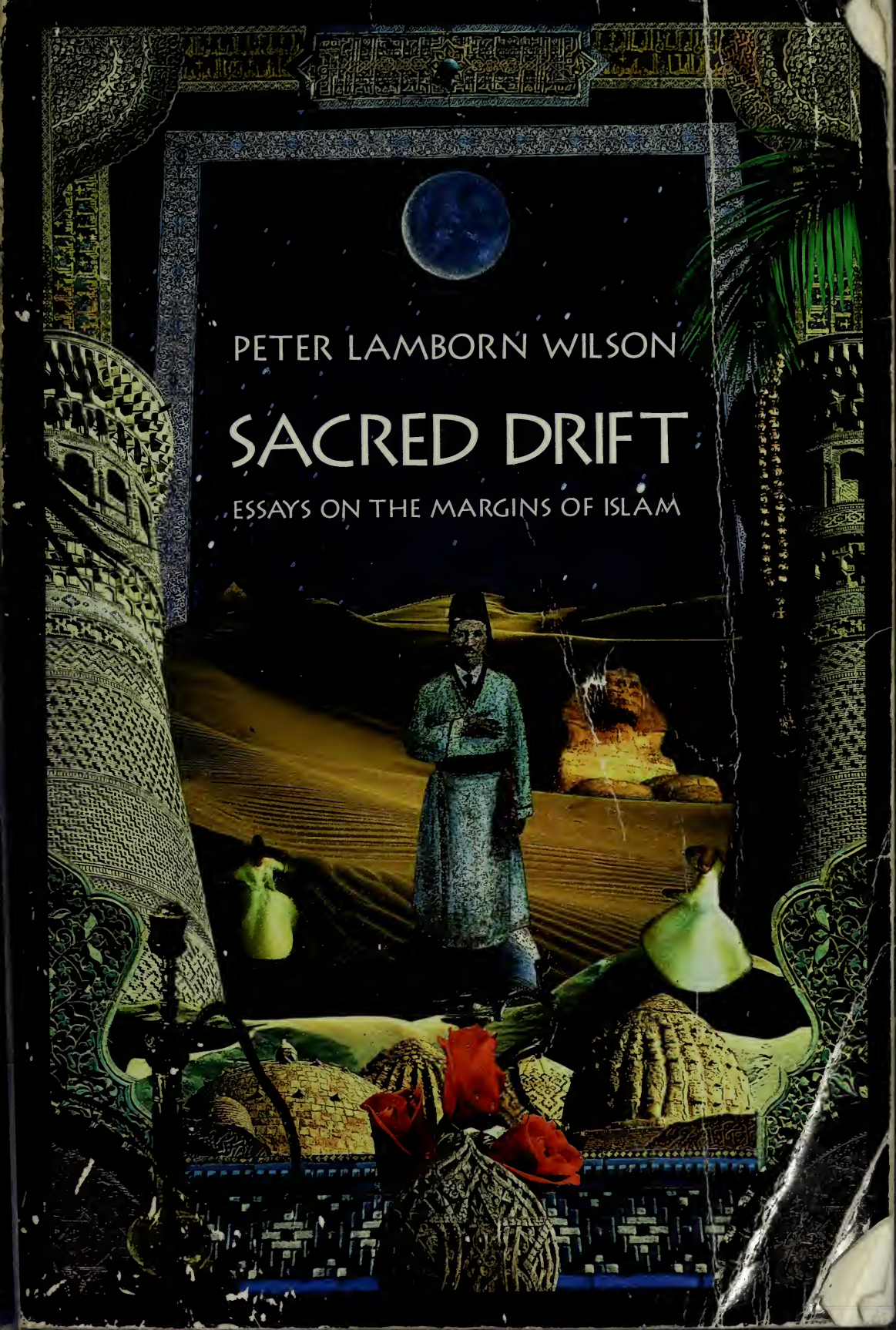




PETER LAMBORN WILSON

SACRED DRIFT

ESSAYS ON THE MARGINS OF ISLAM



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SACRED DRIFT



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ESSAYS ON THE MARGINS OF ISLAM

PETER LAMBORN WILSON



CITY LIGHTS BOOKS

San Francisco

SACRED DRIFT

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To my brothers and sisters in the
Moorish Orthodox Church of America

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SACRED DRIFT



MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

Quatrain

Penetrate that world

which is in your veins like blood;

(does blood sleep

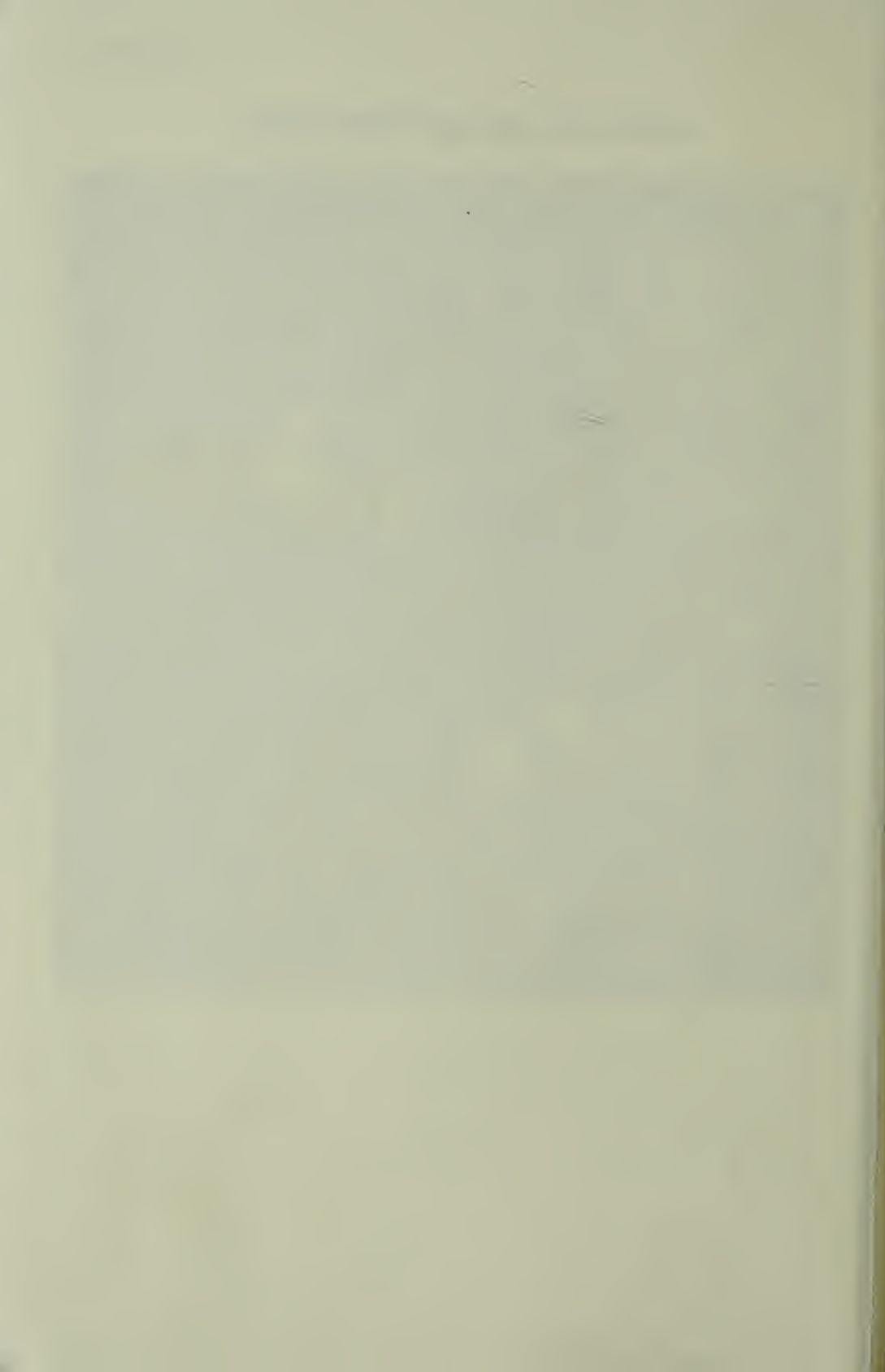
as it moves in its courses?)

No, it is not grief, but the taint

of madness in your veins —

innoculated by

the Binder of all Spells.



PREFACE

"Love, which once seemed so easy,
has fallen into difficulties."

— Hafez



a

"First time as tragedy — second time as farce" . . . : — the "West" has rediscovered its ancient Other, its legendary enemy — the Saracen.

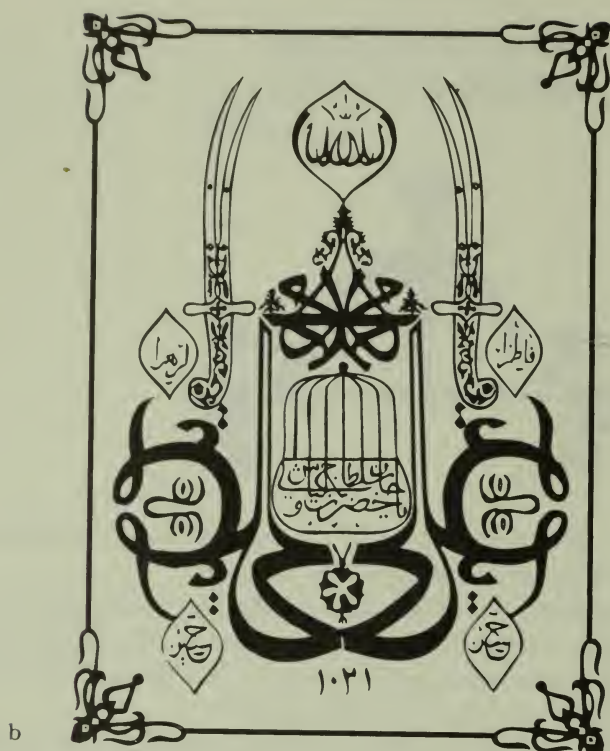
Perhaps the medieval battle of Christendom vs. Islam once displayed some of the glamour of tragedy — (since even brutality can attain epic proportions) — but the West now no longer takes itself seriously as Champion of God, and speaks instead of Capital, Family Values, New World Order.

As for Islam, it sometimes seems to want to represent itself as an emaciated parody of itself, stripped of all organic subtlety, "purified" to the point of mindlessness. The recent Nintendo War in the Gulf was a struggle between two commodities, not two ideals — pure Spectacle, two ignorant armies clashing by the light of flickering cathode — tragic only for the innocent poor of Baghdad, buried in rubble.

In this light — the light of flaming oil wells seen on CNN — what role can now be played by an "orientalism" which (as Edward Said has shown) consists of little more than "translation" as imperialist/colonialist appropriation?

Against this colonialist model — the orientalist-as-spy — I proposed (in *Scandal: Essays In Islamic Heresy*, 1987) an alternative that might be called the heretical model of translation. In this model, the heretical culture of resistance

(a) "*Haqq*," Truth, one of the Divine Names, doubled and drawn in mirror-image, as a bow and arrow — symbol of the Turkish ghazis or holy warriors who practiced a Zen-like art of archery — designed in classic Ottoman style by a dervish of the Bektashi Sufi Order, a heterodox confraternity with links to Turkic shamanism, extreme Shi'ism, and the Janissary Corps (the Ottoman Imperial Guard). *Ya Haqq!* is a common invocation among gnostic groups such as the Isma'ilis; and the Sufi Ibn Mansur al-Hallaj was executed, according to legend, for claiming, "*Ana'l-Haqq*," "I am the Truth."



(b) and (c) Two somewhat florid and baroque Bektashi calligrammes in mirror-image based on the names Allah, Mohammad, and especially 'Ali — founder of both Shi'ism and Sufism — and his famous double-bladed sword Zulfikar. The Bektashi *taj* or dervish hat is also shown.

within Islam (or any “Other” society) is carried across by Western heretics into the Western culture of resistance, and becomes part of our own hidden heritage, our own struggle on behalf of realization. ✱

By a process of “fortuitous mistranslation,” moreover, it may even happen that some orthodox content of Islam is transformed, in the process of transplantation, into a Western heresy. For example, the positive image of Islam among anticlerical freethinkers of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe (from the Freemasons to Nietzsche) cannot be called an accurate picture of Islam — and yet for the freethinkers it became a liberating image. Romantic perception often deliberately distorts, but does so in the interests of freeing the very means of perception from the oppression of consensus and the deadly humdrum of mere accuracy.

Thus I suggested a poetics (in Gaston Bachelard’s sense of the word) of Islamology — a search for “poetic facts.” This project presupposes a nonmonolithic view of Islam, a definition not based on theology or politics or any other one-dimensional grid (whether proposed by “occidentals” or “orientals”), but rooted instead in an appreciation of complexity, of difference, of mutability over the “long duration” of a civilization, and of the organicity of everyday life.

This heretical model of translation is still (one might argue) a model of appropriation — although I would prefer to think of it as a cooperative venture among world heretics, rebels, artists, visionaries. Perhaps we should try to resolve the dialectic (colonial model vs. heretical model) with a third term, which the poet/anthropologist Nathaniel Tarn calls anti-translation. As he explains it, the insurrectionary banner “Don’t Tread On Me” is rewritten — in the context of a culture which suffers appropriation — and becomes “Don’t Translate Me.” Enough mediation! Enough explanation and representation!

The anti-translation movement would then constitute a demand for tact, and even for silence, but it would not thereby rule out all chance for communicativeness. The anti-translational text (if we can imagine such a thing) would not be a Representation but rather a presentation, a direct making-present (or making a present of) material from one culture of resistance to another. Perhaps it is not possible to do this without going inside the “other” culture and (as Rumi says) “abandoning self and selves” to the extent possible, so that “my ‘self’ is now my ‘other’”: — essentially an erotic gesture.

The present work certainly falls far beneath this vague and lofty goal. At various times I have practiced Islam in its Shi’ite form, as Sufism, as Moorish Science, and as *kebatinan* (Javanese/Arabic for “pure esotericism”) — but I certainly cannot thereby claim to have produced anti-translation or even to have visualized its lineaments.

If anything, this book constitutes a series of attempts (essays) to revalorize the “romantic” image of Islam, an image that in part survives the “betrayal” of translation because it really exists within both cultures. “Wherever a caravan

may journey, Love is its Mecca," says Rumi; and Ibn 'Arabi declares that "Wherever the caravan of Love may turn, there is my faith, my religion." Here Islam *presents* itself as romantic; here is a gift we can accept; a present to be passed on, like all real gifts.

Especially in certain heterodox or even heretical moments, Islam's self-romanticization achieves a baroque intensity that reminds us of the *tropicalismo* of certain Latin-American poets, and which might be called by analogy *orientalismo*, the poetics of an "orient" which knows itself as mystery and even as "exotic." The exotic may not be the "true," but it's certainly a relief from the obscene banality of simulation.

"Islam" (whatever that may be) is present, here in New York, Paris, London, Berlin; the "other" is within the "self," alien and sibling at once — and our everyday life is situated with a strange and precise grace for what Surrealism called the penetration of the marvelous. Cultural drift is sacred drift. And even these texts aspire to the condition of music — or song — or to be more exact, to the condition of music translated into words.

PLW

San Francisco

August, 1992



d

(d) A mirror calligramme on the name 'Ali, drawn in 1907, but in the classic Ottoman style. The object depicted above the writing may be a dervish begging bowl made out of a gourd. Calligrammes from Anton Josef Dierl, *Geschichte und Lehre des anatolischen Alevismus-Bektasismus* [Frankfort, Dagvli Verlag, 1985].

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

The Spiritual Concert

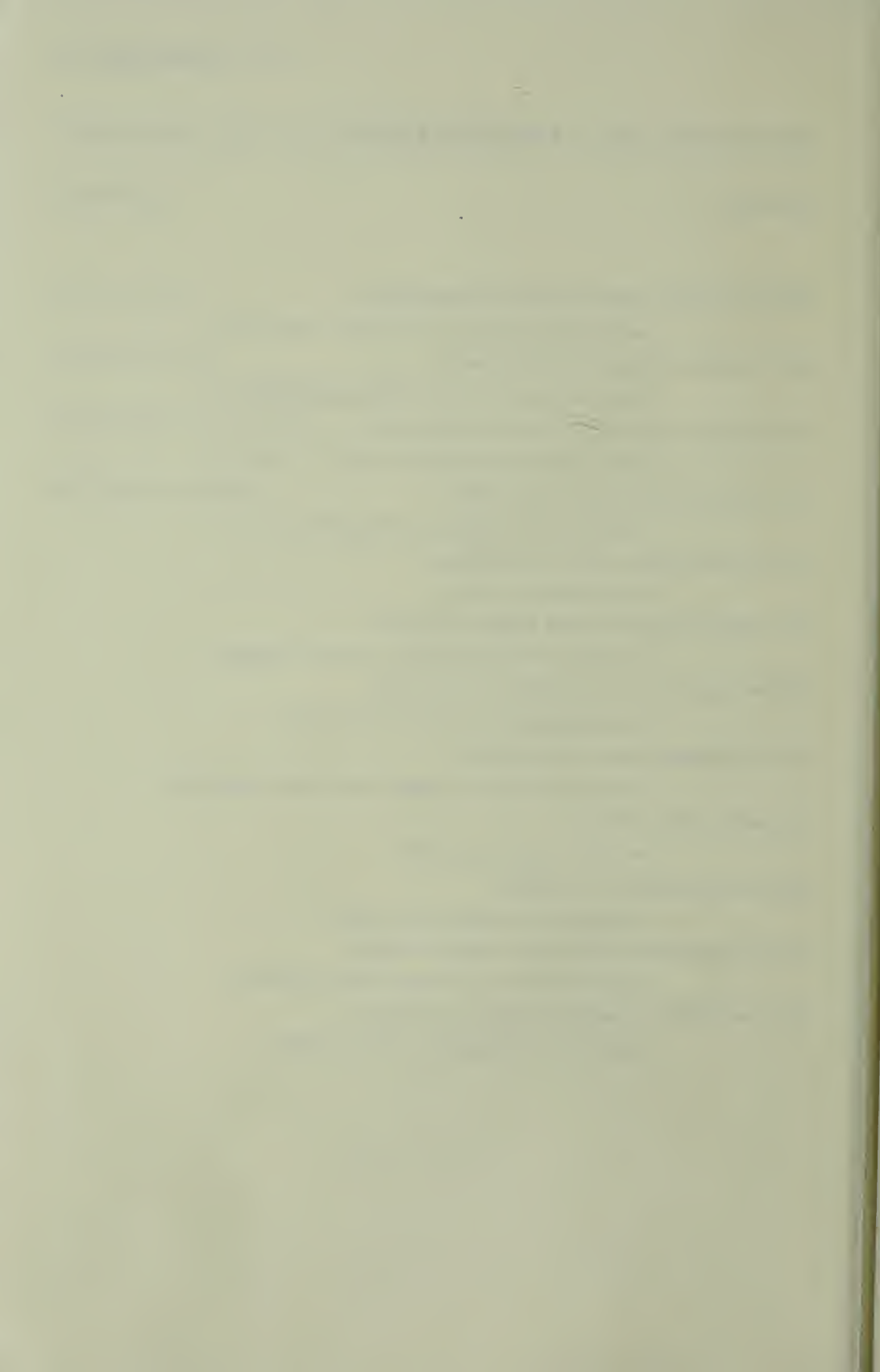
Music: the tranquility of life's spirit: but known
 only to those who know life's spirit's spirit
 Fall asleep in a garden & you gain by waking —
 drowse in a prison & your waking will be but loss
 Make music at weddings not wakes: at times
 of rejoicing not places of lamentation
 One blind to his own inner jewel — one
 from whose eyes that moon is hidden —
 how could he be worthy of whirling dance & tambourine?
 of music which unites us with the Thief of Hearts?
 Turn your face toward Mecca, yes, but know this: —
 music is this world, music is the other world
 and of all the world the circle-dancers turn & turn
 around the pivot of the Kaaba.
 You want the Big Rock Candy Mountain? By all means go!
 a single candy cane? Well, that you can have for free.

Sama, or the spiritual concert of music and whirling dance, was a major part of the Sufi ritual established by Rumi for his Order, called the *Mevleviyya* or "Whirling Dervishes." Here he says that although Moslems may turn toward Mecca in prayer, or circumambulate the Kaaba as part of their pilgrimage to Mecca, they should be aware that the dervish, wherever he whirls, is in truth turning about the spiritual axis of the world. Rumi usually ends his lyrics with a punning reference to his own pen name, "The Silent," or else with a reference to his spiritual beloved, Shamsoddin of Tabriz, the wandering dervish to whom he dedicated his *Divan*. Since Shams was by profession a confectioner, the last lines of the poems sometimes contain references to sugar or candy, rather than a direct mention of Shams's name.

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

Quatrain

If the very least
 of these passions
inflamed the sun,
 it would forget to shine.
And if this love were split up
 amongst all lovers,
they'd get ten percent,
 & all the rest to me.





HONBLE DREW ALI

(1886 - 1929)

Diploma
of the
Adapt Chamber
of the
Holy Moorish Orthodox Temple
("Third Paradise")



Prophet Noble Drew Ali, founder of Moorish Science Temple of America, 1925, four years before his death, posing formally as Prophet, Sharif, and Mason. From *Who Was Noble Drew Ali?* by Isa al-Mahdi.

Lost/Found Moorish Time Lines in the Wilderness of North America

The Image:

crumbling 1920s photograph of an American black man dressed in robe, sash, and fez, posing formally hand on breast like Napoleon, labeled "Prophet Noble Drew Ali 1886-1929."

To recover the meaning of this obscure and enigmatic portrait we must rediscover a lost or secret portion of our own history, for American history is defined for us as much by its absences and disappearances as by its official presences — indeed, perhaps even more so.

The official sources describe Noble Drew Ali as founder of the first black Islamic sect in America. In truth he was less than this, for there were black Moslems here before him; but he was also more than this — he was an *American prophet*. He could have stepped from the pages of Melville or Ishmael Reed, "a thought of Allah clothed in flesh" — a *fact*, a poetic fact.

)

Timothy Drew was born (most probably) January 8, 1886, in North Carolina, child of ex-slaves, among the Cherokee Indians — who are said to have adopted him¹ — so that later in life he always wore a feather in his fez, or so they say, for a great deal of this account is pure oral history. His mother foresaw great things of him, but she died and left the child to a wicked aunt who beat him, leaving lifelong scars, and once even threw him into a blazing furnace. But Allah saved him. He ran away and joined the gypsies. One day as he walked alone he heard a voice say, "If you go I will follow"; he tried to ignore it but it kept repeating itself until finally he left the gypsies and sought after knowledge.

An interesting hypothesis concerning Timothy Drew's ancestry: was he perhaps descended from Bilali Mohamet, a slave who lived on Sapelo Island off the Georgia coast? Author of a "diary" written in Arabic, Bilali Mohamet proves continuity of Islamic identity in nineteenth-century America; no doubt he can be considered at least a spiritual grandfather of Noble Drew Ali.²

¹ The Cherokee like the Seminole adopted runaway slaves and indentured servants; there are many racially mixed Cherokee, including the Lumbee Tribe, one of several such groups to claim descent from the Croatan Indians and the "Lost Settlers" of Roanoke.

² Suggested by M. A. al-Ahari, in letters of March 4 and March 16, 1991. For Bilali Mahomet, see *Journal of Negro History* 25, no. 3 (July 1940), pp. 372-375 and Lydia Parrish, *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands* (University of Georgia Press, 1942).

According to a privately published essay by Ravanna Bey of the Moorish Academy of Chicago,³ Drew's father was said to have been of Moorish extraction, his mother of Cherokee ancestry. By the early 1880s, Ravanna Bey claims, the Drew family had settled in Newark, New Jersey, where they are said to have met and studied with the "Master Adept" Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897), who visited the U.S. in the winter of 1882–1883. The Drews were not only initiated into the Salafiyya, Afghani's political reform movement, but also into the Brethren of Purity, the Ikhwan al-Safa.⁴ According to most authors, Drew knew nothing of any deeper mysteries until his visit to the Orient, sometime before 1912.

Aged sixteen he shipped out as a merchant seaman — some say he took a job as a magician in a traveling circus (he is also said to have worked as a railway expressman) — and somehow ended up in Egypt. There he met the last priest of an ancient cult of High Magic who took him to the Pyramid of Cheops, led him in blindfolded, and abandoned him. When Drew found his way out unaided the magus recognized him as a potential adept and offered him initiation. He received the name Sharif [Noble] Abdul Ali; in America he would be known as Noble Drew Ali. In Egypt his prophecy manifested as a book, the "*Circle Seven Koran*";⁵ or it might have been in Mecca, where he was somehow empowered by Sultan Abdul Aziz al-Sa'ud, ruler [*sharif*] of the city and later of the whole country.

In 1912 or 1913, aged 27, in Newark, New Jersey, he had a dream in which he was ordered to found a religion "for the uplifting of fallen mankind" and especially for the "lost-found nation" of American blacks. According to Drew Ali, blacks are "Asiatics," specifically Moors; that is, descendants of the biblical Moabites through the prophetess Ruth, later the inhabitants of Western Africa or Morocco, which he proclaimed a sort of spiritual homeland or promised land (like Ethiopia for the Rastafarians). Going back yet further, he believed his

³ Sent to me by correspondent Prince Cuba. The typescript states plans for publication in the *Research News Journal* of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations, but I have not seen this.

⁴ The Brethren of Purity was a tenth-century group of philosophers in Iraq who seem to have been influenced by both Hellenistic mystery religions and Ismaili gnosis, as well as by Neoplatonism. See I. R. Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991).

⁵ The book's official title is *The Holy Koran of The Moorish Science Temple of America*, but it is frequently called the *Circle Seven Koran* because of the design that appears at the front of the book. The year 1916 is sometimes mentioned as its first publication date, but my copy is dated 1927, and I do not believe there was a printed edition earlier than this. For years no outsider saw this book; early articles refer to it as "secret." These articles are now outdated, but references can be found in Arthur Huff Fauset, *Black Gods of the Urban Metropolis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971); in the journal *Moslem World*; and in C. Eric Lincon, *Black Muslims in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

ancestors were Canaanites,⁶ and that Ham (or Adoniram as the Masons call him), father of Canaan, was present at the building of Solomon's Temple. Thus he called the first center of Moorish Science, in Newark, The Canaanite Temple.

The hypothesis of a Moorish origin for at least some American blacks has been taken up by historians inspired by such as Ivan Van Sertima,⁷ Cheikh Anta Diop, John G. Jackson, and others. What, they ask, happened to the Moors of Spain after 1492? Many were forcibly converted to Catholicism, and were known as Moriscos. Others, however, were enslaved. Soon after 1492 the Spanish were sending black slaves to the New World, some of whom are known to have been Moors or Moriscos. Some authors have even suggested that Moors and other Africans may have reached the New World *before* Columbus (the work of Ishmael Reed's Before Columbus Foundation deals with such questions). Whatever the case, clearly Moorish Moslems were among the first "discoverers" of America.

Moorish Science, however, propagates a more colorful and less sustainable image of the "Moorish Empire."⁸ The Empire once included most of Europe as well as Asia. Ireland was one of its last strongholds. The legend of St. Patrick and the snakes is said to be a mask for the real story — the expulsion of the Moors from Ireland.⁹ In 1929, in Chicago, St. Patrick's Day (March 17) was celebrated as Moorish Tag Day ("tags" were sold to raise funds for charity). "In later days, some of the Moors celebrated this day in remembrance of the Moors who were driven out of . . . Ireland."¹⁰

⁶ This was not an original idea. I don't know where it originated, but white segregationists have written on the "curse of Canaan"; Hamitic is still sometimes used as an anthropological term for the Ethiopians. Biblical tradition accuses the Canaanites and Moabites of every archetypal sin; Drew Ali's temple-naming was defiant and bold indeed.

⁷ See Ivan Van Sertima, ed., *Golden Age of the Moor* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publs., 1992).

⁸ See, for example, Dhanifu Sayed Karim-Bey, *The Fallen Moorish Empire* (San Francisco, Ca.: Quddus Publishing, 1989).

⁹ Ali Moore-El, G. G., "Moorish Literature — This is Tag Day" (March 17, 1983), xerox typescript.

¹⁰ See *Moorish-American Voice* (March 1981) for message from Bro. R. Love-El, Grand Shiekh.

A strange book, *Atlantean: Ireland's North African and Maritime Heritage* by Bob Quinn (London & New York: Quartet Books, 1986) lends support to this notion. Quinn traces influence on Ireland from Phoenicia and Carthage, Egypt (especially the Desert Fathers of the early Christian period), North Africa, including the pirates of the Barbary Coast, and especially Morocco. Certain forms of Irish music are almost identical with certain forms of Berber music. Quinn piles up evidence to support an Atlantean world, unified from the megalithic period onward. He even discusses ancient Moorish snake cults, and connects them with the legend of St. Patrick. He is, however, completely unaware that certain American Moslems share his obsessions. The question remains: where did Noble Drew Ali acquire this lore?

I have been unable to discover a *locus classicus* for this legend. However, I find it fascinating in light of the fact that the Irish in America sometimes made common cause with blacks (and Indians) against their common oppressors. Irish were frequently called "worse than niggers." In 1741, in New York City, Irish, blacks, and Indians joined in a conspiracy to riot; one of the Irish firebrands was heard to say he'd try to "kill as many whites" as possible.¹¹ The Civil War (and the New York Draft Riots) drove a wedge between the Irish and black lumpen proletariats, but antebellum America was, oddly, less racist than post-bellum America, at least for the marginalized poor. This forgotten harmony among the outcasts of three races no doubt helps to explain the existence of Maroon communities and "tri-racial isolate" communities, some of which still survive — and Noble Drew Ali may have been influenced by them. According to oral sources, he recognized "Celts" as Asiatics and hence eligible for membership in the Moorish Science Temple.

Scholars have been able to trace the sources for most of Noble Drew Ali's scripture, the *Circle Seven Koran*, but no one seems to have discovered the source of his ideas about Moorish Science itself, or the Moorish Empire.¹² In 1912, the young Drew Ali apparently wrote a letter to President Woodrow Wilson, asking him to turn over the Moorish flag, which he believed had been hidden in a safe in Independence Hall in 1776 by George Washington himself. The reason for this strange act constitutes something of an origin myth for the Moorish Science Temple. Noble Drew believed that blacks in America were actually Moors, that is, in contemporary terms, natives of Morocco. In 1774 the Founding Fathers had met in Philadelphia and decreed that only "Negroes" were subject to slavery. In 1776 this decree became law under the now-independent regime. Since the blacks had *forgotten* their true identity as Moors, they accepted this essentially linguistic act of terrorism and, along with the word, the condition of slavery. Now, according to the "Black Laws of Virginia" of 1682, Moors (Moroccan nationals) were exempt from such bondage. Morocco was the first country to recognize the U.S. diplomatically, in 1786. Clearly, "Moors" could not be "slaves." But George Washington, of course, was a slaveholder — and not about to tamper with bourgeois concepts of property. He cut

¹¹ See P. Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, "The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, and the Atlantic Working Class in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Historical Sociology* III, no. 3 (September 1990), pp. 225–252. The uprising was planned for St. Patrick's Day.

