

Ibn 'Arabi and Human Beauty

The School of Passionate Love

One of the most distinctive, fascinating, and certainly poetically prolific movements in classical Sufism is that known in Persian as the “School of Passionate Love” (*madhhab-i 'ishq*). The word *madhhab* (school or way), often indicating a jurisprudential or theological allegiance within the various Islamic denominations, reveals the development of this identity for certain Sufis, an identity by which they considered themselves distinct from those outside of their tradition. In some cases, it might also imply a disdain for the overemphasis placed on a jurisprudential *madhhab* and a claim to have transcended the differences that separate them from each other. While love is arguably a common experience for the majority of practitioners of Islamic mysticism, the loose designation *madhhab-i 'ishq* comprised those enamored by divine beauty, often in the sensory world. Moreover, a clear predilection for witnessing God in forms, as well as allusions to the supremacy of the human form, often surround references to the School of Passionate Love. This is so much the case that witnessing absolute beauty in the sensory and admiring the human form (whether *poetically* through imagery or *practically* through gazing) seem to serve as unofficial principles of this unofficial school, at least for some. Any such uniformity found in reference to this *madhhab* reflects a commonality different from chains of initiation through the distinctive Sufi cloak (*khirqah*), inculcation of divine names (*talqin-i dhikr*), or instructive fellowship (*suhbah*). Rather, such references convey a unity of sensibility, emphasis, and outlook among those who did not necessarily have any formally binding affiliation.¹

Attesting to the relationship between reference to this “school” and the practice of contemplating visions of beauty, 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadani's (d. 526/1131) description of the School of Passionate Love concerns gnostics enamored with God through direct witnessing.² Also, this often undefined but implied relationship between the School of Love and witnessing in forms appears in the poetry of 'Umar ibn 'Ali ibn al-Farid (d. 632/1235). Ibn al-Farid seems to allude to the School of Love early on in his “Poem of the Way,” a poem that in many places, especially lines 239–64, could serve as a manifesto for witnessing the Real in forms and the poetic

supremacy of the human form.³ The Egyptian poet exclaims that "I was never confounded, until I chose your love as a *madhhab*," a pronouncement that intimates witnessing in form insofar as the divine beloved has here—at least in terms of poetic language and imagery—assumed the form of a beautiful female.⁴ Similarly, Ibn al-Farid declares that "from my *madhhab* of love there is no egress for me / and if I incline one day away from it, I have forsaken my religion completely."⁵ Although *madhhab* is not an uncommon word in Arabic love poetry, the reference here to the School of Passionate Love was clear to the poem's most famous commentator, Sa'id al-Din al-Farghani (d. 699/1300), a student of Ibn 'Arabi's preeminent student Qunawi. As is usually the case, Farghani translates the Arabic *hubb* (love) into Persian as *'ishq* (passionate love), a translation that, in this instance, for the commentator's audience, mitigates the lexical discrepancy between Ibn al-Farid and Persian adherents to the School of Passionate Love.⁶ In another instance, Farghani's commentary associates "the Denomination of Passionate Lovers" (*firqah-i 'ashiqan*) directly and unambiguously with "the Passionate Lovers of the *Shahid*" (*'ushshaq-i shahid*).⁷ Arguments for the validity and superiority of this way of love can be found in Ruzbihan Baqli's treatise *'Abhar al-'Ashiqin*, where, again, the author refers to "the School of the People of Passionate Love [*madhhab-i ahl-i 'ishq*]."⁸ One sees a similar phrase used by Awhad al-Din al-Kirmani, when he asserts that "until a man has lost his head to the sword of passionate love / he has not become purified in the School of the Passionate Lover [*madhhab-i 'ashiqi*]."⁹ Many of the adherents of this school whom I will discuss correspond to that group which Jami describes in his *Nafahat al-Uns*: "A congregation among the chief figures such as Shaykh Ahmad Ghazali and Awhad al-Din Kirmani occupied themselves in contemplating the beauty of sensory loci in forms, and in those forms witnessed absolute beauty of the Real—may he be exalted—though they were not attached to sensory form."¹⁰

Yet the phrase had fluidity; it was used sometimes by Sufi saints who disagreed upon the manner in which the knower fueled passionate love.¹¹ Indeed, although Mawlana Jalal al-Din Balkhi/Rumi (d. 672/1273) makes many references to the School of Passionate Love in his *Mathnawi-i Ma'nawi* as well as his *Diwan-i Shams*, one cannot group Rumi so easily with figures such as Kirmani, because of Rumi's expressed disapproval of the *practice* (though definitely not the *imagery*) of gazing at beardless youths.¹² As with any *madhhab*, the School of Passionate Love saw not only variances of interpretation but also criticism; the School of Passionate Love, as described by Kirmani, Baqli and others, even faced criticism from other Sufis. For example, Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn 'Uthman Hujwiri (d. 465–69/1072–77) comments that gazing at beardless youths has become a *madhhab*, one which he considers to be a remnant of the Incarnationist movement (*al-Hululiyah*).¹³ Lastly, it seems that the infamy of abuses of this *madhhab* reached beyond the boundaries of Sufi discourse. In a satirical shadow play written in Cairo proximate to 'Iraqi's own stay there, the

poet Shams al-Din Ibn Daniyal (d. 710/1311) comically refers to pederasty as its own *madhhab*. Considering the satiric inversion of Sufi terms in this play, it is highly likely that this phrase is an ironic response to abuses of a sort of *madhhab-i 'ishq* practiced in the poet's age.¹⁴

What was Ibn 'Arabi's relationship to this "school"? Moreover, how sympathetically would Ibn 'Arabi have responded to those adherents who proclaimed the supremacy of the human form for the goal of witnessing? Surely he was aware of these seminal figures and their provocative statements about witnessing divine beauty in the forms of human beloveds. Such can be seen in his mention of Ruzbihan Baqli's infatuation with a singing girl:

The story is told of Shaykh Ruzbihan that he was afflicted with the love of a woman singer; he fell ecstatically in love with her, and he cried much in his state of ecstasy before God, confounding the pilgrims at the Ka'bah during the time he resided there. . . . When he was afflicted by the love of this singer, no one knew of it, but whatever he had with God was transferred to her. He realized that the people would imagine that his ecstasy was for God in its source. So he went to the Sufis and took off his cloak, throwing it before them. He told his story to the people, saying, "I do not want to lie about my spiritual state." He then became like a servant to the singer. The woman was told of his state and his ecstasy over her, and she learned that he was one of the great ones of the People of God. The woman became ashamed, and repented before God for the profession she had followed, by the blessing of his sincerity. She became like a servant to him. God removed that attachment to her from his heart, and he returned to the Sufis and put on his cloak.¹⁵

Most significant, this account highlights 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. This is a major theme in Ibn 'Arabi's writings on love, one that parallels statements made by advocates of the School of Passionate Love, particularly advocates of gazing at human beauty. Also important to note here is Ibn 'Arabi's reference to an ecstasy that others mistakenly imagine is for God "in its source" (*'ala asilihi*). The "source" is what differentiates gnostic love from uninformed love, which is another major theme in Ibn 'Arabi's reflections on love. In other words love for human beings, its signs and symptoms, does not differ in any apparent sense from love for God. Rather, the gnostic must monitor himself, remain wary of the true motivating force behind his love for beautiful forms, and desist from loving women (or young boys) for their own sake.

It is not simply that Ibn 'Arabi was *aware* of this movement. Rather, his statements, poetry, and cosmological view suggest that he sympathized with the sentiment and contemplative methods of those whose allegiance was to the School of

Passionate Love and who advocated witnessing the divine in the forms of human beloveds. In a poem in his *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, Ibn 'Arabi famously describes a "Religion of Love" (*din al-hubb*) as a way particular to those possessing a heart receptive to every form of the divine; the heart, in other words, fluctuates to suit its Lord's state-changing quality ("My heart has become receptive to every form. . . . I profess the Religion of Love; to whatever direction turn its riding mounts, there love is my religion and belief").¹⁶ This religion, as Ibn 'Arabi describes it, is epitomized by the legendary lovers of Arabic erotic poetry. It is important to note that both words used here, *din* (religion) and *hubb* (love), differ in definition and connotation from the words *madhhab* (school) and *'ishq* (passionate love). There is also, however, a parallel that cannot be ignored. The close relationship that Ibn 'Arabi discerns between love and the divine in forms, coupled with his focus on the great lovers of Arabic poetry and his emphasis on contemplating the divine in women, indicates that Ibn 'Arabi saw himself as a member of a religion of love, a tradition that experienced love for the ever-changing and self-manifesting divine, especially in the forms of beautiful human beings.

The Epitome of Beauty: The Human Form

Repeatedly the writings of Ibn 'Arabi affirm that no object of beauty more ably arouses human pleasure and evokes love than the human form. Considering Ibn 'Arabi's emphasis that attraction coincides with constitution, such an assertion seems like a simple statement about natural human inclinations, but the spiritual ramifications of human-to-human attraction fit into more extensive assertions about the nature of beauty and love. The potency of human-to-human attraction is indeed so overwhelming that Ibn 'Arabi often compares it with the love between gnostics and God, ranking these as the two most powerful loves: "Know that love only enraptures the lover in his entirety when the beloved is the Real, may he be exalted, or someone from among the lover's own genus [i.e., a human being], whether girl [*jariyah*] or boy [*ghulam*]."¹⁷ Or as described elsewhere, a human being becomes annihilated in his or her totality either in the love of his or her Lord or in another human being who "is a place of self-disclosure for his Lord."¹⁸ From this second quotation, it is clear that a human loves another human because he or she is a locus of divine beauty, although not all lovers know this. The process of contemplating God in humans finds further cosmological legitimacy in that the "Treasure"—that is, the Real in himself—has been collected and hidden in the form of the Perfect Man, or, translated more consistently with Ibn 'Arabi's thought, the Complete Human (*al-insan al-kamil*).¹⁹

Muhyi al-Din's observations about human beauty usually focus on the male viewpoint, especially the attraction of men for women (though he also comments on the attraction experienced by women for men and men for beardless youths). Indeed, as

Ibn 'Arabi explains in his final chapter of *Fusus al-Hikam*, the alluring quality of women for the male gnostic results from the heights of witnessing (*shuhud*) achievable in beholding and enjoying the female form, a witnessing unattainable through any other medium.²⁰ Ibn 'Arabi declares that humans cannot witness the Real divorced from matter (*la yushahad al-haqq mujarradan 'an al-mawadd abadan*).²¹ Witnessing does not interact with pure spirit or meaning but occurs through the medium of matter, which permits the envisioning of the divine in forms. The medium of witnessing is not necessarily of physical matter (there are other types of matter in Ibn 'Arabi's thought), so it is remarkable that Ibn 'Arabi emphasizes the *physical* form of woman as the greatest medium for witnessing. He informs his audience that the witnessing of the Real in women is the greatest (*a'zam*), most perfect (*akmal*), and most complete (*atamm*) instance of witnessing.²²

Inherent Love of Women

Ibn 'Arabi's discussion of contemplating the divine in woman, considered in detail by Sachiko Murata, originates in the Prophet Muhammad's declaration that women were one of three things made beloved to him.²³ As the hadith states, "*Three things have been made beloved of me from this world of yours: women, perfume, and the delight of my eye has been placed in the prescribed prayer.*"²⁴ These three things have also been made beloved of the heirs of the Prophet Muhammad, that is, those saints who have benefited fully from his infallible example and esoteric knowledge. Ibn 'Arabi is careful to mention that such heirs do not love these three things of their own accord; rather, like the Prophet, these three things have been *made beloved* to them.²⁵ The lack of agency in loving these three things means that women, perfume, and prayer exhibit inherent perfections that those possessing spiritual insight cannot help but love.

