

The hidden ways by which we lovers go;
 I cannot bear my life without his face,
 And every minute I am in this place.
 The passing world outside is unaware
 Of mysteries Ayaz and Mahmoud share;
 In public I ask after him, although
 Behind the veil of secrecy I know
 Whatever news my messengers could give;
 I hide my secret and in secret live''.'

The birds question the hoopoe and he advises them

An ancient secret yielded to the birds
 When they had understood the hoopoe's words –
 Their kinship with the Simorgh was now plain
 And all were eager to set off again.
 The homily returned them to the Way
 And with one voice the birds were heard to say:
 'Tell us, dear hoopoe, how we should proceed –
 Our weakness quails before this glorious deed.'

'A lover', said the hoopoe, now their guide,
 'Is one in whom all thoughts of Self have died;
 Those who renounce the Self deserve that name;
 Righteous or sinful, they are all the same!
 Your heart is thwarted by the Self's control;
 Destroy its hold on you and reach your goal.
 Give up this hindrance, give up mortal sight,
 For only then can you approach the light.
 If you are told: "Renounce our Faith", obey!
 The Self and Faith must both be tossed away;
 Blasphemers call such action blasphemy –
 Tell them that love exceeds mere piety.
 Love has no time for blasphemy or faith,
 Nor lovers for the Self, that feeble wraith.
 They burn all that they own; unmoved they feel
 Against their skin the torturer's sharp steel.

Heart's blood and bitter pain belong to love,
 And tales of problems no one can remove;
 Cupbearer, fill the bowl with blood, not wine –
 And if you lack the heart's rich blood take mine.
 Love thrives on inextinguishable pain,
 Which tears the soul, then knits the threads again.
 A mote of love exceeds all bounds; it gives
 The vital essence to whatever lives.
 But where love thrives, there pain is always found;
 Angels alone escape this weary round –
 They love without that savage agony
 Which is reserved for vexed humanity.
 Islam and blasphemy have both been passed
 By those who set out on love's path at last;
 Love will direct you to Dame Poverty,
 And she will show the way to Blasphemy.
 When neither Blasphemy nor Faith remain,
 The body and the Self have both been slain;
 Then the fierce fortitude the Way will ask
 Is yours, and you are worthy of our task.
 Begin the journey without fear; be calm;
 Forget what is and what is not Islam;
 Put childish dread aside – like heroes meet
 The hundred problems which you must defeat.

The story of Sheikh Sam'an

Sam'an was once the first man of his time.
 Whatever praise can be expressed in rhyme
 Belonged to him: for fifty years this sheikh
 Kept Mecca's holy place, and for his sake
 Four hundred pupils entered learning's way.
 He mortified his body night and day,
 Knew theory, practice, mysteries of great age,
 And fifty times had made the Pilgrimage.
 He fasted, prayed, observed all sacred laws –
 Astonished saints and clerics thronged his doors.

He split religious hairs in argument;
 His breath revived the sick and impotent.
 He knew the people's hearts in joy and grief
 And was their living symbol of Belief.
 Though conscious of his credit in their sight,
 A strange dream troubled him, night after night;
 Mecca was left behind; he lived in Rome,
 The temple where he worshipped was his home,
 And to an idol he bowed down his head.
 "Alas!" he cried, when he awoke in dread,
 "Like Joseph I am in a well of need
 And have no notion when I shall be freed.
 But every man meets problems on the Way,
 And I shall conquer if I watch and pray.
 If I can shift this rock my path is clear;
 If not, then I must wait and suffer here."
 Then suddenly he burst out: "It would seem
 That Rome could show the meaning of this dream;
 There I must go!" And off the old man strode;
 Four hundred followed him along the road.
 They left the Ka'abah* for Rome's boundaries,
 A gentle landscape of low hills and trees,
 Where, infinitely lovelier than the view,
 There sat a girl, a Christian girl who knew
 The secrets of her faith's theology.
 A fairer child no man could hope to see –
 In beauty's mansion she was like a sun
 That never set – indeed the spoils she won
 Were headed by the sun himself, whose face
 Was pale with jealousy and sour disgrace.
 The man about whose heart her ringlets curled
 Became a Christian and renounced the world;
 The man who saw her lips and knew defeat.

* A building of grey stone at the centre of the great mosque in Mecca, circumambulated by every pilgrim seven times. It is the geographical centre of Islam.

