Hearer, the Seer* [42:11] which is an affirmation of Himself with attributes attributable to all living creatures that hear and see.

Ibn al-ʿArabī explains in the Elias chapter in Bezels that the transcendent God is the aspect of the Divine known by the intellect, which “knows only according to the transcendental and nothing of the immanental.” To truly know God -- to be termed a true gnostic -- a person must see God as both aspects. The Shaykh recalls the Qur ānic verse *There is nothing like unto Him* (Sūra 42:11) -- asserting that this is the “great expression of transcendence” -- and cites the verse *He is the Hearing, the Seeing* (Sūra 42:11) to explain comparability. Related to this verse is the well known ḥadīth qudsī that is important to Sufi doctrine which says, “When I love him [that is, My servant], I am his hearing through which he hears, his eyesight through which he sees, his hand through which he holds, and his foot through which he walks.” Chittick explains what would have been the general Sufi view of this hadith in his discussing Ibn al-ʿArabī’s approach to it:


[T]he Shaykh al-Akbar alludes to a hadith that he quotes more commonly than any other.... Here we have the mystery of God’s nearness to the servant expressed in a language that provides the Shaykh endless opportunities to meditate upon the divine/human relationship. One meaning he frequently attributes to the hadith is that “None knows God but God.” The servant, qua servant, can never know God, because he is existentially locked into tanzīḥ. But inasmuch as God becomes the eyesight through which he sees, he is God’s representative and vicegerent, and because of the tashbīḥ involved he can see God. Or, rather, none sees God but God -- only the divine in the human sees and recognizes the signs for what they are.506

Ibn al-ʿArabī notes that even in referring to God as transcendent, a person does so inadequately because God “put Himself beyond their insistence on His transcendence, because such insistence [in fact] limits Him by reason of the inadequacy of the intellect to grasp such things.” This is in accordance with the Qurʾānic verse, “May thy Lord, the Lord of Might, be exalted beyond what they describe” (Sūra 37:170). Furthermore, the Shaykh shows the concepts of transcendence and immanence to be truly united in opposition, in saying, “we speak of likeness in transcendence and transcendence in likeness.”507

II.D.2 Bezels: The Distant-Proximate Axis and the Veil

Another view of the concept of the transcendent-immanent polarity is the distant-proximate axis. Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses this in the Bezels chapter on Job, in remarking that “[e]verything perceived is close to the eye, even if it be physically remote, for the sight makes contact with it by perception, or else does not perceive it at all,” adding that sometimes it is the object that makes contact with the sight. “There is, therefore, a certain proximity between the perception and the perceived,” and “distance and proximity are relative notions, having no existence in themselves, despite their quite definite effects on that which is distant and near.”508 The consequence for the consideration of the transcendent God versus the immanent God is that anything that is

508 Ibid., 216.
perceived must be immanent, whereas if some attribute is not perceived, it is incomparable to anything else and, therefore, transcendent.

Ibn al-ʿArabī uses the analogy of the veil and the act of veiling or hiding in characterizing the transcendence of God. Introducing the concept in the Adam chapter, he says that

the Ruler [God] is veiled, since the Reality has described Himself as being hidden in veils of darkness, which are the natural forms, and by veils of light, which are the subtle spirits.... [T]he Cosmos does not perceive the Reality as He perceives Himself, nor can it ever not be veiled, knowing itself to be distinct from its Creator and dependent on Him.... In this sense, the Reality can never be known [by cosmic being] in any way, since originated being has no part in that [Self-sufficiency].

There is, therefore, a veil that will always exist between the Cosmos -- human beings -- and the transcendent aspects of God, the former being the dependent/contingent created beings and the latter being the Creator.

II.D.3 Bezels: The Prophet Noah -- Tension between Transcendence and Immanence

Though Ibn al-ʿArabī introduces the concept of the transcendent and immanent God in the Adam chapter and makes reference to it throughout Bezels, he gives special attention to the subject in the chapter on Noah (“The Wisdom of the Exaltation of in the Word of Noah”). This chapter demonstrates that contradictions and opposites, such as incomparability and similarity, must necessarily ultimately resolve in the unity of God. Some non-Sufi Muslim scholars have declared this view to be heretical. The Shaykh al-Akbar is particularly adamant in this chapter that a view of divine incomparability and similarity must be in balance, and that a person “who asserts that God is [purely] transcendent is either fool or a rogue, even if he be a professed believer.” Ibn al-ʿArabī states the theosophically correct (balanced) view that “the Reality is manifest in every created being and in every concept, while He is [at the same time] hidden from all

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510 See Austin’s introduction to the Noah chapter for further discussion of how non-Sufi Muslim scholars have sometimes regarded the Noah theories as being heretical. Ibn al-ʿArabī, 71–73.
understanding,” that is, He is represented by the divine Names the Manifest and the Unmanifest, respectively. But just as the “fool” considers only the transcendent aspects of God, a person is likewise incorrect “in the case of one who professes the comparability of God without taking into consideration His incomparability, so that he also restricts and limits Him and therefore does not know Him.”

Ibn al-ʿArabī thought these concepts so important that he set the theories apart in the form of poetry in the Noah chapter, saying that

If you insist only on His transcendence, you restrict Him.
   And if you insist only on His immanence you limit Him.
If you maintain both aspects you are right,
   An Imām in the spiritual sciences.
Whoso would say He is two things is a polytheist,
   While the one who isolates Him tries to regulate Him.
Beware of comparing Him if you profess duality,
   And, if unity, beware of making Him transcendent.
You are not He and you are He and
   You see Him in the essences of things both boundless and limited.

Ibn al-ʿArabī cites the Qur’ānic verse that helps form the rationale for this balanced approach to viewing God in saying that “There is naught like unto Him,” which speaks to His transcendence, and “He is the Hearing, the Seeing,” which speaks to His comparability (Sūra 42:11). In a demonstration of the Sufi inclination toward looking for alternative or hidden or multiple meanings in Qur’ānic verses -- sometimes finding even meaning upon meaning at many levels -- the Shaykh says, regarding the above interpretation of this verse, that “On the other hand, there are implicit in the first quotation comparison [albeit negative] and duality [in the word “like”], and in the second quotation transcendence and isolation are implicit [He alone being named].

In the Enoch chapter in Bezels, the Shaykh further explains the concept of transcendence by saying that “only He sees Him and only He is hidden from Him, for He is manifest to Himself and hidden from Himself” and that “He Himself being determined only by

511 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 73–74.
512 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 75.
513 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 75.
His Own Self-manifestation,” citing that part of the profession of faith that says, “There is naught but He.”

Ibn al-ʿArabī uses the story of the Prophet Noah to flesh out the subtleties of the tension between transcendence and immanence. Noah’s mistake, claims the Great Shaykh -- and the reason the people of his time did not heed his call to repent of their sins -- was that Noah did not combine both aspects of transcendence and immanence, but spoke to those aspects separately. Noah’s own view of God was primarily transcendent and the view of the people was primarily immanent. Noah actually did summon the people in both ways, but he did not combine them. As Ibn al-ʿArabī explains,

[Noah] appealed to their outer and inner understanding saying, _Ask your Lord to shield you [from your sins], for He is Forgiving_ [Sūra 71:10].

Then he said, _I summoned them by night [inwardly] and by day [outwardly], but my summons only made them more averse [outer]_ (Sūra 71:5)....

The whole truth is a conjunction and not a discrimination.

Ibn al-ʿArabī offers the suggestion that if Noah had, instead, taken the approach of the Qurānic verse _There is none like unto Him_ (Sūra 42:11), which combines both aspects, they would have responded favourably to him, “because this quote combines in a single verse the transcendental and immanental modes; nay, even in half a verse.” Noah had, though,

summoned his people _by night_, in that he appealed to their intellects and spirits, which are unseen, and by day, in that he appealed to the [evidence of] their external senses. But he did not unite the two as in the verse _There is none like unto Him_. For this reason their inner selves [given to the immanental aspects] recoiled [from his summons] because of its discriminatory nature, making them even more averse [outer].

Then he told them that he summoned them in order that God might

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515 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 75–76.
shield them [from the sin of excessive immanence] and not to reveal [uncover] for them [His transcendence as an absolute]. This they understood from him [according to their outer senses] so that they put their fingers in their ears and tried to cover themselves with their clothes (Sūra 71:2).\footnote{Ibn al-ʿArabī, 76.}

Ibn al-ʿArabī then follows the above explanation by differentiating the Prophet Noah’s approach to summoning the people to that of the Prophet Muhammad. The Shaykh says that

In the verse \textit{There is none like unto Him}, similarity is at once implied and denied. Because of this Muhammad said that he had been granted [knowledge of God] integrating all His aspects. Muhammad [unlike Noah] did not summon his people \textit{by night and day}, but by night during the day [an inner summons implicit in the outer one], and by day during the night [the outer being implicit in the inner].\footnote{Ibn al-ʿArabī, 76–77.}

Thus not only is the Muhammad ideal to combine transcendence and immanence in a balanced way, but -- from the Sufi ideal which seeks to demonstrate an even deeper meaning of the verse’s explanation -- to show immanence in transcendence and transcendence in immanence.

The Shaykh al-Akbar makes a further reference to the day-night analogy to similarity-incomparability in the \textit{Bezels} chapter on the Prophet Jesus. He writes in verse form that

\begin{quote}
All is essentially in the Breath, as light is, in essence, in the dark before dawn. Knowledge [of this] by [intellectual] proof is like the emergence of daylight to one half asleep.... It manifests itself to him who comes seeking a coal [from a fire]. He sees it as fire, but it is a light to kings and night-farers.\footnote{Ibn al-ʿArabī, 181.}
\end{quote}
Here, too, the poet shows the Muhammadan ideal of viewing God in how the “day” is in the night, from the coal lighting the night-farer’s way, and how the night is in the day, as the darkness of night mingles with the dawn.

II.D.4 Bezels: Elevation as Transcendence

In the Bezels chapter on the Prophet Enoch, Ibn al-ʿArabī connects the issue of God’s transcendence with the concept of “elevation.” In his introduction to that chapter, he first analogizes elevation to the sun’s position as the most elevated cosmic point. This analogy clearly ties back into the discussion of daylight and night, though in a somewhat roundabout way. In respect to the concept of elevation, it is actually the sun - which is the source of light -- that is the highest, that is, the transcendent.519 This rather complex view of God as transcendent darkness yet elevated as the sun in His remoteness, His incomparability, the Shaykh addresses in the Adam Bezels chapter, in saying that “the Ruler [God] is veiled, since the Reality has described Himself as being hidden in veils of darkness, which are the natural forms, and the veils of light, which are the subtle spirits.”520

In explaining how God as the divine Name the Elevated is not actually elevated relative to anything in His cosmos, Ibn al-ʿArabī clearly links transcendence and elevation by stating that “Naught is except the Essence, which is Elevated in Itself, its elevation being unrelated to any other.” In further clarifying the meaning of this divine Name, Ibn al-ʿArabī writes that “He Who is Elevated in Himself enjoys the [complete] perfection in which all realities and relationships, determined, or undetermined, are immersed, since none of the attributes can possible apply to other than He.”521

Finally, in connection with transcendence and immanence, Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses the concept of “signs” in explaining the concept of His immanence, or comparability (tashbih). He cites the Qurʾanic verse “We will show them Our signs upon the horizon” (Sūra 41:53) in saying that “God draws our attention to what is originated as an aid to knowledge of Him and says that He will show forth His signs in

519 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 83–84. Analogizing the divine with light relative to shade and shadow in connection with dreams and the imagination is discussed as a separate subject in Chapter Two.

520 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 56.

521 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 85,88.
Thus, He chooses to show evidence of Himself to human beings by providing signs -- His immanence -- in the created things of the Cosmos. One of the implications of this is that knowledge of these signs -- that is, knowledge of God’s creation -- includes knowledge of ourselves. “[God] suggests that knowledge of Him is inferred in knowledge of ourselves,” so that

Whenever we ascribe any quality to Him, we are ourselves [representative of] that quality, except it be the quality of His Self-sufficient Being. Since we know Him through ourselves and from ourselves, we attribute to Him all we attribute to ourselves. It is for this reason that the divine revelations come to us through the mouths of the Interpreters [the prophets], for He describes Himself to us through us. If we witness Him we witness ourselves, and when He sees us He looks on Himself.522

Ibn al-ʿArabī reminds his readers, in this need for a balanced view of God, that “God cannot be known except as uniting the opposites.”523 As discussed, Ibn al-ʿArabī is adamant that it is important to see both the transcendent and immanent in God is crucial to theoretical Sufism. In this regard, in the Bezels chapter on the Prophet Hūd, Ibn al-ʿArabī says that

He who sees the Reality from his standpoint, in Him by Him, is a gnostic. He who sees the Reality from His standpoint, in Him, but with himself as the seer, is not a gnostic.524

In the Noah chapter, Ibn al-ʿArabī expands on the notion of gnosis and transcendence versus immanence. He contrasts the transcendence of intellectual knowledge, or reason, referred to when Noah said, “He causes the heaven to rain upon you copiously,” but the prophet Noah added, referring to immanental knowledge, “has provided you with reserves [of wealth] (Sūra 71:12), by which He reserves you to Himself.” The Shaykh says that by this latter action a person is able to see his form in God. “Whoever imagines that he sees the Reality Himself has no gnosis; he has gnosis who knows that

523 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 85.
524 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 137.
it is his own essential self he sees.” The former is merely the result of “ordinary
discursive thinking, while what is required is the devotion of knowledge to
contemplation., far removed from the fruits of ordinary thought.”

II.E Interpreter of Desires: Daylight in the Night

The poems of Interpreter of Desires are very much an exposition on the
transcendence and immanence of God as the Sufi-lover struggles toward a Beloved by
whom he is compelled by his memory of previous union in the hope of a re-union. Ibn
al-ʿArabī says in the poetry, “She composed a [proper] arrangement of the union (al-
shamli); hence, she is our ruling system (naẓāmunā): [she is both] Arab (ʿarabiyyatun)
[and] a foreigner” (ʿajmāʾ) (P29:14a). But it is this union (al-shamli) of the
transcendent and immanent that frustrates the worldly journey of the Sufi-lover. The
poetic allusion in this verse is to both the Outer and the Inner, analogized by the Arab
(ʿarabiyyatun) and foreigner (ʿajmāʾ) references as the Arab represents reason and
remoteness from God and the foreigner represents inner knowledge and sensuality of
immanence; the verse further shows how in the girl exists the unity of polarities of
Names and attributes in the mirror of the human being about which the Shaykh wrote.
The sensual, physical aspects of the girl both frustrate and drive him into the desert, but
it is really toward God that the Sufi-lover travels. The proof of God in his Cosmos
provides immanental signs of Himself, yet the God Whom the gnostic seeks remains
ultimately unknowable in His remote, dark transcendence.

II.E.1 Interpreter: Transcendence: Separation and Disunion

Many of the verses of the Tarjumān relate to the incomparable beauty of the
Beloved, as in he poet’s asserting that “[there is] no authority (lā aḥtikāmun) over the
beautiful (or, white, that is, fair) ones” (al-dumā) (P4:2b). The high position of the
Beloved in relation to the Sufi is indicated by his saying there is “no authority” (lā
aḥtikāmun) which keeps them separated. There are other significant examples of
transcendence that do not relate only to the girl’s physical form, her beauty and, rather,
evoke transcendent attributes in other ways. The tremendous number of references to
the transcendent God seen in the transcendent attributes reflected by the girl

525 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 77.
526 Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, 569.
demonstrates the importance of this concept to the poetry collection. These attributes relate to qualities such as incomparability, authoritativeness, separation/disunion, distance/remoteness, and hiddenness/veiledness, night/darkness, and true gnosis (that is, knowledge or understanding that does not rely totally upon reason), and elevation. The Sufi-lover yearns for the immanental -- to bring God into the sensual -- yet he seems to be experiencing primarily the transcendent attributes of God. When he asks where the girl is, or asks why she remains at a distance to him, he is really exhibiting his frustration with God in His transcendence. Corbin notes that the surname of the girl with whom the Shaykh is enamoured is actually a combination of the transcendent and immanent: ʻayn al-shams wa ʻl-Bahā’, meaning “Eye of the sun and of Beauty,” whereas her forename—Niţām -- meaning “Harmony,” thus combining the two aspects of transcendence and immanence.527

The incomparability of God that concerns this present section relates more to the attitudes and actions of the girl, rather than to her physical form and the metaphors associated with that form. Patrick Laude posits a view of separation that does not focus on the outer physical form since “the outer perception of the Beloved is un-needed since His reality is to be found in the heart.” This is seen in the poem in which the Beloved says, “Is it not sufficient for him that I am in his heart (bi-qalbihi)?” (P4:6a). Laude says that this verse “expresses the very mystery of presence in absence.”528 This relationship is seen in the Tarjumān’s most direct verse to this effect in the Sufi-lover’s stating that “[my] longing is [like the] Highland; [my] suffering is [like the] Lowland” (anjada al-shawqu wa-athama al-gurām) / They can never meet as opposites (or, as two) (humā ḍiddānī lan yajtami ā) / so my dispersion (shatātī) (that is, disunion) is never put into proper order (niţām)” (P5:1a,2). First, to note, is the word for something that is “rightly ordered,” “the cause of something,” or its “foundation” (niţām), is the exact same word as the name of the fourteen-year-old girl who is the subject of Tarjumān al-Ashwāq: Niţām. The occurrence of this word only happens once more, in Poem 55, and is discussed at length in the next chapter’s section on the Sufi-lover’s predisposition as it also has – in other contexts – many other important meanings. But, here, it is used in conjunction with a reference to the “dispersion,” (shatātī) – also

527 Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi, 137.
translated as “disunion” – from which the Sufi-poet is suffering, the poet’s assessment being that “they can never meet as opposites (or, as two)” (humā diiddānī lan yajtami’a).

This is the situation of disunion, or separation, from God against which the lover struggles throughout the collection. The lover, early in the collection and throughout most of the poems, cannot see how the transcendence of the Highland (anjada) and the immanence of the Lowland (athama) are ever to be joined. As already stated, the lover states the general problem of getting close to God saying, “She is untamed (wahshīyatun); indeed, not with her is [(forcibly) made] an intimate friend (mā bī-hā ansun)” (P2:7a), that is, it is not possible to become close to her as an intimate friend (ansun), with intimacy being the result of union and mercy, in Sufi doctrine. Separation leads to emotional cries from the Sufi-lover, as he is overcome by the sight of the girl’s mounting the camel, hiding herself away in the hawdaj, then setting off away from him, as he says, quoted again, “O camel-driver of the pack of ‘dirty white camels,’ do not drive the pack on with her!” (P2:13b). This journey away from the poet is referred as the classical Arabic topos known as the zaʾn(un), “departure.” The Arabic word zaʾn derives from the verb meaning to journey, move away from, or depart. A host of other words related to the departure derive from this term, including ziʾānun, the rope used to bind the woman’s camel carriage (hawdaj), and zaʾūnun, the camel used to carry a burden.

The Sufi-lover is distraught by his separation from God, ever trying to communicate discursively to God in whatever way he can, as in telling the wind, “Then I said to the wind (li-(a)l-rrīḥi), ‘head out and overtaking them / because they are residents near the shade in the thicket [of trees]; and convey to them (ballīghihim) “best regards” from a saddened (shajanin) ‘fellow man’”’ (P6:3,4a). The role of the wind in communicating has already been demonstrated both in the poems and in the Qurʾan (Sūra 27:65). Murata states the common linguistic and Sufi links between the Arabic word for wind (rūḥ) and spirit (rūḥ), along with a similar relationship between the words for breath (nafas) and soul (nafs). The poet, thus, evokes the personified wind

529 Murata, The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought, 76.
530 Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsaying, 109–10.
531 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 1911.
532 Murata, The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought, 229.
(rūḥ) — a spirit (rūḥ) -- who is told to “convey to them” (ballighīhim) his status as a “saddened” (shajanin) lover.

The lover repeats his lamentations about his suffering caused by God’s seeming to have left him alone, remarking that, “I did not yield to swallow tears from my illness / I hid and preserved the passion (al-hawā) regarding the blamer of me / until, when the raven crowed their separation (bi-baynihim) and disclosed the “fervent longing” (sabābata) of the sorrowful one” (P13:7,8). Sachiko Murata notes, in relation to separation and union that some branches of Islam (such as Kalām) emphasise the quality of human distance from God and “the resulting necessity of fear, awe, and submission.” This is in contrast to doctrinal Sufism which emphasises the quality of nearness after distance, or nearness along with distance, since in Sufism, God is viewed as primarily near and only secondarily far. For the gnostic, the goal of submission to God is to re-establish the right relationships so that nearness and distance can play their proper roles. By this, Murata means the Sufi view of Divine attributes reflected in the Cosmos – including in human beings -- as being both those of similitude and incomparability.533

The Beloved of the Tarjumān, however, often seems not to heed the Sufi-lover’s pleas and puts even more distance between herself and the human being, a realization the lover articulates in saying, “A crow (ghurābu) of the separation (al-bayni) is only a camel (jamalun) [which] carried away the loved ones [with] a ‘lifting up’ (that is, picking up speed) of the ‘pace of a camel’” (P15:11). Schimmel notes the role in Sufi poetry (especially that of Rūmī) of the symbol of the crow, whose image is associated with the concept of “separation,” as in the above verse. In contrast, the camel often represents, as here, the faithful person who patiently carries out the tasks of his master.534 Surrounded by the animals of the desert who are his only company, the lover cries out, “O dove (hamām) of the arāks (trees), [have] a little [bit of pity on me]!/ Separation (al-baynu) only increased [for me my] raging” (P16:7). Schimmel also points out that the dove – as in this verse -- can be in Sufi verse make queries as to the location of the Be-lover, since the dove’s call is “kū kū,” meaning, “Where, where?”535 And, not realizing that Nature was, in fact, the immanental proof of God, the lover is

533 Murata, 70.
535 Schimmel, 308.
caught up in a storm, where “the cloud is flashing and thundering, / the rain descends from a gap of a cloud / like tears pouring, is dissipated because of separation [from the one he loves]” (P26:5b,6). Chittick explains the Shaykh’s symbolism of lightning in his writings on the self-disclosure of God. He says that not all divine manifestations can be articulated since “some self-disclosure may exist within the spirit beyond the imagination and leave no expressible trace within the soul,” which Ibn al-ʿArabī often attributes to the Divine Essence (dhāt) which is, of course, completely incomparable and unknown. Muḥyī al-Dīn compares this type of disclosure to lightning, saying the “flashes of lightning are compared to the loci of witnessing the Essence in that they have no subsistence.”

Continuing with the examination of separation and disunion, in the tradition of the nasīb, the lover comes upon the abandoned ruins of his beloved, the God who is never seen, never apparently present, again moved off and remote. In one of the most direct references to the transcendent God, the poet commands his camel driver to “stand by the ruins (bi-al-ṭulūl) of a habitation at Laʾlaʾ / and mourn our dear ones in that uninhabited country (al-balqaʾi). / Stand by the habitations and call out to them asking (or, wondering) about them, their loneliness (or, sensitivity) (bi-husnī), with refined lamentation” (P24:1,2). Separated from the girl, the lover stands amidst the emptiness of the ruins (bi-al-ṭulūl), and thinks of his Beloved in a faraway “uninhabited country” (al-balqaʾi). The place is seemingly absent God, as in Corbin’s characterisation of a Sufi being “alone with the Alone.” Later, at yet another ruin, the poet says, “Stand and ask for speech of the remains (rasma) of a house [which] became destroyed after them” (P30:3). The journey of the Sufi-lover through the desert is to the remains (rasma) of one empty, unspeaking place to another. Near the end of the collection, the Sufi-lover finally realizes that he is doomed to never realize the physical union with God that he has been seeking in his long trek, and that transcendent separation from God is, indeed, a very real aspect of the Divine. “You persisted (ẓalilta) in [the] heat of the distance (al-nawā) (that is, journey towards the distance); you were searching for / clouds (saḥāba) of reunion (al-wiṣālī), [but] they did not overshadow you” (P54:10). The Sufi-lover addresses himself, recalls how “you persisted” (ẓalilta), following

537 Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi, 6.
always at a distance (al-nawā), yet the hoped-for reunion (al-wiṣāli) for which the Sufi-lover was searching did not come. Murata illuminates the mention of the “clouds” in saying the metaphor is another way of referring to the Breath of the All-Merciful (nafas), but -- when referred to in relation to the “inmost reality of the macrocosm” -- the Breath is referred to as the “Cloud,” within which God was found before He formed the creatures. The Beloved to whom the Sufi-lover is pursuing is the God of the Cloud.

II.E.2 Interpreter: Transcendence: Hiddenness and the Veil

The subject of the veil is discussed extensively in the following chapter in the section on the the spiritual path, but it is helpful to mention a few examples as they relate to transcendence. Ibn al-ʿArabī includes a large number of references in the Interpreter of Desires to the transcendent God in his describing the girl’s veils or her hiddenness, an allusion to his assertion in Bezels that “the Ruler [God] is veiled,” that is, ineffable, incomparable. The Sufi-lover experiences transcendent separation from God as “they travelled and darkness of the night [was when] the curtains (sudūlahu) were let down (arkhā), Then I said to her, ‘Enslave (or, “pity”) an enamoured alien” (P4:3). This veiling by the Beloved is the opposite of what he seeks, which is unveiling (mukashafah). Zargar’s discussion of the concepts of witnessing (mushahadah) versus unveiling defines witnessing as “that important visionary ability to see things as they really are, not as they merely appear to be.” Ibn al-ʿArabī thinks of witnessing as “an esoteric counterpart” to knowledge, a type of knowing not of the intellect but of the heart (al-qalb) or soul (al-nafs). The Shaykh considered unveiling to be superior to witnessing, Zargar explaining that witnessing is a pathway to true knowledge, whereas unveiling is the full attainment of that path to knowledge. Witnessing involves receiving unseen Divine self-disclosures through forms, but unveiling “strips the self-disclosure of its forms and reverts to the meanings behind it.” Related to veiling, the poet also writes that “their locks of hair (that is, tresses) are in the enclosed darkness”

540 Zargar, 15–16.
Bruijn notes that the blackness of the hair often symbolises distancing and concealment, and the curls represent the devious ways of the Beloved.\textsuperscript{541}

The Shaykh undoubtedly has God’s transcendence in mind when he writes that “if the veil (\textit{burqu`ihi}) were removed (\textit{yusfiru}) / there [would be] a pain (\textit{`adhāban}) , so she veiled herself (\textit{ahtajabā})” (P25:6). Zargar explains the Shaykh’s thinking on the veil in stating that the natural world is itself a veil, one that not only allows the gnostic to experience a vision of unity, but also actually increases his longing for the Beloved: “The separation between beloved and lover, perceived by the heart, excites the sense of yearning, passion, and aspiration to union.” Zargar explains further that it is the veil itself that actually allows for the longing to unveil. This is true for the distance that separates the poet from the beloved, allowing him to see her and desire her. “Her eyes provoke a feeling and urgency and pain inside him.”\textsuperscript{542} Zargar’s summary of Ibn al-`Arabi’s writings about the veil and unveiling, and help explain the above poem very well through the lens of doctrinal Sufism, with the memory of the Beloved, and her eyes viewed through the veil (\textit{burqu`ihi}) causing “a pain” (\textit{`adhāban}) which would be even greater if the veil “were removed” were removed (\textit{yusfiru}).

One helpful view of the consequence of removing of the veil is considered by Peter Bachmann, in his examination of the manifestation of the divine in the Shaykh’s poetry. He writes that God's beauty represents God’s compassion (\textit{raḥma}), which is a saving grace protecting human beings from the “overriding force of God's majesty,” that is, his Lordship (related to the name, \textit{al-rabb}), since directly encountering the majesty of the Lord -- “without curtains,” that is, without being veiled -- is an annihilation of the consciousness of the individual himself.\textsuperscript{543} As already discussed, the Sufi-lover has as his goal at journey’s end reunion with God in the only way he can imagine, with the veil between God and himself removed “[as if] a virgin (that is, bride) [who was] unveiled (\textit{juliyat}) in the very much perfumed hall” (P56:2b).

\section*{II.E.3 Interpreter: Transcendence: Night and Darkness}


A poetic subject frequently associated with transcendence are references to night or darkness. Intriguingly, the only reference to night that is not also made in reference to day, or lighting the darkness in some way, is in the verses,

They continued the travel by night (al-surā)
they cut the group of rings for the camels’ noses of their [dirty] white camels (that is, indicating a type of camel of good stock) / [resulting in] making of plaintive sounds and emanating sighs [of the camels] beneath the camel-litter. (9)
I beheld [the] occasions of Fate (asbāba al-manīyati) (that is, physical manifestations of dying) when /
they loosened the camel-reins and tightened the camel-girdle. (10) (P13:9,10)

These verses speak to the girl’s rushing through the desert at night (assurā), her travel-party taking the extreme step of cutting the nose-rings and letting go of the reins so that the camels could run more quickly through the darkness. The verses confirm God’s transcendence in racing away from the Sufi-lover, and doing so in darkness. The “occasions of Fate” (asbāba al-manīyati) (translated as the “pangs of death” by Nicholson, both translations referring to the physical manifestations of dying)544 that the lover feels are from the pain of God’s negating the proximity the Sufi-lover desires, because “the beautiful one is loved wherever she may be” (maʾšūqatun ḥasnā ḥaythu takūnu) (P13:12b), words that further reinforce the remoteness of God from the Sufi-lover who is seeking reunion. In relation to the issue of beauty and proximity in this poem, the tension may be further understood by the Shaykh’s view that human beings were placed in the world to develop their own selves in harmony with the divine form, and thereby to gain nearness to God. Murta and Chittick have noted the importance of beauty in this regard by summarising Ibn al-ʿArabī’s view as being “the standard by which everything needs to be judged is beauty, but a beauty defined and shaped by the implications of tawḥīd.”545

In an intriguing contrast to the Muhammadan ideal about which Ibn al-ʿArabī writes of in Bezels of combining transcendence and immanence -- analogized to

The first thing to note is the relevance of the Qur’anic verse, “We will show them Our signs on the horizons and in themselves” (Sūra 41:53). Lings indicates that these words call attention to the correspondence between outer phenomena and inner faculties. He states that the idea of the heart is particularly relevant to these signs, it being the centre of the human being and the “inward sun.” This idea is strongly evoked in the above verse in the poet’s saying, “a light glimmers for you in your hearts” (nūrun lakum bi-kulūbinā yatalālā). Here the group of camels “travelled by night” (sārat).

The approach to God above, however, is aligned to that of Noah as portrayed in Bezels who made the mistake of appealing to the sinful people with both transcendence and immanence, but not in combination. First, the poet shows no evidence of experiencing anything but day in day and night in night. The lover here does not

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differentiate day from night as he races through the desert from “the very early early [part of the morning], passing time away [until] the coming in evening” (al-bukūra wa-aqṭi ‘u alāsālā). He is impassioned, but miserable and joyless in his journey since -- though eager with desire -- he admits “they (the camels) did not hope to reach by this” (mā tarḥū bi-dhal wiṣālā), that is, by traveling by night and by traveling fast.

The transcendent God of the Sufi-lover’s desire is always in a place other than that to which the lover is racing, thus frustrating proximity. The Sufi-lover sees only a rainless wasteland, and nothing of the signs of a receptive, immanent God. Abd al-Hakeem Carney alludes to the necessity of gnostics -- such as this poet-lover -- to remain open to a relationship with God that combines immanence with transcendence, by understanding that God’s immanence is nothing less than “a Divine communication, a discourse between God and humans that demands to be heard.” In rushing through the darkness, the poet closes himself off from whatever signs God might be giving him.\(^{547}\) Indeed, the Sufi-lover says, “I have claimed an impossible thing” (ataytu muḥālā) in his continued belief that God will ever be anything other than out of his reach, will ever return his eager desire. The reader cannot forget, however, that all of the Sufi-lover’s reflections on his situation are performed without reference to God’s perspective. The Sufi-lover seems to suffer from an immanental delusion, in remembering only what he wants to remember of the Beloved in the time before he suffered separation.

As the Sufi-lover has said before, “because I see a form (shakhṣan), [its] beauty (jamāluh) grows -- at our meeting -- in good fortune and glory” (P55:3), but these attributes speak clearly to transcendence, not the sensual similitude that causes him to think he can gain proximity to God in this life without any consideration of His incomparable qualities. He races across the desert with the image of the feminine, sensual, receptive before him. Even in the meetings about which the lover speaks in this poem, the form of the Beloved does not satisfy immanental and sensual desires, but only draws a veil of splendour and majesty, and the Beloved remains transcendent. She is, as he says elsewhere, “[She is] a pearl concealed in a shell / of hair like blackness (sawādi) of jet (al-sabaj) / a pearl which is a reflection (or, a conception) [which is] her

\(^{547}\) In relation to immanence, Carney says also: “Mysticism, then, does not consist in seeking out ecstatic experiences that are beyond the pale of everyday life. Rather, it is based upon a kind of listening, whereby the gnostic pays attention to the discourse that is all around him but, hitherto, he has been heedless of. ‘Abd al-Hakeem Carney, ‘Imamate and Love: The Discourse of the Divine in Islamic Mysticism’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 3 (September 2005): 705–30.
diver/ which does not cease [to remain] in the hollows of that ocean-depths (al-llujaji)" (P48:5,6). God is doubly transcendent: a hidden pearl that is also too deep to reach. Murata points out that the darkness is what allows the light to appear, and she recalls the famous light sūra to assert the necessity of complementariness: “God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The likeness of His light is a niche wherein is a lamp....” (Sūra 24:35). The niche in this instance is the hair with the blackness of jet (sawādi al-sabaj).

Austin posits in his examination of the girl Niẓām that the Beloved exhibits both immanence and transcendence. He presents her as the image of (immanental) Love, but also as the image of (transcendent) Knowledge, saying about the latter that the transcendence the Beloved evidences in the poems includes “a terrifying encounter with the exalting personification of the Divine Sophia, a lady of spirit and intellect demanding unswerving dedication and unambiguous sincerity.” In verses such as the one showing her to be “aloof in earnest and only plays at loving in jest” [Austin’s translation of Poem 46], “the divine Essence broods, so to speak, over her nest of latent essences holding her kingly consciousness in close and undiverted thrall.”548

II.E.4 Interpreter: Immanence -- Proximity and Union

In contrast to the poems that clearly depict incomparable attributes such as separation, hiddenness, and night-time, Ibn al-ʿArabī also presents the Beloved as God immanent, as in the following poem which, after recognizing God’s transcendence, alludes to divine immanence of which the Shaykh wrote about in the Noah chapter in which he cites the Qurānic verse “We will show them Our signs upon the horizon” (Sūra 41:53): One direct reference to this Qurānic verse in the Tarjumān is “She rose in the eye [like] a sun (shamsan); then when / she vanished she shone (ashraqqat) in [the] horizon of my soul (or, heart) (bi-ufqi janānī)” (P20:4). The word janān(ī) has as its verb root janna, meaning to “conceal,” “veil,” or “cover with darkness; the word for “garden” is a related noun -- jannatun -- meaning, literally, a place where the grounds are concealed.”549 One of the noun forms, as above -- janān(un) -- means the “interior that the eye does not see,” or “heart,” or “soul,” “spirit,” or “mind.”550 A related word –

549 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 462–63.
550 Lane, 263.
jinnun – means “darkness of night.” As already referenced, doctrinal Sufism considers the heart to be inward sun. Thus the poet presents several concepts evoked by the same word root. The Beloved shone (ashraqat) in the horizon of “my soul” (janānī), thus illuminating the darkness jinnun of the heart’s interior (janān(un)). Theoretical gnosis relates these words and concepts in saying, as Lings notes, that in the macrocosm, the Garden (jannat(un)) is both the centre and summit of the immanental, earthly state; the heart -- janān(un) corresponds to the microcosm, the centre and sum of the human being. To relate the above poem to the Bezels theory, the transcendent is perceived in majestic elevation as the sun in the sky before setting in the Sufi-lover’s heart, where the non-elevated, setting sun then becomes a sign, this sign here being the Sufi-lover’s seeing in himself -- as part of God’s created Cosmos -- God. As already mentioned, Ibn al-ʿArabī explains in Bezels that “God draws our attention to what is originated [immanental] as an aid to knowledge of Him and says that He will show forth His signs in it.” In this regard, Chittick has noted that Ibn al-ʿArabī recognizes that there can be no pure imagination or reason and no pure similarity or incomparability, such that every revealed message combines the two modes of understanding. Thus, when imagination predominates, similarity is perceived more clearly than difference. The predominance of similarity – possible because of the poet’s and the reader’s imagination used in attempt to describe or imagine God in his ultimate transcendence -- allows readers to sense the presence of God.

The transcendent divine attributes of incomparability, separation/disunion, distance/remoteness, hiddenness, and reliance upon oftentimes faulty reason seen in the poems are balanced by the opposite immanental attributes such as similarity/comparability, union/proximity, day/light, and non-discursive (contemplative) knowledge. The God of immanence is “the Hearer, the Seer” (Sūra 42:11), not the God who proclaims, “There is nothing like unto Him” (Sūra 42:11). The ḥadīth qudsī “When I love him [that is, My servant], I am his hearing through which he

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551 Lane, 462.
552 Lings, What Is Sufism?, 51.
553 Lings, 50.
hears, his eyesight through which he sees, his hand through which he holds, and his foot through which he walks,” however, relates to the ability of human beings to see and hear God since it is actually God Who is doing the seeing and hearing, allowing humans to witness Himself immanently in His Cosmos in the similitude of the Cosmos to the Real.556

Generally, the references to immanence in the Interpreter of Desires are relative to the hope of the lover to witness such feminine, receptive attributes in the girl, that is, to witness such qualities in the God Who is his Beloved to Whom he is attempting to draw near. The Beloved is almost exclusively transcendent in apparent attitude and action, versus the three situations of 1) how the Sufi-lover remembers her before her departure, 2) how he imagines her to be as he races across the desert to consummate union with her, and 3) how he wishes her to be once they are in union. What might be interpreted as immanental references to hearing and seeing seem, actually, to serve, instead, to reinforce the Beloved as the transcendent God by way of contrast as even the occasions for evoking similitude seem only to bring into sharper focus the incomparability and wrathful aspects of God.

The concept of immanence is directly related to the human body -- and the senses -- in Sufi literature. It is, according to Scot Alan Kugle, the “affirmation of God’s immanence and fascination with God’s presence that causes Sufis to value the body in ways fuller and deeper than other Muslim authorities.” He further claims that Sufis did not undertake the rigorous ascetic practices of other mystical faiths, in part because they viewed the body “more subtly, as a sign of the creator, or rather as a whole constellation of signs.”557 As Zargar has said of Sufi writings, the form in which God’s self-disclosures are most fully witnessed is the human form, evoking not only great love, but a comprehensive cosmological perspective of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings.558

The question of demonstrating the evocation of immanence in the poems revolves around what of God in the Cosmos the lover can perceive through his human senses, just as evocation of transcendence revolves around how the lover perceives God to be incomparable, separate, distant, or hidden. Examples of one of the most important

556 The topic of the Path -- and how it relates to “the foot by which he walks” -- is taken up in the following chapter on predetermination.


senses -- seeing -- are found throughout the *Interpreter of Desires* poems, and are examined here are exemplar senses to help demonstrate the inclusion of references to divine immanence in the poetry collection. (Further examples of immanence through the sense of “hearing” are considered within other analytical sections so as to avoid redundant explications.)

One of the most important aspects of immanence or similitude is proximity to or union with the Divine. The language of *tashbīḥ* speaks to the gnostic’s witnessing God in His Cosmos, and relates to the relationship between God and human beings in which the gnostic realizes signs of God through everything that He created through the Breath of the All-Merciful. There are several highly important Qur’anic verses in this regard. First, happiness (felicity) is achieved by nearness (*qurb*) to God, as made clear in the Qur’ān in two especially relevant verses: “He is with you wherever you are” (*Sūra 57:4*) and “We are nearer to him than the jugular vein” (*Sūra 50:16*). The Sufis also often referenced the *ḥadīth* in this regard that says “When my servant takes one step towards Me, I take ten steps towards him. When my servant comes walking towards me, I come running towards him.”

Chittick writes that, in doctrinal Sufism, “in order to achieve the perfection of servanthood, man must be with God, just as God is with him.” Chittick quotes Ibn al-ʿArabī as saying, “The Real is perpetually in a state of ‘union’ (*waṣl*) with engendered existence, indicated by the words, ‘He is with you wherever you are’ (*Sūra 57:4*). He never ceases disclosing Himself in the forms of His servants continuously, so the servant is with Him wherever He discloses Himself continuously.... The gnostic never ceases witnessing nearness continuously, since they never cease witnessing forms within themselves and outside of themselves of the Real”.

As already discussed, much of the poet’s speaking of union or proximity is limited to memories of the past before the Beloved’s departure, yearning for her in the present, or imagining a future re-union with her. Much of what the poet writes relates to the Sufi-lover’s desiring closeness to God, which is not possible with God in His transcendence. The lover hears from the girl that “our rendezvous place (*mawʿidūnā*) after the circumambulation is at Zamzam / at the middle cupola (or, tent) at the rocks” (*P7:6*), but this is after she has warned him off coming close, promising that the “death

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of the soul is in [your] glances [of us]” (P7:2b). The realization of the transcendent and the immanental aspects of God throughout the poems must lead to the Sufi-lover’s bewilderment. Yet the Sufi-lover is compelled to experience God in His immanence as he urges the camel-driver to

Go get up to them, seeking their tracks / 
   and hasten with your white she-camels striding fast in their direction. (8)

Their stations (or, abodes) are near (qaribat) and their fire [are near]\(^{561}\) 
a fire that caused the fire of love to be setting ablaze. (10)

(P18:8,10)

Proximity with the Beloved is the objective and to be near (qaribat) means being close to the one who caused the lover to love. The lover regards this objective explicitly in saying, “at the road cross between the sandy and stony paths is the place of rendezvous (al-maw’īdu) / bid our riding camels to kneel in this watering place (al-mawridu) (colloquially, place of arrival)” (P26:1). Thus, the place of rendezvous (al-maw’īdu) is the “place of “coming to water” (al-mawridu), yet another allusion to the Garden.\(^{562}\)

Hope is in immanence, fear is in transcendence, parting (firāqin), the idea that the lover cannot realize closeness – much less, reunion (liwiṣālin) -- to God: “How often did we call aloud in hope for the sake of a [lovers’] reunion (liwiṣālin)? / how often did we call aloud from being afraid (rahbā) of parting (firāqin)?” (P30:34). Much of the lover’s frustration and bewilderment through much of Interpreter of Desires owes to his not perceiving God in His Cosmos, that is, in neither seeing nor hearing God in his present situation, in not realizing that God is actually with him (as the Beloved has already told him, but which did not satisfy him). As Schimmel notes, in doctrinal Sufism, of course, final, real, and complete reunion of the Sufi-lover with the Beloved can only be achieved through death, such that the undertone of suffering and dying runs throughout the poems of Tarjumān, and is a common trope of Sufi poetry.\(^{563}\)

Schimmel says in relation to the tension between striving for spiritual union before physical death and the inadequacy of describing the relationship, “Words die when

\(^{561}\) Nicholson translates this as ‘their fires will clearly be seen.’ Ibn al-ʿArabi, The Tarjumān al-Ashwāq: A Collection of Mystical Odes (1911), 82.

\(^{562}\) Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 2936.

\(^{563}\) Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 30.
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.” 564

But in the following verses, the lover actually does use his imagination not to discern the transcendent God, which is not possible, but to imagine that God is already in his heart. The wind tells the lover that the travel-party of the girl “are not settled in any country,” to which he replies:

The land is not being settled (lā tastaqirru) by them. / so I said to it (that is, the wind), “where is the refuge when a group of horses of my longing is in pursuit?” (11) Preposterous! They have no habitation but my mind (or, heart) (khaladī). / Wherever I am, there is the full moon (al-badru). Watch! (12) Is not her place of rising my imagination (wahmī) and my place of setting my heart (qalbī)? (13a)

(P46:11,12,13a)

When the Sufi-poet makes reference to the “full moon” (al-badru), Ibn al-ʿArabī alludes to Sufi view of the “speaker” of this poem – and God through whom he speaks – which holds that “the plante moon is the locus of manifestation for the name Speaker.” 565 The Sufi-lover correctly understands that the only way he can comprehend God is through “my imagination” (wahmī), the facility that allows him to perceive the signs of God. The verb root w-h-m relates to “something occurring in the mind,” with the noun being the object of such a thought, or – apropos to the Sufi-poet, “an opinion that is outweighed in probability,” such that the thought of the rendezvous is more of a delusive thought. 566 The full moon – also an allusion to the elevation of God -- may rise in transcendence but it is in himself, in his heart (qalbī), in which the immanental God settles.

As the Interpreter of Desires progresses toward the last poem, the subjects of proximity and union become even more important. The poet analogizes the grief of separation to a dove parted from its mate, in saying,

564 Schimmel, 79.
565 Murata, The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought, 135.
566 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 3061.
I am separated (on account of grief) (firāqu) from a neighbour and far away from (my) habitation. / 

O in my time [of separation] against my time (of the opposite, that is, separation as opposite of union). (7)

Who [will bring] to me [one] who is pleased by my torment? / 

With me is now power (or, help) because of [that which] she is pleased. (8) (P49:7,8)

Part of the lover’s frustration and bewilderment is that the Beloved seems happy with being “separated on account of grief” (firāqu), even as he is trekking through the wastelands to reach her, or -- in another metaphor, of course -- travelling the Path to achieve nearness with God. This seeming inequality of affection, some Sufis had claimed, supports the notion that love between a human being and God should be understood exclusively as obedience, which some asserted was the primary quality of the lover. Al-Ghazzālī cited a famous verse from early Sufism to reinforce this idea: “I want union with him, and he wants separation from me: Therefore I give up what I want for that which he wants.”567

The union that the Sufi-lover imagines is so comprehensive that the two would become one, as in this unusual imagining of nearness with God, which comprises the totality of the following poem:

Wherever we meet for our pious farewell you surmised us
-- by the joining together (al-ḍammi) and [lying down] the levels
-- [to be] a double letter (1)

We, though, had our persons made lean
so that glances were [only] perceiving a single one (2)

And that this, except for leanness and his light
so if not for my moaning, she did not see a sight of me
(that is, I was invisible) (3). (P53:1,2,3)

The clever irony of these verses is that by achieving the ultimate in nearness and similitude -- where two become one -- the Sufi-lover is no longer even perceptible because of the extreme proximity. This is a contradiction of immanental proximity,

567 Schimmel, 29 citing Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī 
Iḥyā IV, p. 282.
coming so close to God as to lose immanence by no longer being perceptible. The Sufi-lover is a creature of the Cosmos which would otherwise be a sign of immanence seen by another human’s eyes, God being the “eyesight through which he sees,” yet as “[e]verything perceived is close to the eye, even if it be physically remote, for the sight makes contact with it by perception, or else does not perceive it at all,” the notion of proximity and perception lose relevance when the Sufi-lover is in union since “distance and proximity are relative notions, having no existence in themselves.” The Sufi in union becomes transcendent which neither the Sufi-lover himself or any other human viewing the Sufi-lover can perceive. The Shaykh also cleverly uses a word with two instances of double letters -- al-ḍammi, “the joining together” -- to underscore his point. Schimmel notes how the use and meaning of Arabic letters figures into Sufi poetry, and recalls Massingnon’s idea that consonants are the body of the word with the vowels -- which change according to the meaning are the spirit. Massingnon extended this concept to include the idea every word has a ẓāhir and a bāṭin, an external and an interior sense, which is true for both Islamic mystical poetry. Thus, “every Arabic root evokes of necessity many reminiscences in the listener’s or reader’s mind and may lead him back to the words of the Koran and the tradition.”