The love that the Prophet Muhammad and the achieved gnostics have for women reflects, in fact, a number of cosmological rules of beauty and attraction, the most fundamental of which can be described as "self-knowledge through the medium of otherness." Self-knowledge, arguably the very purpose of existence, has grades of ontological significance. On the most absolute level, the Real seeks to know himself through the process of creation, according to the famous hadith of the Hidden Treasure ("*I was a Treasure . . . Unknown, so I loved to be known*"). On the level of the individual human soul, another hadith, "*Whoever knows himself knows his Lord,*" beckons each seeker of the divine to pursue the true depths of the self or soul.²⁶ In both cases, the seeker needs an "other," a mirror that is similar but somehow detached.

Witnessing of the self in such mirrors results in a fervent longing for the self-in-other. Using a hadith in which God addresses the Prophet David, Ibn 'Arabi underscores God's longing for creation, a longing that outweighs the longing that creation has for God.²⁷ Since, in the case of the human, God breathed his own spirit into his

creation, God's longing for the human is merely a longing for himself, that is, for the derivative of himself that he deposited in man. Because God created man from his spirit, he also endowed man with his form—that is, the form of the cosmos, since the cosmos is the form and mirror of God.²⁸ This means that man is the most complete of mirrors for the Real, in essence and form, such that the Real views himself most fully and longs for himself most urgently in man. Similarly man longs for himself through woman, who is an *other* receptive with respect to him in the same way that the cosmos is receptive with respect to God, and woman longs for herself through her active counterpart, man.

In accordance with the paradigm discussed above, Ibn 'Arabi refers to the attraction that women have for men as "the longing of the whole for its part."²⁹ Just as the human spirit has its source in God, Eve was created from a rib of Adam, a notion Ibn 'Arabi has doubtless received from canonical Sunni narrations.³⁰ As Muhyi al-Din explains in chapter 7 of *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, Adam was first created without the faculty of desire (*shahwah*).³¹ Once Eve was created, however, a mutual attraction arose because of the physical propensities effected by Eve's creation. Eve, having been created from a rib, acquired the traits of "curvature" (*al-inhina'*) and "inclination" (*al-in'itaf*), words that signify the shape of the rib, but also signify attachment and kind disposition. Because of these qualities, a woman is attached and sympathetic (*tahnu*) toward her children and husband. Moreover, and more important, since the rib from which Eve was made came from Adam, Eve's love for Adam is "a love of native place" (*hubb al-mawtin*).³² Or as Ibn 'Arabi states in the *Fusus al-Hikam*, the longing of women for men is the longing of "a thing for its homeland" (*watanih*).³³ Eve longs for the place from which she came, namely, the body of Adam, and, since Adam and Eve are prototypes for the consequent human race, the love of all women for men is one of a derivative for its source. This of course parallels the love of humans for God, who in accordance with Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the Qur'anic verses 15:29 and 38:72 ("I breathed in him [Adam] of My spirit") is the Source of the human spirit.

Adam's longing for Eve also arises from this creative process, although the results are reversed and, in a sense, complementary. Just as, according to the hadith cited so often by Ibn 'Arabi, "God created Adam according to his form," that is, God's form, so too has God created Eve according to Adam's form.³⁴ God witnesses himself in the form of man, one derived from himself; similarly, man witnesses himself in the form of woman, derived from himself. When the rib was taken from Adam, a void came about that had to be filled, for "there will not remain any emptiness in existence."³⁵ Thus in place of this void in Adam's side, God placed desire for Eve, a desire so forceful that at the time of union it "spreads throughout all the parts of his body."³⁶ Since the rib has come from Adam, the love of Adam for Eve is "a love of himself," for she is "a part from him."³⁷ Here the love of Adam for Eve resembles the

love of God for creation, which is also a love of the Divine Self. Hence one can see that Adam sees in Eve that which God sees in his creatures, and Eve sees in Adam that which the creatures see in God.

The Beauty of Creative Powers

Expanding on the causes of human attraction, Ibn 'Arabi explains in chapter 380 of *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah* that women allow men to actualize an inherent ambition: the act of creation. The desire to procreate comes from the very physical form of man, an action that requires an accommodating locale. Enlightened men, always more cognizant than other men, actually see in women a place of creation (*mahall al-takwin*).³⁸ Man, moreover, seeks perfection and, like his Creator, desires to produce nothing less than perfection (*al-kamal*). In terms of creation, there is nothing more perfect or complete (*akmal*) than human existence; thus no undertaking can outdo the creation of a human. Such cannot occur, of course, except in women. Hence, the love men have for women is a creative love. Ibn 'Arabi notes that this is an astounding situation, since woman has come from man (as his rib), is the source of man (as his mother), and yet also allows him to bring into being something identical to himself (a human child). Of course, for Ibn 'Arabi the significance of this creative attraction and the act of creation is its resemblance to the situation between God and the cosmos: God creates from himself the cosmos, which reflects his attributes (and is thus, in a sense, identical to him), and yet from this creation he comes to be the God-in-creation, acquiring manifestation from that which he created.

The potential to create leads the spiritual elect to love perfume as well. As Ibn 'Arabi tells us in the final chapter of *Fusus al-Hikam*, using an Arabic proverb, the "loveliest of perfumes is the embrace of the beloved."³⁹ The most compelling perfume is the natural fragrance of women—a scent that for Ibn 'Arabi indicates fertility and reproduction, one that, as he puts it, comes from the "odors of creation" (*rawa'ih al-takwin*).⁴⁰ In Ibn 'Arabi's vision, attraction or love arises from the complementary relationships that have been established in the first instances of creation. Since man comes from a creative entity, God, and has produced a creative entity, woman (who creates by bearing children), the love of creative feminine powers is inherent in him.

Cosmological Implications

The Prophet Muhammad's very wording in his narration of the three beloved things carries great meaning according to Ibn 'Arabi, reflecting not only man's inherent love of the creative powers of the feminine but also his stance in the cosmos and the order of creation. Ibn 'Arabi tells us that the three beloved things—women (*al-nisa'*), perfume (*al-tib*), and prayer (*al-salah*), in that order—are feminine, masculine, and feminine, in terms of Arabic lexical gender. Moreover, the first word in this series,

al-nisa', refers to *actual* female entities in terms of sex, namely, women. For Ibn 'Arabi this indicates the order of things in creation. First, the divine essence (*al-dhat*) is lexically feminine; from it proceeds all creation. Since the divine essence's powers of creation are absolute, it is represented by a *real* feminine word, the word for "women." Then comes a masculine word (*al-tib*), paralleling the masculinity of Adam, the first man and thus the first human soul. Although Adam is a man, his being represented by perfume means that he still retains within himself a scent of the divine creative powers, since, as Ibn 'Arabi has established, the truest of perfumes emits the fragrances of creation. Last in the series is a feminine word (*al-salah*), which reflects the feminine entity—Eve—who came from Adam's rib and from whom proceeds all of mankind. Since Eve creates only in a physical (and thus relatively unreal) sense, she is represented by a word that is feminine only lexically, not in actuality.⁴¹ Thus the creative ability of women is merely a manifestation of the inherent propensity of the divine essence to create, bestowing on women a physical femininity that reflects the actual femininity of the divine essence. Just as Adam stands between two femininities—that of the divine essence and that of the woman who proceeded from him—the word "perfume" stands between the words "women" and "prayer," such that the very words of the Prophet Muhammad reproduce the ontological situation of the cosmos. By contemplating himself in woman, woman as his effect, and himself as the effect of God, all in one relationship, man has the ability to see himself as receptive vis-à-vis God, creative vis-à-vis woman, a Source for woman, an effect of God, and a medium through which God witnesses the affair in its entirety. This is the realization of triplicity that Ibn 'Arabi stresses so emphatically in the final chapter of the *Fusus al-Hikam*.