¹² M. A. al-Ahari, in a letter of March 4, 1991, suggests the following possibilities: a book published by the orientalist J. F. Foard, *North America & Africa: Their Past, Present & Future*, 3rd ed. (Statesville, N.C., 1903); and also the Imam of a mosque in Manhattan in the early part of the century, Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb, author of *Islam in America*.

down the red banner of the Moors and hid it away. The masking legend for this act is the story of Washington cutting down the "proverbial cherry tree."¹³

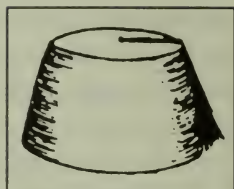
If the blacks had only "honored their father and mother" and not "strayed after the strange gods of Europe," they would not have suffered slavery, nor would they now be ignorant of their true identity — "nationality and birthright."¹⁴ It is said that the hidden flag was turned over to Noble Drew Ali, thus prompting the founding of the Moorish Science Temple in 1913. I can offer no objective proof of the literal truth of this story, but its symbolic richness throws more light on Drew Ali's prophetic sense of mission than anything in the *Circle Seven Koran* or other early Moorish Science Temple texts. "The name means everything; by taking the Asiatic's name from him and calling him Negro, black, colored, or Ethiopian, the European stripped the Moor of his power, his authority, his God, and every other worthwhile possession."¹⁵ The flag is the symbol of this identity.

The *Circle Seven Koran* must be considered a modern apocryphon. The specific sources of ancient apocrypha and pseudepigrapha are largely unknown, but we can actually trace the genesis of Drew Ali's "Koran." About half of it (II–XIX) is taken from *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* by "Levi" H. Dowling of Ohio (1908), a still-popular account of Christ's sojourn in India from adolescence to age thirty during the Gospel's "lost years." Liberal and mystical-theosophical in tone, *The Aquarian Gospel* (which Dowling said was revealed to him out of the Akashic Record) in turn owes its inspiration to *La Vie Inconnue de Jesus Christ* by Nicolas Notovitch (1894), a Russian Jew converted to Orthodoxy who claimed to have discovered an ancient manuscript in a Tibetan monastery in Ladakh, which he persuaded the monks to translate for him. It dealt with the Indian travels of "Saint Issa"; and indeed there exists in Kashmir a supposed tomb of Jesus, who (according to some Moslems) was not crucified but fled to the East. The founder of the Ahmadiyya sect of Islam (one of the early influences on American black Islam), Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, also produced a *Jesus In India* (1899) inspired by Notovitch and by oral tradition.

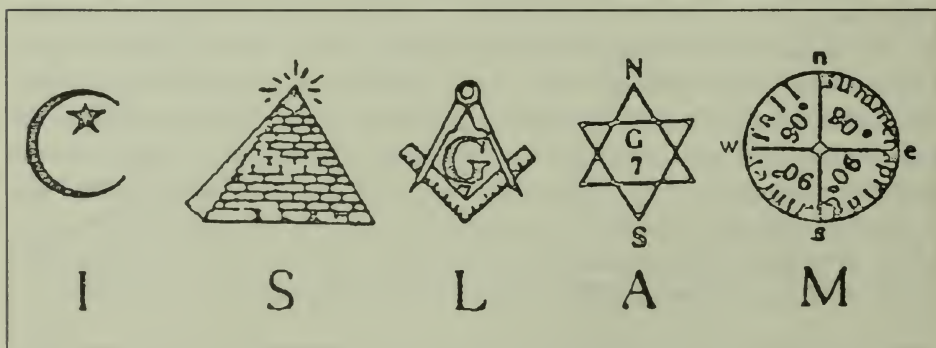
¹³ In 1912 the Moroccan flag had still not acquired its central green star, added by French authority November 17, 1915, in order to distinguish it from the plain red signal flag used in maritime communications. See M. E. Combs-Schilling, *Sacred Performance: Islam, Sexuality, and Sacrifice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 319. But according to the *Moorish Communicator* 1, no. 1 (January 1989), of Hartford, Connecticut, the five-pointed star or Seal of Sulayman on the Moroccan flag symbolizes Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom, and Justice. Tag Day also celebrates Noble Drew Ali's discovery and "the day the star was returned to the Moorish flag."

¹⁴ "Moorish-American History" (n.d.), xerox typescript, published by the Moorish Divine National Movement of the World. See also Ravanna Bey, op. cit.

¹⁵ See A. H. Fauset, op. cit., p. 47.



Moorish Symbols. The mystic circle-seven appears at the front of Noble Drew Ali's *Circle Seven Koran*. It relates to the ELOHIM, the angels or "gods," called by him "the Seven Eyes of ALLAH." The handshake, used as a symbol by many groups, may be Masonic in origin. According to Isa al-Mahdi, the handclasp represents Divine Unity. The fez may also be adopted from the Black Shriners, although in Drew Ali's time it was common in the Islamic world, and the shape shown here is distinctly Moroccan.



Symbols of Moorish Masonry. Noble Drew Ali was initiated in several branches of Masonry — a movement which has "translated" certain elements of Islamic into occidental culture. One possible "Masonic" link with Islam might have risen from meetings between "Assassins" and Knights Templar during the Crusades; the Rosicrucians also claim an Eastern origin (in Yemen). From the point of view of "heretical" Westerners, Islam represents a source of esoteric knowledge. From a xerox Moorish Science Temple text, 1973.

Drew Ali made only a few changes in the sections of *Aquarian Gospel* he used, for instance changing "God" to "Allah" and removing the description of Jesus as blond and blue-eyed. Chapter I, a poetic metaphysics of human and divine nature, may have been written by Noble Drew Ali himself (at least, I've been unable to trace any source for it). As for Chapters XX through XLIV, "Holy Instructions From The Prophet," these too derive from another source, a book called *Unto Thee I Grant* (also known as *The Economy of Life*, and as *Infinite Wisdom*).¹⁶ AMORC, the American Rosicrucian Society, keeps this text in print, and to my delight, *Unto Thee* turns out, like *The Aquarian Gospel*, to be in turn a kind of apocryphon or pseudepigraphal text. The editor, or "revisor," one Sri Ramatherio, claims that the English version dates back to 1760. AMORC seems to possess editions from that period, so we can assume that this date is correct. However, the text itself makes far more exalted claims. Supposedly an unnamed "English Gentleman" representing British interests in China arranged in 1749 for a translation to be made of a Chinese text, which was in turn a translation of a Tibetan work of great antiquity, made by the Gentleman's friend, a Chinese Prime Minister named Cao-Tsou, who obtained it from the Dalai Lama. Since the text is clearly not Buddhist, the Chinese translator is said to have believed the work was composed by Confucius or Lao Tzu. Presumably this legend was offered as an explanation of the book in 1760. Sri Ramatherio, who rediscovered the text in a Rosicrucian collection, noted that it contains references highly unlikely in a Tibetan work, such as crocodiles, the sea, and, we might add, tulips, Arabian perfumes, and a beaver!, and he leaps to the conclusion that the Tibetans had somehow acquired a translation of a work by Akhnaten, the "first monotheist" Pharaoh of Egypt.

Ramatherio's "revision" of 1925, with its mention of Egyptian monotheism, is probably the version seen and appropriated by Noble Drew Ali in 1927. However, the *Circle Seven Koran* does not agree in every respect with the text of the 1986 AMORC edition (which is apparently the second printing of the thirty-second edition, which was issued in 1979). Drew Ali's version, aside from obvious changes made by him, contains sentences missing from the 1986 *Unto Thee*, including passages of a rather pessimistic or puritanical tone. "Be always prepared to give an account of thine action; and the best death is that which is least premeditated," appears as XLIV/23 in the *Koran* but is missing from the 1986 *Unto Thee*, for example. It would seem that someone has tried to "liberalize" the message. In other cases the differences are trifling or even baffling.

¹⁶ I was alerted to this fact by a letter (July 5, 1989) from Clara Campbell, librarian of the Rosicrucian Research Library in San Jose, California. Subsequently M. A. al-Ahari also discussed *Unto Thee*, stating his belief that the Rosicrucian edition (1925) was lifted from an earlier version of *Infinite Wisdom*, published in 1923 by De Lawrence Publishing Co. See letters, op. cit.

Unto Thee, IX/5, "Misery," reads: "Reflection is the business of man; a sense of his state is his first duty; but who remembereth himself in joy?" The parallel passage in the *Koran* (XLIV/19) reads: "Reflection is the business of man; a sense of his state is his first duty; but who remembereth himself as a boy?"

Frankly, neither reading makes much sense to me.

The sentences which are found in the *Koran* but not in *Unto Thee* (1986) are *not*, I believe, additions by Noble Drew, but were taken by him from the edition he saw. The questions remain: how much did Ramatherio tinker with pre-1925 editions in his "revision" and how much tinkering has gone on *since* 1925 in the thirty-two subsequent editions?

Although Ramatherio makes great claims for *The Economy of Life* as a mystical work, its most striking feature is its practical, ethical, somewhat literalist, rather world-weary conservatism. Our hypothesis is that the work was composed before 1760 (but not much before) in England by someone who had the Bible open to Proverbs as he wrote; the author may or may not be the same person who published the Legend of the book with its Sino-Tibetan claims. The author of the Legend was probably a Rosicrucian or member of some related Masonic order. The continuing appeal of the work owes more to the Legend than the text. Ramatherio added to the Legend, and Noble Drew made it his own.

And who's to say that these imaginal Tibets and Egypts of Noble Drew Ali, Levi, Notovitch, Ramatherio, and the English Gentleman, which possess the charming two-dimensionality (or perhaps fractal dimensionality) of a hallucination or a packet of Turkish cigarettes, are not in their own sweet way as valuable as the "real" items? (And just how "real" are the four canonical gospels, for instance?) The world of apocrypha is a world of books *made* real, which may well be understood and appreciated by readers of Borges, Calvino, Lewis Carroll — or certain of the Sufis. The apocryphal imagination turns "Tibet" or "Egypt" into an amulet or mantram with which to unlock an "other world," most real in dreams and books and dreams *of* books, visions induced by holy fasting or noxious alchemic fumes.

In the world of apocrypha the Images of established religion and canonical texts acquire a kind of mutability, a tendency to *drift*, to reflect the subjectivities of the (often anonymous) visionaries who sift through fragments in order to produce more fragments — so that texts become fluid organic mosaics with replaceable parts, each bit catching and reflecting a shard of light, like a magpie's hoard. This is not plagiarism in the crude sense of the word. Like Borges's man who wrote *Don Quixote*, the apocryphist re-creates within the Imagination the texts he venerates, even as the texts themselves take on a certain autonomy, a nomadic life of their own. And thus are born the scriptures of heresies, the

canons of the gnostics, the fugitive poetics of self-revelation, the rants of the cults of love and light.¹⁷

The most puzzling part of the *Circle Seven* consists of the final chapters, XLV–XLVIII, which deal with the “Asiatic” origin of the Moors. Here Africa is called “Amexem,” and the dominion of the Moors is said to have extended even to Atlantis and America (so that Latin and Native Americans are actually “Asiatic races”). The Moors were stripped of their nationality in 1774 by the white Founding Fathers of America, and their Moorish identity lost and forgotten. Noble Drew Ali has come to restore it. None of my Moorish Science Temple informants or fellow-researchers have succeeded in discovering a source for this section, which has a style of its own. Similar to Chapter I, it is less grammatical but more poetic than all the rest. The presumption and consensus is that chapters XLV–XLVIII were composed by Noble Drew himself. Some authors have denied this on the grounds that certain newspaper reports called the Prophet illiterate, or nearly so. Oral tradition however asserts that “he wrote his own biography, and in disgust at the slow pace people were returning to Islam, threw it into the Sea of the Cares of the World. Both this and his writing on the Charter of Temple #9 Baltimore (now in Chicago) separate him from the commonly called unlettered Prophet Muhammad.”¹⁸

Drew Ali is a racist but not a racist. He calls on every nation to “love instead of hate”; and “every man need to worship under his own vine and fig tree.” He was concerned especially and naturally with his own people, but considered that any “Asiatic” had the right to join the Moorish Science Temple, including Amerindians, Chinese, and Japanese, and even whites as “Celts” or “Persians.” Pale folk come in for some criticism in the *Circle Seven*, but there is no atmosphere of race-hate (as with Elijah Muhammad’s later Nation of Islam) — the emphasis is always on “Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom, and Justice.” Levi’s and the English Gentleman’s biblical pastiches combine with Drew Ali’s Islamic influences to produce a kind of folk-poetic style that permeates the whole of Moorish Science. In 1965, when I met the Moorish “Governor” of Baltimore in his old-fashioned junk shop, he sprinkled his discourse with metaphors of roses and musk, as well as Southern black dialect, in what can only be called an American Sufi style.¹⁹

¹⁷ Thanks to Bro. J. Mahmud Irsay for help in unraveling the tangled story of the *Circle Seven*’s sources.

¹⁸ M. A. al-Ahari, letters, op. cit.

¹⁹ Regenault Wright-El of Hyattsville, Maryland, letter of June 27, 1990. Rufus German-Bey [the governor I met] was “easily the most influential and charismatic Moorish American Moslem . . . in Baltimore.” German-Bey knew Noble Drew Ali personally, followed J. Givens-El after Ali’s death, moved to Baltimore in the 1950s, and died “around 1984.”



Moorish Map. On the map, *a* and *b* represent the Moroccan and U.S. flags; *c* is the Masonic Eye in the Pyramid; the map itself, *d*, is said to show Moorish population distribution in the U.S. (although I can't understand why it seems to indicate none in the East); and *e* is the date 1776, carved in the base of the Pyramid. From *Moor Sense*, 1971, reprinted in al-Mahdi, op. cit.

Contemporary readers may find the most attractive aspect of his *Koran* its emphasis on spiritual individuality and self-sufficiency. In part this reflects Levi's theosophicoid influence, in part a natural American (Transcendentalist) tendency, and in part a rather Sufistic reading of Islam. "You are, each one, a priest, just for yourself." "Allah and man are one." "I (Jesus) brought immortality to light and painted on the walls of time a rainbow for the sons of men; and what I did all men shall do." Thus the *Circle Seven Koran*. Drew Ali commented, "When we rely upon others to study the secrets of nature and think and act for us, then we have created a life for ourselves, one which is termed 'Hell'."

The Prophet Muhammad is mentioned only twice in this *Koran*, as the fulfiller of the works of Jesus. Drew Ali was addressing a mostly Christian readership; moreover, it must be admitted that he knew more of the spirit than the letter of "real" Islam. Given the nature of his supposed oriental wanderings, we may wonder if he had *any* contact with Islam other than in his poetic imagination. Until recently I might have answered, No, but in preparing this essay I found surprising and colorful new source material unknown to most historians of black Islam in America, which I believe solves some of the problems of Drew Ali's sources of inspiration.

The *Koran* mentions Marcus Garvey as the "forerunner" of Noble Drew Ali (some say he was Drew Ali's cousin, as John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus), and Moorish Science is generally regarded as an offshoot of Garveyism. Socially and politically this is true, but does little to explain the Islamic ingredients of Moorish Science. Some scholars mention Ahmadiyya missionaries, but I find this hypothesis unconvincing. The Ahmadiyya are very "orthopractic," despite their heresies, and would at least have introduced the Islamic *Koran* (as they apparently did later with the Nation of Islam). Indian Sufi musicians under Hazrat Inayat Khan visited America as early as 1912, a year before Drew declared his prophethood. Then there is also the story about Jamal al-Din Afghani and the Brethren of Purity; the story of Drew Ali's own oriental wanderings; and finally, as a possible source of knowledge of Islam — the public library. But in the end none of these theories satisfies completely. Some are mere guesses, others probably legendary, others simply not compelling enough. I believe that Noble Drew Ali's "Islam" had historical roots, of several kinds — first in various secret societies, second in certain surviving groups of Islamic-descended black Americans.

The first deep source of Moorish Science is Masonry.²⁰ Connections between Islam and Freemasonry may go back to the Crusades, to pacts between Templars and Ismailis ("Assassins"). Eighteenth-century Rosicrucians claimed sources in the Yemen for their alchemical wisdom. The freethinkers of the Enlightenment held favorable opinions of Islam, not because they understood it very well, but because it represented the antithesis of Christianity; "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Frederick II, Voltaire, Goethe, and Nietzsche all admired Islam; dandies as well as revolutionary Masons adopted the accoutrements of the "wicked Turk." If this Masonic reading of Islam can be called a *misreading*, nevertheless it contains a fortuitous element — an example of heresy acting as a means of cultural transfer. That is: an image of Islam (however distorted) had in fact moved from East to West and brought about cultural ferment. This "hidden" Islamic tradition in western culture deserves full-scale treatment. Much of its energy will be found within Masonry.

European lodges admitted blacks, but American Masons were segregationist. The so-called clandestine Prince Hall Lodges of "black Masonry" actually possess legitimate European charters and have a history going back to the American Revolution, under such names as the Chapter of the Eastern Star, Order of the Golden Circle, and Knights of the Invisible Colored Kingdom.

In 1876–7 some New York businessmen, all thirty-second degree or thirty-third degree Scottish Rite Masons, founded the Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine — the "Shriners." They concocted a legend claiming initiations from a Grand Shaykh of Mecca, honors from the Ottoman Sultan Selim III, a charter from Adam Weishaupt of the Bavarian Illuminati, and links with the Bektashi Sufi Order.²¹ They bestowed the title "Noble" on themselves, wore fezzes, displayed a crescent moon and star with Egyptian ornaments (including the Great Pyramid), and founded lodges called "Mecca," "Medina," "Al Koran," etc. Later Shriners found this esoteric mishmash embarrassing, repudiated the legend, devolved into a charitable fraternity, and saved their fezzes for parades and costume balls.

During the Great Columbian Exhibition in Chicago (1893), a world's fair attended by numerous Eastern religious figures (such as Swami Vivekananda),

²⁰ I owe this insight to Bro. Morocco Bey of Newark, and subsequently to a pamphlet, *Who Was Noble Drew Ali?* (1988?) by Isa al-Mahdi, leader of the Nubian Islamic Hebrews (Ansaaru Allah) of Brooklyn, a group well-known in New York for selling incense in the subways. The Mahdi seems to have written this book to convert Moors to his own version of Islam by claiming Drew as a forerunner — but it does contain some valuable insights and rare graphic material.

²¹ A Turkish Brotherhood connected with the Ottoman Imperial Guard, the Janissaries, who included shamanism and wine drinking among their heresies. See J. Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes* (London: Luzac & Co., 1937).



a



c



b

Shiner Symbols. (a) and (b) The sphinx-and-pyramid Grand Seal surrounded by crescents and stars (with date of founding); and the pendant "jewel" consisting of an oriental scimitar, sphinx, crescent and star. The Shriners romanticized Islam, which had always played a role in Masonry, but they also adopted a pseudo-Islamic nomenclature, costume, ritual, etc. Modern-day Shriners, with their circuses and clowns, have taken on the ancient role of the comic "Moor," which dates back at least to the medieval English Mummer Plays. Moorish Science represents a more serious meditation on the Islamic current within Masonry. (c) A founder of the Shriners. The fez usually carries a version of the sword-and-crescent jewel, and the name of a Lodge, e.g., "Mecca," "Medina," "Ismailia," while the Moorish Science Temple fez bears only a crescent and star, a more "orthodox" version of the symbol.

American blacks claiming initiation from visiting Moslem dignitaries founded the Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order of Nobles of the Shrine (and its sister affiliate the Daughters of Isis) — black Shriners. Certain photographs exist of Noble Drew Ali in Egyptian Shriner gear; even his famous Napoleonic pose is Masonic, as are his title, headgear, and other favorite symbols. I have seen documents purporting to represent Moorish Masonry which may refer to the existence of an Adept Chamber within Moorish Science, mentioned in its Catechism.

According to my informant M. A. Ahari, Noble Drew Ali was “a Pythian Knight, a Shriner, a Prophet of the Veiled Realm, and, of course, a thirty-second degree Mason.” He suggests that Masonic “catechisms” may have been the model for the Moorish Catechism; one is reminded here of Joseph Smith and the Masonic influence on Mormonism, which has undergone a veiling and metamorphosis similar to that of the Masonic roots of Moorish Science.

The other major source for Drew Ali’s teachings — or at least for an ambience or “taste” in Moorish Science — may well be traced to communities of “Moors” existing in America since the eighteenth century (or even earlier, especially in the Spanish colonies). Undoubtedly some slaves (such as the Fulani) were Moslems, and just as African traditions survived in the land of captivity, so must Islamic identity and folkways have been preserved. Thus we have the Delaware Moors,²² and even more striking, the tribe of Ben Ishmael, whose Islamic name was no doubt Ibn Isma’il.

About 1785 a group of freed and runaway slaves and poor white indentured servants fled from Noble (!) County (now Bourbon County) in Kentucky and settled on the future site of Indianapolis — then a wilderness. There they mingled with Pawnee Indians and took up a nomadic life modeled on that of local hunter-gatherer tribes. Led by a “king” and “queen,” Ben and Jennie Ishmael (who later supposedly vanished into the far West), they were known as fine artisans, musicians and dancers, abstainers from alcohol, practitioners of polygamy, non-Christian, and racially integrated. They believed that land could

²² Also called the Forgotten Moors. See C. A. Weslager, *The Nanricoke Indians: Past and Present* (Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1983; based in part on his earlier work, *Delaware's Forgotten Folk*, Philadelphia, 1943). The subject of a “tri-racial isolate” and Maroon communities is too vast for the present essay. I concentrate here on “tribes” showing some Islamic influence. For Maroons in North America, see H. Leaming-Bey, *Hidden Americans: Maroons of Virginia and the Carolinas* (microfiche, 1979). D. S. Karim-Bey discusses the Moorish-Maroon connection in *The Fallen Moorish Empire*, and I have an odd pamphlet called “Moorish Sports Club,” which also mentions it. Relevant material will appear in a forthcoming Autonomedia book, *Gone to Croatan*, edited by R. Sakolsky and J. Koehnline, which will include the full text of Hugo P. Leaming’s wonderful essay “The Ben Ismael Tribe.” See *The Ethnic Frontier*, M. G. Holli, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1977). This is one of the most exciting recoveries of lost history I’ve ever read. Thanks to James Koehnline (Ismael Bey) of Chicago and Seattle for bringing it to my attention.

not be owned (a typically Native-American idea), and that property should be movable (they even built movable houses). By about 1810 they had established a cycle of travel which took them annually from Indianapolis (where their village gradually became a city slum) through a triangle formed by the hamlets of Morocco and Mecca in Indiana and Mahomet in Illinois. James Fenimore Cooper described them in *The Prairie* (1827) but until recently literary historians believed he invented them.

Later "official" white pioneers detested the Ishmaels, and apparently the feeling was mutual. From about 1890 comes this description of an elder: "He is an anarchist of course, and he has the instinctive, envious dislike so characteristic of his people, of anyone in a better condition than himself." The elder is quoted directly: "The law is against us . . . It is meant to crush the poor." The observer continues: "He abused the law, the courts; the rich, factories — everything." The elder stated that "the police should be hanged"; he was ready, he said, to burn the institutions of society. "I am better than any man that wears store clothes."

The Ishmaels, like the "Kallikaks" in New Jersey and the "Jukes" in New York, drew the attention of early eugenicists, who decided that the mongrel tribe should cease to pass on its evil heritage. *The Tribe of Ishmael: A Study in Social Degradation* (1880), by the Rev. O. C. McCulloch set the tone. The good pastor wanted Ishmael families broken up and the men castrated. In 1907 Indiana passed a draconian eugenics law, and the Ishmaels themselves reacted by abandoning nomadism and fleeing Indianapolis for Chicago, Detroit, and other nearby cities. They almost vanished.

When Noble Drew Ali left Newark for Chicago in 1925 he gave as his reason the opinion that the Midwest was "closer to Islam." He might have been referring to the "Egyptian" Shriners — but he also might have meant the Ishmaels — or both. An Ishmael woman with the delightfully nomadic name Mrs. Gallivant passed down a tradition that Ishmaelites were among Drew Ali's first converts in the area.²³

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Other reasons are given for the move to Chicago: that the Moors were persecuted for refusing conscription during World War I; or that Drew Ali was discomfited by the appearance of a Russo-Syrian peddler of silks and raincoats named Abdul Wali Farrad Mohammed Ali, who began to lure some of the Moors away to his own brand of Islam, closer to the Arabic model but apparently tainted with race-hatred (the white man as "blue-eyed devil"). This may or may not be the same Wallace Fard who later (according to Moorish legend) convinced Elijah Muhammad to leave Moorish Science and set up his own

²³ All this from Hugo P. Leaming, *ibid.*

Don't Miss the Great Moorish Drama

Look!

Look!

COME YE EVERYONE AND SEE

THE SEVENTH WONDER OF THE WORLD

The Great Moorish Drama, which constitutes

"Events in The Last Days Among the Inhabitants of North America"

In this Moorish Drama the need of a nationality will be made know to you through the acts, of men, women and children. There will be great lectures and this Nationalistic topic by the Prophet Noble Drew Ali, and many of the Sherks of the Grand Body of the Moorish Holy Temple of Science. You will also hear one of the greatest Moorish female songstress of the day — MME. L. O. MAX-BEY.

THE PROPHET NOBLE DREW ALI, WILL BE BOUND WITH SEVERAL YARDS OF ROPE, AS JESUS WAS BOUND IN THE TEMPLE AT JERUSALEM.

And escaped before the authorities could charge of him; so will the Prophet Drew Ali, perform the same act, after being bound by anyone in the audience and will escape in a few seconds.

He also will heal many in the audience with touching them, free of charge, as they stand in front of their seats manifesting his divine power.

COME ONE. COME ALL TO

THE MOORISH HOLY TEMPLE OF SCIENCE

AT COMMUNITY CENTRE

3140 INDIANA AVE.

8 to 11 p. m.

Refreshments Served

ADMISSION:

ADULTS 50c

CHILDREN 25c

NOBLE DREW ALI

On Monday Evening, May 16th, 1927

The Great Moorish Drama. Was Noble Drew Ali ever a professional circus magician, as oral tradition relates? This curious and crumbling flyer represents a rare bit of "evidence" (circumstantial, admittedly) for such a belief. Shamanism, which appears as "trickery" to the "modern Western observer" (that mythical beast), always makes use of prestidigitation as a therapeutic tactic; this practice is neither rank superstition nor fraud, but rather a deep-rooted structure in all healing faiths — the "shamanic trace" in all religion, so to speak. Religion is magic theater, just as theater was originally magical religion: rites performed for healing and *communitas*. (Thanks to Prince Cuba for his copy of the flyer.)



Group photograph, Chicago. Noble Drew and Pearl Ali can be seen in the front row. The date is 1928, one year before his death. (From the *Chicago Defender*.)

Nation of Islam, the "Black Muslims."²⁴ But whatever Drew Ali's reasons, Chicago proved far more hospitable than Newark, and the Moorish Science Temple entered its golden age.

²⁴ One theory (see *Who Was Noble Drew Ali?*, op. cit.) supposes that Wali Farrad, imprisoned in 1926, was "replaced" by one Wallace Douglas (Dodd) Ford, a communist agent sent to mislead and arouse the blacks. (Elijah Mohammad claimed that Ford [Fard] was Allah Himself; Fard is a Divine Name in Arabic, "the Unique.") When Ford was in turn arrested in 1933 he is said to have confessed that his cult was "strictly a racket." Thereafter he too vanished mysteriously. Another theory states that Fard was a member of the Moorish Science Temple who, after Noble Drew's death, claimed (like many others) to be his "reincarnation," and that he himself founded the Nation of Islam. I am informed by Prince Cuba in a letter of August 13, 1990, that Isa al-Mahdi has apologized for his claims against Fard ("Apology To The N.O.I. & The Followers Of The Hon. Elijah Muhammad," a text I have not seen), and ordered all earlier works mentioning these claims (including *The Book of Lamm*, Ansar Pub. #100) to be destroyed. Prince Cuba makes a good argument for dismissing the "communist agent" theory as sheer disinformation. The story that Fard was a disciple of Noble Drew, however, is harder to discredit. It receives some support from an article in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Mar. 6, 1935) describing a courtroom riot involving followers of W. D. Fard ("or Fard Mohammed"), described as members of "the Moorish Order," and specifically linked to the Moorish Science Temple.

Prince Cuba sent me a copy of his edition of the extremely rare article about Fard, "Detroit History," *Newport News* [Virginia], originally published as E. D. Benyon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit," *American Journal of Sociology* (May 1938). In his notes, Prince Cuba supports the theory of a connection between Fard and Noble Drew, based in part on Fard's use of "Moorish" terminology. In "Black Gods of the Inner City," *Gnosis* 25 (Fall, 1992), Prince Cuba summarizes his research thus: "Prior to Fard's appearance in 1930, Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Science Temples . . . were in decline. After the loss of its founder in 1929, the movement had fallen into three separate schisms. Sheik John Givens El claimed that Noble Drew Ali had become reincarnated into him, Givens-El, on August 7, 1929, in Chicago. This was publicly announced in Chicago's Pythian Hall on August 19 of that year."

A communication from Ravanna Bey adds: "W. D. Fard, known at the time as Abdul Wali Farrad Muhammad, and two other Moorish Scientists, Mealy El and Charles Kirkman Bey, contested the authority of Givens-El. The latter two went on to establish their own independent Moorish Science Temples, while Fard converted a Detroit Moorish Science Temple and renamed it the Temple of the Lost-Found People of Islam. This story has been hotly contested by Nation of Islam leadership, who believe that it was Fard who taught Noble Drew, not the other way around. See E. U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

A wartime FBI report quoted by Prince Cuba identifies W. D. Fard as "Sheik Davis El," a very Moorish-Science-sounding name. According to another source, Fard had declared himself the reincarnation of Noble Drew Ali. See Anna Bontemps & J. Conroy, *Anyplace But Here* (New York: 1966). Prince Cuba concludes, "With so many stories in circulation, confusion has been the norm." I quote him not to add to the confusion, but because some of his findings throw light on the confused events following Noble Drew's death.

On joining the Temple converts were given new surnames — Bey or El — and told to wear their fezzes at all times. Meat, alcohol, and smoking were forbidden (along with shaving, cosmetics, and hair straighteners), and morality encouraged. In contrast to many black Christian churches, Friday worship was quiet and unemotional. Hymns were sung, replacing Christian with Islamic words (“Moslem’s That Old-Time Religion”), the *Koran* was recited and discussed, a sermon was given. Men and women sat separately, and prayed, “Allah, the Father of the Universe, the Father of Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom and Justice. Allah is my protector, my Guide, and my Salvation by night and day, through His Holy Prophet, Drew Ali. Amen.”²⁵

Members were issued nationality cards or “passports” and a copy of the *Divine Constitution and By-Laws*. As new temples opened in Pittsburg, Detroit, Baltimore, and other cities throughout the Midwest and South, Grand Sheiks, Governors, and Elders were appointed, charitable work was carried out, and Drew Ali was praised by the press for his community spirit. The Moors paraded in fancy dress (with camel), and a weekly newspaper, *The Moorish Guide*, appeared. A company was set up to manufacture Old Moorish health products such as antiseptic bath compound and oil, blood purifiers and other traditional herbal remedies, and teas (not magic spells and nostrums as some historians claim). New holidays were celebrated, including Drew Ali’s birthday, and Moorish Tag Day.