Embraced the earth before her bonny feet;
 And as the breeze passed through her musky hair
 The men of Rome watched wondering in despair.
 Her eyes spoke promises to those in love,
 Their fine brows arched coquettishly above –
 Those brows sent glancing messages that seemed
 To offer everything her lovers dreamed.
 The pupils of her eyes grew wide and smiled,
 And countless souls were glad to be beguiled;
 The face beneath her curls glowed like soft fire;
 Her honeyed lips provoked the world's desire;
 But those who thought to feast there found her eyes
 Held pointed daggers to protect the prize,
 And since she kept her counsel no one knew –
 Despite the claims of some – what she would do.
 Her mouth was tiny as a needle's eye,
 Her breath as quickening as Jesus' sigh;
 Her chin was dimpled with a silver well
 In which a thousand drowning Josephs fell;
 A glistening jewel secured her hair in place,
 Which like a veil obscured her lovely face.
 The Christian turned, the dark veil was removed,
 A fire flashed through the old man's joints – he loved!
 One hair converted hundreds; how could he
 Resist that idol's face shown openly?
 He did not know himself; in sudden fire
 He knelt abjectly as the flames beat higher;
 In that sad instant all he had been fled
 And passion's smoke obscured his heart and head.
 Love sacked his heart; the girl's bewitching hair
 Twined round his faith impiety's smooth snare.
 The sheikh exchanged religion's wealth for shame,
 A hopeless heart submitted to love's fame.
 "I have no faith," he cried. "The heart I gave
 Is useless now; I am the Christian's slave."
 When his disciples saw him weeping there
 And understood the truth of the affair,

*tropes
of beauty*

They stared, confounded by his frantic grief,
 And strove to call him back to his belief.
 Their remonstrations fell on deafened ears;
 Advice has no effect when no one hears.
 In turn the sheikh's disciples had their say;
 Love has no cure, and he could not obey.
 (When did a lover listen to advice?
 When did a nostrum cool love's flames to ice?)
 Till evening came he could not move but gazed
 With stupefaction in his face, amazed.

When gloomy twilight spread its darkening shrouds –
 Like blasphemy concealed by guilty clouds –
 His ardent heart gave out the only light,
 And love increased a hundredfold that night.
 He put aside the Self and selfish lust;
 In grief he smeared his locks with filth and dust
 And kept his haunted vigil, watched and wept,
 Lay trembling in love's grip and never slept.
 "O Lord, when will this darkness end?" he cried,
 "Or is it that the heavenly sun has died?
 Those nights I passed in faith's austerities
 Cannot compare with this night's agonies;
 But like a candle now my flame burns high
 To weep all night and in the daylight die.
 Ambush and blood have been my lot this night;
 Who knows what torments day will bring to light?
 This fevered darkness and my wretched state
 Were made when I was made, and are my fate;
 The night continues and the hours delay –
 Perhaps the world has reached its Judgement Day;
 Perhaps the sun's extinguished with my sighs,
 Or hides in shame from my beloved's eyes.
 This long, dark night is like her flowing hair –
 The thought in absence comforts my despair,
 But love consumes me through this endless night –
 I yield to love, unequal to the fight.

Where is there time enough to tell my grief?
 Where is the patience to regain belief?
 Where is the luck to waken me, or move
 Love's idol to reciprocate my love?
 Where is the reason that could rescue me,
 Or by some trick prove my auxiliary?
 Where is the hand to pour dust on my head,
 Or lift me from the dust where I lie dead?
 Where is the foot that seeks the longed-for place?
 Where is the eye to show me her fair face?
 Where is the loved one to relieve my pain?
 Where is the guide to help me turn again?
 Where is the strength to utter my complaint?
 Where is the mind to counsel calm restraint?
 The loved one, reason, patience – all are gone
 And I remain to suffer love alone."

At this the fond disciples gathered round,
 Bewildered by his groans' pathetic sound.
 "My sheikh," urged one, "forget this evil sight;
 Rise, cleanse yourself according to our rite."
 "In blood I cleanse myself," the sheikh replied;
 "In blood, a hundred times, my life is dyed."
 Another asked: "Where is your rosary?"
 He said: "I fling the beads away from me;
 The Christian's belt* is my sole sanctuary!"
 One urged him to repent; he said: "I do,
 Of all I was, all that belonged thereto."
 One counselled prayer; he said: "Where is her face
 That I may pray toward that blessed place?"
 Another cried: "Enough of this; you must
 Seek solitude and in repentant dust
 Bow down to God." "I will", replied the sheikh,
 "Bow down in dust, but for my idol's sake."
 And one reproached him: "Have you no regret

* The *zonnar*, a belt or cord worn by Eastern Christians and Jews; thus a symbol of heresy.