The threefold structure encountered—God, man, and woman—embodies a pattern of ongoing genesis throughout the cosmos. As Ibn 'Arabi repeatedly affirms, the creation of the cosmos involves triplicity (*al-tathlith*), a threefold process involving activity, receptivity, and bestowed activity. In Muhyi al-Din's manifold descriptions of the cosmos' genesis, a general pattern emerges in which three participants interact: (1) a divine source; (2) a medial participant, receptive toward the divine essence and active toward that which proceeds from it; and (3) a third participant, receptive toward the medial participant, active toward the rest of creation.⁴² In some descriptions, the cosmos is described as having resulted from a process whereby the divine essence (*al-dhat*) engenders the Primary Intellect (*al-'aql al-awwal*), which consequently employs the Universal Soul (*al-nafs al-kulliyah*) to bring creation into being.⁴³ Or using a different set of terms, the essential light (*al-nur al-dhati*) becomes manifest in a process of speaking; here the medial participant is the Breath of the All-Merciful (*al-nafas al-rahmani*) and the third participant is called the Cloud (*al-'ama'*).⁴⁴ Often, the medial and third participants mentioned above are described as male and female respectively, or as Adam and Eve, and the interchange between

them that allows creation is dubbed by Ibn 'Arabi as conjugal union (*al-nikah*).⁴⁵ This is perhaps most evident in Ibn 'Arabi's description of the Pen and the Preserved Tablet, which unite in an active-receptive or male-female relationship to write out the letters and words that correspond to all created things.⁴⁶

Also, it is clear from Ibn 'Arabi's descriptions of these various sets of terms that the medial and third participants are in fact one reality; in that reality's functioning as a locus of reception it is called a "tablet," for example, since words are imposed upon it, while in its functioning as a generative medium, it is called a "pen." When seen as one indiscernible reality, this receptive-active entity is often described as the "Muhammadan Reality" (*al-haqiqah al-Muhammadiyah*), where Ibn 'Arabi attributes both the medial participant and the third participant of the cosmos' genesis to the essence of the Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁷ Here it must be understood that the "Muhammad" who lived for a duration of time in the Arabian Peninsula is merely a manifestation on the physical plane of the created entity most proximate to the divine essence. This proximity is such that the Muhammadan Reality precedes any other existent and occupies an axial position in the generation of all things.⁴⁸

Comprehensive Witnessing

In understanding the significance of the male-female relationship, one must bear in mind that, in Ibn 'Arabi's vision, the greatest witnessing of existence is that which is most comprehensive. Ibn 'Arabi establishes this early on in the *Fusus al-Hikam* in his discussion of Adam, where he asserts the superiority of Adam to the angels and indeed any other created thing. Adam serves as the supreme mirror in which God witnesses himself—that is, witnesses himself through the witnessing of Adam—because Adam as the first Perfect Man possesses an unparalleled comprehensiveness. Adam as the prototype of the Perfect Man enjoys a comprehensiveness that causes him to be both the "very polishing" (*al-jala'*) that elicits the cosmos' reflectivity in its function as the divine mirror, as well as the "spirit" vis-à-vis the cosmos, which serves as the "form" of this mirror.⁴⁹ In other words, Adam is the essence or inner reality of the cosmos on account of his comprehensiveness.⁵⁰ The human reality that Adam represents also comprehends two polar attributes—receptivity and activity, or femininity and masculinity, for "humanness [*al-insaniyah*]" is a coming together of male and female."⁵¹

In order for a human to possess the comprehensiveness that allows for complete witnessing, that human must possess qualities of femininity as well as masculinity, servitude as well as mastery. Of course, no witness possesses these traits in a manner as balanced or as complete as Muhammad, the most complete of Complete Humans (or Perfect Men), and it is for this reason that his witnessing is ideal.⁵² Muhammad as an ontological phenomenon, not merely as a historical figure, possesses perfect receptivity as well as borrowed activity. This means that Muhammad

sees himself as a completely receptive servant vis-à-vis God, an empty container that can serve as a locus of manifestation for all the divine names. On the other hand, he also sees the cosmos actively or creatively, as his effect, all in all yielding a witnessing unsurpassed in any other existent. Ibn 'Arabi notes the relationship between receptivity, bestowed activity, and witnessing in describing the purely passive and receptive origins of the Muhammadan Reality: "When he [Muhammad] was created quintessentially a slave, he never once sought mastery, rather remaining in a state of prostration, steadfast in his being purely receptive [*munfa'ilan*], with the effect that God created through him that which he created, thus conferring upon him the rank of activity [*fa'iliyah*] in the World of the Breaths."⁵³ Muhammad hence embodies the paradox of creation. Through his absolute servitude, his being the most subservient or receptive of existents, Muhammad acquires a sort of mastery: a comprehensive creative ability, such that in relation to creation he is both a Source and a Cause, witnessing creation from a Creative point of view and manifesting God's dominance and vigilance over his creatures.

As a pair, Adam, who is active, and Eve, who is receptive—and in fact all men and women—embody Muhammad's cosmological synthesis (femininity and masculinity, receptivity and activity, servitude and lordship) on the physical plane of existence.⁵⁴ Male-female attraction and union allows the gnostic to witness the Real in a comprehensive, Muhammadan manner, as both active and receptive. It is for this reason that man's witnessing the Real in woman supersedes all other manners of witnessing and that those gnostics who emulate the Muhammadan ideal love women so profoundly.

Those Oblivious to the True Beauty of Women

Of course, the love of women is a witnessing and love of God only for those aware of that which Ibn 'Arabi describes, those who—like the Prophet Muhammad—love women because of the "completeness of witnessing in them."⁵⁵ One who enjoys women without such knowledge and insight merely seeks pleasure and indulges in that pleasure in a manner similar to beasts. The form of comprehensive union is present in such attraction, but it lacks the "spirit" that exists only for one who understands and sees that man's enjoyment of woman actually corresponds to the Real's enjoyment of himself.⁵⁶ After all, true agency always belongs to the Real, even though he achieves his will through intermediaries; that is, in reality the object and subject of witnessing is the Real, but through the medium of man.

Nevertheless, Ibn 'Arabi admits that he too once lacked proper knowledge of women and love for them. For eighteen years of his life, after he entered upon the path of spiritual perfection, he detested women and union with them because he lacked understanding of the true status of male-female attraction and union.⁵⁷ After acquiring knowledge that, for the reasons outlined above, God has made women

beloved to Muhammad and those who imitate his spiritual faultlessness, Ibn 'Arabi proudly states, "I am the most tender of people toward them [women] and the most observant of their due, because of the insight that I possess in this matter, an insight that comes from [their] being made beloved, not from a natural love; only one given knowledge and understanding from God knows the value of women."⁵⁸

One who possesses such knowledge realizes that through male-female attraction and union, human lovers recreate the genesis of the cosmos, the first and truest instance of love and fulfillment; all participants, divine, medial, and third, are included in their love. Their love comprehends both poles of existence: cosmos and Real, created and Creator, passive and Active, feminine and masculine. It is for these reasons that love for women—if undertaken with proper gnosis—is a "divine love" (*hubb ilahi*).⁵⁹ Despite the fact that the form of male-to-female attraction and union is physical, the witnessing, longing, and love that occur therein has a spirit or inner reality that Ibn 'Arabi deems "divine."

Gazing at Beardless Youths

Considering the cosmological significance of the female gender to Ibn 'Arabi's account of love and beauty, one might assume that he would not approve of male admiration for the beauty of young men, a beauty so often celebrated in the Persian Sufi texts of this age. After all, simple biology dictates that beardless male youths, while depicted as somewhat androgynous in Persian poetry, still cannot represent the same creative feminine faculty that Ibn 'Arabi emphasizes. It is perhaps with this in mind—along with the observation that Ibn 'Arabi's erotic poetry, like that of his Egyptian counterpart Ibn al-Farid, revolves around the godly female form—that some scholars have asserted Ibn 'Arabi's opposition to gazing at beardless young men.⁶⁰

Yet while man's enjoyment of woman has the exclusive potential for a certain meditation on the created order, gazing at beardless youths grants the accomplished gnostic (and only the accomplished gnostic) a different contemplative perspective. In outlining this perspective, Ibn 'Arabi's double definition of "recent ones" (*al-ahdath*) exemplifies his unexpected and shifting use of words:

[We turn our attention] to companionship with "recent ones" [*al-ahdath*], that is, both beardless youths [*al-murdan*], and the People of Innovations who create praiseworthy imitated customs [*al-tasnin al-mahmud*] in the religion, a practice that the Lawgiver has conceded to us. The gnostic gazes [*yanzur*] at the beardless youth because he is smooth [*amlas*]. That is, there is no growth on his cheeks, like a sleek rock. The sort of earth that is called *marda'* [the feminine singular of the word for "beardless" mentioned above] is that which has no vegetation upon it. Thus the beardless youth reminds the

gnostic of the Station of Detachment [*maqam al-tajrid*], and [the gnostic gazes because the youth] has more recently been with his Lord than an older person. The Law [*shar'*] has taken this into consideration in the matter of rain.⁶¹ The closer something is to its original creation, the nearer it is in signification, the more exalted in sanctity, and the more plenteous in drawing mercy to itself, than the one who is older and distant from this station. As for why [these beardless youths] are "recent ones" [*al-ahdath*], it means that they are fresh from their Lord. In their companionship is a recollection of their newness by which one discerns his eternalness—may he be exalted. This is an instance of proper reflection [*i'tibar*] and a connecting path. If [the "recent one" in question] should be of the recent ones in declaring new imitated customs [*ahdath al-tasnin*], then he is supported by [God's] saying, may he be exalted, whenever a recent reminder [*dhikr muhdath*] comes to them from their Lord [21:2], or whenever a recent reminder comes to them from the All-Merciful (26:5). The one who blames has not accepted [the divine message] heartily. This is how the gnostics consider the matter. As for novice wayfarers [*al-muridun*] and Sufis [*al-sufiyah*], the companionship of recent ones is forbidden to them, because of the predominance of animal desire in them. This is because of the intellect, which God has placed in opposition to it. Were it not for the intellect, natural desire would be praiseworthy.⁶²

Ibn 'Arabi has here combined ingeniously two aspects of the practice of gazing at beardless youths: first, the cosmological reason for choosing young men as objects of aesthetic contemplation and, second, the answer to objections raised that this practice falls outside of the Prophet's established way, the *Sunnah*. While only one term equivalent to "gazing" arises in this passage, Ibn 'Arabi's concentration on the physical features of beardless youths, particularly their smooth, hairless cheeks, clarifies that such is his intent. The beauty of a beardless young man lies in his youthful countenance, a reminder to the man of awakened perception that the object of contemplation in question has arrived more recently from the realm of potentiality into the realm of external existence.⁶³

The notion that ontological freshness is a sort of beauty can be found intimated in an earlier treatise on beauty and love by the Sufi philosopher Abu al-Hasan al-Daylami, who categorizes proximity with relation to Universal Beauty as one factor causing an entity to be beautiful. Noteworthy here is al-Daylami's reference to a hadith alluded to in the passage by Ibn 'Arabi above, narrated by Anas ibn Malik: "We were with God's Messenger (God's blessings and peace be upon him) when rain fell upon us. . . . God's Messenger (God's blessings and peace be upon him) laid aside part of his attire, so that the rain would hit him [uncovered]. We asked, 'Why did you do this?' He replied, 'Because it is recent from its Lord [hadith 'ahd

bi-rabbihi], may he be exalted.”⁶⁴ Supporting his assertion that any entity recently with its Lord has sway over one more distantly created by him, Ibn 'Arabi refers more directly to this hadith in the *Fusus al-Hikam* and highlights the ability of a simple substance (rain) recently with its Lord to have a subduing effect (*sakhkhara*) on even a divine messenger who receives revelation but is, in terms of creational chronology, more distant from his Lord.⁶⁵

In the case of beardless youths, companionship with them yields another realization indicated by Ibn 'Arabi: God's eternalness. That the observer has aged while creation continually pours forth young human beings should remind the observer that the Source of creation is eternal and continually new.