“Sunday schools” were taught from the *Koran Questions For Children*, the so-called Catechism, wherein some esoteric hints of an inner teaching may be discerned. “What is Aught? Aught is ALLAH.” Truth is defined as HOLY BREATH. Mecca is the site of Eden. The true name of the first man is known only to the Executive Rulers of the Adept Chamber (3rd Heaven),²⁶ presumably the higher Masonic initiates. Devil and angel are names for the lower and higher selves. The devil was made by the Elohim, the Seven Creative Spirits or SEVEN EYES OF ALLAH, but in truth Satan is nothing but “the shadow of our lower selves and will pass away.”

The Moorish Science Temple was officially incorporated in 1928, and in the same year Drew Ali inaugurated Unity Hall, at 3140 Indiana Avenue, as headquarters. At the height of his success, he campaigned for Oscar DePriest, the first black to have served in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1901.

²⁵ See Fauset, *Black Gods*, op. cit.

²⁶ According to Sufi doctrine the esoteric name of the first man would be Muhammad, who said, “I was a Prophet while Adam was between water and clay” (that is, still uncreated). All prophets are in a sense Muhammad, since they exist, so to speak, as rays of the pre-eternal Muhammadan Light. I believe Noble Drew himself was somehow cognizant of this doctrine, and may have considered himself a “reincarnation” of Muhammad.

Moors paraded in the victory celebration and the Moorish Chorus entertained the jubilant crowd.

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Meteoric success brought disaster in its wake. Young and fanatical Moors had taken to "flashing their cards" at people in the street and ranting about the overthrow of European civilization. The police took notice; an official in Detroit later described "those fellows! What a terrible gang! Thieves and cut-throats! Wouldn't answer anything. Wouldn't sit down when you told them. Wouldn't stand up when you told them. Pretending they didn't understand you, that they were Moors from Morocco. They never saw Morocco! Those Moors never saw anything before they came to Detroit except Florida and Alabama!"²⁷

The sect's sudden wealth attracted unscrupulous and shady types who achieved high position, milked the faithful, and began to conspire against the Prophet himself. Drew issued a warning to both the rowdies and the conspirators: "... end all radical agitating speeches while at work . . . or on the streets. We are for peace and not destruction. Stop flashing your cards at Europeans; it causes confusion. . . . Any member or group of members who hold malicious feelings toward the temple or the Prophet, or violate the divine covenant of the Moorish Movement will receive their reward from Allah for their unjust deeds." He ends with a plea to the faithful to protect their Prophet.

In 1929, disaster struck. The history of the Moorish Science Temple now takes on a violent edge, an air of tragedy. The *Chicago Defender*, a "race" newspaper, had happily boosted Noble Drew Ali in his rise to fame, with stories about him and his wife, Pearl Drew Ali, and her Young Peoples' Moorish League.²⁸ But the paper changed its tone when the shooting started. The Moorish Science Temple was now a "cult," and the Prophet was a "prophet"-in-quotations and "illiterate," his followers ignorant and misguided.

The headline read: "Blame Split In Cult For Brutal Crime." Claude D. Greene, Noble Drew's business manager, was shot and cut, stabbed four times in neck and body, at the Unity Club, 3140 Indiana Avenue, by a "slaying crew" of the "cult." After a city-wide hunt — forty arrests were made within an hour — Noble Drew Ali was found "in hiding" at 3365 Indiana Avenue at "a feast." An informant named Small Bey told police that Greene was the head of a break-away group within the Moorish Science Temple, and that Noble Drew had

²⁷ Fauset, *Black Gods*, op. cit., p. 43.

²⁸ Pearl was said to be sixteen at the time, and looks it in her newspaper photo. Noble Drew is known to have had two wives, following Islamic custom; the other was Mary Foreman Bey. According to M. A. al-Ahari, both were older than sixteen at the time of marriage. He says both are still alive, but have refused all attempts to interview them.

arranged to have him “bumped off” by one George (or perhaps Ira) Johnson Bey or El (still unarrested).

“Cult Leader Lured Girls To His Harem.” One was fourteen years old, and there were two others as well, or so the *Defender* alleged. (This charge is stoutly denied by Moorish historians, and indeed the newspaper allegation is vague and probably based on slander or rumor.) Noble Drew is now in jail with nine of his followers, the report continues. Johnson Bey has been spotted in Detroit. Drew Ali made \$35,000 last year. “He can scarcely read and write. In addition to duping his followers with religious hokum, he sells medicine made by himself and alleges it is blessed by the Prophet Mohammad. The ignorance of the crowd following him is appalling, the police probe brought out.”²⁹

While in jail Drew issued a statement to his followers: “Though I am now in custody for you and the cause, it is all right and is well for all who still believe . . . I have redeemed you all and you shall be saved, all of you, even with me. I go to bat Monday, May 20, before the Grand Jury. If you are with me, be there. Remember my laws and love one another. Prefer not a stranger to thy brother. Love and truth and my peace I leave you all. Peace from your Prophet, Noble Drew Ali.” These were to be his last words.

The trial apparently never took place. Released on bond, the Prophet died — some say from severe, third-degree police beatings, others say assassinated by his rivals in the movement. In his sincerity and undoubted innocence, Noble Drew Ali had met a martyr’s end.

The *Defender* article on Drew’s death mentions a trial, but I have been unable to find any other evidence that the Prophet actually appeared in court. According to the story, “Enough evidence could not be obtained . . . to convict him (of Greene’s murder) but it is believed that the ordeal of the trial together with the treatment he received at the hands of the police in an effort to obtain true statements are directly responsible for the illness which precipitated his death.” Greene was said to have diverted funds from Moorish Science Temple business ventures;³⁰ Pearl Ali claimed that her husband “was not very wealthy, as he had devoted his entire life to the service and advancement of his people.”

²⁹ Oral tradition says that Drew was only captured after a gun battle between police and his bodyguard, the huge “Enforcer of the Law” (believed to be a reincarnation of Jesus), who died in the hail of bullets. I find no evidence to support this tale.

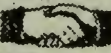
³⁰ According to a very strange book, *The Resurrection*, by Timothy Dingle-El (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1978), Greene had been “interfering” not only with funds but also with one of the prophet’s wives. Noble Drew returned from his trip and called his secret Adept Chamber together: “The Noble told the Chamber his story and asked who would pull this bad tooth out. A sheik volunteered and done the job.” This presumably refers to Ira Johnson.



"WITHOUT HISTORY A RACE SLEEPS"

The Moorish Science Temple

OF AMERICA

UNITE 

The Divine Constitution and By-Laws

ACT 1.—The Grand Book and the children of the Moorish Science Temple of America is in power to make law and enforce laws with the assistance of the Prophet and the Grand Body of the Moorish Science Temple of America. The sacred Grand Book is to read the Grand Book in all affairs of the law according to Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom and Justice, and it is known before the members of the Moorish Science Temple of America.

ACT 2.—All meetings are to be opened and closed promptly according to the order given and Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom and Justice. Friday is our Holy Day of rest, because on a Friday the first man was created in flesh and on a Friday the first man departed out of flesh and ascended unto his father God Allah, for that exact Friday is the Holy Day for all Moors to rest the world.

ACT 3.—Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom and Justice must be practiced and protected by all members of the Moorish Science Temple of America. No member is to put in danger or incur injury his brother or sister on any occasion at all that may harm his brother or sister, because Allah is Love.

ACT 4.—All members must practice these Holy and Divine laws, and all members must obey the laws of the government, because by being a Moorish American, you are a part and parcel of the government, and must live the life accordingly.

ACT 5.—This organization of the Moorish Science Temple of America is not to cover any confusion or to overturn the laws and jurisdiction of the said government but to obey her laws.



NOBLE DREW ALI
Founder

ACT 6.—With such members must practice their nationality and on any teaching our people their nationality and their Divine Creed that they may know that they are a part and a parcel of this said government, and know that they are not Negroes, Colored People, Black People or Aborigines, because these names were given to slaves by slave holders in 1779 and hated until this during the time of slavery, but this is a new era of time now, and all men are now protected their true national name to be recognized by the government in which they live and the actions of the spirit, this is the reason why Allah the Great God of the universe ordained Noble Drew Ali, the Prophet to redeem his people from their sinful ways, the Moorish Americans, or the descendants of the ancient Moabites whom inhabited the North Western and South Western corners of Africa.

ACT 7.—All members must promptly attend their meetings and become a part and a parcel of all uplifting acts of the Moorish Science Temple of America. Members must pay their dues and keep in line with all necessities of the Moorish Science Temple of America, then you are entitled in the name of "Faithful" husband, you must support your wife and children: wife you must obey, your husband and take care of your children and look after the houses of your household, sons and daughters must obey father and mother and be industrious and become a part of the uplifting of their humanity. All Moorish Americans must keep their hearts and minds pure with love, and their bodies clean with soap. This Divine Covenant is from your Holy Prophet Noble Drew Ali, then the guidance of his Father God Allah.

MOORISH AMERICAN PRAYER

After the Father of the universe, the Father of Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom and Justice, Allah be my protector, my guide and my salvation by night and by day, Amen. Holy Prophet Noble Drew Ali, "Amen."

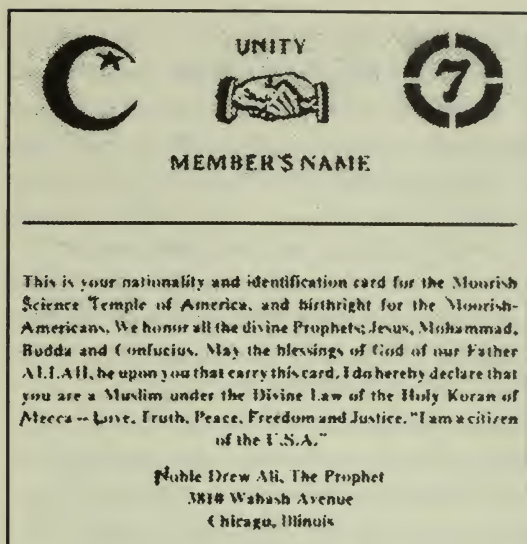


REDEMPTION

THE MOORISH SCIENCE TEMPLE OF AMERICA

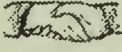
Home Office of Noble Drew Ali: Chicago, Ill., U.S.A.

A Version of the Divine Constitution and By-Laws, containing references to the 1779 (or 1776) origin story; the identification of Moors with biblical Moabites; and the slogan, "Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom, and Justice." From al-Mahdi.



A reconstruction of the "Passport" — a source of pride to the Moors, annoyance to the Police! From al-Mahdi.

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**MOORISH ROOT
GOLDEN AND
BLOOD PURIFIER**

For Yaws, Syphilis and
"Gallens" Detached Ear
"Mushrooms" long growth,
various eruptions, in-
flamation, and loss of nose
hair

Price 12⁰⁰



**Moorish Antiseptic
Bath Compound**

Beneficial for Rheumatism,
Rheumatism, Stiff,
Tooths, Ford and Sore
Pain, Also Skin
Tenderness, when used
as a Face Wash

Price 12⁰⁰

**MOORISH MEDICAL
AND PHARMACY**

\$3.00




Moorish Health Products. Note that they are herbal preparations, not "voodoo oils" as claimed by the Temple's enemies — and certain misguided scholars. From al-Mahdi.

"Most Noble Drew Ali Is Laid To Rest" at the Pythian Temple on State Street. "The eastern burial ritual was led by Kirkman Bey. Whatever he was saying in connection with this ceremony was as foreign to the audience as Caesar to a fourth-grade pupil, at least to that part of the audience not affiliated with the cult." An "adept," Aaron Payne (who had been present at Drew's deathbed) was "said to be a candidate to succeed Noble Drew Ali. . . . One elderly woman whispered to a friend, 'The "prophet" was not ill, his work was done and he laid his head upon the lap of his followers and passed out.' . . . Another remarked that the 'prophet's spirit will come back and enter the body of one of the governors.'" (This belief is called "reincarnation" in Moorish Science, and as we shall see, the speaker's prediction came true, at least for some Moors.)

Date of death, July 20, 1929. He was buried in Burr Oak Cemetery.

Or was he? An oral tradition claims that no grave site is known, and that Drew Ali was made to "disappear" by the police in collusion with the FBI — who knows? — perhaps to return again some day like the Hidden Imam of the Shi'ites, or like King Arthur.

Like the Prophet Muhammad, Noble Drew Ali apparently named no successor on his deathbed; and as with Islam after Muhammad's death, the Moorish movement split into warring factions. Two months after Drew's death, violence broke out again. In late September 1929, police fought an out-and-out battle with the Moors. Two policemen died, one was severely wounded, and one Moor died as well.

The *Defender* reported: "State's Attorney John A. Swanson announced his plans for a speedy arrest and prosecution of Ira Johnson, 50, the slayer of policeman William Gallagher, and other cult leaders who are responsible for the riot Wednesday at 4137 South Parkway. Every effort will be made to have the state of Illinois revoke the license of the Moorish Science Temple of America.

"Numerous death threats have been sent to leading officials of the cult and a police guard has been stationed at the home of Attorney Aaron Payne, . . . supreme business manager of the cult, following an attempt on his life by four gunmen Monday night.

"For two days Chicago has been an armed camp. More than a thousand police and members of the National Guard have been assigned to special duty. They are patrolling the vicinity of 4137 South Parkway, where Wednesday morning at 11 o'clock a clan of the Moorish Science Temple of America shot it out with two police squads and left a trail of dead and wounded 'Moors' and officers in their wake.

"The excitement following upon this outbreak was the greatest Chicago has seen since the bloody riots of 1919. From Wednesday morning to Friday more than 500,000 persons are said to have visited the scene of the outbreak. . . .

"A mysterious, daring daylight kidnapping precipitated the battle.

"Shortly after 9 o'clock Wednesday morning four men, with pistols drawn, forced their way into the home of Charles Kirkman Bey, . . . grand legal advisor of the Moorish Temple, and ordered him to stop eating his breakfast and come with them. 'We have orders to bring you back, dead or alive,' they said. When Kirkman's wife objected to her husband's being taken away the gunmen threatened her life.

"Seizing Kirkman, they dragged him out to a waiting taxicab. The four kidnappers and their prisoner then sped away, west on Elm St., at high speed."

Mrs. Kirkman called the police, and went with them to Moorish Headquarters on Indiana Avenue. The police persuaded a Moor found there to lead them to a branch headquarters of the "cult" where he believed the kidnappers were hiding. There they pounded on the door and demanded entry.

The *Defender's* report went on: "The door opened a trifle, then was closed quickly. On the inside word was flashed that the 'law' was on the outside.

"Sergeant O'Toole, unable to get into the Temple headquarters went around to the back door. In the meantime, Officer McCutcheon had gone to the rear entrance and knocked down a screen from the window and crawled into the apartment. Immediately the shooting started, and before McCutcheon could warn Officer Hultz the latter had followed his partner inside.

"Officer Kieback, who appeared on the scene with a sawed-off shotgun, narrowly escaped death when one of the bullets from the rifle of a Moor clipped a bit of skin from his left ear. He dropped to the porch to save himself.

"Although shot in the abdomen, McCutcheon managed to open the kitchen door while his partner Hultz lay wounded on the floor. He pulled Hultz out of the house and it was then that Sergeants O'Toole and Frank Reynolds rounded the end of the house to enter the fight.

"More than a hundred shots were fired in the battle and a dozen or more tear gas bombs were hurled through the window of the temple.

"As Sergeant O'Toole neared the house where his comrade had fallen in battle, he saw Kirkman Bey come near him with both hands in the air. In his right hand he held a pencil and paper. " 'Don't shoot! I am the man you're looking for. Please save me,' Kirkman yelled. Then Sgt. O'Toole ordered him to continue walking with his hands in the air until he had reached Officer Kiebeck, who took him into custody.

"By this time the twenty-five or more persons, consisting of men, women and children who had been in the temple, fled from it and sought refuge in a vacant flat across the court . . .

"On the second floor landing Kiebeck found Gallagher's revolver and beside it was the gun of Ira Johnson, . . . confessed slayer of Gallagher. On the third floor in the vacant flat was Johnson and his partner, J. Stevenson Bey.

"Johnson surrendered without a struggle, while Stevenson was killed by Sgt. Reynolds in a gun battle." Reynolds and another cop burst into the room

"where the women and children were in hiding. Stevenson attempted to shoot Officer Catron, but Reynolds shot first and Stevenson fell dead with bullets through his head and heart."

As more police closed in, the informant who had led them to the "hide-out," Moe Jackson, was shot in the shoulder — perhaps by his own seventeen-year-old son Francis, who was apprehended with a revolver in each hand.

Gallagher and Hultz both died in hospital of their wounds. Sixty-two "cult" members were rounded up and questioned, including Aaron Payne and E. Mealy El, called the "grand sheik and successor to the late Prophet Noble Drew Ali." Protest meetings held during the next few days were broken up, and prospective jury members were given a tour of the "battlefield."

Kirkman Bey "alleges that he received his education in Asia, India, and at Howard University. He was unable to give proof of his attendance at Howard. . . .

"Ira Johnson Bey, who . . . confessed that he had killed Gallagher, refused to testify on the stand. 'I'll do my talking at the right time,'" Johnson said.

The Coroner's Jury learned that Johnson was also suspected of killing Claude Greene the previous March. "Johnson, it is said, aspired to become supreme legal advisor, the next highest office to Grand Sheik. That office was held by Kirkman, who had been chosen by the council of governors last week at the annual convention. Johnson admitted that he was very much disappointed when Grand Sheik E. Mealy El did not name him adviser instead of Kirkman. He confessed that he had intended seizing Kirkman's certificate, which had the signatures of the twenty-one governors of the various temples.

"In order to accomplish his purpose he sent out four henchmen and ordered them to bring back Kirkman dead or alive, and by all means get the certificate."

The Coroner's Jury, consisting of upright citizens (including a banker, a boxing commissioner, and a lawyer for the *Defender* itself), urged prosecution of Ira Johnson, Edward Mealy El, and the beys Eugene and Moses and Compton Jackson.

"According to testimony of witnesses, Kirkman and Aaron Payne possessed valuable papers which they refused to surrender. The papers Kirkman held were believed to be the last will and testament of the late Timothy Drew . . .

"The prophet's successor was named in the testament, it was believed, and Johnson wanted to get the document . . ." (It should be noted that no such document ever subsequently came to light.)

"A practice, strictly anarchistic, is observed by the cultists, it was revealed when Moses Jackson testified that the officers of the order could designate any person to perform a certain duty. The penalty was death if the task was not carried out.

"In telling of the kidnapping, Moses stated that Ira Johnson called him, his father, Stevenson (the dead member), and a fourth man who is not apprehended, and gave him his instructions. 'Brother Kirkman must be brought in,' he is alleged to have said. 'I want you "sheiks" to go after him, and you had better arm yourselves, so in case he refuses to come voluntarily you can use force.'

"Jackson said Johnson reminded them that unless they brought in Kirkman their lives would be in danger. He remembered the cult's creed and the four set out upon what turned out to be the bloodiest mission since [the St. Valentine's Day Massacre].

"Ira Johnson was rather philosophical while the jury was out deliberating. He talked freely to police officers and newspaper men. Life, he believed, ended at death — that is, so far as the body is concerned. He likened the real man, or 'spirit man,' to the wind. The 'spirit man,' he asserted, never dies. The cultist also repeated his analysis of the parts of a pistol for the benefit of reporters. The service performed by one particular part of a revolver was stressed. The hammer, he said, is used to drive home the truth."

Johnson refused to testify, "and took the report of the jury without any visible stir."

The murder trial began, with Johnson expected to plead insanity. But, the *Defender* proclaimed in banner headlines, "MOORS' TRIAL 'BLOWS UP': SICK JUROR AND ALLAH THE CAUSE." Oddly, the story began with a poem:

"With upraised hands, three fingers down,
The seven symbolic of their creed:
Five thousand Moors, thanked their God,
Crying Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom and Justice."

"'Allah has heard our prayers,' murmured a small group composed of members of the Moorish Science Temple of America Tuesday when Judge Harry B. Miller withdrew Juror William N. Rondquist and declared a mistrial just when the case of Ira Johnson and his father, Eugene . . . was ready to be given to the jury."

Ira had not only withdrawn his confession, he had also given testimony that "tended to show" that his father, who had been wounded by Gallagher, had also in fact killed him. "The good Moors, knowing little about the Illinois system of jurisprudence, or of any system for that matter, had no knowledge of what could happen to prevent the Jury from getting the case. . . . Meanwhile the good Moslems prayed. They implored the intervention of Mohammad; they invoked the blessing of Allah; they called upon the spirit of Noble Drew Ali." Their prayers appeared to be answered when Juror Rondquist fell ill, and a mistrial was declared. According to the eloquent but sarcastic *Defender* reporter, "It was admittedly one of the most difficult cases involving members of our Race in the history of crime in Cook county. The fact that the defendants had killed two white policeman made the situation unfavorable to begin with, regardless of the defense, but when it was learned that they were members of a society of fanatics who had, within less than three months, been charged with the brutal murder of a fellow member of the cult, efforts to convict them were doubled."

Some testimony had been given tending to suggest that "the kidnapping story" (the kidnapping of Kirkman Bey) "was manufactured. Police, it was pointed out, had been frequently visiting headquarters of the Moors on secret missions. Just why they were repulsed on September 25 could not be learned."

Attorney Harold M. Tyler, chief counsel for the defense, filed a motion "charging double jeopardy to his clients if they are retried," and asked that the case be dismissed — which led at least one Moor to declare that Tyler was being guided by the spirit of Noble Drew. However, another trial of Johnson and the Jacksons was scheduled a month later.

It began dramatically with the new judge, Walter P. Steffens, sustaining Tyler's objection to the State's motion "that every person who enters the courtroom be searched" or "frisked." Tyler apparently intended a defense based partly on insanity and partly on self-defense. Our reporter continued his slighting remarks about the Moors' piety, ignorance, and trust in Allah.

E. Mealy El, whose case had been "severed" from that of the Jacksons and Kirkman Bey, now testified against Johnson and the Jacksons, but declared that the "kidnapping committee" was unarmed, and that the policemen who were shot had never said they were policemen (presumably they were in plain clothes).

"The state was determined to get a death penalty for Johnson [if not for the Jacksons]. It pictured him as a cold, heartless, ambitious individual who, to attain personal glory, had instigated and engineered the plot" which led to violence and death. However, as the case dragged on (with Tyler cross-examining everyone at great length), both court and jury began to fear they would not be home for Easter!, and it was suggested that the defendants be thrown on the mercy of the court so as to wrap things up as quickly as possible. Tyler refused to do this unless the judge promised not to hand out any death penalties. A psychiatrist testified to Johnson's mental imbalance, and after some tense moments of deliberation the judge agreed to reduce the charges from murder to manslaughter. Moses Jackson (who reportedly intended to admit that the "kidnapping committee" had indeed been armed when it called upon Kirkman Bey) was not permitted to testify.

Under these conditions Tyler agreed to a guilty plea, and the judge handed down a life sentence to Johnson, and one to fourteen years each for the Jacksons. The *Defender* rightly called this "a signal and sweeping victory for the defense."

In summing up the case, our reporter recounted the history of events as he understood them. "Until the summer of 1928 very little attention was paid to [the Moors]. It was in that year that the society held a convention at the Unity clubhouse, 3140 Indiana Avenue. The brilliant colors of the costumes and proud walking sheiks and shebas made gossip for the South side for several weeks.

"In March last year following a break between Claude D. Greene, grand supreme business manager, and the prophet, Greene was murdered in his

office at the Unity clubhouse. From the position of his body when found it is believed that he was killed while on his knees begging for his life. Ira Johnson was said to have killed him, but no action was ever taken against him.

"In July the prophet died. There were reports that he was poisoned. . . .

"Edward Mealy, Kirkman and Ira Johnson began angling for the leadership. Of the trio Johnson was the least learned. Mealy, a former railroad porter, has a fair education. Kirkman, who was called 'the interpreter,' was one of the prophet's right hand men.

"Early last September another convention was held. Ira Johnson did not attend any of the sessions. Mealy presided at all the meetings, being a member of the grand council and a noble grand sheik. Kirkman also took part. It was at the convention that Kirkman is alleged to have come into possession of those 'papers.'

"Johnson is said to have criticized Mealy and Kirkman for the manner in which the convention was conducted and attributed its failure to the fact that there was no leader.

"For a few days everything was quiet, then on Sept. 23 four members of the cult waited on Attorney Aaron A. Payne; they went to jail; four waited on Mayor Thompson [of Chicago]: they were gotten rid of diplomatically. On the 24th four other men waited on Mealy; Mealy followed them to Johnson's house. And the next morning, the fatal 25th, four men waited on Kirkman and the story has been told."

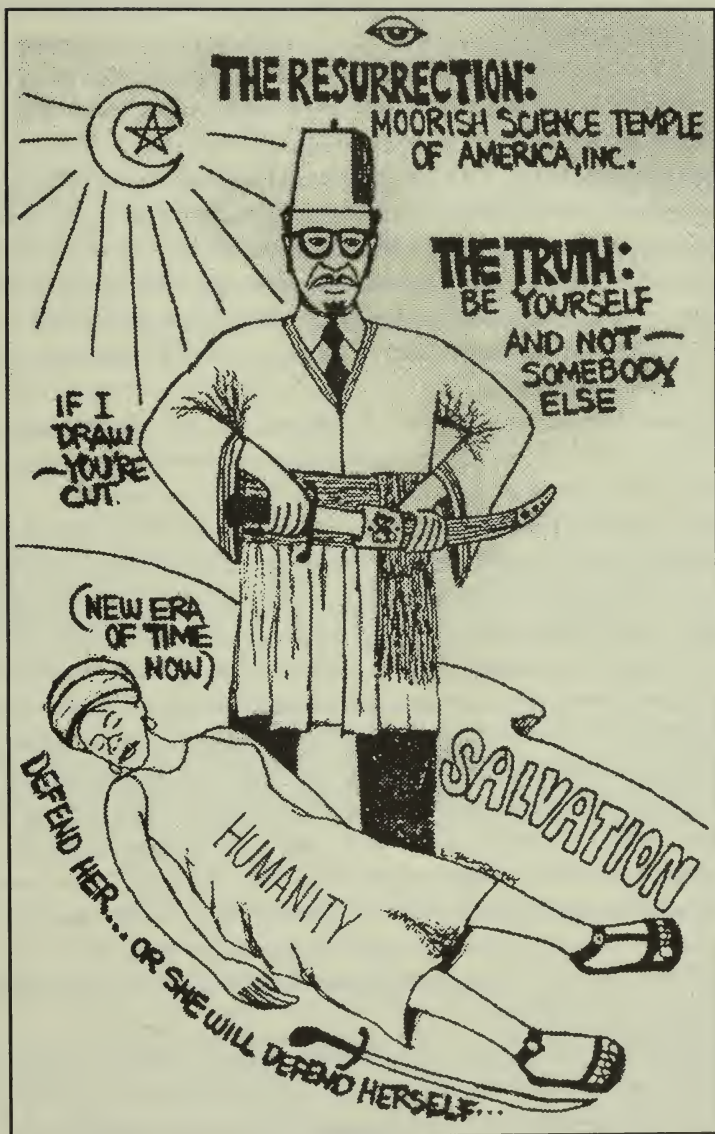
Thus, all was clear for the *Defender* — but the history of the Moorish Science Temple (and its various branches and offshoots) after the death of Noble Drew is still — for me, anyway — tangled and hard to trace. Leaving aside all confusion surrounding the death of Claude Greene and subsequent events, which the trial rather deepened than dissipated, the question of lines of succession to the Prophet is also quite tangled. As best as I can make out,³¹ the story goes something like this:

At the second annual convention of the Moorish Science Temple, which took place after Noble Drew's death in 1929, and which gave rise to the incidents of violence, E. Mealy El was *not* chosen as Grand Sheik — that honor

³¹ My most informative informant here is R. Wright-El of Maryland, but this account owes something to oral tradition and random reading as well. Apologies for any errors. This research is not ended yet, and I invite corrections and elucidations from informed correspondents. Publication of the first version of this essay in *Gnosis* 12 (Summer 1989) elicited a flood of letters, including invaluable data from R. Wright-El, M. A. al-Ahari, Morocco Conti Bey, Prince Cuba, and others. Salaams and thanks to all! Moorish info and material were also sent to me by Daniel G., Jaka, and others even more anonymous. Special thanks to fellow Moorish Orthodox Church researchers Bro. J. Mahmud Irsay, Bro. J. Ishmael Koehonline, Bro. Arif Husayn C. Potter, et al. Moorish historians: please write to me c/o the publisher.



Noble Drew Ali emerges from the "Sea of the Cares of the World," uplifting fallen "Humanity" to the rock of "Salvation." This drawing is from *Who Was Noble Drew Ali?* and appears there without attribution, but it may be authentic Moorish Science Temple art.



Certainly the "brother prophet" T. Dingle-El seems to refer to such an iconic complex in the cover art for his book, a symbolic portrait by L. Jackson-Bey showing Dingle-El as a reincarnated Noble Drew Ali.

went to Kirkman Bey, who was elected president of the corporation (which had *not* been dissolved by the state of Illinois), and Grand Sheik of the Moorish Science Temple of America, Incorporated. At this convention, John Givens-El (who is said to have been Drew Ali's chauffeur) declared himself the "reincarnation" of the Prophet in the special sense of this term in Moorish Science. Givens-El was not to be the last such reincarnation. Such claimants are popularly known as "brother prophets." Some say that at this time there were twenty-one Moorish Science Temple branch temples; others say fifteen, of which eight followed Kirkman Bey, and seven followed Givens-El.

The differences between a Grand Sheik and a reincarnated Prophet are, as R. Wright-El puts it, "not insignificant. Grand Sheiks of the corporation must be elected annually at the Convention. They can be removed from office through election at any of these annual conventions. They are not allowed to establish their own doctrines or teachings. . . . They are only elected to manage the business of the corporation and to maintain the Prophet's works in the same form that he wrote them.

"On the other hand, reincarnated Prophets establish their own teachings, interpret Drew Ali's teachings for their followers, cannot be removed from their stations through election, and retain almost absolute power . . ." ³²

Givens-El's splendid mausoleum, incised with Moorish symbols, lies in Lincoln Cemetery in Chicago, marked "Noble Drew Ali (Reincarnated)."

