

Mystical Arabic Poetry 2

Week 5: Ibn 'Arabi's Tarjumān al-ashwāq

Poem 1¹

I wish I knew if they knew
whose heart they have taken

Or my heart knew
which high-ridge track they follow.

Do you picture them safe
or do you picture them perished?

The lords of love in love
are ensnared, bewildered.

From the preface

“Amazing! How could it be that the one pierced through the heart by love had any remainder of self left to be bewildered? Love’s character is to be all consuming. It numbs the senses, drives away intellect, astonishes thoughts, and sends off the one in love with the others who are gone. Where is bewilderment, and who is left to be bewildered?”²

¹ From the translation by Michael Sells *Stations of Desire* (Ibis, Jerusalem, 200), p.51

² *Ibid*, frontispiece.

Week 5: Tarjumān al-ashwāq

Poem 16³

1. They (the women) mounted the howdahs on the swift camels and placed in them the (damsels like) marble statues and full moons,
2. And promised my heart that they should return; but do the fair promise anything except deceit?
3. And she saluted with her henna-tipped fingers for the leave-taking, and let fall tears that excited the flames (of desire).
4. When she turned her back with the purpose of making for al-Khawarnaq and al-Sadīr
5. I cried out after them, “Perdition!”. She answered and said. “Do you invoke perdition?”
6. Then invoke it not only once, but cry ‘perdition’ many times”.
7. Oh dove of the *arāk* trees, have a little pity on me! For parting only increased your moans,
8. And your lamentation, O dove, inflames the longing lover, excites the jealous,
9. Melts the heart, drives off sleep and doubles our desires and sighing.
10. Death hovers because of the dove’s lamentation, and we beg him to spare us a while,
11. That perchance a breath from the zephyr of Hājir may sweep towards us rain-clouds
12. By means of which you will satisfy thirsty souls; but your clouds only flee further than before.
13. Oh watcher of the star, be my boon-companion, and Oh wakeful spy on the lightning, be my nocturnal comrade!
14. Oh sleeper in the night, you did welcome sleep and inhabit the tombs before your death.

³ From the translation by R H Nicholson, *The Tarjumān al-ashwāq* (Royal Asiatic Society, 1911/1978), p. 77-80.

15. But had you been in love with a fond maiden, you would have gained, through her, happiness and joy,
16. Giving to the fair (women) the wines of intimacy, conversing secretly with the suns and flattering the full moons.

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From Poem 11⁴

Marvel, a garden among the flames!

My heart can take on any form: a meadow for gazelles, a cloister for monks,

For the idols, sacred ground, Ka'ba for the circling pilgrim, the tables of the Torah,
the scrolls of the Qur'án.

I profess the religion of love; wherever its caravan turns along the way, that is the belief, the faith I keep.

⁴ Translation by Sells, p.73