One last indication that in a passage about *suhbah* (companionship) Ibn 'Arabi refers to gazing—although his abstruse language and reluctance to mention gazing directly seem to point to atypical timidity—is his insistence that anyone other than achieved gnostics (*al-'arifun*) should not enjoy the company of the beardless. This includes novice wayfarers (*al-muridun*) who have recently taken the path and “Sufis,” a term that, when contrasted with the term *'arif*/gnostic, has the connotation of a simple albeit pious person observing the path of traditional spiritual and ethical training, not just in the works of Ibn 'Arabi but also in Rumi's statements.⁶⁶

Lastly, lest one dismiss the practice of gazing at beardless youths as an innovation and blame those who associate with such innovators, Ibn 'Arabi defends keeping the companionship of those who undertake *tasnin*, that is, the creation of imitated customs. As he points out, God has conceded this matter to men of spiritual ability. Here, in using the unusual word *tasnin*, Ibn 'Arabi refers to a hadith that “*whoever leaves an exemplary established way in Islam [man sanna fi-al-islam sunnah hasanah] will have its reward and the reward of all those who practice it after him, without any reduction in their reward.*”⁶⁷ Of course, to consider the practice of gazing at beardless youths an exemplary established way might be considered somewhat presumptuous, and, in fact, many (including Rumi) would regard the latter portion of this narration more applicable to the practice of gazing: “*Whoever leaves an evil established way in Islam [man sanna fi-al-islam sunnah sayi'ah] will bear its burden and the burden of all those who practice it after him, without any reduction in their burden.*”

Nevertheless the liberty of the saints in creating new practices by this point had become somewhat of a truism in certain Sufi circles, as can be seen in the reminder Ibn 'Arabi's preeminent disciple Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi (d. 673/1273–74) gives to the Parwanah of Konya in response to his consideration of banning *sama'*: “Indeed, the innovation [*bid'at*] of the Friends of God is like customary practice [*sunnat*] of the noble prophets, and the Friends know what the wisdom behind it is. Whatever issues from them is not without the prompting of the Almighty.”⁶⁸ Ibn 'Arabi's reference to two almost identical verses in support of such new practices is somewhat

strange, if only because—while the portion quoted of each of the two verses is neutral—that which follows is strikingly condemnatory. Of course, the portion quoted supports Ibn 'Arabi's statement, and, moreover, to the man of insight, each meaning derived from the verse is a revealed meaning, which is Ibn 'Arabi's point; revelation is an ongoing affair. The gnostics, sensitive to the true universal significance of the physical world around them, should be permitted to introduce practices verified by their insight and constant communication with the Real.

It is such insight that allows Ibn 'Arabi to make his final statement somewhat boldly: Natural desire (*al-shahwah al-tabi'iyah*) itself would be praiseworthy if not for the intellect (*al-'aql*). While it is not unusual for medieval Islamic writers, including Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, to consider the functional benefits of the faculty of sexual desire,⁶⁹ Ibn 'Arabi takes the matter one intuitive step further. Since all of creation is essentially good and permissible, desire itself cannot be blamed, especially since it joins together separated entities, enkindling within them natural love, which is a means to something that approximates divine love. In the divine-human dialogue that is law, only reason—not natural or animal desire—has the ability to hear. Reason draws boundaries and makes judgments, and while they are a great service to moral human beings, restraining them from desire's tendency to neglect divine commands, such determinations are distant from the pervasive goodness of all things.⁷⁰ Of course, while here intimating the praiseworthiness of desire, Ibn 'Arabi limits concupiscent contemplation of human beauty to male-female relationships, for reasons grounded in both his cosmology and divine law. Ibn 'Arabi seems to be aware of the risks of experiencing sexual longing for young males, as can be seen in his repeated mentioning that the most intense experience of love occurs for a beloved that is either a "girl" (*jariyah*) or a "boy" (*ghulam*).⁷¹ (It should also be mentioned that, in discussions of love, Ibn 'Arabi often assumes that the lover in question is a mature male.) Moreover, a contemplation of human beauty that arises purely from sexually motivated companionship, without contemplation of the divine, is "defective" (*ma'lulah*), according to Ibn 'Arabi.⁷² This is because, as we have seen, appreciation for the beautiful human form must always be accompanied by an informed recognition of the divine presence.

Three Levels of Love, Three Levels of Beauty

While Ibn 'Arabi's vision eludes definition and classification, it can be described as emanational in that the realms of existence come from a Source, share the same binding reality, affect one another, but also differ in the precision with which they reflect the divine names and thus the clarity with which they allow one to perceive. This is especially significant when it comes to beauty and love because, to Muhyi al-Din, beauty or the power to evoke love has different meanings in accordance with the level of existence on which the admiring lover perceives. According to Ibn 'Arabi,

the levels of love are three: the divine (*al-hubb al-ilahi*), the spiritual (*al-hubb al-ruhani*), and the natural (*al-hubb al-tabi'i*). While the parameters and signs of these three loves differ, lovers on the lower levels of spirit and nature imitate the pattern set by the divine love of Self. The Real's love for himself effects the creation of a mirror; this mirror has no actual existence, especially with respect to the Real. The mirror is merely a passive locus in which the Real unburdens his love, releasing the existence-bestowing breath that Ibn 'Arabi calls the "Breath of the All-Merciful." The more nonexistent and thus receptive that mirror is, the better it reflects and thus the more beloved it is. In similar fashion, all lovers "create" their beloveds and all beloveds are in fact nonexistent. Whether the gnostic experiences divine, spiritual, or natural love, in any case, the beloved lacks both existence and necessity, for it is a fashioning of the lover.

In order to understand this, we first return to Ibn 'Arabi's chapter on love in *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, chapter 178. Referring to the hadith that serves as the nucleus of his account of gnostic perception, the hadith that describes God's becoming the very faculties of his servant, Ibn 'Arabi turns his attention to the narration's introductory words.⁷³ Recall that in this first part of the hadith, God proclaims that his servant draws near to him, in the first instance, by fulfilling obligatory duties. This drawing near continues and intensifies through recommended or supererogatory deeds (*al-nawafil*), and it is on account of these supererogatory deeds that eventually God loves his servant. Once God loves his servant, God becomes the servant's *hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his hand through which he seizes, and his foot through which he walks*. That "extra" or supererogatory deeds result in God's love is a central point for Ibn 'Arabi. For him, an important cosmological lesson underlies God's love of non-obligatory additions or augmentations of worship. Just as a lack of necessity or an extraneous addition of worship arouses God's love, so too can all excess (*ziyadah*) be understood as a cause of love. This is because all lovers, in their act of loving, reproduce the creational love of God, who saw in creation nothingness (as opposed to his existence) and a lack of necessity (as opposed to his necessity, in that he is the Necessary Existent or *wajib al-wujud*): "A cause of love is supererogatory things, which are augmentations; the world is an augmentation in being, such that he loved the world because it was supererogatory, so that it became his hearing and his sight—until he loved none other than himself."⁷⁴ Considering that augmentation (*ziyadah*) is a cause of love, and beauty is "that which causes love," it might be fair to describe augmentation (*ziyadah*) as a sort of beauty. Regardless, since creation imitates the pattern of love set by God, augmentation arouses love in the created things just as it does in the Creator. That which causes God to love things, a lack of being and a lack of necessity, also causes each lover to love his beloved—every beloved is both nonexistent and unnecessary.

Of course, a number of misgivings might arise when such an assertion is made, the most immediate of which concerns God's function as a beloved. After all, God is not only a subject of love, a lover, but often also an object of devotion, a beloved. How can it be said that God as a beloved is nonexistent or unnecessary? One has to remember here that the lover does not love God directly, for it is impossible to have any direct knowledge of God without intermediaries; even on the most exalted level, the divine names act as intermediaries. In the case of *shuhud*, the God that is witnessed and thus loved by the gnostic has taken on forms through the gnostic's imaginal powers. The gnostic has encountered some reality but has come to witness and love that reality only through "creating" a beloved within the imagination. Thus the beloved in forms neither has absolute existence or necessity: "The beloved, who is nonexistent, although he does happen to be nonexistent, takes on representational forms in the imagination, thus possessing one of the many types of existence that is perceived by the imaginal vision in the imaginal realm by means of the eye that suits it."⁷⁵ Even if the lover adores something in the sensible realm, still, the lover does not encounter that beloved object directly; it is filtered through the lover's senses and formed anew in the imagination before it becomes an object of love. In other words, every lover creates his own beloved.

Similar to the divine love of self that results in the universe, the lover first loves himself or loves the True Self, then projects that love outward, creating a beloved. Ibn 'Arabi refers to this phenomenon in terms used to describe conjugal states, usually of women: "It is incumbent to thank God since / she is a virgin for me, and I have been previously wed."⁷⁶ As Ibn 'Arabi explains, the term "virgin" (*bikr*) signifies that the beloved is untouched by existence.⁷⁷ The term that refers to a person formerly wed (*thayyib*), however, signifies that the lover's love has caused and thus in a figurative sense preexisted the beloved. According to Ibn 'Arabi, "I have loved before that, so that I am a person previously wed"; like one once married, the source/lover has experienced love, returning to that experience upon the creation of the beloved. The beloved's virginity, mirroring the purity of nonexistence, results from her later entry into the narrative of love and her being an unwitting object of the lover's desire to see and know. This beloved has an autonomous will and yet emanates from the lover's experimental knowledge. In other words, there is a parallel between individual acts of love and the love that brought the cosmos into creation, the love that God attributes to himself when asserting in the famous narration that "*I loved to be known, so I created creation.*"⁷⁸ Just as God created the universe so that we might know him, "*we only create for him, so that we might know him.*"⁷⁹ We, the created things, attempt to share in divine love by creating our own beloved, thus experiencing the divine quality that caused creation and acquiring some knowledge of our Lord. This is why Ibn 'Arabi tells us that the beloved does not exist: it is the lover's limited enjoyment of an infinite longing.