Kirkman Bey died in 1959 and was succeeded by F. Nelson-Bey, then J. Blakely-Bey (1963), and finally Robert Love-El, elected in 1971 and still the incumbent. Rufus German-Bey (whom I knew as the governor of Baltimore), claimed to have inherited the *incorporated* Moorish Science Temple of America from headquarters at 75th Street in Chicago. A lawsuit, which seems to have taken four years to settle (1978–1982), finally ended with legal recognition of the claims of Love-El's organization, and the denial of the claims of German-Bey and the "75th St. Moors." Thus only one organization is entitled to the name of Moorish Science Temple of America, Inc. Recently I saw a notice of a Temple #65 opening in Kansas City — I don't know if this means that the Moorish Science Temple of America has sixty-five active branches, but certainly it has many. The "official" Moorish Science Temple, however, is only one part of the total Moorish *movement*.

According to one informant,³³ Ira Johnson-El later called himself Allah-El, and named his son the third reincarnation of Noble Drew Ali. Presumably this is the same Ira Johnson whom we have just seen "sent up to the pen" for life.

In Baltimore, German-Bey's group produced at least two more offshoots. Two brothers, Richardson Dingle-El and Timothy Dingle-El, both claimed to be

³² R. Wright-El, letter, June 27, 1990.

³³ M. A. al-Ahari, loc. cit.

Reincarnations (the former “in the third form,” the latter as “Noble Drew Ali Reincarnated” or “Supreme Grand Resurrection”). Timothy died in 1980 and was succeeded by his wife Louise Dingle-El as “Prophetess.” Richardson still lives and leads a group centered around Morgan State University.

Timothy wrote a book, used by both brothers, entitled *The Resurrection: Moorish Science Temple of America, Inc. — The Truth: Be Yourself And Not — Somebody Else*, by Timothy Dingle-El-Noble-Drew-Ali (in This Era of Time). He claims to have lifted (i.e., saved) the works of Noble Drew Ali from the public domain and thus to have “resurrected” the Moorish Science Temple of America. (After 1982, however, it would seem that neither Dingle-El group has any legal claim to this nomenclature.) We’ve already heard Timothy’s assertion that Noble Drew really did order the death of Sheik Claude Greene, and that he was fully justified to do so — a position many Moors doubtless find distasteful and absurd. T. Dingle-El, however, was apparently not one to quail before the prospect of violence. The cover of his book depicts him half-unsheathing a scimitar, with the motto “If I draw — you’re cut” — although he gives this an esoteric meaning (the sword is Truth, etc.) — and the general tone of his writing sometimes verges on verbal aggression:

I look upon Noble Drew Ali as Judah, Shiloh and Chief because he is a mental warrior. I am also classed as a mental warrior. It is my determination to obtain copyright authority. I will not allow superstitious people to confuse me, like they confused the man of Justice. If copyright authority is granted to me, then the name Noble Drew Ali, Judah, Shiloh and Chief is mine by divine rights or conquest. If any mental warrior is wiser than I am, then it is his right to meet me in mental debate on all of the lessons on the true and divine Prophet of Allah. Someone or group may wonder what I mean when I say mental warrior, never hearing of such. The hangout for mental warriors is in the courtrooms. I will name some: Judges, Lawyers, Jurors, Counselors, Missionaries, Ministers, etc. Some are in the Moorish Movement of Noble Drew Ali. Another name for mental warrior is Brain Shooter.³⁴

Dingle-El also recounts a fascinating version of the “Flag in the Safe” story:

In 1912, the Prophet Noble Drew Ali appeared in Washington, D.C., at the nation’s capital, and asked President Woodrow Wilson for his people and the return of our flag (the proverbial Cherry tree), chopped down by General George Washington, 1776. The President stated that he wouldn’t know where to find the Moorish flag since it has been stored away for so long. The Prophet told him that he knew where to find it, if given permission to enter the storageroom. Prophet Noble Drew Ali went and retrieved our flag, the Moorish flag. He then asked Mr. Wilson why did the government record the Asiatic as Moors on official record, and in actual practice label them Negro, Black, Colored and Ethiopians? Mr. Wilson’s

³⁴ Dingle-El, T. *The Resurrection*, op. cit., p. 3.

reply was that we know nothing of our national descent and birthright, and it would not be in the interest of the American people to wake us up to the truth about ourselves. Prophet Noble Drew Ali asked for the right to teach us the truth about ourselves and our Divine Creed. Mr. Wilson told the Prophet that we would not accept him or his teaching because he was of the same pigmentation of skin as we were and we would not accept our own. To prove his point he told our Prophet to go out and get 5,000 to follow him. He was so sure he could not get anyone to follow him, he reduced the figure to 50. Prophet Noble Drew Ali went out and sounded the trumpet and began to teach the everlasting Gospel to the lost tribes of Isra-el. Ten thousand answer the call. With this, the Prophet returned to Washington and was given authorization to teach Islam and to return our nationality to us. At this commitment by the government of the United States, the former slaves were finally acknowledged as a separate nation of people and the fact accepted that they were the true owner of this land called America. The great eagle spread her wings over the new foundation and vowed to protect it.³⁵

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It's my impression that the Moorish movement has been expanding and revitalizing itself after the centenary of Noble Drew Ali's birth, celebrated in 1986. Among the groups I've communicated with are the Moorish Circle of Fulfillment, the Moorish Great Seal, and the National Council of Sheikhs of the Moorish National and Divine Movement,³⁶ Branch #1, "The Beys of Missouri." In *How To Start Your Own Country* (Loompanics, 1984), E. Strauss mentions a secessionist group in Washington, D.C., called the United Moorish Republic.

Another current of Moorish influence leads from Noble Drew Ali to W. D. Fard to Elijah Muhammad to the genius Malcolm X (Hajji Malik al-Shabazz), who discovered orthodox Sunni Islam during his pilgrimage to Mecca, shortly before his assassination. He renounced Black Muslim racist theory, and inaugurated a new organization (Muslim Mosque, Inc.) which still survives — although Malcolm's real influence runs deepest among the many black Americans who have embraced Sunnism (or Sufism, in which Malcolm was apparently taking some interest when death interrupted his intellectual trajectory), as well as those who carry on his struggle for justice in the radical movement in general. Elijah's son Wallace Muhammad inherited the Nation of Islam mantle, but eventually he too decided for Sunnism and broke away to found the American Muslim Mission. The unreconstructed Nation of Islam is led by the well-known Louis Farrakhan.

There exists some evidence for a Moorish connection with "Black Judaism." Ravanna Bey claims that Noble Drew established ties with the Falasha, or

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 32–33.

³⁶ The leader of this council, Sheikh J. Lewis Bey, visited Morocco in 1990, where he was received at the ministerial level, and paid homage to the ruler of Morocco as "my king." See *St. Louis Limelight* (May–June 1990) and *St. Louis Argus* (April 19, 1990).

Ethiopian Jews. I've seen an old photograph of a "Moorish Zionist Temple of Moorish Jews" in Harlem; and the Ansaaru Allah of Brooklyn seem to have some connection both with the Moorish Science Temple tradition and "Nubian Hebrew Islam" and other militant "Black Jewish" groups.

I myself belong to yet another offshoot of the "Baltimore tradition" — the Moorish Orthodox Church of America. Founded in the late 1950s by "Europeans" who (according to oral sources) had obtained Moorish Science Temple passports as "Celts" or "Persians," including one Yale Sharif, the Moorish Orthodox Church attracted a bohemian element. Sharif later left the Church and embraced Sunni Islam, but the movement survived his departure. In the early-to-mid-1960s a Baltimore and a Manhattan lodge were active; the latter developed close ties with Bill Haines's Ananda Ashram in Monroe, New York, which later moved lock, stock, and barrel to Millbrook, New York, to share the Hitchcock Estate with Timothy Leary and the League for Spiritual Discovery, the Neo-American Church, and other psychedelic sects. The Moorish Orthodox Church was registered officially in Dutchess County.

In 1986 the Manhattan Lodge, which had been dormant, began to publish its newsletter again — the last issue of *The Moorish Science Monitor* having appeared in 1966 — and the Moorish Orthodox Church too underwent something of a revival. The *Monitor* was published from Providence, Rhode Island, during the 1980s boom in self-published "zines" and networking; it then moved to Rochester, New York, and to Seattle. The Moorish Orthodox Church of America has branches also in Brooklyn; Ukiah, California; Chicago; San Francisco; Seattle; Orange County, New York, (where there is an ashram and temple); and Bombay, India.

The Moorish Orthodox Church uses a form of nonhierarchic organization in which every member chooses his or her own title. We give an esoteric reading to Noble Drew's teachings, and have always been willing to absorb influences from other sources. The Sufi Hazrat Inayat Khan was an important influence in the 1960s, and we adopted his crest of a winged heart with crescent and star as our own "banner"; the psychedelic movement was also important. Apparently the original founders of the Moorish Orthodox Church also had some connections with the "Wandering Bishops" and the autocephalous Catholic/Orthodox Churches movement — hence the name Orthodox — which was active in the 1950s.³⁷ Like Noble Drew himself, we also honor (and are sometimes deeply involved in) other traditions, such as Buddhism, the Chinese and Japanese religions, Judaism, Hinduism, shamanism . . . usually in their more "heretical" forms. The Moorish Orthodox Church (and the Moorish current in general) has also served us as a powerful means of cultural

³⁷ See Peter F. Anson, *Bishops at Large* (London: Faber & Faber, 1964) for an overview of the *episcopos vagrantes*; also *Gnosis* 12 (Summer 1989).

transfer — it has been for us a guiding light in our appreciation of oriental culture, a bridge between our world and that of an esoteric Asia.

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All these branches and offshoots of the Moorish Science Temple add up to conclusive proof of at least one fact: as a prophet and founder of a religion, Noble Drew Ali was no flash in the pan. Moorish Science is still alive. Drew Ali's faith has "behaved" like other faiths. As a student of the history of religions I find fascinating the development of Moorish apocrypha and fission into subsects, each with different orally transmitted *stories*. One might imagine oneself present at the first century of Christianity or Islam; Moorish Science admittedly transpires on a smaller scale, but displays structural and archetypal similarities to "major" religions that are almost uncanny. It is also worth pointing out that the world still needs Noble Drew's message of love, truth, peace, freedom, and justice — and that our own society especially needs his subtle message of racial pride combined with tolerance and love.

As for me, I admire above all Noble Drew's aesthetic, his unique and special blend of Afro-American, Native-American, High Magical, and Oriental symbolism and imagery — as well as his courage, his martyrdom, and his revolutionary stance against "Pharaoh." By Americanizing the prophetic spirit he injected our culture with a kind of folk Sufism. On the esoteric level, anyone who loves Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom, and Justice is a member of the "Asiatic race" and the Lost/Found Moorish Nation of North America.

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

The Patent Medicine Show

We are the doctors, the medicos, all the way from Baghdad with the
 cure for hearts dis-eased.
 With our forceps & tweezers we've plucked out many an ocular occlusion
 and deep-rooted coronary blight:
 eloquent physicians, disciples of Jesus who've breathed afflatus into
 myriad cadavers.
 Why, just ask our satisfied customers, listen to their testimonials and
 tales of deliverance from whatever ills
 by the strange doctors of distant destinations displaying pharmaceuticals
 hitherto unseen by human eye!
 We macerate the head of Grief, heartpain we hygienically sweep from the
 house; ah, how splendid & useful we are,
 like the festive Moon, divine physicians, wanting wages from no one,
 pure-souled, greedless & undefiled.
 Don't think the prescriptions we write are merely more snake oil — No! —
 they're extracts of Paradise.
 We've gone beyond urinalysis — the limits of medicine — and delved like
 pure thought into the patient's very marrow . . .
 But no more! Most of our listeners gape like owls! Enough boasting! and
 off we fly again.

NOTE ON TWO POEMS BY HAKIM SANA'I

Abu'l Majd Madud ibn Adam, called Hakim [wise man or doctor] Sana'i, was born in Ghazna or Balkh, both in what is now Afghanistan, and died in 525/1130-1. He is the first great Sufi poet of Persia; of him, Rumi said

'Attar was the Spirit, Sana'i its two eyes;
we come after Sana'i and 'Attar.

Very little is known of his life, other than that he was at one time attached to the Court at Ghazna, that he composed his famous *Hadiqa* (translated as *The Enclosed Garden of Truth*) in his old age and died soon afterwards. He is supposed to have given up his court position when a jester made fun of his poetry; thereafter he devoted himself to Sufism, and to a new style. He was one of the first to use the lyric form as a vehicle for mysticism. The tension between his "profane" poetic forms and "sacred" content set the tone for all Persian literary spirituality from then on.

In later poets, who inherit and feel at home with the conventions of love, wine, and "idolatry," these tensions are less apparent. But Sana'i was a pioneer; he invented and roughed out a great deal which was later to become part of the literary tradition; and in his best lyrics (these are from his untranslated *Divan*), tension crackles like electricity, every line contains some paradox, some irony. In these two ghazals he plays with images of apostasy. In ancient Iran, Christians customarily wore white sashes, Zoroastrians wore blue. Both religions were used in poetry as metaphors of esotericism, and Sana'i suggests that he has renounced outward religion for the inwardness of pure mysticism.

HAKIM SANA'I

Ghazal

Saki, bring wine
 and do not cease to bring it
 for our dear friend here has broken
 his vows of repentance,
 has stood up from the siege
 of self-denial and obligation
 and sat down in the tavern
 with that "Portrait."
 He's rid his head of hypocrisy
 and vain boasting
 and all at once sprung himself
 from his monastery;
 he's freed his ankle
 from the chains of religion
 and bound his waist with
 a fire-worshipper's sash.
 He drinks and urges me
 "Have one yourself:
 stay drunk
 for as long as you can;
 keep following this path
 to Nothingness
 and strike a fire beneath
 all that survives."

HAKIM SANA'I

Ghazal

Night after night I am drunk as a lord
 drunk as a lover —
for every night my beloved haunts
 the tavern without me.
Day by day my idol is occupied
 with luxurious revelry
while by night I busy myself alone
 with lamentation and noisy tears.
I am a monk — but an egotist
 I am a reveler — but still self-willed
for my nightly bouts are sealed and approved
 by Satan himself.
Head and foot go bare, go bare
 for every night at the bar
I pawn my shoes and turban
 for a drink.
Drunk but still raging with thirst
 for love of that faithless idol:
the Fire-worshippers could rekindle their coals
 at the temple of my flames.
Ah, that Portrait, seeing my eyes
 raining nocturnal jewels
asks me again and again
 Why does love make you weep?
I have tightened around my waist
 two hundred Christian sashes; it seems
that all of Rome stays up at night
 to weave them for me!





The Anti-Caliph

Ibn 'Arabi, Inner Wisdom, and the Heretic Tradition

1 *بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم*

and Khezzr, the Hidden Prophet, the Green Man, King of Hyperborea, wily servant of Moses, trickster-cook of Alexander, Khezzr who drank from the fountain of life in the Land of Darkness. Flowers and herbs spring up in his footsteps, and he strolls across the water, walking toward Ibn 'Arabi's ship, coming closer; his green robe trailing on green waves — or perhaps woven of waves. Or Khezzr appears in the desert with water and initiation for the masterless ones, the mad and blameworthy, the unique ones. "And three things of this life are worthy of the glance: water, green things, and a beautiful face . . ."

and the Hidden Imam who vanished into a cave, perhaps in Samarra, perhaps in Yemen, who lives beyond the Isthmus of Similitudes in the midst of the sea of Images, on an island all of emerald, with trees of emerald and flowers of green beryl, palaces of jasper and jade — the young man dressed in black, who appears in dreams to alchemists, who initiates in dreams . . .

and Ovays al-Qarani, hermit of the Yemen who met the Prophet — but only in dreams — who upheld the Household of Ali — who appears to the masterless ones in dreams and initiates them into the Order of the Ovaysiyya.

2 *The Silsilah*

Sohrawardi al Maqtul, who was executed for heresy, established for himself a *silsilah* or Initiatic Chain, consisting of teachers whom he met in visions or dreams — that is, in the Imaginal Realm. Here then follows a list in no particular order, of names each of which constitutes a link in such a chain — Imaginal or imaginary . . .

Mansur ibn al-Hallaj, executed for heresy, for preaching "I am the Truth," defender of Satan as "the perfect lover and unitarian," supporter of the Zinjarite Black Slave Rebellion, condemned to the gibbet on a warrant signed by his own Sufi master;

Hafez Shirazi, who recommended that we "stain our prayer carpets with wine";

Mahmud Shabistari, who said, "If Moslems really understood Islam, they would be idol-worshippers";

Ahmad Ghazzali, Fakhroddin Iraqi, and Awhadoddin Kermani, the three poets of Witness Play or "Contemplation of the Beardless";

Shaykh Husayn Kashefi, my patron alchemist-saint of Herat;

Lal Shabazz Qalandar, the "Red Hawk" of Sindh, shaykh of the Lawless dervishes and hasheesheen;

Hassan-i Sabbah, the Old Man of the Mountain of Alamut, founder of the Assassins; and his descendant Hassan II "On Whose Mention Be Peace," who declared that "the Chains of the Law have been broken";

the Egyptian Fatimid "Anti-Caliph" Hakim, who wrote treatises on alchemy and ordered that day be turned to night and night to day in Cairo, who vanished into the desert;

Sunan Kalidjaga, who brought esoteric Islam to Java and invented the Wayang Kulit Shadow Puppet play, based on the Hindu epics;

Mushtaq Ali Shah the mad musician, who was stoned to death in Kerman for playing the call to Prayer on his *sehtar*;

Mohiyoddin Ibn 'Arabi, initiated by Khezr, chased out of Cairo for writing love poems to a fourteen-year-old girl, founder of the School of the Oneness of Being.

By invoking each of these figures to bestow a particular *baraka* on the present undertaking, enough will have been said to those who are familiar with their names, that what follows will be almost superfluous. One meets these shaykhs by pilgrimages to their tombs, or to their books (for cenotaphs and divans are both square dead objects which may seem to hold living spirits) — or in visions, or dreams — and virtually everything we might say here is already swallowed up by their presence.

"Catastrophe Theory" in science deals with sudden and drastic changes in some feature of a system, such as the earth's crust, or human society. In popular usage the word catastrophe has "bad" connotations, but some sudden changes may well be experienced as positive. Revelation itself might be called a catastrophe. Mystical insight or Wisdom (*hikmah*) can also work catastrophically on the system known as human consciousness.

Scholars generally limit themselves to descriptions of change while mystics and poets prefer to participate in or even to precipitate catastrophes of consciousness. What follows can be classified neither as scholarship nor mystical poetry; it is rather a prolegomena to a study of certain catastrophic potentialities in the teachings of Ibn 'Arabi and the heretical tradition. Here we are concerned neither with facts nor with poetry per se, but with *poetic facts* — bits of information which, at a certain density, may cause a sudden breakthrough or catastrophic breakdown of the border between ordinary consciousness and the *alam-i khyal* or World of Imagination.

What follows is almost more *story* than scholarly text — the idea of "fiction" will help provide an appropriate bezel for our shadowy confusion, hyperbole and rhetoric, palpable *orientalismo*, scandalous and unfounded assertions. This text may push itself toward the edge of discourse, in danger of a Humpty-

Dumpty-like crash into totally arbitrary semantics ("words mean what I want them to mean!"). As one of the Persian poets (Salman Savaji) said:

Who does not know my bad reputation?
like a bathtub fallen off the roof!

3 Ibn 'Arabi and the Heretics

In the long and beautiful introduction to his *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, the late Henry Corbin summarized, in effect, an idiosyncratic philosophy of "Oriental Wisdom" that illuminated all his writing. This essay presents itself as rooted in a tradition: Corbin mentions all his favorite figures (many of the same listed in the *silsilah* of the present text as well). Corbin's essay focuses on certain events in the biography of the Shaykh al-Akbar, but Corbin's subtext is in fact his own spiritual autobiography. As he says, he has *lived* certain events, temporal and atemporal, historical and spiritual. The *ta'wil* (esoteric interpretation) in this context serves as more than a tool of the intellect or even of the Imagination: like a bathysphere, it offers to plunge the entire self, body included, into the depths — a Catastrophe Machine!

One of these events, Ibn 'Arabi's birthday, provokes in Corbin an indulgence in sheer occult synchronicity, the celebration of a coincidence which assumed for him an archetypal importance. According to the lunar calendar, this birthday (17 Ramazan 560/July 28, 1165) marked the first anniversary of the proclamation of the Great Resurrection at Alamut (17 Ramazan 559/August 8, 1164). Corbin's exquisite hagiography invites us to meditate on this double anniversary, this holiday, but does not stop to explain *why*. A clue has been offered, or perhaps one of Corbin's obsessions has briefly and rather mysteriously surfaced. What was the Great Resurrection and what connection might it have with Ibn 'Arabi besides a happenstance of dating?

Corbin himself had plenty to say on the subject in other books, which cannot be too highly recommended. Here however a somewhat different slant is proposed, one based on the literal significance of the Great Resurrection or *Ruz-i Qiyamat*. In brief, Hassan II, the Ismaili Pir of Alamut, proclaimed on this day a general esoteric abrogation of the Shariah (Divine Law). The veil of dissimulation (*taqiyya*) was lifted from the letter of the Law, and its outer form was shattered. "The Chains of the Law have been broken." The uncovering of the inner meaning of Revelation results in a *benign reversal* of its outward symbolism; those who participate in this gnosis are freed from both the literal meaning and the legal stipulations of organized religion. In both senses of the word they have *broken the code*. The Ismailis (or "Assassins") of Alamut signaled this general amnesty from the tyranny of Exoteric Authority by drinking wine for lunch in the middle of Ramazan: thus they broke their Fast forever.

Outward Islam must of necessity view the Qiyamat as antinomian, heretical, and revolutionary — and indeed it did so, with good reason. No doubt, as Corbin emphasizes, Ismailism was primarily *gnosis*, Oriental Wisdom — but it also acted with overt militancy and stealthy terror to propagandize itself. In Islamdom, where politics and religion form parts of a seamless life and culture, “heresy” works as both critique and polemic, as discourse and as war. Heresy speaks the same language as its surrounding culture but insists that certain words possess a catastrophic significance: hidden meanings capable of transforming an entire world suddenly from within itself, like a self-resurrecting phoenix.

The Qiyamat, then, represents a radical break with institutional, ritual, and traditional Islam — a rupture that cannot be attributed to Ibn ‘Arabi. His autobiographical writings bear witness to a classical Sufi intention to *intensify* the ritual aspect of Islam as part of his practical path. Nevertheless, the hyperorthodox have always looked on the Shaykh as somehow *risky*, if not downright suspect.

For example, while living in Egypt he published his *Interpreter of Desires*, a book of poems celebrating his love for a young girl he met while circumambulating the Kaaba in Mecca. The local ulema (religious authorities) smelled blasphemy; Ibn ‘Arabi hastily removed himself to Syria — and we can thank the outraged mullahs for inspiring his next work, the *Interpreter of the Interpreter*, in which he defends his erotic-mystical ambiguities with dazzling scholasticism. Centuries later (a few years ago) Ibn ‘Arabi was again in trouble in Egypt: the Muslim Brotherhood and other reactionaries inspired a law banning publication of his *Meccan Revelations*. And scholars like Fazlur Rahman still blame him for the ruination of orthodox Sufism.

Ibn ‘Arabi’s continental mass, so to speak, covers too much territory to fit on any single map. His writings have been used to bolster up the most impeccably orthodox mysticism — as in the North African Sufi orders, for example — as well as many other types of Islamic esotericism, some not so orthodox. Treatises such as the *Risala al-ahadiyya* (on the *hadith* “Whoso knoweth his Lord”), which present a pure and radical monism, might well serve the outlaw purposes of Ismaili metaphysicians. Indeed, Corbin shows that Ismailis did make such use of Ibn ‘Arabi’s teachings on *ta’wil*, the Perfect Man, the Oneness of Being, etc. The Nizaris of Alamut experienced the Great Resurrection as a historical moment and as a mythic or Imaginal Archetype; what Ibn ‘Arabi gave them was a new vocabulary with which to expand their exegesis of the *Qiyamat* and its radical ramifications.

To the Persian poets the Shaykh bequeathed still another map, one that begins its cartomantic project with texts like *The Interpreter of Desires*, and the twenty-eighth chapter of the *Fusus al-hikam* (on the *hadith* “Three things of this world are made worthy of love to me: women, perfume and prayer”). Here Love is declared the equivalent or perhaps superior of religion; the human

beloved becomes a Witness (*shahed*), a Theophany of the Real. Again, the poets received from Ibn 'Arabi a language of discourse with which to expand their comprehension of a complex already central to their very being: *eros*, desire, and the borderland between erotic and mystical consciousness.

Out of such speculation arose a spiritual practice, the "Witness Game," which uses Imaginal Yoga to transmute erotic desire *into* spiritual consciousness. The means include poetic and musical improvisation, dance, and "gazing" chastely at beautiful boys (whence the practice was also known as "Contemplation of the Beardless").

This teaching was perfected in the centuries after Ibn 'Arabi's death by a series of gifted poets closely associated with his School — Fakhroddin Iraqi, Awhadoddin Kermani, and Abdul Rahman Jami, to name three of the best-known. Without specific reference to the Witness Game, other poets such as Mahmud Shabistari and Shah Nematollah Vali synthesized Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics with a general poetic and romantic symbolism. All this together constitutes what can be called a Persian "School of Love" within the general context of a School of *wahdat al-wujud* (oneness of being).

Needless to say, although the poets of the Witness Game followed the letter of the Shariah and its sexual code, their dangerous game of Sublimation was condemned as rank heresy by such as Ibn Taymiyya, who complained, "They kiss a slave boy and claim to have seen God!" However orthodox (or not) the Sufis might have been in their private lives, their poetry has given much aid and comfort to "real heretics" like the Ismailis, who would of course take quite literally such lines as Iraqi's:

Forget the Kaaba:
The vintner's gates are open!

Despite the protests of scholars like Ivanov and even Corbin, the later (post-Alamut) Ismailis did not adopt Persian *dervishi* Sufism simply as a mask. They *incorporated* such poets as Shabastari and Shah Nematollah wholesale into their grand synthesis, just as they did with Ibn 'Arabi's more austere metaphysics.

In mapping Ibn 'Arabi's influence on the heretical tradition, we see his language (or landmarks) taken up by erudite cosmopolitan philosopher-rebels and erudite aesthetical/emotional Sufi poets. But as this synthesis moves eastward from Andalusia through Egypt and Persia, it begins to acquire a more popular and cultic aspect as well. Shi'ite sectarians such as the Qizilbashi, Hurufi, Alevi, Bektashi, Ahl-i Haqq, Ali Ilahi, Kakhsari, Ovaysi — and the Shi'ite alchemists — all inherit something of the basic mix. In Afghanistan and North India the tradition includes the so-called Lawless (*bi-shahr*) dervish elders such as the Qalandars, the transvestite dancers and hashish-maulangs, heterodox Sufi orders such as the Shattariyya ("Rapid Way") and certain offshoots

of the Sohrawardiyya; also syncretistic sects such as the Emperor Akbar's Din-i Ilahi, as well as various folkish combinations of Ismailism, Tantric Hinduism, Bakhti yoga, millenarian Shi'ism, and dervish madness.

All these names are dropped not merely to disturb the mystico-academic dust but to point toward a project; a tradition has been invoked, but only in order to ask of it whether it still lives, whether it still possesses a practical and soteliological (or "salvific") vitality. Let us imagine that this tradition, which is no longer to be identified only with Ibn 'Arabi, might be somehow personified or poeticized. Call it The Anti-Caliph, with reference to its heretical antecedents and in honor of the Fatimid Ismaili Anti-Caliphs of Egypt, such as Hakim Billah the alchemist whose name means "the Wise." This fictional character, the Anti-Caliph, who is also a text, will stand for our Imaginal reliving of the tradition it evokes.

The Anti-Caliph will exist only within the confines of this text, where it will act as an oracle, answering certain questions about the past, present, and future. The Anti-Caliph may well be antinomian, heretical, mad, "blameworthy" — but it demands recognition for its own "traditional authority," and phrases all its answers in reference to its own authentic and coherent past.

We want to know the meaning of that past, but even more — if we can perform a little hermeneutic phenomenology and *live* at least for an hour within the Anti-Caliph's world — we will demand to know what it can teach us here on this most mysterious of planes (everyday life) at this most precious of moments, the present. When the text is read, we can allow it to slip back into the Imaginal World again — and perhaps retain from it a few poetic facts.

4 Cyclic Time

For Ismailism, history takes place in cycles. This is a way of valuating Time, of symbolizing the way in which meaning penetrates Time. But Ismailis do not emphasize *decline* (as in the myth of the Ages of Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Lead) so much as simply *change* itself. For the conservative mind things always get worse: perfection lies in the Golden past. The radical views matters in a more complex way: the past englobes a certain primordially, origins, and revelations, but time can also present certain unfoldings, processes, or progressions. The modern notion of progress has nothing to do with this unfolding; a cyclic conception of time admits no omega points, no ultimate perfections either in the past or future.

Each subcycle in Ismaili gnosis is "ruled" by a *prophet*, who represents the outward aspect of revelation, and a *saint* (or *asas*, whence "Assassins"), who represents the inner. Moses, for example, brought the Law — Aaron taught its esoteric significance. Jesus spoke in parables — John the Baptist (or some other gnostic figure) unveiled their hidden meaning to the Elect. Muhammad brought the Koran and Shariah; Ali embodied their secret significance.

Orthodox Islam claims — like all established religions — to be the final cycle of revelation. To recognize a prophet after Muhammad is therefore to cease to be a Moslem. Ismailis accept this, but they maintain that the cycle of prophecy has been replaced by the cycle of esoteric interpreters: Ali and the Household. In one sense, this represents not a decline in the spiritual quality of time, but rather an advance, or at least a wonderful chance: the inner meaning of revelation formerly taught only to the Elect will become the *outer path* accessible to all. Time turns inside out, Revelation and Law disgorge meanings so hidden they seem to turn the very words and ordinances on their heads, to make them their opposites — benign inversion.

For the Ismailis this unfolding begins with Ali, passes on to the first six Shi'ite Imams, then from Jafar al-Sadeq to his son Ismail, the seventh Imam — hence to the Egyptian Anti-Caliphs, the Fatimid dynasty.

The Fatimids believed their caliphs to be blood descendants of Ali and the Prophet through Fatima's line: these were the Imams, rulers of the secular world and simultaneously of the spiritual world: king/saints. The higher-ranking initiates were taught the esoteric secrets of Ismailism but outwardly the Shariah was still followed. For the inner circle, this outward conformity was called *taqiyya* or "permissible dissimulation"; the Fatimid *da'is* or missionaries (such as Nasir-i Khusraw) were also permitted to practice *taqiyya*, pretending to be Sunni or Orthodox Shi'ite when necessary.