Of particular importance to the discussion of union and proximity in relation to immanental attributes is Poem 57, in which the poet is almost breathlessly imagining actually achieving this promised re-union with the Beloved:

And then behold [if] all [words] be true that she says about it / and in the opinion of her is the powerful longing (al-shawqi) for me [as I have] for her, (4) Then in the heat of noon we will meet (naltaqā) secretly (sirrā) by her tent / on the basis of a most reliable promise (aṣdaq al-wa’di). (5) She is experiencing and we are experiencing [that] which we are suffering from the love / and from misery of the testings [of the relationship] and from feeling pain of the violent grief (6) Is this confused dreams [or] good tidings in sleep-place

568 Ibid., 216.

569 Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 23.
(that is, sleeping)? (7a)

Perhaps he who urges on a kind [object] of my desire will guide them to [my] “seeing with one’s eyes” (8a) (P57:4,5,6,7a,8a)

The Sufi-lover hopes that the promise of God to come closer -- that God yearns for him as much as he yearns for God with “the powerful longing” (al-shawqī al-mubarrīḥi), as evidenced by shared love and pain -- will result in passionate union “on the basis of a most reliable promise” (aṣdāqī al-waḍī). The lover wonders if God’s love and yearning are merely in his imagination, as in a dream, which is the only place where God can be comprehended. Reunion with mere human beauty is ephemeral, since the form of Beauty is God’s attribute and, as Murata and Chittick say, “[t]hings made of dust can only borrow beauty, and they must give it back to its owner [God] quickly”.570 So the reference to union -- “seeing with one’s eyes”, that is, being in the presence of the Beloved, face to face” -- is to nearness in Paradise, which actually hints at return to God in the afterlife, which is the only way to realize absolute nearness to God. The most the Sufi-lover can hope for in his lifetime is to see the signs pointing to God and to become lost in bewilderment, which is in Muhammadan ideal of experiencing the unity of transcendence and immanence combined. Still, the Sufi-lover hopes for that they will “meet secretly” (naltaqā sirrā).

II.E.5 Interpreter: Muhammadan Integration of Transcendence and Immanence

Although, as Sells recounts, the Shaykh has been criticized for destroying the element of transcendence in Islamic mysticism -- by his emphasising the attributes of God in his Creation -- this view fails to address the dialectic of transcendence and immanence.571 Very important for demonstrating Akbarian doctrine in the Interpreter of Desires, the poetry does, in fact, demonstrate the Muhammadan integration of transcendence and immanence as “Muhammad [unlike Noah] did not summon his people by night and by day, but by night during the day [an inner summons implicit in the outer one], and by day during the night [the outer being implicit in the inner].”572 This indicates a unity of opposites, revealing a God Who is a balance of transcendent


571 Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsaying, 113.

and immanent, and not just the immanent God that the Sufi-lover seeks or the transcendent God Whom the Sufi-lover perceives in his separation from the Beloved. In using the story of the Prophet Noah to explore the tension between God’s transcendence and His immanence, Ibn al-ʿArabī provided the especially useful night-day analogy that may be used to help interpret the Sufi doctrine in *Interpreter of Desires*.

The Great Shaykh indicates, generally, the importance of this uniting of opposites, of uniting the Inner and Outer, the immanent and transcendent, in the following poem:

Long is my longing for a little girl, possessor of prose / and a line [of poetry] and a pulpit of eloquence (that is, accomplished rhetorician] (16)
from the daughter of the kings of the house of Persia / most illustrious of lands of Iṣbahan (17)
She, a daughter of Irāq, a daughter of my imām /
and I, opposite of her (didduhā), I am a child of Yamān (18)
O, had you seen us, my lords, or heard /
that opposites (diddayni) are [ever] unified (yajtamiʿāni) (19)
Had you seen us at Rāma giving /
between us cups of love without fingertips (20)
passion is urging on a sweet and excited /
joyful statement without a tongue (21)
Verily, in [this situation], the reason going away: /
Yaman and Irāq embracing (muʿtaniqāni) each other. (22)

(Poem 20:16-22)

This is the unity of opposites, which is very different from union, union being a form of proximity and having as its opposite the immanental qualities of disunion or separation. This concept, therefore, unites the immanental attribute of union with the transcendent attribute of separation. The verb choice (yajtamiʿāni) – from the root jamaʿa, meaning to gather or collect together – also implies that the two opposites are being “unified”
specifically after previously having been separated. Lane states that this may refer specifically to being brought together in a state of union after being separated.\textsuperscript{573}

In the context of the present poem, the Persian girl represents the contemplative, in her being eloquent (discursive) while the Arab represents the tradition that finds God unapproachable and unspeakable. If there is passion between the two in unity, then the transcendent (Arab) has become immanental, and the immanental (Persian) has become transcendent, there being no more discernment between the two in “a state in which the understanding disappears.” Austin comments on these differing cultural roots that “the seeming tensions and conflicts between the [immanental] Love and [transcendent] Knowledge which the Lady Niẓām images and manifests in her Persian and Greek modes are resolved and truly fulfilled in her Arab home, which symbolism will reveal for us the real mystery of her appearance of beauty and truth, and that is the mystery of selfhood, of Lordship and humanity.... It is here that the inspirations and expirations of creation and return fuse.”\textsuperscript{574}

Intriguingly, almost all of the references in the poems to transcendence and immanence in combination actually do relate to the subject of night becoming day and day becoming night, as most of the verses on night are made in conjunction with references to lighting the darkness, so that there is, indeed, clearly evident in the poems the Muhammadan ideal of transcendence in immanence, and immanence in transcendence. The poet writes that “She showed her front-teeth and a shining (\textit{bāriqun}) (that is, lightening) flashed (\textit{awmaḍa})” (P4:5), an early example among many in the poems of light in darkness. In an allusion to lighting the darkness with the light of the full moon -- a metaphor for the elevated God -- Ibn al-ʿArabī writes,

\begin{quote}
Then if you were loving the loving young girl / 
truly you obtained the enjoyment and the joy with her (15)
Giving to the very beautiful ones wines of the “hangover,” / 
whispering secrets to the suns [and] flattering the full moons (\textit{al-budūrā}). (16)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{573} The root jamaʿa means to gather, collect. Lane states that this may refer specifically to being brought together in a state of union after being separated. Lane, \textit{An Arabic-English Lexicon}, 455.

\textsuperscript{574} Austin, ‘The Lady Nizam: An Image of Love and Knowledge’, 43.
Additionally, in this example, the moon serves as both a symbol for the transcendent God through elevation, and the immanental God through light that illuminates the darkness. The poet uses the device of night becoming day, or day becoming night, in such poems as, “An ember (humratu) (that is, blush) of shame in his cheek is brilliance (wāḍahu) of the dawn (al-subhi) ‘speaking gently with’ the ‘ruddy twilight’ (al-shafāqā)” (P15:3). Here, the brilliance (wāḍahu) of the girl’s blush (symbolised by an ember, humratu) lights up the “ruddy twilight” (al-shafāqā).

The following poem directly addresses the combination of transcendence and immanence, in not only referring to light in darkness, but of how the Sufi-lover experiences at the same time the grief of immanental passion and joy of transcendent reason:

O war (that is, internal conflict), O war for my heart (kabīdī) / O joy, O joy for my mind (or, heart) (khaladī). (1)

In my heart (kabīdī) is a fire of a burning thing (that is, passion); / In my mind (khaladī) a full moon (badru) of darkness (dujan) was already set (2)

O musk! O full moon (badru)! O branch of the sand-heap / How ash-grey [is the branch]! How brightest (anwarā) [is the full moon]! How most pleasant [is the smell of musk]! (3) (P25:1,2,3)

As will be noted in the later examination of this poem in terms of suffering in the following chapter, the opening line – literally, “O war” – is also translated as “O ‘internal conflict,’” but Lane states that this combination actually is rendered as an exclamation of grief or loss.\(^{575}\) The full moon (badru) is in darkness (dujan) very directly indicates the condition of light in darkness. One of the recurring symbols of elevation running throughout the poetry is a celestial body, specifically either the sun or the moon. This ties back to Ibn al-ʿArabī’s understanding of the Qurʾānic verse about which he writes in the Bezels Noah chapter which relates that “Seest thou not that Allah merges Night into Day and he merges Day into Night; that He has subjected the sun, and the Moon” (31:29), but also a hadith such as the one in which Muhammad is

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\(^{575}\) Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 543.
quoted as saying, “The Sun and the Moon are two of the signs of Allah; they do not
eclipse.”

In the poem above, Ibn al-ʿArabī explicitly here associates both transcendence
and immanence with the lover’s heart, in saying, “in my mind (or, heart) a full moon” -
an allusion to elevation, and transcendence -- “was already set,” while also saying
that, “In my heart is a fire of burning thing (that is, passion)” a reference to immanence.

The Shaykh’s choices of words for “my heart” (kabidī) and “my mind” – alternatively,
“my heart” – (khaladī) deserve special mention, as they are so close in meaning, but
used differently in this poem that associates the mind with transcendence and associates
the heart with immanence. The word kabidun means, literally, the liver, but the liver
was usually understood as the seat of human emotions in the traditional Galenic
physiology of Ibn ʿArabi's time, being the home of a human’s blood, thus warm and
moist, conditions necessary for life. A closely related word is kabadun, meaning
difficulty or distress. The liver, then, is the seat of the emotions, including difficulties,
false passions, and the source of suffering and loss for much of human experience.

This view corresponds to a verse from Qur’an: “We have created man to be in hardship
(kabadin) (Sūra 90:4)” Thus, in Arabic, the liver is considered to be the seat of
emotions -- not the heart, as in English -- though kabidun is translated into English as
“heart” as in this poem of the Shaykh, since it deals primarily with emotions. The other
word used in this poem – khaladun – may be translated here either as “mind” (which
Lane and others lists first in his lexicon) or “heart.”

Looking at the root verb – khalada – the underlying meaning is “to remain” incessantly or “to dwell” (as in an
abode or in Paradise) forever. Either translation – “mind” or “heart” seems correct, if
taken to mean that it is the place in which emotions are seated.

A similarly explicit reference to the Muhammadan ideal of day in night and
night in day is in the Sufi-lover’s asserting that “night-time (laylā) is resplendent with
her image (or, face), and( my) day (yamā) is [like the] ‘first part of the night’ (ghāsiqu)

577 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 2584; James Winston Morris, ‘Opening the Heart: Ibn
ʿArabi on Suffering, Compassion and Atonement’, Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society
51 (2012): 47.
579 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 748; Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, 294.
580 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 783.
(that is, dark) from her hair” (P31:11). Likewise, the poet rights in highly direct references to integration of transcendence and immanence, as evidenced by light in darkness:

Night (laylun) was moon (qamarun) and did not overshadow me (dajānī). /
I remembered then, so I journeyed by night in the moonlight (al-qamārī) (3)
Only when I walked in their group of riding camels was /
the night (al-laylu) to me friendly [like] the sun (al-shamsī)
in the “early rising” (al-bakārī). (4) (P39:3,4)

A similar unambiguous reference to Muhammadan integration speaks of the Beloved’s incomparability, but also her similitude, then each aspect combined:

If she unveiled her face, she showed you brightness /
like the rising sun (mithla al-ghazālati) [which is]
ot without shining. (6)
Her bright forehead [is] for the sun (shamsun), her ‘hair hanging in front’ for the night-time (li-laylī). /
More wonderful a form (al-ṣuwārī) [is she], sun (shamsun) and night (laylun) together (m’an)! (7)
We are in midday (al-ṣuhri) in night (laylin)
from the hair (al-sh’ārī). (8b) (P39:5-7,8b)

Bruijn says that, as with most other descriptions of the Beloved’s physical beauty, these are concentrated on the head, encompassing both the face and the hair with the blackness of the hair here symbolises distancing and concealment. The Beloved is without comparison and she is elevated in transcendence like the rising sun. Ibn al-ʿArabī then shows that she is sun and night together (shamsun wa-laylun m’an). Also, the Sufi-lover experiences the brightness of midday in night (al-ṣuhri fī laylin) due to the darkness of the hair (al-sh’ārī). These lines are an almost word-for-word equivalent to the doctrinal Sufism of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Noah chapter in the Bezels of Wisdom regarding integration of transcendence and immanence.

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The Shaykh al-Akbar includes several more direct references to the Muhammadan integration in the later poems, as well. Similar to Poem 29, the poet writes,

The fullness (al-badru) (that is, of the moon) ascended
in darkness of [her] hair (al-shʿari). /

The rose blossom watered the narcissus (narjisu),
shining black and white. (1)

A fresh and tender one [is she]. The very beautiful ones (that is, women)
were torn apart by her. /

and [the] blossom – her light – was over
(that is, was greater than) the moon. (2) (P44:1,2)

Again, the dark hair (al-shʿari) -- also representing a veil -- is illuminated by the full moon (al-badru), perhaps a direct reference to a poem by al-Ḥallāj that would have been well known by the poem’s readers in which he says that the rose opens to light and the narcissus leans to the shade.582 The rose of these poems might also be Ibn al-ʿArabī’s reference to the white rose which Muhammad said was created by his sweat during the Night of the Ascension. The rose is cloaked by the black narcissus, a flower grown in water;583 a rose opens in the light, but resulting in day in night and night in day. But then Ibn al-ʿArabī introduces a veiling of transcendent light with a light of even higher elevation, in stating that the “radiance outshone the moon,” so that the elevated light becomes the transcendent “veil of light” about which Ibn al-ʿArabī writes in Bezels.

582 You understand our God is a consuming fire.
The rose opens to the light,
the Narcissus leans to the shade...
But at some point His Light
penetrates our eyes, destroying our shades...
If we are roses we are drawn to light.
We do not think about the end.
There is none.


583 “The white rose was created from my sweat on the Night of the Ascension, the red rose was created by the sweat of Gabriel, and the yellow rose was created by the sweat of Burāq,” quoted in Shawkat M. Toorawa, Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur and Arabic Writerly Culture: A Ninth Century Bookman in Baghdad (Routledge, 2012).
The poet also says that “they (that is, the women), lifted up (rafaʿna) the curtain (al-sijāfa) (or, veil), lighting up the darkness (aḍā al-dujā) / then a group of riding camels set out by the brightness of the moon (li-ḍaū al-qamar)” (P41:6). Again, Ibn al-ʿArabī shows the reader darkness in light in raising the curtain of the howdahs so that the light of the Beloved’s countenance -- here, being full moons, as analogized previously -- illuminate the night, thus rendering the night as day so that the Sufi-lover may travel toward the Beloved. More generally, the poet-lover says that “The night did not darken (mā `asa asa al-laylu) / but there came -- succeeding it – [the] breathing of the dawn (al-ṣubhī)” (P46:6). The darkness of the night merges at dawn with the light of dawn, to be repeated as the light of day merging back into dusk, a cycle endlessly repeated as poetic evidence of God’s uniting the opposites of transcendence and immanence, bringing unity to polarities, confirming the Muhammadan ideal. As Against the general prohibitions of poetry by some Islamic scholars, Ibn al-ʿArabī reveals the positive role that Sufi poetry can play is to awaken the imaginal perception of God’s self-disclosures. The Great Shaykh’s insistence on a proper place in theosophy for both reason and imagination -- the “two eyes” with which God can be perceived – shines forth in the teaching power of Tarjumān al-Ashwāq.584

CHAPTER TWO

Inherent Predisposition, Suffering, and the Religion of Love

Ibn al-ʿArabī’s explanation of the role of cosmic predisposition in the Bezels of Wisdom chapter of “The Wisdom of Destiny in the Word of Ezra” provides a starting point for understanding the key theme of inherent predisposition and the Sufi-lover’s relationship to the Beloved in the Interpreter of Desires. Beginning with this chapter, the Great Shaykh describes in theoretical terms how the human being is travelling along a worldly and spiritual path according to God’s predetermined Will, and explains the relationship between the Will, human suffering, and petitions for divine mercy interact. Throughout the poetry collection, the Sufi-lover is in pain from the separation from his Beloved, and continually seeks divine help to bring him into union with the girl who has departed from him. The lover’s responses to suffering, his petitions for help, and his perception of the Beloved clearly reflect the Akbarian doctrines as articulated in Bezels about divine creative determination.

Indeed, the entirety of the collection in which the lover pursues the Beloved across the desert in pursuit of the Beloved is a metaphor for both the lover -- referred to in the Qurʾān verse which states, “No living being is there but He will seize it by the forelock” -- and the Path, along which all humans are pulled by God (11:56). The lover does not even realize that he is on his “Path,” but only on a trek through the wasteland, but as Ibn al-ʿArabī says, “It would not be a Path but for the procession along it.”

The poet demonstrates this procession, even though the Sufi-lover does not understand its ontological significance -- or even existence -- as a true gnostic. Ibn al-ʿArabī also

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shows how an individual’s predisposition is related to religion. The *Interpreter of Desires* is, in effect, a meditation on the subjects of predisposition and divine favours and how a person’s faith-life is the result of the Breath of the All-Merciful in creating an individual who is predisposed to see God according to whatever form he was created to be.

III.A  *Bezels of Wisdom: Pulling the Gnostic Along the Path by the Forelock*

III.A.1  *Bezels: Human Destiny and Predisposition*

The Sufi readers of the Ezra chapter would have immediately understood the nuances of its title, “The Wisdom of Destiny in the Word of Ezra.” The Decree (qadāʾ) about which Ibn al-ʿArabī writes in this chapter relates, generally, to the divine creative Breath of the All-Merciful and is “God’s determination of things, which is limited to what He knows of them, in them, since His knowledge of things is dependent on that which may be known gives to Him from what they are [eternally] in themselves [essentially].” The Destiny (qadar) of the title more specifically relates to the essential nature or latent predisposition of a thing, which was the result of the creative process of God in giving existence to the latent essences. Ibn al-ʿArabī explains that “Destiny is the precise timing of [the manifestation and annihilation of] things as they are essentially.” One of God’s Names is the Determiner, meaning that “God has the last word,” (Qur ān 6:149), but this Name must be understood more comprehensively in the fact that

the Determiner, in actualizing His determination, complies with the requirements of [a created thing’s] essential nature. The thing determined, in strict accordance with its essential state, itself determines the Determiner to determine concerning it by that [which is essentially], since every governor is itself governed by that in accordance with which it governors or determines....

Thus, the Shaykh is saying that something -- or someone -- cannot be other than what it was meant to be, this being determined by God in giving it its existence, and the precise character of its existence was governed by its latent essence. Ibn al-ʿArabī adds to the

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586 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 165.
above that Destiny is unknown by humans, even though many try to ascertain it, but fail because of its immediacy of its manifestation.

Ibn al-ʿArabī further says cites in the Qurānic verses “God has given to everything He has created” (Sūra 20:50) and “he sends down as He wills” (Sūra 42:27) in supporting his assertion that every person receives a premeasurement of “provisions” to which that individual is entitled to receive, since “He wills only in accordance with what He knows and by what He determines.” As already mentioned, humans pursue knowledge of Destiny, but the Great Shaykh states that only those with perfect gnosis are granted this insight, and that comes only from divine Self-revelation -- and even most of the prophets of Islam usually had only partial, transcendent, knowledge based on reason -- so those gnostics with this insight were in possession of perfect knowledge which brings “both perfect repose and terrible torment, for it brings the opposites by which God described Himself as Wrathful and Approving [Merciful],” as it is through the mystery of insight into Destiny that the divine Names polarize.587

When God does, in fact, grant this perfect gnosis, “God draws back the veils from [gnostic] Hearts and eyes so that they might perceive things, eternal and ephemeral, nonexistent and existent, impossible, necessary, or permissible, as they are in their eternal reality and essentiality.”588 Ibn al-ʿArabī asserts in this chapter that Ezra was trying to achieve this perfect gnosis in asking about Destiny, but it was not given to him, as he was not one of those whom God wanted to inform about some things concerning Destiny.589 As the Shaykh writes in the Bezels chapter on the prophet Jacob, “None knows what the Will wills until what it has willed takes place, except one receive a spiritual intuition from God enabling one to perceive the essences of contingent beings in their [eternal] latency, in which case he may act in accordance with what he sees.” The Shaykh says that very few men receive this kind of gnosis, the rest of His servants subject to the Qurānic verse “I know not what He will do with me or you” (46:9) which speaks to the veil between God and human beings in relation to knowing one’s own destiny.590

587 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 166.
588 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 166.
590 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 117–18.
III.A.2  *Bezels: Petitions to God*

Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses more fully the concepts of premeasurement and predisposition in the chapter “The Wisdom of Expiration in the Word of Seth,” the word for “expiration” alluding to the creative Breath of the All-Merciful. Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses more fully the concepts of premeasurement and predisposition in the chapter “The Wisdom of Expiration in the Word of Seth,” the word for “expiration” alluding to the creative Breath of the All-Merciful. He states the “the servant is not aware of his predisposition, but only of the spiritual state, which he knows as that which impels him, since knowledge of the predisposition is the most hidden.” The individual, thus, is not aware even that he is unaware of his predisposition to act or not act in one way or another, but only acts or does not act. Much of this chapter actually concerns predisposition and the subject of petitions to God and the related topic of divine “gifts,” the Hebrew name of “Seth” having as its root “gift of God.” Ibn al-ʿArabī says that there are two kinds of divine gifts relative to determined beings, these favours divided into two types: gifts of the Essence and gifts of the Names, further differentiating gifts that are given by God in response to a specific request and those given in response to a general request, in addition to gifts given by God not bestowed in response to any petition; of those on whom favours are bestowed without a request, Ibn al-ʿArabī says that the request is, nonetheless, actually articulated, “for in the case of any [divine] action [gift] there must be a request, whether it be expressed in words or is inherent in the state or predisposition.”

Corbin adds that in relation to petitions that prayer really is not a request for something, but an expression of a mode of being, that is a means of causing the God who reveals Himself to appear – of “seeing” Him – not to be certain of his Essence, but in the form precisely He reveals by revealing Himself by and to that form. Corbin validates Ibn al-ʿArabī’s belief in saying that, precisely because God is the creation of the imagination that humans pray to Him, and that He exists. Prayer is, therefore, the highest form of Creative Imagination. Humans do not pray to the Divine Essence in its hiddenness; each faithful person prays to his Lord, the Lord who is the form of that person’s own faith.

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593 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 69.
594 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 63.
The Shaykh says that a person petitioning God cannot “know his own eternally
determined predisposition to receive,” and “were it not for that with which the
predisposition imbues the request, he would not make the request at all.” God,
therefore, knows that the individual is going to make the request even before he makes
it, and the petition is made because it is his eternal predisposition so to do. Ibn al-
ʿArabī writes that the most that anyone can know of his predisposition is to know it at
the precise time of its happening, in the asking or receiving of the divine gift since
“they know what the Reality bestows on them at that time and they know that they
receive it only because of their predisposition.” Those receiving favours the Great
Shaykh divides into two types: “those who know their predisposition by knowing what
they receive, the others knowing what they [will] receive by knowing their
predisposition ... the latter [being] the more complete knowledge of the
predisposition.” Ibn al-ʿArabī also recognizes the situation where someone asks just
because of his servanthood relative to God, as in

those who ask, not because of any natural impulse, nor yet through
knowledge of the possibilities, but simply to conform with God’s
command, *Call upon Me and I will answer you*. Such a one is eminently
a servant, for in such a supplication there is no trace of self-interest, the
concern being directed solely to conformity with the behest of his
Master. If his state necessitates a request on his part, he asks for more
servanthood, whereas if it necessitates silence and resignation, he is silent.

Furthermore, of those persons who do not make specific requests of God, Ibn
al-ʿArabī writes that they do so only because they understand that God knows their
predisposition and these types of persons “have made themselves ever ready to receive
whatever comes from Him and have withdrawn completely from their separative selves
and their aims.” The individuals of this sort include “those who know that God’s
knowledge of them, in all their states, corresponds to what they themselves are in their
state of preexistent latency” and they understand “that the Reality will bestow on them
only that which their latent essences contribute to Him [as being what He knows

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598 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 63.
Himself to be],” therefore indicating that ‘they know the original of God’s [predetermining] knowledge concerning them.” Ibn al-ʿArabī claims that those in this category truly understand the mystery of divine Premeasurement. The Shaykh al-Akbar reminds his readers that God only dispenses his favours “according to a prescribed measure through the appropriate name,” citing the Qur ānic verse “He bestows [appropriately] on all He has created” (20:50) in the Name the Just and related Names. Ibn al-ʿArabī addresses the issues of predisposition, petitions, and divine favours in several other places in the Bezels text. In the chapter on Jesus, the Shaykh explains that every request to God is responded to, even if it is delayed. When a person says, “O my Lord, forgive me!” (Qur ān 23:118), he is making a request of God. In the Qur ānic verse “If you chastise them, then they are Your servants, but if You forgive them, then You are the Mighty, the Wise” (5:118), the Shaykh indicates that “there is no abasement greater than that of slaves [servants]” and “that they are abased is determined by their essences.” In regard to petitioning God, Ibn al-ʿArabī says that “when God likes the voice of His servant in his supplication to Him, He postpones the response, so that [the servant] might repeat it, not out of any aversion, but out of love for him.” Very important to the subject of predisposition and petitions, Ibn al-ʿArabī confirms that

When God befits a servant to give expression to some matter [in prayer/supplication], He does so only that He might respond to him and fulfil his need. Therefore let no one think that what he has been made fit for [in his predisposition] is late in coming. Let him rather emulate the zeal of God’s Apostle, in respect of this verse [If you chastise them, then they are Your servants, but if You forgive them, then You are the Mighty, the Wise (5:118)], in all his states, so that he may hear with his inner or outer hearing, or in whatever way God may cause him to hear His response. If God blesses you with a physically expressed request, He will cause you to hear His response with the physical ear, but if He

599 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 63–64.
600 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 68.
blesses you with an inner request, then He will cause you to hear His response inwardly.\textsuperscript{601}

The central learning of these passages from the prophet Jesus chapter is that God will respond to requests -- made either inwardly or outwardly -- in accordance to the latent predisposition of the petitioner, the predisposition including both the favour bestowed as well as the timing of the gift. Just because the petitioner does not understand the delay in God’s responding or does not understand God’s responding in a way other than was specifically requested does contradict that God will respond according to the predisposition.

In the chapter on Solomon, Ibn al-ʿArabī comments further on the subject of favours and predisposition, saying that the act of making a request to God is predetermined (“made at the command of his Lord”) and that “when a request is made by divine command, the one who requests is fully rewarded for his request.” The Great Shaykh writes that

\textit{The Creator fulfils the need implicit in what is requested, if He so wills, or withholds it, since the servant has performed what God obliged him to do in obeying His command regarding that which he requested from his Lord. Had he made the request on his own initiative rather than at his Lord’s command, He would have called him to account for it.}\textsuperscript{602}

Here, Ibn al-ʿArabī is emphasizing the facts both that someone who makes a petition is doing so in response to God’s commanding him to ask for help, and that the act of making the request is predetermined.

III.A.3 \textit{Bezels: Suffering and Patience}

In the \textit{Bezels} chapter “The Wisdom of the Unseen in the Word of Job” Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses the roles of predetermination as it relates to pain, suffering, and petitions to God. The Shaykh discusses God in both His Merciful and Wrathful aspects, reminding his readers that while the latter aspect indicates God’s transcendence in being far removed from human experience, the former aspect shows that “the Reality is the Identity of the Cosmos” such that “all determinations are manifest from Him and in

\textsuperscript{601} Ibn al-ʿArabī, 183–86.

\textsuperscript{602} Ibn al-ʿArabī, 196.
Him, as in His saying, ‘The whole matter reverts to Him’” (Sūra 11:123). The Shaykh says that human beings are God’s outer form and that “He is the Outer with respect to the changing of determination and states, the Inner with respect to directing, as ‘He knows everything’” (Sūra 6:101). This reminder of the roles of the transcendent and immanent God are important to the text on suffering and petitions to God in the Job chapter as God knows everything and -- despite Job’s pain and petitions for help -- “The whole matter reverts to Him,” so that Job’s predicament is predetermined, as is the outcome. The importance of this subject is to demonstrate God’s relationship with His servant, who -- by virtue of being a contingent creature -- does not understand everything -- as God does -- and so is perplexed about what should be his right conduct toward God.

Ibn al-ʿArabī begins the discussion of Job’s suffering by recounting the story of how God gave to Job -- in response to a request from the prophet -- water to relieve his suffering caused by Satan’s afflictions. God does not chastise Job for making the petition, but commends him for his patience during the suffering. The Great Shaykh says that “the supplication of a servant in no way detracts from his patience or his being a good servant.” Ibn al-ʿArabī reminds his readers of the Name of God, the Causer, and writes that the “resorting of the servant to the One Who alleviates the hurt by causes is better than having resort to some particular cause that might not be in accord with God’s knowledge concerning the hurt,” that is, a person should turn to God as the Causer of the hurt rather than to someplace else as “He knows everything” and understands the whole matter concerning the reason for the suffering. Blaming some cause other than God for pain could, incorrectly, lead a person to say, ‘God does not answer me.’”

Ibn al-ʿArabī’s use of the example of the prophet Job is to demonstrate the roles of “complaint” and patience. The Shaykh al-Akbar explains at length these roles relative to predisposition:

Job, being a prophet, acted according to the wisdom of God, knowing as he did that patience, which most men regard as the restraining of the soul from complaint, is not limited, as we also know, to that, but is rather the restraining of the soul from complaint to what is other than

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603 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 215.
604 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 216.
God, not to God Himself. Most people are misled in their view that the one who complains detracts from his acceptance of destiny thereby. That is not the case, since it is not one’s acceptance of destiny that is impaired by complaint to God or any other so much as one’s acceptance of the thing predestined. What we have been told, however, does not concern the acceptance of what is destined, since the hurt itself is that which is predestined and not destiny itself. Now Job knew what was implicit in the restraining of the soul from complaint to God, that he might relieve the affliction, was a resistance to divine compulsion. [Such resistance] reveals an ignorance in the person, when God tests him, as to the real nature of what is afflicting the soul, so that he refrains from calling on God to end his pain. In the view of one who is truly aware, one ought to humble oneself and beg God to raise such a thing from one, since, for the inspired one, that alleviation is an alleviation also for God.605

Thus, to complain to God and to ask for relief from suffering is right Muslim conduct. Ibn al-ʿArabī extends the discussion on the specifics of pain, asking, “What greater hurt is there for Him than that He should try you with some affliction or station unknown to you, so that you might beg Him to relieve it, when you are heedless?” The Great Shaykh reminds his readers that God has described Himself in terms of pain and suffering in the Qurʾānic verse “those who would hurt God and His Apostle” (Sūra 33:57). The Shaykh states that “It is better that you approach Him with the sense of [spiritual] indigence, which is your true condition, since, by your asking Him to relieve you, the Reality Himself is relieved, you being His outer form.”

Ibn al-ʿArabī concludes his examination of suffering in the Job chapter by offering the example of a hungry and weeping gnostic who was chastised by someone who said that the gnostic lacked insight, to which the gnostic replied, “’He made me hungry only so that I might weep,’” meaning that God afflicted him so that the gnostic might ask for relief, which -- according to Ibn al-ʿArabī -- did not detract from the gnostic’s patience, “which is the restraining of the soul from complaint to what is other than God.” Even pain itself is a mercy, as Ibn al-ʿArabī says in the Bezels chapter on Zakariah, “Mercy is inherent in all creating, so that, by the mercy bestowed on pain,

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606 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 217.
pain was created.” Indeed, since each person is, in reality, nonexistent -- since the only true existent Being is God and it is God whose existence is in the form of the contingent being -- it is God Himself who experiences pleasure or pain. The Shaykh concludes this discussion by stating that “In asking the Identity of God [that is, God Himself] to lift the affliction from him, the gnostic is well aware that all causes are in Him in particular ways,” meaning that God had a reason for afflicting him, which would also be the gnostic’s destiny to suffer, as it was his destiny to request relief from suffering.

III.A.4 Bezels: The Spiritual Path

As would be expected in a poetry collection modelled on the nasīb section of the pre-Islamic qaṣīda, one of the topics related to destiny and human predisposition that Ibn al-ʿArabī gives special attention to in Bezels of Wisdom is the topic of the spiritual Path. This Path is referred to in the Qurʾānic verse “For every one of you We have made a way and a course, that is a Path [ṣīḥah]” (5:48). The Qurʾān also states in the first chapter (al-Ḥāfitah), which is used in ritual prayer, “Guide us on the right path, the path of those whom you have favoured, and not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray” (1:6-7). In the Bezels chapter on the prophet David, the Shaykh al-Akbar reminds the reader that everything that happens in the Cosmos is according to the Divine Will. Even when someone appears to be contradicting God’s command, earning blame rather than praise, this person will still eventually come to “felicity,” as do all of God’s creatures as God’s mercy embraces all things and His mercy takes precedence over His wrath. This divine Mercy, then -- relative to the Path -- “stands as the eventual goal toward which all are travelling,” so that every person ultimately attains Mercy is separated from Wrath. God in His mercy leads His servants along their Paths to merciful felicity.

The Sufi views movement along the Path as involving a constant struggle against the nafs, translated as the “soul” but with emphasis on the “lower self” or the baser instincts. Sufi dogma drew upon the Qurʾān which taught adepts to “fear the

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607 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 224.
608 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 115.
609 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 217.
610 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 204–5.
place of his Lord and hinder the nafs from lust” (Sūra 79:40). Muslims, generally, have termed the struggle with nafs the “greater jihād,” based at least partly on a hadīth that says “the worst enemy you have is [the nafs between your sides]. In relation to the Path, Rūmī compared the struggle of the intellect with the nafs with the attempt of Majnūn to turn his camel in the right direction, toward his Beloved. The symbol of the camel moving the lover along the Path is repeated throughout the Tarjumān.611

The first chapter dealing with this subject is in “The Wisdom of Unity in the Word of Hūd,” a chapter that examines at length human destiny in terms of the Path in relation to God’s transcendence and immanence. Ibn al-ʿArabī begins the chapter with the following poem which speaks directly to God’s immanence:

The Straight Path of God is not hidden,
But manifest universally.
He is essentially in all things great or small,
Ignorant of truth or aware.
Thus does His Mercy embrace all things,
Be they mean or mighty.612

In explaining this poem, the Shaykh first cites the Qurānic verse which says “No living being is there but He will seize it by it forelock. Surely my Lord is on a Straight Path” (Sūra 11:56). This he relates to the immanental attributes of God in saying that “All things walk on the Straight Path of their Lord and, in a sense, they do not incur the divine Wrath nor are they astray” because ultimately God’s Mercy takes precedence over his Wrath. The Shaykh writes that “All that is other than the Reality is a being walking [on the Path], since each has a spirit and none proceeds [on the Path] by itself but by another [God],” so that each creature “proceeds [along the Path] following, according to a [certain] determination, Him Who is on the Path [the Lord]; furthermore, “It would not be a path but for the procession along it.” This final statement means that there is no path except that which God pulls someone along, otherwise it may not be termed his Path.613

613 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 130.
In another poem within *Bezels*, Ibn al-ʿArabī writes in the chapter on Ṣāliḥ the following, using the camel as a metaphor -- a sign of God, in the Shaykh’s vocabulary -- for a person travelling along his Path:

Among His signs are the riding beasts,
because of the variety of paths.
Some follow the true course,
while others traverse trackless wastes.
The former are possessed of true vision,
the latter have missed the way.
To both there come from God
Revelations of inner realities from every side.\(^{614}\)

The poem evokes the Qurānic verse, “This is the Path of your Lord, straight -- We have differentiated the signs for a people who remember” (*Sūra* 6:126). The true gnostic, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, is the one who actually realizes that he is following his “true course,” which would be the Path along which he is pulled by God. This situation is in contrast to someone who is pulled along the Path, but who does not realize that he is being pulled along his Path by God and, instead, believes himself to be wandering aimlessly through life as if wandering through the trackless wastes of the desert. Each of these two different individuals, however, is given signs by God -- including the camel -- which point to His immanence in the Cosmos. The true gnostic sees God as is revealed to “from every side,” that is, in the attributes of God revealed in His created things that mirror the Names and qualities of the Real.

Ibn al-ʿArabī also addresses the issue of the Path in the *Bezels* chapter on the prophet Solomon, noting that not only does God pull His servants along the Path by the forelock, but it is impossible for anyone to be separated from Him, that is, it is not possible that God should not be grasping His servant’s forelock by which He draws him along his Path, as everything in the Cosmos is on a Straight Path, which is the Path of God. In this regard, the Shaykh cites the Qurānic verse, “He is with you wherever you are” (*Sūra* 57:4), in confirmation of the servant’s being inseparably with God.\(^{615}\)

In regard to the Path, Ibn al-ʿArabī also cites in the Hūd chapter the hadīth which says, “I am his hearing by which he hears and his sight by which he perceives,

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\(^{614}\) Ibn al-ʿArabī, 140–41.

\(^{615}\) Ibid., 195.
his hand with which he takes and his foot by which he moves along.” The focus here, of course, is on the part of this saying of Muhammad which refers to the “foot by which he moves along,” which the Shaykh also relates to the Qur’anic verse that says, “[And if they had observed the Torah and the Gospel and that which revealed to them from their Lord, they would certainly have eaten from above them] and from beneath their feet” (Sūra 5:66), since the Path is there to be walked along by the feet. In a controversial commentary on the Path, Ibn al-ʿArabī also mentions here that the “wrongdoers” are pulled along by God by their forelocks while at the same time the westerly wind pushes them from behind to Hell, Hell being the place that is distance between the wrongdoer and God. Ironically, as it is God who is drawing them along the Path to Hell, they at the same time attain proximity to God so that this distance and the idea of Hell actually ceases for them. As the Great Shaykh explains further,

Thus they attain [in reality] the blessing of nearness [to Him] in respect of what they have merited [in their eternal essences], being [eternally] wrongdoers; nor does He grant them this pleasurable station as a freely given gift, since it is they themselves who adopt it according as their essential realities have merited eternally by their deeds [thus determined]. Indeed, in performing their deeds [of wrongdoing] they are, nevertheless, on the Path of their Lord, their forelocks being in the hand of the One thus qualified; thus, they do not walk [on their Path] by themselves, but under compulsion till they reach [their] nearness [to Him].

Here Ibn al-ʿArabī adds the Qur’anic reference often cited by other Sufis, in which God says, “We are nearer to him than his jugular vein” (Sūra 50:16), and brings the discussion back to the Path by saying “No proximity is closer than that His Identity should be the very limbs and faculties of the servant himself.”

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616 Muhammad ibn Isma’il Bukhari, Sahih, ed. L. Krehl (Vols. I-III) and T. Juynboll (Vol. IV) (Leiden, 1862), 81:38 cited in Ibn al-ʿArabī, Bezels, 130. Khan, alternatively, translates this as “I become his sense of hearing with which he hears, and his sense of sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grips, and his leg with which he walks.” Bukhari, The English Translation of Sahih Al Bukhari with the Arabic Text, 76:509.


618 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 131–32.
Ibn al-ʿArabī continues his exposition on the Path in an important section in the Hūd chapter by stating that human beings are divided into two groups, distinguished by their gnosis: “The first travel a way they know and whose destination they know, which is their Straight Path,” whereas the second group “travel a way they do not know and of whose destination they are unaware, which is equally the Straight Path.” The first group are true gnostics with understanding of the Path; it is also the Straight Path for the latter group, of course, because it is still the Path along which God is drawing the person, regardless of whether he knows it or not. The Shaykh cites the Qurānic verse “the lowest of the low” (Sūra 95:5) in relating the idea that the only things lower than the feet of a person is the Path on which he travels. The gnostic is the person who understands that the Reality (God) is the Path. Ibn al-ʿArabī asserts that it is in God that a person travels -- as there is, of course, nothing but God in the Cosmos -- and also that the traveler himself is God, since God is Being Itself.619 Thus, “there is no act but God’s,” and “[t]o pronounce blame for one’s own purpose is itself blameworthy in God’s sight.”620

III.B Interpreter of Desires: The Lover’s Path of Suffering and the All-Merciful Beloved

One of the overarching themes of Interpreter of Desires is that of the lover’s struggling along his spiritual Path, as analogized to the trek through the desert as he pursues the girl, Niẓām. The Sufi-lover experiences suffering because he is -- from his own sensual perspective -- unable to attain his beloved. Much of the tension of the poetry in the collection is driven by the lover’s inability or unwillingness to understand neither that he is, actually, on his Path -- which includes his suffering -- nor the endpoint, which may not be the attainment of proximity or union with the girl. The same perspective applies in viewing the Sufi-lover’s progression along his analogous spiritual Path, which also includes suffering and does not promise union with God the Beloved in his lifetime. Ibn al-ʿArabī says that someone cannot be other than what he is meant to be -- which applies to the wandering Sufi-lover -- this being determined by God in giving him his existence.

619 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 132.
620 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 209.
Addas, in an exploration of “voyage” in the Shaykh’s poetry, says that “all beings are on a path toward their point of origin; but, as Ibn ‘Arabi emphasizes on a number of different occasions, this return has no endpoint, for man is ontologically doomed to travel forever, be it in this world or in the next.” Addas adds that the body’s voyage progresses unrelentingly from birth to death through a series of changes, “a journey of the heart which, from theophany to theophany, wanders incessantly toward new territories.” The major life events such as birth, death, resurrection, judgement, and Paradise (or Hell) are never anything more than steps in a passage that -- in the image of God the Voyage Leader, will never know an end. For those who have forgotten the reason for the spiritual voyage, it is a bitter and painful circuit, but for those who – from one moment of worship to the next – let themselves “be gently guided by the spiral that carries them away”, it is a breath-taking journey.621

III.B.1 Interpreter: The Lover’s Predisposition

With the mention of the henna-dyed hair or fingers of the Beloved and the meadow of gazelles, the classical tradition of Arabic poetry became another of the language worlds in which Ibn al-ʿArabī’s thought takes form. Of the lovers and beloveds mentioned in the Tarjumān al-ʿAshwāq, the most famous are Qays and Laylā. Michael Sells explains that in the poetry attributed to the poet Qays, said to be a contemporary of Muḥammad, the poet speaks of being driven mad, Majnūn, the term for “mad,” mean, literally, “jinned,” that is, taken over by jinn (genies), the semi-spirit denizens of the desert associated in early Arabic poetry with love, madness, and poetic inspiration. Because the poet Qays was driven mad out of his love for the Beloved, he became known as “Majnūn-Laylā”: “jinned – or driven made by – Laylā.622

Sells writes further that the groves, wadies (river beds), and camp ruins that were the sites of the union and separation of the early Arab lover had -- by Ibn al-ʿArabī’s time -- become fully inscribed with the cultural tradition. The names of one of these lovers -- or one of the stopping places, wadies, or groves associated with them -- was enough to evoke the entire legend of Laylā and Majnūn. Such sites were frequently recalled during the almost ritual recounting of the station of the Beloved in her journey

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622 Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsaying, 109–10.
away from the poet, referred to, as already discussed, as the classical Arabic idea known as the zaʾn(un), “departure.”

The opening poem of the collection establishes the recurring theme of the zaʾn and the “departing women” — one of the predominant themes of the nasīb — usually portraying the women departing set upon the howdahs of their camels. As opposed to the balance of descriptions throughout the Tarjumān, here the poet-lover is describing the Beloved at the beginning of both her and his journey, whereas the recollection (dhikr) normally takes places as a meditation over the ruins of the travel party which has moved on. Also in the short opening poem of the collection (below in its totality), the Sufi-lover makes reference to the imaginal and speaks directly to the issue of knowledge of Destiny and the Path:

If only I were knowing whether they knew / what heart (qalbin) they possessed (1)
And if my “nobler intestines” (fūʿādī) (that is, my “heart”) knew / what mountain-path (shīʿīn) they followed (2)
Do you perceive them [as if] they were safe / or do you perceive them [as if] they were perished? (3)
Lords of the love (arbābu al-hawā) become confused (ḥāra) / in the love and they are being muddled (artabakū)
(or, entangled) (4) (Poem 1:1-4)

The Shaykh said that it is not possible for human beings to know Destiny, even though they will try. Chittick asserts of the opening verse of the collection that when the Shaykh says, “If only I were knowing whether they knew what heart they possessed,” that this is the first instance of an inward, imaginal experience of the poet-lover, which is repeated throughout the collection.

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Sells agrees in this evaluation of the poem, affirming the party traversing the mountain-path (shiʿbin) are, indeed, the beloved of the mystic lover. Sells also comments that the ephemeral nature of the Beloved’s appearances (and consequently of the poet-lover) here and throughout the Tarjumān is a source of mystical bewilderment (hayra) and perishing (halak) of the lover. Sells says that the notion of love madness is invoked by the context of the poems so strongly that it does not have to be mentioned explicitly, though there are, of course, references to other famous lovers “jinned” by being in love (fī al-hawā) with the Beloved, here denoted by the “Lords of love” (arbābu al-hawā) – of whom the Sufi-lover counts himself -- being “confused” (ḥāra) and “muddled” (artabakū). Sells claims that the intensity of the lover’s experience is directly proportional to the ephemerality of his experience.626

Corbin’s take on this poem links the Interpreter of Desires with the gnostic theories of Bezels in suggesting that the “they” of the opening poem are divine Wisdoms (ḥikam), that is “individuations of eternal Wisdoms (ḥikmat), each one imparted to one of the twenty-seven prophets typified in the book of the Fuṣūṣ --Wisdoms for which in pre-eternity the cherubic Spirits were taken with ecstatic love, just as the hearts of the mystics are taken with love for them in time.”627

The Sufi-lover anticipates a journey in this opening poem, trying to discern what their Path is because it will soon become his own Path.628 The course along which one of God’s servants travels -- both in terms of his actions and his relationship to God -- is dependent on his essential nature, that is, his latent predisposition. Thus the opening poem sets up the question of whether the Sufi-lover’s own Path will be in following that of the beloved. Akbarian doctrine informs the reader that, of course, God’s servant will follow God -- who is pulling the lover along -- so the only questions are will the lover, indeed, follow the girl, and -- if so -- exactly what twists and turns this particular servant will be making. Schimmel posits that the Sufi poets were aware that the “caravan of life” is constantly moving, and -- with images taken from the Arabic tradition -- “they taught their listeners to follow the call in Arabic: ar-raḥīl -- ‘Let’s travel!’” Once the journey to God is finished the journey in God begins. This

627 Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi, 141–42.
628 The subject of the Path is discussed in great detail in the next chapter in the section on inherent predisposition.
infinite way, however, can be traversed only by Love, for every stage on it requires a loving sacrifice from the wayfarer.  