The nonexistent beloved results from the lover's stopping short in aiming at the object of love, choosing a particular beloved, when in fact the *real* object of love for any lover is infinite and divine Love itself: "I am a beloved of Love, if only you knew, / and Love is our beloved, if you only understood!"⁸⁰ The failure of human lovers to know the true object of love can be seen in Ibn 'Arabi's lamentations "if only you knew" and "if you only understood." Of course, this failure varies according to the different levels or grades of love that exist. One on the spiritual level of love is more aware of his actual love object than a lover engaged in natural love, yet both have chosen objects of love rather than love itself. These lovers share in the portion of divine love that God has caused to "diffuse throughout every possible entity attributed with existence, and [to which he has] coupled a pleasure beyond which there is no higher pleasure."⁸¹ It is a bounded form of that infinite love on account of which God makes himself manifest throughout the cosmos: "One part of the cosmos loves another with a limited love derived from absolute love."⁸²

These differences in the levels or grades of love result, to some degree, from the proximity possible between lover and beloved on that stage of existence. Can two physical bodies become one? In the material realm, the closest union possible—as Ibn 'Arabi mentions—is sexual union, but even then there is an evident separation, and each party maintains an individual identity. On this level of nature, the lover maintains his distinct will and uses the beloved to achieve his amatory objective, gratifying the desire that flows through his constitution like "water in wool."⁸³ If this sounds selfish, it is precisely Ibn 'Arabi's point. The "lover" on the level of natural love loves little more than the self that is constructed by physical desires. His love is not aimed at "the beloved herself."⁸⁴ According to Ibn 'Arabi, natural love is "the love of the common masses, the aim of which is union through the animal spirit, such that the spirit of each lover is [actualized as] a spirit for its possessor only through sensual pleasure and the provocation of desire; its ultimate fulfillment is the sexual act."⁸⁵ Such a lover acknowledges the boundaries set by the natural realm and experiences love exclusively within those boundaries, thus unable to perceive beyond them.

On the level of spirit, the merge is far more complete and the interchange more exact; this is so much the case that the wills or the desires of the two parties merge into one, such that the lover wills whatever his beloved wills and vice versa.⁸⁶ As Ibn 'Arabi explains, giving and receiving on the level of spirit avoids the limits of bodies, with the effect that the merging of spirits is harmonious and perfectly reciprocal:

Spiritual love is removed from the definition [of natural love] and distant from measure and figure, because the spiritual faculties have an inclination that is relational. Thus, when relationships in the inclinations of lover and beloved become more comprehensive than gazing, hearing, or knowing, that

is [spiritual] love. Yet if there is a deficiency, and the relationships come up short, then it is not [such] love. The meaning of "relationships" is that the spirits whose business it is to give and bestow are turned toward the spirits whose business it is to take and lay hold; those spirits suffer when there is a lack of reception and these spirits suffer when there is a lack of effusion. . . . Each of these two spirits exerts its full capability in the love of the other.⁸⁷

Clearly, boundaries in the spiritual realm are far more attenuated than boundaries in the natural realm. Here the lover and beloved merge in a manner more abstract and conceptual than natural love, since, after all, their wills or desires become one, so much so that the lover resembles the beloved.⁸⁸ Ibn 'Arabi explains in fact that in the case of spiritual love, the chosen beloved must be capable of having a will (*iradah*), otherwise the lover has no will to imitate and make his own. Still, on the level of spirit, the "self" remains and the union is imperfect.

It is only on the level of divine love that no distinction can be made, for the divine essence is not a "self" that serves as a barrier. Moreover, creation (the object of his love) is his mirror, so one cannot speak of God and creation as two disjointed entities. In other words, lover and beloved are one: "His love knows no beginning or end. . . . The essence of his love for his servants is precisely the beginning of their creation, from the first created entities to the last ones ad infinitum. The relationship of God's love to them is the relationship of his creational-ontological disposition [*kaymunatihi*]: it is with them however they might be, in their state of non-existence or existence."⁸⁹ While Ibn 'Arabi intermittently attributes divine love to human beings, he pronounces that divine love in its plenary sense cannot be achieved by humans. Yet the human love that most resembles divine love (which Ibn 'Arabi often simply calls "divine love") demands an almost complete loss of self.

While the barrier between a human lover and his beloved cannot be completely removed, the distinction between "self" and "other" can be reduced to almost nothing. On this level of love, the gnostic lover realizes the Oneness of Being. Things are inseparable, including the lover and the Beloved, such that everything is beautiful and everything is beloved. If it were fair to posit a "divine perspective," the human version of divine love would most correspond to such a perspective, since the Real sees only himself in all created things, thus admiring the beauty of all things and loving them. One who loves with the human version of divine love adores all created things, for "the sign of divine love is a love for all created things on every realm [of existence], supersensory, sensory, imaginal, or subjective-imaginal."⁹⁰ In a *qasidah* that begins his chapter on love, Ibn 'Arabi refers to this uniquely human brand of divine love, one that involves a union of *both* spirit and body:

The ultimate fulfillment of love for a human is his union
spirit to spirit and body to body;

the ultimate of union with the All-Merciful is heresy,
 for without doubt his *ihsan* [excellent action] is a part of my *ihsan*.
 If I cannot depict him in a form, then I know not whom I adore;
 my soul and his depiction in forms reject any rational arguments.⁹¹

The lover has committed heresy (*zandaqah*) because, using the eye of *tashbih*/similitude, he has associated himself or his soul with his Lord and has denied any boundary between them. Thus the excellent actions (*ihsan*) of the Real and the actions of the lover are inseparable. Another act of heresy is the depicting of the Real in forms, for God is beyond forms and limitations. Yet the lover must see the Real in forms (as mentioned, *shuhud* demands such) in order to know the beloved and experience love. While these statements are beyond the intellectual boundaries of any rational argument (*burhan*), they are proven by the reality of the soul (which is inseparable from its Lord), its experiences, and the witnessing of the Real in forms (*taswirihi*), an envisioning beheld firsthand by the gnostic lover.

In ranking these three loves, one might assume that Ibn 'Arabi places divine love as most exalted, spiritual love directly below, and natural love as the lowest form of love, but as is often the case in Ibn 'Arabi's writings, matters are not that simple. First, as has been mentioned, divine love cannot be perfectly achieved by a human lover. The human reality (*al-haqiqah al-insaniyah*) as it develops within the limits of the human frame is limited by its constitution, and on account of this constitution, preference is inevitable and a pure divine love of all things impossible. For this reason, man's love is limited to the spiritual and the natural: "The relationship of love to us is not the same as the way love is related to him. The love pertaining to us, because of that which our [human] reality can accommodate, is divided into [merely] two parts: that which is called 'spiritual love' and 'natural love.' Our love for God, the Exalted, takes place with both loves simultaneously, although this is a matter difficult to imagine."⁹² Again, contrary to what one would expect, Ibn 'Arabi does not emphasize here the superiority of spiritual love. This is because natural love and spiritual love must coexist for complete human love; they have a complementary relationship intrinsic to human perfection.

Man loves with "both loves simultaneously," because he is a balance of both the spiritual and the natural worlds, spirit and body, and it is this combination that yields his comprehensiveness. On the one hand, man can experience the natural world, which allows him to produce forms in the imagination, which bestows on him proximity and love, and which gives him a taste of the level of being closest to nonexistence. On the other hand, the spiritual reality of man—his spirit—is an inhabitant of the highest supersensory realm, a direct result of God's command, a breath from the divine Breaths; the spiritual love man experiences puts him in contact with a much more sublime sort of intimacy. As Ibn 'Arabi explains, while loving

God simply for himself (which is spiritual love) does outweigh loving God selfishly, or simply for oneself (natural love), the combination of spiritual love and natural love surpasses even the selfless spiritual love he has described: "Some of us love him for himself. Others from among us love him for the combination [*al-majmu'*] [himself and ourselves, that is, himself and his manifestations in creation], which is more complete in terms of love, since it is more complete in terms of gnosis of God and witnessing. This is because some of us have gnosis of him through witnessing [*shuhud*], and thus love him for the combination. This [loving him through the combination of himself and creation] is because witnessing is not possible unless in a form, and form is composite [*murakkabah*], such that the Beloved possesses a composite form."⁹³

Since the natural world allows witnessing the Real in forms, it is a necessary part of the complete gnostic love that Ibn 'Arabi describes: loving God in his sensory as well as supersensory manifestations. Although this might not be equivalent to true divine love, it is the closest human beings can come to divine love; it is, after all, an effectively comprehensive love of both the high and the low. As was made clear in our discussions of perception, the "low" or the natural realm provides the observer with the material needed to interact consciously with the supersensory realm. The lover uses his presence in the natural realm to interpret his interactions in the spiritual realm, all the while recognizing the relative illusoriness of the natural realm. In this way, the lover acknowledges the "self" (the self or soul that is a product of his natural or physical existence) while also negating it.

Conclusion: Loving Humans with Divine Love

The key, then, to complete love or "divine love" is merging spiritual and natural love, while acknowledging the true object of love: the Real. If such occurs, the gnostic is then able to love another human being with divine love. After all, the gnostic sees the Real in that human beloved, such that the beauty of the human beloved is divine. In such a case, the representational beloved can vary or even be multiple in number, for the true Beloved is invariably the Real.