The Persian or Nizari Ismailis, the so-called Assassins, split away from the Fatimids originally over a question of legitimacy — i.e., of succession to the Caliphate/Imamate. Here looms a confusing issue: the present-day Aga Khan, head of the Nizari Ismailis, claims actual blood descent from the Fatimid Pretender Nizar, who in turn claimed blood descent from Ali. The Nizaris maintain that their founder, the notorious Hassan-i-Sabbah, secretly spirited out of Cairo the infant son of Nizar, took him to Alamut and raised him in secrecy. This very hidden Imam married and had a son who married and had a son (a secret process involving various cradle substitutions and devious stratagems of Byzantine complexity) who was Hassan II *'ala dhikrihi's-salam*, "Upon Whose Mention Be Peace," the proclaimer of the Qiyamat in 1164. According to the Aga Khans, the abrogation of the Shariah thus coincided with the open manifestation of the blood-legitimate Imam. This claim, incidentally, was upheld by a nineteenth-century British court in Bombay.

Since the Mongols burned the great library at Alamut, Ismaili history yawns with lacunae. No real evidence exists to support the story of Nizar's infant son. Some historians believe these claims of legitimacy to be later fabrications. But who would have fomented such a hoax? Hassan-i Sabbah? Apparently he preached only in the name of the murdered Pretender Nizar, and never mentioned any rescued infant. Was the hoaxer then Hassan II, Master of the Qiyamat? No. In the earliest descriptions of the Qiyamat, he presents himself as

speaking on *behalf* of the Imam. Apparently only after his violent death — a few years after the Qiyamat — was he openly proclaimed Imam.

These vexing historical problems must be addressed if the true nature of the Qiyamat is to be uncovered. Corbin believed, with justification, that the Qiyamat was a purely esoteric event, and had nothing whatsoever to do with legitimacy. He felt that the later blood-line claims constituted in effect a betrayal of the Qiyamat's deepest sense, an attempt to force pure free spirit into the forms of dogma, cult, and history.

In opposition to the concept of blood legitimacy Corbin emphasizes that of *adoption on the spiritual plane*, the initiatic vision which can link two souls as kin, even though they be separated in time, space, and genetics. Moreover, Corbin introduces the typically Ismaili concept of "the Imam-of-one's-own-being": whoever has gnosis of self has gnosis of the archetypal Imam and in effect "becomes" the Imam. In Corbin's hypothesis, such a theophanic vision allowed Hassan II to speak "on behalf of" the Imam, to lift the veil of *taqiyya* forever and for all gnostics, to abrogate the Shariah and proclaim its hidden meanings. Indeed, even if the *Qa'im* or *Sahebi Qiyamat* had spoken of himself as the Imam, he could have done so with perfect right according to the doctrines of spiritual adoption and the realization of the inner Imam. An event such as the Qiyamat consists of an intersection between history and the timeless "Nowever"; to drag it down to the level of blood again is to ruin it. In a sense, anyone can be the Imam; in a sense, everyone already is the Imam.

With all respect to the Aga Khans (especially the third, that *bon vivant* and gambler who gave away his weight in diamonds, and wrote a gem-like treatise on Hafez) the present text prefers to follow the Corbinian version of the Qiyamat: a total opening up of esoteric truth which liberated its celebrants from all outward forms of authority, whether of Revelation, Law, or blood.

Each adherent of the Qiyamat does not suddenly and miraculously become a perfect saint. But the chains of Law have been broken for all who adhere and hear, for all who know. A new Cycle has been inaugurated; those who realize it are *in* it; time has a different value for them. Within this Cycle, of course, different seekers attain different degrees of realization. However, for each one the path now *begins* with esoteric interpretation (*ta'wil*). The meanings of Koran and Shariah are now interiorized as a *first step*.

Prayer becomes any process or act which serves to open the conscious self to the Imam-of-one's-own-being;

Fasting becomes the avoidance of anything that impedes this enlargement of awareness;

Pilgrimage signifies major efforts to unify individual consciousness with its ultimate manifestation as the Self;

Belief in Allah, Prophets, and Angels means the esoteric understanding of theology as symbolic;

Almsgiving means generosity of self, the open interdependence and mutual realization of all life (especially consciousness, which can be given and shared);

Justice (the "Sixth Pillar" of Shi'ism) means the simultaneous realization of the Self in oneself and in others, in all life, and giving it its due in every situation;

The Last Judgement means Resurrection Day as taught by Pir Hassan II. Hell and Heaven are seen as present and interior states; eschatology in its literal sense is either denied or ignored.

This new Cycle portends upheavals in politics as well as theology. If every person is potentially the Imam, and partakes through the Qiyamat directly in the Imam's authority, then each individual is his or her own ruler — a system that might be called paradoxical anarcho-monarchism. We can scarcely imagine what this might have meant to the people of Alamut, who in any case enjoyed no more than a few years of total revolution. Hassan II was probably murdered by conservative elements within the Ismaili community, unable to share his utopian vision.

But for this text — The Anti-Caliph — the Qiyamat signals the beginning of a Cycle which is still in the process of unfolding. Following Corbin, we can experience the Qiyamat in the *alam-i mithal* or Imaginal Plane, and receive its gnosis direct and unmediated. The Qiyamat survives, and we can participate in it.

Through it, the "Nowever" remains always accessible; moreover, history itself is now defined for us by our Qiyamat-consciousness. Thus we appear as authentic interpreters of the Qiyamat, able to explain its past and present unfolding, its ever-changing strategies, its perpetually revolutionary energies.

For example: what would the Qiyamat today "say" about . . . sexual liberation? about the social revolution? about an authentic contemporary spiritual path? Using these questions as examples, let us treat The Anti-Caliph as a crystal ball, and entrance ourselves with Imaginings, flashes of prismatic light.



a



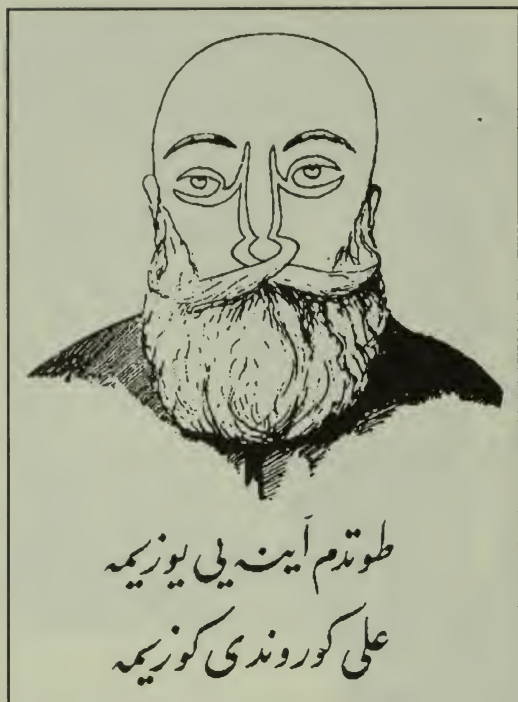
b

(a) and (b) The fifteenth-century sect of the Hurufiyya ("Lettrists" or "Abecedarians") were apparently wiped out by orthodoxy, but their ideas filtered into a number of still-existing currents and groups, including the Bektashi Order of dervishes in Turkey. Extremist Shi'ism, meditations on gematria and angelic physiognomy, and a heretical tendency toward representational art, all combined and resulted in a school of calligrammatic iconography based on the body of the "Perfect Man" (*al-insan al-kamil*) and especially the face, which reveals certain letters in its forms. The following illustrations are from A. J. Dierl's work on the Bektashis, cited in the Preface. The first two examples are both faces, based on the names of God and the Five Pure Ones, Mohammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn.



c

(c) The body as text, or as "revelation." A man raising his hands in prayer constitutes the *axis mundi*, with the Divine Name ("Allah") as his heart. Nature, or material reality, and the Koran, or scripture — the two canonical sources of "signs for the aware" — are here united in human form, which is of course also angelic form. The heretical conclusion is that the human body and the material world are divine.



d

(d) Another face, combining calligraphy ("Ali") and realistic drawing; the tails of the long *ī*'s in 'Ali's mirror-doubled name make up the mustaches of the Perfect Man! The caption is a line of poetry in praise of 'Ali.



e

(e) The Lion of 'Ali, who is himself a lion among men, and who is invoked in the text of this charming calligramme.



f

(f) Bektashi *Alem* or metal standard, with the names of the Twelve Imams in a zodiacal orbit around the center, and Bektashi poetry on the fingers. Similar alems are carried in procession in Iran on 'Ashura, commemorating the martyrdom of Husayn, and on other Shi'ite holy days; this piece shows distinct Persian influence.

5 Sexuality and Hermeneutics

Most antinomian sects have been accused of sexual license, polymorphous and perverse, and many such cults have indeed practiced variations of "free love." The Adamites and Families of Love took "no marriage in heaven" to mean no marriage here on earth, since for them the Millennium had arrived. For Alamut also a Millennium had arrived, and although we know almost nothing about love among the Assassins, we can easily extrapolate. The Qiyamat philosophy leads logically to a contemporary position outwardly similar to that held by the most radical of sexual liberationists.

One of the commonest misapprehensions about antinomianism claims that it causes (or is synonymous with) libertinism — doing "whatever you want" regardless of other peoples' values or lives. Luckily Nietzsche (that Islamophile) settled this point once and for all for everyone, no matter what their sect or belief: "beyond good and evil" means nothing without that "self-overcoming" or "sublimation" which utterly rules out the banality of a pointless and self-defeating "evil." The antinomian may commit crimes in the eyes of society or the Law, but only out of a personal ethics which reaches unimaginably higher than any moral code. Antinomian ethics does this precisely because it is Imaginal, "made up" by the individual, personal, and central.

Islam begins as one of the very few pro-sexual-pleasure religions known to civilized humanity. Paul may say it is better to marry than burn, but the Prophet advises a follower to "marry a young woman so that you may enjoy life" — and says, "Three things of this world I love, women, perfume, and prayer." He married eleven times, allowed his followers each four wives and countless concubines; at one time he instituted "temporary marriage," which is still practiced by the Shi'ites. He permitted birth control (but not abortion). This high valuation of sexual pleasure has led to a tantric aspect in Islamic spirituality, exemplified by Ibn 'Arabi's exposition (in the *Bezels of Wisdom*) of sexual intercourse as the supreme form of contemplation:

But as the (Divine) Reality is inaccessible in respect (of the Essence), and there is contemplation only in a substance, the contemplation of God in women is the most intense and the most perfect; and the union which is the most intense . . . is the conjugal act.

. . . God causes the forms of the world to blossom by the projection of His Will and by the Divine Command . . . which manifests itself as the sexual act in the world of forms constituted by the elements, as the spiritual will (*al-himmah*) in the world of the spirits of light, and as logical conclusion in the discursive order, the whole thing being but an act of love of the primordial ternary reflecting itself in each and all its aspects.

People know well that I am in love;
Only they do not know with whom . . .

This applies well to he who loves only voluptuousness, that is to say he who loves the support of voluptuousness, the woman, but remains unconscious in the spiritual sense of that which is really in question. If he knew it, he would know by virtue of what he enjoyed it, and who (really) enjoys the voluptuousness; then, he would be (spiritually) perfect. (Burckhardt trans.)

Revolutionary as this may be, Ibn 'Arabi still writes from the essentially masculinist point of view that permeates the Koran and hadith. Women are seen in themselves as individuals with souls, but as virtual property in relation to men. The "Feminist Principle" is notoriously hard to locate in Islam. True, on the mystical or popular and syncretistic level, all sorts of hints and echoes of the Anima are found: the cult of *Buraq*, the cult of the Beloved in Persian poetry. The veiled and secluded woman becomes the symbol of all that is esoteric and hidden. But, outwardly, in contemporary terms — women are simply suppressed. Examples of this bias are already well-known and constitute a major charge against orthodox Islam. How would a contemporary Qiyamat-mystic deal with this problem?

A freedom or pleasure that rests on someone else's slavery or misery cannot finally satisfy the self because it is a limitation or narrowing of the self, an admission of impotence, an offense against generosity and justice. Our freedom depends on other people's freedom, for our fates are inextricably interwoven with others', especially with those we love. Our text — The Anti-Caliph — would doubtless recommend (along with the abrogation of the Shariah) the abolition of all forms of marriage, temporary marriage, concubinage, and slavery, all human relations expressed in terms of owner/property (including the parent/child relation). Now, according to orthodox Islam, the result of this liberation would be simply a state of unbridled sin and disorder. But, by reversing the Shariah, the esotericists have in fact interiorized its meaning, not simply discarded it. They no longer wish to take refuge in empty form when the essence of a relation (love, friendship, mutual advantage) has been poisoned by enmity and possessiveness. The spiritual meaning of sexual pleasure precludes for them all uncaring or selfish attitudes, all violence, all brackish resentment and cold fetishism — in short, all *libertinage*.

Moreover, the polarity masculine/feminine can now be seen and experienced as reversed; the Anima now gains a certain ascendancy, and this is the meaning of Islamic syncretist sects in Bengal and Java which worship goddesses like Kali or Loro Kidul. (It is said that at one time the Prophet contemplated allowing two pagan goddesses to survive as Allah's "consorts" — so perhaps this "feminine" Islam could be viewed as authentic and even "pre-Koranic"!). In practice, this feminization of Islam or reversal of polarities must involve a code

of sexual behavior both highly ethical and highly humane, including a strong valuation of both pleasure and conviviality ("living together") as spiritual practice, as the "good life," virtually as purposes in themselves.

The Shariah bestows many privileges on the adult heterosexual male, but few on anyone else. Homosexuality, for example, is strictly forbidden. The devotees of Witness Play in theory remained chaste, arguing that *desire* for a boy was permitted even if sexual union were forbidden. Certain hadith seem to support this point of view; for instance, it is said that those who love but remain chaste and die as a result of frustration, must be considered holy martyrs. Iraqi and Kermani believed also in the yogic or alchemical efficacy of chastity — but clearly from a psychological perspective their path must indeed have seemed a sort of martyrdom . . . and their poetry does contain elements of repression and melancholy.

Such poetry, however, often attains the opacity of code; moreover, many heretical texts have vanished. Did any mystic ever hit upon the idea of combining the Witness Game with the Qiyamat, the abrogation of the Shariah? Some dervishes boasted of enjoying far more than "glances," or even kisses. Why should they not have enjoyed a philosophy — a spiritual hermeneutics of sex — with which to understand their practice and construct their *apologia*?

Such a philosophy might of course interest *all* believers in sexual freedom, not merely a few mystical boy-lovers. If we combine Ibn 'Arabi's 'tantric' teachings with the actual practice of the Witness Game (the yoga of music, poetry, dance, wine, and love) under the sign of the Qiyamat, we arrive at a new valuation of all and every variety of sexuality — both as "permissible voluptuousness" and as spiritual practice.

This valuation uproots all orthodox morality — but even from the usual modern "Sexual Liberation" standpoint it appears highly radical as well. Religious morality condemns non-ordinary sex as sinful and criminal, but vulgar materialism condemns sexuality itself to joyless commodification, the fetishization of desire, the proliferation of a pornography of violence and advertising. Without a "spiritual dimension," the sexual revolution can only betray itself into libertinage and other distortions.

The Anti-Caliph dares to assert that its new valuation of sexuality transcends both religious morality and vulgar materialism. It affirms the reality and centrality of physical love, and at the same time identifies this love with the highest form of spiritual experience. It frees every amorous individual from the myriad varieties of repression, whether chains of the Law or numbness of alienation. Its touchstone is joy, and the agreement of two sovereign monarchs to share it. Body and soul are one — the erotic constitutes the essence of spirituality.

6 Social Justice

With the exception of the Caliphate of Ali (and certain other brief periods in Islamic history) the Shi'ites have generally existed as a powerless minority within Islam, and consequently have elaborated a particularly interesting teaching on Social Justice, even going so far as to call it the Sixth Pillar of Islam. In political terms (although one can never wholly separate theological from political terms in Islam) Shi'ism begins as a form of mystical monarchism, a line of deposed Pretenders to the Caliphate who claimed not only bloodline legitimacy but also spiritual preeminence. Socially Shi'ism consisted of Hashemite aristocrats and marginalized groups such as the Aryan Persians, pockets of the rural poor, "primitive communists" (such as the Qarmatians, who at one point managed to steal the Black Stone from the Kaaba in Mecca), unofficial mystics, and dissident intellectuals (such as the alchemist Jabir ibn Hayyan or the secretive sect of scientists called the Brethren of Purity, *Ikhwan al-Safa*). Revolution, or at least the hope of revolution, became a Shi'ite principle. After Ali, none of the orthodox twelve Imams ever ruled — but the black banners of Shi'ism were carried by the Abbasids in their successful uprising against the Ommayyids, by the Fatimids who conquered Egypt and built Cairo, by the victorious Safavids in Iran, by innumerable less successful rebels in North Africa, Syria, Persia, and India.

The Assassins established a revolutionary Shi'ite "state" which consisted not of a single land ruled by a king but a network of autonomous castles and mountain strongholds, separated by thousands of miles; defended not by armies but by fedayeen-terrorists, by bribery and secret propaganda; it was dedicated to science and learning, and ruled by a hierarchy based on spiritual attainment. With the total abrogation of the Shariah and the teaching of the Imam-of-one's-own-being under the Qiyamat, this "state" or web of armed communes must have attained a height of libertarianism unknown in Islamdom. The Caliphs of Baghdad failed to destroy them — only the Mongol avalanche succeeded in burying Alamut and its scattered allies.

In the twentieth century, Sunni modernists and reformers have tended to look toward such Western models as Protestantism and Democracy for inspiration. Shi'ite thinkers, however, have shown an interest in more revolutionary philosophies. Dr. Ali Shariati, who is said to have been murdered by SAVAK, attempted a brilliant if somewhat tendentious rapprochement between Shi'ism and Socialism which inspired many Iranians to revolution: the Mujaheddin or Holy Warriors, despised equally by the Shah, the Ayatollah, and the U.S. State Department. Khomeini's revolution demands "pure" Shi'ism, unmixed with foreign influence or heretical Ismaili-like extremism. Khomeini himself was considered something of a wild-eyed mystic (he wrote a treatise on Ibn 'Arabi) and rebel in his youth and exile, but in power he has enforced the Shariah with public executions of loose women, dissidents, Mujaheddin, homosexuals, drug

addicts, Bahais, Sufis, Jews, Ismailis, Christians, Kurds, monarchists, communists — an almost endless list of scapegoats. Most traces of utopian Shi'ite social experimentation have been outlawed or "postponed" due to endless war in Kurdistan and Iraq, which now consumes thirteen-year-old children like a demented Moloch. Theater, music, painting, dancing, and subversive poetry are banned. Shi'ism in triumph has turned out as dismal and terrifying as if Cotton Mather and Dr. Mengele had cooked it up to torment a conquered foe.

What other forces in the Islamic world might attract an esotericist interested in social justice? Pakistan and the Reformist movement? Saudi Arabia, with its oil and Wahhabiism? Qaddafi? Perhaps the Afghan rebels?

Some mystics may perhaps even feel a twinge of nostalgia for old-time corrupt venal dim monarchs like Farouk of Egypt or Zahir Shah of Afghanistan or Idris of Libya or the Persian Qajars — bad as they were, at least they had no ideology to push and no urge to "purify the Faith"! Indeed, traditional monarchism still finds favor with certain mystics such as the Guénonian Sufis or the Javanese adherents of the "Just King" — but even granting them sincerity and humane intentions, their ideas are impractical, and repugnant to the libertarian spirit of the Qiyamat.

One might derive a great deal of enjoyment from contemplating — imagining — a contemporary version of the concept of social justice propagated at Alamut. The abolition of Law characterizes only one other political system: anarchism. Moreover, the idea of the Imam-of-one's-own-being implies the idea of self-rule, autarky: each human being a potential king, and human relations carried out as a mutuality of "free lords." Of course, Alamut retained a hierarchy — but so did Nestor Makhno's anarchist army. Moreover, the economic communism and the cooperation between autonomous strongholds which characterized Nizari society somewhat resembled certain ideas such as syndicalism and council communism. Altogether, a curious blend of individualist anarchism, Bakuninism, and antinomian mysticism sums up Alamut in modern political language.

In updating the Alamut revolution we might also try to imagine a workable contemporary version of the Alamut-concept itself — the protected autonomous enclave of free spirits, warriors, and scholars. In an age of airplanes, bombs, and universal state control of land and resources, the notion seems quite impossible. Gold and daggers no longer entice or terrify a world grown numb with endless commodities and megadeaths; deserts and mountains all are mapped, not one remote valley or island remains unguarded or untaxed. What about survivalist hideouts? Artificial islands? Underground computer networks? Antarctica? Submarines? Orbital L-5's? The asteroid belt?

Outside of a science fiction story, and short of some catastrophic change in the general world order, none of these versions of Alamut seems practical or feasible. However, some shards of praxis do survive amid the rubble of utopian

fancies. One may always attempt as much insight, love, freedom of thought and expression, justice, and tolerance as possible for oneself and the very few people who share one's truest life. To be a "free lord" in secret is better than being a public slave, a willing accomplice of repression and injustice. As for a more general struggle, Ismaili history provides an answer to the question of revolutionary tactics in times of outward powerlessness: propaganda. According to the doctrine of *taqiyya* or Concealment, Ismailis are allowed to pretend or disguise themselves at will in order to propagate the message to keep it alive. In such a situation the attentat or political assassination, terrorism and propaganda of the deed may be deemed tragically counterproductive. What counts is action on the personal and cultural level — "poetic terrorism" if you like — but also simply bearing witness.

Above all, the latter-day devotee of Alamut might feel almost an obligation (if a free spirit may admit of any duty whatsoever) to experience joy, and not postpone it to an afterlife or some utopian future. In this imperative lies the need of doing *justice to oneself*, for those who cheat themselves can scarcely expect to know how to deal fairly (i.e., beautifully) with others. Here again the esotericist is capable of imagining an ethics much more demanding than any moral or civil law, precisely because it is based on expansion of self to include others rather than denial of self, resentment, and hopeless longing. The practice of this sort of politics-of-eros cannot be totally suppressed even by our present technarchies, mandarins of snoop, or commissars of hysterical greed.

To liberate everyday life, to seize back our own history from the society of the Spectacle — the Empire of Lies — this project begins with the individual and spirals outward in love to embrace others. From the ruins of Alamut, the Anti-Caliph creates a catastrophic archaeology of desire — and out of this, our insurrection creates itself.

7 Taste

Here, words like ritual, mysticism, and religion cannot be taken in their usual exoteric meanings of obligatory sacrifice, unreasoning piety, and organized endarkenment. The Anti-Caliph esotericizes these terms, turns them inside out, wreaks upon them a benign inversion. It models itself on some Paleolithic language that has not yet differentiated between ritual and art, between mysticism and personal awareness, between religion and the harmonious life of the tribe. Only such no-longer-extant ur-words would really fit our precise needs. (And only poetry can hope to re-create them.)

In a society that used such a language, the artist (as A. K. Coomaraswamy pointed out) would not be a special sort of person, but every person would be a special sort of artist. In effect, as a Javanese *pamong* or teacher of the Sumarah sect exhorted me with permissible hyperbole, "Everyone must be an artist!" In

Javanese and Balinese society, this maxim amounts to a cultural axiom. Tremendous prestige attaches to the arts of shadow puppetry, dance, gamelan, batik, etc. — to *participation* in these arts. The *kebatinan* or “pure esoteric” cults (which have cut themselves off from orthodox Islam and Hinduism alike) often teach their devotees nothing more than meditation techniques and art appreciation. The trance dance epitomizes this path: complete identification of self with aesthetic action. The Javanese or Balinese who lacks talent is like a Lakota Sioux without a vision quest, or a Malaysian Senoi who cannot dream, or an African pygmy deaf to the music the forest makes. In Java this ideal has survived since Independence as at least a partial reality thanks to the renaissance-like efforts of esotericists to keep the culture alive, comprehensible and accessible to all. Rather than aping the West, many young Indonesian artists experiment with elegant new syncretisms of traditional and modern (the Balinese Monkey Dance for example was introduced in the 1930s); the pure Classical forms are seen as sources of inspiration which must be fostered rather than dead weight to be tossed aside.

Such paleolithic culture-remnants were long ago buried among us occidentals by Church, Empire, and Machine. Our cliché of the artist is the alien and isolated individual, who continually betrays or exposes our cultural ideals as sham, or else kowtows to them by producing expensive pap and elitist rubbish. With the Romantics — the first completely marginalized artistic group — we can begin to trace the idea of the artist as revolutionary (whether progressive or reactionary), the voice saying No to that society whose vision the artist no longer embodies or creates. By our century *all* art, for whatever reason, stands against modern society — in fact, this very movement constitutes what is called Modernism. Even the Futurists who loved machines wanted a revolution — as for the others, each tried to heap up a few shards of something or other, whether from the past or the future, against the present ruin. With Dadaism, art is pronounced dead and simultaneously announced as the only possible revolution. The Surrealists picked up this idea but then sold it for a mess of Vienno-Moscovian pottage. In the 1950s and 1960s the Lettrists and Situationists unearthed the notion again and polished it into a statement of the artist as a model of revolutionary consciousness — still a close relation to Shelley’s “unacknowledged legislator.” To say that our Consensus Art is dead — and this school of thought says so — means that now *everyone must be an artist*. The paleolithic credo reborn. Modernism and tradition like an ourobourous.

Once again (as with Alamuti utopianism) our era seems particularly unsuited to this dream, which appears as yet another hopeless desire to add to our list of miseries. How can we turn our cities into Java and Bali? Not even Bali is Bali anymore, but is now polluted with Kentucky Fried Chicken and mass tourism. After all, artists do not choose alienation — they *want* to add to the tribal image hoard — that is their vocation. But modern society itself decrees this alienation by teaching its children that play and work are mutually exclusive and hostile

realities, that vision and practice are forever at odds. Where can one see hope (outside the legendary past or the exotic Orient or the Future Perfect) for a society of artist-visionaries, a world with no separate words for work and play?

As with questions of social justice, each era creates some possibilities and destroys others, offers certain tactics and withdraws others. The chances for action here are exactly the same as in the field of justice: work on the self and propaganda.

Artwork on the self includes art as meditation and meditation as art; it includes shaping the personal environment; it includes direct and beautiful communication with close comrades or chosen collaborators as a deep primary purpose in life; it includes both visible and invisible artifacts as expressions of spiritual states, as self-expression; it includes adopting the *code of the artist*, which has about it something of the antique ludicrousness of a code of honor or a code of dueling, but also bestows experience and grace in all the unconventional freedoms.

This new art involves a certain spiritual childliness, what the Zen dramatist Zeami called the First Flower — Beginner's Mind — the ability to see and act with spontaneous directness; and thus it holds out the promise of a genuine maturity, rather than the sort of deadly adulthood that now prepares the world for robotic mindlessness and/or hellish war.

At this level, art has little to do with *made things*, but rather concerns a state of mind, a way of being, a gesture that cannot be betrayed, a life.

When we consider art as *made things*, however, the possibility of a teleology arises — the possibility of a purpose, a usefulness of the artwork. For the Paleolithic tribe this purpose remains transparent and unquestioned: all made things have purpose, all made things are art. Such a culture possesses neither useless ugly commodities nor useless beautiful commodities, nor does it possess the concepts "utilitarianism" or "art for art's sake." We, however, have lived with all this clutter to the point of suffocation and claustrophobia, weighed down with excremental monuments and mausoleoid museums, crushed with separated alienated isolated immobile chunks of *dead art*. Aside then from the charming personal esoteric cult of the artist outlined in the last few paragraphs, what purpose can be served now by our art? Why are we making it and for whom?

If we fall back now on the word "propaganda" it should be obvious that we intend to freight the term with more than its usual load of meaning. In totalitarian nations censorship works by fiat; in democratic nations the Market accomplishes the same end, since anything that fails as a commodity cannot conceivably damage the Empire. The avant-garde and the "folk" have both been reduced to suppliers of imagery for advertising; the lag-time between the birth of a new artform and its appropriation by the Consensus Media has almost ceased to exist. In such a situation, any art which manages to slip between the cracks of the monolith or eke out an existence on the margin can only have one purpose: propaganda, insurrectionist propaganda.

This does *not* mean "art in the service of the revolution" — an impossible tyranny — nor "Social Realism," nor any recognizable form of "political art." Garbage is garbage, no matter how pure its intentions. No, for The Anti-Caliph art *is* politics, art *is* the revolution, art *is* religion. Art that succeeds in beauty and cannot be absorbed by the Machine is already propaganda for the truth, no matter what its style and content, because it is already a manifestation of the truth in cognizable and ordered form. Please do not take these words in their Platonic sense: by "truth" we do not mean an abstract and bodiless Ideal, nor even an unspeakable mystical sentiment. This is something much simpler and yet more difficult to explain or define, something for which we might use the Arabic/Persian word *zawq* and the Sanskrit/Japanese term *rasa*.

Taste — Intuition — Feeling — Aesthetic Category — the interiorization of a perception ("becoming the bamboo" as *The Mustard Seed Garden* puts it) — hence a kind of mystical/aesthetic state of consciousness — a sense of what fits — the faculty of choice or discrimination, choosing *this* color or note or word and not *that* one — artistic appreciation, "good taste" — the quality of a performance or artwork — "tasting" as direct experience, experiential certainty . . .

Here we reach the keynote of this entire exercise in esoteric propaganda, the key term of the text and the closest approximation to an actual spiritual path "recommended" by The Anti-Caliph: the cultivation of *taste* both as work-on-the-self and as propaganda for the esoteric "cause." To awaken in others the *desire* for that which can scarcely be spoken at all except in booming clichés or divine names — the desire for desire, for Eros son of Chaos — the taste for life itself and none of its cheap representations or lying substitutes: the desire to *be* art, spontaneously and absolutely.

For the future, then, The Anti-Caliph recommends that everyone be an artist. First, certain traditional arts might be taken up, such as Persian and North Indian classical music, poetry, Far Eastern martial arts, Japanese dance, music and puppetry, calligraphy, illumination. Such traditions do not deserve preservation for any inherent goodness or godliness, but as living possibilities. Like speaking another language, they help us get outside our own cultural skins — and they provide ground for powerful new cross-fertilizations and syncretisms. All of Oriental Wisdom has been made accessible to our century; the rootless cosmopolitan culture of the future will create endless mosaics and mandalas out of ten thousand tribes and civilizations.

Adab, which means both good manners and aesthetic cultivation as well as literature and also the spiritual path, is a quality which seems appropriate to the artist and the anarchist as well. Emma Goldman once said that in an anarchist society everyone would be an aristocrat: "Radical Aristocratism" as Nietzsche put it.

The art of love as adjunct of the other arts and also their chief Muse: the Sufi *sama'* interpreted as an aesthetic-erotic love feast; the intoxication of

music, poetry, dance, the presence of the beloved.

Hospitality as an art form. The Javanese give so-called Peace Banquets (*slametan*) to appease spirits, celebrate luck or *rites de passage*, any excuse for good food and entertainment, but with a spiritual slant. Neighbors and passers-by invited in a spirit of conviviality and openness.