For Islam and those rites you would forget?"
 He said: "No man repents past folly more;
 Why is it I was not in love before?"
 Another said: "A demon's poisoned dart –
 Unknown to you – has pierced your trusting heart."
 The sheikh said: "If a demon straight from hell
 Deceives me, I rejoice and wish her well."
 One said: "Our noble sheikh has lost his way;
 Passion has led his wandering wits astray."
 "True, I have lost the fame I once held dear,"
 Replied their sheikh, "and fraud as well, and fear."
 One said: "You break our hearts with this disgrace."
 He laughed: "The Christian's heart will take their place."
 One said: "Stay with old friends awhile, and come –
 We'll seek the Ka'abah's shade and journey home."
 The sheikh replied: "A Christian monastery
 And not the Ka'abah's shade suffices me."
 One said: "Return to Mecca and repent!"
 He answered: "Leave me here, I am content."
 One said: "You travel on hell's road." "This sigh
 Would shrivel seven hells" was his reply.
 One said: "In hope of heaven turn again."
 He said: "Her face is heaven; I remain."
 One said: "Before our God confess your shame."
 He answered: "God Himself has lit this flame."
 One said: "Stop vacillating now and fight;
 Defend the ways our faith proclaims as right."
 He said: "Prepare your ears for blasphemy;
 An infidel does not prate piety."
 Their words could not recall him to belief,
 And slowly they grew silent, sunk in grief.
 They watched; each felt the heart within him fail,
 Fearful of deeds Fate hid beneath her veil.

At last white day displayed her golden shield;
 Black night declined his head, compelled to yield –
 The world lay drowned in sparkling light, and dawn

Disclosed the sheikh, still wretched and forlorn,
 Disputing with stray dogs the place before
 His unattainable beloved's door.
 There in the dust he knelt, till constant prayers
 Made him resemble one of her dark hairs;
 A patient month he waited day and night
 To glimpse the radiance of her beauty's light.
 At last fatigue and sorrow made him ill –
 Her street became his bed and he lay still.
 When she perceived he would – and could – not move,
 She understood the fury of his love,
 But she pretended ignorance and said:
 "What is it, sheikh? Why is our street your bed?
 How can a Moslem sleep where Christians tread?" }
 He answered her: "I have no need to speak;
 You know why I am wasted, pale and weak.
 Restore the heart you stole, or let me see
 Some glimmer in your heart of sympathy;
 In all your pride find some affection for
 The grey-haired, lovesick stranger at your door.
 Accept my love or kill me now – your breath
 Revives me or consigns me here to death.
 Your face and curls command my life; beware
 Of how the breeze displays your vagrant hair;
 The sight breeds fever in me, and your deep
 Hypnotic eyes induce love's restless sleep.
 Love mists my eyes, love burns my heart – alone, }
 Impatient and unloved, I weep and groan;
 See what a sack of sorrow I have sewn!
 I give my soul and all the world to burn,
 And endless tears are all I hope to earn.
 My eyes beheld your face, my heart despaired;
 What I have seen and suffered none have shared.
 My heart has turned to blood; how long must I
 Subsist on misery? You need not try
 To humble wretchedness, or kick the foe
 Who in the dust submissively bows low.

It is my fortune to lament and wait –
 When, if, love answers me depends on Fate.
 My soul is ambushed here, and in your street
 Relives each night the anguish of defeat;
 Your threshold's dust receives my prayers – I give
 As cheap as dust the soul by which I live.
 How long outside your door must I complain?
 Relent a moment and relieve my pain.
 You are the sun and I a shadow thrown
 By you – how then can I survive alone?
 Though pain has worn me to a shadow's edge,
 Like sunlight I shall leap your window's ledge;
 Let me come in and I shall secretly
 Bring seven heavens' happiness with me.
 My soul is burnt to ash; my passion's fire
 Destroys the world with unappeased desire.
 Love binds my feet and I cannot depart;
 Love holds the hand pressed hard against my heart.
 My fainting soul dissolves in deathly sighs –
 How long must you stay hidden from my eyes?"