According to Ibn 'Arabi, such an acknowledgment of the True Beloved in various loci is ably captured in a poem by the 'Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 170/786–193/809), whose statement so impresses Muhyi al-Din that he quotes and explicates it twice in *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah*. In fact, the instances of this quotation occur in the two sections of *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah* where Ibn 'Arabi discusses natural, spiritual, and divine love, namely, chapter 178, on love, and the segment of chapter 73 where in questions 116 through 119 Ibn 'Arabi engages with inquiries concerning love posed earlier by al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi. Notwithstanding Ibn 'Arabi's epiphanic commentary, the poem was clearly written without any esoteric or spiritual significance. According to the contemporary historian Baqir Sharif al-Qurashi,

al-Rashid's impetus for these lines was his infatuation with three singers from among his slave girls, Ghadir, Maridah, and Haylanah.⁹⁴

Three delightful maidens possess my bridle
and have alighted in every place of my heart.
Why, when all of creation coils in fright of me,
do I obey them—although they constantly disobey me!
This is nothing other than the dominion of passion
with which they prevail more mightily than my dominion.⁹⁵

Ibn 'Arabi tells us that there is a "concealed secret" behind Harun al-Rashid's use of the phrase "my bridle" (*'inani*), speaking of the bridle as one instead of attributing a separate bridle to each of the three beloveds who has sovereignty over him.⁹⁶ Such language reveals a unified desideratum: The enthralled caliph "loves exclusively One Meaning actualized for him by these three girls." In other words, the girls are mere representations of one Beloved Source, and for this reason they are described as alighting *together* in each place of the lover's heart.⁹⁷

Yet the power of these beloveds should not be attributed to themselves. In a separate discussion of these same lines, Ibn 'Arabi clarifies that it is *not* the beloved who humbles or has power over the lover.⁹⁸ In fact, the beloved is "owned" (*mamluk*) and overpowered (*maqhur*) by the lover, because the beloved is created by the lover; the preceding lines from al-Rashid illustrate this in a particularly pertinent manner, since he does in fact own his beloveds, who are literally his slaves. Yet clearly, despite the power that he has over them, the lover still suffers abasement vis-à-vis his beloveds; the caliph has become humbled and even degraded before his slave girls. As Ibn 'Arabi argues, it is love itself that dominates and abases the lover, exemplified in the caliph's attribution of dominion (*sultan*) not to the girls but rather to love or passion itself (*al-hawa*). Ibn 'Arabi here intimates that an indivisible and powerful entity—love—results in the lover-beloved relationship, remains the source of that relationship, and maintains its dominance over the two complementary parties it has created from itself. Like the candid observations of 'Iraqi's *Lama'at*, Ibn 'Arabi's more guarded comments point to a belief that Love corresponds to the divine essence. After all, according to the hadith of the "Treasure . . . Unknown," the divine essence "loved" to be known even before creation or the manifestation of the divine names, and created all things as mirrors for himself because of this essential love of himself. Consequently love permeates the cosmos, drawing all things toward one another. This attraction is Beauty, the common alluring Source that pulls every lover toward every beloved, seen in Ibn 'Arabi's observation that these three singing girls represent a unified Meaning. There is an implication here and in many other observations that the quality that draws the Real to himself is also Beauty and that perfect Beauty corresponds to the Real, as attested to by Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the hadith "*God*

is beautiful and loves beauty, so he loves himself."⁹⁹ While the form of the beloved may vary, Beauty (or, if one prefers, "belovedness") pertains exclusively to the Real.

Despite the ontological precision that he discerns in al-Rashid's language, it is important to note that Muhyi al-Din does not necessarily mean to assert that the caliph is aware of the divine reality of this love. Lovers have a tendency to be precise when it comes to describing the symptoms of the sway of their beloved(s), which explains the validity of all love poetry, even when the beloved is exclusively human. The accuracy of lovers in describing love is due to their attention to its effects and concomitants, for these are phenomena common to all lovers, those aware of their true Beloved as well as the oblivious. As we begin to apply Ibn 'Arabi's concepts of beauty and love to his lyric poems, it becomes increasingly clear that love and beauty are each One Reality, communicated through universal terms and images but subject to degrees of perception.

Chapter 4: Ibn 'Arabi and Human Beauty

1. As Omid Safi describes it, "The Path of Love may be described as a loosely affiliated group of Sufi mystics and poets who throughout the centuries have propagated a highly nuanced teaching focused on passionate love (*'ishq*).” See Omid Safi, "The Path of Sufi Love in Iran and India," in *A Pearl in Wine: Essays on the Life, Music, and Sufism of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, ed. Pirzade Zia Inayat Khan (New Lebanon, N.Y.: Omega, 2001), 221–266, 244.

2. 'Ayn al-Qudat's use of this phrase has been quoted in Carl W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1985), 74.

3. Th. Emil Homerin describes this section as telling "the seeker to become sensitive to the divine beauty within all of existence and its shifting self-manifestation among lovers." See Th. Emil Homerin, *Umar Ibn al-Farid: Sufi Verse, Saintly Life* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2001), 68.

4. Ibn al-Farid, *Diwan Ibn al-Farid*, ed. Mahdi Muhammad Nasir al-Din (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1423/2002) (hereafter cited as *Diwan Ibn al-Farid*), p. 32, line 83.

5. *Diwan Ibn al-Farid*, p. 31, line 64.

6. Farghani, *Mashariq al-Darari*, p. 234, line 3. William C. Chittick discusses the various possibilities for Farghani's death dates in "Sa'id al-Din Muhammad b. Ahmad Farghani," *EI2*, 8:860–61.

7. Farghani, *Mashariq al-Darari*, 440. Farghani describes the station of passionate love for the witness/testimony as a "lower station," presumably lower than the rank of the most achieved gnostic.

8. Baqli, *Kitab 'Abhar al-'Ashiqin*, ed. Henry Corbin and Muhammad Mu'in (Tehran: Dep. d'iranologie de l'Institut francoiranien, 1337/1958) (hereafter cited as *Kitab 'Abhar al-'Ashiqin*), p. 16, #33.

9. See the Persian text in *Heart's Witness: The Sufi Quatrains of Awhaduddin Kirmani*, edited with introduction and notes by Bernd Manuel Weischer, trans. Peter Lamborn Wilson and Bernd Manuel Weischer (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978), p. 98, #62. This *ruba'i* is missing from the *Diwan-i Ruba'iyat*, which are cited later.

10. Jami, *Nafahat al-Uns*, 591. The second name included is Awhad al-Din 'Iraqi, although surrounding context clarifies that Kirmani is meant.

11. Omid Safi highlights the "fresh, dynamic, and ever transforming understanding of themselves" that characterized adherents to the School of Love. See Omid Safi, "On the Path of Love Towards the Divine: A Journey with Muslim Mystics," *Sufi* 78 (Winter 09/Spring 10): 22–38, here 28, reprinted from the *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 3, no. 2 (August 2003).

12. See William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 168–69, 212–20, and 288–94, which clarify the importance of human beauty (and the term *shahid*) in Rumi's poetry.

13. Hellmut Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele*, translated as *The Ocean of the Soul: Men, the World and God in the Stories of Farid al-Din 'Attar*, trans. John O'Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2003) (hereafter cited as *Ocean of the Soul*), 471. Ritter cites the *Kashf al-Mahjub*.

14. See Cyrus Ali Zargar, "The Satiric Method of Ibn Daniyal: Morality and Anti-Morality in *Tayf al-Khayal*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37, no. 1 (2006): 68–108, here 90–92.

15. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 177, p. 311.18 (p. 315). Translation taken from Carl W. Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism* (Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1996), 3–4, with some slight modifications. The story is also narrated by Jami in his *Nafahat al-Uns*, 257. It seems that Louis Massignon considered the protagonist of this episode to be Ruzbihan Misri, not Ruzbihan al-Baqli (the text of *FM* has the name as "al-Shaykh Ruzbahar"). However, Henry Corbin, Muhammad Mu'in (Mo'in), and Ghulam 'Ali Ariya confirm that the protagonist is indeed Ruzbihan al-Baqli. See Masataka Takeshita, "Continuity and Change in the Tradition of Shirazi Love Mysticism: A Comparison between al-Daylami's 'Atf al-alif and Ruzbihan Baqli's 'Abhar al-'Ashiqin," *Orient: Report of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan* 23 (1987): 113–31, here 129n.4.

16. *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, 43–44. For the entirety of the poem, translated stunningly with a commentary elucidating the poem's literary and mystical context, see Michael Sells, "Love," in *The Literature of al-Andalus*, ed. María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Sells (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), 126–58, especially 150–55. Since I mention the poem on a few occasions throughout the book, and since endnote formatting will not do justice to Sells' lyrical use of line breaks, I will here cite Nicholson's translation (*Mystical Odes*, 66–67) with very minor adjustments:

O doves that haunt the *arak* and *ban* trees, have pity! Do not double my woes
by your lamentation!

Have pity! Do not reveal, by wailing and weeping, my hidden desires and my
secret sorrows!

I respond to her, at eve and morn, with the plaintive cry of a longing man and
the moan of an impassioned lover.

The spirits faced one another in the thicket of *ghada* trees and bent their
branches towards me, and it (the bending) annihilated me;

And they brought me divers sorts of tormenting desire and passion and untried
affliction

Who will give me sure promise of Jam' and al-Muhassab of Mina? Who of
Dhat al-Athl? Who of Na'man?

They encompass my heart moment after moment, for the sake of love and
anguish, and kiss my pillars,

Even as the best of mankind encompassed the Ka'ba, which the evidence of
reason proclaims to be imperfect,

And kissed stones therein, although he possessed reason. And what is the rank of the Temple in comparison with the dignity of a human?

How often did they vow and swear that they would not change, but one dyed with henna does not keep oaths.

And one of the most wonderful things is a veiled gazelle, who points with red finger-tip and winks with eyelids,

A gazelle whose pasture is between the breast-bones and the bowels. O marvel! a garden amidst fires!

My heart has become receptive to every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,

And a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Ka'ba and the tables of the Torah and the Book of the Qur'an.

I follow the Religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith.

Ours is a model in Hind's lover Bishr and in their counterparts and in Qays and Layla, and in Mayya and Ghaylan.

17. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 321.15 (p. 325). While this quotation acknowledges homoerotic love for young boys, prevalent in the author's time, it should not be taken as a sanctioning of *concupiscent* gazing at beardless youths, a practice that Ibn 'Arabi explicitly declares forbidden in his 108th chapter of *al-Futuhat*, an interesting point to which we will return (gazing without sexual desire, though, he clearly does allow for the elite). In at least one other instance, Ibn 'Arabi names the love for a *jariyah* or *ghulam* to be the peak of human love; see *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 108, p. 186.17 (p. 189). It is also interesting that both terms used here are commonly used to describe a female and male slave respectively.

18. *FM* (Ihya'), vol. 4, ch. 558, p. 260.33 (p. 260). See also William C. Chittick, "The Divine Roots of Human Love," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 17 (1995): 55–78, here 76–77, where this passage along with much of the subchapter discussing the Presence of Love (*hadrat al-wudd*) has been translated.

19. *FM*, vol. 3, ch. 358, p. 260.26 (p. 267).

20. *Fusus al-Hikam*, 217. For a lucid analysis of this chapter, see Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics and Qur'anic Prophets*, 176–203.