This opening poem, then, has received much scholarly attention, including especially insightful comments by William Chittick. The notes that the “organ” through which a human being perceives the invisible and higher things is the heart (as above, qalbī or fiʿ ādī), mentioned in this very first poem of the Tarjumān. For Ibn al-ʿArabī, the ultimate object of vision is God. But God in Himself is absolutely invisible and indefinable, which is to say that He cannot be seen in His unknowable Essence. Chittick says that God can be seen in His self-disclosure, however, and this takes place within a form, which is the place of “locus” within which vision occurs. The form, which is also termed an “imaginal form.” Chittick says that this opening poem -- and all subsequent poems of the Interpreter of Desires -- represents the description of God’s self-disclosure as they appeared to the poet in the invisible worlds. This is the theosophic foundation which the Shaykh lays for the entire collection. Another concept introduced in the opening poem and carried throughout the collection is the idea of “love.” This poem introduces the idea of the lover-beloved-love relationship, as discussed in this project’s introduction. In the final verse, the poet refers to himself as one of the Lords of the love (arbābu al-hawā). Sells explains that, like many other Sufis, Ibn al-ʿArabī “refused to rest at an easy and comfortable distinction between ‘earthly’ love and ‘spiritual’ love.” The earthly-heavenly ambiguity of the Beloved is a central feature of much poetry within the Islamic poetic traditions. Sells concludes that “if the Arabic love-poetry tradition been merely an analogy for the intensity of the divine-human love relation, such an analogy could have been drawn without the profound and sustained appropriation of the classical poetic conventions of love, love sickness, love madness, and passing away in love.” In assessing the relationship between mystical and profane love, Bruijn comments that the theme of love is unique in that it is directly concerned with one of the most fundamental experiences of the human soul which cannot be made without reference to its human

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631 Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsaying, 111–12.
and biological origin. “Erotic motives, even in the most abstract usages are essentially metaphorical.”

In another theosophic context, when the Sufi-lover wonders about the destiny of the girl -- her own heart, her physical position, whether she is safe or perished -- he is actually addressing the doctrine about which Ibn al-ʿArabī spoke in saying that it is, in fact, not possible for the servant to know the answers to these questions. The seeming capriciousness of the Beloved causes the Sufi-lover to become increasingly frustrated as the poems progress, as when he says, “How often did they covenant (ʿahidat) and swear (aqsamat) that they would not change (lā tahūla) / but a dyed one (that is, with henna) does not keep a promise (laysa wafā) of oaths (literally, “in [the] right hand”) (P11:10). The Beloved “did not keep a promise,” she who swore (aqsamat) she “would not change” (lā tahūla). Later in the collection, the Sufi-lover says, “So blame Fate (aʿtib zamānan) – we did not have a stratagem [with which to deal]” (P24:7a), an acknowledgement that what happens to the lover is not determined by himself but by something greater.

Well into the collection, in a very direct reference to his latent predisposition, the Sufi-lover says, “So there is no escape from emotional upset (or, passion) [that] exists, a thing connected / with that which supplied provisions of beauty (husnin) in [the] order (nizāman) set down in writing (that is, predestined)” (P55:4). By this point in the collection, the lover has begun finally to address God more directly. Thus, even though “the servant is not aware of his predisposition, but only of the spiritual state, which he knows as that which impels him, since knowledge of the predisposition is the most hidden,” the Sufi-lover does seem aware, at least -- as the writer approaches the final poems -- that he does have a predisposition of some sort that impels him. This understanding on the part of the lover exhibited in Poem 55 is the type of awareness about which Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote in saying that there are “those who know their predisposition by knowing what they receive.”

Poem 55 is unique in that it contains an intriguing reference to the girl Niẓām in the last line of this poem, and is worth exploring, especially as it is the only word reference of this sort in the entire collection. The word nizām(un) is a noun that has the

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literal sense in the poem’s context as something rightly ordered, the cause of something, or its foundation. Thus, in the poem, the very literal translation of the last line may be translated more evenly as, “There is no escape from the upsetting emotions that exist, which were caused by beauty, something that was ordered in writing (that is, ordered as part of what has been written down by God).”

There are, however, several other fascinating connotations of this particular verb root n-ẓ-m. For example, the verb root naẓama means to pierce, knot a cord, or string beads or pearls. McCauley states in his monograph on the Shaykh’s poetry that Ibn al-ʿArabī saw the world as composed of “measures and metres” as does poetry. McCauley summarises Ibn al-ʿArabī’s views on the order of poetry in saying that, “[i]f poetry as he understands it reflects the workings of the Cosmos, it is also the vehicle for secret knowledge, the preserve of the elite of mystics. For God ‘arranged the jewels of knowledge on the necklace of poetry and prose, out of his concern for them, and fastened them around the necks of the spirits of the knowers.’ Here Ibn al-ʿArabī uses the common comparison between the composition of poetry and the ordering of pearls.”

The root verb (naẓama) may also be translated as to compose poetry. Other variations of this verb root include manẓūm, meaning metrical or poetical, and naẓm, meaning poem, poetry, or – more specifically – a didactic poem, which is what a theophanic and theosophical read of the Tarjumān yields. The noun naẓm also can also mean a rosary, that is, a string of beads used to count prayers, thus linking the girl Niẓām’s name to praying to God. Yet another verb form, naẓīm, is an adjective meaning handsome or pretty. Sells agrees with the varied and nuanced reading of the girl’s name and its related words built upon the n-ẓ-m root, stating that is has meanings of “beauty,” “artful arrangement,” “perfected harmony,” and “fluency. Such beauty was commonly compared to the stringing of

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635 Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 3034.
637 McCauley, 45.
638 Steingass, *The Student’s Arabic-English Dictionary*, 1130.
641 Steingass, 1130.
pearls. A lover of puns, Ibn al-ʿArabī at one point proclaims that in seeking [the girl] Niẓām he has become “undone and unstrung.” The order and harmony, as connoted by the words based on n/z/m, apply to expressive composition, as in poetry and the Quran, making Niẓām a figure for both poetic inspiration and divine manifestation.642

III.B.2 Interpreter: Petitions of the Suffering Lover and the Beloved’s Mercy

Throughout the Interpreter of Desires poems, the Sufi-lover makes petitions for relief from his suffering. The suffering from the grief of separation and the quest for reunion is evidence that of the basic theme in mysticism, what Esmail says is a dialectic between separation and union.643 As discussed, the central Akbarian belief applicable to the topic of petitions is that such a petition is determined by the servant’s inherent predisposition, even if he does not know he has the predisposition; generally speaking, if he did not have the predisposition, he would not have made the request of God. After establishing in the opening poem that the poems of the collection would address the question of Destiny and the Path, Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Sufi-lover says in the second poem -- which is a flashback to the departure of the beloved Niẓām from the lover -- “When my soul reached the collar bones (that is, the throat, implying when I was at the point of death), / I asked that Beauty and that Grace for consoling (tanfīsā)” (P2:11). This poem was discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the concept of “beauty,” but here, was also see that the lover is compelled by his predisposition not only to experience the pain of eminent separation from the Divine (as analogized to the girl) but to ask God for consoling (tanfīsā), for relief from that pain; God knows that both pain and petition are in the servant’s predisposition.

At this point – at the beginning of the discussion of the Sufi-servant’s petitions to God, through his praying to God -- it is helpful to assert again the importance of the role of the pre-Islamic Arabic poetry in the formation of Islamic culture, and then the role of Islamic culture, generally, on Arabic mystical verse. Carl Ernst states that the “origins of Arabic mystical verse probably lie in the rhythmic qualities of prayer. The powerful poetic reverberations of the Qurʾān as recited on a daily basis must have had a deep impact on the verbalization of religious feeling.” Thus, Arabic and Sufi mystical

642 Sells, Stations Of Desire: Love Elegies From Ibn ʿArabi And New Poems, 32.
writings – both prose as well as poetry – often display the rhymed and metrical words and sentence development that is one of the most striking aspects of Arabic literature in general. Ernst notes that the short prayers and verses of Rabiʿa are outstanding instances of this kind of poetry.”

Thus, to appreciate fully the poetry of the Shaykh al-Akbar requires an appreciation of the aesthetics evident in the long history of Sufi poetry, which both influences -- and is influenced by -- even the praxis of Islamic prayers and petitions about which he writes in the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*.

In the collection, the Sufi-lover’s essential latent impulse to request help is evident in poems in which he asks such questions as “Who for the purpose of [addressing] my expression [of grief]? Who for the purpose of [addressing] my emotional upset? Point him out to me! / Who for the purpose of [addressing] my sadness? Who for [addressing] an effusion of love?” (Poem 15:5). Similarly, the lover asks, “…a youth endowed with an amorous rapture, docile, / his sorrows ‘rotted’ (ramat) him into a confusion (bahmā), a remain of a wasteland (rasma balqaʿi)” (P28:14b,15). Abū Bakr, the first caliph, had said, “Incapacity to obtain comprehension is itself comprehension,” to which al-Shaykh al-Akbar responded with a comment on bewilderment (hayra), that those who are, indeed, aware of their own ambiguous situation know that the answer to every significant question regarding God is “He/not He” (huwa/lā huwa), or, implying the answer is both “Yes and no.”

The lover’s bewilderment is actually the mercy bestowed by God upon him, though he does not understand this. The Sufi-lover does not realise that mystical bewilderment is the favour bestowed upon a gnostic trying to perfect himself in this life and is the station to which God is pulling him by his forelock upon the spiritual Path. The “remain of a wasteland” (P28:15) is, paradoxically, the bewilderment which precedes annihilation of the self-ego, which may then lead to annihilation in annihilation where the gnostic is not even aware of his annihilation, and is an example of a gift that has not been requested by His servant but which is otherwise bestowed, still in conformity to the Sufi-lover’s predisposition.

It is the lover’s divine premeasurement that he be led to bewilderment and annihilation without even realising that this is the Path along which he is proceeding or

the endpoint of his journey. When the poet says in a verse such as “… with my heart-blood (that is, an oath), one who is thin in the waist (literally, ‘empty’ or ‘hungry’) / she caused upset, [giving] to me bounties and favours (literally, ‘a thing that is loaned’) (ayādiyan wa- āzifā)” (P29:13), the passion instilled over the apparent “bounties and favours” is falsely attributed: as the poems make clear, the sensual bounties and favours which the lover believed he had received from the girl -- and the promises of more upon re-union -- before her departure were clearly misunderstood, and perhaps not even genuine, as the girl does not indicate she wishes to consummate the relationship and the lover feels her oaths were false. But what the lover does not understand is that this re-union with the Beloved is not to be on the basis of proximity and union at the end of the journey but the mercy of bewilderment and annihilation -- so that the gnostic “dies before he dies” and the hoped-for dewy pastures as the place of consummation is, instead, Paradise in the afterlife. The Sufi-lover recounts that “Who will help (assuming halla from the previous line, meaning, literally, to ‘unbind’ or ‘resolve’) a youth wandering (mutayyatin) (that is, lost) in a [vast] desert, / enamoured, ‘furnished evidence’ (that is, ‘confounded’) (mudallahi) in the mind, deeply grieved?” (P48:11). The arc of the Interpreter of Desires story makes it obvious that the lover is unaware of the alternative possibilities for God’s mercy in bestowing favours that were not asked for exoterically, but esoterically, consistent with the Akbarian understanding of petitions in that “If God blesses you with a physically expressed request, he will cause you to hear His response with the physical ear, but if He blesses you with an inner request, then He will cause you to hear His response inwardly.” The sum of the poetry collection is, in effect, God’s blessing the Sufi-lover in ways that His servant had not specifically requested, but which were bestowed upon him inwardly in the granting of continued pain, frustration, and bewilderment which will actually bring him closer to God.

God did, though, command His servants to request help in His saying “Call upon Me and I will answer you” (Sūra 40:60), thus establishing the lover in the poems as a servant who, in his petitions, conforms to the relationship with God as his Master

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646 The command by Muhammad to “Die before you die!” is famous and often cited by Ibn al-ʿArabī and other Sufis, though not found in the traditional cannon of the hadīth. Ibn al-ʿArabī, Meccan Revelations: Volume 1, 277, fn 19.

and in making the request is also asking for more servanthood. Ibn al-ʿArabī seems to be alluding to this view of petitions in the following poem:

Behold, I am impoverished (muflisu)! (3b)
I rolled (in the mud) my cheek, being seized by tenderness and love,
so with truth, a duty intending (that is, owed) to you,
do not deprive [me] of hope (lā tūyisā) (4)
one who is “all day long” drowning in his tears and in/
fire of the sadness burned and (that is, with) no resting. (5)

(P8:3b,4,5)

The lover’s love for “them” -- another instance of a plural reference to the Beloved in her travel-party -- and his asserting his lower status as a beggar help to establish these verses as an example of petition based on servanthood. The Sufi-lover is spiritually “impoverished” (muflisu) and asks that the Beloved not deprive him of hope (lā tūyisā). Spiritual poverty – often termed faqr in doctrinal Sufism – is considered to be one of the ecessary stages on the spiritual Path and is praised, being – as Schimmel cites Junayd as saying – “an ocean of affliction, yet its affliction is complete glory.”

When the lover says, “My [love-] sickness is from [her love-] sick eyelids/purify me by her remembrance! Purify me!” (P20:1), he seems again to be acknowledging his lower status as the passive object. In speaking of himself, saying, “of his heart (sirbihi), with his heart (bisirbihi), for his herd (lisirbati)” (P42:3), the lover equates himself to a keeper of the herd, but with the emphasis being that the lover serves the “herd” -- a female alternative form of this noun (sirbatun) being a reference again to God the Beloved -- the result being that the lover receives “gifts,” divine favours which prompt praise to God, the source of the mercy.

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648 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 63.
649 As Sells says, “she suddenly shatters into the plural and we speak of her as ‘‘them.’” Sells, Stations Of Desire: Love Elegies From Ibn ʿArabi And New Poems, 37.
650 Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 58.
651 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 1341.
652 Lane, 1341; Steingass, The Student’s Arabic-English Dictionary, 489.
The Sufi-lover was not immediately granted the relief sought upon the Beloved’s departure when he said, “I asked (sāltu) that Beauty (al-jamāla) and that Kindess (al-lutta) for consoling (tanfisā) (P2:11b). The first consideration in assessing this petition was that the relief sought might not be the relief bestowed, as the mercies God bestows are in accordance with His servant’s latent predisposition. God’s promise, however, is certainly that He will lead human beings to His ultimate mercy, though that mercy may be of a different sort anticipated or may even be delayed. In the case of the Sufi-lover, he laments that the beloved fails to give him what he most wants, which is some word of her whereabouts and some indication of her love of him. In his frustration he says, “What is it to her if she gave me a greeting? / [There is] no authority (lā ahtikāmun) over the white/fair (that is, beautiful) ones (al-dumā)” (P4:2).

The lover’s suffering seems unbearable and his frustration grows with the Beloved’s apparent non-response, but the Sufi-lover is unaware that “when God likes the voice of His servant in his supplication to Him, he postpones the response, so that he might repeat it, not out of any aversion, but out of love for him.”

Thus God uses the lover’s continued suffering to prompt more supplications, not because God is withholding the favours to which the lover is predisposed in his latent essence to receive, but because of God’s great love for His servant.

The poet’s repeating the lamentations and petitions as the lover moves through a cycle of anticipating reunion with his Beloved only to find she has moved on, only to leave him to meditate upon the campsite ruins before he senses her perfume on the wind before setting off yet again on his camel, seems cruel, but -- aside from the fact that this is the Path upon which God is pulling him -- God loves the sound of the Sufi-lover’s voice in supplication, as Ibn al-ʿArabī writes in Bezels. Each painful step through the desert brings the lover closer to God, but not in the way that the lover anticipates. The tension this cycle creates builds unrelentingly as the poem progresses:

[The] dear ones of my heart – where are they (ayna hum)?

By God, I say – where are they? (1)

As you saw their phantasm /

will you show me their essence? (2)

So how long, how long, did I search for them?

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How many (that is, often) did I beg (sāltu) to be a “joined one” (baynahum) with them (that is, to be united with them)? (3)

Until I feel safe [regarding] being separated from them (baynahum) and [yet] I did not feel safe being among them (4)

Maybe “good luck” is a solution in relation to [their] absence and being separated from them (baynahum). (5)

May the eye [be] “living at ease” (that is, blessed) with them – so can I not say, Where are they? (6)

(P45:1-6)

The central petition to God is, “Where are they (ayna hum)? The lover thinks that God is not answering his request for help in being a “joined one with them” (baynahum) when he is presently “separated from them” (baynahum), reunited with his Beloved.

(Of special note is Muhīyī al-Dīn’s use of a term that appears to have opposite meanings within the poem: baynahum, which means both separated from them, as well as joined with them. The sense of the word when being used to suggest union is for two entities to be separate, but joined; this is proved by the lexicons of Lane and others, as well as supported by Nicholson’s own translation.654) Yet in regard to asking to be joined through in separation, Ibn al-ʿArabī says that “let no one think that what he has been made fit for [in his predisposition] is late in coming”655 The lover has not, of course, achieved that true gnosis that would tell him that his suffering is simply his Path and that his faith should inform him that God’s Mercy will overcome His apparent wrath in predisposing His servant to suffer.656

The poet underscores the idea that the lover does not realise that a petition that seems unanswered may only be delayed in writing,

I say from emotional upset (wajdin) and from amorous rapture /

“O would that he who caused me to be ill (amradani),
treat(ed) [me] (marradā)! (3)

He passed by a door of the habitation, mocking, /


656 The verse, “Until I had no fear of being parted from them, and yet I feared to be amongst them,” seems a variation on Ibn al-ʿArabī’s saying “I seek refuge in Him from Him.” Bezels, 135.
hiding [himself], “being with turban wrapped around his head”, turning away. (4)

The veiling (ta'jirutu) did not harm me (mā ṣarnī), only / am I hurt (aḍarranī) from his circumstance of having turned away [from me] (aʾraḍā). (5)

(P47:3,4,5)

In this poem, the Sufi asks relief from the Beloved “who caused me to be ill,” (amraḍanī), demanding, “treat (me) (marradā)!” The Sufi-poet says that it was not the veiling per se of the Beloved that harmed him (mā ṣarnī), but the circumstance of actually being turned away by her (aʾraḍā).

The Persian Sufi ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin al-Qushayrī (d.1064), in what Sells considers to be the most popular classical work on Sufism, wrote his Treatise which discusses many key Sufi concepts and terms which appear in the works of the Shaykh and other Sufi writers. Ibn al-ʿArabī’s use of veiling (ta’jirutu) above calls to mind Qushayrī’s commentary on self-manifestation (tallajī) and suffering (balāʾ) and what separates the Sufi from the “common folk.” Qushayrī said that the common condition of humans is to seek the removal of veils that deprive humankind from the Divine light. But for those who are spiritually advanced, the Sufis, are the Divine light becomes so overwhelming that it blinds in its brilliance so much so that the Sufi is “wander-lost” (tashū) actually seeks relief from being veiled. Thus, for the common people, the veil is perceived as punishment, but for the Sufi, it is mercy. The poet-lover acknowledges that the Beloved is veiled from him, which is not as hurtful as the fact that she has turned away from him.657 Ibn al-ʿArabī said that even though mere poets are “veiled from Him” and “exhaust their words” on “the love for [women], the world, money, position, and everything loved in the world”, a gnostic who “knows” never “hears a voice, a riddle, a panegyric, or a love poem that is not about Him, hidden beyond the veils of all forms.”658

In the same vein as the above poem, Ibn al-ʿArabī writes, “Bending her soft eye she dissolves him / and abandons him (tatrukuhu) above the sick bed” (P50:2). Thus, the lover feels that the Beloved has abandoned him as he lies love-sick on his bed. In

657 Sells, Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qurʾan, Miʿraj, Poetic and Theological Writings, 129.
both instances, the lover had asked for God to help him in his love-sickness, but the specific answer he sought seemed not forthcoming. The possibility does not occur to the Sufi-lover that the relief he is seeking is not in his predisposition to receive at the time at which he requested it.

As discussed, Ibn al-ʿArabi says that there are two types of gifts bestowed by God: the type given in response to a petition and the type given without a specific petition. The poems exhibit a vast number of petitions of the former type, but God’s bestowing favours upon His servant is also generally evident in the poems, though not often so explicitly. The servant is always led by God along the Path to His Mercy, which is a gift of the All-Merciful. The favour of felicity promised to God’s servants is not always given in response to a specific, discursive request, but it is still, nonetheless, bestowed by God, leading the person along the Path according to the servant’s predisposition to that certain felicity, though the particular form of that felicity may not be known by the servant along the Path and not attained until the afterlife.

Chittick very eloquently says of the Path and God’s immanental stations and signs along the way that the “homesteads of the afterlife are the stages of an endless succession of awakenings to the self-disclosures of the Real. In this life, the stages of the return to God map out in broad strokes the infinite imaginal realm where divine self-disclosures will be seen for what they are. Every stage on the path to God prefigures on of the homesteads of the next world. Human nature finds the imperative to follow the path in the hunger to know the divine names and to find their substance within the self, a hunger that is commonly known as love.”

III.B.3 Interpreter: Patience and the Hadīth of the Swaying Tree

A major sub-theme of the topic of suffering in Interpreter of Desires is the subject of patience of the suffering lover. As already mentioned, the Great Shaykh says in Bezels chapter on the prophet Job that “the supplication of a servant in no way detracts from his patience or his being a good servant.” Job’s patience and requesting relief from his suffering is directly analogous to that of the Sufi-lover.

The way in which Sufi-lover approaches this situation is in contrast to how Job approaches the issue of suffering, complaint, and patience, in that Job realizes that his

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659 Chittick, Ibn ʿArabi: Heir to the Prophets, 120.
wanting to complain and petition for relief was from his predisposition, as Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote in *Bezels* that “Job knew what was implicit in the restraining of the soul from complaint to God, that he might relieve the affliction, was a resistance to divine compulsion,” meaning that to resist supplication is to rest his natural, God-created predisposition and that to resist in this way “reveals an ignorance in the person, when God tests him, as to the real nature of what is afflicting the soul,” the source of that affliction being God the Causer Himself. 661 But the Sufi-lover does, to the contrary, resist his own predisposition to not only suffer but to accept his impatience as evidenced in the following:

O doves of the ārak [tree] and the bān [tree], /
soothe me! Do not multiply my worry by [your] wailing. (1)
Soothe me! Do not be made visible [by you] by the loud and bemoaning/
of my secret love and my concealed griefings. (2)
I converse [with] her at the evening and through the sun-light /
with [the] pitiful [cry] of a yearning one and the groan of one
“madly in love”. (3) (P11:1,2,3)

The Sufi-lover is ashamed of his suffering and lack of patience, preferring to hide his desires and sorrows, and not acknowledging -- or understanding -- that lack of patience does not necessarily negate his reliance as a dependent being upon God or obviate his need to petition God for relief as God has commanded.

An important poem in the first part of the poetry collection -- significant in that it makes a rare reference directly to God that is not seen again until near the end of the collection -- tells how precious and distinct the transcendent God is (indicated rhetorically by the “oath” device), linking God’s departure with the resulting grief and loss of patience:

[I offer] my father (said as an oath) for him [whom] I melted in grief
(*dhubtu fi-h kamadan*) /
[I offer] my father (said as an oath) for him [whom] I mortified
my passions out of fear [of separation]. (2)
The patience (*al-ṣabrū*) tore down (*qawwada*) and the sadness settled
down, /

and I between these [two] am meeting. (4)


(P15:2,4,5)

The poet-lover says that he “melted in grief” (dhubtu fī-h kamadan), the result being that his patience tore down (al-ṣabru qawwaḍa). He, again, petitions God for help, in asking for an explanation for his “emotional upset” (li-wajdī), “sadness” (li-ḥuzmī), and “effusion of love” (l-ṣabbin ‘ashiqā). These verses suggest that the Sufi-lover not only suffers pain and lacks patience, but -- contrary to Akbarian teachings -- deems the lack of patience in a negative light, seeming to believe that impatience equates to a lack of faith. He asks for guidance, indicating that he does not understand that it is God who is the source of his pain; he also does not appeal to God for relief. In Sufi doctrine, patience is a station along the mystical Path since “God is with those who show patience” (Sūra 2:103). Schimmel recounts that the camel – often cited by Ibn al-ʿArabī – was a Sufi symbol of the faithful person who possessed perfect patience, as he followed the will of his master. Yet the Sufi recognises the power of love in the common saying that “My patience died the night that love was born.”

In a similar poem linking grief and patience, the lover cannot understand that God does not condemn a servant who petitions for relief as unfaithful in his appeal to God, despite knowing that God is the Causer and source of his pain:

They said, “Forbearance (ṣabrān)! but discord is lacking (that is, “non-”) patient (ghaīrū ʾṣābirin). / So what are my means [when] patience (al-ṣabru) is in isolation? (8)

If even with me was patience (ṣabrun) and I were a judged thing by it / my soul would not be patient (lama ṣabarat).

How, when I have it not? (9) (P43:8,9)

The poet makes it evident that the lover feels that lack of patience is unacceptable whilst being tested by God, even if this contradicts the Great Shaykh’s doctrine on this

662 Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 124,308,294.
subject. The point the poet continues to make throughout the collection is that the lover is, indeed, not a true gnostic as he does not possess true or perfect knowledge of God; if he did, the lover would know that supplications to God are in accordance with God’s command and that to resist both His command and one’s own eternal predisposition is contrary to the Cosmos God created. The Interpreter of Desires portrays a servant who does not yet possess true gnosis by way of a contrary example to the poet’s readers.

Ibn al-ʿArabī relies heavily upon a particular hadīth in underscoring certain notions about predisposition, suffering, and patience. Muhammad is quoted as saying,

> The example of a believer is that of a fresh tender plant; from whatever direction the wind comes, it bends it, but when the wind becomes quiet, it becomes straight again. Similarly, a believer is afflicted with calamities (but he remains patient till Allah removes his difficulties). And an impious wicked person is like a pine tree which keeps hard and straight till Allah cuts (breaks) it down when He wishes.”

The hadīth speaks to faith in God through calamities and suffering and to patience during adversity. Ibn al-ʿArabī very evidently had this hadīth in mind in his substantial number of references in the Tarjumān to swaying and bending tree branches and suppleness. Since the Qurʾan states that everything was created in order to worship God, early Sufis listened to Nature -- trees and the flowers, the birds and the fishes, each of them speaking, the “tongue of its whole being.” In a poem in which Sufis would witness Nature speaking in familiar symbols – and also a reference to the story of the prophet Noah and the great flood -- the poet writes,

> The clouds poured [onto] every soft sand (that is, meadow) / and every[thing] tossed about (or, tottering) (mayyādin) bends toward you (ʿalayka yamīdu) (2)
> The water-courses gushed out and their “fragrant breeze” / whistled and a ring-dove flitted past and the wood [put forth] leaves. (3) (Poem 9:2,3)

Not only is the branch bending (yamīdu) but it is tossed about (or tottering) (mayyādin). The general interpretation of such references to trees or branches and

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663 Bukhari, The English Translation of Sahih Al Bukhari with the Arabic Text, 70:547.
664 Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 75.
bending or swaying is that the poet is evoking the previously mentioned *ḥadīth* which, in the context of the poems, indicates that these trees or branches are immanent signs of God which a person of faith would recognize as meaning that when His servant is suffering, he should be patient and realize that his suffering is his predisposition but that God will ultimately and eternally lead His servant to Mercy, which takes precedence over His (temporary) Wrath. Thus, any references to bending, swaying, suppleness and similar words in the poems are to point the Sufi-lover (and reader) to God’s Mercy, regardless of the seemingly overwhelming suffering (which the Sufi-lover should also recognize as being from God). Also important to the bending and swaying of trees is the Muhammadan said that

The example of a believer is that of a fresh tender plant; from whatever direction the wind comes, it bends it, but when the wind becomes quiet, it becomes straight again. Similarly, a believer is afflicted with calamities (but he remains patient till Allah removes his difficulties).

And an impious wicked person is like a pine tree which keeps hard and straight till Allah cuts (breaks) it down when He wishes.\(^{665}\)

Viewing the references to bending/swaying branches in the poems in this way allows the reader to better understand that the Sufi-lover -- even in his pain and suffering -- should, if he were a true gnostic, be comforted by these signs of God, as when the poet writes,

The spirits lay face-to-face in a reedy bank of the ghaḍa trees /  
then the branches bending (*mālat*) towards me [and it (that is, the bending) that] annihilated me (*fa-afnān*) / (4)  
They brought an abundance of the excruciating longing and passion (*al-shawqī al-mubarrīḥī*) /  
and [brought] -- by branches (*bi-afnān*) [bending] towards me – presents of the exquisite grief (*ṭurāfī al-balwā*). (5)  
(P11:4)

Again, the bent branches signify a person of faith and the annihilation (*fanā*) is a Mercy from God in drawing His servant closer; the fact that this is accompanied by “excruciating longing and passion” (*al-shawqī al-mubarrīḥī*) and “exquisite grief” (*ṭurāfī al-balwā*) in the presence of the bending branches (*bi-afnān*) only serves to

\(^{665}\) *Bukhari, The English Translation of Sahih Al Bukhari with the Arabic Text*, 70:547.
confirm that these apparent sufferings are, in actuality, divine mercies, even if the lover does not recognize them as such.

Significantly, the poet also relies upon this *ḥadīth* to show in several poems the female moving and bending just as the tree. In a reference to the Islamic tradition of the female having originated from the male’s rib, the poet writes of the Beloved, “He whom you love is between your ribs, / the breathings (*al-anfāsu*) turn him over (*tuqalibuhu*) side to side” (P14:5); here, the creative Breath (*nafas*) of the All-Merciful is what is tossing the lover from side to side, the woman being a part of him, thus it is she -- in whom the lover may contemplate God (as discussed extensively in the final *Bezels* chapter and explored in detail in this thesis in Chapter 3) -- who is swaying the lover. The Beloved is showing the lover a reminder of the *ḥadīth* regarding being tender and swaying in the lover’s declaring, “By my father! (that is, an oath) [for] a playful tender one (*ṭaflatun*) (also implying a young girl), a playful one swaying (*tahadā*) / from among the girls tempting in the curtains [of the *hawdaj*]” (P20:3). In an even more direct reference to the *ḥadīth*, the poet writes,

> [The drowned one (from previous line)] bent in drunkenness (*sakrā*) like being similar to branches (*al-ghuṣūn*) /
> The breaths (or, the air) folded it over, similar to one-half (13) with a terrible rump like a sand-hill, / the sand-heap like a trembling hump of a noble stallion.667 (P23:13,14)

The verses which analogize the girl to swaying and bending branches are direct references to God’s immanence in His providing signs of Himself to human beings. There are actually two separate references to the *ḥadīth*: the girl swaying in drunkenness (*sakrā*) in mystical intoxication like bent branches (*al-ghuṣūn*) -- blown even more in being as light as raw silk -- and the girl shaking like the hump of the camel. Generally, as Sells notes, in Sufi poetry, wine and intoxication traditionally refer

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666 Bukhari, 55:548.
667 This unknown term at the end of verse 13, *al-shaqiqi*, is translated in the demistich by Nicholson as ‘fresh as raw silk, which the winds have bent’; he suggests others have offered alternative translations, as well; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *The Tarjuman Al-ʿAshwaq: A Collection of Mystical Odes (1911)*, trans. Reynold Nicholson (Kessinger Publishing, 2007), 94.
to “the mystical intoxication that can be achieved when the boundaries of the ego-self are dissolved and the divine beloved appears in the heart of the human.”

As the poetry collection progresses toward the final poem, the references to bending and swaying become even more frequent, taking on even more significance as this is the part of the poetry collection where the lover begins to directly address God. Ibn al-ʿArabī writes,

The wind plays in the branches (al-ghuṣūnī) so there is a doubling /
and so it was from [the doubling] a promise [to one another]. (3)

[May] God pray (that is, a blessing) upon him, as sang /
a ring-dove on a shaking (maīyādī) [branch]. (6) (P56:3,6)

Consistent with his lack of true gnosis, all of these references in the bending and swaying point to signs of God and to the faithfulness and patience of His servants are not, however, recognized by the Sufi-lover. Near the conclusion of the poetry collection, the lover says, “in Arafat I became aware of that which / she desires so I am not in patience (al-ṣābīri)” (P59:2). Finally, in the last poem of Tarjumān al-Ashwāq, the Sufi-lover laments, “An agitated mourner [that is, a dove] [who is] / on top of a shaking [branch] (maīyādī) is anguish to me” (P61:2). This confession clearly demonstrates that the wandering Sufi-lover believes that he has not achieved what he sought during his trek, which was proximity to the Divine in this world. Ibn al-ʿArabī does not allow him to achieve this sensual, worldly objective, as God’s central purpose for this Sufi-lover is to bring him to mystical bewilderment (hayra) and annihilation of his ego-self (fanā’) in Himself. The poetry collection itself comes to a conclusion though the journey of the lover has not: God has not yet tired of hearing the voice of His servant asking for supplication and the Sufi-lover has not yet realized that the Path he is on is, in fact, the Path on which he is being pulled along by God.

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III.B.4 Interpreter: God’s Afflicting Grief and Pain as Mercy

Finally, in a poem that Ibn al-ʿArabī certainly developed as an exposition of his doctrine on God’s intentionally inflicting grief, the lover says of himself,

You persisted (ẓalilta) in [the] heat of the distance (that is, journey towards the distance); you were searching for / clouds (saḥāba) of the reunion (al-wiṣāli) [of lovers], [but] they did not overshadow you (10)
The might of His authority (ʿizzun li-sulṭānihi) humiliated you (adhallaka) / and if only just as He humiliated you he showed coquettishness (dalla) to you. (11) (P54:10,11)

These verses show that the Beloved has afflicted the lover with love-sickness – the might of God’s authority (iazzun li-sulṭānihi) humiliated (adhallaka) the lover -- such that he cannot but help to think of the Beloved in God-commanded remembrance (dhikr). The poem demonstrates forthrightly that the lover has persisted (ẓalilta) in pursuing the Beloved with the wrong objective in mind, that is, proximity to God and reunion (al-wiṣāli), even likening the quest to seeking relief from the rain clouds (saḥāba), just as Job had sought in petitioning God. The true gnostic would know, however, that the Mercy represented by the rain clouds was not properly union, but continued mystical bewilderment (hayra) and annihilation (fanāʾ) of the self-ego (nafs) in God and that -- in addition to those mercies -- the Path was to continue suffering even to the point in the story at which the poems end. Surely, though -- despite still being unable to view God outside of His transcendence (being veiled and proud) -- His servant is much loved when the Beloved causes so much pain to him that the lover admits about himself, “The glory of His sovereignty abased thee, and would that as He abased thee so He had shown fondness towards thee,” seemingly a petition to God to abase His servant further and to not show fondness, or coquettishness (dalla). In these words, the Sufi-lover may be starting to realise that the apparent pain of separation and haughtiness might actually be signs of God’s love.

Sells says that, in Ibn al-ʿArabī’ theosophy, every affliction that God rained down upon the Sufis during their lives was a to test their love and sincerity. Affliction reminded them of the pre-eternal covenant in which they pledged to obey love only God. In doctrinal Sufism, pain became associated with, and even the most important
ingredient, of Love. As Sells phrases the concept, “pain has been granted by the Beloved, who then will appear as the physician to heal the wound which He Himself has inflicted upon the lover. Destruction is necessary for building up kenosis, emptying oneself, complete surrender, or ‘being broken’ is the prerequisite for a higher spiritual life.”

Early Sufi ideas, such as those interpretations attributed to the Shi‘ah imām Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣaddiq (d. 765), speak of balā‘, meaning trial, suffering, or torment that each Sufi must pass on the path on the way to union with the Beloved. Ja‘far comments on the story of Mūsa (Moses) telling Pharaoh that his people followed the “Lord of the two worlds” (that is, of heaven and earth). Pharaoh threatened to cut off his hands and legs or to crucify him, but Mūsa replied: “No harm. To our Lord is our return.” Ja‘far interprets this as Mūsa saying that whoever does not feel the trial (balā‘) in love is not truly a lover of God, meaning that whoever does not take pleasure in the trial of loving God is not a true lover of God.

Abu al-Qasīm al-Junayd (d. 910) of the Baghdad school of Sufism wrote in his Book of the Annihilation (Kitāb al-Fanā‘) about human beings’ struggles to give up their self-existence through the process of balā‘. the painful death of the ego-self in order to abide with the “existence-of-the-real-for-them.” Junayd posits a “mobius reality” (that is, two sides, yet one surface) reflecting the paradox of humility: as soon as a person knows he has achieved it, he has lost it. Trail (balā‘) is the constant struggle against the ego-self which concludes with the human being overwhelmed by God, being the “hearing with which he hears and the seeing with which he sees.” But once the Sufi finds bliss in abiding with the Real by his annihilated ego of non-existence, this very abiding and bliss become an obstacle to remaining in annihilation. “They choke on their own selves,” they no longer abide with God, fall into a state of discursive reason, and “[g]rief settles in upon them.”

One of the Great Shaykh’s perspectives on suffering is that pain is a form of God’s Mercy in the Cosmos, the theme already discussed in Bezels in Ibn al-ʿArabi’s

670 Sells, Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic and Theological Writings, 79–82.
671 Sells, 257,258,262.
saying, “Mercy is inherent in all creating, so that, by the mercy bestowed on pain, pain was created.”

When the Sufi-lover exclaims,

O war (that is, ‘internal conflict’) wā ḥarabā,  
O war for my heart (kabidī) /  
O joy (ṭarabā), O joy for my mind (or, heart) (khaladī). (1)

In my heart (khaladī) is a fire of a burning thing (that is, passion) /  
In my mind a full moon (badru) was already set (2)

(P25:1,2)

the poet seems to be alluding to the fact that a human being can experience both pain and joy in his heart. The opening line’s wā ḥarabā – literally, “O war” – is better translated here as “O ‘internal conflict,’” but Lane states that this combination actually is rendered as an exclamation of grief or loss. Even though the lover is suffering from separation from his Beloved, it is nonetheless a great mercy as God still gives him joy (ṭarabā) from the transcendent understanding of the Divine in knowing that God is present even though unseen, the full moon (badru) -- which represents the transcendent God throughout the poems -- being a metaphor for God in His elevation. Bruijn notes that the Path of the true lover is, indeed, full of paradoxes. Although love leads the soul toward the bliss of being reunited with the Beloved, the Path can be difficult, leading through suffering which may include an abyss of self-denial and humiliation. The Sufi, however, should not attempt to such pain, welcome it as a sign of the beloved’s attention. Love through pain is, after all, a way of gaining knowledge about the desired object.” Yet, as Schimmel says, “the mystical poets knew that it is both impossible and illicit to express in plain words their experience of burning and melting, of transformation in suffering.”

The pain which is a mercy is the desire which does not cease, the mercy of relief (remedy) actually only resulting in more pain, as in the lover’s saying,

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673 The differences between the two words used for "heart" or "mind" in Poem 25 -- *kabidun* and *khaladun* -- were discussed extensively in the previous chapter in the section on Muhammadan integration of immanence and transcendence.

674 Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 543.


I remain absent (aghību) so the yearning (al-shawqu) annihilates (yufnī) my soul (nafṣī); /

I am not cured, therefore it is yearning whether absent or present. (1)

Meeting him occurs to me that which I did not imagine (or, suspect) him /

the place of the remedy (makāna al-shifā)

is another illness (dāʾan) from the passionate love. (2)  (P55:1,2)

The first line above calls to mind the Shaykh’s advice in the Futūḥāt: “Every seeker of his Lord must be alone with himself with his Lord in his inmost consciousness, since God gave man an inward dimension (zāhir) and an inward dimension (bātin) only so that he might be alone with God in his inner dimension and witness Him in his outward dimension.”677 The Sufi-lover is, indeed, absent (aghību), or alone, and – as theoretical gnosis dictates – his soul (nafṣī) is properly annihilated (yufnī) in its yearning (al-shawqu), thus leaving him more “alone with the Alone.” The “place of remedy” (makāna al-shifā) is not the desired relief from yearning (al-shawqu), but more love-sickness (dāʾan). The Sufi-lover may have had his soul annihilated, but he has not reached that higher state of fanāʾ al-fanāʾ (annihilation in annihilation), thus God has compelled him to suffer more in his yearning. What the true gnostic would have realized, however, is that the pain of the lover is the pain of the Beloved, as Ibn al-ʿArabī notes in Bezels, “What greater hurt is there for Him than that He should try you with some affliction or station unknown to you, so that you might beg Him to relieve it, when you are heedless?”678 The lover has been heedless in his not seeing the signs of God in His immanence, resulting in God’s afflicting him so that His servant may recognise his complete contingency and plead for relief.

The other important view of pain discussed by Ibn al-ʿArabī in Bezels relates to the Shaykh’s writing that “[it is none other than the Reality] Who undergoes pleasure

678 Ibn al-ʿArabī, The Bezels of Wisdom, 224.
and pain.” The lover thinks he sees glimmers of this pain in the Beloved when he remarks, “I excused her when I heard her speech / and [her] complaining (tashkū) as I complain with an agitated heart” (P24:8). Similarly, the Sufi-lover hopefully voices his desire for the Beloved to suffer as much as he does:

And then behold [if] all [words] be true that she says about it / and in the opinion (that is, feeling) of her is the powerful longing (al-shawqi al-mubarrihi) for me [as I have] an opinion (that is, feeling) for her, (4)

Then in the heat of noon we will meet (naltaqā) secretly by her tent / on the basis of a most reliable promise. (5)

She is experiencing and we are experiencing (tulqī wa nulqī) [that] which we are suffering from the love / and from misery (shiddati) of the testings [of the relationship] and from feeling pain of the violent grief (alami al-wajdi). (6)

(P57:4,5,6)

Ibn al-ʿArabī certainly here encompasses the possibility of God’s feeling His servant’s pain – the “powerful longing” (al-shawqi al-mubarrihi) in these verses -- just as he feels for her. This, though, is pure imagination from the perspective of the Sufi-lover as it is the hoped-for union as they meet (naltaqā) in the future which is the presumed end-point of his quest. The poet, however, claims here that they both are “experiencing” (tulqī wa nulqī) “suffering from love” (mā nulqī mina al-haway), and “misery” (shiddati), and “feeling the pain of the violent grief” (alami al-wajdi). The pain of God is nevertheless real, regardless of whether it happens in the space of the Tarjumān al-Ashwāq poems or later in the story of the lover and the girl, or if the grievous pain takes a form incomprehensible to the Sufi-lover. For, as the Shaykh says in Bezels, “In the view of one who is truly aware, one ought to humble oneself and beg God to raise such a thing from one, since, for the inspired one, that alleviation is an alleviation also for God.”

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679 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 115.
III.B.5 *Interpreter: Gnosis of the Lover’s Path and Blame for Following the Beloved*

The importance to Ibn al-ʿArabī in exploring the topic of predisposition and suffering in *Interpreter of Desires* is closely tied to his revealing elements of his theoretical gnosis on the subject of the spiritual Path in the collection. As already seen, the Shaykh al-Akbar cites in *Bezels* the Qurʾānic verse, “No living being is there but He will seize it by it forelock. / Surely my Lord is on a straight path” (Sūra 11:56) to help establish the importance of the topic. This following behind the Beloved by the lover -- as if pulled by God -- features prominently throughout the *Tarjumān* text, as in the lover saying,

I hurried – and in [my] heart for their sake/
was a hellfire burning brightly because of
their separation (*li-baynihimu*) (3)
trying to get ahead of them (*asābiqhum*) in darkness
of the gloom (that is, night) /
calling out to them, thereupon following (*aqfū*) the remains. (4)
I had no sign (or, guide) for the purpose of “having an eagerness”
(*ishari*)681 for them /
except a breath of their love [that is] fragrant. (5) (P41:3,4,5)

The Sufi-lover is spurred on by their separation (*li-baynihimu*), and believes that he is pursuing the Beloved when, in fact, he is being pulled along his Path by God the Beloved. He, of course, never gains the Beloved during the course of the collection, even though he tries to catch up (*asābiqhum*) with the girl’s travel-party by riding the camels through the night. In relation to the famous lovers’ story, Sells notes that the love-mad Majnūn could never break from the remembrance of the beloved, thus the lover’s journey is never a journey away from the Beloved to an integration into a world without her, but always circling back after her. The poet-lover thus follows that path of the Beloved and incorporates her original stations into his own pilgrimage.” 682

The lover’s beliefs and actions demonstrate that, without possessing perfect gnosis of one’s Path, a person travels that Path but in ignorance of either the route that

681 Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1525; The verb *ishar* has a negative connotation to it, as in an ‘inordinate desire’; the spelling seems to be a variation of standard uses found in lexicons. Steingass, *The Student’s Arabic-English Dictionary*, 534.

Path takes or the ultimate destination. The Path that the Sufi-lover in the poems believes he is on is not the one he is, in fact, on. The Shaykh demonstrates in the collection key elements in this regard that are also contained in the Bezels of Wisdom, including the point that gnosis about the Path -- even if not knowledge or understanding of the precise route of the Path -- and its ultimate objective are discernible if a person is aware of the signs of God in His Cosmos. A human being’s viewing through his reason only the transcendent, ineffable aspects of God will fail to see the immanent aspects through the signs that God provides to point His servants to Himself. In ritual prayer, the Servant asks God to “Guide us on the right path” (Sūra 1:6) and, as the Shaykh writes in Bezels, “The Straight Path of God is not hidden, but manifest universally” as God is manifest in all things and persons, regardless of whether they are aware of their Path or not. 683

Intriguingly, it seems that the poet addresses the prayer citation from the first chapter of the Qur ān in the first poem of the collection in saying, “And if my ‘nobler intestines’ (fū ṭādi) (that is, my ‘heart’) knew what mountain-path (shī’ bin) they followed (salakū)”? (P1:2). Here, the lover is concerned with the Path (shī’ bin) of his Beloved -- which will be the Path which he himself follows in pursuit of her -- and alludes to a Path which may not, in fact, be “straight.” If the Path were straight from the lover’s point of view, he would not say, “The land is not being settled by them, so I said to it (that is, to the wind), “where is the refuge when a group of horses of my longing is in the pursuit (al-talabī)?” (P46:11). 684

Schimmel notes that the constant emphasis on pain and suffering led the Sufis to declare that love is only for the strong, for the true men of God. She quotes an oft-cited proverb: “He who is not pregnant from pain, he is a woman, he is not a man!” The Sufi who seeks nothing but God alone must give up joyfully everything, especially his life and must also actually enjoy the blame of outsiders. 685 The lover throughout the poems is concerned with the Path, but states that none of his actions in pursuit of the Beloved are blameworthy, even if others blame him, reflecting the Akbarian belief that


684 Zargar explicates Poem 46 at length largely from the perspective of assessing human beauty, concluding that the descriptions of physical human beauty (such as the “full-ankled” girl) are not merely “a code or metaphorical allusion to God’s awesomeness,” but, rather, “its sway on the lover results from God’s awesomeness made manifest in the natural world.” Zargar, Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ‘Arabi and ‘Iraqi, 124.