She laughed: "You shameless fool, take my advice –
 Prepare yourself for death and paradise!
 Forget flirtatious games, your breath is cold;
 Stop chasing love, remember you are old.
 It is a shroud you need, not me! How could
 You hope for wealth when you must beg for food?"
 He answered her: "Say what you will, but I
 In love's unhappy torments live and die;
 To Love, both young and old are one – his dart
 Strikes with unequalled strength in every heart."
 The girl replied: "There are four things you must
 Perform to show that you deserve my trust:
 Burn the Koran, drink wine, seel up Faith's eye,
 Bow down to images." And in reply
 The sheikh declared: "Wine I will drink with you;
 The rest are things that I could never do."

She said: "If you agree to my commands,
 To start with, you must wholly wash your hands
 Of Islam's faith – the love which does not care
 To bend to love's requests is empty air."
 He yielded then: "I must and will obey;
 I'll do whatever you are pleased to say.
 Your slave submits – lead me with ringlets twined
 As chains about my neck; I am resigned!"
 She smiled: "Come then and drink", and he allowed
 Her to escort him to a hall (the crowd
 Of scholars followed, weeping and afraid)
 Where Christians banqueted, and there a maid
 Of matchless beauty passed the cup around.
 Love humbled our poor sheikh – without a sound
 He gave his heart into the Christian's hands;
 His mind had fled, he bowed to her commands,
 And from those hands he took the proffered bowl;
 He drank, oblivion overwhelmed his soul.
 Wine mingled with his love – her laughter seemed
 To challenge him to take the bliss he dreamed.
 Passion flared up in him; again he drank,
 And slave-like at her feet contented sank –
 This sheikh who had the whole Koran by heart
 Felt wine spread through him and his faith depart;
 Whatever he had known deserted him,
 Wine conquered and his intellect grew dim;
 Wine sluiced away his conscience; she alone
 Lived in his heart, all other thoughts had flown.
 Now love grew violent as an angry sea,
 He watched her drink and moved instinctively –
 Half-fuddled with the wine – to touch her neck.
 But she drew back and held his hand in check,
 Deriding him: "What do you want, old man?
 Old hypocrite of love, who talks but can
 Do nothing else? To prove your love, declare
 That your religion is my rippling hair.
 Love's more than childish games, if you agree –

For love – to imitate my blasphemy
 You can embrace me here; if not, you may
 Take up your stick and hobble on your way."
 The abject sheikh had sunk to such a state
 That he could not resist his wretched fate;
 Now ignorant of shame and unafraid,
 He heard the Christian's wishes and obeyed –
 The old wine sidled through the old man's veins
 And like a twisting compass turned his brains;
 Old wine, young love, a lover far too old,
 Her soft arms welcoming – could he be cold?
 Beside himself with love and drink he cried:
 "Command me now; whatever you decide
 I will perform. I spurned idolatry
 When sober, but your beauty is to me
 An idol for whose sake I'll gladly burn
 My faith's Koran." "Now you begin to learn,
 Now you are mine, dear sheikh," she said. "Sleep well,
 Sweet dreams; our ripening fruit begins to swell."

News spread among the Christians that this sheikh
 Had chosen their religion for love's sake.
 They took him to a nearby monastery,
 Where he accepted their theology;
 He burnt his dervish cloak and set his face
 Against the faith and Mecca's holy place –
 After so many years of true belief,
 A young girl brought this learned sheikh to grief.
 He said: "This dervish has been well betrayed;
 The agent was mere passion for a maid.
 I must obey her now – what I have done
 Is worse than any crime beneath the sun."
 (How many leave the faith through wine! It is
 The mother of such evil vagaries.)
 "Whatever you required is done," he said.
 "What more remains? I have bowed down my head
 In love's idolatry, I have drunk wine;