Salons, musicales, symposia, pilgrimages to spots of geomantic beauty or baroque and eccentric spiritual potency; public celebrations of great works of art or exquisite folly — finally the creation of shrines dedicated to moments of aesthetic breakthrough and mystical “taste.”

Poetic Terrorism — art as propaganda of the deed — aesthetico-Assassinism. Powerful propagandistic art should produce powerful emotion or *rasa* — as powerful as terror or joy — forcibly ripping aside the veils of inattention, anaesthetized dullness, self-betraying egotism and forgetfulness by *acts of unexpected art* — a sort of “Theater of Cruelty” without walls.

And as a final suggestion (before The Anti-Caliph slips back into the World of Archetypes): the creation of holidays, pure acts of celebration. For example, the 17th of Ramazan, Ibn ‘Arabi’s birthday and the Anniversary of the Qiyamat — a banquet to proclaim the Oneness of Being, the Inner Wisdom, the breaking of the chains of the Law.

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

Like This

If anyone asks you about the hours of paradise

unveil yourself;

when they speak to you of the moon,

rise over the roof.

If they ask, "what is a peri?",

show them your face;

when they wonder about musk,

scatter your tresses.

“What is it like when the clouds

open up before the moon?"

"Like this," tell them, & button by button

undo your robe.

“How was it that the Messiah

brought life to the dead?" they ask;

Come, kiss me on the lips

& show them.

I told the secret of my union with the friend

to no one but the East Wind

till at last in its mysterious purity

it too whispered, “. . . like this!”

I asked, "How can the fragrance of a Yusuf

be wafted from city to city?"

Then God blew a perfume from the World of Essences

& showed me.

“How can the scent of a Yusuf

open my eyes?"

The breeze touched my face with light

and said, "Like this!"

I am a Court of Angels,

my breast an expanse of azure;

come, lift up your eyes & gaze on heaven

& say, "Yes . . . like this!"

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

The Lovers' Tailor's Shop

The Lovers' Tailor's Shop: tomorrow I'll go there
 wrapped in my long cloak, with a hundred yards of madness.
 The Tailor snips you from Jones and stitches you to Smith,
 pairing you with one, separating you from the other,
 sews your heart to one of them for a lifetime —
 such silken thread! wonderful stitches! miraculous hand! —
 then, when your heart is fixed, he rips out the seam,
 snick! snick! with the scissors of "*Get ye down from it!*"*
 All this sewing-together and tearing-apart bewilders me,
 my mind reels at the variegations of affirmation and
 obliteration.
 The heart is a dust-board, he the geometer of the heart:
 what a marvel of figures, numbers, realities and names
 he inscribes!**
 When he multiplies you, like a number, by somebody else,
 what a sum he manifests with his arithmetic!
 You've seen multiplication — now study division:
 how he parcels up one drop into an Ocean!
 By the algebra of Fate he balances all equations:
 Silence! for thought itself breaks down at such wonders.

*Koran II, 38. God's command to Adam and Eve.

**"Dust Numbers," so-called in Islamic number theory after the dustboard method of computation.





Iblis, the Black Light

Satanism in Islam

I had a Persian friend in Tehran, an avant-garde playwright and member of a sect called Ahl-i Haqq ("People of Truth" or "People of God," "haqq" being a divine name) who traveled to the valley of the Satan-worshippers in the mid-1970s.

A Kurdish sect influenced by extreme Shi'ism, Sufism, Iranian gnosticism, and native shamanism, the Ahl-i Haqq consists of a number of subgroups, most of whose adherents are non-literate peasants. With no Sacred Book to unite these subgroups in their remote valleys, they often developed widely divergent versions of the Ahl-i Haqq myths and teachings. One subgroup venerates Satan. I know of almost nothing written about the *Shaitan-parastinyan* or "Satan-worshippers,"¹ and not much has been done on the Ahl-i Haqq in general.² Many secrets remain unknown to outsiders.

The Tehran Ahl-i Haqq were led by a Kurdish *pir*, Ustad Nur Ali Elahi, a great musician and teacher.³ Some old-fashioned Ahl-i Haqq considered him a renegade because he revealed secrets to outsiders, i.e., non-Kurds, and even published them in books. When my friend asked him about the Satan-worshippers, however, Elahi gently rebuffed him: "Don't worry about Shaitan; worry about the *shay-yi tan*" (literally "the thing of the body," the carnal soul, the separative ego). My friend ignored this doubtless good advice, and with his brother set off for Kurdistan in their Land Rover.

You have no idea how remote some parts of Asia can be unless you've been there; not even a helicopter could penetrate those jagged peaks and dessicated ravines. For the last leg of their expedition they hired donkeys. As they neared their goal they heard more about the Satan worshippers, none of it good: they were ruffians and bandits who lived on pork and wine and practiced the "blow-

¹ Nothing in English, that is. Another friend, Martin van Bruinessen, a Marxist ethnographer in search of romantic rebels, also visited the Shaitan-parastinyan and wrote something about them — in Dutch (watch *Index Islamica* for an eventual publication of this article, which is most informative, and may appear in English). I also mentioned them, in the context of folk art, in my *Scandal: Essays In Islamic Heresy* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Autonomedia, 1988).

² See V. Ivanov, *Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan. Ahl-i Haqq Texts* (Bombay: Ismaili Text Society). According to my informants within the sect this work is almost useless. V. Minorsky's article "Ahl-i Haqq" in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (old series), though short, is remarkably informative.

³ For a discussion of Ustad Nur Ali Elahi, see my *Scandal: Essays In Islamic Heresy* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Autonomedia, 1988).

ing out of lamps" (indiscriminate ritual orgies in the dark). . . .

At last they were there — and their little caravan was met by a dozen or so long-tressed tribesmen in traditional Kurdish costume: baggy pants, turbans, guns. Scowling fiercely they greeted the brothers thus:

"Ya! Zati Shaitan!" — Hail, O Essence of Satan!

Compared with the thrill of that moment the rest of the trip proved anticlimactic. The villagers had long ago given up banditry (they said), and naturally there was no evidence of nocturnal perversion. Abjectly poor, they possessed nothing so exotic as a pig or a flagon of wine. As for their religion, they professed to know virtually nothing about it; either they were protecting secrets from outsiders, or they had really forgotten almost everything. Considerable knowledge can be lost in a nonliterate society devoted to secrecy and cut off from the world; leaders can die without passing on certain details, and whole villages, stricken by disease or drought, can perish or disperse and vanish.

No doubt the devil worshippers knew more than they told my friends, but in the end they seemed no more sinister than any other group of mountain Kurds, a generally noble-hearted and hospitable people when not engaged in blood-feuds, vendettas, or guerrilla warfare.

What, however, is the "essence of Satan"? In a book devoted to the teachings of Ustad Elahi,⁴ Satan is said to exist, bound and powerless, a mere fallen angel. Moreover, "apart from man, evil does not exist in nature . . . the 'devil' is simply the way that the domineering self . . . expresses itself in us. . . . The story of Satan was over long ago; it only concerns God and him." In other words, the Koranic version of the Temptation and Fall (very similar to that of *Genesis*) is literally true, but irrelevant. The Satan from whom all believers "take refuge" in prayer is, in truth, a projection of their own spiritual imperfection. Needless to say, this is not orthodox Islam or the opinion of most Sufis; it is, however, a very interesting resolution to a very thorny theological problem. In a religion founded on metaphysical oneness, on the unity of Reality (*tawhid*), how does one explain *evil*?

⁴ Dr. Bahram Elahi (Ustad Nur Ali Elahi's son), *The Path of Perfection*, trans. James Morris from the French version by Jean During (London: Rider Books, 1987). On p. 28 Elahi makes a remark which might refer to the Shaitan-parastiyyan: "Certain misguided minds even go so far as to say that 'Since in any event God is good and merciful, we don't need to be concerned with Him; but since all our sufferings come from the devil and the god of evil, we should rather be concerned with ensuring his favor.' And so they end up worshipping the devil."

The Adversary

Biblical Judaism knows no separate principle of evil. In The Book of Job Satan is merely the Adversary, proud and wicked but still very much a part of Jehovah's cosmos and under his power — almost an aspect of the deity.

In reaction to Gnosticism (which claimed that Jehovah himself was "evil"), Christianity emphasized God's goodness to such an extent that over time Satan took on a more and more separate and substantial existence. In Christian theology (or "theodicy" to be precise) evil remains relatively unreal, or at least secondary; but in Christian *practice* the devil became "Lord of this world," a true power, almost a principle. For this reason, in Christian culture Satanism emerged as devoted to the opposite of good, which is evil. The sort of intellectual and ritualized wickedness depicted in Huysmans's *Là Bas* or in LeVey's *Satanic Bible* could never arise within Judaism, nor is it typical of Islamic culture.⁵

Allah is characterized by ninety-nine names, among them "the Tyrant" and "the Wily One." Certain qualities associated by Christianity with "evil" are thus divinized by the Koran as attributes of God's majestic or "terrible" aspect. In this context, Satan cannot aspire to a separate or substantial autonomy — his power cannot oppose Allah's but must instead derive from and complement it. Islam admits no "original sin," only forgetfulness of the Real; likewise, cosmos/nature cannot be considered "evil" in itself, since it is a reflection or aspect of the Real. But precisely because cosmos/nature reflects the divine all-possibility, it must also include the "terrible" possibilities of negation and illusion, including the existence of Iblis.⁶

In the Koran and accepted Traditions (*ahadith*), Satan is said to be made of fire like the djinn, not of light like the angels. Nevertheless, he is also the Angel Azazel, preacher to all the angels in preeternity, seated beneath the Throne in glory. When God creates the form of Adam and commands the angels to bow to him (because only the human is truly microcosmic), only Azazel refuses. He claims the proud superiority of fire (the psychic) over clay (the material). For this God curses him, Azazel becomes Iblis, and all proceeds more or less as in Genesis.

Given the principles of divine unity and omniscience, one might easily surmise a story hidden within this story: that God somehow wanted Iblis to

⁵ This is not to say that there are no wicked Jews or Moslems, nor that these cultures are free of "black magic," but neither has ever given rise to *organized Satanic evil*. With the possible exception of the Shaitan-parastiyyan, the cult of Satan in Islam (as we shall see in the case of the Yezidis and in certain Sufis) views the devil as *secretly good*.

⁶ "Satan" is a title meaning "the Adversary"; "Iblis," from the Greek for *diabolos*, is his name.

become Satan, and wanted Adam and Eve to fall, so that the full drama of creation and the manifestation of all the Names might be played out unto redemption. Satan and Adam both have "free will," yet everything is *written*, foreordained, and known. Clearly some secret is in play here, some meaning beneath the text (and the Koran, according to orthodox teaching, contains at least seven levels of meaning). It is from the esoteric science of hermeneutics, and from Sufism, that an explanation of this secret arises.

Three Defenses of Satan as Perfect Monotheist

Of the three most famous Sufis who defended Iblis, two were executed for heresy. Even today they are widely revered by many who consider Sufism to be true Islam, and they are seen as martyrs to a blind puritanical reaction.

The first and best known was Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, executed in Baghdad in A.D. 922. In his book, *The Tawasin*,⁷ he told this story:

[Sayedina Musa (Moses)] met Iblis on the slope of Sinai and said to him: 'Oh Iblis, what prevented you from prostrating?' He said: 'That which prevented me was my declaration of a Unique Beloved, and if I had prostrated I would have become like you, because you were only called upon once to "look at the mountain" and you looked. As for me, I was called upon a thousand times to prostrate myself to Adam and I did not prostrate myself because I stood by the Intention of my Declaration.'

Sayedina Musa said: 'You abandoned a Command?' Iblis said: 'It was a test. Not a command.' Sayedina Musa said: 'Without sin? But your face was deformed.' Iblis replied: 'Oh Musa, that is but the ambiguity of appearances, while the spiritual state does not rely on it and does not change. Gnosis remains true even as it was at the beginning and does not change even if the individual changes.'

Sayedina Musa said: 'Do you remember Him now?' 'Oh Musa, pure mind does not have need of memory — by it I am remembered and He is remembered. His remembrance is my remembrance, and my remembrance is His remembrance. How, when remembering ourselves, can we two be other than one? My service is now purer, my time more pleasant, my remembrance more glorious, because I served Him in the absolute for my good fortune, and now I serve Him for Himself.'

Hallaj has Iblis excuse his pride before God by saying:

If there was one glance between us, it would have been enough to make me proud and imperious, but I am he who knew You in Before Endless-Time, "I am better than him" because I have served you for a longer time. No one, in the two

⁷ *The Tawasin of Mansur al-Hallaj*, trans. Aisha at-Tarjumana (Berkeley and London: Diwan Press, 1974).

types of beings, knows You better than I do! There was an intention of Yours in me, and an intention of mine in You, and both of them preceded Adam.

Al-Hallaj said: 'There are various theories regarding the spiritual status of Azazyl (Iblis before his fall). One said that he was charged with a mission in heaven, and with a mission on earth. In heaven he preached to the Angels showing them good works, and on earth preaching to men and jinn showing them evil deeds.

'Because one does not recognize things except by their opposites, as with fine white silk which can only be woven using black fabric behind it — so the Angel could show good actions and say symbolically "If you do these you will be rewarded." But he who did not know evil before cannot recognize good.'

Here Hallaj has propounded the principle of complementarity, or the *coincidentia oppositorum*; as in the Yin Yang disc, black and white embrace and contain sparks of each other embedded within themselves. In one sense God is everything, and Iblis nothing; yet God cannot be realized as the Beloved without a lover, even and especially a *tragic* lover, one doomed to separation. This tragedy itself is Satan's pride.

Hallaj went even further. He declared that Iblis and Pharaoh (considered the wickedest of men for claiming godhood) are the perfect champions of spiritual chivalry. "My companion is Iblis and my teacher is Pharaoh. Iblis was threatened with the fire and did not retract his allegation. Pharaoh was drowned in the Red Sea without retracting his allegation or recognizing a mediator." Hallaj himself made a similarly outrageous claim: "And I said: 'If you do not know Him, then know His signs, I am His sign (*tajalli*) and I am the Truth! And this is because I have not ceased to realize the Truth!'" And like Iblis and Pharaoh, Hallaj held to his claim and honor, even though he was crucified and dismembered for it.

The second shaykh to defend Satan, Ahmad al-Ghazzali, avoided execution (if not execration) both by the very density of his mystical language and by having a powerful brother, the Imam al-Ghazzali, famous for the impeccable orthodoxy of his Sufism. Ahmad al-Ghazzali echoed Hallaj on many points, saying for instance that "whoever does not learn adherence to Divine Unity from Iblis, is an unbeliever," and "Though Satan was cursed and humiliated, he was still the paragon of lovers in self-sacrifice."⁸

Ahmad Ghazzali in turn initiated and taught the third of our shaykhs, Ayn al-Qozat Hamadani. The least known but perhaps most brilliant, he was impris-

⁸ From a marvelous compilation of Sufi material on the devil by the contemporary Persian Sufi master Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh, wittily entitled *The Great Satan 'Eblis'* (London: Khaniqah-i Nimatullahi). See also Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits*, trans. N. Pourjavady (London: KPI, 1986), an immensely influential work in the Persian "School of Love."

oned in Baghdad and executed in his hometown of Hamadan (in northwest Iran) in A.D. 1131 at the age of thirty-three.⁹ Ayn al-Qozat said:

Put aside 'jealousy-in-love,' O dear friend! Don't you know what that maddened lover, whom you called 'Eblis' in this world, was called in the divine world? If you knew his name, you would consider yourself an unbeliever in calling him by that name. Take care in what you hear! That crazy one loved God. Do you know what occurred by way of a test of loving-kindness? On the one hand, affliction and wrath; on the other blame and humiliation. He was told that if he claimed to love God, he should prove it. The tests of affliction and wrath and of blame and humiliation were presented to him, and he accepted them.

At that time these tests proved that his love was true. You have no idea what I am talking about! In love there must be both rejection and acceptance, so that the lover may become mature through the grace and wrath of the Beloved; if not he remains immature and unproductive.

Not everyone can fathom that both Eblis and Mohammad claim to be guides on the Path. Eblis guides one away from God, while Mohammad guides one towards God. God appointed Eblis the gatekeeper of His court, saying to him, 'My lover, because of the jealousy-in-love that you have for me, do not let strangers approach me.'

Ayn al-Qozat implies that separation-in-love is in some sense superior to union-in-love, because the former is a dynamic condition and the latter a static one. Iblis is not only the paragon of Separated Ones, he also causes this condition in human lovers — and although some experience this as "evil," the Sufi knows that it is necessary, and even good.

The Islamic profession of faith states "There is no god (*la ilaha*) except God (*illa'Llah*)." Ayn al-Qozat explains that the unworthy will never reach beyond mere negation, the *la* (no), or attain the inner sanctum of *illa'Llah*. The guardian or chamberlain of this inner realm is none other than Iblis. Ayn al-Qozat makes his original contribution to Islamic satanology by symbolizing the chamberlainhood of Iblis with two powerful images: the Black Light, and the dark tresses of the Beloved.

"Black Light" again suggests the *coincidentia oppositorum* familiar to Western mystics and alchemists in such phrases as "the Sun at Midnight." As for the

⁹ See *A Sufi Martyr*, Hamadani's apologia composed in prison, trans. A. J. Arberry (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), which includes an appendix of some "satanic" passages from other works. See also Nurbakhsh, op. cit., for extensive selections, and also *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology* by Peter J. Awn (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982), chiefly useful for the immense number of quotations from Sufi authors. N. Pourjavady and I included some of Hamadani's fine quatrains in our *Drunk-en Universe: An Anthology of Persian Sufi Poetry* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Phanes Press, 1987); as far as I know, nothing else exists in English.

"tresses," which sometimes hide and sometimes reveal the Beloved's face, this image suggests the Hindu concept of Maya, the beauty of the world which can be both damning illusion and saving grace, and which can seduce to either forgetfulness or remembrance. Ayn al-Qozat wrote:

Do you know what is meant by the 'cheek' and 'mole' of the Beloved? Has the black light above the Throne not been explained to you? It is the light of Eblis, which has been likened to the tresses of God; compared with the Divine Light it is darkness, but it is light just the same.

Without question, one who sees the Beloved [as Eblis did] with such a 'curl,' 'mole,' 'tress' and 'eyebrow,' will declare, like Hallâj, 'I am God.' . . .

People have only heard the name of Eblis and do not know that he possessed such pride in love that he acknowledged no one! Do you know why he had this pride? It is because the light of Eblis [the tresses] is close to the cheek and mole [the light of Mohammad]. Can the cheek and the mole ever be complete without the tresses, eyebrow and hair? By God, they are not complete! . . .

If you do not believe this, then hear the word of God: "Praise be to God, who has created the heavens and the earth and has established darkness and light." (VI:1) How can black be complete without white or white without black be complete? It cannot be so. The Divine Wisdom has so ordained.¹⁰

The Peacock Angel

Within Sufism the defense of Iblis remained an interesting, shocking, and dangerous problem in mystical metaphysics. Inevitably, the potent and scintillating images used to defend Iblis found expression in cult and ritual, and just as inevitably this exteriorization caused a rupture within the body of Islam. Although Islam possessed a doctrinal elasticity unknown to, say, Catholicism, there are some outrages it could not accept. Devil-worship is one such outrage.

Around A.D. 1100 a shaykh from Baalbek (Lebanon) named Adi ibn Musafir arrived in Baghdad and associated himself with Imam al-Ghazzali and Abd al-Qadir Jilani, the great orthodox Sufis. Through them he was made aware of, and may have even met, Ahmad Ghazzali and Ayn al-Qozat Hamadani. Later, Shaykh Adi retired to the remote valley of Lalish (Iraq), and there created his own Sufi order among the Kurdish peasantry. He was known for his fierce Sunni orthodoxy and severe ascetic practices, and all authentic works by him reflect this pious simplicity.

Shaykh Adi, however, seems to have possessed a shadow-self. His followers' descendants, known as the Yezidis,¹¹ attribute to him (and other shaykhs of his

¹⁰ Hamadani, op. cit.

¹¹ The following material is from John Guest's painstaking and fascinating study *The Yezidis* (London and New York: KPI, 1987), rich in history and documentation but weak on Sufism and metaphysics.

Order) various strange texts in which the devil appears as Malek Ta'us, the Peacock Angel, a great god in his own right — the Iblis of Hallaj mythologized into a pagan deity.

Hallaj is venerated by the Yezidis, who call one of their great bronze peacock idols (*sanjak*) by his name. In a poem attributed to Shaykh Adi, he seems to boast of divinity and makes reference to similar "ecstatic utterances" by Sufis such as Hallaj and Bayazid Bastami:

I am Adi of Shams (Damascus), son of Musafir
 Verily the All-Merciful has assigned unto me names,
 The heavenly Throne, and the footstool, and the seven
 heavens, and the earth.
 In the secret of my knowledge there is no god but me. . . .
 Praise be to myself, and all things are by my will.
 And the universe is lighted by some of my gifts.

For a long time the name *Yezidi* was thought (even by the Yezidis) to have derived from that wicked libertine, the Caliph Yazid, who in A.D. 690 caused the murder of al-Husayn, the Prophet's own grandson and Imam of the Shi'ites. Yazid's defense against the Shi'ites' curses may reflect the fanatical Sunnism of Shaykh Adi's Order, but the Yezidis now consider the Caliph their champion, the enemy of all orthodoxy who freed them from the strictures of the Law (*shariah*). The name Yezidi, however, more probably derives from the ancient Persian word, *yazd* or *yazad*, meaning god or spirit. The Kurds of Lalish may have retained "pagan" pre-Islamic beliefs rooted in Zoroastrian Dualism which somehow harmonized with the Hallajian defense of Iblis as well as the extremist Sunni cult of the Caliph Yazid. Whether the historical Shaykh Adi, whose tomb in Lalish is now the center of Yezidi devotions, was responsible for this wild syncretism, or whether it happened after his death, is a moot point.

Although the Yezidis are supposed to reject literacy on principle (and most, in fact, are illiterate), they do possess two "scriptures," *The Book of Divine Effulgence* and *The Black Book* (with "effulgence" plus "black" equal to "Black Light"). They do not worship the devil as the principle of evil, like Christian Satanists, but rather as the principle of energy, unjustly condemned by orthodox religions. According to *The Black Book*:

In the beginning God created the White Pearl out of His most precious Essence; and He created a bird named *Anfar*. And He placed the pearl upon its back, and dwelt thereon forty thousand years. On the first day, Sunday, He created an angel named 'Azazil, which is *Ta'us Malek* ('the Peacock Angel'), the chief of all.

Then, in *The Book of Divine Effulgence*, Malek Ta'us speaks to us in the first person:

I was, and am now, and will continue unto eternity, ruling over all creatures and ordering the affairs and deeds of those who are under my sway. I am presently at hand to such as trust in me and call upon me in time of need, neither is there any place void of me where I am not present. I am concerned in all those events which strangers name evils because they are not done according to their desire.

The Black Book contains a number of interesting prohibitions. Lettuce and beans are forbidden; the former was believed to contain sparks of "pure light" (by the Manichaeans), the latter to contain souls which had undergone transmigration (by the Pythagoreans). The flesh of fish, gazelles, and peacocks are forbidden, as is the color indigo blue, all no doubt because they symbolize Satan, whose name, moreover, the Yezidis are forbidden to pronounce. Pumpkins, traditionally symbols of chaos, are also considered too sacred to eat.

Iblis the Imagination

We must pass over such fascinating digressions as a full-scale anthropological analysis of the Yezidis, the development of Satan's defense in later Sufism, the critiques directed against Satanism by such profound mystics as al-Jili or Ruzbehan Baqli, the extensive folklore material on demonology and demonolatry, Islamic eschatology (including the "maps" of Hell used by Dante), or the use of Iblis's figure as a symbol for Islamic rebels from medieval Ismailis to modern leftists. (All this material is, however, covered by titles referenced in the footnotes.) My purpose here must remain simply to ask again, "What is that 'essence of Satan' mentioned by those Kurdish devil-worshippers encountered by my friend?"¹²

The answer is suggested by certain texts of the school of "the greatest shaykh," Ibn 'Arabi, especially Aziz ad-Din Nasafi's treatise on *The Perfect Man*:

God delegated his vicegerent to represent him in this microcosm, this divine vicegerent being the 'intellect.' When the 'intellect' had taken up the vicegerency in this microcosm, all the angels of the microcosm prostrated before it, except 'imagination,' which did not, refusing to bow, just as when Adam assumed the vicegerency in the macrocosm, all the angels prostrated to him, except Eblis, who did not. . . .

Six persons emerged from the third heaven: Adam, Eve, Satan, Eblis, the Peacock, and the Snake.

Adam is the spirit, Eve the body, Satan nature, Eblis imagination, the Peacock lust, and the Snake wrath. When Adam approached the tree of intellect, he left

¹² It seems likely that the Ahl-i Haqq Shaitan-parastiyyan must be "related" somehow to the Yezidis across the border in Iraqi Kurdistan. Some scholars (such as C. Glasse in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, Harper & Row, 1989), have asserted such a relation, but I know of no actual proof.

the third heaven and entered the fourth. All the angels prostrated before Adam, except Eblis, who refused. That is to say, all the powers, spiritual and physical, became obeisant and obedient to the spirit, except imagination, which refrained from doing so.

The word used here for imagination is *wahm*, which might be translated as "fancy," in distinction to *khyyal*, or imagination as the "imaginal faculty." But in the School of Ibn 'Arabi the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, for in truth imagination (like the Beloved's tresses) both dissipates and concentrates the faculty of remembrance, and seduces both to "sin and rebellion" and to the vision of the divine-in-things. According to Ibn 'Arabi himself, without images there can be no spiritual realization at all, for the undifferentiated oneness of the Real can be experienced only through its manifestation as (or in) the multiplicity of creation.

Satan is the guardian of a threshold, as Ayn al-Qozat explained, and a doorway is an isthmus, a space-between-worlds, an ambiguous and liminal no-place-place, a land of the imagination.¹³ In the West only William Blake recognized the Devil as the imagination; in Sufism this identity has been clear since at least the tenth century. The Sufis who defended Satan were not defending or excusing evil, but rather telling a secret: "evil" has only a relative existence, and it is "merely human." It is the "shaitan" in each of us which we must "convert to Islam," as the Prophet said. But the very means by which we carry out this self-alchemy is presided over by that very same force, the power of our imagination, lit by paradoxical moonbeams of Black Light — Iblis himself.

¹³ See Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. R. Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

ABU NUWAS

Satanic Panic*

I quarreled with my boy —
 my letters
 came back marked "Unknown
 At This Address — So Bugger Off"
 In solitude & tears
 I damply prayed — to Satan:
 "Weeping & insomnia have got me
 down to 90 pounds —
 don't you care
 that I'm suffering?
 That I'm so depressed
 I've almost run out of lust?
 This obsession's getting in the way
 of my duty to *thee*:
 my sinning's halfhearted — I feel a fit
 of repentance coming on!
 Yes! Thou hadst better stoke up some love for me
 in that lad's heart (you know how!)
 or I'll retire from Sin: from Poetry, from Song,
 from pickling my veins in wine!
 I'll read the Koran! I'll start
 a Koranic Night School for Adults!
 I'll make the Pilgrimage to Mecca every year
 & accumulate so much virtue that I'll . . . I'll . . ."

*Although Abu Nuwas is taking ironic advantage of his reputation as a rakehell, rather than seriously proposing a cult of Satan-worship, nevertheless it's tempting to compare this poem with such heretical works of Sufism as the *Tawasin* of al-Hallaj and those of his later admirers such as Ahmad al-Ghazzali (brother of the famous Imam al-Ghazzali) who carried out a mystical apologia for Iblis — and in some cases suffered the outrage of Orthodoxy for it.

Well, three days hadn't passed when suddenly
my sweetheart came crawling back
begging for reunion. Was it good?

It was twice as good as before!

Ah, joy after sorrow!

almost the heart splits with it!

Ah, overdose of joy! . . . And of course, since then

I've been on the best of terms
with the Father of Lies.

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

False Authority

What's all this fanfara in the morning?

Ah! The khwajeh's going to the grave!
won't be back till late, I suppose:

a rather distant caravanserai, Death.

Instead of fair beauties he'll consort

with scorpions & snakes;

he's come from the silken pavilion

& inherited the sepulchre.

No more beer & free lunch —

his neck is firmly broken.

How steadfastly,

how patiently he makes his exit.

While he lived no one

had the guts to say anything to him;

but now, one imagines, where he's going,

the Khwajeh's own intestines will be kebabs.

He does not go purified by purity,

nor in the way of fidelity,

he does not go in God-intoxication

but stone-blind drunk on lies.

(Happy only the one who dies

before he dies, slave of true faith;

Moses of his era

he goes toward Mt Sinai.)

The Khwajeh: how many fine robes tailored,

how many turbans fitted;

& now, undressed by God,

a naked nobody.

Every exile returns home at last,

East to East, West to West;

he who was born of devil's fire returns to fire,
 he who was born of light to light.
Spawn of the imp,
 he spread out the fingers of cruelty;
do you think it likely he'll be
 rewarded with houris?
The witty & nimble
 are seated at God's dining table —
but he, unsalted, unripe,
 is headed for the pits.
Listen: the drum of retribution:
 its terrible monotone
reduces the lion to a kitten,
 the aristocrat to an ant.
Enough! You know the rest,
 hidden in your deep mind
like the image of your beloved:
 never spoken.

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

Three Rude Quatrains

1

What remains for you, O Falsehood
but to flee the Truth?
O Poison, what can you bring
but racking bitterness?
Love is the Water of Life — and you,
who deny it, are an ass.
So what else can you do, O Donkey
but piss in the stream?

2

You, who are prodded
by the whim of an ignorant soul,
the example of others
has taught you nothing.
Your one real contribution
was to build a public convenience,
that the whole city might come
and shit upon your good deed.

3

He popped out of an owl's egg —
should he look like a falcon?
He munches garlic and onions —
should his breath smell of balsam?
When do you expect to see a raging lion
slain by a quivering pansy?
When, from the trumpet of a donkey's arse
do you expect the Call to Prayer?

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

Quatrain

Yesterday someone recited

a Spell of Coldness:

a wizard more frigid even

than his own incantations.

Around the banquet of Love

buzz innumerable bluebottles;

he who allows them to drive him away

is lower than a fly.





"The Shaykhs Have Two States"

Loose-strung Meditations on the Problems of Sexuality and Authority in Modern Sufism

Knowledge is a light which God throws into the heart of whomsoever He will.

— Sufi saying quoted by Ibn 'Arabi¹

When the star of the Real rises and enters into the servant's heart, the heart is illuminated and irradiated. Then bewilderment and fear disappear from the possessor of the heart, and he gives news of his Lord explicitly, through hints, and by means of various modes of report-giving.