685 Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 72.
even when someone appears to be contradicting God’s command, earning blame rather than praise, this person will still eventually come to felicity, as God’s Mercy takes precedence over His Wrath. A “good Sufi” would, in fact, actually blame himself. Sufis are also known as “people of blame” as some intentionally take on suffering and blame for what other Muslims might consider to be actions not consistent with right action, the purpose being to increase their spiritual indigence. Such is actually the case for the lover who says,

I did not yield to swallow tears from my illness /  
I hid and preserved my passion regarding  
my blamer (ʿādhīlī) (7)  
until, when the raven crowed their separation /  
and disclosed the “fervent longing” of the sorrowful one (8)  
Surely not [anyone is] blaming (ʿadhūlun) [me] for setting one’s thoughts on her /  
[because] the beautiful one is loved wherever she may be. (12)  
(P13:7,8,12)

Ibn al-ʿArabī seems to be saying that the Sufi-lover – who directly calls the Beloved “my blamer” (ʿādhīlī)-- believes that his wasteland trek in search of the Beloved is not in vain, even though he does not actually truly understand where he is going or the precise Path there; the pursuit of God is what is not blameworthy. The poet also writes of the lover,

A rebuker (ʿdhūlun) did not blame me (lāmanī) in loving her /  
and a friend did not accuse me in loving her. (15)

If a rebuker accused me in loving her /  
my reply to him would have been sobbing (shāhīqī). (16)  
(P23:15,16)

As discussed in Bezels, this sobbing is, of course, what God desires of His servant, as God loves to hear the voice of His servant in supplication and afflicts the lover so that He might petition God for relief. Indeed, the lover’s pursuit itself -- and the accompanying suffering and requests from his contingent being to the Beloved -- are what God desires, confirmation of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writing in Bezels that “there is no act

but God’s,” and “[t]o pronounce blame for one’s own purpose is itself blameworthy in God’s sight.”687 The lover, though, is afraid that he will be among those “wrongdoers” who are pulled along by God by their forelocks while at the same time the westerly wind pushes them from behind to Hell688. Indeed, on his Path, he just does not know if it is the Path to Paradise or the road to Hell. Thus, the Şūfī-lover cries out, “What is my doing? What is my stratagem? / Lead me (dullnī), O my rebuker (‘adhūlī); do not terrify me with blame (bi-almalām)” (P5:3).

The poet-lover is, of course, not without a guide as God provides the sign of the Breath of the All-Merciful in the perfume of her and the trees amongst which she camps; the drawing of him to the Beloved by the Breath of the All-Merciful by which he is encompassed is as if God is pulling the lover by his forelock along his Path. God the Beloved -- seen by the lover as the girl -- is actually on the Path along which the lover proceeds, as Ibn al-‘Arabi writes in Bezels, each creature in his predisposition is actually following God, “Him Who is on the Path [the Lord].”689 It is the divine Mercy, then -- relative to the lover’s Path -- that “stands at the eventual goal toward which all are travelling,” so that “the attainment of Mercy and the separation from Wrath is also inevitable” according to the lover’s predisposition.690

Chittick addresses situations such as those in which the Sufi-lover finds himself in relation to his path. He cites Muhīyī al-Dīn’s writing in the Futūḥāt that – unlike the poet-lover of Tarjumān – the person who sees things as they truly are – that is the gnostic – “travels on the path of felicity that is not preceded by any wretchedness, for this path is easy, bright, exemplary, pure, unstained and without any crookedness or deviation. As for the other path, its final outcome is felicity, but along the way are found deserts, perils, vicious predators, and harmful serpents. Hence, no created things reaches the end of this second path without suffering those terrors.”691 The latter path is the one on which the Sufi-lover is travelling throughout the Tarjumān as he remains unaware of the path on which he travels, thus is fated to suffer these hardships.

687 Ibn al-‘Arabi, 209.
688 Ibn al-‘Arabi, 131.
689 Ibn al-‘Arabi, 130.
690 Ibn al-‘Arabi, 204–5.
Interestingly, it is not until near the end of the collection -- when the Sufi-lover is beginning to address God Himself -- when he references the fact that the ultimate goal might have something to do with God’s Mercy, rather than just union, the Mercy holding the possibility that the end-point of the journey might be something he cannot foresee, including return to God the Beloved in the afterlife. Such a reference includes the lover’s saying, “So if they set out they will hasten with a fortunate omen / and if they halt, they will unbind [camels] at an abounding (that is, bountiful) place where one alights (bi-akhşabi manzili)” (P43:3), the bountiful halting-place being a paradisal setting, Paradise itself. As Nasr states, the Sufis drew from the symbolism of the Qur’an and speak of the garden as not just the various aspects of the soul’s existence in Paradise, but also the Divine Reality beyond Paradise, the highest level of Paradise being al-haqq, the Real, and Paradise is known as the Garden of the Divine Essence (jannat al-dhāt).\(^{692}\) As the Tarjumān al-Ashwāq moves towards the final poems of the collection, the reader, at least, understands that the abounding place (akhşabi) is not of this life, but the next.

Ralph Austin provides insight into the girl Niẓām and the concept of re-union with the Beloved, in saying, “Niẓām, the lovely warm Persian girl, is for Ibn ‘Arabī a wonderful image of the divine treasure, the divine need to know and love that treasure, the creational beauty which elicits and attracts that love and the innate identity which promises re-union and bliss.” Niẓām, then, is “the personification of the very mercy of becoming and actuality which promotes and fulfils the divine love, just as again it might be said that she manifests ‘the garden’ in which the Names might sow themselves and realise their potentialities. On both the Cosmic and the human level, the delightful lady of Isphahan is an image of the divine Love and of that human love which is its reflection.\(^{693}\) The girl Niẓām is never directly named in the Tarjumān, but, as Schimmel notes, this is in keeping with the Sufi tradition of never revealing the name of the Beloved.\(^{694}\)


\(^{694}\) Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam*, 86.
III.C  *Bezels of Wisdom: Predisposition to Religion, Forms of Worship, and Perplexity*

As already discussed, one of the most memorable, important, and oft-quoted verses from the *Interpreter of Desires* is “I profess the belief of loving; however ‘riding camels’ (from the Arabic word for ‘stirrups’) wended their way, that is my creed and my sign” (P11:15). As should be obvious from the preceding discussion, this verse contains references to latent predisposition and the Path. The significance of “religion” here is also a key element of Akbarian theories and deserves separate consideration.

The issue of forms of religion and worship for Ibn al-ʿArabī revolves around the overarching topic of Oneness of Being and multiplicity. In this context, the Path to the “religion of love” is in one sense predetermined, but in another sense encompasses the infinite possibilities of perceiving and worshipping God in His immanence that the Qurānic promises in the verse “Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God” (*Sūra* 2:115).

III.C.1  *Bezels: Predisposition to Form of Worship*

Ibn al-ʿArabī’s doctrines include the idea that the form of worship which someone observes is determined by his or her natural predisposition to worship in that way. In the *Bezels* chapter on the prophet Jacob, the Shaykh states that there are two types of religion, that which comes from God and that of created things, which He also acknowledges. Ibn al-ʿArabī says that the religion of God -- which is chosen by Him -- is at a level far above that of the religion of created things. Specifically, God says in the Qurān, “The religion with God is Islam [submission]” (*Sūra* 2:132). The Shaykh states that “[i]t is the servant who establishes the practice of the religion and God Who determines its nature,” the submission being the servant’s action and the religion flowing from the act. The exact nature of one’s religion is determined by a person’s natural predisposition, though “All religion is from God, from you not Him, except as being your Origin.”

Ibn al-ʿArabī explains that, in its outer aspects, religion is a form of “recompense” or submission (Islam) to what is both pleasing to someone and not pleasing. The Shaykh’s perspective on religion’s inner aspects is that it relates to a contingent being’s predisposition in that God’s servants “receive from the Reality only...”

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as they themselves in their [essential] state dictate; they have a form for every state, the
forms varying according to the variation of their states, as the Self-revelation [of the
Reality] differs according to the state.” Religion is -- as with anything that happens to a
person -- “only that which his own state demands and necessitates.” 696

Ibn al-ʿArabī further discusses the connection between religion and natural
predisposition in the Bezels chapter on Muhammad (which is discussed in greater detail
in the next section of this thesis). In the Muhammad chapter he uses the term “God of
belief” to indicate the servant’s view of God which is created in the person’s heart that
is the only view possible, given that person’s eternal predisposition. Ibn al-ʿArabī
asserts that as this “God of belief” is a person’s own product -- formed out of his own
predisposition -- his praising God in worship and prayer is really self-praise, which
explains, according to the Great Shaykh, why someone rejects the beliefs of another
person. The key point that Ibn al-ʿArabī makes in this regard is that such a view of God
and religion means that a person

would allow to every believer his belief and would recognize God in
every form and in every belief.... Thus, he has said, “I am in my
servant’s notion of Me,” 697 that is to say that He is manifest to him only
in the form of his belief, whether it be universal or particular in nature.
The God of belief is subject to certain limitation, and it is this God Who
is contained in His servant’s Heart, since the Absolute God cannot be
contained by anything, being the very essence of everything and of
Itself. 698

Thus, every person should acknowledge that the different perspectives of God are
based on the varying predispositions in an individual’s religion, which encompasses. as
the Shaykh says above, God “in every form and in every belief.”

III.C.2 Bezels: Admonition Against Restricting Tenets of Belief

The great bulk of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writing about religion in Bezels relates to
further details about how God’s servants should not limit their views of God, which is
an extension of the Shaykh’s idea that such views are for individuals’ inherent

696 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 115–16.
697 Bukhari, Sahih, 97:15 cited in Ibn al-ʿArabī, Bezels, 283.
predispositions. A saying attributed to the Prophet on this subject states that “There are as many paths to God as there are human souls”; a related proverb is that “the divergence of the religious scholars is a mercy.”

One of the important expositions on this subject is contained in the Bezels chapter on the prophet Hūd in which Ibn al-ʿArabī says,

*beware lest you restrict yourself to a particular tenet [concerning the Reality] and so deny any other tenet [equally reflecting Him], for you would forfeit so much good, indeed you would forfeit the true knowledge of what is [the Reality]. Therefore, be completely and utterly receptive to all doctrinal forms, for God, Most High, is too All-embracing and Great to be confined within one creed rather than another, for He has said, “Wherever you turn, there is the face of God”* (Sūra 2:115), without mentioning any particular direction.

What Ibn al-ʿArabī is saying is that to be a true gnostic, one must not rigidly restrict oneself to a particular belief or view of God. The Shaykh states that a person must be in a state of constant prayer because he does not know in which instance he will die. It is a mistake, in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s view, to limit one’s facing only the direction of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca because God is not in that direction only as it is only one of an infinite number of directions where God is. Likewise, the Shaykh says that “God has made it clear that He is in every direction turned to, each of which represents a particular doctrinal perspective regarding Him. All are [in some sense] right [in their approach].”

The Bezels chapter on the prophet Shuʿayb further explains at length the concept of predisposition and the importance of not limiting one’s beliefs. Ibn al-ʿArabī is adamant that a person not deny God by denying the “God of belief” of other believers, who have been predisposed to see God according in other ways, which are equally as valid. Specially, the Shaykh al-Akbar states that

*He who restricts the Reality [to his own belief] denies Him [when manifested] in other beliefs, affirming Him only when He is manifest in.*

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701 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 137–38.
his own belief. He who does not restrict Him thus does not deny Him, but affirms His Reality in every formal transformation, worshipping Him in His infinite forms, since there is no limit to the form in which He manifests Himself.  

The Great Shaykh explains that for the true gnostic, the Real is always known and never denied. The true gnostic is the one “who knows the Reality through His Self-manifestation and witnessing Him in the totality of formal possibilities” and is a servant “who turns [toward the Reality] in all the diversity of the forms [in which He manifests Himself].”  

Relating back to the more general subject of predisposition, Ibn al-ʿArabī reminds his readers that “each and every creed is a [particular] Path.”  

Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Bezels chapter on the prophet Aaron offers an intriguing perspective on worshiping God in a discussion of the story about Moses and the golden calf. The idol-worshiping, the Shaykh claims, was an example of the premise that God might be worshiped in every form. Sells notes, in relation to idol worship, that—as had been the case with other major Sufi poets— Ibn ʿArabī “played upon the issue of idolatry, reversing expectations, and focusing the problem of true idolatry not on figures of this or that religion, but on the ‘gods of belief’ that become the centers for exclusivism and intolerance.”  

Ibn al-ʿArabī says that “even if that form [the calf] disappears thereafter, it does so only after it has been, for its worshippers, clothed in divinity, so that every kind of thing is [at some time] worshipped as divine.” The Shaykh’s explanation is that  

Nothing in the Cosmos is worshiped, however, except it assume for the worshiper a certain sublimity and enjoy a certain degree in his heart. Thus God is called “The Lofty in degrees” (Sūra 40:15), and not lofty in degree, since He has made many degrees in One Essence. Thus also, He has ordained that none but He be worshiped in many different degrees, 

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702 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 149.  
703 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 151.  
704 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 152.  
and that each degree should become a context for that divine Self-manifestation in which He is worshiped.\textsuperscript{707}

Ibn al-ʿArabi then states that the “greatest and most sublime” of these contexts is “passion” in the heart for God, referring to the Qur’anic verse “Do you not consider him who has taken his passion as a god?” (Sūra 45:23). The Shaykh says that passion is “the greatest object of worship, since nothing can be worshiped without it, nor can it be worshiped without His Essence.” Ibn al-ʿArabi offers a brief poem that further elucidates this point:

\begin{quote}
By the truth of passion, surely passion beget passion,
And but for passion in the heart it would not be worshiped.\textsuperscript{708}
\end{quote}

It is possible, though, Ibn al-ʿArabi says, that passion can an object of worship itself. The Shaykh more generally views passion in a positive light, however, in that it is God who puts this passion into the person, causing that person to worship whatever he worships as a part of his predisposition, whether that be God or some object. Key to some of the most important point of his theoretical gnosis, Ibn al-ʿArabi develops this idea further in demonstrating how God accomplishes His Will by making a person worship passion as a god. The Great Shaykh’s own words are worth quoting at length in the following sections below to clearly demonstrate the nuances and impact of these critical arguments:

He says, \textit{God has caused him to err, knowingly} (Sūra 45:23), error being confusion. Thus He sees that the worshiper worships only his passion because he is driven to obey its urge to worship whatever he worships. Indeed, even his worship of God is motivated by passion, since, had he no passion for the divine Holiness, which is the will to love, he would not worship God or prefer Him to another. The same is the case with everyone who worships some cosmic form and adopts it as a god, since it is only by passion that he can regard it in this way. Every worshiper is under the rule of passion.\textsuperscript{709}

\textsuperscript{707} Ibn al-ʿArabi, 246.
\textsuperscript{708} Ibn al-ʿArabi, 246.
\textsuperscript{709} Ibn al-ʿArabi, 247.
Thus, Ibn al-ʿArabī establishes that the worshiper cannot be faulted for worshiping something other than God as it is God Who caused the worshiper to err. The Shaykh continues his explanation of some of the more controversial points of the subject of worshiping objects in the Cosmos rather than God, saying that among those who worship, the objects of worship are various and that the worshiper of some particular object of worship accuses those who worship anything else of infidelity. Thus those who have any awareness become confused because of the universality of this passion, indeed, the oneness of passion being the same in every worshiper.710

Ibn al-ʿArabī, here, is beginning to develop the idea that the God-given passion in each worshipper is the same for each worshiper. He says further that “every worshiper serves only his passion, but which alone he is moved to worship, whether it conforms to the Sacred Law [of Islam] or not.” In the most significant passage in this section, the Shaykh writes,

>The perfect gnostic is one who regards every object of worship as a manifestation of God in which He is worshiped. They call it a god, although its proper name might be stone, wood, animal, man star, or angel. Although that might be its particular name, Divinity presents a level [of reality] that causes the worshiper to imagine that it is his object of worship. In reality, this level is the Self-manifestation of God to the consciousness of the worshiper of the object in this particular mode of manifestation. Because of this, certain people ignorantly said, *We worship them only that they might bring us nearer to God* (Sūra 39:3), but calling them gods when they said, *Would he make the gods into one God, surely this is amazing* (Sūra 38:5). They were not rejecting Him, but showed their amazement, being limited to a notion of multiple forms and that attribution of divinity to them.711

Ibn al-ʿArabī’s thinking on this topic is highly important, as it conforms to the Akbarian Oneness of Being doctrine, relating a human being’s predisposition to the worship of God. The Shaykh concludes his thoughts in the Aaron chapter on this topic.

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710 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 247.
711 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 247.
by saying that the gnostics, who have true understanding of how things are, though themselves reject the worship of forms -- realize that “the polytheists do not worship the forms themselves, but only God in them, by the dominance of the divine Self-manifestation they discern in them.”

In connection with Ibn al-ʿArabī’s saying, “Nothing in the Cosmos is worshiped, however, except it assume for the worshiper a certain sublimity and enjoy a certain degree in his heart,” the Shaykh expands at length on the concept of the “heart” and predisposition in the Bezels chapter on Shuʿayb. He first reminds his readers that God in His Self-manifestation reveals Himself in the various forms created in the Cosmos. Thus when the Heart embraces God and contemplates God in His Self-manifestation in forms, the Heart embraces God and not the form itself. Ibn al-ʿArabī also states that since “the Self-manifestation of the Reality is variable according to the variety of forms, the Heart is necessarily [either] wide or restricted according to the form in which God manifests Himself” as the heart “can comprise no more than the form in which the Self-manifestation occurs.” It is here where Ibn al-ʿArabī explains the title of Bezels of Wisdom, analogizing the Heart of the gnostic to the setting for the gemstone of a ring, so that the setting -- the bezels -- conforms to whatever shape the stone takes; the Heart, therefore, conforms to the forms it contemplates, and not the other way around. Very important to the present discussion of religion, Ibn al-ʿArabī clarifies this issue in saying, “This is opposed by those who maintain that the Reality manifests Himself in accordance with the predisposition of the servant. This is, however, not the case, since the servant is manifest to the Reality according to the form in which the Reality manifests Himself to him.” Hence, it is the form that God takes that determines how a person perceives God. This statement of the Shaykh’s seems, on its face, to be directly at odds with his other writings on human predisposition, but he explains further in differentiating God’s transcendent manifestation versus his immanent manifestation to a person in saying that “God manifests himself in two ways: an unseen manifestation and a sensible manifestation,” claiming that “it is from the former [unseen] that the predisposition of the Heart is bestowed, being the essential

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712 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 248.
713 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 246.
714 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 148–49.
715 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 149.
Self-manifestation, the very nature of which is to be unseen.” The Shaykh’s reference here is to the transcendent God, “the divine Identity in accordance with which He calls Himself [in the Qurān, throughout] ‘He.’” The Shaykh further explains that when the predisposition comes to the Heart there is then manifest to it the sensible Self-manifestation in the sensible world, so that it sees Him manifest in the form in which He manifests Himself to it. Then He raises the veil between Himself and the servant and the servant sees Him in the form of his belief; indeed, He is the very content of the belief. Thus, neither the Heart nor the eye [of the Heart] sees anything but the form of its belief concerning the Reality. It is the Reality contained in the belief whose form the Heart encompasses. It is this Reality that manifests itself to the Heart so that it recognizes it. Thus the eye sees only the credal Reality, and there are a great many beliefs.

Thus, the transcendent predisposition of the servant predisposes the servant to receive certain immanental manifestations of God, and it is in an immanental form in which God manifests Himself to the servant. The immanental “credal Reality” is the individual’s “God of belief” which was spoken of earlier, a view of God which is different for every person, according to the form in which God has manifested Himself.

### III.C.3 Bezels: Multiplicity of Object-Forms of Worship, and Perplexity

The Shaykh al-Akbar says in respect to the multiplicity of forms in which God is worshiped that “the summons to God is not a summons to His [transcendent] Ipseity [Essence], but to Him in respect of His Names [attributes/modes].” Ibn al-ʿArabī says that for people to abandon their gods -- gods other than the Reality -- “they would have become ignorant of the Reality, to the extent that they deserted them, for in every object of worship there is a reflection of the Reality, whether it be recognized or not.” The Shaykh writes that even though the Qurān says God says, “Your Lord has decreed that you serve only Him” (Sūra 27:23), a true gnostic

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716 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 149.
717 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 149.
718 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 149.
719 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 78.
720 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 78.
knows Who is worshiped and in what form He is manifest to be worshiped. He also knows that the distinction and multiplicity [of forms] are merely like parts of a sensible form or the powers of a spiritual image. Indeed, in every object of worship it is [in truth] God Who is worshiped.\textsuperscript{721}

Again, Ibn al-ʿArabī is referring to that part of Akbarian theory associated with Oneness of Being, indicating that the multiplicity of forms are merely manifestations and Names of God. This “multiplicity of the One, in respect of His aspects and attributions,” however, causes perplexity for the gnostic.\textsuperscript{722} In a very important link to the concepts of the Path and religion, the Shaykh states that being “[i]n confusion” (Sūra 71:24) is a good thing, in its being a “[spiritually self-effacing] perplexity on the part of the heirs of Muhammad.”\textsuperscript{723} Ibn al-ʿArabī explains how one who is in perplexity is the true gnostic compared to one who is otherwise:

He who experiences this perplexity is ceaselessly centered on the Pole [God], while he who follows the “long” path [to a distant God] is always turning aside from the [Supreme] Goal to search after that which is [eternally] within him, running after imagination as his goal. He has an [imaginary] starting point and [what he supposed to be] a goal and what lies between them, while for the God-centered man there is no restriction of beginning or end, possessing [as he does] the most comprehensive existence and being the recipient of [divine] truths and realities.\textsuperscript{724}

Here Ibn al-ʿArabī makes clear that one who understands that God is manifested in the multiple forms also realizes that He has no restrictions in the forms or attributes or Names; the person who does not have this understanding restricts God by what he can imagine, limiting God to a beginning, end, and the “path” that lies between. It is better to be lost in mystical bewilderment than for a person to believe that he has contained God in his imagination. In what reads like a prayer asking for God to bestow bewilderment, in the Noah Bezels text, the Great Shaykh says,

\textsuperscript{721} Ibn al-ʿArabī, 78.

\textsuperscript{722} Ibn al-ʿArabī, 79.

\textsuperscript{723} Ibn al-ʿArabī, 79.

\textsuperscript{724} Ibn al-ʿArabī, 79.
My Lord, shield [forgive] me (Sūra 71:28), that is conceal me [from my separate self] and cover for my sake [other than You] and render my [relative] span and station unknowable [in You] since You are without measure; You say, They do not assess God to the fullness of His measure (Sūra 6:91).725

Ibn al-‘Arabī famously says that being lost in this perplexity is their being “drowned in the seas of the knowledge of God” so that if “He were to deliver them [from the seas of gnosis] onto the shore of Nature He would be lowering them from an eminent stage [or spiritual attainment].”726 The Shaykh also recalls in this context the Qur ānic verse “All perishes save His face” (Sūra 28:88) in reference to the annihilation of the self-ego, saying that those who have been annihilated in God “have [gnostic] consciousness of themselves because their contemplation of the face of Reality absorbs them to the exclusion of their [separative] selves.727

III.D Interpreter of Desires: Following the Religion of Love into Perplexity

Though evident throughout the collection, two poems, in particular, in Interpreter of Desires address elements of doctrinal gnosis as found in Bezels just discussed that are concerned with the subject of religion and worship. Some of these verses have been examined before, but not specifically or extensively in relation to the topic of religion. In this examination of these topics, the focus will be primarily on an explication of extended sections of these two poems with reference to several other poems in relation to the sub-issues of passion, the gnostic heart, and perplexity.

III.D.1 Interpreter: Explication of Poem 2 -- Drowning in the Sea of Knowledge

Ibn al-‘Arabī establishes very early in Interpreter of Desires that one of the important theoretical subjects contained in the poems is worship and religion. After first informing the reader in the opening poem that the poems that follow will address the servant’s spiritual Path and the topic of predetermination, the Shaykh includes as part of the second poem several very explicit references to religion. The relevant portion of the previously discussed is cited below in the highly consequential Poem 2:

725 Ibn al-‘Arabī, 81.
727 Ibn al-‘Arabī, 81.
"They made not to leave on the day they departed on the white she-camels (al-ʿīsā) [which had] cut [its teeth indicating maturity in years] (that is, full-grown) / [until] already they had loaded the peacocks up onto them. (1)

From each [peacock], murderous glances (fāṭikatī al-ḥāẓī) and reigning [power] /
imagining her as Bilqīs [seated upon] a throne of pearls (2)

When she was allowed to walk on the glass palace you see /
  sun (shamsan) on a celestial sphere on [the] bosom of Idrīs (3)
Her language (that is, words/speech) grants life (yuḥyī) when she killed
by her glance; /
it is like – with [that] granting life (tuḥyī)
by her – [she is] Jesus (4)

Tawrāt (that is, the Torah) is [like] a [smooth] sheet of her legs in
  brightness and I /
follow and I tread it (that is, walk) as if [I were] Mūsa
  (that is, Moses) (5)
a bishopess (asquffatun) from daughters of
Romē (banāṭi al-rūm), unadorned /
  you see in her the brightest honour (6)
She is untamed; indeed, not with her [is (forcibly) made]
an intimate friend. /

In her private place -- in a chamber – [she has] a burial place for
  remembrance (7)
She surpasses everyone learned of our religion /
moreover [also those learned in] David (dawūdyyan) and non-
Muslim religious authority and [every] priest. (8)

If she pointed, she requests the Gospel; you regard us /
[to be] priests or patricians or deacons. (9) (P2:1-9)

The above poem supports the idea of the Beloved as God. Sells says in this regard that -
- while grounded in the traditions of classical Arabic poetry and its integration into the
Islamic world -- these poems are “often stunningly original,” and, specifically, in

728 See the following pages for a discussion of the word translated here as ‘honour’ (nāmūs).
relation to the above poem, he declared that, “while Sufis frequently used the love poem to represent the deity in the feminine, Poem 2 is one of the most brilliant and extended treatments of God in feminine form ever composed in an Abrahamic tradition.”

As already discussed, the mounting of the peacocks -- with murderous (annihilating) glances (fātikati al-alḥāzī) and reigning (māliktin) (that is, sovereign) power -- onto the camels (al-ʾīsā) is an allusion to the transcendent elevation of God in His Wrathful aspects and to the spiritual Path which is, as previously discussed, represented by the camels. The poet’s reference to Bilqīs, as previously explored is, overall, a metaphor for many forms manifested by God, and specifically evokes the story of Bilqīs coming to the palace of Solomon, a metaphor for “following” the monotheistic teachings in which Solomon believed, which Ibn al-ʿ Arabī says is like following the Path along which God pulls His servant by his forelock.

Michael Sells has written specifically on this poem and about the bewildering aspects of the Bilqīs story, concluding that the “association of Bilqīs with Idris reflects a theme in the heavenly ascent that was shared by Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Harranian, and other Near Eastern mystics” such that when the voyager arrives at the divine throne and sees the reflections, he becomes bewildered, leaving him wondering if the image appearing in those reflections are a deity, an angel, Satan, or human. Sells suggests that “at this phase, at the threshold of mystical union, any mistake can be fatal.”

Seeing in her reflection in the glass pavement a sun (shamsan) is another elevation (transcendence) reference, the Idris (Elias) allusion being to the Akbarian doctrines on transcendence versus immanence already discussed in the Bezels chapter on that prophet. Sells says further that beyond “such Sufi categories of states and stations, another world of stations can Beloved found in the various levels of Muhammad’s journey through the heavens and the Sufi journeys through the heavenly spheres that were modelled on those of Muhammad…. The mention of the station of Idris would bring to mind the story of Muhammad’s night journey and ascent (miʿrāj) to the divine throne.

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729 Sells, Stations Of Desire: Love Elegies From Ibn ʿArabi And New Poems, 44.
732 Sells, 26–27.
Since this above poem contains such an abundance of metaphors to theophanic and other religious concepts, it is useful to review very briefly the reason why such metaphors work so well in this particular context. Alexander Knysh say that, generally, poetic language functions as such because of its “elasticity,” with the poet incorporating, perhaps, not just a single signified, but multiple signifieds. The ability of the signifier to refer to multiple, even unlimited, signifed. He says its aesthetic value “rests on the creation of tensions between various levels of meaning, never to be resolved,” which allows the each reader to create meaning – even outside of that intended by the poet – and “to enjoy the interplay between symbol and potential interpretations. Knysh says that, in light of this view of poetical interpretation, “the similarities between poetic language and the articulation of religious experience appear to be obvious,” since “both make use of symbols and of the chains of the associations they produce. Both lose their vitality and open-endedness when they are subjected to reductionism, when their elasticity is replaced by a one-to-one correspondence of the signifier to be signified.”

The fascinating aspect of this view of Sufi poetics and multiple symbols is that it parallels Ibn al-ʿArabī’s view of being receptive to every tenet about God lest a person restrict the self to any one tenet about God to the exclusion of others which may actually also be representative of God. More specifically, the poet’s including references to the several religions that follow in the poem is consistent with his writing in Bezel that a person should “beware lest you restrict yourself to a particular tenet [concerning the Reality] and so deny any other tenet [equally reflecting Him].” Ibn al-ʿArabī seems in this poem to be reminding the lover to “be completely and utterly receptive to all doctrinal forms, for God, Most High, is too All-embracing and Great to be confined within one creed rather than another.”

References to the prophet Jesus (ʿisā) are traditionally associated with restorative powers of that prophet -- as in the poem’s reference to the Beloved’s being like Jesus in that she can grant life -- such that it was God through Jesus that God restored health and raised the dead. “Carl Ernst says of Jesus that he is the master

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734 Knysh, 151.
736 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 176.
physician, his breath restoring the dead to life, just as his word can reanimate dead birds. Perhaps Schimmel puts it most poetically by saying, that Jesus’s being endowed with life-giving breath allows him to become “the ideal beloved whose kiss quickens the near-dead lover” such that the kiss is “an exchange of souls” … for the poetry hoped that the Beloved would put his soul into his mouth, because his own soul is has “reached the collar bones (that is, the throat, implying when I was at the point of death).”

The poet’s Christian metaphorical reference in saying that the Beloved is “a bishopess (asqufl#un) from daughters of Rome (ban#ti al-r#m),” seems an explicit reference to the Shaykh’s theory about tenets of belief in which he says about “goodness” (or “honour”): “beware lest you restrict yourself to a particular tenet [concerning the Reality] and so deny any other tenet [equally reflecting Him], for you would forfeit so much good, indeed you would forfeit the true knowledge of what is [the Reality].” (Worth noting is the word translated here as “honour” (n#m#s). Nicholson translates this word as “Goodness,” and and includes a footnote saying that Ibn al-ʿArabī’s explains in his Commentary that the word is equivalent to khayr, meaning morally “good” or “goodness.” Some lexicons also indicate translations other than “secret,” which would be the primary translation as the root verb mean “to conceal” or “to keep a secret.” Wehr offers alternative possibilities for the word as meaning “honour,” “honourableness,” or “reputation”; Steingass includes similar alternative translations. Lane acknowledges that n#m#s could mean a man’s “honour” or “reputation” “which should be preserved as inviolate.” Due to the Nicholson’s footnote citing Ibn al-ʿArabī on this word, and the lexicon alternatives, the word is translated here as “honour.”) The Beloved’s being “untamed (wa#sh#yatun); indeed, not with her [is (forcibly) made] an intimate friend (m# bi-h# ansun)” and her being “in her private (khalwatih#) place,” all further point to

737 Ernst, Sufism: An Essential Introduction to the Philosophy and Practice of the Mystical Tradition of Islam, 159.
738 Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 74.
739 Ibn al-ʿArabī, The Bezels of Wisdom, 137.
741 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 2853.
742 Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, 1173; Steingass, The Student’s Arabic-English Dictionary, 1099.
743 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 2854.
God in His transcendence; the specific inclusion of her “chamber for remembrance (li-(a)l-dhikri)” is a clear reminder of the many Qurʾanic verses about the importance of remembering God, as well as a reference to Sufi praxis of remembrance (dhikr).

Specific to the concept of dhikr in this poem, Sells remarks that the moment in which the poet-lover recognizes the traces of the Beloved is what leads to remembrance (dhikr). As Sells writes so poetically:

We remember the last time we saw her. We remember when the wasteland around us bloomed from spring rains. We remember her disappearing into the embroiled coverings of her camel palanquin or howdah along with the other women of her tribe and slowly disappearing into the distance, until the palanquin could no longer be distinguished from the tamarisk trees or boulders. As she moves away from us in space and time, we recall and name her stations. We remember them, one by one. Or do we imagine them? After all, the beloved is distant from us and yet, somehow, the turjuman allows us to follow her journey.744

Schimmel remarks that there are several figures from Quranic heritage in this poem, including David (Dawūd) who’s Psalter recalls the song of the nightingale.745 There are several interpretations of the references to Mūsa (Moses) that deserve special attention. The first relates to the multiplicity of forms in which God is worshiped. Esmail says about this that Ibn al-ʿArabī’s doctrine on the “pluralism of religious consciousness” draws upon “the notions of symbolism and imagination -- features, that is, of the poetics of religious experience.”746

Ibn al-ʿArabī states that the idol worshiping in the Mūsa and Hārūn (Aaron) story was an example of the premise that “He has made many degrees in One Essence” and that “He has ordained that none but He be worshiped in many different degrees, and that each degree should become a context for that divine Self-manifestation in which He is worshiped.”747 Thus, to follow in the footsteps of Mūsa is to recognize that God is, indeed, worshiped in many forms which encompass the Oneness of Being.

745 Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 74.
Dadoo has observed that, divergent understandings of relationships with God -- be they of a transcendent or immanent – “are under the authority of one of God's Names Which furnishes the person with a zone for Its self-manifestation and inspires an appropriate belief within that being in unknown ways. Since all Divine Names are linked to God, all beliefs, regardless of their contradictions, are correct, a perspective understood only by true gnostics.\textsuperscript{748} Ibn al-ʿArabī rather poetically characterizes God in this regard in saying that “He is the theatre of the forms of the Cosmos.”\textsuperscript{749}

The second interpretation relative to Mūsa is the fire in the bush from which God spoke to Mūsa. The Great Shaykh includes in his theories on passion and forms an explanation relating to the significance of the fire to the concept of God’s Self-manifestation in forms:

As for the divine Self-revelation and its speaking in the form of fire, it occurred because of the desire of Moses. God revealed Himself [to him] in [the form of] his desire, so that he might approach and not turn away. Had He revealed Himself to him in any other way, he would have turned away because of the concentration of his interest on a particular purpose [given his predisposition]. If he had turned away, his act would have rebounded on him and God would have turned away from him also. He, however, was a chosen and favoured one, as indicated by the fact that God revealed Himself to him in [the object of] his desire, unknown to him.\textsuperscript{750}

Yet another meaning of the inclusion of Mūsa in this poem is, therefore, that Mūsa was predisposed (inwardly) to find God in fire, which, as has been explained, led the prophet Mūsa to (outwardly) conform to the form in which God presented Himself. Schimmel analogises Mūsa to the waiting Sufi-lover who longs to see again Beloved, yet hears, instead, “You will never behold Me!” (Sūra 7:139).\textsuperscript{751} The Sufi-lover says, “I will follow (atīli) and tread it (adrusûhā) – that is the Path – as if I were Mūsa.” This verse is of critical significance for the story of the wandering lover in the Interpreter of


\textsuperscript{749} Ibn al-ʿArabī, The Bezels of Wisdom, 254.

\textsuperscript{750} Ibn al-ʿArabī, 266.

\textsuperscript{751} Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 74.
Desires poems, his progression along the same Path as Mūsa evokes the Shaykh’s writing in the Bezels chapter on Moses in his saying, in regard to mystical bewilderment,

[True] guidance means being guided to bewilderment, that he might know that the whole affair [of God] is perplexity, which means perturbation and flux, and flux is life. There is not abatement and no cessation, but all is being with no nonbeing.752

This above citation may be one of the most directly applicable to, and explanatory of, the overarching purpose of the author of Tarjumān al-ʿAshwāq. A servant’s being led into perplexity is precisely the objective of the poet’s presenting the story of Sufi-lover’s relationship with the Beloved. As Ian Almond says, when Ibn al-ʿArabi quotes the ḥadīth, ‘O Lord, increase my perplexity concerning You” (as he frequently does), what he is really asking is, “‘O Lord, confuse and confound the simplistic limitations I have attempted to cage You within.”753

In the above poem, the poet says that, “She surpasses everyone learned of our religion / moreover [also those learned in] David and non-Muslim religious authority and [every] priest,” evoking the Qurʾānic verse about being “[i]n confusion” (Sūra 71:24), which is a positive state of being as it is a “[spiritually self-effacing] perplexity” by Muslims.754 Being baffled by the Beloved is the goal of the true gnostic, of course, in being “drowned in the seas of the knowledge of God.”755 The poet asserts in Bezels that the person who experiences perplexity is the one centered on God, versus the person who believes that his Path to God consists of a beginning and end point and who thinks that he can actually imagine what lies in between; the true gnostic does not try to assert these limitations on God.756 Thus, for the Sufi-lover to suffer as he does in constantly reflecting back on the time when he was in union with the Beloved before the start of the poems’ story and imagining the hoped-for events of union after the end

756 Ibn al-ʿArabi, 79.
of the journey is to not live in the perplexity that is God’s intention for the Sufi-lover. The Sufi-lover’s saying that, “she surpasses everyone learned of our religion / moreover [also those learned in] David and non-Muslim religious authority and [every] priest,” actually combines the concepts of multiplicity of forms and tenets and the idea of goal of mystical perplexity. Concerning the subject of this mystical perplexity, Corbin writes specifically in relation to this poem and the Sufi-lover’s asking the questions about the whereabouts and safety of the Beloved. Corbin states that these questions get to the core of the question of human relationship with God: “what to a philosopher is doubt, is to the fedele d’amore [faithful one to love, that is, the mystic] absence and trial. For on occasion the mystic Beloved may prefer absence and separation while the fedele desires union; yet must the fedele not love what the Beloved loves? Accordingly, he falls a prey to perplexity, caught between two contradictories.”

As Ibn al-ʿArabi writes in Bezels, “[h]e who restricts the Reality [to his own belief] denies Him [when manifested] in other beliefs” and “He who does not restrict Him thus does not deny Him, but affirms His Reality in every formal transformation, worshiping Him in His infinite forms, since there is no limit to the form in which He manifests Himself.” For the most part, the Sufi-lover seems to be restricting God. In whichever way the servant faces -- and in whatever form he perceives God -- there is the face of God, and the true gnostic is led down the Path to bewilderment in whatever “God of belief” he may worship. One of the purposes of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s including the religion material in this particular poem seems to be that it helps to establish early in the collection the importance of being receptive to every form, so that the reader -- and not just the lover -- is receptive to what follows on the Path the story follows through the poems that follow. Sells adds that for Ibn al-ʿArabi, the Beloved is beyond the world, but within everything: Her forms are ever changing.

Schimmel says about these several references to figures from Quranic heritage in the poem that – similar to Mūsa – the waiting lover hears from God the words, “You will never behold Me!” (Sūra 7:139). She notes that David’s psalter is echoed in the songs of the nightingales and Jesus, endowed with life-giving breath, becomes the ideal

757 Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi, 143–44.
758 Ibn al-ʿArabi, The Bezels of Wisdom, 149.
beloved whose kiss quickens the near-dead lover in that the kiss is an exchange of souls; the Sufi-lover hoped that the Beloved would put his soul into his mouth, because his own soul is already on the lip, that is, he is almost dead.760

III.D.2 Interpreter: Explication of Poem 11 -- Embracing God, Not the Form

The second poem with a large number of references to worship and religion is Poem 11, which focuses more on the issue of the multiplicity of forms of God’s Self-manifestation and the Path, as opposed to Poem 2 which focuses on tenets of belief. Important to the explication of all of the poems in the collection – but especially to poems addressing “gods of belief” -- is what Sells says is the necessary mind-set in trying not to keep the image of the Beloved that is carried by the Sufi-lover “frozen into an idol.” Sells explains the Shaykh’s perspective that the worship of such frozen idols – which he equates with “gods of belief” within theologies, philosophies, and religions -- leads to a world of mutual intolerance such that each person or group worships the god of one belief and denies the god of the other. Ibn al-ʿArabī, however, who sees the divine beloved as both transcending the word and immanent within every manifestation, views such denial a form of unbelief (kufr). “The only true affirmation of oneness is the affirmation of the one reality in each of its manifestation along with the refusal to confine it to any one of them.” One whose “heart is made possible of every form” would need not simply to tolerate the manifestation of reality in each belief, but to actively appreciate them.761

The key text from Poem 11 is as follows:

O doves of the ārak [tree] and the bān [tree], / soothe me! Do not multiply my worry by [your] wailing. (1)

Soothe me! Do not be made visible [by you] by the loud and bemoaning /

of my secret love and my concealed grievings. (2)

I converse [with] her at the evening and through the sun-light /

with [the] pitiful [cry] of a yearning one and the groan of one “madly in love”. (3)

The spirits lay face-to-face in a reedy bank of the ghāḍa trees /

760 Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 74.
then the branches bent towards me [and it (that is, the bending)]
annihilated me (4)

They brought an abundance of the excruciating longing and passion /
and [brought] -- by branches [bending] towards me -- presents of
the exquisite grief. (5)

So who [will give] to me essence (or, possession) of Jam’a and al-
Muḥaṣṣab and Mina /

who to me for essence (or possession) for Dhat al-Athl? Who to
me N’amān? (6)

They enclose my heart moment after moment
for the sake of love-ecstasy /

and grief, and kiss my pillars (7)

Even as [the] best of creatures (khayru al-khalqi) (that is, best of
mankind, referring to Muḥammad) was enclosed by the Ka’ba /

which proof of reason proposed concerning it [to be] being
diminished (that is, imperfect). (8)

and kissed stones in it, whereas he was a Nātīq (a prophet). /

And what is the place (that is, rank) of the house (Temple) from
comparison to human (Man)? (9)

How often did they covenant and swear that they would not change /

but a dyed one (that is, with henna) does not keep a promise of
oaths (literally, “in right [the] hand”) (10)

one of the most wonderful (or, surprising) of things is a veiled gazelle /

who is pointing with “nut brown” fingertips and beckons with
eyelids, (11)

[a gazelle whose] pasture is between the collar bones (that is, breast) and
the intestines (that is, bowels) /

O most marvelous! From a garden among a fiery place! (12)

Verily became my heart made possible of every form / (13)

a meadow of gazelles and a convent for [Christian]
monks. (13)

And a house (that is, temple) for idols a Ka’ba of “those who walk
much” (that is, pilgrims) /

and a bound book of the Torah and
a bound book of the Qurʾan (14)  
I profess the belief of loving: however (or, wherever) ‘riding camels’
(from the Arabic word for ‘stirrups’) wended their way, /
that is my creed and my sign. (15)  
We have an example in Bishr [lover of] Hind and her sister /
and in Qays [who became “Majnun” after separated from Laylā]
and Laylā, and there is Mayya (that is, the beloved) and Ghaylān
[the lover] (16)  

The mention of the Prophet -- “the best of the creatures” (khayru al-khalqi) --in
connection with the kaʿba refers to the ḥadīth in which Muhammad is about to kiss the
Black Stone of the kaʿba, before which he said, “It is here that tears must be shed.”

The mention of the Black Stone recalls Schimmel’s comment on the Sufi poetic
tradition “the greatest sin of the lover is divulgence of the secret.” She notes that poets
“have woven a veil of symbols in order to point to and at the same time hide the secret
of love, longing, and union.” Schimmel points to the example of the world of Islam as
offering numerous useful poetic metaphors, including the Black Stone of the kaʿba that
is becomes a symbol for the mole on the beloved’s cheek, so that – within the poem –
to kiss the Black Stone during the pilgrimage would remind the lover of kissing the
mole on his beloved’s cheek.

The multiple references to the kaʿba speak of circling it as if it were the Sufi-
lover’s heart, a concept explored by Sells who says that the Sufis reinterpreted it as the
heart of the mystic lover who is annihilated in love for the divine beloved.

Furthermore, Schimmel, in a of the feminine in Islam, concludes that references to the
kaʿba evoke memories of passionate lovers of Sufi literature. In relation to the symbolic
significance of the kaʿba, she states that a woman can serve as a symbol of the highest
goal of one’s aspirations. One example of this can be found in Jāmī’s version of the
story of Majnūn and Laylā in which the love-sick Majnūn approaches the black-draped
kaʿba during his ḥajj, unsure – once standing in front of it – if what he really sees is the

762 Sabiq, Fiqh Us-Sunnah, 5.74b. See the study of Ibn al-ʿArabi’s eight love letters to the kaʿba
which includes a discussion on love and descriptions of the Beloved that parallel those in
Interpreter of Desires. Denis Gril, “Love Letters to the Kaʿba: A Presentation of Ibn ʿArabi’s

763 Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 73.

“Celestial Beloved” (Layla) Schimmel also writes that medieval Islamic poets had often compared the Ka’ba as the objective of the hajj with a “veiled bride” or “desired virgin,” with this symbolic transformation providing the additional incentive to approach the ka’ba in the face of a long and dangerous journey through the desert, the final objective being to touch her and to kiss her beauty mark, that is, the black stone.\(^{765}\)

The inclusion of the ka’ba in this poem also addresses the issue of the presence of God. In a discussion of the subject of a monotheistic God in relation to the topic of perplexity, Amer Latif says in relation to this poem that the Muslim believes that “[God’s] place is no-place; He is everywhere and nowhere at the same time.” Yet, being beyond all form and space, God has a house in the ka’ba, around which Muslims circumambulate and, following the example of Muhammad, kiss the black stone. Latif’s central point is to draw attention to the paradox created by the disconnect between God’s being in no-place and the Prophet’s kissing the stone. The believer struggles with the concept of the God being worshipped: does God inhabit a specific place (the ka’ba), or is God utterly transcendent and living in no-place? Latif answers this question by insisting that the believer must assert God’s absolute transcendence, or incomparability, with created things side by side with the assertion that God has qualities similar to creatures.\(^{766}\)

Sells’ interpretation of the poem falls largely along lines that relate the nasīb tradition to Sufi poetry. He says that “the beloved is evoked so powerfully that the reader or hearer is convinced she has been described. But in fact the similes, so vivid in their imagery, tell us very little about the actual appearance of the beloved. They seem to be depicting the beloved, but in fact what they actually show ... is the symbolic analogue of the beloved: the lost garden.”\(^{767}\) As already discussed, one of the examples of garden imagery of the Tarjumān is the swaying and bending branches. The bending of the branches in this poem speaks to the patience and perseverance of the faithful servant of God during times of calamity; interestingly, here, the bending also is annihilating, a possible allusion to Ibn al-ʿArabī’s saying that “Destiny is the precise timing of [the manifestation and annihilation of] things as they are essentially.”\(^{768}\) This

\(^{765}\) Schimmel, My Soul Is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam, 100–101.