21. *Fusus al-Hikam*, 217.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Numerous passages on Ibn 'Arabi's cosmological approach to sexual intercourse and male-female love have been translated and analyzed insightfully by Sachiko Murata in chapter 6 of *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 171–202.

24. See, for example, *FM*, vol. 3, ch. 380, p. 485.19 (p. 501). Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855) narrates this hadith from Anas ibn Malik in *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*

(Riyadh: Bayt al-Afkar al-Duwalayah, 1419/1998), #12318/9, p. 868. This hadith is also narrated from Anas ibn Malik by Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Ahmad (ibn 'Ali) ibn Shu'ayb al-Nasa'i (d. 303/915), in *al-Mujtaba min al-Sunan, al-mashhur bi-Sunan al-Nasa'i* (Riyadh: Bayt al-Afkar al-Duwalayah, 1420/1999), *Kitab 'Ishrat al-Nisa'* (36/1), #3939/3940, p. 416. All versions in these two collections are missing the word *thalath* found in Ibn 'Arabi's citation, and all have either *al-dunya* or no prepositional phrase instead of *dunyakum*.

25. *FM*, vol. 3, ch. 380, p. 488.22 (p. 504).

26. Commenting on the hadith "He who knows his soul (or self) knows his Lord," Ibn 'Arabi states that "a human's gnosis of himself is a precursor to gnosis of his Lord." *Fusus al-Hikam*, 215. As William Chittick comments, it is a hadith "not accepted by the specialists," that is, the specialists in Sunni narrations. See *SPK*, 396n.22.

27. Again this comes from a *hadith qudsi*, "Oh David! I long for them [i.e., those who long for me] much more intensely!" See *Fusus al-Hikam*, 215. I have not been able to locate this narration with the wording that Ibn 'Arabi uses in any of the traditional hadith collections.

28. In Ibn 'Arabi's thought, the cosmos is the Great Man (*al-insan al-kabir*), such that man and cosmos share formal similarities (e.g., being made up of four elements or humors, making use of faculties or angels, and of course, having the ability to serve as a divine mirror). In more familiar terminology, man is a "microcosm." Still, the human being has a comprehensiveness not possessed by the cosmos. See *Fusus al-Hikam*, 49.

29. *Ibid.*, 215. While Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of gender and creation can arguably be described as "patriarchal," he also does not hesitate to take stances on spiritual and even jurisprudential matters that oppose traditional views of women. See Sa'diyya Shaikh, "In Search of 'Al-Insan': Sufism, Islamic Law, and Gender," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 4 (December 2009): 781–822.

30. See narrations describing women as "created from a rib" in *Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab Ahadith al-Anbiya'* (60/1), #3331, p. 819, as well as *Kitab al-Nikah* (67/80), #5185, p. 1321. Also see *Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Rada'* (17/18), #1468, p. 775. This account of Eve's creation is rejected in certain Shi'i narrations (which indicate that Eve was made from clay like Adam) and, hence, in Shi'i scholarly circles as well; see 'Allamah Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i (1402/1981), *al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lam li-l-Matbu'at, 1418/1997), 4:136, 146, and especially 151.

31. *FM*, vol. 1, ch. 7, p. 175.12 (p. 124).

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Fusus al-Hikam*, 216.

34. Ibn 'Arabi states this explicitly: "Man, that is, Adam, was created according to his form and Eve was created according to the form of Adam." See *FM*, vol. 1, ch. 72, p. 811.4 (p. 679). This hadith is cited often in the works of Ibn 'Arabi; he considers it fully in a series of answers to questions posed to him. See *FM (Ihya')*, vol. 2, ch. 73,

question #143, p. 121.6 (p. 124). This hadith can also be found in *Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Isti'dhan* (79/1), #6227, p. 1554, and *Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Birr* (45/32), #2612, p. 1408, *Kitab al-Jannah* (51/11), #2841, p. 1523.

35. *FM*, vol. 1, ch. 7, p. 175.17 (p. 124)

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Fusus al-Hikam*, 220. As Ibn 'Arabi mentions, this proverb was still current in his day.

40. *Ibid.*

41. That is, the word for “prayer” is not actually female in terms of sex. Arab grammarians have divided feminine words into “real” (*haqiqi*) and “lexical” (*lafzi*). Real feminine words are those the referents of which possess female reproductive organs; all other words are lexically feminine. See, for example, an introductory treatise on Arabic grammar by Baha' al-Din Muhammad ibn Husayn 'Amuli, that is, Shaykh al-Baha'i (d. 1030/1621), *al-Fawa'id al-Samadiyah* (Qum, Iran: Intisharat-i Nahawandi, 2006), 11.

42. While each set of words (the Intellect and the Soul, the Cloud and the Breath, and the Pen and the Tablet) has its own specific function in the vision of Ibn 'Arabi, sometimes certain parallel terms are in fact treated as synonyms.

43. Ibn 'Arabi tells us that in the creation of the cosmos an existent (*mawjud*) allows for the coming to being of that which is “detached” or derived (*munfasil*) from that existent. The first existent is the Primary Intellect, and the first derivative or detachment is the Universal Soul. In parallel fashion, the last existent is Adam, and the last derivative is Eve. See *FM*, vol. 1, ch. 10, p. 188.28 (p. 137). Elsewhere Ibn 'Arabi explains that the Primary Intellect is “a precondition for the existence of the [Universal] Soul,” and that the process of active-receptive creation continues with the Dust Cloud (*al-haba'*) and the Universal Body (*al-jism al-kull*) acting as receptive counterparts to that which results from the marriage of the Intellect and the Soul, resulting in the created forms. See *FM*, vol. 1, ch. 60, p. 367.17 (p. 293). More often, as the process of receptivity continues, Ibn 'Arabi describes the Universal Nature (*al-tabi'ah al-kulliyah*) as being receptive vis-à-vis the Universal Soul.

44. Ibn 'Arabi never clearly lays out these three components as one set but speaks of the relationship between the essential light and the Cloud in one instance, *FM*, vol. 1, ch. 13, p. 201.11 (p. 148), and the relationship between the Cloud and the Breath of the All-Merciful in another, *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 198, p. 394.7 (p. 400). Chittick has translated the latter passage, wherein Ibn 'Arabi clearly describes the Cloud as “an All-Merciful Breath receptive to the forms of the letters and words of the cosmos.” See *SDG*, 70. In other words, the Cloud and the Breath are one reality, a reality described using different terms in accordance with its function as receptive or active.

45. Su'ad al-Hakim discusses in detail the concept of *al-nikah* in the writings of Ibn 'Arabi, which she defines as the “marriage of two things resulting in a third, on

whatever level it might be" and identifies as the concept of triplicity (*al-tathlith*). See al-Hakim, *al-Mu'jam al-Sufi*, 1069–71. Among later Akbari commentators, Ibn 'Arabi's use of the term developed into the "five conjugal unions" (*al-nikahat al-khamsah*), a more complex hierarchy of unions begetting the Five Presences or Five "Worlds": the World of Meanings (*'alam al-ma'ani*), the World of Pure Spirits (*'alam al-arwah al-mujarradah*), the World of Rational Souls (*'alam al-nufus al-natiqah*), the World of Representations (*'alam al-mithal*), and, last, the World of Sensory Perception (*'alam al-hiss*) or the Visible World (*'alam al-shahadah*). The conjugal unions that beget the Five Presences (sometimes four), which differ in name and distinction among various Akbari commentators, are discussed ably by 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani in his *Sharh Fusus al-Hikam*, 549–50. See also chapter 5 (143–69) of Murata's *Tao of Islam* for a clear discussion in English of "macrocosmic marriage."

46. In a chapter concerning cosmological "fathers" and "mothers," Ibn 'Arabi discusses the marriage of the Pen and the Tablet, terms taken from Qur'anic usage (68:1 and 85:22). According to Ibn 'Arabi, "the Pen and Tablet have a conjugal union that is suprasensory (*ma'nawi*) and abstracted but an effect that is sensory and witnessed." *FM*, vol. 1, ch. 11, p. 191.25 (p. 139).

47. Ibn 'Arabi sometimes equates the Muhammadan Reality with the Highest Pen (*al-qalam al-a'la*) and mentions that in the terminology of others it is called the Primary Intellect (*al-'aql al-awwal*); he consistently refers to the comprehensiveness of this Reality, its precedence over all creation, and its being the first receptive (and thus, other than the Real, the first active) agent. See *FM*, vol. 1, ch. 3, p. 140.29 (p. 94). Su'ad al-Hakim defines the Muhammadan Reality as the "most perfect created locus of self-disclosure in which the Real becomes manifest; rather, this reality is the Perfect Man in the truest sense. Although every existent is a particular locus of self-disclosure for a divine name, Muhammad is unique in being a locus of self-disclosure for the Comprehensive Name (*al-ism al-jami'*), which is also the Greatest Name (*al-ism al-a'zam*); thus his is the rank of utter comprehensiveness (*al-jam'iyah al-mutlaqah*)." After listing the creative functions of the Muhammadan Reality, al-Hakim provides textual proof for her claims, which—due to the discussion of the Muhammadan Reality in the coming paragraph—need not be cited here. See al-Hakim, *al-Mu'jam al-Sufi*, 347–52.

48. It is also a precedence and proximity that is ceaseless: The continued maintenance of those things depends upon the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*), who acquires the inner Muhammadan perfections and embodies the Muhammadan Reality (*al-haqiqah al-Muhammadiyah*).

49. *Fusus al-Hikam*, 49. See also Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 72–73, where Sells translates this passage powerfully in free verse; the phrase "very polishing" can be found in his translation.

50. Ibn 'Arabi makes this clear: "When the Real (may he be exalted), because of his innumerable Beautiful Names, wanted to see the essences of those Names, or, if you prefer, wanted to see his own essence, in a comprehensive being (*kawn jami'*) that,

upon having the attribute of existence, would encompass the affair in its entirety and through which he would make manifest his own mystery to himself, [he created Adam.] . . . All of those Names which are in the Divine Form are made manifest in this human configuration, such that—through this [external] existence—it has obtained the rank of comprehending (*al-jam'*) and encompassment (*al-ihatah*). . . . Angels do not possess the comprehensiveness (*jam'iyah*) of Adam and only understand the divine names particular to them, those names by which they declare the transcendence of the Real and glorify him; they do not know that God has certain names the knowledge of which does not reach them, names by which they do not declare his transcendence [like Adam] and do not glorify him with the glorification of Adam." *Fusus al-Hikam*, 48 and 50. My translation of "Divine Form" (*al-surah al-ilahiyah*) instead of the plural "Divine Forms" (*al-suwar al-ilahiyah*) is a correction of the text based on Qaysari's quotation of the *Fusus al-Hikam* in his commentary, 363.