— Ibn 'Arabi²

Ibn 'Arabi's teachings on light remind us irresistibly of the mystical Protestant doctrine of the "inner light," and of the Nizari Ismaili formulation, "the Imam-of-one's-own-being." In both these cases, the inner light doctrine led to a principled rejection of the idea of religious hierarchy; it collapsed the whole structure of "authority," concertina-wise, into the single "heart" of the believer. Ibn 'Arabi did not carry the interiorization of authority to such an extent — he remained within the "church" of Islamic Sufism — but his "inner-light" teachings have inspired countless heretics to reject all mediation of the spirit. Protestant inner light, Ismaili inner light, and Akbarian inner light: the emphasis in all these lies in aloneness with the One, the *individual* realization, rather than on the mediation of realization through authority. "Radical" *'erfan* [knowing] in a sense rectifies that hypertranscendentalism of religion which makes the One unapproachable *except* through the authority of priest, book, guru, prophet. For example: orthodox Shi'ism insists on the mediation of the Imams, Ismailism on the Imam of the Time, but "radical" (post-Qiyamat) Ismailism restores "sovereignty" to the individual, who thus becomes his/her own "authority." A similar trajectory can be seen to extend from the Pope to Luther and Calvin's "reformism" to the "radical" position of the Anabaptists, Family of Love, Levelers, Ranters, Behmenites, Hermeticists, Antinomians, etc. The moment of the rejection of

¹ Translated from the *Futuhat al-Makkiyya* by William C. Chittick in *The Sufi Path of Knowledge; Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*: (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1989), p. 170.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 215–216.

authority (see Corbin's discussion of the Qiyamat)³ represents an extreme degree of this trajectory, the momentary liberation of esotericism in perfect heresy. Afterwards the moment seems to pass and "authority" begins to reoccupy the space once claimed for "spiritual freedom." And here, on the second gyre, so to speak, the "priest" is replaced by the "spiritual guide," the shaykh, the guru.

The radical impulse in *'erfan* constitutes a kind of immediatism — a way without media — and also an "instant" way. In the apotheosis of *presence* which this implies, clearly the "guide" cannot be considered to possess more authority than any other *aref* [knower] but only, at best, more experience of the way. But gradually (in the "history" of spiritual institutions) a gap opens between the guide and the other initiates. The guide is now the sole prolongation of spirit within the circle; the others, by definition, no longer aspire to the "rights" of full realization.

The teachings of Ibn 'Arabi contain both the concept of authority — the hidden hierarchy, the necessity of the shaykh, — and the concept of the inner light as radical "liberation." One might describe these concepts as making up a deliberately unresolved contradiction, a dialectic with no synthetic resolution, and it is precisely this ambiguity which constitutes the "shocking" nature of his texts in the eyes of both rationalists and pious believers. But Ibn 'Arabi's "radical" followers have tended to concentrate on the lived experience of the Shaykh as a template for their own realization, while those who seek to reconcile *wahdat al-wujud* [oneness of being] with orthodox theology have concentrated instead on Ibn 'Arabi's teachings on authority and on his own authority as "Seal of Saints." Thus we have on the one hand: Ibn 'Arabi in Mecca writing love poems to Nizam and receiving initiation from an angel who is in effect an aspect of his own love and realization — an Imam-of-his-own-being — and on the other hand, Ibn 'Arabi as head of a "gnostic church" that is none other than the invisible collegium of esoteric Islam.

In the twentieth century many "seekers" in the West felt cheated by our own culture's distrust of authority, and into the vacuum thus created flowed a force from the East, "spiritual authority" and its representatives the gurus. The guru was the shadow of the darkness we felt in ourselves at our failures of "independence" or "self-liberation." Onto that shadow we projected all the light which, according to radical *'erfan* we already possessed but had not realized, and then looked to the "masters" for enlightenment. (Among them was the psychologist Carl Jung from whom I've borrowed this metaphor, who was at one time an

³ A discussion of the "Day of Resurrection" of the so-called Assassins of Alamut is to be found in Henry Corbin's *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

apologist for fascism — as were also Eliot, Yeats, Pound, Guénon, Schwaller de Lubicz, Evola, and many other European “mystics”.) In the 1960s this tendency became a movement. Thousands of Americans made the existential leap from *distrust of authority* (supposedly an American trait) to the whole-hearted *acceptance of authority* — as long as it presented itself in Oriental garb. Theosophical/Hindu strains, which appeared in the 1890s through the 1920s, were now largely replaced by an enthusiasm for Buddhism of the D. T. Suzuki variety. Hinduism and Buddhism being the first Oriental traditions to send “authentic and valid” representatives to our shores, it seems appropriate that the problem of authority first arises for us within these spheres of influence.

Rick Fields believes that the current trouble with authority in American Buddhism arises in part from the attempt to transplant an oriental monastery/temple tradition into an occidental setting of laymen and women, neither monks nor priests.⁴ By analogy, the troubles in American Hinduism might be seen to emerge from the transportation of a rigid system of caste and social role (in which “householders” cannot be sādhus) into a society based on the rejection of the validity of such roles. But what of Islam, which has neither priests nor monks, and in which the ideal Sufi remains “*in the world*” — family, job, etc. — “*but not of it*?” In Fields’s theory such institutions should be relatively easy to adapt to Western “democratic” social structures. Perhaps, however, the problem is not at root one of incomparable social structures or inappropriate institutions, but precisely a problem of authority. The oriental religions have looked for ways to implement a theory of virtually absolute authority in a social setting based on a culture that has passed through and been deeply changed by Protestant Reformation, bourgeois and proletarian revolution, and so-called sexual revolution. As Foucault points out, these “revolutions” only become articulated within the discourse of History at the very moment in which they “disappear” — so that, in his paradoxical reading, our society is in fact *post-Protestant*, *post-revolutionary*, and *post-sexual*. The new “authorities” created by revolution and reformation are themselves now seen to be empty. Even the “experts” of the sexual revolution have proven themselves false prophets: we are not dancing forward into an era of liberated desire, but lurching backwards toward some dark age of plague-fear and sexual hysteria in which all desire will eventually be experienced as “abuse” or “sin.”⁵ Thus within

⁴ Rick Fields, “The Changing of the Guard — Western Buddhism in the 80s,” in *Tricycle* (Winter 1991): pp. 43–49.

⁵ People wonder how a neo-puritanical society can renounce real sex on the one hand while on the other coding its central form of discourse — advertising — with erotic frenzy. Simple. “Sin” becomes more attractive the more it is denied. “Sin” sells product. Of course, not *real* “sin,” i.e., real pleasure, but only its simulacrum, its eternal promise and postponement.

the American Roman Catholic Church we have cardinals who fulminate against every form of human pleasure in language as deeply imbued with hysteria (if not literary style) as Cotton Mather's — while at the same time vast numbers of priests are in trouble for "abusing" various orphans or parishoners. Televangelism has lost much of its political, i.e., financial, power since the 1980s in a series of sexual and fiscal scandals. In the "Orient" adulterous women and homosexuals are stoned to death. There's a great deal *less* sexual freedom in the world now than in medieval times, perhaps even Victorian times. All the talk talk talk about sexuality (as Foucault says) has led only to new modalities of repression/oppression. The gurus arrive here (actually or psychologically) from traditions which contain strong anti-sexual codes — combined in some cases with social customs that mitigate the religious laws through tacit tolerance of deviance.⁶ Our society, by utter contrast, has a *code* of tolerance and a *discourse* of "freedom," along with a social praxis of horrified rejection of all deviance and even of all pleasure. The guru's first temptation therefore will almost certainly be a sexual one — but once he's arrived at a good esoteric excuse for disciple-boffing, he may as well go all the way and cheat and lie and steal as well — all in the name of his "transcendence" of mere religious and moral codes. The rejection of petty morality might perhaps be defended as spiritual revolution, except that the freedom *never* extends to the guru's disciples — in fact, most of them will never hear of the guru's "total freedom," much less share it. Let me be clear: personally I do not disapprove of sexual intercourse nor of "deviant" desire and pleasure. I do, however, disapprove of hypocrisy, power-tripping, and the self-aggrandizement of self-proclaimed avatars. I can even imagine erotic love as an integral aspect of spiritual/pedagogic companionship, but only on condition of its open consensuality. I reject (for myself) the moral/sexual codes of outdated and reactionary religious ideologies, but I accept (for myself) the best ethics I can imagine, based on a perception of the other as an aspect of the self, so that my desire to some extent depends on the other's desire and not on the other's loss. If I can do this for myself, then I can demand of anyone who claims to be able to teach self-realization that he too follow this minimal ethics of mutuality. And as with erotic desire, so too with other desires, including the desire for spiritual "liberation." Ibn Ata'allah of Alexandria says somewhere that one should distrust the shaykh who tells you that enlightenment is "far off," and trust the one who assures you that it is "near" — in other words, gurus who never give up power over their

⁶ In some Islamic or Buddhist societies, for example, homosexuality is not only tolerated but even "socialized," seen as a "normal" category of behavior. This is now changing due to neo-puritanical and modernist movements of religious and social "revival," frequently sponsored by Western missionaries and do-gooders.

disciples, who never “graduate” them, who pretend to an unbridgable or “avatic” superiority over their disciples — these are the untrustworthy. I suggest that many of the Oriental traditions have fallen prey to a *guru-prinzip* which makes the “nearness” of realization a kind of commodity, promised but never delivered, since deliverance would threaten the power-monopoly of the guru. Most of these “spiritual paths” (which once attracted us precisely due to the seductiveness of the promise of “real authority” in our post-Protestant world so empty of “inner light”), most of these so-called traditions are themselves long overdue for a protestant reformation. Traditional power relations are tragically out of synch with our own needs for connection and conviviality. We need something else, perhaps an “urban shamanism” which aims at a virtual democratization of spirituality; or perhaps it could be said that we need *teachers*, not masters. Spirituality is not a master/slave relation — it is not an “Oriental despotism.” Not any more. Not now. Maybe it never was. Who cares? Here and now: — we need something different.

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Nowadays the term “abuse” has come to be nearly synonymous with “sexuality” in general: behind many neo-puritan squawks about “abuse” one can detect the social/personal neurosis of fear of pleasure. However, if we examine cases of *real* abuse — whether expressed in sexuality, fraud, or outright oppression — we discover that the subject of abuse is not pleasure but authority. Sexual abuse can only be understood in terms of *abuse of authority*. That is, sexuality in itself is innocent (and under the sign of consensuality it can never be defined as “abuse” except on the premise that pleasure is evil) — but authority in itself is already questionable, and when it violates conditions of trust that constitute the (spoken or tacit) contract between, say, a “spiritual master” and a “disciple,” we may ask whether this violation constitutes “abuse of authority” or whether it in fact reveals the real tendency of all authority toward inequality of power, aggrandizement, and betrayal. For the sake of argument let us assume that such a thing as “innocent” spiritual authority can really exist as propounded by the traditional literature, e.g., in classical Sufism. Of course one may have doubts of this assumption as well. Some might say that the phrase “abuse of authority” could well be subjected to a *ta’wil* [spiritual hermeneutic] which would suggest that the exercise of authority is abuse. But let’s leave that hypothesis aside for the moment and examine the behavior of the model major gurus of today in the light of their own traditions, on the assumption that “abuse” is a meaningful category, leaving aside for now the deeper question of the actual validity of authority itself.

In the age of Karma-Cola (to borrow a phrase) we’ve had an avatar of Vishnu arrested for smuggling jewels across the Indian border in his limousine; a perfectly-realized master with sixty-three Rolls-Royces embroiled in scandal

and stories of poison; not to mention the Airplane Game, a bald confidence trick run by scores of New Age pundits as a form of "prosperity consciousness"; or the head of a vast franchise-system of "self-improvement" fleeing the country to avoid charges of incest. But these, you may argue, were not representatives of "real Traditions." These are mere flakes, not the pious and ascetic mystics of genuine and magisterial *Traditional* authority. Let us therefore examine the careers of several such true masters.

Rick Fields discusses with painful openness his own guru, the late Chogyam Trungpa, whom no one may doubt was a genuine reincarnated fully-trained Tibetan master. Trungpa drank heavily and was several times accused of sleeping with disciples and of using his authority to intimidate and coerce. Before dying Trungpa appointed an American as Regent of his Order; this man recently died of AIDS, which he had transmitted to several of his disciples without telling them he was HIV positive when he knew it. Years ago I recall being told by neo-Guénonian Traditionalists (including the late Marco Pallis) that Trungpa had become possessed by demons, that he was a "subversive" force within Tradition. But Fields also mentions the cases of other genuinely-traditional masters such as Baker Roshi of the California Zen Center, recently deposed for clandestine affairs with disciples. (He too had a large fancy car.) Fields mentions scores of other examples within Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. According to a poster I saw in the subway the head Swami of Integral Yoga has been publicly accused of sleeping with his disciples. In the same issue of *Tricycle* we learn that the *soi-disant* "virgin" Krishnamurti (who also had several luxurious cars) has been accused posthumously of lying about his lifelong practice of chastity —by the daughter of his mistress, who was one of his disciples. The Guénonians would no doubt explain all these as cases of possession or subversion as well.

Of course I can mention a few examples of Oriental masters, known to me personally or by reputation, who are both enlightened and ethically sound from the point of view of their own traditions. But it does begin to seem as if spiritual authority were particularly prone nowadays to demonic possession — clearly a dangerous vocation, especially in America. This paradox emerges most clearly from the recent (in fact ongoing) case of a leading neo-Guénonian spiritual master, from whose circle over the years have emerged many accusations of "subversion" and even "possession," hurled at any and all who "deviate" in any degree from the absolute rule of "Tradition." The case of Monsieur Frithjof Schuon is of particular interest here, inasmuch as he and his followers have identified him so closely with the teachings of Ibn 'Arabi. In a recent series of articles in the Bloomington, Indiana, *Herald Times* (from October 15, 1991 to November 24, 1991), one might follow the story of Schuon's appearance before a Grand Jury on charges of child abuse and fraud. It was alleged that, as "Shaykh Issa of the Maryami Sufi Order" (Master Jesus of the Marian Sufi

Order), Schuon led his disciples in American Indian ceremonies centered around "sacred nudity"; also that he may have "sexually abused" disciples' wives and daughters. The charges were eventually dropped for lack of evidence and the Prosecutor of the case was fired by the governor of the state. The Grand Jury, in an unprecedented move, then reconstituted itself and attempted to investigate further. The Schuon group threatened further legal action in January 1992.

Once again let me repeat: nudity and sexuality in a spiritual context bother me personally not at all (though orthodox Sufis might well feel otherwise); but the case also revealed that many Order members were kept unaware of Schuon's prerogatives as "avataric and magisterial authority" of his *tariqa*. They were taught to obey the Shariah. In Schuon's secret unpublished autobiography, which I have read, he claimed to be a lifelong celibate. One may agree or disagree with the neo-Guénonian position on "authority" (which led Guénon himself as far as collaboration with Action Française and other fascist groups), but in either case one may question the right of authority to such a degree of untruthfulness. (And some disaffected disciples have even produced documented evidence that Monsieur Schuon never received the position of initiating shaykh from any Shadhili master, including the Shaykh al-Alawi, and that therefore he has no genuine "traditional" authority, even by his own definition.)

In order to situate this case in the context of the teaching of Ibn 'Arabi, we must read a good portion of the section on "Spiritual Mastery" in the *Futuhat*. W. C. Chittick, the translator, comments on this text:⁷

Even in Ibn al-'Arabi's time there were people who claimed to be Sufi masters without possessing the proper qualifications. Often these were seekers who began with good intentions, but were then "led on step by step" through the divine deception. In other words, God continued to show them favors while they did not fulfill their part of the covenant. Instead of acting in accordance with the rules of courtesy in every situation and observing all the intricacies of the Law, they gradually were emboldened to the point of considering themselves beyond these affairs, which they saw as fit only for the common people. Thus they forgot that the Prophet and all his Companions, not to mention every friend of God, followed the Scale of the Law in all affairs.

Ibn 'Arabi begins with a poem, in which he describes two kinds of shaykhs:

To revere the shaykh is to show reverence for none but God, so revere him out of courtesy toward God in God.

The shaykhs are the courteous, and proximity aids them in guiding and strengthening in God.

⁷ Chittick, op. cit., pp. 270–273.

They are the inheritors of all the messengers, so their words come only from God. You see them like the prophets among their enemies, never asking from God anything but God.

But if a state should appear in them which distracts them from the Shari'a, leave them with God —

Follow not after them and walk not in their tracks, for they are God's freedmen in God.

Be not guided by him from whom the Shari'a has gone, even if he brings news from God!

After enlarging on the subject of the first kind of shaykh, worthy of being followed, he then has this to say of other more ambiguous cases:

Whenever a person lacks anything which a shaykh needs for the training of disciples, it is not lawful for him to sit upon the couch of the shaykh, since he will corrupt and throw into affliction much more than he will set right, like the quack who makes the healthy person ill and kills the patient. But when the individual reaches the point [which we have described], then he is a shaykh in the path of God, and every disciple must show reverence to him, serve him, observe his prescripts, and not conceal from him anything which he knows that God knows about him.

The disciple should serve the shaykh as long as he has reverence for him. But if reverence for him should fall from his heart, he should not sit with him for a single hour, for he will not gain any profit from him and will suffer loss, since companionship only yields profit when there is reverence. Whenever the reverence returns to him, then he should serve him and profit from him.

And finally he sums up his own position thus:

The shaykhs have two states:

There are shaykhs who know the Book and the Sunna, uphold them in their outward activities, realize them in their inmost consciousness, observe God's bounds, fulfill God's covenant, uphold the precepts of the Shari'a, never interpret in their pious fear, take with caution, avoid the people who mix levels, sympathize with the community at large, never hate a single one of the disobedient, love God, and hate what God hates through God's hate. No blame of any blamer ever affects them concerning God. They "command the approved, forbid the disapproved" in which there is consensus "and vie with each other in good works" (Koran 3:114). They pardon the people, venerate the old, show mercy to the young, and remove harm from the path of God and the path of the people. They invite to the good — first the most incumbent, then the next most incumbent. They deliver dues to their owners and behave gently toward their brothers, or rather, to all people. They do not limit their munificence to those whom they know, for their munificence is nondelimited. The old person is their father, their fellow is their brother and equal, the young person is their child. All the creatures are members of their household after whose needs they ask.

If they obey [the Law], they see that the Real has given them success to obey Him. If they disobey Him, they hurry to repentance and shame before God, blaming themselves for that which emerged from them. They never flee in their acts of

disobedience to “decree and destiny,” for that is discourtesy toward God. They are the easy, the pliant, the possessors of tender love, “merciful to one another. You see them bowing, prostrating” (Koran 48:21). In their face is mercy toward God’s servants, as if they were weeping. Worry dominates over them more than joy, because of what is given by the place of the Law’s prescription.

Such as these are the ones by whom one should be guided and whose reverence is incumbent. It is they who, “when they are seen, God is remembered.”

The second group of shaykhs are the possessors of states. They have a certain dispersion and do not preserve the outward in the way that the first group does. Their states are acknowledged, but one should not become their companion. If the miraculous breaking of habit that may become manifest from them should become manifest, it is not to be relied upon, because of the discourtesy toward the Law. For we have no way to God except that which He has laid down for us as the Law. He who says there is another way to God, different from what He has laid down in the Law, has spoken falsehood. So a shaykh who has no courtesy is not to be taken as a guide, even if he is truthful in his state. However, reverence should be shown to him.

All this is so clear, in relation to the situation of the Maryamiyya of Bloomington, that no further comments seem necessary. However, what about those disciples who, as Ibn ‘Arabi puts it, have lost their “reverence” and realized they’ve wasted their efforts on a shaykh who “should not be followed?”

People used to ask themselves whether Stalin had perverted Marxism-Leninism, or whether Marxism-Leninism had produced Stalin and his reign of terror, as a natural consequence of the pseudo-scientific and hyperauthoritarian essence of Bolshevism. The answer of course is that both explanations are “true.” Original Marxism and even Bolshevism had a sincere commitment to liberatory ideals and values, and Stalin stomped out the last feeble embers of that pale fire. But it is also true that the lethal insanity of a Stalin was somehow inherent in the “authority” and “party discipline” of Marx, Engels, Trotsky, and Lenin. In Monsieur Schuon’s case the question is: did he betray Sufism; or did Sufism create him? It makes no difference to those he’s harmed, of course, although it is an interesting problem.

Inasmuch as real, (small “t”) traditional Sufism represents ideals and values of tolerance, humanity, love, art, and self-realization, one must conclude that the Maryami *tariqa* has betrayed Sufism. But Sufism has its guru-principle just as Islam itself has its doctrine of valid authority. I wish to beg the issue of whether or not even genuine Sufism might sometimes give rise to false gurus (and in fact Sufi writers are constantly warning their readers that such is the case) — but I also wish to avoid the question of whether or not organized mysticism and organized religion in general inevitably damage human freedom in any or all valid senses of the term. However, I will assert that neo-Guénonian-Schuonian-Traditionalist Sufism is a doctrine so severely flawed that it will, must, and in fact has already resulted in misery and loss for those who are

deluded into practicing it seriously. Guénon was brilliant — and even Schuon does not deserve to be blamed for his earlier works, which are less brilliant than Guénon's but still of some interest. Of course Lenin was brilliant too. I've met plenty of brilliant fascists; I've met brilliant murderers. Brilliance — of a certain sort — is cheap as shit and twice as nasty. One can be brilliant for humanity, for love, for tolerance, for beauty — and one can be brilliant for hatred, insane pride, intellectual fraud, and megalomaniacal self-aggrandizement. Resistance to the latter brand of brilliance has nothing to do with adherence to this or that moral code or "transmission of doctrine." Resistance to such brilliance becomes sheer necessity, simple self-defense. One must refuse that brilliance, or else suffer as one already damned in this life.

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Is enlightenment worth it?

One might well ask, in light of all that has been said, whether "enlightenment" itself is all it's cracked up to be. Might one not be enlightened, and yet still "all too human," subject to boredom, anxiety, desire, accident, and woe, just as the "unenlightened?" What is spiritual realization *good* for? In my opinion (and it's only an opinion) it's good for quite a lot. It's worth striving for and it's worth tasting. But problems arise if it is taken as the *end* of human potential and development. Spiritual realization is not *in itself* an answer to all human and social problems. The enlightened individual will still be faced with a lifetime of ethical decisions, and the consequences of ethical successes and failures. Outmoded oriental moral codes provide no safety net here, nor does modern secular humanism or any other *prix fixe* ideology. Modern ethics must be "situational" as a minimum requirement for any happy implementation. Enlightenment can be a big help here, but not a guarantor of success. In effect there is no "end of human development" — except death. While we live we change, and "it" changes too — that indefinable complex of all that is not our individual selves but "other." Spiritual enlightenment might well be seen as a valuable (perhaps essential) key to the openness, harmony, spontaneity, tolerance, and love most useful in the project of negotiating this change — surfing the wave of chaos — besides, of course, the fact that these qualities are good and pleasurable in and for themselves. Therefore we do not wish to renounce enlightenment from any disillusionment with false masters or even with the very principle of "spiritual authority." We can see clearly (in certain shamanic societies for example, or among the early Quakers) that enlightenment does not depend ipso facto on any "Oriental despot" model of authority, or even on "authority" itself in any but the most vague and nonpolitical connotations of the term. Enlightenment is possible without "authority" as a categorical imperative. The shaman on a vision quest and the Quaker in search of inner light do not distrust themselves enough to need someone to tell them what to do

(instruction is one thing, command is something else altogether). Distrust of self lies at the root of what E. La Boetie called "voluntary servitude," the mystery of humankind's "fear of freedom," our cursed inability to break through the barrier of *mental reproduction of misery* long enough to discover how easy enlightenment can be, how obvious, how organic. The facile and vulgar mysticism which speaks of eradicating the "ego" does not help in this impasse. Let us recall that in Sufism the ego is not to be erased but transformed, transmuted, and in fact strengthened by its awareness of identity with *wahdat al-wujud*. There are those, like the Dalai Lama (as we shall hear), who recommend years of "testing" before one places one's trust in a spiritual teacher. It might make more sense to devote "even fifteen years," if necessary, to learning how to trust *oneself*—whereupon the question of seeking further instruction about enlightenment will no longer present the dangers congruent with "false authority." Other dangers, yes. The danger of failure, for example. But at least then it would be *our* failure, and not that of a fake authority.

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One valid reaction to the spectacle of false authority, or indeed of every voice that speaks as "magisterial authority," is simply to distrust it all, to reject it, and to strike out alone into the heresy of the Free Spirit. But we may also contemplate the possibility of a change that would proceed from within the traditions, and which would save them from what I've called here the problem of authority, without distorting them in their essence.

In the first place, the traditions could admit that rigid moral/sexual codes are neither central nor metaphysically determined within their doctrinal structures. Through the exercise of *ijtihad* (theological reasoning) and *ta'wil* (esoteric hermeneutics), the representatives of the traditions could arrive at interpretations of their "divine laws" which emphasize the positive aspects of human desire and love.

In the second place, these representatives could also legitimately maintain that the exaggerated hyperauthoritarianism of organized spiritual "paths" — what we've called the Oriental despotism model or the *guru-prinzip* — is also peripheral to the central core of the paths, an "innovation," a "medieval excrescence," an outmoded and even *antitraditional* element in spiritual practice.

1 The Problem of Sexuality

The problem of sexuality in mysticism was brilliantly analyzed by John Humphrey Noyes, a nineteenth-century American utopian socialist. Noyes remained a believing Christian throughout his career; he was converted during the great "revivals" of Protestant spirituality, to which he gave a mystical and Perfectionist interpretation which recalls that of the seventeenth-century Antinomians. Noyes had noted the frequency with which Revivalist enthusiasts seem to become eroticized and fall into what most Christians would call "sin."

"Religious love is very near neighbor to sexual love, and they always get mixed in the intimacies and social excitements of Revivals. . . . A worldly wise man might say [these facts] show that Revivals are damnable delusions, leading to immorality and disorganization of society. I should say, they show that Revivals, because they are divine, require for their complement, a divine organization of society. . . . The course of things may be restated thus: Revivals lead to religious love; religious love excites the passions; the converts, finding themselves in theocratic liberty, begin to look about for their mates and their paradise."⁸

Noyes clearly did not think of sexuality as "sin" — certainly not for the Perfectionists of Oneida (his utopian community in upstate New York, one of the most radical and most successful of the nineteenth-century "intentional communities"). What was sinful in his mind (as with Charles Fourier and other more "secular" proponents of "Free Love") was the selfish hypocrisy of the moralists. The links between desire, pleasure, and spiritual realization should (he taught) be articulated openly, and even strengthened — outside the miserliness of marriage and the false egoicity of romantic love. The result would be not only happiness, but also a social/individual intensification of spiritual realization.

Ibn 'Arabi also spoke quite openly of the psychic links between sexuality and spirituality (especially in the chapter on Muhammad in the *Fusus al-hikam*).⁹ His *ambiguity*, which we have already discussed, certainly extends to questions of sexuality. Thus, for example, although he condemns *shahed-bazi* ("sacred pederasty"), he also befriends and approves of Awhadoddin Kermani, the foremost exponent of "Contemplation of the Unbearded." As we've also already noted, certain practices condemned by the Shariah were in effect not taken very seriously by social custom and even by Sufiistic custom. This seeming conflict or

⁸ From a letter to W. Hepworth Dixon, 1867, quoted in Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment*, Minneapolis: (University of Minnesota Press, 1949), p. 193.

⁹ See the translation by R. W. Austin, *Ibn al-'Arabi: The Bezels of Wisdom* (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1981).

dialectic not only helps to explain Ibn 'Arabi's apparent contradictoriness, but also such strange and heretical syntheses as that of an Ibn al-Nusayri (founder of the Syrian Nusayriyya) or Shaykh Abu Hulman al-Dimeshqi, who approved of homosexuality for spiritual reasons.¹⁰ As for Ibn 'Arabi, although he remained within the Shariah, he definitely gave his approval to chivalric/chaste/"Sophianic" love outside marriage (such as his own affair with Nizam Ayn al-Shams in Mecca, immortalized in the *Tarjuman al-ashwaq* or "Interpreter of Desires"). He naturally accepted polygamy and concubinage, and himself practiced certain strange "tantric" methods, ranging from the dream-initiation of women to the exaltation of sexual intercourse as a supreme method of realization. We know that Ibn 'Arabi gave his full metaphysical support to the validity of the Shariah — but we also know that he considered the "Gate of *ijtihad*" to be still open. When *ijtihad* is esotericized as *ta'wil*, the Shariah may appear outwardly to undergo a certain change or shift of emphasis, even a mutation. Thus it would seem that Ibn 'Arabi has left a gate and a path open for the exploration of contemporary Sufism. Even orthodox Islamic Sufism might set out on this way toward greater tolerance and liberality as regards sexual ethics. It might well be argued that the Shariah is not antisexual in essence, but rather merciful and latitudinarian — except toward oppression and hypocrisy. Pleasure could be seen as a divine gift to all seekers, rather than as the secret prerogative of the guru who has "transcended ordinary morality." Indeed, "ordinary morality" may be felt as simply a mask for sexual hysteria — a burden which no human deserves to bear. "Sexual freedom" within an ethics of love would then be seen as a gift bestowed on all true lovers of the true beloved — and not as the special right (or wrong) of the gurus. One might even claim that Sufism has a mission to combat the misogyny, homophobia, and sexual immiseration of modern puritanist Islam. If Sufism cannot do this, who or what will? And spirituality in general is perhaps the only force capable of confronting the sexual repression not only of traditional moralism but also of contemporary "secular puritanism" — the Control-mechanism of the Spectacle which simultaneously commodifies desire and punishes its realization.

¹⁰ For Awadoddin Kermani, see B. M. Weischer & P. L. Wilson, *Heart's Witness: The Sufi Quatrains of Awhad al-Din Kermani* (Tehran: Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978); also P. L. Wilson, *Scandal: Essays In Islamic Heresy* (New York: Autonomedia, 1987), esp. chapter 4. For Nusayri, see Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1987). For al-Dimeshqi, see Abd al-Qadi al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, translated as *Moslem Sects and Schisms* by K. S. Seelye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1920).

2 The Problem of Authority

[The dervish] should be extremely careful not to test his spiritual guide.¹¹

— Sheikh Muzafer Ozak al-Jerrahi

Reflecting on the problems of American Buddhism in the 1980s, the Dalai Lama has emphasized that it is important for students to test their teacher for five, ten, or even fifteen years. 'Part of the blame lies with the student because too much obedience, devotion, and blind acceptance spoils a teacher. Part lies also with the spiritual master, because he lacks the integrity to be immune to that kind of vulnerability.' He recommends never adopting the attitude toward one's spiritual master of seeing his or her every action as divine or noble. 'This may seem a little bit bold, but if one has a teacher who is not qualified, who is engaging in unsuitable or wrong behavior, then it is appropriate for the student to criticize that behavior.'