\(^{768}\) Ibn al-ʿArabī, The Bezels of Wisdom, 165.
reading is supported by the poem text that says the branches bent (mālat) towards me [and it (that is, the bending)] annihilated me (famālat bi-aftānin aʿlaa fa-afrānī)” (P11:4), which would, indeed, be the calamitous suffering of the lover, the suffering being part of the Sufi-lover’s predisposition, his destiny that includes the manifesteration and annihilation of all things in the Cosmos in each instant: “They enclose (taṭūfu) my heart (bi-qalbi) moment after moment (sāʿatun baʿda sāʿatin) / for the sake of love-ecstasy (li-wajdin) and grief (tabriḥin)” (P11:7). Sells translates this line of the poem as “Hour by hour they circle my heart in rapture, in love-ache,” stating that this verse is based on the Sufi claim that the greatest kaʿba is the heart of the divine lover at the moment of fanāʾ.”

The theophany for one believer is never the same as that of another believer, and never the same twice for the same believer: “When Ibnʿ Arabī speaks of the ‘religion of love’ ... he is alluding to the nonspecificity or “nonentification” of the heart of the Perfect man, who experiences continuous Theophanies of the Divine Essence, theophanies that ‘never repeat themselves.” Nasr speaks to the renewal of creation at every moment to which Ibn al-ʿ Arabī alludes in the above poem, seeing Creation itself as the Self-Disclosure of God. The Akbarian view is that of understanding “creation in God” as well as “creation by God.”

Annihilation is also alluded to by the mention of henna twice in this very important poem: “a dyed one (that is, with henna)” and “nut-brown’ fingertips”, both references symbolic of a bloody death, the “slaying” of the lover by the Beloved, symbolic of the Sufis death of the ego-self (nafs) in the experience of passing away (fanāʾ ). Michael Sells notes in regard to this poem that “the lover’s complaint of the faithlessness of the Beloved who has left him is always matched in early Arabic poetry by his own inability to forget or actually disown her” and that the deep red colour of the henna is used here to symbolise the “slaying” of the poet-lover by the Beloved, a slaying that the Sufis incorporate into the death of the ego-self (nafs) in the experience of passing away. Sells comments generally on this poem that the parallel between the passing away of the Sufi in mystical union and the passing away or perishing of the

772 Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsaying, 109.
lover out of the intensity of his love was by this time one of the central tropes of medieval Islamic culture.\footnote{Sells, 109.}

The encompassing of the heart here -- “for the sake of love-ecstasy and grief” (P11:7b) -- is the first of three references to the heart in the poem. The Beloved is a “veiled gazelle / who is pointing with “nut brown” fingertips and beckons with eyelids, / [a gazelle whose] pasture is between the collar bones (that is, breast) and the intestines (\textit{al-hashā} (that is, bowels),” that is, in the Sufī-lover’s heart (P11:11b,12a). The most important reference, however, in the context of worship and religion, is in the poet’s saying,

\begin{quote}

my heart (\textit{qalbī}) made possible (\textit{qābilā}) of every form (\textit{kulla sūratin}) / a meadow of gazelles and a convent for [Christian] monks. (13)
And a house (that is, temple) for idols and [the] Ka’ba of “those who walk much” (that is, pilgrims) / and a bound book of the Torah and a bound book of the Qur’ān. (14) (P11:13,14)
\end{quote}

Here, Ibn al-ʿArabī explicitly links the true gnostic’s heart (\textit{qalbī}) and the Self-manifested forms – “every form” (\textit{kulla sūratin}) -- conforming to his \textit{Bezels} doctrine in which he states that the true gnostic is the one “who knows the Reality through His Self-manifestation” and is a servant “who turns [toward the Reality] in all the diversity of the forms [in which He manifests Himself].”\footnote{Ibn al-ʿArabī, \textit{The Bezels of Wisdom}, 151.} As discussed, the Shaykh believes that when the Heart embraces God and contemplates God in His Self-manifestation in forms, the Heart embraces God and not the form itself. In what is arguably the most important verse of the entirety of the \textit{Tarjumān al-Ashwāq}, when the Sufī-lover’s declares that, “verily became my heart made possible of every form (\textit{laqad śāra qalbī qābilā kullā sūratin})” (P11:13), he indicates that his heart is “wide” to receive a large number of forms, since “the Heart is necessarily [either] wide or restricted according to the form in which God manifests Himself” as the heart “can comprise no more than the form in which the Self-manifestation occurs.”\footnote{Ibn al-ʿArabī, 149.} In saying in the poem, “How often did they covenant and swear that they would not change / but a dyed one (that is, with henna) does not keep a promise of oaths (literally, “in right [the] hand”),” the poet is
reinforcing the importance of the concept of the multiplicity and ever-changing nature of the forms (which are re-created in every instant by the creative Breath of the All-merciful). It is the Beloved who “does not keep a promise (laysa wafā),” therefore reinforcing the concept of the multiplicity of her forms. That the poet voices the fact that the true gnostic’s heart is capable of such a multiplicity of forms, and that it has become a temple (baytun) which encompasses the form even of “idols” (li-(a)wthānin) is especially remarkable in the context of traditional Islamic teachings.

Not surprisingly, Michael Sells has devoted a significant amount of effort in explicating Poem 11 across several of his academic writings as this is one of the most important poems of the collection. Sells reconciles the movement of the Beloved away from the lover with the apparent references to mystical union in this poem. He states that within these lines “lies the elegiac lyricism of Ibn ‘Arabi’s understanding of mystical union,” saying that the “heart that is receptive of every form must be willing to give up each image, each form, each beloved, in order to be receptive for the next form.” Sells sees that this “mysticism of perpetual transformation (taqallub),” which he notes is a play on the word qalb (heart), is related to “the perpetually changing manifestations of the Real figured as the changing moods and states of the beloved, [that is] her ahwāl, and as the continual moving around and past the poet of the beloved.”

Sells further comments at length upon the issue of the changing of forms in this poem’s most famous and significant verse, “Verily became my heart made possible of every form,” (P11:13a) linking the verse “to his mystical philosophy of the constant transformation of the heart.” Sells states that for the Shaykh, “the infinite cannot be known in any one manifestation in time, and its manifestations are constantly changing.... [E]ach belief (i tilqād) binds the deity into the image formed within that system and denies the images manifested within other beliefs.” He says this results in “a double error: an idolatry in which the ‘god of belief’ is worshipped not as a manifestation of the divine, but as the deity itself; and a disbelief (kurf) in which the one deity is denied in its authentic manifestations in other beliefs.” Sells posits that the corrective to this error is found within the ḥadīth of love, in which God announces: “When I love my servant ... I become the hearing with which he hears, the seeing with which he sees, the feet with which he walks, the hands with which he touches [and in

some versions], the tongue with which he speaks.” He claims that this *hadīth* is the foundation of the Sufī understanding of *fanā‘* (annihilation, or passing away). Sells suggests that throughout the *Tarjumān*, there is a parallel between the passing away of the Sufi-lover in mystical union and the passing away, or perishing, of the Sufi-lover out of the intensity of his love.777 The divine cannot be known as an objectified entity but can only be known when the ego-self (*nafs*) of the Sufi, “with its delimiting intellect and projecting will, passes away. At that moment the heart of the Sufi becomes like a combination of polished mirror and prism in which the undifferentiated unity of the divine light is reflected and refracted.” Sells offers that the temptation for the Sufi is to attempt to possess the image of the reflection or refraction but, of course, the manifestations are constantly changing. Thus, for the advanced believer, the heart is made possible by every form, so that in each moment he receives new manifestation, giving up the prior manifestation. Sells adds,

> In poetic terms, the constantly moving caravan of the beloved, always just behind the poet, in memory, or just ahead of him, in the stages of her journey, offers a lyrical understanding perfectly consonant with this mystical philosophy.... The beloved is held within the heart, but never possessed. The images of her are constantly changing, driving the lover to bewilderment (*hayra*).... When the lover is driven out of his wits (*aql*), he no longer binds the divine into a particular image. In the shifting images, lyrically evoked in the fickle states and moods of the beloved, he perishes. Herein lies the elegiac lyricism of Ibn ‘Arabi’s understanding of mystical union.... At the end, the poetic voice speaks from out of the Kaaba of the heart. The beloveds (of different manifestations of the beloved) combine both centripetal and centrifugal forces in their circling motion around the Kaaba of love.778

Sells restates the Shaykh’s view on religion and forms in the poetry collection in saying “[t]o try to keep the image of the beloved known in the union it to freeze it into an idol. The worship of such frozen idols, which are constructed as ‘gods of belief’ within theologies, philosophies, and religions, leads to a world of mutual intolerance. Each person or group worships the god of one belief and denies the god of the other.”

For Ibn al-ʿArabi, who sees the Divine Beloved as both transcendent and immanent within every manifestation, such denial is a form of unbelief (kufr). “The only true affirmation of oneness is the affirmation of the one reality in each of its manifestations along with the refusal to confine it to any one of them. One whose ‘heart is open to every form’ would need not simply to tolerate the manifestations of reality in each belief, but to actively appreciate them.”\(^{779}\)

Nicholson comments on this poem saying, “Ibn al-ʿArabi declares that no religion is more sublime than a religion of love and longing for God. Love is the essence of all creeds: the true mystic welcomes it whatever guise it may assume.”\(^{780}\) When the Sufi-lover says that famous verse -- “I profess (adīnu) the belief of loving (bi-dīni al-ḥubbī) however ‘riding camels’ / wended their way, that is my creed and my sign (anna tawijjahat fi al-dīnu dīna wa ʿīmāna) (P11:15) -- he is, obviously, affirming several very significant Akbarian concepts. Chittick says that “when Muslims see their religion as rooted in inner attitudes such as love and compassion, they place greater stress on the qualities that establish bonds between lovers. Theologically, this leads to an emphasis on the principle enunciated in the famous ḥadīth, “God’s mercy takes precedence over His wrath.”\(^{781}\)

The camels allude to the Path, which, firstly, relates to the Shaykh’s perspective on religion’s inner aspects and predisposition in a person received from God “only as they themselves in their [essential] state dictate; they have a form for every state, the forms varying according to the variation of their states, as the Self-revelation [of the Reality] differs according to the state.”\(^{782}\) Secondly, the Path which the Sufi-lover follows in this poem also relates to the Qurānic verse “Wherever way you turn, there is the face of God” (Sūra 2:115), which Ibn al-ʿArabī says reinforces the fact that God is not in any particular direction.\(^{783}\) Thus, following the religion of love for the Sufi-lover means that he is following the Path upon which he is predisposed to progress, and that the direction of that Path could be in any direction.

Aaron Cass says in relation to this poem that Akbarian thinking dictates that the journey of the true gnostic is both to union and in union. “The Heart that is capable of

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\(^{783}\) Ibn al-ʿArabī, 137.
every form is the Heart that knows whose love it is that moves the ‘mounts.’ To say ‘whichever way’ is far from an abandonment of direction; rather it is the renunciation of the separate will and the submission to the movement of Love Itself -- and this movement is to Beauty and from Beauty.”  

Sells notes on the subject of the direction the camels take that Ibn ʿArabī frequently quotes the Qur’anic verse to the effect that in each moment God “is in a different condition” (Sūra 55:29), that is, nothing infinite can be kept in a place or time or image. Sells offers that both the lover and the mystic must have a heart that is open to every form. “Even the religions, theologies, philosophies, and other systems of thought that Ibn ʿArabi knew so deeply are only stations along the path, or constantly shifting forms of that which transcends fixed determinations. In the philosophical context, this notion of the heart receptive to every form is a mordant critique of dogmatisms of all kinds and a call for a life of openness to new understanding. In the context of love poetry, the heart in perpetual transformation reflects the shifting of the beloved’s manifestations and personae.” Notably, Sells states that, in the Tarjumān, “the context of love poetry is most apparent, although certain verses come close to explicit intersection with the theological expression.”

Sells also calls attention to the fact that -- in addition to Sufi symbols taken from the classical Arabic poetic tradition -- the poems in the Tarjumān offer a number of terms and symbols particular to Ibn al-ʿArabī. Sells notes, for example, that the camels of the Beloved that lead her from station to station are the ʿīs, the red roans. He notes that there are thousands of descriptive words for camel in Arabic and in Arabic poetry from which the Sufi poet could choose. Sells suggests that -- in addition to its evoking of a sandy or red roan coloring -- the word ʿīs allows Ibn al-ʿArabī to make multiple puns on the word for Jesus, ʿĪsa (Jesus), the prophet with whom Ibn al-ʿArabī claimed a particularly close, personal relationship. Sells further suggests that since the the two words can become perfect homonyms, so that the poet-lover can shout to the camel-

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786 Lane offers as translations for ʿīs: a camel with colour of reddish-white, or dingy-white, the type connoting a camel of good breed. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2210.
driver, “don’t lead the āṣ(a) (a)way!” thus evoking both the camels that bear away the Beloved and Ibn al-ʿArabī’s special prophet at the same time.⁷⁸⁷

As the Shaykh says, “God has made it clear that He is in every direction turned to, each of which represents a particular doctrinal perspective regarding Him. All are [in some sense] right [in their approach].”⁷⁸⁸ Furthermore, the way “Love’s camels” take -- the Path -- will determine the Sufi-lover’s particular religion and faith, as Ibn al-ʿArabī says that “each and every creed is a [particular] Path.”⁷⁸⁹ Since the heart is the Sufi-lover’s spiritual organ of love so that, as discussed, “[w]hen the predisposition comes to the Heart ... it sees Him manifest in the form in which He manifests Himself to it,” the Sufi-lover will see his Beloved as the his own “god of belief.”⁷⁹⁰ Regardless of which way the Sufi-lover’s camels turn on his Path, the Great Shaykh confirms that the passion instilled by God is universal, “the oneness of passion being the same in every worshiper.”⁷⁹¹ The inclusion of the “love” reference in the poem also evokes the Shaykh’s thinking in Bezels which he explains ties love back in a greater sense to God’s creation of the Cosmos in saying that “all motivation springs from love.” He further explains that

the origin [of all motivation] is the movement of the Cosmos out of its state of nonexistence in which it was [latently] until its existence, it being, so to speak, a stirring from immobility [rest]. The movement that is the coming into existence of the Cosmos is a movement of love. This is shown by the Apostle of God in the saying, “I was an unknown treasure, and longed to be known.”⁷⁹²

The importance of love to the subject of religion and worship in the context of this poem is also underscored by the final line, which says, “We have an example in Bishr [lover of] Hind and her sister / and in Qays [who became “Majnun” after separated from Laylā] and Laylā, and there is Mayya (that is, the beloved) and Ghaylān [the lover]” (P11:16). These names are all evocative of the martyred lovers of the classical

⁷⁸⁹ Ibn al-ʿArabī, 152.
⁷⁹⁰ Ibn al-ʿArabī, 149.
⁷⁹¹ Ibn al-ʿArabī, 247.
⁷⁹² Ibn al-ʿArabī, 257.
ghazal form on which the poet based the form of *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*. The names also reinforce Ibn al-ʿArabī’s intention to emphasize the role of the Path which the Beloved’s lovers take and the importance of the heart and passion to the worship of God. Sells says that the last line of this poem speaks to the breath and the famous lovers in that -- with every breath -- they give up attachment to the old manifestation and are open for new forms. Similarly, in every moment the Sufi “passes away only to return or remain in the next moment shaped around the new form.” This transformation leads to bewilderment and love-madness, and thus “the poet-lovers who perished in the forms of their beloved are cited in the verses quoted above as tradition as examples of those who entered into bewilderment that is caused by such openness.”793 The reference to these lovers’ names is, furthermore, an allusion to a lover’s annihilation of the self-ego in God.

Sells comments further on this final line of the poem, saying that the reference to the lovers from the Arabic tradition of love poetry and their erotic themes are critical for a full understanding of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s “heart that can take on every form.” Sells notes that it is within this tradition that “Ibn al-ʿArabī’s mystical apophasis achieves its final and most distinctive configuration,” drawing together such major Sufi themes as transformation, the heart of the mystic, the breath of the compassionate, passing away (*fanāʾ*), the mystical moment and breath, and the station of no station.794 The heart open to every form is receptive to the different belief systems as well as different manifestations of beauty. The final verse referencing the famous lovers of the poetic tradition are examples of those who entered into the bewilderment that this caused by such openness.795

Elsewhere, Sells – in his monograph on apophasis and mystical language -- explains that Ibn al-ʿArabī suggests that the ancient lovers like Majnūn and Laylā are models for the intense mystical love of the Sufi. “Had the Arabic love-poetry tradition been merely an analogy for the intensity of the divine-human love relation, such an analogy could have been drawn without the profound and sustained appropriation of the classical poetic conventions of love, love sickness, love madness, and passing away in love.” Sells relates that “when it turns to the erotic mode and the identity of the

beloved, Sufi discourse offers a distinctive apophatic perspective.” He says that – within the context of Sufi poetry -- to ask who the Beloved is, human or Deity, would violate *adab* (Sufi “refined behaviour” or “good manners,” akin to the concept of “chivalry” in Western medieval thought), and would, therefore, be an indelicate question. The Beloved -- immanent within the heart-secret (*sirr*) of the poet and the Sufi -- is also transcendent, beyond all delimitation, beyond any single static image.\(^7^9^6\) This ambiguity and tension is what lends strength to the poetic metaphors and similes of the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*.

\(^7^9^6\) “Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 111–12.
CHAPTER THREE

Women, Perfume, and Prayer:
The Muhammadan Link between Human and Divine Love

The last chapter of *Bezels of Wisdom* -- “The Wisdom of Singularity in the Word of Muḥammad” -- provides an especially important text linking love for the human form of woman and love for the Divine. As such, it is tremendously useful in evaluating the seemingly purely exoteric, sensual aspects of the *Interpreter of Desires* poems in regard to women as creatures desirable to men. Ibn al-ʿArabī uses a ḥadīth -- in which Muḥammad is quoted as saying that, “Three things have been made beloved to me in this world of yours: women (*al-nisaʾ*), perfume (*al-tib*), and prayer (*al-salah*)”\(^{797}\) -- to explain the relationship between lust for women and divine love for women. This relationship provides further linkage between the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda* and Sufi theosophy as it explains the “proper” way that bewildering, annihilating love for a woman -- such as that of the poet for the Beloved -- should be viewed from not just an erotic perspective but from the point of view of theoretical gnosis. In writing about the Eternal Feminine, Anne Marie Schimmel has noted that Ibn al-ʿArabī is an ideal interpreter of the Prophet’s positive statements about “women and scent.”\(^{798}\) She says also that woman reveal, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, the secret of the compassionate God. Citing this ḥadīth allowed Ibn al-ʿArabī to defend the idea that “love of women belongs to the perfections of the gnostics, for it is inherited from the Prophet and is a divine love.”\(^{799}\)


\(^{798}\) “That [Ibn al-ʿArabī] was accused of a predilection for ‘parasexual symbolism’ is an understandable reaction from traditionalist circles.” Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*, 201.

Ibn al-ʿArabī begins *Bezels* with the chapter on Adam and ends the book with this chapter on Muḥammad, arranged in this way, perhaps, to open with an exposition on the fundamentals of his cosmology and ontology, then to close with a demonstration of the theoretical links between God and the sensual -- even orgasmic -- world of human love. Expanding upon Muḥammad’s saying, Ibn al-ʿArabī shows how woman’s relationship to man is analogous to man’s relationship to God. Application of this *Bezels* chapter -- unlike the ones preceding it -- does not result in a view of the girl Niẓām primarily as God-Beloved or a metaphor for God, but allows the reader to consider the woman as a female human being and to consider God in woman. Some interpreters have, of course, viewed the Beloved Niẓām explicitly as a female God. One writer has remarked, in relation to the theme of the union of opposites and Niẓām as a *Sophia aeterna* figure (also discussed at length by Corbin), that this “coniunctio oppositorum is ... necessary for the emergence of the wholeness of Self,” citing the example of the theme in *Interpreter of Desires* of “the union of a male mystic with his female (Divine) Beloved.”

At the outset of this chapter of the dissertation, it is critically important to note that, whilst the previous two chapters on divine self-disclosure and predisposition were concerned with God’s relationship to human beings generally, this present chapter concerns God’s relationship to the male human and God’s relationship to the female human, and the relationship between the three; the discussion will, thus, speak of “man” and “woman” as that is the subject-matter and language of both the *Bezels* chapter and the *ḥadīth* on which it is based. Unlike the preceding sections of this present project, therefore, most references to the girl will be to the “beloved” and not to the “Beloved,” as the concern is with the role of the female human being in the *Bezels* chapter and the poems. Unlike most of the other *Bezels* chapters from which this project pulls and synthesises different facets of the many themes of the *summa*, this chapter on Muḥammad’s *ḥadīth* merits consideration on primarily a stand-alone basis in applying its doctrinal Sufism to the poetry collection; the theoretical portions of this present chapter concern almost exclusively the theory contained in the Muḥammad channel. The poems of *the Interpreter of Desires*, therefore, will be examined according to the topics of women, perfume, and prayer, the main subjects of the

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underlying *ḥadīth*. As might be expected, the ultimate chapter of the *Bezels* of Wisdom contains several key points already discussed in the *Bezels* text, and some of the doctrinal points arising in the Muḥammad chapter will be referenced as being previously discussed, though explication of the poems from the perspective of this particular *ḥadīth* on which the chapter is based often yields differently nuanced understandings. Also, as many of the poems related to the *ḥadīth*-based theories in the Muḥammad chapter have already discussed extensively in earlier chapters of this dissertation, they will not be repeated below except to demonstrate a new reading of the verses.

IV. *A Bezels of Wisdom: Muḥammadan Triplicity in Singularity -- Lover-Loved-Loving*

The *Bezels* Muḥammad chapter heading is, perhaps, the most significant of all the chapter headings in the Shaykh’s *summa*. The chapter heading’s inclusion of the word “singularity” (*fardīyya*) -- translated secondarily as, “universality” -- in connection with Muḥammad is a reference to the Prophet’s special place in humankind as being the most Perfect Human, and in whom was manifest all the divine names that represent the attributes of God, the Prophet being the outward manifestation of the all-comprehensive Name, Allah. The characteristic wisdom of Muḥammad is described as *fardīyya* (singularity), demonstrating the synthesizing and encompassing nature of of his reality.801 Muḥammad himself refers to this in his declaration that, “‘The first thing created by God was my light.’”802 Al-Kāshānī explains that “[t]he Wisdom of Singularity was singled out for Muḥammad because he was the first entification through which the Unique Essence became entified, before any other entification” so that through the Prophet “the other entifications, infinite in number, became outwardly manifest.”803 Al-Kāshānī says further that “everything in the cosmos is a proof of the Lord, since everything is His sign. But Muḥammad, as the most perfect human being, proves his Lord perfectly on all levels of existence, since he is the most perfect of

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802 al–Qaysari, *Sharh Fusus-Al Hikam*, 1299, 470 in; Chittick, *‘The Chapter Headings of the Fusus’*, 86.
803 al-Kahani, *al-Jandi (Sharh Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥikam)* (Cairo, 1966), 336 in ; Chittick, *‘The Chapter Headings of the Fuṣūṣ’*, 86.
microcosms and thereby fully conforms to the metacosm. His human level corresponds exactly to the Divine Presence, the reality of God inasmuch as it embraces everything that exists.”  

Often forgotten in the examination of Sufi literature is the overriding role of Muḥammad as the foundational construct for understanding God and his relationship to humankind. As summarised by Saʿdīyya Shaikh in her detailed work on Ibn al-ʿArabi, gender, and sexuality, the Muḥammad bezel introduces to readers “an enormously significant creation story,” invoking God’s transcendent Essence (dhāt) as the source of all Creation, while at the same time using gender in a very deliberate manner, “explicitly and distinctly describing this source as feminine,” then drawing parallels to human females.  

Ibn al-ʿArabi alludes to an earlier chapter (“The Wisdom of Opening in the Word of Ṣāliḥ”) when he discusses the concept of “triplicity” (tathlīṭ) in the Muḥammad chapter, in saying that Muḥammad’s reality “was marked by primal singularity and his makeup by triplicity” in the Shaykh’s introducing the tripartite subject of this chapter -- women, perfume, and prayer. In doing so, the Shaykh is speaking of God’s creation, the Cosmos, in saying in the Ṣāliḥ chapter that, “The origin of all becoming is thus triplicity,” referring generally to God, the created beings, and the relationship between the two as the three constituent parts. As Austin says, “the familiar triplicity of knower-known-knowledge in which the term ‘knowledge’ as relationship brings together the receptive objectivity of the known and the active subjectivity of the knower to produce the principle of knowledge itself.”  

The triplicity can further be viewed from the perspective of both the Creator and the created. Specifically, Ibn al-ʿArabi cites -- from God’s perspective -- the triplicity as being composed of Divine Essence, the Divine Will (being the tendency to bring a creature into a state of being), and the Divine Word (“Be!”), which is a reference to the Quranic verse in which God says, “When we wish a thing, We only say to it, ‘Be!’ and it is” (16:40); from the created being’s perspective, the triplicity consists of its quiddity, its “hearing” (or receptivity), and its obeying the Creator’s command to come into  

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806 Shaikh, 173.
808 Ibn al-ʿArabi, 139.
being.\textsuperscript{809} The Shaykh’s inclusion of the concept of triplicity (as a derivation of singularity) in relation to the Prophet’s thoughts expressly on the topic of love that comprises the bulk of this \textit{Bezels} chapter is, indeed, a clear reference to the topic of creation: God (the Creator), the creature, and the relationship between the two, which Ibn al-ʿArabī proceeds to then link to the triplicity of women, perfume, and prayer. Interestingly, the \textit{Bezels} chapter number -- Chapter 27 -- may be obtained by cubing the number three: \(3^3\). It is almost impossible to imagine that Ibn al-ʿArabī was unaware of this aspect of triplicity and he may have even devised this chapter number with this fact in mind. The Shaykh has written at length on numerology, generally, and even includes some references to numerology in \textit{Bezels}.

Though his perspective on Muhammadan triplicity will not be explored, Austin’s perspective is worth noting. He recounts the meeting of the Shaykh and the girl in the context of the \textit{Tarjumān}, stating that she is an image of Love and Knowledge, “in that that she partakes of both the Iranian and Greek spirits while dwelling in an Arab land; the Iranian spirit of spiritual and mythical drama and divine sacrifice, the Greek spirit of intellect and philosophy coming together in Arabia, the home of Islam. Thus, the imagery of the Lady Niẕām is one both of polarity and triplicity in unity.”\textsuperscript{810} Ibn al-ʿArabī might remind the poems’ readers that -- in regard to the combination of spiritual and intellectual in the girl – “the experience of all-consuming natural love and gnostic love have enough in common to be considered one reality.”\textsuperscript{811}

\section*{IV.B \textit{Bezels} Theory: Woman as the Highest Form of Contemplation of God}

\subsection*{IV.B.1 \textit{Bezels}: Yearning in God-Man-Woman Relationships}

The Great Shaykh begins his discussion of women in the Muḥammad chapter by reminding the reader that “in the manifestation of her essence, woman is part of man.”\textsuperscript{812} He then cites the saying, “‘Whoso knows himself, knows his Lord,’” implying that “man’s knowledge of himself comes before his knowledge of his Lord, the latter

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[809]{Ibn al-ʿArabī, 141.}
\footnotetext[810]{Austin, ‘The Lady Nizum: An Image of Love and Knowledge’, 38–39.}
\footnotetext[811]{Zargar, \textit{Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ʿArabi and ʿIraqi}, 135.}
\footnotetext[812]{Ibn al-ʿArabī, \textit{The Bezels of Wisdom}, 272.}
\end{footnotes}
being the result of the former.”813 And, since woman is a part of man, man cannot know his Lord until he knows the woman (who is part of himself). Ibn al-ʿArabī’s central argument regarding the general relationship between man and woman is the same as that between the Prophet and women: “Women were beloved to him and he had great affection for them because the whole always is drawn to the part [italics added].”814 This situation he begins to explain by first referring to God’s creation of man in the Quran -- “And I breathed into him of My spirit” (Sūra 15:29) -- which resulted in God’s having a “deep longing for contact with man,” which was, in effect, God’s “yearning for Himself.”815 To underscore that sense of longing, the Shaykh cites the Ḥadīth of Hesitation concerning man’s death and return to God: “[Man] hates death as much as I hate to hurt him; but he must meet Me.”816 The purpose of his mentioning this ḥadīth is that it confirms that the yearning is not just in one direction -- from man toward God -- but also from God toward His creation. Ibn al-ʿArabī sums up this relationship in an important poem within the text of the Muḥammad Bezels chapter:

The Beloved longs to see me,
And I long even more to see Him,
The hearts beat fast, but destiny bars the way,
I groan in complaint and so does He.817

God has breathed His spirit into man and because of this, man is in His image.818 God longs to see Himself, which He does through the form of His created being (man); al-Kāshānī’s commentary on Bezels includes his saying that being God’s beloved consists in each of the lovers being a mirror for the other, so that “each totally embraces what is embraced by the other.”819 Ibn al-ʿArabī then goes on to explain the

813 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 272.
814 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 273.
815 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 273.
816 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 273. Austin cites the original source for the ḥadīth as being found at Muhammad ibn Isma`il Bukhari, Sahih, ed. L. Krehl (Vols. I-III) and T. Juynboll (Vol IV) (Leyden, 1862), 81:38.
818 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 273.
economics of the God-man-woman triplicity, analogising the relationship between God and man to that of the relationship between man and woman:

Then God drew forth from [man] a being in [man’s] own image, called woman, and because she appears in his own image, the man feels a deep longing for her, as something yearns for itself, while she feels longing for him as one longs for that place to which one belongs. Thus, women were made beloved to him, for God loves that which He has created in His own image…. Thus we have a ternary [that is, triplicity]: God, man, and woman, the man yearning for his Lord Who is his origin, as woman yearns for man. His Lord made women dear to him, just as God loves that which is in His own image. Love arises only for that from which one has one’s being, so that man loves that from which he has his being, which is the Reality….820

The connection of this triplicity with the Shaykh’s cosmology is made even more apparent in his statement that, “[man’s] love is for his Lord in Whose image he is, this being so even as regards his love for his wife, since he loves her through God’s love for him, after the divine manner.”821 Here, then, Ibn al-ʿArabī asserts that the love that man has for woman is -- in reality -- the love of man for God. As Murata summarises Qaṣarī’s commentary on this subject: “The cosmos turns the Real into a God and woman turns man into man. Without cosmos, there is no god. Without woman, there is no man.”822

IV.B.2 Bezels: Sexual Desire and Divine Love

The Shaykh specifically addresses how sexual desire and sexual union are related to divine love. God is actually jealous of man’s desire and pleasure in woman in that man “should find pleasure in any but Him.”823 In the ecstatic moment of consummation in sexual union, man’s annihilation (fānā’) in woman is total. Because “such desires pervade all his parts,” God has commanded that man perform the “major

821 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 274.
822 Murata, The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought, 191.
823 Ibn al-ʿArabī, The Bezels of Wisdom, 274.
ablution” -- washing his body after sex -- so that God may purify man, “so that [man] might once again behold Him in the one in whom he was annihilated, since it is none other than He Whom he sees in her.”

Qayṣarī expands on this concept of God’s jealousy mentioned by the Shaykh in terms of Muslim praxis:

The gnostic, in his state of taking enjoyment, believes that he is taking enjoyment in the Real, who becomes manifest within that form. Hence he is busy with the Real, not with the other. So in this case there is no jealousy. However, that form is entified and distinct from the station of perfect Divine All-comprehensiveness. Hence it is stained with the stain of having been originated in time. It is sullied by imperfection and impurities. Hence God made the major ablution complete (that is, washing of the body that is obligatory after sexual intercourse) incumbent upon him, that he may become pure of the imperfections he gained by turning his attention toward the form and busying himself with it.

Qayṣarī’s explanation thus demonstrates how even theoretical gnosis may be used to elucidate daily ritual practices for all Muslims. In commenting specifically on the Shaykh’s love poetry in relation to the topic of sexuality, Abdelwahab Bouhdiba addresses directly issues of sexuality and intercourse from the Sufi perspective in saying that “[f]rom sensuality to spirituality there is a path to be crossed that is the very essence of Sufism and which carries within it the sublimation of sexuality. Profane love is the starting point and spiritual love embraces everything. Sexuality is a mystery of procreation that has meaning only in projection into God.”

A somewhat recent and very important addition to the literature on Ibn al-ʿArabī relating to gender issues is the expansive monograph by Saʿdiyya Shaikh who – on the whole – demonstrates that a “too-literal” reading of the Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings and gendered metaphors that seemingly focus on “normative” language does a disservice to a more comprehensive view of the Shaykh al-Akbar. She argues that more attention

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824 A “minor ablution” would be washing after activities such as performing a toilet.
must be given to the subtle ways in which he shifts the established parameters of Islamic culture and scholarship that seem to reduce his theoretical constructions of gender to a defense of the traditional patriarchy.\textsuperscript{828} By way of overview, the discussion that follows focuses on primarily on gender issues from Shaikh’s perspective before a more in-depth exploration of issues is undertaken.

Shaikh explores sexuality and gender from several perspectives in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings. She notes that Arabic is a gendered language signifying aspects of ontology. She summarises the Shaykh al-Akbar’s view that demonstrating that the feminine permeates all things ontologically is effected, partly, by the fact that all abstract Arabic nouns referring to God are feminine. For example, not only is the term for the Divine Essence (dhāt), feminine, but so too are many of the Divine Names for God (as discussed previously). Even the word for Divine Attribute (ṣīfa) is feminine.\textsuperscript{829}

One of the other key areas in which Shaikh adds to the understanding of Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Muḥammad chapter in Bezels is the concept of so-called masculine “activity” versus so-called feminine “passivity,” also termed “receptivity”. Shaikh first explains that some Sufis have used gendered language as a way to describe and understand movement along the spiritual Path and interaction with God. She explains that they see certain actions as being “masculine” if they reflect the believer’s process of struggling against the basic instincts of the lower self (nafs), whereas when the soul assumes the correct position of “receptivity” to God, can be cultivated and refined as a human being. Thus all human must be both receptive to the Divine while being active in subduing the self. These postures apply to both male and female human beings.\textsuperscript{830}

Shaikh says that Ibn al-ʿArabī’s doctrinal perspective emphasizes the point that if a man loves a woman with the insight of Muḥammad of the comprehensive nature of women’s reality, he has loved God.\textsuperscript{831} This prophetic insight is explained by Muḥammad’s reflecting both the dimensions passivity and activity as an archetypal and perfect human by reflecting the Divine wisdom of singularity, representing the union of opposites with God being both active/male and receptive/female. Passivity (or receptivity) is reflected in the Prophet’s dimension of servanthood (ʿubūdiyya) in

\textsuperscript{829} Shaikh, 175.
\textsuperscript{830} Shaikh, 38–39.
\textsuperscript{831} Shaikh, 176.
relation to the Creator, while the Prophet’s dimension of lordship (rubūbiyya) in acting as the first principle of Creation. Thus, a Sufi who loves women in the manner of Muḥammad will have loved the God, the Beloved.

Ibn al-ʿArabi’s perspective in the Muḥammad bezel is that in women, men witness this coincidenta oppositorium of passivity/receptivity and activity as the most complete theophany of God. Shaikh demonstrates that Ibn al-ʿArabi draws a parallel between women and the Divine receptive realities, both of which occupy a place of superiority in the order of created existence. She notes an example in which the Shaykh al-Akbar speaks metaphorically about the “possible entities” as the “wife” whom the Divine masculine as “husband” seeks through desire and need such that, through their marriage, the entire Cosmos comes into existence. Women have been given a special position in Creation by virtue of their biological form which is capable of giving birth, that is, creating. Shaikh posits that this position is not only by virtue of their biology, but fully reflects the theophanic realities reflected in female procreative capabilities which integrate body and spirit. Tying together the unifying singularity of Muḥammad in reflecting the union of opposites with the concept of passivity and activity, Shaikh concludes that the Prophet was made to love women because they are the locus of receptivity for the purpose of effecting the perfect form, which is the human form. More simply put, Muḥammad’s affinity for women explains his love for them since, as fellow human beings, women were the closest to the Prophet in nature.

It is helpful to note, even if briefly, an important contrast, between Shaikh’s perspective on gender and theoretical Sufism and that of the prominent scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who emphasizes the fundamental ontological differences between males and females who, he claims, primarily reflect different divine qualities that are complementary. Shaikh mirrors what she presents as Ibn al-ʿArabi’s own view of males and females as both reflecting traditional masculine and feminine qualities such that divine attributes are not restricted to gender. Shaikh summarizes her differences with

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832 Shaikh, 73.
833 Shaikh, 164,177.
834 Shaikh, 183.
835 Shaikh, 178.
837 Shaikh, Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn ʿArabi, Gender, and Sexuality, 204.
Nasr in saying that, “[s]ince Ibn al-ʿArabī states that men and women alike share in all levels and stations of spiritual attainment, the theophanic realities of a particular station are by definition ungendered.”838 Shaikh also compares her view to that of Sachiko Murata who, she asserts, presents a far more complex and nuanced view of Sufism and gender than Nasr. Shaikh notes that in much of her interpretation, Murata supports the idea that gender differences are foundational to the work of Ibn al-ʿArabī, while maintaining that men and women are not always correlated with the categories of male/masculine and female/feminine. This is despite Murata’s embracing what Shaikh views as “patriarchal stereotypes” inherent in traditional constructs of masculine and feminine. Shaikh concludes her assessment of Murata by calling attention to a conflict between Murato’s arguing for spiritual equivalency for females and Murata’s arguing for a traditional gender hierarchy on a social level.839 To sum up the key elements of Shaykh’s examination of the gender and sexual aspects of Sufi ontology, she states that “Ibn al-ʿArabī revolutionizes gendered ways of imagining human-divine relationships, providing unique associations of plenitude and divine presence with the traditionally female dimensions of reality.”840

IV.B.3 Bezels: Contemplating God in Woman and Avoiding Animal Lust

Ibn al-ʿArabī believes that love between a man and a woman is a reflection of the love between God and human beings, a love the culminates in sexual intimacy.841 Specific to the importance of women to human beings’ relationship to God, the Shaykh makes some of his most controversial statements -- from the point of view of “conservative” patriarchal Islamic theology and attitudes. Ibn al-ʿArabī first explains that

When man contemplates the Reality in woman he beholds [Him] in a passive aspect, while when he contemplates Him in himself, as being that from which woman is manifest, he beholds Him in an active aspect.

When, however, he contemplates Him in himself, without any regard to what has come from him, he beholds Him as passive to Himself directly.

838 Shaikh, 206.
839 Shaikh, 209.
840 Shaikh, 181.
841 Shaikh, 181.
However, his contemplation of the Reality in woman is the most complete and perfect, because in this way he contemplates the Reality in both active and passive mode, while by contemplating the Reality only in himself, he beholds Him in a passive mode particularly. Ibn al-ʿArabī pushes the point even farther by insisting that, “the best and most perfect [contemplation] is the contemplation of God in women” as evidenced by the Prophet’s example of loving women “by reason of [the possibility of] perfect contemplation of the Reality in them.” It is not possible to contemplate God in His Essence without some type of “formal support” as God does not actually “need” the Cosmos (man). The Shaykh says that “the greatest union is that between man and woman, corresponding as it does to the turning of God toward the one He has created in His own image … so that He might behold Himself in him.” The significance of these statements must be viewed in the context of sapiential Muslim thought that does not allow that “God can be seen in Himself” as “God’s Essence stands beyond every sort of delimitation, entification, and relationship,” though “God can be witnessed as he discloses Himself” which he does in every existent thing – including woman.

Ibn al-ʿArabī does not ignore traditional (patriarchal) Islamic thinking on the role of women as being ontologically inferior to men. He traces the derivation of the word for women (nisāʿ) to “coming after,” referring to the fact “that they came into being after him [man]” and writes that Muḥammad loved women “only because of their [lower] rank and their being a repository for passivity.” This seemingly lower-status view of women by the Shaykh, in a sense, part of the wider Islamic cosmology which includes predetermined roles for each creature -- citing the Qurānic verse that, “Men enjoy a rank over them” (Sūra 2:228). Yet there is also in this predisposition women’s being loved by Muḥammad (representing all men as the Perfect Man) with a love that derives from a divine love. For the gnostic -- the one who understands the nature of the God-man-woman triptych -- the one with whom he is in love is always God, even in the form of the woman.

Similar to Shaikh, in her essay on women in the Islamic mystical tradition, Maria Massi Dakake also addresses the important issue of “activity” versus “passivity,”

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843 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 275.
844 Murata, The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought, 192.
but concentrates on the issues in relation to who has rank over whom which arises in
the seemingly misogynistic Sufi expression that “every woman is a man on the Path,” a
phrase that actually speaks to masculine and feminine attributes that are necessary for
both men and women. Dakake asserts that the phrase should be stated, more
completely, “every woman is a man on the Path, and every man is a woman on the
path.” The theory behind this saying is that every woman who “actively” journeys on
the Path “is necessarily ‘a man’ in a symbolic -- perhaps even an existential -- sense,
since she is ‘active’ (as opposed to passive) in her journeying, and insofar as journeying
requires the intellect as its guiding force, every woman actively journeying on the
mystical path is identified directly with the masculine element of the ‘intellect’ or
‘spirit,’ having subdued her ego [nafs] to a sufficient extent.” On the other hand,
Dakake contends that “a man’s spiritual struggle would be to perfect his masculine
virtues outwardly, while acquiring the feminine virtues inwardly.... [A] woman may
have to acquire certain masculine virtues not inherent to her nature --such as
detachment and bravery.” She concludes that, viewed from this perspective, if “‘every
woman on the path is a man,’ then every man on the path must also be, at least from
one perspective, ‘a woman’ -- in the sense that he must acquire the positive feminine
elements of his original self, lost in the initial separation of male and female ‘from a
single soul.’”

Ibn al-ʿArabī, however, introduces into the theory an innovative, highly positive
perspective on the traditional, patriarchal position of women viewed as “inferior” by
declaring that, in relation to man, women “are as the Universal Nature is to God in
which He revealed the forms of the Cosmos by directing toward it the divine Will and
Command, which, at the level of elemental forms, is symbolized by conjugal union”
which corresponds to “the consummation of the Primordial Singularity…. He is
thus explaining that woman’s role in the God-man-woman triplicity as “repository of
passivity” is -- in an exceptionally important way -- similar to the critical role played by
the Cosmos in God’s creation as being receptive to the creative Breath of the All-
Merciful. It is woman’s predisposition -- as willed by God -- to be loved by man and to
engage in conjugal union to make the relationship between God and man complete.

845 Maria Massi Dakake, ‘Walking Upon the Path of God Like Men? -- Women and Feminism
in the Islamic Mystical Tradition’, in Sufism: Love and Wisdom, ed. Jean-Louis Michon and

Ibn al-ʿArabī further makes it clear that to love women in a state of pure natural lust is to lack true understanding of the nature of that desire. A woman desired in this way is nothing but a “mere form” for the man. Such a man who approaches his wife or other women in this way does not know himself -- because he does not recognise God in himself -- and “is [really] in love with pleasure itself and, in consequence, loves its repository, which is woman, the real truth and meaning of the act being lost on him.” The Shaykh states that “If he knew the truth, he would know Whom it is he is enjoying and Who it is Who is the enjoyer.”

As already discussed, Murata’s views on Ibn al-ʿArabī and women include an element of viewing the Shaykh through the lens of “traditional” constructs. She claims that Ibn al-ʿArabī’s teachings in Bezels on the subject of women and sexuality are written for only a few gnostics with the spiritual capacity to understand and apply them, and that for most people, “he has no prescriptions outside of the Shariite teachings on human relationships; in other words, he accepts the ‘patriarchal’ orientation of those Islamic teachings that stress God’s incomparability and difference.” Murata concedes that Ibn al-ʿArabī’s doctrine does offer a way for able gnostics “who should recognize that God’s similarity and sameness with the cosmos allow for a totally positive evaluation of the feminine dimensions of reality.”

IV.C Interpreter of Desires: The Muhammadan Ideal of Love for Woman

Recent scholarship by Zargar on witnessing of God in the human form in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī confirms that “the complications that occur for the mystic in maintaining a distinction between the human beloved as a medium of love and the human beloved as an object of love” lie at the heart of many of the Shaykh’s writings. Schimmel contributes a comparison with Rumi in this regard that “[a]lthough Rumi symbolizes the soul’s union with God through the image of human intercourse, his attention remains focused on the feminine aspect of the soul and not so much, as with Ibn

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847 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 276.
848 Murata, The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought, 199.
849 Zargar, Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ʿArabi and ʿIraqi, 65. This major work on the subject of “witnessing” God in the human form examines the poetic works of both Ibn al-ʿArabī and ʿIraqi has previously been introduced in the Literature Review section.
‘Arabi, on the role of women as an idealized object of love.”850 The controversy over the sensuality (eroticism) of the poems in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s day is actually at the core of the consideration of whether or not the poet is describing and advocating the Muḥammadan ideal of love for women: does the Sufi-lover’s desire for the girl written in the poems represent the divine love for women as demonstrated by Muḥammad in the ḥadīth on women, perfume, and prayer, or does the desire represent mere lust for the form of the woman? Ibn al-‘Arabī’s reply to his critics -- who deemed the collection to be merely erotic in substance and not just, as the Shaykh admitted, erotic in form -- was that everything he wrote in the collection signified “Divine influences and spiritual revelations and sublime analogies” devised according to Sufi doctrines, that is, attaching “a mystical significance to words used in ordinary speech.” Ibn al-‘Arabī says that, “I have used the erotic style and form of expression because men’s souls are enamoured of it.”851

As previously discussed, Ibn al-‘Arabī wrote a Commentary in which he explained in great detail how the poems’ words, which were inspired in the mystical moment, were a poetic articulation of his theosophy. As already stated, the purpose of this project is, however, to determine if major elements of the Great Master’s doctrinal Sufism are evident in the poems apart from this Commentary, those elements being synthesized from the Bezels text. The present task is to determine if there is, indeed, sufficient evidence for the Muhammadan ideal of love for women in the poems. A finding to the contrary would, of course, begin to suggest that the Shaykh’s critics might have been correct in their deeming the poetry merely erotic and, therefore, profane.