May no one pass through wretchedness like mine!
 Love ruins one like me, and black disgrace
 Now stares a once-loved dervish in the face.
 For fifty years I walked an open road
 While in my heart high seas of worship flowed;
 Love ambushed me and at its sudden stroke
 For Christian garments I gave up my cloak;
 The Ka'abah has become love's secret sign,
 And homeless love interprets the Divine.
 Consider what, for your sake, I have done –
 Then tell me, when shall we two be as one?
 Hope for that moment justifies my pain;
 Have all my troubles been endured in vain?"
 The girl replied: "But you are poor, and I
 Cannot be cheaply won – the price is high;
 Bring gold, and silver too, you innocent –
 Then I might pity your predicament;
 But you have neither, therefore go – and take
 A beggar's alms from me; be off, old sheikh!
 Be on your travels like the sun – alone;
 Be manly now and patient, do not groan!"
 "A fine interpretation of your vow,"
 The sheikh replied; "my love, look at me now –
 I have no one but you; your cypress gait,
 Your silver form, decide my wretched fate.
 Take back your cruel commands; each moment you
 Confuse me by demanding something new.
 I have endured your absence, promptly done
 All you have asked – what profit have I won?
 I've passed beyond loss, profit, Islam, crime,
 For how much longer must I bide my time?
 Is this what we agreed? My friends have gone,
 Despising me, and I am here alone.
 They follow one way, you another – I
 Stand witless here uncertain where to fly;
 I know without you heaven would be hell,
 Hell heaven with you; more I cannot tell."

At last his protestations moved her heart.
 "You are too poor to play the bridegroom's part,"
 She said, "but be my swineherd for a year
 And then we'll stay together, never fear."
 The sheikh did not refuse – a fractious way
 Estranges love; he hurried to obey.
 This reverend sheikh kept swine – but who does not
 Keep something swinish in his nature's plot?
 Do not imagine only he could fall;
 This hidden danger lurks within us all,
 Rearing its bestial head when we begin
 To tread salvation's path – if you think sin
 Has no place in your nature, you can stay
 Content at home; you are excused the Way.
 But if you start our journey you will find
 That countless swine and idols tease the mind –
 Destroy these hindrances to love or you
 Must suffer that disgrace the sad sheikh knew.

Despair unmanned his friends; they saw his plight
 And turned in helpless horror from the sight –
 The dust of grief anointed each bowed head;
 But one approached the hapless man and said:
 "We leave for Mecca now, O weak-willed sheikh;
 Is there some message you would have us take?
 Or should we all turn Christians and embrace
 This faith men call a blasphemous disgrace?
 We get no pleasure from the thought of you
 Left here alone – shall we be Christians too?
 Or since we cannot bear your state should we,
 Deserting you, incontinently flee;
 Forget that you exist and live in prayer
 Beside the Ka'abah's stone without a care?"
 The sheikh replied: "What grief has filled my heart!
 Go where you please – but quickly, now, depart;
 Only the Christian keeps my soul alive,
 And I shall stay with her while I survive.

Though you are wise your wisdom cannot know
 The wild frustrations through which lovers go.
 If for one moment you could share my pain,
 We could be old companions once again.
 But now go back, dear friends; if anyone
 Asks after me explain what I have done –
 Say that my eyes swim blood, that parched I wait
 Trapped in the gullet of a monstrous fate.
 Say Islam's elder has outsinned the whole
 Of heathen blasphemy, that self-control
 Slipped from him when he saw the Christian's hair,
 That faith was conquered by insane despair.
 Should anyone reproach my actions, say
 That countless others have pursued this Way,
 This endless Way where no one is secure,
 Where danger waits and issues are unsure."
 He turned from them; a swineherd sought his swine.
 His friends wept vehemently – their sheikh's decline
 Seemed death to them. Sadly they journeyed home,
 Resigning their apostate sheikh to Rome.

They skulked in corners, shameful and afraid.
 A close companion of the sheikh had stayed
 In Mecca while the group had journeyed west –
 A man of wisdom, fit for any test,
 Who, seeing now the vacant oratory
 Where once his friend had worshipped faithfully,
 Asked after their lost sheikh. In tears then they
 Described what had occurred along the way;
 How he had bound his fortunes to her hair,
 And blocked the path of faith with love's despair;
 How curls usurped belief and how his cloak
 Had been consumed in passion's blackening smoke;
 How he'd become a swineherd, how the four
 Acts contrary to all Islamic law
 Had been performed by him, how this great sheikh
 Lived like a pagan for his lover's sake.