51. *FM*, vol. 4, ch. 463, p. 88.12 (p. 84).

52. Muhammad's combination of two polar perspectives, receptive and active, enjoys a higher degree of perfection than one alone; as Ibn 'Arabi states elsewhere, the offspring of the male-female relationship combines the perfection and preparedness (*isti'dad*) of both male and female, such that "the perfection of the Perfect Son is greater than the perfection of the [Perfect] Father," which is why Muhammad—as a "son" or a merging of male and female—is "distinguished by the most complete perfection." Adam, on the other hand, while having male qualities, had no mother and so lacks comprehensiveness. In the present context the offspring discussed is not a human child but the very *act* of attraction and union. By bringing together male activity and female receptivity, the phenomenon of male-female attraction and the act of male-female union has a comprehensiveness that parallels the essential nature of the Muhammadan Reality. Thus one might say that the witnessing that man experiences in woman, by reenacting the original triplicity of the cosmos, parallels that of existence's greatest witness, Muhammad. See *FM*, vol. 1, ch. 72, p. 811.4 (p. 679).

53. *Fusus al-Hikam*, 220.

54. In distinguishing Muhammad from Adam, Ibn 'Arabi depicts Adam as the male prototype or "father" of mankind while attributing to Muhammad—as has been said—the attributes of the first entification, that which God created from nothing else. While Adam as the first man represents primacy, Muhammad as the first light represents completion, totally, and comprehensiveness. In other words, Ibn 'Arabi uses "Adam" to discuss human origins, nature, and potential but relates "Muhammad" to the comprehensive creative faculty, for Muhammad represents the ambiguity that lies between the Perfect Man and pure divine action.

55. *Fusus al-Hikam*, 217. The word here translated as "completeness," *kamal*, can also mean "perfection" and has been translated as such in a number of instances throughout this chapter. In the case of witnessing in women, however, Ibn 'Arabi does seem to refer to witnessing in a locus that allows for comprehensiveness, wholeness, or "completeness," as has been discussed.

56. This is implied in Ibn 'Arabi's statement that the one who enjoys women as a locus of pleasure does not know "through Whom he has pleasure and Who [in reality] has pleasure," implying—as he has throughout this chapter—that comprehensive witnessing is the Real's witnessing of himself as cosmos and as God simultaneously through man. See *Fusus al-Hikam*, 219.

57. *FM*, vol. 4, ch. 463, p. 88.21 (p. 84).

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Fusus al-Hikam*, 218.

60. Hellmut Ritter states such in *Ocean of the Soul*, 494. Joseph Norment Bell makes this assertion in his *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 140.

61. For the matter of rain, see note 64, which refers to a hadith from *Sahih Muslim*. As for the phrase *maqam al-tajrid*, it refers to the wayfarer's setting aside all things, including the entire cosmos and even his own heart; it is precursory to *maqam al-tafrid*, in which the wayfarer experiences an even purer oneness with God. See al-Hakim, *al-Mu'jam al-Sufi*, 878–80, wherein al-Hakim cites Ibn 'Arabi's *al-Istilahat*. A concise but clear explanation of these two stations can also be found in Shihab al-Din 'Umar al-Suhrawardi (d. 632/1234), *'Awarif al-Ma'arif*, appended to Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2004), 5:42–250, here 243.

62. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 108, p. 186.24 (p. 190).

63. Ibn 'Arabi also discusses the recentness of the young in his discussion of the child Moses' power of subjection (*taskhir*) over the adult Pharaoh in the chapter concerning Moses of *Fusus al-Hikam*. The subjugating force that the young have over the old comes from being newer in terms of creation (*hadith al-takwin*). See *Fusus al-Hikam*, 197–98.

64. *Sahih Muslim, Kitab Salat al-Istisqa'* (9/2), #898, p. 446. See also *Fusus al-Hikam*, 198, as well as al-Daylami, *Atf al-Alif*, 23.

65. See *Fusus al-Hikam*, 198.

66. Shams al-Din Ahmad-i Aflaki (fl. 754/1354), *Manaqib al-'Arifin*, ed. Tahsin Yazici (Tehran: Dunya-i Kitab, 1362 hijri-shamsi) (hereafter cited as *Manaqib al-'Arifin*), trans. in John O'Kane, *The Feats of the Knowers of God: Manaqeb al-'Arefin* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), xvi–xvii.

67. *Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Zakah* (12/20), #1017, p. 508, for this and the following portion of the hadith. It is interesting to note the possibility raised by Franklin D. Lewis that the person mentioned as "Shaykh Muhammad" might be Ibn 'Arabi. Important here is that while Shams generally admires "Shaykh Muhammad," he disapproves of his "failure to follow in the way of the Prophet and observe the law." See Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 149–51, here 151.

68. *Manaqib al-'Arifin*, vol. 2, p. 578, translation from O'Kane, *Feats of the Knowers of God*, p. 397, #564.

69. See Al-Ghazali, *Kimiya-i Sa'adat*, vol. 1, 19–20.

70. Chittick discusses the useful opposition of desire and intellect (or, in his translation, passion and reason) in Ibn 'Arabi's thought in *SPK*, 159–62.

71. See *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 108, p. 186.17 (p. 189) as well as *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 321.15 (p. 325). The equivalence suggested here between the lovability of young women and young men is worth mentioning.

72. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 108, p. 188.5 (p. 191).

73. As quoted and discussed in the first chapter of this book, this hadith is narrated in the divine first-person: "My servant draws near to Me through nothing I love more than that which I have made obligatory for him. My servant never ceases drawing near to Me through supererogatory works until I love him. Then, when I love him, I am his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his hand through which he seizes, and his foot through which he walks." There are other versions of this hadith that Ibn 'Arabi cites. For this version, see *SPK*, 325, and al-Bukhari, *Kitab al-Riqaq* (81/38), #6502, p. 1617.

74. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 322.18–19 (p. 326).

75. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 329.13 (p. 334).

76. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 328.16 (p. 333).

77. *Ibid.*

78. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 323.21 (p. 327).

79. *Ibid.*

80. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 316.2 (p. 320).

81. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 73, question #116, p. 111.13 (p. 113).

82. *Ibid.*

83. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 73, question #116, p. 108.34 (p. 111).

84. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 329.36 (p. 334).

85. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 73, question #116, p. 108.34 (p. 111). As Ibn 'Arabi indicates, a desire for union is the natural result of love on every level of existence—on the level of sensory or material existence, this union is called "sexual." But in the "elemental configuration" (*al-nash'ah al-'unsuriyah*), the most complete union is conjugal or sexual union (*nikah*). See *Fusus al-Hikam*, p. 217, line 5. Whether in an embrace, time spent together, or sexual relations, all lovers seek some sort of union; see *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 322.31 (p. 327).

86. Thus Ibn 'Arabi tells us that the ultimate result of spiritual love is for "the essence of the beloved to become identical with the essence of the lover, and the essence of the lover to be identical with the essence of the beloved, which is what the School of Incarnation (*al-Hululiyah*) suggests, though they have no knowledge of it in its true sense." *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 329.11 (p. 334).

87. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 73, question #116, p. 110.16 (p. 112).

88. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 73, question #116, p. 110.35 (p. 113).

89. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 324.26 (p. 329).

90. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 73, question #116, p. 110.32 (p. 113).

91. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, 315.33 (p. 320).

92. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 325.3 (p. 329).

93. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 325.22 (p. 330).

94. Al-Qurashi, *Hayat al-Imam al-Rida* (Tehran: Manshurat Sa'id ibn Jubayr, 1412/1992), 2:225. Al-Hafiz Abu al-Fida' Isma'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373), the famous historian and student of the vehement Ibn 'Arabi critic Ahmad ibn Tay-miyah (d. 728/1328), reports after citing this poem that singing girls performed for Harun al-Rashid, whereupon, having become overexcited by their music, he lavished money upon them, no less than three thousand dirhams for each performer. See Ibn Kathir, *al-Badayah wa-l-Nahayah*, ed. 'Ali Shiri (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1408 hijri), 10:238–39.

95. The three double lines quoted here appear in *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 73, question #116, p. 111.3 (p. 113), while the first double line also appears in *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 325.17 (p. 329).

96. See *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 325.18 (p. 330) for this and the following quotation.

97. *Ibid.*

98. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 73, question #116, p. 110.36 (p. 113).

99. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 322.14 (p. 326). See p. 45.

Chapter 5: 'Iraqi and the Tradition of Love, Witnessing, and *Shahidbazi*

1. Of course, genre must be considered as well. For Sufi authors, the word seems to have carried its many connotations in disparate contexts, even when one connotation was highlighted. While in poetry, the human *shahid* was emphasized, in prose, authors tended to focus on cosmological aspects of the word. Thus the glossaries attributed to 'Iraqi and authored by Tabrizi define the *shahid* rather simply as "what they call the self-disclosure (*tajalli*).” See *Kulliyat*, 564; *Diwan*, 430; *Rashf al-Alhaz*, 64. 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani offers a more detailed definition of *shahid* in his glossary of Sufi terms, a definition that still includes *tajallin* as a factor; see his *Istilahat al-Sufiyah*, 37.

2. See Bell, *Love Theory*, 125–47.

3. The use of the word *baz*, an active participle derived from *bazi* (playing), carries a negative sense in many of the compound words where it occurs, such as *qumar-baz* (a gambler) or *nazarbaz* (a profligate gazer). The word often conveys a sense of hedonism. Yet since *bazi* also implies playfulness, in the case of *shahidbazi*, there might also exist a sense of harmlessness, something stopping short of carnal conduct. See Dihkhuda, *Lughatnamah*, under *shahidbazi*.

4. See the Qur'an, 11:90, 85:14, 3:31, 60:8, 61:4, 3:76, 3:148, 3:159, 20:39, and so on.

5. A number of medieval Muslim commentators have noted the differences in the various terms meaning "love," including Ibn 'Arabi. In chapter 178 of *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, Ibn 'Arabi, always sensitive to etymologies, outlines the implications of four such words: (1) *hubb*, from a root related to the seed and thus indicating "germinal,

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