Bouhdiba notes that in Sufism, “amorous possession of God expresses a sublimation of the Eros and the transubstantiation of the beloved object.”852 The love for the female is subsumed into the love for God. In her work on the Sufi poetics which can be at the same moment both sensual and sacred, Schimmel finds that the Sufi poets often used the language of profane love. Even though they spoke of the physical beauty of “tresses and rosy cheeks, of kisses and union,” every world in their colourful poetry “is filled with connotations which can be understood properly only by those who

852 Bouhdiba, Sexuality in Islam, 121.
carefully unravel the significance of each, even the smallest, motif in a verse.” She notes that when an Islamic mystical poet might twists the meaning either of a profane word or of Quranic verse, it might be easy to interpret the verse as being worldly poetry in praise of wine or love, instead of being a veiled commentary on theoretical gnosis, or a mystical prayer addressing God the Beloved. Schimmel states that this double entendre is intended, and unless the poem’s reader “disentangles the interwoven designs in each and every verse and places the images into the context” of the whole history of Persian or Arabic poetical language, the reader one neither really understands nor enjoys the verses, “which look, to the outsider or to those who know them only in translation, often quite repetitious.”853 In Claude Addas’ own examination of the poetry the Shaykh’s poetry, she perceives that it is fundamentally “divinely instituted” in its relationship to the poet’s messages about wisdom and divine providence. She also views Ibn al-ʿArabi’s poetry as they type of Sufi verse inclusive of “the language of poetry is used as the privileged support of spiritual and divine knowledge, the perpetuity of which it reserves for the exclusive use of gnostics.”854

Ibn al-ʿArabi uses many different words in the poems to refer to the primary female subject of the Tarjumān, the choice of which he uses in context of the specific poems to help communicate his views on doctrinal Sufism. The words include: “my beloved” (maḥbūbī), my Blamer (ʿādhilī), a Beautiful One (ḥasnāʾ), a young girl (fatātun), a tender/young girl (taflatun), a playful one (lʿābun), a daughter (bintun), a young/delicate one (ghaydāʾ), a very timorous one (ruʾbūbatun), one who is thin-in-waist (that is, “empty” or “hungry”) (khumsanatun), and, a virgin, which may refer also to a bride (ʿadhrāʾ). More often, the Shaykh refers to the Beloved simply by using verb forms reflecting use of the singular feminine personal pronoun, or the suffix “her” (ha), or even as part of a collective “they” or “them” in certain instances (again, reflected in the verb form or the suffix, hum). Very rarely in the Tarjumān does Ibn al-ʿArabi use the female singular pronoun (hiya) and, of course, using it for emphasis on the subject of the sentence. As previously discussed, the Shaykh also employs a number of metaphors for the object of his love, including a peacock (tāwūs), gazelle (zabun), and even Jesus (Īsā). In all these instances, however, it is clear that the subject is a female. The Shaykh says that “he would have descanted on [Nizām’s] physical beauty and

853 Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 81.
moral perfections had he not been deterred by the weakness of human souls, which are easily corrupted,” so he, instead, in the Preface, focuses on her “learning, literary accomplishments, and spiritual gifts.”\textsuperscript{855} It seems that the Shaykh al-Akbar himself was afraid to dwell too much on her physical beauty, lest he himself fall prey to the feared corruption. Ibn al-ʿArabī prefers to let the lover of the poetry be his voice to maintain the “nobility of her nature”\textsuperscript{856} but the poet unambiguously states, “[w]henever I mention a name in this book I always allude to her, and whenever I mourn over an abode I mean her abode.”\textsuperscript{857}

Ibn al-ʿArabī’s view of Muḥammad’s hadīth on women, perfume, and prayer stands in contrast to that of Sufis such as al-Ghazālī who concluded it meant simply that prayer was more worthy of love than women. For the Shaykh al-Akbar, the best way to contemplate God is in the form of a woman. For Ghazālī, the Prophet’s love for women was something superficially sensual, saying “he termed women lovable even though only sight and touch partake of them, but not smell or hearing. He terms prayer the ‘apple of his eye’ and declared it most worthy of love, even though, as is obvious, the five senses play no part in prayer; on the contrary, it involves a sixth sense whose seat is the heart and he alone perceives it who possesses such a heart [XXXIV:3].”\textsuperscript{858}

Leonard Lewisohn says that Ghazālī found anathema any notion that God can be contemplated through the medium of a mortal being, except for the use of erotic metaphors relating to female beauty to refer to God in particular circumstances such as in Sufi poetry for meditation during sama’.\textsuperscript{859}

In the discussion that follows immediately, the poems will be evaluated to show how the Muhammadan saying on women, perfume, and prayer evidences four elements that support the doctrine of the Muḥammad Bezels chapter: the lover’s being drawn to the physical beauty and sexuality of the girl; witnessing by the lover of the Divine in the girl; the girl’s yearning for the lover; and, the lover’s mistaken understanding that union with the girl means sexual union in a paradisal setting.

\textsuperscript{855} Nicholson, ‘Introduction, Tarjumān Al-Ashwāq, A Collection of Mystical Odes (1911)’, 3.
\textsuperscript{856} Nicholson, 3.
\textsuperscript{857} Nicholson, 4.
IV.C.1 Interpreter: Drawn to the Terrible Beauty of the Beloved

An extensive discussion here of the degree to which the lover is drawn to both the physical beauty and sexuality of the girl is unnecessary and will not be undertaken as this was proved in the previous chapters. This attraction is, as pointed out, so powerful that the girl can “makes oblivious the “knowing person” (that is, the gnostic) (P29:14b) owing to her coquettishness and incomparable, “beauty of cunning (that is, in causing pleasure by beauty)” (P28:18b) that reaches the “most extreme limit” (P40) in her. Sells suggests an additional interpretation for her coquettishness: “The poetic motif of the fickleness of the beloved is closely tied to the perishing of the lover, a perishing which ... is intricately tied into the perishing of the self in fana’.”

The person of Niẓām, of course, figures prominently in all that Ibn al-ʿArabī writes in Tarjumān al-ʿAshawq, and has received some critical attention. To underscore the effect of the Beloved’s beauty, Souad al-Ḥikam says in relation to the real-life Niẓām that she is “a window from which we can view Ibn ʿArabi’s perception of female beauty,” and that she is “the only woman who was capable of becoming to him ‘Eve’ who came out of the body of ‘Adam,’ and with whom he yearned to unite to achieve his satiation in being.” Ralph Austin explores at length in his highly salient article on the Lady Niẓām several concepts in the Tarjumān, using the Bezels’ chapter on Muḥammad to explain this muse’s role in the poems. In regard to the concept of yearning, Austin explains in Akbarian terms that “[t]he secret of the Lady Niẓām as image of Love lies primordially in the eternal yearning of God to know Himself, to reveal the hidden treasure of Himself to Himself, to release Himself from the aloneness of His uniqueness, and to experience the bliss of enjoying Himself in all His infinite possibility, to release the potentialities of His latent Being into the becoming of actuality.” Austin adds that since love requires two beings for its proper expression: the lover and the beloved, that is, a subject and object. He explains that the act of love itself is what connects the two in a relationship of desire, need and adoration, with all its tensions and contradiction of wishing to possess and be possessed, to merge with and be merged with. Austin concludes that “the secret revealed by the Lady as an image of

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love is the wonderful secret and mystery of otherness, since unless God creates Himself as another and makes His reassure an object He can know and experience for Himself, His yearning can never be assuaged. However, the secret of the secret is that since His treasure, His ‘other’ to know and experience, can never be really other and alien to Himself, that necessary otherness is inevitably suffused with Himself.” Ibn al-ʿArabī’s muse Niẓām inspires the Shaykh al-Akbar to explore in both a sensual and theosophic way a wide range of topics encompassed by both sensual and Sufi love.862

Seyyed Hossein introduces the use of beauty in Sufi poetry by explaining that since most people do not have an interest in reading works on doctrinal Sufism, Sufi poetry became a primary means for the dissemination of the teachings of Sufi to the larger public. The Sufis have used beauty to adorn the expressions of the Truth, and they attract souls to the Truth through the beauty of the literary form in which it is addressed.863 Thus the reader of the poems of the Tarjumān examines the verses through the eyes of the Sufi-lover who works through the erotic tension of the story and at the same time gives evidence of God’s theophany. Despite the fact that he says, “her being elegant frightened me (rābni)” (P42:6), the Sufi-lover desires her, explicitly demonstrating that -- as the Bezels Muḥammad chapter says – “the man feels a deep longing for her,” she being “a slender, delicate, timorous one / for whom the heart of the troubled one is desirous (tāyaqu)” (P31:5). This is exactly what the Shaykh spoke of in Bezels when he wrote of Muḥammad that “[w]omen were beloved to him and he had great affection for them because the whole always is drawn to the part.”864 This is a reference to creation of woman out of man in the ḥadīth in which Muḥammad said, "Treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, and the most curved portion of the rib is its upper portion, so, if you should try to straighten it, it will break, but if you leave it as it is, it will remain crooked; so treat women nicely.”865 There is in one poem an explicit reference to the Bezels allusion in regard to woman coming out of man when the lover states that the winds have carried a message from the girl, whom he quotes as

saying, “‘He whom you love is between your ribs’ (aadha tāhwāhu bayna ḍulīa’ kum)” (P14:5). There is a second reference to woman’s deriving from man’s rib late in the collection: “[The] waters of al-Ghāḍā diminished due to rage [which] passion started a fire in his ribs (bi-ādliha ‘hi)” (P59:9).

For Sufi and some other Muslim theoreticians, the story of Adam (ʿĀdam) and Eve (Hawwa) provides an explanation for the love between man and woman. Ibn al-ʿArabī explains in Futūḥāt that Eve came from the rib because “the ribs bent,” and may thereby bend towards her husband and children. The bending of the woman toward the man is because she is created for the rib and within the rib “are bending and inclination.” The man’s bending toward her is his bending toward himself since she is part of him. When the rib was removed from Adam, God filled the empty space with an appetite for her. Therefore, Eve’s love is love for the place from whence she came (“homeland”), whereas Adam’s love is love for the self. 866 The Shaykh similarly explains why those Sufis who have reached spiritual perfection incline toward women since the longing (ḥanīn) of these gnostics is the longing of the whole for the part, like the loneliness of dwellings for the inhabitants that give them life. God filled up the place in men from which woman was taken with inclination (mayl) toward her. 867 The references to these aspects of doctrinal Sufism in the Tarjumān are many – as already shown -- including metaphors for bending and inclination, and the empty spaces and dwellings.

IV.C.2 Witnessing the Divine in the Girl Niẓām

Aziz Esmail asserts that erotic mystical literature is characterised by an ambiguity that functions as symbolism, appropriate to the topic of spiritual love is best understood by the metaphors for human love. 868 As already alluded to, Nasr says that “the male body itself reflects majesty, power, absoluteness; and the female body reflects beauty, beatitude, and infinity,” each person a theomorphic being reflecting

866 Fut. I 124.29 reference found in Murata, The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought, 181.

867 Fut. II 190.9) reference found in Murata, 181.

God’s attributes. Even after viewing the many ways in which the lover yearns for the girl physically, the significance of the reflection of the Bezels’ doctrine on women in the poetry is not complete, however, until the link to the Divine in woman he sees is also established. The lover wants to be with her so he can be whole, so that he can see the Divine in her. The poems of the Interpreter of Desires do, in fact, clearly indicate that in the collection that the poet is referring also longing for the girl’s spiritual attributes.

Though the first poem is a highly compact exposition on several very important theological themes in Bezels, the Shaykh’s characterization of the divine element in the girl is not readily apparent until the second poem, where the poet explicitly alludes to several religious qualities associated with her. The reader cannot help but to begin making very strong associations between the girl and God in the following key middle section of this poem. As Schimmel explains, “the eye of the mystic who is enraptured in love sees traces of eternal beauty everywhere and listens to the mute eloquence of everything created.”

Though discussed already in Chapter 3 in connection with the topic of the lover’s religious predisposition, the verses take on a different significance when viewed as in relation to sensing divine qualities in the Beloved:

Her language (that is, words/speech) grants life (yuḥyī) when she killed by her glance; /

it is like – with [that] she grants life (tuḥyī) – [she is] Jesus (4)
Tawrāt (that is, the Torah) is [like] a [smooth] sheet of her legs in brightness and I / (5a)
If she pointed, she requests the Gospel (al-ʾaʾjila); (9a)
(Poem 2:4,5a,9a)

The poet is establishing unambiguously that he sees in the girl elements of God not just from the Islamic perspective (“our religion”), but from the other major faiths of the different cultures inside the Islamic geography at that time. The purpose of the poet’s inserting these lines is to leave no doubt that from any reader’s point of view – even

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869 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (Kegan Paul International, 1990), 49. The subject of divine attributes has already been examined at length in Chapter 1 which showed the existence of the divine Names/attributes in both the girl and the Sufi-lover.

those who have not “submitted” to God as a Muslim – that the girl exhibits qualities associated with God. The girl’s own words grants life (yuhī) as if like Jesus (ʿĪsa). The poet further associates her words with the Word of God in equating her to the Torah (Tawrāt) and by reference to the Christian Gospel (al-ʿājila).

Ibn al-ʿArabī’s inclusion of these several religions (Islam, Christian, Jewish) as encompassed by her reinforces -- in terms of the Muhammadan ḥadīth on women in Bezels -- that he acknowledges the Divine in the female form. This the poet actually does before he begins describing at length in the collection the beauty of her physical form and its effects upon the lover; in giving priority to the spiritual over the physical, he is establishing at the very outset of Interpreter of Desires the precedence of the witnessing of God in the girl over the witnessing of the merely physical, lust-inducing beauty in her. In what is Ibn al-ʿArabī’s most famous passage in his most well-known poem -- Poem 11 from Interpreter of Desires -- the poet clearly demonstrates that he is both aware of and receptive to the Divine of which he speaks in the above-cited poem about the several religious traditions:

Verily became my heart made possible of every form
(laqad ṣāra qaṣbī qābilā kullā ṣūrātīn) /
 a meadow of gazelles and a convent for [Christian] monks. (13)
And a house (that is, temple) for idols a Kaʿba of “those who walk much” (that is, pilgrims) /
 and a bound book of the Torah and
 a bound book of the Qurʾān (14)
I profess the belief of loving: however (or, wherever) ‘riding camels’
 (from the Arabic word for ‘stirrups’) wended their way, /
 that is my creed and my sign. (15)
(Poem 11:13,14,15)

This reading of the verses is another, complementary view of what has been demonstrated in the earlier chapter on religious predisposition: here, the verses show that the lover is aware of the divine in her whom he follows through the desert and the spiritual nature of the quest. This is a slightly different interpretation of the verses that

871 “Ibn ʿArabi interpreted the Prophet’s words referring to his love for women on the basis of his own conception of the central role of the feminine components of the Divine....” Schimmel, My Soul Is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam, 109.
had previously been understood as meaning that the poet wanted to demonstrate the doctrinal importance of remaining open to every form of worship. Only through the power of God – his Beloved -- can he say that she opens up “my heart” (qalbī) to every form (kulla šūratin). When the poet-love says, “I profess the belief of loving,” (‘adaynu bi dīna al-hubbī) – that is, of loving God, the Beloved – he is making a claim of love mysticism, equating human love with love for God. When he says “however ‘riding camels’ wended their way (anna tawjjahat fi al-dīnu dīna wa ‘īmāna), that is my creed and my sign,” the poet asserts that he recognises the Beloved leading him along the spiritual Path, equated to the direction the camels take.

The relatively small amount of scholarship explicating the poems of Tarjumān al-Ashwāq tends to focus on a few key poems and important verses within those, with the majority of academic writing on this collection being on Poem 11, above. As this poem figures so prominently in the scholarship, it is important to examine carefully what the scholarship has concluded about this famous poem of the Shaykh al-Akbar. In summarising its significance, Nasr states that this Poem and its profession of love as being the Sufi-poet’s creed, demonstrates Sufi gnosis is not separated from love. Nicholson himself said about the Tarjumān that it is “a peculiar prerogative of Moslems, for the station of perfect love is appropriated to Muhammad beyond any other prophet, since God took him as his beloved, ḥabīb.” Anne Marie Schimmel comments that the poem’s famous verse shows that “Ibn al-ʿArabī boasts of having reached the highest possible station on the mystical path, a station which is beyond the limited forms of peculiar religions, and has realized in himself the pleroma of Divine Names.” Consequent for Sufi adepts and spiritual seekers, alike, however, Schimmel states that the poem is “a glowing tribute to Islam, for, as Ibn al-ʿArabī himself explained: ‘I accept willingly and gladly whatever burden He lays upon me. No religion is more sublime than a religions based on love and longing for Him whom I worship and in whom I have faith.’”

874 Schimmel, 39.
875 Schimmel, 39.
But it is Michael Sells who has delved the deepest into this poem’s theoretical gnosic. He says that the final verses of the poem culminate a complex series of poetic transformations of the notion of “station” (maqām), following the earlier part of the poem in which the departure of the Beloved was explicitly addressed. The stations of the Beloved’s departure along the spiritual Path away were then identified with the pilgrimage station of the pre-Islamic and Islamic pilgrim in his movement toward the kaʿba. Sells says that the final verses recount a third set of stations (verses 13,14) -- a “meadow of gazelles”, a “house for idols,” the “Kaʿba of the pilgrims”, and the Tawrāt (Torah) and Qurʾan – “that expand out interculturally into various traditions and cultural modes.” Sells notes that these stations are metaphors for the various forms that the heart can take on. There are also the stations visited and abandoned by the Beloved. “This merging of various understandings of the station is intensified by the poetic shift in which the physical kaʿba is identified with the heart of the Sufi. In that shift, the stations or fixed sites are portrayed (through poetic allusion) as moving around the heart.”

Sells further notes the link between the poem’s “heart made possible of every form” and the “perpetual transformation of the heart” (taqallub) that is central to the Noah and Shuʿayb Bezels chapters. Sells believes that because of the fact that the stations of the poet-lover can only be achieved through the passing away of the individual in fanā’, the voice here cannot be simply identified with the ego-self of the author of the poem who claims he has reached this lofty spiritual state. Instead, the “self-praise becomes, in the heart of the mystic who has passed away, the hearing with which he hears, the seeing with which he sees, and the tongue with which he speaks.” Sells refers to the famous lovers (Bishr, Hind, Qays, Laylā and the others) at the end of this poem, observing that Ibn al-ʿArabī evokes the classical theme of the zaʿn, the departure or trek, especially of a caravan. The women correspond to the “appearances” (zawāhir) of the real that appear to the mystic whose heart is “made possible of every form.” Sells also notes that by exploiting the fact that the nonanimate plural form of the verb for “wended” (that is, “made their way”) is grammatically feminine in gender – using tawajjahat for “they (the camels) wended” (that is, “made

876 Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsaying, 110.
877 Sells, 110.
their way” -- Ibn al-ʿArabī, like many Sufis, makes use of “intricately pitched gender balance in reference to deity,” often being a feminine reference to God the Beloved.879

The poem that follows the above continues with the theme of the God in the girl in referencing the Christian Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: “My Beloved (maḥbūbī) is Three (tathallatha) (that is, a Trinity), and [yet] already he was One (waḥidā), even as the [group of] Persons (al-ʿaqnām) were induced to become a Person in the essence (bi al-dhātī)” (Poem 12:4). It would be difficult for Ibn al-ʿArabī to provide any more direct allusion to the lover’s witnessing the Divine in the girl than acknowledging the Persons and the Divine Essence (al-Dhāt) of the Christian God in her. The references in these two poems to Christians and Jews and Muslims -- with the implied All-comprehensiveness of the Real in the cosmos -- parallels the pan-religious references which described the beloved in Poem 2. It is in his gnostic heart – and not in his loins – that he is capable of seeing God in the girl.

The collection contains many other general references showing that Ibn al-ʿArabī intended to portray the lover as actually seeing the Divine in the girl. In Poem 44, stands out, though – and deserves an in-depth examination of the particular words -- in how the Shaykh demonstrates both transcendence and immanence of God apparent in the girl. Ibn al-ʿArabī describes her qualities many times over in terms of incomparability (tanzīḥ), the exoteric view of the God, in addition to terms of similitude (tashbīḥ), which would be associated with her immanental beauty, the type more associated with her physical traits. Here, therefore, we see an exemplar poem of Muhammadan integration of transcendence and immanence (as discussed in a previous chapter) in a series of strong contrasting images:

A fresh/tender one (ghādatun) is she, [such that] the very beautiful [girls] (al-hisānu) were torn apart (tāhati) (that is confounded) by her / and her blossom is her light [that] was over (ʿalā) (that is, greater than) the moon. (2)

She is a “plaything” (luʿbatun) (or, phantom) -- our remembering (dhikrīnā) dissolves her (yudhawwibuhā) /… (4a)

The description (al-nnaʿtu) wished to make her evident (or, explain her) (yubayyinhā) but she raised above (taʿālat) (that is, she was transcendent), /

879 Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsaying, 114.
so this (that is, description) was accounted for
in “strict secrecy” (ḥaṣari). (5)

[She is] a Divine mercy (rawḥatun) (or, joy) [who] removed (naqalat)
from humanity /
the human being [who] burns with love for her (8)
From jealousy that her pureness (rāyiẓuḥā) is mingled) (yūshāba) /
which is in the muddiness (kadari) of the tanks. (9)
She is higher (asna) than the sun in brightness (and sublimity), /
a form (ṣūratun) not to be compared (lā yuqāsu)
with [any other] form (10)
A celestial sphere of light (falaku al-nūri) is
under (dūna) the sole of her foot; (11a) (P44:2,4a,5,8,9,10,11a)

Denis McCauley finds that the Shaykh al-Akbar “frequently makes a connection
between poetry and the plural world of forms, which points towards one meaning.”

In the above poem, the “one meaning” is the divinity of the Beloved, demonstrated
metaphorically in verse in a way that conforms to doctrinal Sufism which seeks to
disclose the Muhammadan integration of incomparability and similitude. For example,
the poet-lover declares that he sees in her the immanental beauty quality of her being a
tender one ((ghādatun) but then admits that even the other very beautiful ones (al-
hīsānu) are torn apart (tāhati) – that is, confounded – by her beauty, suggesting a
transcendent quality, which is demonstrated again by her being equated to a light of a
blossom which is over (‘alā) -- that is greater than -- the light of the moon. A most
interesting choice of words by the Shaykh for the girl is lu’batun, which Lane translates
first as a “plaything” (literally, anything or anyone with which or with whom one
plays), but Lane also translates the word as a person with outstretched arms, hence,
“crucifix,” suggesting, yet again, the Divine in the girl. Nicholson translates the word
as “phantom,” perhaps from an alternative meaning of the word suggested by Lane of a
thing to play, thus an “image” or “effigy.”

880 McCauley, Ibn `Arabī’s Mystical Poetics, 10.
881 Edward William Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863),
2720.
Ibn al-'Arabī then introduces the concept of “our remembering” (dhikrunā) the girl as this plaything, or crucifix, recalling the Sufi term (dhikr) for spiritual recollection on God, again signifying her divinity. Again, the poet references her immanental qualities in saying that “the description (al-na’tu) wished to make her evident (or, explain her) (yubayyinhā),” but he integrates immanence with transcendence when the Shaykh says that “she raised above (taʾālat) (that is, she was transcendent),” highlighting the transcendence by referring to the girl’s description being accounted for in “strict secrecy” (ḥašari). Again, displaying Muhammadan integration, Ibn al-'Arabī writes, “[She is] a Divine mercy (rawḥatun) (or, joy) [who] removed (naqalat) [herself] from humanity,” indicating her immanental quality of mercy, yet she is also separate, and removed from world in a transcendent way.

The Shaykh again presents contrasts of incomparability and similitude – yet he uses a specific word (“mingled”) to integrate them -- in noting that “her pureness (rāyiquhā) is mingled (yūshāba), which is in the muddiness (kadari) of the tanks.” Here, she is like clarified wine that is also mixed in the same container with the muddiness of the sediment in the bottom. The poet-lover further sees in the girl her divine incomparability in saying that “she is higher (asna) than the sun in brightness (and sublimity), a form (ṣūratun) not to be compared (lā yuqāsu) with [any other] form. Additionally, Ibn al-'Arabī declares that even “a celestial sphere of light (falaku al-nūri)” from the heavens “is under (dūna) the sole of her foot.”

Peter Bachmann, who has written about manifestations of the divine in Ibn al-‘Arabī’ poetry, confirms both that the Shaykh makes great use of the nuanced beauty of the Arabic language and that he calls upon classical Sufi devices when speaking about divine manifestations and the Sufis witnessing them, as in the poem above just explicated. The remembering of the Beloved dissolves her (yudhawwibuhā), a reference to annihilation (fanāʾ) which the Sufi experiences of his ego-self (nafs) which also causes him to forget about (dissolving) the immanental God as he is in union with the transcendent God. The abundant symbols of immanence in this exemplar poem are dissolved. As Bachmann explains, “the experience of God’s ‘resulting nothingness’ is complementary to the experience of God’s abundant plenty of being as witnessed in the overwhelming manifestation of His divine majesty.”

To conclude the exploration of the sub-theme of witnessing of the Divine in the girl Niẓām relative to the hadīth on women, perfume, and prayer, a final poem is discussed which addresses the issue of the poet-lover’s specifically addressing God explicitly as “God” or addressing God as “He.” This poem is situated near the end of the collection, and up to this point in the Tarjumān, any references to God are made indirectly, in connection with the girl and her attributes and her effect on him. But in Poem 54, the reader can very clearly see that the lover now, in a very direct way, recognizes God in his beloved and also sees God in himself through his beloved as the poet directly associates the beloved with God. These verses support a doctrinal reading of the poem as demonstrating Ibn al-ʿArabiʾs important assertion that “the best and most perfect [contemplation] is the contemplation of God in women.” Here, God becomes not just a simile or metaphor as seen in the girl, but God is now God in His own Essence.

He made himself master of me (tamallakanī) and I made myself master of Him (tamallaktuhu) /

so each of us certainly possessed each other. (4)

My being property of Him (milḵā lahu) is evident, /

and my possessing of Him (milḵī lahu) [is evident in]

his saying, ‘Come here!’ (hayta)... (5)

[The] might of his authority (ʾizzun lizulṭānihi) humiliated you (dhallalak), /

and if only just as he humiliated you (dhallalak)

he showed coquetishness (dalla) to you. (11)

And, O, if only since by his honour he refused (abā)
flirting (tadallulahu) /

if only you flirted [with him]. (12) (Poem 54:4,5,11,12)

The basis for the core of the above verses is an important hadīth cited by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 988) in his Kitāb al-lumaʾ fiʾt-taṣawwuf (also edited by Nicholson), which is considered the oldest systematic presentation of Sufism, and served as the basis for later commentaries such as that by al-Qushayrī. The hadīth states:

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My servant ceases not to draw nigh unto me by works of devotion, until I love him, and when I love him I am the eye by which he sees and the ear by which he hears. And when he approaches a span I approach a cubit, and when he comes walking, I come running.\(^{885}\)

Being the master of each other and possessing each other – both verbs based on the \(m-l-k\) root – emphasises a mutuality of love and longing. The “Come here!” command relates to the manifestation of the Cosmos. But the poet’s quoting God as saying to him, “Come here! (hayta)” also clearly resonates with the end of this \(hādīth\) in which the Prophet speaks of approaching each other. Such mutual longing, however, was not accepted as a legitimate theoretical concept by all Sufis, such as Jāmī, who believed that is necessitated a duality between lover and the Beloved, whereas the emphasis should be on mystical unity, instead.\(^{886}\) Similarly, some Sufis would deny this station of longing since a person must long for someone who is absent, yet God is never absent. This contrary view alludes to the Quranic verse which states, “We are nearer to him than his jugular vein” (\(Sūra\) 50:16).

Sells says of the concept of “longing” in *Interpreter of Desires* that the “vectors of longing extend not only vertically and horizontally, but they also seem to change constantly their angles and emphasis. Such suppleness manifests itself through throughout the *Turjumān* as variations in the form, address, location, apparition, tone, gender, and voice of the beloved(s), and in forms, tones, and stances of the poet-persona(s).”\(^{887}\)

The actions of God that the lover relates in this poem are identical to those of the girl in the preceding poems: God and the girl abased him – here, “humiliated you” (\(dhallalak\)) – and, from the lover’s point of view, refused to show fondness for him. There is regret that he refused flirting (\(abā tadallulahu\)), which would have emboldened the poet-lover to flirt back with God the Beloved. But it was the “might of his authority” (\(īzzun lizulľānihi\)) that underscored the Beloved’s aloofness such that the Sufi could not comprehend, though it is clear that the girl yearned for the lover as much

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\(^{887}\) Sells, ‘Return to the Flash Rock Plain of Thahmad: Two Nasibs by Ibn Al-Arabi’, 10.
as he yearned for her, just as the Shaykh indicates in the Bezels Muḥammad chapter is
the case of the mutual yearning between God and man.

IV.C.3 The Girl’s Yearning for the Lover

Ibn al-ʿArabī, of course, writes in the Muḥammad chapter of Bezels not just
about the longing by the man of the woman – both because she is a part of himself and
because he is drawn to the Divine in woman – but the Shaykh also explains that his
doctrine inspired by the women, perfume, and prayer ḥadīth includes the female
yearning for the man because, as already said, “in the manifestation of her essence, a
woman is part of man,” and “love arises only for that from which one has one’s being,”
and woman is derived from man in the same was as man is derived from God.888
Critical to understanding the role of the Muhammadan triplicity of lover-loved-loving
is Qayṣarī’s comment on the mutuality of this yearning and love, saying that “each of
them is lover from one point of view and beloved from another point of view.”889

The poems in the collection appear superficially to include substantially less of
this yearning of woman for man. Several poems, however, show how the Sufi-lover’s
hopes are raised as he quotes any small action or any few words tossed his way that
might indicate the girl’s longing for him. One example is Poem 57. Although there are
many poems -- already discussed in previous chapters -- which indicate the girl’s
causing the lover to suffer greatly because of her seeming betrayals or indifference after
her departure, Ibn al-ʿArabī allows the lover, near the end of the collection to hope
again that he is longed for by the girl just as he longs for her:

And then behold [if] all [words] be true (ḥaqqān) that she says about it /
and in the opinion of her is the powerful longing (al-shawqi al-
mubarriḥī) for me [as I have] for her, (4)
Then in the heat of noon we will meet /
secretly by her tent on the basis of a most reliable promise. (5)
She is experiencing and we are experiencing [that] which we are
suffering from the love /
and from misery of the testings [of the relationship] and from
feeling pain of the violent grief (6)

888 Ibn al-ʿArabī, The Bezels of Wisdom, 274.
889 Murata, The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought, 196.
Is this confused dreams (اذْحَاثُو اْحْلَامٍ) [or] good tidings in sleep-place (that is, sleeping)? /

Was [her] speech [at the time] an [really] an utterance of my good fortune (اَنْعَطْقُ زَمَانِينَ كَانَ اْنْعَطْقَيْهِ اْيَدِ) (7) (Poem 57:4-7)

The poet hopes that her words about her own love for him are true (حاَقْكَانَ), an adjective which may also be seen as an allusion to one of the principal names of the Divine sharing the same root, اَلْ-ْحَاقُ (the Real). He notes that she might have a powerful longing for him (الشَّوْقُ اَلْ-ْمُبْارِيْحِ) in the same way that he has for her. The Sufi-lover imagines their meeting secretly, a rendezvous he anticipates based on a “most reliable promise” (اْسْدَاقِي اْل-ْوَيْدِي). He claims that “she is presenting and we are presenting” (تَلْقَيْ وَانْتَلْقَيْ) – “what we are suffering due to the love” (اْنْتَلْقَيْ مِنْا اْل-ْحَاوْيْ), thus expressing mutuality of feelings. But, the poet-lover begins to question whether the mutual expressions of love-sickness and the promised rendezvous are merely confused dreams (اذْحَاثُو اْحْلَامٍ) rather than good news received during sleep. He wonders: “Was [her] speech at the time [really] an utterance of my good fortune (اَنْعَطْقُ زَمَانِينَ كَانَ اْنْعَطْقَيْهِ اْيَدِ)?”

On the surface, the poems generally seem not to satisfy the Shaykh’s requirement in the Muḥammad Bezlès chapter that the woman yearns for the man just as the man yearns for the woman. This perspective is greatly mistaken, however, in that it does not account for two considerations. First, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s poems do not actually “conclude” and there is a very real possibility of later union between lover and beloved (though after the action of the final poem); as Chittick has said, “[t]o get to the point is to bring about closure, but there is no closure, only disclosure. Ibn al-‘Arabī has no specific point to which he wants to get. He is simply flowing along with the infinitely diverse self-disclosure of God”890 There is, in fact, no closure to the Interpreter of Desires even though there is ample evidence for the mutual yearning that Ibn al-‘Arabī discusses in Bezlès. As will be discussed, the final poem actually shows that the girl and the lover are both still in the pangs of yearning, a much more satisfying way to leave the reader than a clichéd “conclusion” in which the wandering lover is finally reunited with the object of his desire. The Sufi-poet in that ultimate poem says, sadly: “An agitated mourner (that is, a dove) on top of a shaking [branch] is anguish to me”

(shajā fīkī nāwwāhun ṭarūbun fawqā mayyādi). Thus, the tension of sustained disclosure is, therefore, maintained.

Secondly, the poems are voiced solely from the point of view of the lover, not the beloved so – other than the few hints in the poems – we do not, in fact, know the true heart of the girl. It is easy to conclude from how the poet’s depiction of how the coy girl has toyed with her pursuer that this behaviour – and her role in the poetry as a whole – is just one enormous “tease” of the lover by the girl. The very great majority of the collection text concerns the lover’s lament of being apart from the girl and her seeming coyness. But the coyness actually seems but a game to entice him even more, to lure him to follow her and her family as they move from campsite to campsite through the desert. In truth, the girl desires him just as much as he desires her – the mutual longing of which the Shaykh wrote in Bezels – it is just that she shows it differently than does the man, and in a way more appropriate to the cultural context of a “good” Muslim girl being pursued by a man. If she were to give him everything he wanted during the course of the poetry, there would be no enticement for the physical consummation of a marriage.

Emil Huberin has examined the issue of the Islamic mystical poem as being reflective of an individual poet’s suffering and other experiences versus being reflective of a dogmatic system. He claims that the mark of good poetry is the description of an individual’s experience, saying that mystical and romantic poetry should, therefore, focus on the individual’s lonely self-struggle, so that it “wrenches mystical poetry from its religious and literary contacts.” Huberin adds that to understand the intent and message of the mystical poet, his work “must be evaluated not only in light of a particular system of religious beliefs but also in terms of his literary tradition because the words of a poet have meaning only to the extent that they responded to a situation or interpret life in a way that involves both the poet and his audience, so that they can grasp what he seeks to communicate.”

Certainly, Tarjumān al-Ashwāq fulfils Huberin’s requirement in showing – as with almost all of the collection’s poems – the seemingly autobiographical experience of the individual poet, including his psychological and emotional state. But the Tarjumān does much more, as this project demonstrates in also incorporating within the inherited cultural and poetic context of

the pre-Islamic ode, “a comprehensive vision of reality, a collective experience” reflective of theoretical Sufism. Schimmel posits that one of the aspects of the Shaykh’s poetry that separates it from the poetry of other Sufi poets – such as Rūmī -- is that it had at its core a theosophical purpose, as opposed to the poetry of these other poets, many of whom wrote their lyrics inspired not out of a didactic purpose but from mystical or emotional inspiration. Such a combination of skilfully and aesthetically satisfyingly demonstrating a human girl’s yearning for her lover with God the Beloved’s yearning for the human being is what elevates the Interpreter of Desires to be an accomplished artistic undertaking.

IV.C.4 Imagining Sexual Union in the Paradisal Setting

Sa‘diya Shaikh says that Ibn al-ʿArabī views sexual union as based on “a deep existential love and as having the potential to be the greatest self-disclosure of God.” She says further that Sufi gnosis evidenced in the writings of the Shaykh al-Akbar support the idea that sex provides the Sufi with the opportunity for one of the most comprehensive experiences of servanthood and receptivity. Since servanthood represents the highest human state in relation to God, Shaikh maintains that sexual union provides the human being with the possibility of experiencing “a penultimate state of receptivity” such that the pleasure experienced during sexual intercourse imitates the pleasure of union with God.

In the Bezels of Wisdom, Ibn al-ʿArabī emphasized the importance of woman and this “conjugal union” (which corresponds to “the consummation of the Primordial Singularity”) in terms of her role as the receptive aspect of Nature, the poetry does, indeed, evidence aspects of the girl’s role in the doctrinal view of the God-man-woman triplicity as “repository of passivity,” as she represents the critical role played by the Cosmos in God’s creation as being receptive to the Breath of the All-Merciful. The collection is, first of all, replete with allusions to fecundity – which directly speaks to Nature and a passive repository for God’s creativity -- especially in the inclusion of

893 Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 95.
894 Shaikh, Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn ʿArabi, Gender, and Sexuality, 188.
895 Shaikh, 189.
many references to fertile pastures/meadows and valleys with which the girl is associated.

Chittick shares Ibn al-ʿArabī’s view that those who strive for spiritual perfection in this present life by attempting to manifest their latent divine attributes will not, of course, achieve it, but will have to wait until they are in Paradise to achieve the vision of God’s self-disclosure. In the setting of the Garden, this divine self-disclosure will be constant and never-ending unveilings of Himself. Chittick concludes by saying that Paradise lasts for eternity because the Beloved never repeats His endless self-display. Nasr supports this conclusion in saying that Sufis have drawn from the symbolism of the garden as Paradise and so speak of the Garden as being not only the various levels of paradisal realities but also the Divine Reality beyond which the Garden or Paradise is usually understood.

In relation to the Tarjumān and the union in the paradisal setting, Ibn al-ʿArabī establishes a contrast between the green, fecund meadowland in which the girl camps and the dry, sterile desert through which the lover wanders in pursuit of her. Indeed, the meadowland from which the girl’s party decamps turns into the desert with its ruined abodes once she has departed, as explained by the ending of Poem 19:

They did not dismount but its meadow (rawḍuhu) contained/
beautiful [things like] peacocks. (7)
They did not depart habitation but its earth contained /
tombs of their [passionate] lovers. (8) (P19:7,8)

The peacocks (ṭawāwisā), as already discussed, represent Jesus’s restorative powers, but also love, generally, in all its splendour. But what was once a paradisal meadow (rawḍuhu) has become a graveyard, the tombs (nawāwisā) of which the poet speaks is his own. Upon his arrival at the abandoned site, the lover emotionally and spiritually dies again upon finding only traces of his beloved – the detritus of the campsite and a trail leading away from him.

The poet explores the theme of fertility in this excerpt from Poem 21:

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899 Schimmel, As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam, 114.
O paradisal garden (rawḍata) of valley, be agreeable to a mistress of the sanctuary /

… O paradisal garden of the valley! (1)
She was shaded (ẓallīl) from your shades upon her for a little while/
until that she is settled down in the meeting place. (2)
Her huts (that is, tents) are erected in the centre from you /
so that you will desire dew (țallīn) to feed
for the new growths. (3)
As long as you desire a down-pour (wablin) and as long
as you desire moisture/ (4a)
of the clouds across [the] bān trees at evening and early in [the] morning
As long as you desire lasting (or, cool) shade (that is, Paradise) in [the] garden, (janān) /
appetising to the one gathering,
he touches slightly the swaying [branch]. (5) (Poem 21:1-5)
The girl’s travel-party moves in a succession from one fertile meadowland, pasture, or valley to another. The above garden – the word rawḍata implying not just a garden (janān) but a meadow with water -- is rich in fertility allusions with the Beloved being shaded (ẓallīl) and dew (țallīn) from the night and plenteous rain (wablin) -- literally a down-pour -- feeding new tender plant shoots (li mabbādi) in a garden (janān).900
Bruijn notes that, for the Sufi poet, a garden is an almost inexhaustible source of symbolic references to perfect beauty and, thereby, to the beauty of the Beloved. The metaphors are most easily made in Spring, “when the rebirth of nature provides the strongest impulses to his imagination.”901

Bruijn draws a contrast between the earthly garden and the paradisal garden, though the contrast adds to the poetic tension and useful imagery. He says that, unlike Paradise, “the beauty of the poetic garden of spring is ephemeral; it has as a counterpart the decay of the autumnal garden, in which the flowers and blossoming trees have lost their verdure, and the songs of the nightingale have made way for the screeches of the crow. This contrast equally provides an opportunity for symbolism. The excitement created by the coming of spring alternates with the disillusionment brought about by

900 See rawḍata at Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 1193.
901 Bruijn, Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Poems, 63.
the death of nature or, expressed in the terms of love itself, the joyful experience of 'union' is followed inevitably by the pain of separation.902 This observation is in line with the Sufis’ belief that all contrasts fall together in God, the perfect coincidentia oppositorum, or that both guidance and error are created by God.903

With its references to pollination and virginity, a later poem relates the plenty of Nature even more directly to the girl:

Having dark lips, red-lipped, her “place which is kissed” (that is, her mouth), prepared with honey (ma’sūlun) / giving witness to the bee (al-nali) that beat (that is, produced) the white-honey (2)
The fragrance (rayā) of the “place where anklets are put” over darkness of moon /
in her cheek an evening glow; she is a branch (ghuṣnun) on hills (kushubi) (3)
Beautiful [and] adorned (ḥasnā, ḥālyatun), she is not adorned (as a bride)…. (4a)
The east wind does not pass over meadows (rawḍī) /
[that] encompass bashful souls of swelling breast (kāʾibātin) (7)
But they bent [the branches] and disclosed, they blow them [gently] /
because the slender branch [scent] are carried from the blossoms (al-azhārī). (8)

(P46:2,3,4a,7,8)

Carl Ernst notes that the description of Paradise in the Qurʾan became the focus of devotion and meditation for many Sufis. The imagery, of course, worked its way into mystical poetry in featuring the gardens, meadows, plants, and maidens who serve the souls of the blessed.904 This is seen in the case of the above poem, in which the Beloved is naturally receptive, that “passive repository” of which Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote in Bezels, but she is even more beautiful and adorned (ḥasnā, ḥālyatun) in the paradisal setting of meadows (rawḍī) as an unwed virgin, red lips made sweeter, prepared with honey

902 Bruijn, 64–65.
904 Ernst, Sufism: An Essential Introduction to the Philosophy and Practice of the Mystical Tradition of Islam, 43.
(ma'sīlun) by the bee (al-nalī), with its implications of pollen and fertility. The image of fertility is enhanced by the fragrance (rayā) of the blossoms (al-azhārī) wafting across the lush meadows (rawdī), symbolic of the creative Breath of the All-Merciful. The swelling breast (kā'ibātin) further indicate her status of becoming a fertile, receptive female. The fact that she is receptive in the garden of the meadowland reinforces the poet’s commitment to showing the relationship between the lover and the girl as analogous to the relationship between God -- in which “He revealed the forms of the Cosmos by directing toward it the divine Will and Command” -- and woman, representing Nature, the object of the God’s creative force. Even the allusion to the creative Breath of the All-Merciful is alluded to in such poetry lines as

Of considerable note is the reference to the poet’s words above, “she is a branch (ghusnun) on hills (kushubi). Ibn al-ʿArabī himself used the term “branch” in referring to Eve as since emerged from Adam’s form.905 McCauley notes that Ibn al-ʿArabī makes reference in the Futūḥāt to a ḥadīth the speaks of the “hill of musk” as being Paradise, saying that the “hill of musk is the highest of gardens, where the blessed can see God” (ruʿyat al-ḥaqq)906 In this paradisal setting, the poet-lover writes that the branches “bent (amālt) and disclosed (nammat), allusions, recalling another ḥadīth already discussed which says, “a believer is that of a fresh tender plant; from whatever direction the wind comes, it bends it, but when the wind becomes quiet, it becomes straight again. Similarly, a believer is afflicted with calamities (but he remains patient till Allah removes his difficulties).”907 As discussed earlier, the bending trees are also an allusion to latent predisposition of God’s loci of manifestation of His Will, a reading supported even more emphatically by the Sufi-poet’s inclusion of the branch disclosing (nammat).

Appropos to the Muḥammad bezel of Ḥusūṣ al-Ḥikam’s, a related poem says that, “the wind (al-rīh) plays in the branches so there is a doubling (tanthaṭā) / and so it was from [the doubling] a promise [to one another] (P56:3),” words that analogise the wind (al-rīḥ) with the Divine Breath which creates Nature in many forms, including the

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906 McCauley, Ibn ʿArabī’s Mystical Poetics, 123; McCauley cites as his source for ḥadīth at Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 2592.

907 Bukhari, The English Translation of Sahih Al Bukhari with the Arabic Text, Hadith 5644; Book 75, Hadith 4; Vol. 7, Book 70, Hadith 547.
forms of tree branches which bend; the allusion to sexual union in the twinning (tanthanā) branches is unambiguous. Finally, near the end of Interpreter of Desires, the Paradise to which the poet refers is even in such a locus of fertility that the lover voices one of his last, fondest hopes to someday be reunited with his beloved: “Say to a young girl of ‘a division of a tribe’, ‘our rendezvous (mawʿidunā) is the well-guarded place early morning in the day of Sabbath near [the] hills (rubā) of Najd’” (P57:2). Here, again, is a reference to the “hill of musk” which equates to Paradise, with a suggested rendezvous (mawʿidunā) for (possible) sexual union. As Ibn al-ʿArabī says in Bezels, though, to be a true gnostic, the man must understand even in sexual union the true nature of his desire for the girl -- which is to see God in himself by seeing that part of himself that is woman -- otherwise she is a “mere form” and the attraction merely animal lust.908 Ibn al-ʿArabī asserts that the joy of sexual union is itself beautiful and lovable, proved by the fact that sexual union in Paradise is strictly for pleasure, not for children.909

IV.D Bezels of Wisdom: Perfume and Malodorous Women – Love and Aversion

IV.D.1 Perfume and the Creative Breath of the All-Merciful

Ibn al-ʿArabī begins the second part of his exposition in Bezels on Muhammad’s ḥadīth on women, perfume, and prayer by reminding his readers that the Arabic word for perfume (tīb) is actually masculine -- as opposed to the other two terms of the ḥadīth which are feminine – and remarking that Muhammad gives “precedence to the feminine over the masculine, intending to convey thereby a special concern with and experience of women.”910 This precedence is, of course, related to His Mercy taking precedence over His Wrath. Ibn al-ʿArabī explains that the Arabs usually give precedence to the male noun in grammatical constructions, though Muhammad chooses not to do this in his saying. Ibn al-ʿArabī further explains that, by using this construction, Muhammad was “giving special attention to the significance of the love enjoined on him, seeing that he himself did not choose that love” in recognition that

God was the source of all that Muḥammad knew. The specific placement of “perfume” between “women” and “prayer” is a metaphor for the Cosmos as Adam (as masculine) “is placed between the Essence, which is the source of all existence, and Eve, whose existence stems from him.” The Shaykh also says that Muḥammad’s placing perfume after “women” is because “of the aromas of generation in women, the most delightful of perfumes being [experienced] within the embrace of the beloved.”