Amazement seized the friend – his face grew pale,
 He wept and felt the heart within him fail.
 "O criminals!" he cried. "O frailer than
 Weak women in your faith – when does a man
 Need faithful friends but in adversity?
 You should be there, not prattling here to me.
 Is this devoted love? Shame on you all,
 Fair-weather friends who run when great men fall.
 He put on Christian garments – so should you;
 He took their faith – what else had you to do?
 This was no friendship, to forsake your friend;
 To promise your support and at the end
 Abandon him – this was sheer treachery.
 Friend follows friend to hell and blasphemy –
 When sorrows come a man's true friends are found;
 In times of joy ten thousand gather round.
 Our sheikh is savaged by some shark – you race
 To separate yourselves from his disgrace.
 Love's built on readiness to share love's shame;
 Such self-regarding love usurps love's name."
 "Repeatedly we told him all you say,"
 They cried. "We were companions of the Way,
 Sworn to a common happiness or grief;
 We should exchange the honours of belief
 For odium and scorn; we should accept
 The Christian cult our sheikh could not reject.
 But he insisted that we leave – our love
 Seemed pointless then; he ordered us to move.
 At his express command we journeyed here
 To tell his story plainly, without fear."

He answered them: "However hard the fight,
 You should have fought for what was clearly right.
 Truth struggled there with error; when you went
 You only worsened his predicament.
 You have abandoned him; how could you dare

To enter Mecca's uncorrupted air?"
 They heard his speech; not one would raise his head.
 And then, "There is no point in shame," he said.
 "What's done is done; we must act justly now,
 Bury this sin, seek out the sheikh and bow
 Before him once again." They left their home
 And made their way a second time to Rome;
 They prayed a hundred thousand prayers – at times
 With hope, at times disheartened by their crimes.
 They neither ate nor slept but kept their gaze
 Unswerving throughout forty nights and days.
 Their wailing lamentations filled the sky,
 Moving the green-robed angels ranked on high
 To clothe themselves with black, and in the end
 The leader of the group, the sheikh's true friend,
 His heart consumed by sympathetic grief,
 Let loose the well-aimed arrows of belief.
 For forty nights he had prayed privately,
 Rapt in devotion's holy ecstasy –
 At dawn there came a musk-diffusing breeze,
 And in his heart he knew all mysteries.
 He saw the Prophet, lovely as the moon,
 Whose face, Truth's shadow, was the sun at noon,
 Whose hair in two black heavy braids was curled –
 Each hair, a hundred times, outpriced the world.
 As he approached with his unruffled pace,
 A smile of haunting beauty lit his face.
 The sheikh's friend rose and said: "God's Messenger,
 Vouchsafe your help. Our sheikh has wandered far;
 You are our Guide; guide him to Truth again."
 The Prophet answered: "I have loosed the chain
 Which bound your sheikh – your prayer is answered, go.
 Thick clouds of dust have been allowed to blow
 Between his sight and Truth – those clouds have gone;
 I did not leave him to endure alone.
 I sprinkled on the fortunes of your sheikh
 A cleansing dew for intercession's sake –

The dust is laid; sin disappeared before
His new-made vow. A world of sin, be sure,
Shall with contrition's spittle be made pure. }
The sea of righteousness drowns in its waves
The sins of those sincere repentance saves."

With grateful happiness the friend cried out;
The heavens echoed his triumphant shout.
He told the good news to the group; again
They set out eagerly across the plain.
Weeping they ran to where the swineherd-sheikh,
Now cured of his unnatural mistake,
Had cast aside his Christian clothes, the bell,
The belt, the cap, freed from the strange faith's spell.
Seeing his friends approach his hiding-place,
He saw how he had forfeited God's grace;
He ripped his clothes in frenzies of distress;
He grovelled in the dust with wretchedness.
Tears flowed like rain; he longed for death; his sighs'
Great heat consumed the curtain of the skies;
Grief dried the blood within him when he saw
How he had lost all knowledge of God's law;
All he had once abandoned now returned
And he escaped the hell in which he'd burned.
He came back to himself, and on his knees
Wept bitterly for past iniquities.
When his disciples saw him weeping there,
Bathed in shame's sweat, they reeled between despair
And joy – bewildered they drew near and sighed;
From gratitude they gladly would have died.
They said: "The mist has fled that hid your sun;
Faith has returned and blasphemy is gone;
Truth has defeated Rome's idolatry;
Grace has surged onward like a mighty sea.
The Prophet interceded for your soul;
The world sends up its thanks from pole to pole.
Why should you mourn? You should thank God instead

That out of darkness you've been safely led;
God who can turn the day to darkest night
Can turn black sin to pure repentant light –
He kindles a repentant spark, the flame
Burns all our sins and all sin's burning shame."

I will be brief: the sheikh was purified
According to the faith; his old self died –
He put the dervish cloak on as before.
The group set out for Mecca's gates once more.

And then the Christian girl whom he had loved
Dreamed in her sleep; a shaft of sunlight moved
Before her eyes, and from the dazzling ray
A voice said: "Rise, follow your lost sheikh's way;
Accept his faith, beneath his feet be dust;
You tricked him once, be pure to him and just,
And, as he took your path without pretence,
Take his path now in truth and innocence.
Follow his lead; you once led him astray –
Be his companion as he points the Way;
You were a robber preying on the road
Where you should seek to share the traveller's load.
Wake now, emerge from superstition's night."
She woke, and in her heart a steady light
Beat like the sun, and an unwonted pain
Throbbled there, a longing she could not restrain;
Desire flared up in her; she felt her soul
Slip gently from the intellect's control.
As yet she did not know what seed was sown –
She had no friend and found herself alone
In an uncharted world; no tongue can tell
What then she saw – her pride and triumph fell
Like rain from her; with an unearthly shout
She tore the garments from her back, ran out
And heaped the dust of mourning on her head.
Her frame was weak, the heart within her bled,
But she began the journey to her sheikh,

And like a cloud that seems about to break
 And shed its downpour of torrential rain
 (The heart's rich blood) she ran across the plain.
 But soon the desert's endless vacancy
 Bewildered her; wild with uncertainty,
 She wept and pressed her face against the sand.
 "O God," she cried, "extend your saving hand
 To one who is an outcast of the earth,
 To one who tricked a saint of unmatched worth –
 Do not abandon me; my evil crime
 Was perpetrated in a thoughtless time;
 I did not know what I know now – accept
 The prayers of one who ignorantly slept."

The sheikh's heart spoke: "The Christian is no more;
 The girl you loved knocks at religion's door –
 It is our way she follows now; go back
 And be the comforter her sorrows lack."
 Like wind he ran, and his disciples cried:
 "Has your repentant vow so quickly died?
 Will you slip back, a shameless reprobate?"
 But when the sheikh explained the girl's sad state,
 Compassion moved their hearts and they agreed
 To search for her and serve her every need.
 They found her with hair dragged in the dirt,
 Prone on the earth as if a corpse, her skirt
 Torn from her limbs, barefoot, her face death-pale.
 She saw the sheikh and felt her last strength fail;
 She fainted at his feet, and as she slept
 The sheikh hung over her dear face and wept.

She woke, and seeing tears like rain in spring
 Knew he'd kept faith with her through everything.
 She knelt before him, took his hands and said
 "The shame I brought on your respected head
 Burns me with shame; how long must I remain
 Behind this veil of ignorance? Make plain

The mysteries of Islam to me here,
 And I shall tread its highway without fear."
 The sheikh spelt out the faith to her; the crowd
 Of gratified disciples cried aloud,
 Weeping to see the lovely child embrace
 The search for Truth. Then, as her comely face
 Bent to his words, her heart began to feel
 An inexpressible and troubling zeal;
 Slowly she felt the pall of grief descend,
 Knowing herself still absent from the Friend.
 "Dear sheikh," she said, "I cannot bear such pain;
 Absence undoes me and my spirits wane.
 I go from this unhappy world; farewell
 World's sheikh and mine – further I cannot tell,
 Exhaustion weakens me; O sheikh, forgive . . ."
 And saying this the dear child ceased to live.
 The sun was hidden by a mist – her flesh
 Yielded the sweet soul from its weakening mesh.
 She was a drop returned to Truth's great sea;
 She left this world, and so, like wind, must we.

Whoever knows love's path is soon aware
 That stories such as this are far from rare.
 All things are possible, and you may meet
 Despair, forgiveness, certainty, deceit.
 The Self ignores the secrets of the Way,
 The mysteries no mortal speech can say;
 Assurance whispers in the heart's dark core,
 Not in the muddied Self – a bitter war
 Must rage between these two. Turn now and mourn
 That your existence is so deeply torn!



The birds set off on their journey, pause, then choose a leader

They heard the tale; the birds were all on fire
 To quit the hindrance of the Self; desire
 To gain the Simorgh had convulsed each heart;