There is no more pleasing or alluring perfume than the scent of a woman who is physically receptive to sexual union.

Though Ibn al-ʿArabī’s discussion of perfume is substantially shorter than that of the preceding topic of women in the Muḥammad chapter, as well as shorter than the subsequent topic of prayer, the chapter does include several important theoretical aspects of the subject of perfume. The first is Ibn al-ʿArabī’s explicitly linking perfume with the creative Breath of the All-Merciful. As Ibn al-ʿArabī explains,

When Muḥammad was created a pure servant, he had no ambition for leadership, but continued prostrating and standing [before his Lord in ritual prayer], a passive creation, until God effected [His purpose] in him, when he conferred on him an active role in the realm of Breaths, which are the excellent perfumes [of existence]. Thus, he made perfume beloved to him, placing it after women.

Thus Ibn al-ʿArabī makes the analogy between perfume the Breath of the All-Merciful, linking Muhammad’s “active role” in God’s creation of the Cosmos. The sweet Breath of God is likened to perfume. This is a highly important connection due to the critical importance of the concept of the All-Merciful Breath of God to Sufism and Islam, generally, as discussed in Chapter 1. Through the Divine Breath God brings all things into existence. Ibn al-ʿArabī, in an earlier section of the Muḥammad Bezels chapter, cites the Qurānic verse (Sūra 15:29) whereby God created humans by breathing into them; the Shaykh says directly that “[i]n reality, Nature is the Breath of the

911 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 277.
912 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 277.
913 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 277–78.
914 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 278.
Merciful.” In the context of the women-perfume-prayer ḥadīth, the most relevant aspects of the term relate to Nature and divine creativity. As Murata says, “Nature in the widest sense refers to the Breath of the All-Merciful, within which are imprinted the words or creatures,” and it is with women in which he identifies the qualities of Nature. Thus the term “perfume” is the poetical link between God on one side (as the Divine Breath) and women on the other (as Nature).

The second doctrinal point Ibn al-ʿArabī makes regarding perfume in relation to the Breath is a restatement from other Bezels chapter already considered that the divine Mercy encompasses and affects all things in the Cosmos:

[Muḥammad] pays respect to the ranks of God in His saying, “Lofty of rank, the Possessor of the Throne” [Sūra 15:15], seeing that He is established on it by His name the Merciful, so that everything encompassed by the Throne is affected by the divine Mercy, as He says, “My Mercy encompasses all things” [Sūra 7:156]. It is the Throne that encompasses all things, while the Merciful is its occupant, by Whose reality Mercy permeates the Cosmos....

The key point here is that Muḥammad recognizes in the divine Breath that God’s mercy is everywhere, encompassing and affecting everything in the Cosmos. This is the Divine Breath which the Shaykh has already analogized to perfume, which is the reason why perfume became beloved to the Prophet. When Muḥammad senses perfume, he at once recalls the role of the Breath of the All-Merciful in creation. When he senses perfume from women, Muḥammad recalls the role of the Divine Breath and, thus, he sees the Divine in woman in this way as well as through his yearning for her because she is a part of him.

IV.D.2 Discernment of Good and Bad in the Cosmos

Ibn al-ʿArabī then introduces the third aspect of perfume, which relates to the discernment of the “good” and “bad” in God’s Cosmos:

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918 Ibn al-ʿArabī, The Bezels of Wisdom, 278.
God Himself has put perfume in the context of conjugal union with reference to the innocence of 'Ā i-shah when He says, “Evil [malodorous] women are for evil men and evil men are for evil women, just as good [sweet-smelling] women are for good men and good men for good women, who are innocent of what they allege” [Sūra 24:26]. Thus He speaks of them as sweet smelling, since speaking implies breath, which is of the essence of aroma, coming forth [from the mouth] sweetly or offensively, according to its expression.\(^9\)

Although everything – in a comprehensive sense -- coming from God is “all sweet smelling and good,” created things may also be viewed as good or bad. The Shaykh cites in this connection another ḥadīth in which Muḥammad said of garlic, “It is a bush whose odour I detest.”\(^9\)\(^2\) Ibn al-ʿArabī explains that “the angels are offended by the bad odours arising from the putrefaction associated with this elemental makeup [of man], since he is made of ‘clay and putrid slime’ [Sūra 15:26], that is to say of varying odors, so that the angels find him repugnant by his nature.”\(^9\)\(^2\)\(^1\) Ibn al-ʿ Arabī also cites the example of the dung beetle which, contrary to human beings, is repulsed by the scent of the rose. He says that this is analogous to someone’s being repulsed by the truth and rejoicing in falsehood.\(^9\)\(^2\)\(^2\) The central point Ibn al-ʿArabī is making regarding these perfumed and malodorous smell analogies is that anyone who cannot discern good from bad lacks gnostic perception. Muḥammad was, of course, one who possessed this discernment, understanding that in the Cosmos, “the Mercy of God inheres both good and the bad,” meaning that there are created entities to which one feels love or aversion, even though, in another sense, the good in everything is everything that exists.\(^9\)\(^2\)\(^3\)

\(^9\) Ibn al-ʿArabī, 278.

\(^9\)\(^2\) Muslim (b. al-Hajjaj), Sahīḥ, 18 Vols. in 6 (Cairo, 1981), 5:76; Ibn al-ʿArabī, The Bezels of Wisdom, 278, fn 532.

\(^9\)\(^2\)\(^1\) Ibn al-ʿArabī, The Bezels of Wisdom, 278–79.

\(^9\)\(^2\)\(^2\) Ibn al-ʿArabī, 279.

\(^9\)\(^2\)\(^3\) Ibn al-ʿArabī, 279.
IV.E Interpreter of Desires: The Perfume of Intoxication and Discernment

The human senses play a large role in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s theosophy of the self-disclosure of God. Chittick explains that the Shaykh wants to convey his vision to the reader in a language that the reader will be able to understand, so he cannot use the rational and abstract language of doctrinal Sufism since that is unable to express the divine self-disclosures. Instead, the perception of God’s self-disclosures takes place within the imaginal realm through the five senses. Chittick clarifies this point by saying that “what has been perceived can only be expressed by language that described concrete, sensory objects. Abstract explanations of the imagery would take the reader further away from the reality of the self-disclosure, no close to it.924 Thus, the poet’s verses include concrete, worldly examples to which the reader can easily relate through appeal to the senses.

One sense strongly associated with love is the sense of smell. The subject of perfume has already been well discussed in Chapter 1 in connection with the subject of the creative Breath of the All-Merciful and the subject of the Self-disclosure of God to the Sufi-lover. It is, therefore, unnecessary to restate all of the poems from those sections, though some of the poetry does warrant further consideration below as reading them in light of the women, perfume, and prayer hadīth does reveal new understandings of those same verses. The three central topics discussed below are the girl’s perfume, the perfume as Breath of the All-Merciful, and the link between gnostic Discernment and the Beloved’s perfume.

IV.E.1 Interpreter: “Thou art a pyx” -- The Perfumed Beloved925

Ibn al-ʿArabī acknowledges the powerful effect that the “scent of a woman” can have on a man. It is to the close embrace of the natural perfumes of a woman to which the man is compelled, with the desired result -- at least from the man’s perspective -- being conjugal union. The Shaykh ties in the previously discussed theme of women and Nature and paradisal meadow to perfume, in not only having the girl sweet smelling, but being an actual metaphor for perfume, in her being both a vessel for sweet smells and the locus of God’s manifestation in Nature which produces its own floral scents:

“You are a small-box (huqatun) entrusted with (that is, containing) a diffusion (nashran) of perfume (ambergris) (ʿabīran); you are a meadow (rawṣatun) [which] made grow spring vegetation and flowers (wazahrā)” (Poem 40:5). The lover is smitten not only by memory of the physical form of the girl, but by her intoxicating smell, equated to the diffusion (nashran) of flowers (wazahrā) of the meadow (rawṣatun) – symbolic of the creative Breath of the All-Merciful -- and is driven to reunion with her by the scent of the girl wafting across the desert, as in his saying (as already mentioned in connection with God as guiding His servants, “I had no sign (or, guide) for the purpose of being after them except a breath (nafasin) of their love (hawāhum) [that is] fragrant (ʿatīr)” (Poem 41:5). Schimmel explains that every flower in the garden becomes “a tongue to praise God; every leaf and petal is a book in which God’s wisdom can be read, if man will only look.” She quotes the Qur’ān message that “God has put signs on the horizon and in man’s soul” (Sūra 41:53), and says that man has only to become aware of them.926

As the poetry collection approaches conclusion, the aroma of the perfume suddenly intensifies as Ibn al-ʿArabī makes more frequent references to sweet smells. The poet refers to the Beloved as “a virgin (that is, bride) [who was] unveiled (juliyat) in the very much perfumed (aʿṭari) hall/abode” (P56:2b). This is in the context of the lover’s imagined Paradise at the end of his long journey through the desert, finally arriving at the garden to find a girl unveiled (juliyat) in a perfumed (aʿṭari) hall, perhaps a reference to a wedding chamber, and ready for the conjugal union of which Ibn al-ʿArabī spoke in Bezels. The lover hopes that God will bestow on him the girl in a fertile garden with the sweet-smelling roses about which the Shaykh wrote in Bezels: Perhaps he who urges on a kind [object] of my desire will guide them to [my] “seeing with one’s eyes / Their garden will guide (that is, bestow) to me the freshly gathered rose (al-wardi)” (P57:8). It seems that the closer the lover approaches the girl, the more in a frenzy he becomes. In the penultimate poem of the collection, the lover stands in the desert with his head in the air, still trying to discern her whereabouts, vowing that he will continue “inhaling (astanshiqi) the fragrance (or, wind) (al-rīḥa) from part of their land / in yearning (al-rashawqa),” telling himself that “the (sweet) spirits (al-arwāḥu) are informing you where they are” (P60:2). As if inebriated by her smell, he stands perplexed, confused by the scents wafting on the winds from her encampment

926 Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 308.
about which he only thinks he knows the location, drawn not only to the memory of her beauty but to her musky scent: “Certainly the beauty (al-jamālu) is by her is overtaken / and the musk diffused (fāḥa) and the saffron diffused” (P61:9). The exhilaration of the Sufi of God in life here is captured in the Arab proverb, “Everything -- fragrance, growing, singing -- is nothing but the most high name Allāh.”

IV.E.2 Interpreter: The Girl’s Breath as Breath of the All-Merciful

On a very superficial level, the above references to perfume speak to the sensuality in the poems without any direct reference to the Divine in women or in the relationship. That level addresses the Bezels doctrine already discussed concerning the man yearning for the girl as being analogous to God’s yearning for man as being a part of Himself. Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings in the Muhammad Bezels chapter make it clear that the perfume and related verses may also be interpreted in a much deeper, theological, way. It has already been shown in Chapter 1 that, in Bezels, Ibn al-ʿArabī is tying the perfume-Breath concept back to women and Nature, and anytime the author refers to perfume it is – in addition to all the obvious sensual aspects of the word – an allusion to the Breath of God, the creative process, and the resulting role and place of Nature. The role of perfume may be interpreted as a variant on the Qurānic verse (Sūra 2:115), restated as, “Wheresoever you turn, there is the sweet-smelling aroma of God.”

So what the Sufi-lover may also witness is in girl’s perfumed form is the Divine in woman by virtue of her being representative of Nature in all its receptive qualities as the locus of manifestation for God’s creative mercy.

The lover does, in fact, actually allude to the connection between the Divine Breath and perfume in addressing “a white-faced, young delicate one (ghaydā) having sweetness of breath (bahnānatin) / [diffusing] sweet odours (bashrān) like burst musk (kamiskin fatīqī)” (P23:12). Such a link cannot be coincidental on the part of the author but must be in reference to the poet’s cosmological doctrines on the Breath. Ibn al-ʿArabī also links perfume and Nature -- by means of the wind, a further representation of the Breath -- in writing,

O sahr [tree] of the valley and O bān [tree] of the lush place (al-ghaḍā)
(that is, thicket) /

927 Schimmel, ‘Creation and Judgement in the Koran and in Mystico-Poetical Interpretation’, 174.
928 Schimmel, 174.
guide to us by your spreading (that is, diffusion) (nashrikum) [of your perfume] by the morning [wind]. (14)

A thing perfumed by musk (mumassakan) emanates (yafūḥu) its fragrance (rayyāḥu) to us / from a [bunch of] flowers (zahri) of your valley grounds or a [bunch of] flowers from your hills. (15) (P25:14,15)

As discussed earlier, the inclusion of “hills” is a reference to Paradise, the context of this poem. The poet’s use the term al-ghadā -- here, and throughout the Tarjumān -- means “lush place,” has strong overtones of fresh, beautiful, youthful, tender, and even shade that the sun has not reached, such as a plant. All of these terms, of course, have deep meaning when applied to the other elements present in the poems, as here, to the trees, the valley grounds, the plants, and to the youthful girl herself.

The fecundity and receptivity through the moistness of the imagery Ibn al-ʿArabī presents strongly brings to mind Nature and creation. In relation to the Breath of the All-Merciful and the final chapter of Bezels with its reference to the ḥadīth that includes perfume, the Muḥammad bezel also speaks to the act of creation and the creative Breath of the All-Merciful. Zargar notes that in the Futūḥāt Ibn al-ʿArabī explains that women allow men to actualise an inherent ambition, the act of creation. Enlightened men see in women a place of creation and a place to accommodate their physical form. The male Sufi has for women a creative love. The Shaykh posits that this potential to create leads the gnostic also to love perfume, an idea supported by his quoting an Arab proverb in saying in the Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, the “loveliest perfumes is the embrace of the beloved.” The most compelling perfume is the natural scent of a woman, which Ibn al-ʿArabī associates with fertility and reproduction, which he calls the “odours of creation (rawaʾīh al-takwin).”

There is yet another connection between God and the perfumed trees with which the girl is associated. In the time of the poems’ writing, Muslim readers would

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929 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 2264.
931 Ibn al-ʿArabī, The Bezels of Wisdom, 220.
have been aware that the reference to the arāk tree -- also known as the sīwak or miswak tree -- was also a reference to the many ḥadīths in which Muḥammad commented upon the plant. This tree was mentioned in the Tarjumān, specifically, as the Sufi-poet laments, “O dove of the arāks (trees) [have] a little [bit of pity on me]” (Poem 16:7a).

Many of the references are to using the twigs of the desert tree to clean the teeth and make the breath sweet-smelling. One ḥadīth recounts that

I saw the Prophet cleaning his teeth with sīwak while he was fasting so many times as I can't count,” and the Prophet said, “But for my fear that it would be hard for my followers, I would have ordered them to clean their teeth with sīwak on every performance of ablution.” ... 'Ā’i-shah [Muḥammad’s wife] said, “The Prophet said, ‘It (i.e., sīwak) is a purification for the mouth and it is a way of seeking Allah's pleasures.’”

The above shows that the tree’s role in purification of the breath was obviously significant to Muḥammad, especially in connection with ritual prayer. There is even a ḥadīth that links the tree to anointing oneself with perfume: “Allah's Apostle said, ‘The taking of a bath on Friday is compulsory for every male Muslim who has attained the age of puberty and (also) the cleaning of his teeth with sīwak [arāk], and the using of perfume if it is available.’” In fact, the sīwak/arāk tree was so important to Muḥammad that chewing it was one of the last things he did in his earthly life, as ‘Ā’i-shah relates: “The Prophet died in my house on the day of my turn while he was leaning on my chest closer to my neck, and Allah made my saliva mix with his saliva,” and when a disciple came with sīwak. ‘Ā’i-shah relates that ‘the Prophet was too weak to use it so I took it, chewed it and then (gave it to him and he) cleaned his teeth with it.’ Another ḥadīth relates that “After finishing the brushing of his teeth, he lifted his hand or his finger and said thrice, ‘O Allah! Let me be with the highest companions,’ and then died. ‘Ā’i-shah used to say, ‘He died while his head was resting between my chest and chin.’” All of these ḥadīths would have been known to Ibn al-ʿArabī and his

934 Bukhari, 13:5.
935 Bukhari, 53:332.
inclusion of references to the arāk/sīwak tree in the poems would have been intentional allusions to the “breath” and -- by association to sweetness of breath and perfume -- to the creative Breath of the All-Merciful about which he writes in Bezels.

IV.E.3 Interpreter: The Link Between Gnostic Discernment and the Beloved’s Perfume

The third aspect of perfume in Bezels, which relates to the discernment of the “good” and “bad” in God’s Cosmos, is based on Muḥammad’s speaking of woman’s breath as having either a sweet or offensive smell, the two aromas corresponding, respectively, to someone being either attracted to the truth or rejoicing in falsehood. The central point Ibn al-ʿArabī is making regarding these perfumed and malodorous analogies is that anyone who cannot discern good from bad lacks perception. It is the true gnostic – the person who can see the alternative or deeper meanings of things – who can properly discern good from bad, truth from falsehood. In Ibn al-ʿArabī’s system, a lover is attracted to his beloved because of the truth in her, analogized as her sweet-smelling breath.

Zargar includes in his discussion of Sufi aesthetics a discussion of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s general view of smell and taste, as the poet discusses in the Muḥammad bezel in Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam. Although created things reflect the attribute of God and are inherently beautiful, from the human perspective, not everything is beautiful.937 The terms the Shaykh uses for describing pleasant and unpleasant odors and foods are al-tayyib (“goodly,” a translation Zargar favours over merely “good”) and al-khabīth (foul). From the Shaykh’s perspective, the breath of men and women bears a smell that reflects their moral goodness or vileness; this is usually applied to their speech.938 As an aside, Zargar notes also that angels dislike the smell of human beings. The spirit of the human lacks the imperfections of materiality, and is not subject to change or decay, in contrast to the human body which was, according to the Qur’ān (Sūra 15:26, 28:33), made from putrid-smelling mud.939

The poems of Interpreter of Desires do, in fact, evidence references to this aspect of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s theories on discernment of good from bad. The most relevant

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938 Zargar, 49.
939 Zargar, 51.
poems are the ones speaking of perfume in connection with “guidance,” such as when
the Sufi-lover says, “When you ask for a sign (tastadillu) you are, therefore, lost after
(that is, in pursuit of) them / except by their fragrant breeze (bi-rīḥihimu), the most
pleasant mark (or sign/clue)” (P39:2). It is to the truth that the Sufi-lover is drawn to his
Beloved according to Sufi theoretical gnosis. News or guidance about her whereabouts
is analogous to discernment of truth. Similarly, the lover says that in his passion he
journeys across the desert,

trying to get ahead of them in darkness of the gloom (that is, night) /
calling out to them, thereupon following the remains. (4)
I had no sign (dalīlun) (or, guide) for the purpose of being after them /
except a breath of their love [that is] fragrant (sawā nafāsin min hawāhum 'āṭir).” (5) (P41:4,5)
The poetry’s text could not be any less ambiguous in regard to a direct connection
between the sign or guide he needs (dalīl), the gnostic discernment which the lover
possesses. There would be no sign at all from God, “except a breath of their love [that
is] fragrant” (sawā nafāsin min hawāhum 'āṭir). She is a “good woman” for this “good
man.” In the same poem, the poet also mentions that “the rose of the meadow is like the
rosy blush of shame,” a possible allusion to the fact that a “good woman” would
possess shame, unlike a malodorous, evil, woman. Such a good woman would be like
Muhammad’s young wife, Šāh, an “innocent.”
Finally, the discernment issue may be linked to the very important Sufi concept
of knowledge. For example, in writing, “Perhaps he who urges on a kind [object] of my
desire (al-amānī) will guide them to [my] “seeing with one’s eyes” (ʿayānan) / their
garden (rawḏuhā) will guide (yuḥdī) (that is, bestow) to me freshly gathered of the rose
(al-wardī)” (P57:8), the Shaykh refers to the paradisal garden (rawḏuhā) that the Sufi-
lover seeks and which will guide (yuḥdī) the lover, to his primary goal in pursuing
God, his Beloved. The “seeing with one’s eyes” (ʿayānan) may be interpreted as the
gnostic’s objective, knowledge of God. This objective, however, is that of the true
gnostic and not necessarily that of the lover who, as already discussed, believes
incorrectly that conjugal union in a paradisal setting is the goal. The rose (al-wardī)
also was connected with the Prophet or with God in that the scent of the rose was said
to have been created from the perspiration of the Prophet during his ascension.\textsuperscript{940} There is a further prophetic tradition according to which Muhammad declared the red rose to be the manifestation of God’s glory.\textsuperscript{941}

Chittick says that Ibn al-’Arabī believed that ultimate truth can only be obtained through divine guidance.\textsuperscript{942} Guidance is the role of divine revelation, and the lover senses that guidance from the girl’s perfumed mouth is not always forthcoming, just as truth may not always be discernible even for the person seeking perfect gnosis.\textsuperscript{943} This situation is evident when the poet writes about “… [smiling] mouths (mabāsimin), like musk-bags of musk (miskin) that were not permitted for smelling (li-nāshiqi)” (P51:2b). This guidance -- the discernment of good and evil -- that the lover seeks about the girl is refused. There is no good or evil -- no perfume that provides guidance/discernment from the girl’s mouth (mabāsimin) -- only the goodness of God’s creation, in this larger sense. In the end of the poetry collection, as in the Cosmos, it does not matter where the girl is, because she still exists for the lover as his beloved, regardless of her location, just as God exists on a level at which no discernment is necessary or possible because all of His creation is good and God is ultimately transcendent, his location unknowable. A true gnostic would understand that the lover of the poems is, as discussed, left in a state of perplexity, not only not knowing where the girl is but not even aware of his being lost, which is God’s objective for a true gnostic. As Zargar notes, “Perplexity in the language of Ibn al-’Arabī is directly related to love, for while reason ties down its possessor, love has the opposite effect: ‘among the attributes of love (al-hubb) is waywardness (al-dalal) and perplexity (al-hayrah), although perplexity is incompatible with reason.”\textsuperscript{944}

\textsuperscript{940} Schimmel, \textit{As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam}, 76.
\textsuperscript{941} Schimmel, \textit{Mystical Dimensions of Islam}, 299.
\textsuperscript{942} Chittick, \textit{The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-’Arabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination}, xvi.
\textsuperscript{943} Chittick, 297.
IV.F Bezels of Wisdom: Remembrance of God and Reciprocal Prayer

IV.F.1 Bezels: Remembrance and Forgetfulness

The theoretical discourse on perfume and its poetical explication leads into the final part of Ibn al-ʿArabī Muhammadan Bezels chapter on the women, perfume, and prayer hadith. The Shaykh focuses primarily in this section on the remembrance (dhikr) of God. He begins by writing that contemplation is a state of prayer, “being an intimate discourse between God and His servant,” and cites the Qurānic basis for the concept: “Remember Me, and I will remember you” (Sūra 11:152). For such an important Sufi concept, it is interesting that Ibn al-ʿArabī only writes about remembrance in two of the Bezels chapters: here in the Muḥammad chapter, and in “The Wisdom of Breath in the Word of Jonah”946; it can only be assumed that this verse and the concept of remembrance were so familiar to the Shaykh’s readers that he felt no need to explain them at length in his summa. Remembrance may be defined as “everything that reminds people of God and every effort that they exert in order to bring God to mind,” and relates in one sense to the ḥadīth in which Muḥammad said, “This world is accursed -- accursed is everything within it, save the remembrance of God.”947 This saying helps to explain the significance of the following Qurānic verses -- only two of many -- which speak to remembrance: “He declares His signs for the people so that perhaps they may remember” (Sūra 2:221), and “This is the path of your Lord, straight -- We have differentiated the signs for a people who remember” (Sūra 6:126). Thus, the appropriate response to God’s signs and reminders is remembrance.948 As Schimmel remarks, “The dhikr goes back to the primordial covenant, and the initiative goes back to God’s activity; man responds with his dhikr to the eternal words that made him truly man,” answering with “words of adoration and glorification, until in permanent recollection he may reach the stage in which the subject is lost in the object, in which recollection, recollecting subject, and recollected object become again one.”949 Another of the assumptions that Ibn al-ʿArabī would have made about his reader’s

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945 Ibn al-ʿArabī, The Bezels of Wisdom, 279.
946 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 206–11.
947 This definition of dhikr and the hadith are cited in Murata and Chittick, The Vision of Islam: The Foundations of Muslim Faith and Practice, 90. The ḥadīth is not part of the traditional ḥadith canon, but sometimes cited as being recorded by al-Tirmidhi and ibn Majah.
948 Murata and Chittick, 90–91.
949 Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 172.e
understanding of Islam and doctrinal Sufism and the role of Muḥammad is knowing that one of the titles given to the Prophet was “the Remembrance of God” (dhikrallah). In this regard, Muḥammad is a model for the rest of human beings to emulate as one who remembers God, recalling to mind the Qurʾanic verse, “You have a beautiful example in God’s messenger [Muḥammad], for whosoever hopes for God and the Last day, and remembers God often” (Sūra 33:21).  

Ibn al-ʿArabī’s introduction to the concept of remembrance earlier in the Bezels Jonah is in relation to a discussion on the value of human life, noting that “while a man still has life, he has the opportunity to achieve that perfection for which he was created.” The Shaykh then says that “only he who remembers God properly appreciates the true worth of this human creation, for it is God Who is the companion of one who remembers Him, and the companion is perceived by the one who remember.”

Though not specifically mentioned in this Muhammadan chapter in Bezels, the related concept of forgetfulness (nisyān) is a term that the Shaykh would also assume his readers would know. The idea is contained in the Qurʾanic verse, “They forgot God, so He forgot them” (Sūra 9:67). The word is, however, discussed in the Bezels chapter on Job. Ibn al-ʿArabī relates the term to larger cosmological themes in stating that

If the rememberer does not perceive God, Who is his companion, then he is not a true rememberer, since the remembrance of God flows through every part of the [true] servant.... Indeed, that part of the forgetful man which invokes God is undoubtedly present with God, and the one remembered is his companion. The forgetful person [as a whole], however, is not remembering, and He does not accompany one

953 Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote in *Meccan Openings* that “the rememberer is the one who has knowledge of something, then forgets it, because of the forgetfulness to which human beings are naturally disposed.... The form of their forgetfulness is that they imagine, because of the deeds, possessions, and ownership that God ascribes to them, that they have a portion in lordship....” Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Al-Futuhat Al-Makkiyya*, Reprinted Beirut (Cairo: Dar Sadir, 1911), III 378.16 in ; Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn Al-ʿArabi’s Cosmology*, 199.
who is heedless. Man is multiple and not single of essence, while God is single of Essence, but multiple with respect to the divine Names. So also is man of many parts, and the remembering of one part does not imply the remembering by any other part of him. God is with that part which is remembering Him, the rest being described as forgetful.

The Shaykh is reminding his readers that to remember God with only one part of the body -- such as the mouth from which words of praise issue forth -- is insufficient for someone to be said to be remembering God fully with his entire being, which should be the goal of His servants. Forgetfulness is either a symptom of -- or cause of -- shirk, the associating of other things with God, and is contrary to the dominant principle of Islam, tawhīd, so forgetting God is tantamount to rejection of God.

IV.F.2 Bezels: Mutuality of Prayer between God and Human Beings

In the Muḥammad Bezels chapter, Ibn al-ʿArabī cites the hadīth that expands on the idea that prayer is really an act divided equally between God and human beings.

By way of further explanation, Ibn al-ʿArabī uses the first chapter of the Qurān (Al-Fātihah, the Opening, quoted in italics in the paragraph below) that is recited in the ritual prayers to make the case for prayer being divided between God and His servant:

Thus when the servant says [in reciting Al-Fātihah], In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, God is saying, “My servant is remembering Me.” When the servant says, Praise be to God, the Lords of the worlds, God says, “My servant is praising Me.” When the servant says, The Compassionate, the Merciful, God says, “My servant is lauding me.” When the servant says, King on the Day of Judgment, God says, “My servant is glorifying Me and has yielded to Me.” Thus the whole of the first half [of Al-Fātihah] belongs to God. Then the servant says, Thee do we worship and Thee do we ask for help, and God says, “This is shared between Me and My servant; and for him is whatever he asks,” thus introducing an element of participation into this verse. When the servant says, Guide us on the right path, the path of those whom you

954 The role of the divine names is discussed in detail in Chapter 1 of this thesis.


956 Muslim 4:38.
have favoured, and not the path of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray, God says, “These [verses] are reserved to My servant who may have whatever he asks.” Thus these last verses are for the servant alone, just as the first ones belong only to God. From this one may realize the necessity of reciting [the verse], *Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds*, since whoever omits it has not performed the prayer [properly], which is shared between God and His servant.\(^\text{957}\)

The Shaykh’s calling attention to this mutuality, of course, ties in with the mutuality between God and humans already discussed in the women section (as each longs for the other). Also, Ibn al-ʿArabī, describes several specific different types of prayer -- praise, laud, glorifying – in addition to remembrance. The mentions of these types of the servant’s prayers is important as, “God hears him who praises Him.”\(^\text{958}\) The Great Shaykh further includes a reference to prayers of petition -- the first of two important Sufi concepts on the servant’s side -- acknowledging the ḥadīth about prayer being divided equally between God and human beings that also says that “My servant, who may also have whatever he for.” Ibn al-ʿArabī quotes the Qur’ānic verse “But the remembrance of God is great” (*Sūra* 29:45) to conclude that God’s remembrance of humans is greater than the remembrance of humans of God when God responds to His servant’s petition.\(^\text{959}\) Frithjof Schuon says that the whole doctrine of *dhikr*, the remembrance of God through prayer, is contained in the following Quranic verse: “Therefore remember me, and I will remember you” (*Sūra* 2:151). Schuon states that this is the doctrine of mystical reciprocity.\(^\text{960}\)

The second important doctrinal concept in connection with prayer on the servant’s side relates to the servant’s Path (as the second half of *Al-Fātiḥah* says, “Guide us on the right path, the path of those whom you have favoured, and not the path of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray”). The theoretical issues relating to the Path as found in several *Bezels* chapters have already


\(^{958}\) Austin states that these words are part of ritual prayer.

\(^{959}\) Ibn al-ʿArabī, 281.

been thoroughly discussed in relation to inherent predisposition in Chapter 2 of this present project and will not be repeated here to avoid unnecessary redundancy as the same doctrinal points similarly relate to the ones Ibn al-ʿArabī makes in Bezels in connection with prayer.

IV.F.3 Bezels: God as Companion of One Who Remembers

Finally, in Bezels, Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses another important Sufī concept in relation to prayer, God as “companion.” The writer says that prayer is a discourse and also a remembrance, so that whoever remembers God “sits with God and God sits with him,” an understanding based on the ḥadīth that states, “I am the companion of him who remembers Me.”

This is true, however, only of the servant who is in “contemplative vision” of God in prayer in a way that perceives God in gnosis. The Shaykh says that if someone can neither hear nor see God in prayer, then he is not really praying properly. He says further that if someone cannot hear God in prayer, he is not listening carefully enough. But in any case, a person who prays alone is not truly praying alone because, as Ibn al-ʿArabī reminds the reader in citing the ḥadīth “everyone who prays is an imām [leader], since the angels pray behind one who prays alone.”

Though prayer is divided equally between God and human, the Great Shaykh states that “Self-revelation of God to one praying comes from God, and not the one who is praying.” Not only did God command humans to pray, but God provided the comfort that witnessing God in contemplative prayer brings to one who perceives God in gnosis. Seeing the Beloved “brings solace to the eye of the lover,” so that “the lover’s eye might be fixed [on the Beloved] to the exclusion of all else.” Ibn al-ʿArabī explains that looking around during prayer is bad because Satan would try in this way to diminish the servant’s prayer to deny him the perception of God. The Shaykh also explains the physical positions of the body in ritual prayer in terms of the “movement by which the Cosmos is transformed from nonexistence into existence” in all three phases, including “a vertical movement in which the one praying stands erect.

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961 Muslim, Sahīh, 18 Vols. in 6, 48:2 in Ibn al-ʿArabī, The Bezels of Wisdom, 280.
964 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 282.
a horizontal movement in which the praying one bows, and a downwards movement, which is the prostration,” adding that the “movement of man is vertically, that of the animal is horizontally, that of the plants downward.”

IV.G Interpreter of Desires: The Path of the Lover-Rememberer and Poem as Prayer

IV.G.1 Interpreter: Explicit Remembrance and Forgetfulness of the Beloved

As with the topics of women and perfume, Interpreter of Desires contains many references to the theosophical notion of “prayer” as discussed in Bezels of Wisdom. Most of the allusions to prayer in Interpreter of Desires are, indeed, to the concepts of remembrance and forgetfulness of God. On a superficial, sensual, level, the references to these two concepts are the lover’s views of his beloved -- as he remembers her and remembers their time together before she left him on her journey across the desert, and as he vows not to forget her -- but on the deeper level, the concepts are the true gnostic’s view of God as the Beloved. Early in the collection, where the poet includes several explicit references to the girl that clearly establish her as a divine figure (the Beloved), Ibn al-ʿArabī addresses her transcendent qualities by writing, “She is untamed; indeed, not with her [is (forcibly) made] an intimate friend,” before remarking that “in her private place -- in a chamber -- [she has] a burial place for remembrance (dhikr)” (P2:7). Here -- as elsewhere in the poetry -- Ibn al-ʿArabī uses the same word in Arabic for remembrance (dhikr) as used in Sufi theoretical writings on the subject of the remembrance of God. Another explicit reference to remembrance is contained in one of the exuberant poems of the Sufi-poet,

No wondering, no wondering, no ‘O wonder’ / 
at an Arab, a [passionate] lover (yatahāwā) of the lascivious women; (19)
[who] perishes (yafnā) whenever a turtle-dove sang / 
by the remembrance (bi-dhikr) of his beloved (yahwāatun) 
in his joy. (20) 

(P25:19,20)

965 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 281–82. Ibn al-ʿArabī also discusses the topic of religion at the end of the prayer section in the Bezels Muḥammad chapter; this subject was discussed earlier in Chapter 2 of the present project.
In these verses, the poet is showing that by the remembrance (bi-dhikri) of his beloved (yahwāatun), the “[passionate] lover” (yatahāwā) perishes (yafnā), so that, from a theosophical perspective, the love engages in fanā’, such that his self-ego is annihilated.966

Ibn al-ʿArabī likewise explicitly establishes the role of forgetfulness (literally, “forgetting”, nisyān), about which the Qurān warns. The stage of “forgetfulness,” Murata writes, is an extremely deleterious stage since it is associated with a person being commanded by evil, and is the lowest stage of human development for one who wishes to transform the soul to be at peace with God.967 The poet uses a different term to nisyān for “forgetfulness”– or ghafāla (negligence, heedlessness, inattention), also sometimes used in theoretical gnosis – by utilising in his poem forms of the verb sahā, denoting not just mere forgetfulness, but alluding to wilful neglect or unmindfulness.968

The Shaykh, for example, writes that

Who forgot (sahā) about al-Suhā (that is, ‘the forgotten one’) is not in forgetfulness (sahā) /
  [but he] who is [in forgetfulness] about the sun
  already forgot (sahā). (2)
  of his heart, with his heart, for his heard (that is, let him give his heart to his herd), /
  so the ‘costly gift’ opens the most praise-worthy
  uvula (that is, mouth) (3) (Poem 42:2,3)

Al-Suhā -- meaning, “the Forgotten One” -- is a star, which the Shaykh is also contrasting with the sun. The sun has a special place in Akbarian cosmology969 and the Great Shaykh analogizes the sun to God in several poems, including, “[She is] a forenoon sun (shamsu) in a celestial sphere, a rising thing” (Poem 25:7a). Another reference to the beloved as God is “She rose in the eye [like] a sun (shamsan); then when / she vanished (afalat) she shone in [the] horizon of my soul (or, heart)” (P20:4).

967 Murata, The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought, 254.
968 Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 1455.
969 The Akbarian disciple Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ said that “the sun is the leader of the planets in the celestial sphere. The sun’s soul is the spirit of the whole cosmos.” In Murata, The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought, 216.
Thus, to forget a lesser star -- such as al-Suhā -- in a far-off part of the night sky is not committing any grievous sin of omission, but to forget the sun -- an analogy to God -- is the forgetfulness about which the Qurān admonishes. After reminding the poem’s reader about forgetfulness, the poet -- as discussed further below -- then recommends the speech to be most praise-worthy (bi-al-hamdi) as part of the remembrance of God.

A concept concerning dhikr which this poem highlights is that, in principle, dhikr should be constant. William Stoddart writes that immediate result is that the Sufi finds himself trapped in “manifestation” which is doomed to impermanence, inevitably leading to separation, suffering, and death. Islam and theoretical gnosis teaches that God alone is permanent. The principle of dhikr is that when the Sufi unites himself by invocation the name of God (in silence or aloud) he inwardly frees himself from manifestation and its associated suffering. Stoddart further notes that the essential condition for dhikr is spiritual poverty, or self-effacement (faqr) without which dhikr may suffer from self-delusion or pride.

IV.G.2 Interpreter: Mutuality of Prayer between the Beloved and Lover

In Ibn al-ʿArabi’s Bezels theosophy, prayer is divided equally between humans and God: from humans to God, and from God to humans. In the context of remembrance, when the poet suggests that the human “opens the most praise-worthy uvula (that is, mouth) (bi-al-hamdi)” so as to forget God (Sūra 42:3b), this speaks to the first half of Al-Fātihah (“Praise be to God, the Lords of the worlds”) that is recited in ritual prayer and belongs to God. The ritual prayer also includes the part of Al-Fātihah that links the prayer of God with prayer of His servants (“Thee do we worship and Thee do we ask for help”), containing both sides of prayer in this Qurānic verse, and pointing toward the part of ritual prayer that is reserved for His servant “who may have whatever he asks.” As already discussed, the part of prayer that belongs to humans encompasses both the concept of petitions to God and the concept of the Sufi’s Path; Chapter 3 of this present project has clearly demonstrated the existence and importance of both of these concepts in the poetry collection, so the analysis of the poems will not be repeated here, but is important to note. In a general sense, the true gnostic understands that it is God Who prays through the one praying, and through

prayer that the Sufi-lover realises some degree of unity with God, even if he is not aware of God’s praying through him, just as he may not realise that God sees through him. Robert Dobie summarises the importance of mutuality of prayer is saying “in the height of prayer, it is not the realized knower who prays but God who prays through the realized knower.... [just as] the seeing of the servant becomes God’s seeing, and the prayer of the servant becomes God’s prayer.” Mutuality is also witnessed, Dobie maintains, so that “in prayer we have the highest unity, because in prayer we experience and know the Divine speaking in and through us.”

IV.G.3 Interpreter: Synthesis of Muhammadan Triplicity in the Poems

Ibn al-ʿArabī includes a remarkable poem in Interpreter of Desires that cleverly relates all parts of the Muḥammad triplicity -- the women-perfume-prayer themes of the ḥadīth -- in these few lines from Poem 39:

My soul [as] the ransom (that is, spoken as an oath) for fair-skinned (li-bidin), shy (khurrdin), “amorous women” (ʿurubin) /
who played with me with my kissing the corner of Kaʿba and the stone. (1)

When you ask for a sign you are, therefore, lost after (that is, in pursuit of) them /
except by their fragrant breeze (bi-rīḥihimu), the most pleasant mark (or sign/clue)” (2)

Night was moon and did not overshadow me. /
I remembered them (dhakartuḥumu), so I journeyed by night in the moonlight. (3) (Poem 39:1,2,3)

The first line -- speaking of the “fair-skinned, shy, amorous women (ʿurubin)” whom the Sufi-lover loves -- relates, of course, to the “women” theme of the ḥadīth about which he writes in Bezels. The poet unambiguously alludes to “perfume” in the second line where he describes that he would be lost except by the “sign” asked for (tastadillu) of the fragrant breeze (bi-rīḥihimu). Finally, in the third line, the Shaykh includes an explicit reference to the prayer of remembrance (dhikr) and links the entire poem section to the Path of which he writes in Bezels by saying, “I remembered them”

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971 Dobie, Logos and Revelation: Ibn ʿArabi, Meister Eckhart, and Mystical Hermeneutics, 248, 250.
These lines succinctly encompass by clear analogies all of the key doctrinal points Ibn al-ʿArabī makes in *Bezels of Wisdom* in the Muḥammad chapter: that the gnostic can behold God in woman for whom he yearns (because she is a part of him just as he is part of God); that the perfume is analogous to the creative Breath of the All-Merciful and represents the divine Mercy that acts as a guide leading the Sufi to God; and, that the gnostic faithfully remembers God and realizes that he is being pulled along the Path by God in a predetermined way.

The last two lines of the last poem in the collection is an even more compact synopsis of this ḥadīth:

She reposed in the dark black spot (that is, clot) of blood in the “small piece of flesh” (or, membrane) of my livers (*akbādī*). (8b)

Certainly the beauty (*al-jamālu*) is overtaken (that is, confounded) by her /

and the musk (*al-misku*) diffused (*fāḥa*) and the saffron (*al-jādī*) diffused.” (9) (P61:8b,9)

The term *akbādī* means, literally, “livers,” but – as discussed earlier, is taken to refer to the seat of human emotions and, hence, like the “heart” in Western thought. Nevertheless, this reference is also to the girl as being a part of his physical being and, thus, an allusion to woman being a part of man, as man is a part of God, as is understood by theoretical Sufism. This verse is, therefore, a reference to “women” of Muhammadan triplicity. This reference is also in a poem discussed earlier in which the Sufi-lover exults in the valley in which the girl and her family have camped: “You gathered [the] People [who are] my soul and my breath, and a black spot of a dark black spot (that is, a clot of blood) of a small piece of flesh on the liver (that is, a piece of the liver membrane) of my liver” (P17:6). This line the poet-lover addresses to the camel-driver, who is a symbol for God who moves human beings along their Path or, alternatively, Muḥammad who is a perfect example of the true gnostic. It is noteworthy that Ibn al-ʿArabī makes yet another reference to the blood-clot in a prayer book he authored in saying, “O my Lord, bring me close to You with the closeness of those who truly know (You). Purify me from the attachments of the natural constitution. /
Eliminate the blood-clot of blameworthiness from my heart, that I may be one of the completely purified ones.”\textsuperscript{972}

The perfumed smells of saffron and musk are further analogies to the creative Breath of the All-Merciful which represent “perfume” as the second leg in the Muhammadan triplicity inherent in the hadīth of women, perfume, and prayer. And, that the scents diffused (fāha) is evidence of the prayers of the Sufi, the final leg of the triplicity discussed by Ibn al-ʿArabī in Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam. As discussed, the smells are often the only signs to guide the aware gnostic along his Path, for which he prays daily for awareness. Corbin asserts that essentially “prayer is not a request for something: it is the expression of a mode of being, a means of existing and of causing to exist, that is, a means of causing the God who reveals Himself to appear, of ‘seeing’ Him, not to be sure in His essence, but in the form which precisely He reveals by revealing Himself by and to that form.”\textsuperscript{973}

In addition to the specific verses in Interpreter of Desires that show evidence of the themes about which Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote in his Bezels chapter on Muhammad, the entirety of the collection may be viewed as a poetic commentary on the overarching themes of women, perfume, and prayer. Under the influence of the Muhammadan heart -- as discerned through Sufi interpretation in the nasīb form, relying upon the Qurān and ḥadīth, the Shaykh has told the story of a man’s love for and yearning for a woman who represents “all women.” The creative Breath of the All-Merciful is a “perfume” that not only explains the relationship between the man and woman, but explains the relationship between God and His servants. Furthermore, in one extremely important sense, the whole of the collection is also a prayer. The poetry is really an extended conversation -- as prayer is “divided equally” between God and human beings -- between the poet and God and, as such, constitutes a single, long prayer, an “intimate discourse between God and His servant.”\textsuperscript{974} The lover’s suffering and complaints are, in effect, a long petition -- one form of prayer -- to God, asking, “Let my suffering cease and let me be reunited with my Beloved.” The poems may also be viewed collectively as a prayer of petition by the poet Muḥyī al-Dīn himself, asking God to show the reader the signs to which God points to His immanence in the poems. And, if


\textsuperscript{973} Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi, 248.

\textsuperscript{974} Ibn al-ʿArabī, The Bezels of Wisdom, 279.
it is true, as the ḥadīth says, that the world is accursed “save the remembrance of God,”
then each prayer -- collectively, and in each poem -- is its own answer since -- both by
the poet’s acknowledging God’s existence by making Him the subject of the poem, and
by the lover’s acknowledging God’s existence by petitioning Him. All these forms of
prayer fulfil the Reality’s wish to be known. As Frithjof Schuon says succinctly, “the
name Allāh is the quintessence of Prayer.”\footnote{Schuon, ‘The Quintessential Esoterism of Islam’, 268.}
CONCLUSION

The overriding importance of being able to discern clearly articulated and unambiguous evocations of Sufi doctrine in the Interpreter of Desires poems -- as demonstrated in this present project -- is that there must now be an irrefutable acknowledgement that the Great Shaykh included a very significant level of his gnostic theory in the poems, skilfully worked into the nasīb framework of the collection, and that this doctrine is clearly evidenced on the basis of the poetry alone, even without reference to his Commentary. The doctrinal Sufism to which the poet refers in the poems is found in many of his texts, but his summa, Bezels of Wisdom, provides one theoretical framework by which to assess the poems, and this was the doctrinal template which was applied successfully to the poetry collection. The fact, as already discussed, that Ibn al-ʿArabī actually used the Interpreter of Desires poems to teach Sufi concepts is a fact which seems to be usually overlooked or ignored by scholars discussing the issue of the existence of theory in the poems, yet this fact reinforces the underlying premise of this present project, the existence of foundational Akbarian theory in the poems. The evidence of that Sufi doctrine is apparent to anyone -- adept or academic -- who goes in search of it.

Chapter 1 of this project (“Divine Self-Disclosure of God -- Muhammadan Integration of Transcendence and Immanence”) demonstrated in the poems evidence of God’s wanting to be known by human beings by God’s disclosing Himself to the Sufi-lover in the Beloved’s beauty and coquettish behavior. The analysis also revealed in the poems the many divine Names of God in both the attributes and actions of the Beloved. By references to the wind, Ibn al-ʿArabī demonstrates the importance of the creative Breath of the All-Merciful in the poems, not only in relation to God’s creative powers, but as being a means of communication from the seemingly ineffable God to the Sufi-lover, and as a means of comfort to God’s servant. The poet reveals multiple
transcendent aspects of God in the separation, distance, hiddenness, and elevation of the Beloved, but the Shaykh also demonstrates the immanent qualities of His being the senses through which the Sufi-lover hears and sees, and by incorporating the many signs of God into the world of the Sufi-lover, even if he is unaware of these signs and continues to suffer what he believes to be the disunion characteristic of the unapproachable Beloved. It is, however, Ibn al-ʿArabī’s intention as poet to turn the expected character roles in the collection upside down in representing the female Beloved character as having not only strongly Merciful (feminine), but powerfully Wrathful (masculine) qualities, while the character of the male Sufi-lover evidences primarily the (feminine) Merciful attributes. Through showing evidence of both the transcendent and immanent attributes of God, the concluding theme in this regard is to confirm the Muhammadan integration of transcendence and immanence, the unity of opposites, in the poems.

On an esoteric level, the entire poetry collection may be viewed as yet another sign pointing to God. Not only the poet and the reader -- but the poet’s creation in verse that the collection is -- are a mirror of the Cosmos in which God desires to see Himself reflected. For readers who view God primarily in His transcendence, the poetry brings them into immanental proximity to God in the positive examples of the readers’ witnessing the Beloved manifested in the poems, and in the negative examples of the readers’ witnessing how another person -- here, the Sufi-lover -- does not realise the signs of God strewn upon his spiritual Path. The inclusion of the many references to the creative Breath of the All-Merciful -- which re-creates the Cosmos with every breath and is never repeated -- is applicable even to the poetry in that the poems are continually being re-created every time they are read and interpreted on different levels, resulting in a multiplicity of meanings. The present project is one of those levels and its findings -- similar to the poetry collection -- may be likened to a particular locus of manifestation of the creative Breath.

Chapter 2 of the dissertation (“Inherent Predisposition, Suffering, and the Religion of Love”) showed Ibn al-ʿArabī’s masterful devising of a story about a man’s Path along which he is pulled by God by his forelock in a cautionary tale in which the reader-adept might see himself in the character of the lover who is not only unaware of the immanental signs pointing to God, but unaware of the fact that he is a contingent being who is also completely subject to his inherent predisposition. Throughout the poems, Ibn al-ʿArabī uses the example of the hadith concerning the swaying and rigid
trees to show the reader that he or she must remain supple -- patient -- through calamities until God removes the affliction. The reader of the poems who understands the Shaykh’s doctrines can also see that God may actually want His servant to suffer so that he petitions God, just as the Sufi-lover does during his painful trek through the desert. Thus, suffering may lead to more supplication, desired by God and integral to the human’s role in being His servant; the lover’s complaint is actually preferred by God to His servant’s silent patience. The Sufi-lover repeatedly declaims his ruinous state as he comes upon the ruins of the Beloved’s abandoned camp, and cannot understand why the Beloved, God, does not seem to reply according to his petitions; the poems reinforce the Akbarian belief that God does reply to requests, though the answer may come in neither the form nor timeframe requested. In the end, though, is the promise that the “whole matter reverts to Him” and leads to merciful felicity.

Explication of the poems according to the theoretical template also results in a determination that the poet is explaining to his readers that -- contrary to the lover’s own misunderstanding -- the end-point of the Path can never be complete union with the Beloved in this lifetime, not when God’s objective for the lover is, instead, mystical bewilderment and annihilation of the ego-self. As Ibn al-ʿArabī says, it would not be the Path except for the travelling along it: whatever path one travels is his Path upon which he was eternally predestined to walk. Making use of the available metaphors from the nasīb, Ibn al-ʿArabī introduces the camel as a central symbol for gnosis of being on the Path, the true Path being whichever way the beast travels; the Sufi-lover, though, has not reached true gnosis within the confines of the poems’ verses and remains unaware of the fact that it is God who is drawing him along his predestined Path. Each person moves along his or her Path, also following the religion of love according to his or her inherent predisposition. By examples in the poems, the Great Shaykh also shows that the goal of the true gnostic is mystical bewilderment; the Beloved has “baffled everyone who is learned in our religion,” in addition to Christians and Jews. Regardless of his or her tenets, the true gnostic is the one who is “drowned in the seas of the knowledge of God,” and the Sufi-lover in the poems -- who is very much confused -- does not even realise that his state of unknowing is actually God’s desired state of gnostic knowing, if only he were aware of his unknowing. The reader of the poetry -- much as the Sufi-lover -- must maintain a gnostic Heart that is capable of every form, not restricting his understanding of God by rejecting the “god of belief”
of others. As Muḥyī al-Dīn reminds his readers, “He who does not restrict Him thus does not deny Him.”

Chapter 3 (“Women, Perfume, and Prayer -- The Muhammadan Link between Human and Divine Love”) showed how Ibn al-ʿArabī speaks to the poems’ reader in sharing the lesson from the Muhammad Bezel chapter in that as he or she progresses along his or her own Path in this world, he or she must realize that attraction in man-woman relationships are properly governed by the Muhammadan view that man yearns for the “terrible beauty” of woman and woman yearns for man from which she came, the part wanting to return to the whole, just as God longs for man and man longs for God. It is in woman in whom man best contemplates God according to Akbarian theory. The Beloved of the poems is not only a metaphor for God, but a female in whom the Sufi-lover realizes God, according to the gnostic theories in Tarjumān al-Ashwāq. God is jealous of the yearning of man for woman and He commands that man remember that it is God for whom the man has really yearned, for do to otherwise is mere animal lust and the female is mere form. The fecund girl Nizām is, furthermore, a metaphor for Nature, in being receptive to the creative Breath; she is a passive repository for God’s creativity, especially in the inclusion of many references to fertile pastures/meadows and valleys with which she girl is associated, receptive to conjugal union in these paradisal settings.

The perfume of the girl and the sweet aromas of the trees amidst which she camps -- carried by the wind to the Sufi-lover -- are likened to the Breath of the All-Merciful. The perfume in the poems becomes a means of discernment by the lover, guidance toward the girl as well as a means of being led to being lost in God in perplexity, the true objective of a gnostic who realizes that union with God is in His Paradise, not an earthly garden. Furthermore, the poet in the poems shows not only the importance of remembrance in prayer, but reminds the reader of the Qurʾānic prohibition against forgetfulness of God. The poetry is itself a prayer of remembrance and, more generally, the Interpreter of Desires is very much a meditation on the hadith about woman, perfume, and prayer. To read the poems with an awareness of the gnosis of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s doctrine is to understand the Muhammadan singularity achieved in the several types of triplicity, including that of the Lover-Loved-Loving relationships. Finally, it is the last line of the last poem of the Tarjumān al-Ashwāq in which Ibn al-

976 Ibn al-ʿArabī, The Bezel of Wisdom, 149.
'Arabī brilliantly summarises the women-perfume-prayer hadith in verse in an unambiguous reference to the Great Shaykh’s theoretical Sufism discussed in the final chapter of *Bezels of Wisdom*.

This examination of the poems has also revealed that the role of the Beloved in the poems shifts according to the specific doctrinal point being made in the given poetical context; thus the same verses can often elucidate different aspects of God or God’s relationship to human beings. This is seen especially in the explication of the poems according to the *Bezels* chapter on Muhammad, which speaks to the girl Nizām as being not only a metaphor for God or a human being reflecting the attributes of God -- which was more the focus of the preceding *Bezels* chapters -- but as a female distinct from the male who contemplates God in her.

One sixteenth-century Egyptian apologist for Ibn al-‘Arabī sympathised with the Great Shaykh’s doctrinal detractors, saying that Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings are “a fatal poison” for most men, “due to the subtlety of their meanings, the delicacy of their allusions, and the abstruseness of their structure.”*977* Regarding these poetical allusions, the Great Shaykh himself says, “the [true gnostics] never hear a verse, a riddle, a panegyric, or a love poem that is not about God, hidden beyond the veil of forms.”*978* The relationship between God and the words of poetry are also fundamental to the Islamic and Sufi experience; as Addas has observed: “God placed the jewels of spiritual knowledge, and the secrets of the Lord, in language.”*979*

Much of the apparent redundancy in *Interpreter of Desires* in terms of desert and garden settings and redundancy of the lover’s passionate declarations of his feelings for the Beloved owe to the fact that each new description of settings, and each new declaration, is undertaken with divine Exhalation in each successive poem as an entirely new Cosmos that God has created, after having just annihilated with His Inhalation the preceding poem’s settings and lover’s declarations of love and suffering. Each poem is a new world for the reader as it is for the Sufi-lover. Rather than struggling to see the Sufi doctrine in the poetry, the reader who is aware of gnostic principals -- Sufi-adept and researcher, alike -- is, instead, subject to being


overwhelmed with the overlapping, mutually reinforcing, and dynamic theory in the collection. The complexity and esotericism of the poems could easily lead a reader by his forelock along the Path to perplexity, which is what the poet could have had as one of his purposes in writing *Interpreter of Desires*. That is, Ibn al-ʿArabī’s goal in journeying through the poems is to effect that mystical bewilderment that has been shown to be the objective of God the Beloved for the suffering Sufi-lover who never reaches the hoped-for re-union -- just as the poems do not conclude -- yet who is left in a state of love-madness, love always having as its ultimate object the Divine.

**Further Research Opportunities**

The research and conclusions of this present project suggest several opportunities for further academic exploration. The objective of this dissertation was to focus on a specific number of theoretical aspects in *Bezels of Wisdom*. Obviously, there are a vast number of other areas not specifically examined as they are outside the scope of this present project. Additional scholarly work that may be examined include the following:

- Application of the much more detailed theoretical writings of *Meccan Openings* to *Interpreter of Desires*. This is applicable especially to Chapter 178, the so-called “love” chapter. An interesting study would be to apply that chapter’s theories to the poems of *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*.
- Examination of additional Quranic and ḥadīth sources evident in the *Interpreter of Desires* that tie into Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Sufi doctrines.
- Study of the many specific geographic places named in the poems.
- Exploration of the Imaginal relative to the poetry collection. There is much material in the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* regarding the Sufi-lover and the poet’s imagination in perceiving God.
VI. APPENDIX: Summary of New Poetry Translations from the Arabic Poems

The following chart contains the English translations of all from Tarjumān al-Ashwāq that are cited in this dissertation. Where the dissertation makes reference to the Arabic words in the verses, these are included parenthetically as transliterations. As an aid to readers who may be working with the Nicholson original text and translation, the page number of the original Arabic-language source in the Nicholson translation is included, as is the page number for the Nicholson English translation. All verses included below and throughout the dissertation (unless otherwise specifically indicated), are new translations from the Arabic.

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<tr>
<td>1:1-4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>If only I were knowing whether they knew / what heart (<em>qalbin</em>) they possessed (1) And if my “nobler intestines” (<em>fūʿādi</em>) (that is, my “heart”) knew / what mountain-path (<em>shiʿbin</em>) they followed (2) Do you perceive them [as if] they were safe / or do you perceive them [as if] they were perished? (3) Lords of the love (<em>rubuʿ al-hawa</em>) become confused (<em>ḥāra</em>) / in the love and they are being muddled (<em>artabakū</em>) (or, entangled) (4)</td>
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<td>2:1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>They made not to leave on the day they departed on the white she-camels (<em>al-ʿīsā</em>) [which had] cut [its teeth indicating maturity in years] (that is, full-grown) / [until] already they had loaded the peacocks up onto them. (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>From each [peacock] (a symbol of the girl, plus of the resurrected Jesus), murderous (or, assassin) (<em>fātkati</em>) glances (al-<em>alhāzi</em>) and reigning [power] (<em>māliktin</em>) / imagining her as Bilqis [seated upon] a throne of pearls (2)</td>
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<td>2:3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>When she was allowed to walk on the glass palace you see / (3) sun (<em>shamsan</em>) on a celestial sphere on [the] bosom of Idrīs</td>
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<td>2:4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Her language (that is, words/speech) grants life (<em>yuḥyī</em>) when she killed by her glance; / it is like – with[in] she grants life (<em>tuḥyī</em>) by her – [as if she were] Jesus (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:5,6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Tawrāt (that is, the Torah) is [like] a [smooth] sheet of her legs in brightness</td>
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and I / follow (atlū) and I tread it (adrusuhā) (that is, walk) as if [I were] Mūsa (that is, Moses) (5) 

a bishopess (asquffatun) from daughters of Rome (banāti al-rūm), unadorned / you see in her the brightest honour (6) 

NB: Reference is made by Nicholson to the last word of Line 6, nāmūs, which Nicholson translates as “Goodness,” which the student translates as “Honour,” primarily because of a note of the Shaykh’s which Nicholson includes in which the poet himself says that the word should be translated the same as khayr, “good” (Nicholson p. 49). Some lexicons also indicate “honour” as a possible translation, which is not unrelated to khayr. 

2:7 15 49 She is untamed (wahshīyatun); indeed, not with her [is (forcibly) made] an intimate friend (mā bi-hā ansun). / (7) 

In her private place (khalwatihā) -- in a chamber – [she has] a burial place for remembrance (li-(a)-al-dhikri) 

2:8,9 15 49 She surpasses everyone learned of our religion / moreover [also those learned in] David and non-Muslim religious authority and [every] priest. (8) 

If she pointed, she requests the Gospel; you regard us / [to be] priests or patricians or deacons (9) 

2:11 15 49 When my soul (nafsī) reached the collar bones (that is, reached the throat, implying when I was at the point of death), / I asked that Beauty (al-jamāla) and that Kindness (allutfa) for consoling (tanfīsā) [of me]. (11) 

2:13b 15 49 O camel-driver of the pack of ‘dirty white camels’ (that is, a certain type of camels of good breeding stock), do not drive the pack on with her. (13b) 

3:9 16 54 by one who calls to Da’d and al-Rabaāb and Zaynab / and Hind and Salma and, furthermore, Lubna and to a distant sound [listen] (9) 

4:2 16 57 What is it to her if she gave me a greeting? / [There is] no authority (lā aḥtikāmun) over the beautiful (or, white, that is, fair) ones (al-dumā) (2)
| 4:3 | 16 | 57 | They travelled and darkness of the night  
[was when] the curtains were let down /  
Then I said to her, ‘Enslave (or, “pity”) an impassioned alien (3) |
| 4:5 | 16 | 57 | She showed her front-teeth and a shining (bāqīqun) (that is, lightening) flashed (awmada) (5) |
| 4:6 | 16 | 57 | Is it not sufficient for him that I am in his heart (bi-qalbihi)? /  
He watches me at every moment (kulli waqtin). Isn’t it? (6) |
| 5:1a,2 | 17 | 58 | “[My] longing is [like the] Highland; [my] suffering is [like the] Lowland” (anjada al-shawqu waat hama al-gharām) /  
They can never meet (lan yajtami ‘ā) as opposites (didānī) (or, as two) (1)  
so my dispersion (shatātī) (that is, disunion) is never put into proper order (nizām). (2a) |
| 5:3 | 17 | 58 | What is my doing? What is my stratagem? /  
Lead me (dullī), O my rebuker (‘adhūlī); do not terrify me with blame (bi-almalām) (3) |
| 6:3,4a | 17 | 60 | Then I said to the wind (li-(a)l-rīḥi), ‘head out and overtaking them /  
because they are residents near the shade in the thicket [of trees]; (3)  
and convey to them (ballighīhim) “best regards” from a saddened (shajanīn) ‘fellow man’ (4a) |
| 7:1,2 | 17 | 61 | Cheerful (girls) crowded me near [where] I touched (or kissed) the stone with reverence /  
They came to the circumambulation veiled (literally, mu’tajirūtī, “with their lower faces also covered with a turban”). (1)  
They unconcealed (hasarna) [the faces] – sun-lights (anwārī al-shumūsī) (literally, lights of the sun) / beams – and said /  
to me “Abstain! [There is] death of the soul (mawtu al-nafṣī) is in [your] glances (fī-(a)l-lahāzātī) [of us]” (2) |
| 7:6 | 17 | 61 | our rendezvous place (mūʿidunā) after the circumambulation is at Zamzam /  
at the middle cupola (or, tent) at the rocks (6) |
| 7:7 | 17 | 61 | “There whoever indeed is being rendered emaciated, he is cured / by what fills him with the perfume of women” (7) |
| 7:8b | 17 | 61 | their locks of hair (that is, tresses) are in the enclosed darkness (8b) |
| 8:3,4,5 | 18 | 63 | I called behind their group of riding camels through their love (that is, through love of them); / “O, those who are being rich in the beauty, behold, I am impoverished (muflisu)” (3) I rolled (in the mud) my cheek, being seized by tenderness and love, / so with truth, a duty intending (that is, owed) to you, do not deprive [me] of hope (4) one who is “all day long” drowning in his tears and in / fire of the sadness burned and (that is, with) no resting. (5) |
| 9:2,3 | 18 | 63 | The clouds poured [onto] every soft sand (that is, meadow) / and every[thing] tossed about (mayyādin) bends toward you (‘alayka yamīdu) (2) The water-courses gushed out and their “fragrant breeze”/ whistled and a ring-dove flitted past and the wood [put forth] leaves. (3) |
| 11:1,2,3 | 19 | 66 | O doves of the ārak [tree] and the bān [tree], / soothe me! Do not multiply my worry by [your] wailing. (1) Sooth me! Do not be made visible [by you] by the loud and bemoaning / of my secret love and my concealed grievings. (2) I converse [with] her at the evening and through the sun-light / with [the] pitiful [cry] of a yearning one and the groan of one “madly in love”. (3) |
| 11:4,5 | 19 | 66 | The spirits lay face-to-face in a reedy bank of the ghāḍa trees / then the branches bent (mālat) towards me [and it (that is, the bending) that] annihilated me (fa-afnānī) (4) They brought an abundance of the excruciating longing and passion / and [brought] -- by branches (bi-afnānī) [bending] towards me – presents of the exquisite grief (turafi al-balwā). (5) |
| 11:6,7,8,9 | 19 | 66 | So who [will give] to me essence (or, possession) of Jamʿa and al-Muḥaṣṣab and Mina / Who to me for essence (or possession) for Dhāt al-Athl? Who to me Nʿamān? (6) They enclose (tatūfū) my heart (bi-qalbī) moment after moment (sā’atun baʿda sāʿatīn) / for the sake of love-ecstasy (li-wajdin) and grief (tabriḥīn), and kiss my pillars (7) |
Even as [the] best of creatures (khayru al-khalqi) that is, mankind, referring to Muhammad) was enclosed by the Ka’ba / which proof of reason proposed concerning it [to be] being diminished (that is, imperfect). (8) and kissed stones in it, whereas he was a Nātiq (that is, a prophet). / And what is the place (that is, rank) of the house (Temple) from comparison to human (Man)? (9)

11:10 19 67 How often did they covenant (ʿahidat) and swear (aqsamat) that they would not change (lā tahīla) / but a dyed one (that is, with henna) does not keep a promise (laysa wafā) of oaths (literally, “in [the] right hand”) (10)

11:11,12 19 67 One of the most wonderful (or, surprising) of things is a veiled gazelle (ʿabun) / who is pointing with “nut brown” fingertips and beckons with eyelids, (11) [a gazelle whose] pasture is between the collar bones (that is, breast) and the intestines (al-ḥashā) (that is, bowels) / O most marvelous! From a garden among a fiery place! (12)

11:13 19 67 Verily became my heart made possible of every form (laqad sāra qalbī qābilā kullā šūratin) / a meadow of gazelles and a convent for [Christian] monks. (13)

11:14 19 67 And a house (baytun) (that is, temple) for idols (li-aiwthānin) and [the] Ka’ba of “those who walk much” (that is, pilgrims) / and a bound book of the Torah and a bound book of the Qur’ān (14)

11:15 19 67 I profess (adīnu) the belief of loving (bi-dīni al-ḥubbi) / However (or, wherever) ‘riding camels’ (from the Arabic word for ‘stirrups’) / wended their way, that is my creed and my sign (anna tawjiḥat fi al-dīnu dīna wa ʾīmānu) (15)

11:16 19 67 We have an example in Bishr [lover of] Hind and her sister / and in Qays [who became “Majnun” after separated from Laylā] and Laylā, and there is Mayya (that is, the beloved) and Ghaylān [the lover] (16)

12:4 19 70 My Beloved (maḥbūbī) is Three (that is, a Trinity), and [yet] already he was One, / even as the [group of] Persons <a collective noun> were induced to become
In me is an ardent thing, from love of sandy [tracks] of ‘Alij, where her tents are, and where the [large/evil] eye(d) (al-ʿīnu) [girl] (5) an assassin (fātikati), glancing, sickly, her eyelids scabbards (ajfānūhā) for glancing like sword-points. (6)

I did not yield to swallow tears from my illness / I hid and preserved my passion regarding my blamer (ʿāhīlī) (7) Until, when the raven crowed the separation (al-ghirirāqu) [of them] and disclosed the “fervent longing” of the sorrowful one (8)

They continued the travel by night (al-surā) / they cut the group of rings for the camels’ noses of their [dirty] white camels (that is, indicating camels of good stock) / (9) [resulting in] making of plaintive sounds and emanating sighs [of the camels] beneath the camel-litter.

I beheld [the] occasions of fate (asbāba al-manīyatī) (that is, physical manifestations of death) when / they loosened the camel-reins and tightened the camel-girdle (10)

Surely not [anyone is] blaming [me] for setting one’s thoughts on her, / [because] the beautiful one is loved wherever she may be. (maʾshūqatun ḥasnā haythu takānu) (12)

To me the east wind related a story (that is, a “tradition”) (ḥadīthan) from grieved [feelings, or, thoughts] / in regards to the dissemination from my passionate love from the grief and sorrow (3)

That, “He whom you love is between your ribs (al-ladhī tahwāhu bayna ḥulū ikum), / the breathings turn him over side to side” (5)

So I said to [the east wind], “Convey to him that he is the fireplace (al-mūqidu) which is the fire inside the heart (al-nāra dākhila al-qalbī), (6) [If it be] extinguishing, [then] lasting (that is, eternal) [union], / and if it be burning, then no offense to the ‘one who poured out’ (that is, full of love)” (7)

[I offer] my father (said as an oath) for him
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<td>76</td>
<td>“An ember (ḥumratu) (that is, blush) of shame in his cheek / is brilliance (waḍaḥu) of the dawn (al-subhī) ‘speaking gently with’ the ‘ruddy twilight’ (al-shafāqā)” (3)</td>
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<td>The patience tore down and the sadness settled down, / and I between these [two] am meeting. (4)</td>
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<td>15:11</td>
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<td>A crow (ghurābu) of the separation (al-baynī) is only a camel / [which] carried away the loved ones [with] a ‘lifting up’ (that is, picking up speed) of the ‘pace of a camel’ (11)</td>
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<td>16:7</td>
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<td>O dove (ḥamām) of the arāks (trees) [have] a little [bit of pity on me]; / Separation (al-baynu) only increased [for me my] raging (7)</td>
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<td>16:11,12a</td>
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<td>Perhaps a breath from the east wind of Hājir / drives a rain-cloud towards us, (11) being by which quenching the thirsty souls (12a)</td>
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<td>16:15,16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Then if you were loving the loving young girl (al-fatātan); / truly you obtained the enjoyment and the joy with her (15) Giving to the very beautiful ones wines of the “hangover”, / whispering secrets to the suns [and] flattering the full moons (al-budūrā) (16)</td>
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<td>17:6</td>
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<td>You gathered [the] People [who are] my soul and my breath, / and a black spot of a dark black spot (that is, a clot of blood) of a small piece of flesh on the liver (that is, a piece of the liver membrane) of my liver (6)</td>
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<td>18:1-11</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>Stand at the abodes and mourn at the ruins [of the dwelling places] / and ask the effaced residence a “demanding” (that is, a question): (1) Where are the beloveds? Where are their white she-camels left? / Look at them cutting through the vapour of</td>
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the desert. (2) in the mirage like the gardens; you see them / the person (or, mirage) becomes large in the eyes [through being in] the vapour (3) They hastened; the desire al-Udhayb in order that they might drink / water by it such as fresh (or, pure) water of life (4) I followed [in their tracks]. I ask the morning (that is, blowing toward the east) wind about them / whether they pitched [their tents] or sought shade of the dal [tree]. (5) [The east wind] said, I left their cupolas (that is, tents) at Zarūd / and the white she-camels are complaining from weariness of their night-travelling. (6) Certainly they lowered over their domes (that is, tents), concealed / to veil [their] beauty from heat in the hottest midday. (7) Go get up to them, seeking their tracks / and hasten with your white she-camels striding fast in their direction (8) Then when you stop at the “mile-stones” Hājir / you cross at them [the milestones] depressions (that is, valleys) and hills. (9) Their stations (or, abodes) are near and their fire [are near] <Nicholson “will clearly be seen”> / a fire that caused the fire of love to be setting ablaze. (10) Give [the camels] rest. Do not let the lions frighten you, / so the yearnings [might] be perceived to you [as] lion cubs. (11)

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for the new (li mabbādi) growths. (3)
As long as you desire a down-pour (wablin) and as long
as you desire moisture /
of the clouds across [the] bān trees at
evening and early in [the] morning. (4)
As long as you desire lasting (or, cool)
shade (that is, Paradise)
in [the] garden (janan), /
appetising to the one gathering, he touches
slightly the swaying [branch] (5)

| 22:5 | 25 | 92 | Among the beautiful [females] he loves is she who walks up to (that is, accosts) every anxious heart /
by shooting of arrows and by Indian steel (that is, a sword) (5) |
| 22:7 | 25 | 92 | When she looked she gazes with an eye of a young gazelle (that is, a pretty one) /
To her eye is consoled (that is, belongs) blackness of antimony (a shiny black metalloid) (7) |
| 22:8a | 25 | 92 | the blood-thirsty (al-qatūlī) [eye], kohl-adorned with flirting (bi-alghunjī) and bewitchment (al-sīhri) (8a) |
| 23:11,12 | 26 | 94 | Be superior (that is, have pity, looking down) /
because befallen on us, soon after early in the morning,
a little before the sunrise (11)
by a white-faced,
young delicate one (ghaydāʾ) /
having sweetness of breath (bahnānatin)
diffusing sweet odours like burst musk (ka-miskin fatīqī) (12) |
| 23:13,14 | 26 | 94 | [The drowned one (from previous line)] bent in drunkenness like similar to branches (al-ghusūnī) /
The breaths (or, the air) folded it over, similar to one-half (13)
with a terrible rump like a sand-hill, /
the sand-heap like a trembling hump of a noble stallion.980 (14) |
| 23:15 | 26 | 94 | A rebuker (ʿadūlun) did not accuse me in loving her /
and a friend did not accuse me in loving her. (15) |
| 23:16 | 26 | 94 | If a rebuker accused me in loving her /
my reply to him would have been sobbing (shahīqī). (16) |

980 This unknown term at the end of verse 13, al-shaqīqi, is translated in the demistich by Nicholson as "fresh as raw silk, which the winds have bent"; he suggests others have offered alternative translations, as well; Ibn al-ʿArabi, The Tarjuman Al-Ashwaq: A Collection of Mystical Odes (1911), trans. Reynold Nicholson (Kessinger Publishing, 2007), 94.
| 24:1,2 | 26 | 96 | Stand by the ruins of a habitation at Laʿla' and mourn our dear ones in that uninhabited country (al-balqaʿi). (1) Stand by the habitations and call out to them asking (or, wondering) about them, their loneliness (bi-husni) (or, sensitivity), with refined lamentation (2) |
| 24:7a | 26 | 96 | So blame Fate (aʿīb zamānan) – we did not have a stratagem [with which to deal] (7a) |
| 24:8 | 26 | 96 | I excused her when I heard her speech / and [her] complaining (tashkū) as I complain with an agitated heart (8) |
| 25:1,2,3 | 27 | 97,98 | O war (that is, internal conflict), O war for my heart (or, mind) / O joy, O joy for my mind. (1) In my heart is a fire of a burning thing (that is, passion); / In my mind (or, heart) a full moon (badru) of darkness (dujan) was already set (2) O musk! O full moon (badru)! O branch of the sand-heap / How ash-grey [is the branch]! How brightest (anwarā) [is the full moon]! / How most pleasant [is the smell of musk]? (3) |
| 25:4 | 27 | 98 | O smiling [mouth] (mabsmān) whose pearly teeth I loved! / And O saliva in which I tasted (thick) white honey! (4) |
| 25:6 | 27 | 98 | If the veil (burqūʿihi) were removed (yusfīru) / there [would be] a pain (ʿadhāban), so she veiled herself (aḥtajābā). (6) |
| 25:7 | 27 | 98 | “[She is] a forenoon sun (shamsu) in a celestial sphere, a rising thing; / [she is] a branch already planted in a garden. (7) |
| 25:14,15 | 27 | 98 | O saḥr [tree] of the valley and O bān [tree] of the lush place (that is, thicket) / guide to us by your spreading (that is, diffusion) [of your perfume] by the morning [wind]. (14) A thing perfumed by musk emanates its fragrance to us / from a [bunch of] flowers of your valley grounds or a [bunch of] flowers from your hills. (15) |
| 25:19,20 | 27 | 98 | No wondering, no wondering, no “O wonder’ at an Arāh, / a [passionate] lover (yatahāwā) of the lascivious women (19) [who] perishes whenever a turtle-dove sang / |
by the remembrance (*bi-dhikr*) of his beloved (*yahwātun*) in his joy. (20)

<p>| 26:1  | 28 | 101 | at the road cross between the sandy and stony paths is the place of rendezvous (<em>al-mawʿ idu</em>) / bid our riding camels to kneel in this watering place (that is, place of arrival) (1) |
| 26:5b | 28 | 102 | the cloud is flashing and thundering (5b) |
| 26:6  | 28 | 102 | the rain descends from a gap of a cloud / like tears pouring, is dissipated because of separation (<em>li-(a)ffirāqī</em>) [from the one he loves] (6) |
| 26:7,8 | 28 | 102 | Drink the choicest (<em>sulāfha</em>) of its wine with its effected of intoxication (that is, its “hang-over”) / Be delighted in a singing one [who] recites: (7) ‘O choicest (that is, clearest, most purified) [wine] in Adam’s time, related about the Garden of Habitation (that is, Paradise), a supported (that is authentic) tradition…!’ (8) |
| 27:1,2,3,4,5,7 | 29 | 103 | O you! (That is, “Be silent!”) ancient house, be praised / a light glimmers for you in our hearts (<em>nūrūn lakum bi-kulūbinā yatalālā</em>). (1) I complain to you, escaping, indeed I wandered [the desert], / I pour forth tears in it, I cry (2) Yesterday evening and mornings (that is, dawn), I am not taking delight in rest / I was established in the very early early [part of the morning], passing time away [until] the coming in evening. (3) Truly, if the she-camels have “soreness of hoof” misfortunes are with them. / They journey by night and they stride fast, striding fast in the night journey. (4) These riding camels travelled “by night” (<em>sārat</em>), [carried] us to you / [with] longing, but they did not hope to reach thusly… (5) They did not complain of ravenous love, and I complained of the harm (that is, fatigue); / Indeed, I have claimed an impossible thing (<em>ataytu muḥālā</em>). (7) |
| 28:14b,15 | 29 | 105 | ….a youth endowed with an amorous rapture, docile, / (14b) his sorrows ‘rotted’ (<em>ramat</em>) him into a / confusion (<em>bahmā</em>), a remain of a wasteland (<em>rasma balqāʿī</em>) (15) |
| 28:16-19 | 29 | 105 | O moon beneath darkness/ |</p>
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<td>Stand and ask for speech of the remains (rasma) of a house [which] became destroyed after them</td>
<td>I summoned wind (rīḥin) that blew (gently): / 'O North wind! O South wind! O East wind! (9) Have you news for us? / Weariness has thrown us down concerning their departure. (10) Whoever was made him sick by the illness of love (al-hawā)/ then [let him be] distracted by stories of being in passionate love (bi-ḥadīthī al-sībah). (12) Every evil (kullu sūʾan) in their inspiration is beautiful (ḥasānum) / and my torment is sweetened by their approval (bi-ridāhum). (16)</td>
<td>So why, and on what account, and for what reason, / do you complain and complain about the grief and illness? (17)</td>
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asking [questions] (6)

39:1  35  123  
(1) My soul [as] the ransom (that is, spoken as an oath) for fair-skinned, shy, “amorous women” (‘urūbin) / who played with me with my kissing the corner of Ka’ba and the stone (1)

39:2  35  123  
When you ask for a sign (tastadillu) you are, therefore, lost after (that is, in pursuit of) them / except by their fragrant breeze (bi-rīḥīhīmu), the most pleasant mark (or sign/clue) (al-athari)” (2).

39:3,4  35  123  
Night (laylun) was moon and did not overshadow me (dajānī). / I remembered (dhakartuhumu) then, so I journeyed by night in the moonlight (al-qamari) (3) Only when I walked in their group of riding camels was the night (al-laylu) to me friendly [like] / the sun (al-shamsi) in the “early rising” (al-bakari) (4)

39:5-8  35  123  
She intended (that is, urged) my flirtation from among one of them; / [there is] not a beauty that is a sister for her from among human beings (ḥasnā laysa laha ukhtun mina al-bashari) (5). If she unveiled her face, she showed you brightness / like the rising sun [which is] not without shining (6). Her bright forehead [is] for the sun (shamsun), her ‘hair hanging in front’ for the night-time (li-layli). / More wonderful a form [is she], sun (shamsun) and night together! (7) We are – through her – light of the day in the night / and we are in the midday (al-ẓuhri) night (laylin) from her hair (al-shā’ari). (8)

40:1b-2  36  124  
a girl of fourteen [rose to me like] a full moon. (1b) Indeed, she was made high (taʿālat) against Time in majesty / and transcended (tasāmat) it in grandeur and glory. (2)

40:5  36  124  
You are a small-box entrusted with (that is, containing) a diffusion of perfume (ambergris); / you are a meadow [which] made grow spring vegetation and flowers (5)

40:6  36  124  
Beauty (al-ḥusnu) attained in you is the most extreme limit (aqṣā madāhu) / another was not comprehended (mā tī-
41:3,4  36  125  I hurried – and in [my] heart for their sake / was a hellfire burning brightly because of their separation (li-baynihimī) (3) trying to get ahead of them (asābiquhum) in darkness of the gloom (that is, night) / calling out to them, thereupon following (aqfū) the remains. (4)

41:5  36  125  I had no sign (dalūl) (or, guide) for the purpose of being after them / being equal to (that is, except) a breath (nafasīn) of their love [that is] fragrant (sawā nafasīn min hawāhum āṭir). (5)

41:6  36  125  they (that is, the women), lifted up (rafiʿa na) the curtain (al-sijāfa) (or, veil), lighting up the darkness (ādā al-dujā) / then a group of riding camels set out by the brightness of the moon (li-ḍūl al-qamar) (6)

42:2  37  127  Who forgot (sahā) about al-Suha (that is, ‘the forgotten one’) is not in forgetfulness (sahā) / [but he] who is [in forgetfulness] about the sun already forgot. (2)

42:3  37  127  of his heart, with his heart, for his herd (that is, let him give his heart to his herd), / so the ‘costly gift’ opens the most praise-worthy uvula (that is, mouth) (3)

42:6  37  127  The unveiling by her alarmed me, / and – being near (that is, at the moment) – her being elegant frightened me (6)

43:3  38  129  So if they set out they will hasten with a fortunate omen / and if they halt, they will unbind [camels] at an abounding (that is, bountiful) place where one alights (bi-akhṣabi manzīli) (3)

43:8,9  38  129  They said, “Forbearance! but discord is not patient. / So what are my means [when] patience is in isolation? (8) If even with me was patience and I were a judged thing by it/ my soul would not be patient. How, when I have it not? (9)

44:1,2  38  130  The fullness (al-badru) (that is, of the moon) ascended in darkness of [her] hair. / The rose blossom watered the narcissus (narjisū), shining black and white. (1) A fresh and tender one [is she]. The very beautiful ones (that is, women) were torn apart (that is, confounded) by her. / and [the] blossom – her light – was over
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<td>44:3,4a</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>If she permeated into the innermost mind, it wounds her; / [is her] illusion (al-wahmu) [seen] by eye-sight? (3)</td>
<td>She is a “plaything” (lu’batun) – our remembering dissolves her (3) (yudhawwibuhā) (4a)</td>
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<td>44:5</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>Description wished to make her evident / but she raised above (that is, she was transcendent), so this (that is, description) was accounted for in “strict secrecy” (5)</td>
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<td>44:7</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>If one calls here back, give rest to the beasts [of burden] / they (that is, others) do not give rest to beasts of the meditations. (7)</td>
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<td>44:8,9</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>[She is] a Divine mercy (or, joy) [who] removed [herself] from humanity / the human being [who] burns [with love] for her (8)</td>
<td>From jealousy that her pureness (rāyiquhā) is mingled / which is in the muddiness (kadari) of the tanks. (9)</td>
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<td>44:10</td>
<td></td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>She is higher than the sun in brightness (and sublimity), / a form not to be compared with [any other] form. (10)</td>
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<td>44:11</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>A celestial sphere of light is under the sole of her foot; / her crown is external, away from the ‘return’ (that is, the ‘renewal’ of Mankind) (11)</td>
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<td>45:1</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>[The] dear ones of my heart – where are they? (ayna hum)/ by God, I say – where are they? (1)</td>
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<td>45:2,3</td>
<td></td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>As you saw their phantasm / will you show me their essence? (2)</td>
<td>So how long, how long, did I search for them? / How many (that is, often) did I beg to be a “joined one” with them (baynahum) (that is, to be united with them)? (3)</td>
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<td>45:4,5,6</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>Until I feel safe [regarding] being separated from them / and [yet] I did not feel safe being among them (4)</td>
<td>Maybe “good luck” is a solution / in relation to [their] absence and being separated from them. (5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>46:2,3,4a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Having dark lips, red-lipped, her “place</td>
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which is kissed” (that is, her mouth),
prepared with honey (maʿṣūlun) /
giving witness to the bee (al-nali) that beat
(that is, produced) the white-honey (2)
The fragrance of the “place where anklets
are put” over darkness of moon /
in her cheek an evening glow; she is
a branch (gḥuṣnun) on hills (kushubi) (3)
Beautiful [and] adorned (ḥasnā, ḥālyatun),
she is not adorned (as a bride)…. (4a)

| 46:6 | 39 | 132 | The night did not darken /
but there came -- succeeding it --
[the] breathing of the dawn (6) |

| 46:7,8 | 39 | 132 | The east wind does not pass over
meadows (rawdi) /
[that] encompass bashful souls
of swelling breast (kāʿibātin) (7)
(8) But they bent [the branches] and
disclosed, they blow them [gently] /
because the slender branch [scent] are
carried from the blossoms (al-azhāri). (8) |

| 46:11,12,13a | 39 | 132 | The land is not being settled (lā tastaqīrru)
by them, so I said to it (that is, the wind), /
“where is the refuge when a group of
horses of my longing
is in the pursuit?” (11)
Preposterous! They have no habitation but
my mind (ḥaladī) (or, heart). /
Wherever I am, there is the
full moon (al-badru). Watch! (12)
Is not her place of rising my imagination
(wahmī) and my place of setting my heart
(qalbī)? (13a) |

| 47:1b,2 | 40 | 134 | If the [union] became confined by the
chaos that you imposed on me / (1b)
who is the one who carries the
grieving of love? / 
Who is the one who sips and
swallows bitterness of Fate? (2) |

| 47:3,4,5 | 40 | 134 | I say from emotional upset and from
amorous rapture /
“O would that he who caused me to be ill
(amradānī), treat(ed) [me] (marradā)! (3)
(4) He passed by a door of the
habitation, mocking, /
hiding [himself], “being with turban
wrapped around his head”,
turning away. (4)
His veiling did not harm me, only /
I am hurt from his circumstance
of having turned away [from me] (aʿradā). (5) |

| 48:3,4 | 40 | 134 | at Rāma between al-Naqā and Ḥājir /
is a (slave) girl, one confined |
(that is, sanctuaried) in a howdah. (3) O her beauty [that beauty coming] from a young (or, tender) girl. / Her being fair-skinned beamed light for the night-traveller. (4)

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<td>O her beauty, a tender one (that is, a young girl) (4a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>48:5,6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>[She is] a pearl concealed in a shell / of hair like blackness (sawādī) of jet (al-sabāj) (5) a pearl which is a reflection (or, a conception) [which is] her diver / which does not cease [to remain] in the hollows of that ocean-depths (al-llujājī) (6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>48:11</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>Who will help (assuming bālā from the previous line, meaning, literally, to ‘unbind’ or ‘resolve’) a youth wandering (mutayyatin) (that is, lost) in a [vast] desert, / enamoured, furnished evidence (that is, ‘confounded’) (mudallahi) in the mind, deeply grieved? (11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>49:7,8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>I am separated (on account of grief) (fīrāqī) from a neighbour and far away from (my) habitation. / O in my time [of separation] against my time (of the opposite, that is, separation as opposite of union). (7) Who [will bring] to me [one] who is pleased by my torment? / With me is now power (or, help) because of [that which] she is pleased (8)</td>
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<td>50:2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>Bending her soft eye she dissolves him / and abandons him (tatrūkahu) above the sick bed (2)</td>
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<td>51:2b</td>
<td>41</td>
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<td>… [smiling] mouths (mabāsimin), like musk-bags of musk (miskin) that were not permitted for smelling (li-nāshiqi). (2b)</td>
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<td>52:2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>Maybe friendly people will hear of [the pasture’s] fertility / so [that] they will take its fertility as a “summer habitation” and a “resting place” (2)</td>
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<td>52:3</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>Indeed [my] heart with them is attached / wherever turns [the camels] the camel-driver by [his] chant (asākhā) (3)</td>
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<td>52:4</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>They called out to one another for setting out and they cross the desert / You will hear it wailing behind the pack-camel (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>52:8</td>
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<td>When majesties dazzled eyesight /</td>
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<tr>
<td>53:1,2,3</td>
<td>42 139</td>
<td>The ear was made deaf by the sobbing of her voice (8) Wherever we meet for our pious farewell you surmised us / -- by joining together and [lying down] the levels – [to be] a double letter (1) We, though, had our persons made lean / so that glances were [only] perceiving a single one (2) And that this, except for leanness and his light / so if not for my moaning, she did not see a sight of me (that is, I was invisible) (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>54:4,5</td>
<td>42 140</td>
<td>He made himself master of me and I made myself master of Him (tamallakanī wa tamallaktuha) / so each of us certainly possessed each other. (4) My being property of Him is evident, / and my possessing of Him [is evident in] his saying, ‘Come here!’… (5)</td>
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<td>54:10</td>
<td>42 140</td>
<td>You persisted (ẓalīta) in [the] heat of the distance (that is, journey towards the distance); you were searching for / clouds (sahāba) of the reunion (al-wiṣāli) [of lovers], [but] they did not overshadow you. (10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>54:11</td>
<td>42 140</td>
<td>The might of His authority (ʿizzun li-sulṭāni) humiliated you / and if only just as He humiliated you (dallalk) he showed coquettishness (dalla) to you. (11)</td>
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<td>54:12</td>
<td>42 140</td>
<td>And, O, if only since by his honour he refused flirting / if only you flirted [with him]. (12)</td>
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<td>55:1,2</td>
<td>43 143</td>
<td>I remain absent (aghibu) so the yearning (al-shawqu) annihilates (yu�ī) my soul (nafsī) / I am not cured, therefore it is yearning whether absent or present. (1) Meeting him occurs to me that which I did not imagine (or, suspect) him/ the place of the remedy (makāna al-shifā) is another illness (dāʿan) from the passionate love. (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>55:3</td>
<td>43 142</td>
<td>Because I see a form (shakhṣan), its beauty (jamālhu) grows / -- when our meeting [happens] – in good fortune and glory (3)</td>
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| 55:4         | 43 134       | So there is no escape from emotional upset (or, passion) [that] a thing connected / with that which supplied provisions of beauty in [the] order (nizāman) set down
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<td>56:2b</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>&quot;[as if] a virgin (ʿadhraʾ) (that is, bride) [who was] unveiled (juliyat) in the very much perfumed (aʿtarī) hall (or, abode)” (2b)</td>
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<tr>
<td>56:3,6</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>The wind (al-riḥ) plays in the branches (al-ghusūnī) so there is a doubling (tanthanā) / and so it was from [the doubling] a promise [to one another]. (3) [May] God pray (that is, a blessing) upon him, as sang / a ring-dove on a shaking (maiyādi) [branch]. (6)</td>
</tr>
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<td>57:2</td>
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<td>143</td>
<td>“Say to a young girl of ‘a division of a tribe’, ‘our rendezvous (mawʿiḍi) / is the well-guarded place early morning in the day of Sabbath near [the] hills (rubā) of Najd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57:4,5,6,7,8</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>And then behold [if] all [words] be true (ḥaqqān) that she says about it / and in the opinion of her is the powerful longing (al-shawqi al-mubarriḥ) for me [as I have] for her, (4) Then in the heat of noon we will meet (naltaqā) secretly (sirrā) by her tent / on the basis of a most reliable promise (aṣdaqi alwaʿiḍ). (5) She is experiencing (or, presenting) and we are presenting (or, experiencing) (tulqī wa nulqī) [that] which we are suffering from the love (mā nulāqī mina al-haway) / and from misery (shiddati) of the testings [of the relationship] and from feeling pain of the violent grief (alami al-wajdi) (6) Is this confused dreams (adghāthu ahlāmin) [or] good tidings in sleep-place (that is, sleeping)? / Was [her] speech at the time] an utterance of my good fortune? (amufqu zamānīn kāna fi nutqiḥi saʾīdī)? (7) Perhaps he who urges on a kind [object] of my desire (al-amānī) will guide them to [my] “seeing with one’s eyes” (ʿayānan) / Their garden (rawḍuhā) will guide (that is, bestow) to me the freshly gathered rose (al-wardi). (8)</td>
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<td>58:4</td>
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<td>144</td>
<td>My love in you is true, O end (ghāyat) of my Fate(s) / and from that love, my heart is sick (4)</td>
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<td>59:1</td>
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<td>145</td>
<td>Tayba has a gazelle – the ‘cutting-sharp’ (ṣārimin) sword-point (zubā) / from [its] twinkling, enchanting (that is, eye) is drawing (1)</td>
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<td>59:2</td>
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<td>And in Arafāt I became aware of that which / she desires so I am not in patience (al-šābīrī) (2)</td>
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<td>59:9</td>
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<td>[The] waters of al-Ghaḍā diminished due to rage [which] / passion started a fire in his ribs (9)</td>
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<td>60:2</td>
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<td>Inhaling (astanshīqī) the fragrance (or, wind) (al-rīḥa) from part of their land / in yearning (al-rashawqa), [that] the (sweet) spirits (al-arwāḥu) are informing you where they are (2)</td>
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<td>61:2</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>An agitated mourner [dove] [who is] anguish to me/ one on top of a shaking [branch] is anguish to me (shajā fīkī nawwāḥun ṭarūḥun fawqa mayyādi) (2)</td>
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<td>61:7a</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>I am “bright in face” (that is, radiant) (aṣbaḥtu) in ardent passion (mushghūfan) (7a)</td>
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<td>61:8b</td>
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<td>She reposed in the dark black spot (that is, clot) of blood in the “small piece of flesh” (or, membrane) of my livers (akbādi). (8b)</td>
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<td>61:9</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>Certainly the beauty (al-jāmālu) is overtaken (that is, confounded) by her / and the musk (al-misku) diffused (jāha) and the saffron (al-jādī) diffused” (9)</td>
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BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following are works cited in the dissertation.


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