—Rick Fields¹²

In Java, according to my informants (and also privately mimeographed pamphlets of the Quaker-like Sumarah sect of heretical esotericists [*kebatinan*]), the figure of the guru has been replaced by that of the *pamong* or "teacher." Anyone might well act as teacher to someone or anyone, and therefore no category of authoritativeness can be imagined as attaching to any permanent leader — a remarkable development, given Java's deeply authoritarian culture, and nothing short of a "protestant reformation" of Sufism (*kebatinan* has virtually replaced the traditional Sufi orders in this century). Given the poor state of research into Akbarian influences or texts in Java, one can only speculate that this development may somehow represent a point of the eastern trajectory of the School of *wahdat al-wujud*. Perhaps something similar can be expected along the Western trajectory?

And yet it would not seem necessary for Sufism to go as far toward heresy as the Javanese esotericists, simply to solve the problem of authority. Surely the concept of the "teacher" can be applied, within a general revaluation of Islam's well-known "democratic" value-structure, to a reorganization or reformation of Sufism from within.

In fact, this development had already taken place by the mid-nineteenth century, according to R. S. O'Fahey. His book, *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad ibn Idris and The Idrisi Tradition*,¹³ fell into my hands — remaindered for three dollars! — just at the very moment it was needed to demonstrate my point. Ibn Idris, a Moroccan who lived in Mecca and died in the Yemen in 1837, has generally

¹¹ M. Ozak al-Jerrahi, "Character and Duties of a Dervish," *Sufi Review* (Winter 1992).

¹² R. Fields, loc. cit.

¹³ R. S. O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1990).

been known only as a teacher of al-Sanussi, and a shadowy figure in fundamentalist or neo-Sufism, which sought to strip *tasawwuf* of all “medieval accretions” and turn it toward activism in the style of the Sanusiyya or Tijaniyya or Abd al-Qadir of Algeria. O’Fahey’s research suggests a much more complex analysis.

Ibn Idris was deeply imbued with the Akbarian tradition of the Shadhili Order, to which he belonged; he taught the *Fusus* to his top students, and defended Ibn ‘Arabi against the Wahhabis in open debate. He was no puritan reformist! Now, although Ibn Idris taught and transmitted a number of Sufi *turuq*, his own primary initiation took the form of a vision in which the Prophet himself appeared with al-Khadir (or Khezr), the “hidden green prophet” of unmediated knowledge (*‘ilm al-laduni*); Muhammad then instructed Khezr to transmit certain prayers to Ibn Idris, which became the basis of his praxis.

Moreover, among the *turuq* that al-Sanussi “took” from Ibn Idris, according to O’Fahey, was the Uwaisiyya. Unfortunately O’Fahey does not tell us how, when, or where Ibn Idris himself acquired the Uwaisi *silsila* (initiatic transmission). Was it in Yemen, homeland of Uwais al-Qarani, and still in this period a hotbed of Akbarianism, (as Alexander Knysh has shown)? or did he use the term *Uwaisi* to describe his own direct visionary affiliation with the Prophet and Khezr? The present-day Oveissi Order (which I encountered in Iran) is said to practice a form of Sufism without any *murshid* or master in the usual sense of the word. Like Uwais al-Qarani himself, or Ibn ‘Arabi in his special Khadirian role (see p. 140 ff.), the Oveissi dervishes are initiated in visions or dreams. They are taught how to *induce veridical dreams*, especially visions of the Prophet¹⁴ or other initiatory figures. Significantly Ibn Idris, who wrote very little, produced a treatise on precisely this subject, the *R. al-asas*, in which he gives instructions for an “Office of the Nighttime” for beginners in Sufism: — so many prayers, litanies, invocations, etc., for three nights running —after which “there can be no doubt that he will see in his sleep a sign (*ishara*) or message (*bishara*) depending on the sincerity of the aspirant.” On this basis the aspirant’s teacher will help him choose an appropriate *dhikr* for further practice.

Ibn Idris and other neo-Sufis claimed direct initiation by Khezr and/or the Prophet: (a) because they experienced it, and (b) in order to “deconstruct” the medieval authoritarian *guru-prinzip* of organized Sufism. Ibn Idris himself did not found an Order, but preached instead a universal *tariqa Muhammadiyya*, the key to which was a total rejection of the Canonical Schools and a radical reopening of the Gate of *ijtihad*. The individual, guided by love of the Prophet,

¹⁴ According to Sufi tradition, visions of the Prophet are generally considered to be authentic, since the Devil’s talent for oneiric deception does not extend to the *imitatio Muhammadi*!

thus interprets personal spiritual experience according to a principle very reminiscent of Ibn 'Arabi's "inner light." In a letter to a disciple, Ibn Idris writes:

Indeed I have been joined by a group of Maghribi brothers, and their endeavour towards God was elevated. Indeed, they have triumphed in the knowledge of God, and God has opened for them the door. They have gone beyond the bounds of nature, inwardly and outwardly. They are directly inspired by God without intermediaries; their words are collected in notebooks which contain the direct words and messages which God has revealed, things which have not been heard from the greatest saints in the past, so that even some of the great ones such as Abu Yazid al-Bistami would feel inferior in the presence of one of them.

Another disciple, Muhammad al-Majdhub of the Sudan, described his initiation not as a formal pact with a shaykh, but as the validation of a personal vision:

Al-Majdhub used to say of Ibn Idris, "He is my shaykh". Asked, "Did you take a binding oath to him in the [Sufi] path"? He answered, "No!" "So how can he be your shaykh"? "Through one word he said to me". "What was that"? "I was confused at first about my state compared to the state of the friends of God. [Even] the most eminent of them are proud of [certain miraculous] things they have achieved on the spiritual path, but I never gave heed to these things and even regarded them with contempt. I was thus in a state of doubt as to who of us was really on the right path. When I consulted him [*sc.* Ibn Idris] in this matter, he said, 'They are on a path, and you are on a path. However, the fact that you don't pay any attention to these things clearly shows the gap between them and you. For their spiritual support comes from the shaykhs that educate them; yours though, my brother, comes from God and His Messenger.' And upon this word, my innermost self became calm!"

Although Ibn Idris belonged to many *turuq* and transmitted them to appropriate pupils, he had no patience with exclusivist or authoritarian Orders. Once one of his disciples told him that he already belonged to a *tariqa*, the Khatmiyya, and that his shaykh had warned him, "Whoever joins my Way and then leaves it will die in a state of sin." Ibn Idris exploded:

By God, if there is a veil, it is (the Khatmiyya). As soon as a person leaves them, God grants him illumination. Our brother, Abu 'Majdhub, was one of them, then he left them and God granted him illumination. Our brother, Musa al-Majdhub, left them and God granted him illumination.

Ibn Idris's impeccable orthodoxy cannot be questioned — unlike the *kebatinan* of Java he did not look to heresy for a solution to the problem of authority. Clearly, however, he considered himself not a *murshid* in the "classical" sense but a *teacher* — in very much the meaning of the term *pamong*. (Interestingly enough, Ibn Idris had Javanese and Sumatran disciples, among whom we might well search for clues to the transmission of Akbarian tendencies to Indonesia,

and eventually to the heterodox *kebatinan* sects.) By making his appeal to the Khadirian principle of imaginal auto-initiation and *'ilm al-laduni* (knowledge direct from God via the inner light), Ibn Idris sought a way *within* orthodox Islamic Sufism to overcome the abuses and metaphysical deformities of the guru-principle. In other words, the "protestant reformation" of Sufism has already taken place — but unfortunately was lost and almost forgotten. Wahhabism, reformism, and neo-puritanism triumphed politically, while classical authoritarian *tariqa*-Sufism survived the reformation and even spread to the West. It is tempting to suggest that contemporary European and American Sufis who are bothered by the problem of authority could do far worse than look to Ibn Idris' brand of neo-Sufism for hints about the restructuring of orthodox *tasawwuf* according to principles that are at once Koranic and traditional but also "democratic" and open to the ideas of tolerance and freedom.

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This, however, is not my task, so I'll stop speculating at this point — except to say that, should such a "reform" ever be seriously considered, it must perforce return to Ibn 'Arabi as the veritable "seal" of Sufism, and seek within his teachings on pleasure and desire, and on the "inner light," for inspiration and direction . . . and dare I say it? . . . for "authority."

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

Quatrain

Know that the lover in any case

is no Moslem.

The religion of Love

knows neither infidelity nor faith.

In Love is no body, mind,

heart, or spirit;

he who has not become *thus*

is not THAT.

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

On His Sepulchre

If wheat grows on my grave, cut it

& bake it — the bread will make you drunk:

the dough & the baker himself will go mad

& the oven fall to singing tavern ditties.

If you make a pilgrimage to my grave

you'll see my tombstone dancing by itself;

don't come without a tambourine —

God's holidays should not be marred with gloom.

Jaws clamped, sleeping in the grave,

the mouth nibbles the beloved's opium & sweets;

from every direction trumpets of war & drunkards' harps:

action begets action, & so forth & so on.

God moulded me from the wine-lees of Love —

now death has effaced me I am Love itself;

I am drunkenness, my root is the wine of love —

tell me, what comes of wine but intoxication?

It will not stay an instant: my spirit flies

to the tower of the love of Shamsoddin of Tabriz.

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

Travel

If a tree could get up & walk from place to place
it'd never suffer saw's pain nor axe's cruel blow —
If Sun & Moon lurked unmoving as solid rock
what kind of light could they hope to bestow?
How bitter Bactrus River, Tigris & Euphrates
if they stood in place sluggish as the Sea;
even Air stagnating in a well becomes poison murk —
Can *air* suffer loss from delay? Just see:
How when Ocean's moisture travels upon air as cloud
it loses its load of salt & becomes sweet as cane,
But Fire itself must face ashes, death & nothingness
when held back from the motion of blazing flame.
Take Joseph of Canaan: only when he left his father's side
& traveled to Egypt was he raised above other men —
Or Moses: only when he took leave of his mother & set out
on the road to Midian did he become God's Friend —
Or Jesus son of Mary who wandered unceasing as water
from the Fountain of Youth "which brings life to the dead"*
Or Mohammad the Messenger who left Mecca behind
& only returned to rule it at an army's head —
And when he flew upon Boraq in the Night Ascent
reached the Station of "Nearer Than Two Bows' Length."**
I could make this poem an Encyclopaedia of World-Famous Travelers —
did I not fear to bore you or try your strength!
So take these few for examples
 & yourself become all the rest, my friend.
Journey forth from your own self
 to God's Self — voyage without end.

*Koran, III/49.

**Koran LIII/9.

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

The Elephant's Dream, from the *Mathnawí*

There must exist an elephant, so that when
 it sleeps by night, it can dream about Hindustan.
 After all, the ass can't dream about Hindustan
 because the ass has never been there (or never left) —
 so there's need of a spirit with the power of an elephant
 able to journey in sleep to Hindustan.
 Desire makes the elephant remember Hindustan —
 nostalgia by night gives his recollection form;
 not just any scoundrel understands "*Remember ye Allah*";*
 "*Return thou*"** is not a chain for just any troublemaker.
 But don't give up hope: become an elephant —
 or if not quite that, search out a transmutation.
 Look: the alchemists of the celestial spheres; listen:
 even now sounds come from the laboratory of the Stone
 as those architects of the pattern of Heaven
 take our affairs in hand.
 If you cannot dream of the musk-breasted ones of Hindustan,
 if you are night-blind, still you can feel the touch,
 their touch, brush your perception; still you can feel
 green things springing always fresh from your mortal clay.
 Prince Ibrahim ben Adham was one to whom in sleep
 the whole of the heart's Hindustan was once unveiled,
 causing him to break from the chains of his royalty,
 scatter his kingdom to the winds, and vanish.
 You will know the man who has dreamed of it
 by the way he leaps from sleep like a lunatic,
 heaping cinders on all his careful planning,
 springing the trap that has kept him prisoner.

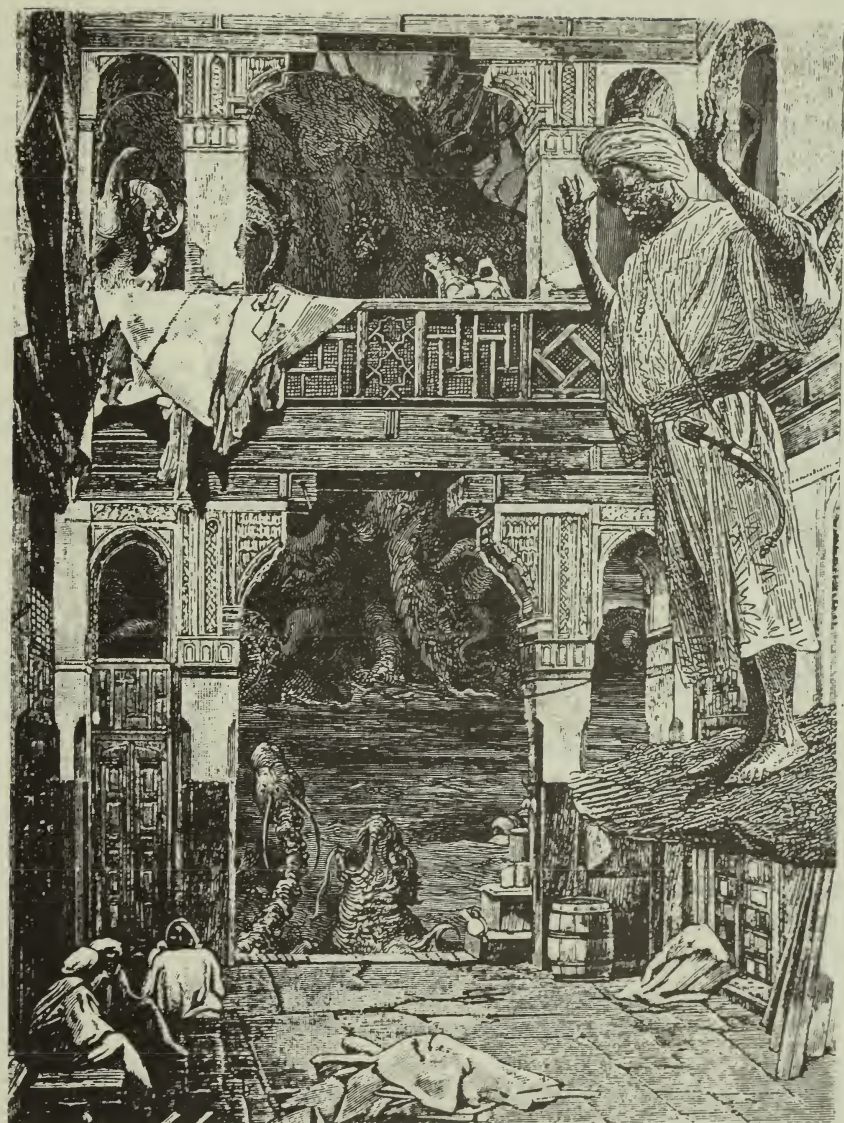
*Koran, XXXIII, 41.

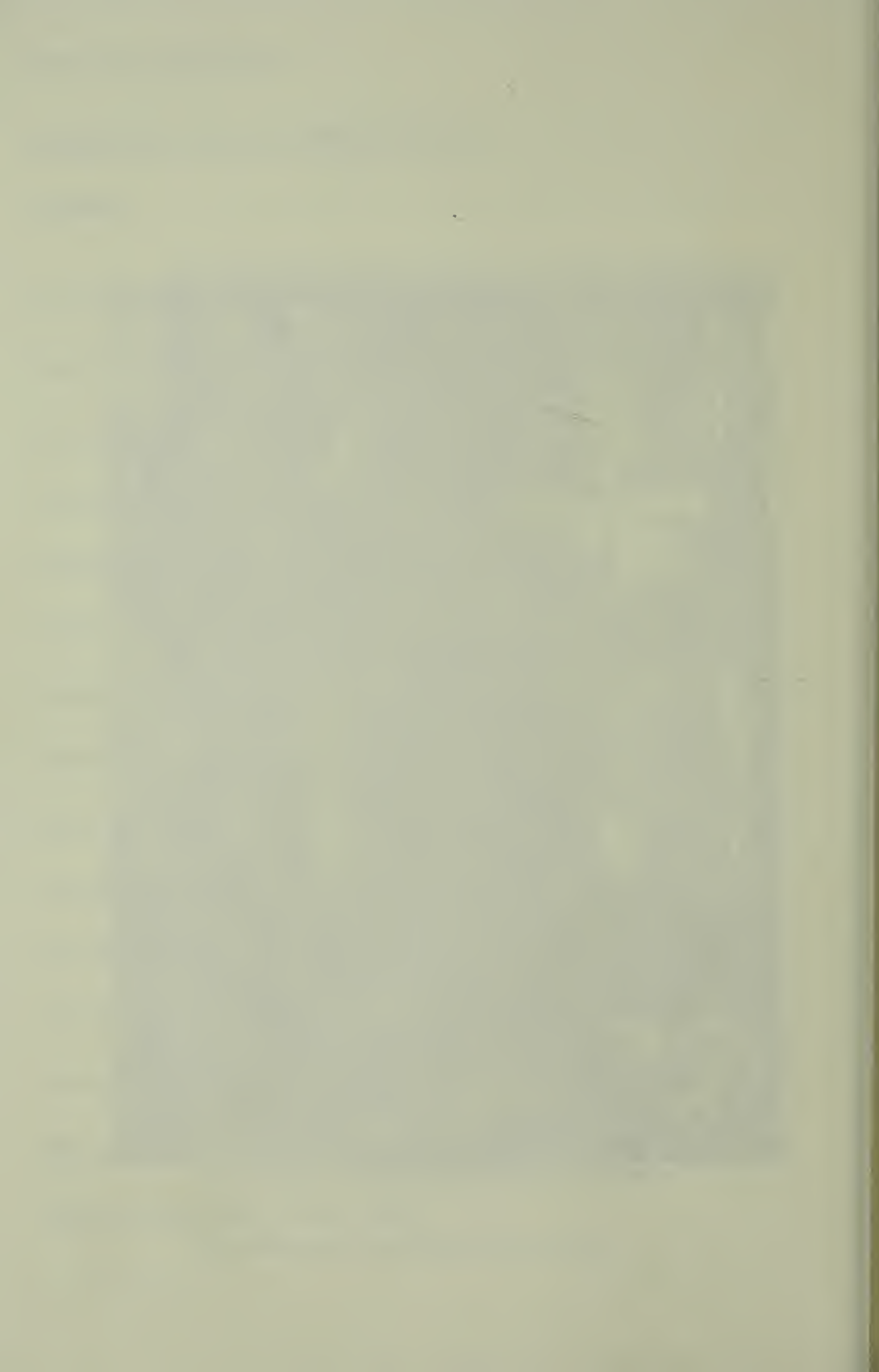
**Koran, LXXXIX, 28.

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

Ghazal

Intellect is the traveler's chain, my child:
 slip your cuffs — the road is well-marked.
Mind is a shackle, heart a lie, spirit a veil;
 the path is hidden from all three —
but even when you have escaped them all,
 my boy, some doubt still remains.
A man who has not gone out from himself
 is no man — & painless love is a myth;
bare your breast, a target for the friend:
 look — the arrow is notched,
& the breast pierced by that shaft is marked
 (like the foreheads of the righteous) with 100 signs.
Love, my child, is not a work
 of soft politesse, but of chivalry;
& he who becomes a lover's slave
 acquires the horoscope of a prince.
Ask no one of love, ask of Love itself,
 the cloud which rains pearls;
it needs no *analyse du texte*, my boy —
 it interprets itself.
If you wish to ascend to the 7th heaven
 it makes a fine ladder;
wherever a caravan may journey
 Love is its Mecca.
Do not let the world which flees from you
 deceive you in this matter:
careful, clam up & be silent
 for the tongue, my child, is the enemy of the spirit.
The Sun of Tabriz rises, the soul rejoices
 in an astrological conjunction with that star.





Sacred Drift

On the Road with Doctor Maximus

1 Nomadosophy

Ibn Khaldun's brilliant dialectic traces the trajectory of Islamic history as a kind of spiral orbiting between two poles or paradigmatic figures, that of the nomad and that of the sedentary city dweller. At first glance Ibn Khaldun's clear-sighted reason and hard-nosed realism, and even his subtly ironic use of pious tags and evasions, might appear to define his *Muqaddimah* as the first materialist theory of history. However, let us recall that he was buried in the Sufi Cemetery outside Cairo in 1406. Although he was no friend of the school of Ibn 'Arabi (the *Shaykh al-akbar* or "Doctor Maximus" to the Latin scholiasts), as Claude Addas points out, his worldview is permeated with a psychological spirituality typical of Islamic esotericism, and his bipolar sociology is rooted in Koranic exegesis.¹

According to Ibn Khaldun, human society strives naturally toward order, civilization, culture, and royal authority. The Bedouin nomad, who constitutes the antithesis of all this, appears as a kind of chaote, untamed, a natural anarchist — "uncooked" as the Sufis might say (or Levi-Strauss) — the force of centrifugal scattering — primitive, even brutal. No city dweller would wish to give up civilized luxury for the wild state of the Bedu, and even the nomad himself wants nothing more than to "enter upon a life of ease and submit himself to the yoke of the city."

The use of the word "yoke" implies the immediate dialectical response to this thesis. At once Ibn Khaldun proceeds to give a dozen arguments for the *superiority* of nomads. They are "closer to being good than sedentary people. . . . closer to the first natural state and more remote from the evil habits that have been impressed upon the souls [of sedentary people] through numerous and ugly, blameworthy customs. . . . Sedentary life constitutes the last stage of civilization and the point where it begins to decay. . . . Bedouins are more disposed to courage than sedentary people" because "the reliance of sedentary people upon laws destroys their fortitude and power of resistance."

This is exemplified by dumb animals, such as gazelles, wild buffaloes, and donkeys, that are domesticated. When they cease to be wild as the result of contact with human beings, and when they have a life of abundance, their vigour and

¹ Claude Addas, *Ibn 'Arabi, ou La quête du Soufre Rouge* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), pp. 293–294.

violence undergo change. This affects even their movements and the beauty of their coat.²

The beauty of their coat! Thus, behind his politique of High Culture and Order, Ibn Khaldun reveals an aesthetic of wildness. The world of Islam, even in the language of the Koran, is the world of the bazaar and the merchant. Some have said that Islam *ennobles* the merchant. And yet it is also a religion of Outer and Inner (*zahir* and *batin*), and the structure of the esoteric sometimes seems paradoxically to contradict that of the outward form. On the other side of the figure of the Merchant lies that of the Nomad, proudly disdainful of manual labor, of buying and selling — interested only in poetry and cattle rustling. The typical Moslem — urban and mercantile — distrusts the shifting shiftiness of the Bedu. And yet the despised alien is always the secretly desired Other — almost as if within every busy fat bazaari there's a thin languid wanderer longing for expression. Islam is permeated with a nostalgia for departure.

Forgetful heart
sleep not too much
in this wayside inn;
listen: the alarm:
get up, pack:
the caravan goes . . .
. . . Saddle
your camel.

— Hakim Sana'i

Confronted by this paradox from its very origins, Islam would set out to reclaim and even redeem the vagabondish personality within itself; Islam would have to manifest the possibility of *holy wandering*. Mohammad's youthful caravaning becomes the *hegira*, the *mir'aj* and the *hajj* of his prophethood. Unlike other city slickers he knows how to survive in the desert, in caves, on the march, spurred by God to a restlessness even more intense than that of the Bedouin. No other Meccan prophet has ever spoken their language, of distances and empty spaces, a pure Arabic of the desert, untainted by urban decay. He is one of them. "Be in this world as a traveler," he says, "a passer-by; and reckon yourself as of the dead." The creed of a nomad warrior.

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² Ibid., p. 107.

R. W. Bulliet has shown (in his fascinating and obsessive study, *The Camel and the Wheel*), that Islam occupied a world which had forgotten the use of wheeled vehicles. Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Battuta, Ibn 'Arabi — none of their traveling was accomplished in carts or carriages, but on foot, by ship, or most typically by camel. Aside from the wealth of historical, economic, and ecological reasons Bulliet has collected to explain this mystery, he offers the interesting clue that camels are associated with the world of the djinn (the lost gods of those pre-Semitic peoples who first domesticated the camel), and thus with the Imaginal Realm. The wheel, which is forever returning to the same place, must appear by comparison a mechanistic and worldly device, fit transport for corrupt urbanites perhaps, but essentially ignoble. The disappearance of the wheel from Islamdom was a triumph of integral nomadism and its aesthetic taste, its *style*. Moreover it was a triumph of the spirit, and even of magic, over the rationalism of Classical Antiquity. The wheel never leaves the flatness of the mundane, while the camel is capable of taking us into the unknown, into the voyage-as-dream.

"The caravan departs . . ." In that phrase is embedded an entire *poetics of wandering*. Such a concept might have occurred to G. Bachelard, had he scrutinized Islamic literature as he did architecture, fire, quantum mechanics, or childhood dreams. Perhaps we may add his *Poetics of Space* to his *Poetics of Reverie* — under the sign of his theory of the Imagination — and produce something like a poetics of wandering. And for evidence we may look to the texts of those Moslems who, above all others, interiorized the image of the sacred traveler — the dervishes. For there exists a kind of Sufism we might call *nomadosophy*, in which the entirety of the spiritual project is expressed in the symbolism of the voyage — the Path, the Wayfarer, the Journey to, from, and *in* God, the spiritual Stations (which are often compared with caravanserais) — surely no other spiritual Way has ever been so heavily perfumed with the romance of travel.

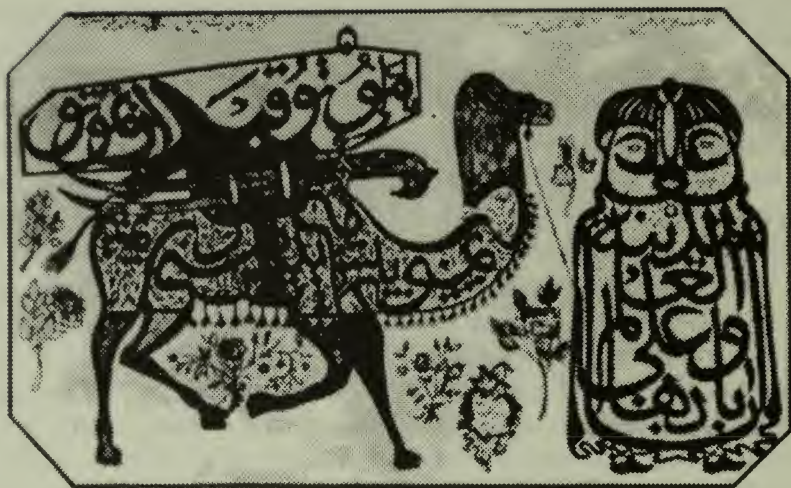
I have wandered after

Love's Caravan:

the whining of the lute in my ear

is a distant camel bell.

— Khusravi, *Kings of Love*



A strangely veiled Iman 'Ali leads his camel, which carries his coffin and his sword, Zulfikar, in this Bektashi calligramme from the wall of a nineteenth-century Turkish coffeehouse. From Dierl. op. cit.

2 The Camel Not the Wheel

The travels of Naser Khusraw, Ibn 'Arabi, and Ibn Battuta³ are spread out roughly over three centuries, but in many respects they might have been contemporaries. After its early period of rapid expansion, up until the Mongol invasions, and even afterward, their world subsisted in a kind of *pax islamica* that made travel both necessary for administrative reasons (Ibn Battuta held the position of *kadi* in Morocco, India, the Maldives, and China) but also for spiritual reasons. "Seek knowledge, even in China," the Prophet said — and now that the way even to China was open, seekers would take him at his literal word.

The Roman Empire consisted of a webwork of roads centered on a point of political power: all roads lead to Rome. Islamdom, however, was a net rather than a web. It had a ceremonial center — the Caliphate — and a spiritual center — Mecca — but myriad points of political organization. In fact Islam did not compare itself with Rome, but rather found a pre-echo of itself in the empire of Alexander, not only for geographical reasons but also because of a spiritual affinity. It was Alexander, not Caesar, who flew to the Moon in a chariot drawn by swans (like a prophet's *mir'aj*), who set out to conquer Hyperborea and the Fountain of Life — an alchemical quest of great importance for our

³ See R. E. Dunn's delightful *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta, A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986), p. 155.

Sufi travelers. Caesar faced West, Alexander East, which means not just the continent of Asia but also the Orient of magic and dream. In the mythopoesis of the *Iskandernama*, Alexander seeks not merely glory but illumination, as if to conquer knowledge by the sword. Muhammad succeeds where the Macedonian fails because for the Prophet knowledge *is* a sword.

In the Sinbad cycle of *The 1001 Nights* we can taste a little of the actual texture of travel in the long summer of Islamdom. Wherever the adventurous sailor goes he finds the unknown, the miraculous, the stupendously amazing and unexpected; and yet wherever he goes he finds Moslems, bazaars, caravans, the Arabic language. Our real-life travelers saw marvels too. Ibn Battuta caught sight of the *rukḥ*, Sinbad's giant bird, from his ship somewhere in the South China Sea. Yet for most of his voyaging he was able to move from caravanserai to caravanserai along trade and pilgrimage routes that cut through borders and regimes, which outlasted dynasties — or else from Sufi hospice to hospice, along chain lines of affiliation that spanned whole seas and continents. Ibn Battuta was a gentleman Sufi (he'd collected *khirqas* or Cloaks-of-initiation from both the Rifa'i and Suhrawardi Orders), which assured him of useful connections from Tangier to Canton. In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of his travels was the way in which he kept running into people he knew. Once, lost, freezing, threatened by bandits and unable to speak the local lingo, he bumped into a former "acquaintance," a dervish, "an Arabic-speaking chap" (from what corner of the world we are not told)," who promptly saved him and his companions. Another time he found an old friend of the family from Morocco living as a merchant in China. Unless shipwrecked or fallen into the hands of some (rare) ungenerous sultan or governor, Ibn Battuta's typical problem was not *finding* hospitality but *avoiding* too much of it. In Turkey his hosts were usually *fityan*, social clubs of young bachelors devoted to chivalry and Sufism, and above all to the care and protection of wanderers. Once, "as we passed through one of the bazaars, some men came down from their booths and seized the bridles of our horses. Then certain other men quarreled with them for doing so, and the altercation between them grew so hot that some of them drew knives. All this time we had no idea what they were saying, and we began to be afraid of them. . . . At length God sent us a man, a pilgrim, who knew Arabic, and I asked him what they wanted of us. He replied that they belonged to the *fityan*, that those who had been the first to reach us were the associates of [one club], while the others were the associates of [another club], and that each party wanted us to lodge with them. . . . Finally they came to an agreement to cast lots, and that we should lodge first with the one whose lot was drawn."⁴

This *ease* of travel within the oecumene of Islam did not really begin to decline till the sixteenth century, and remnants of it survive even into our time.

⁴ Ibid., p. 150.

In the 1970s I met a dervish in Mysore, southern India, who'd walked there from Kabul, and he mentioned having walked to Iran once as well.

The most interesting reasons for travel in Islamdom are always spiritual reasons — in this sense all travels become prolongations or mirrorings of the *hajj*, journey to the Center which is also everywhere. The concept of the *map* rises in the West as an abstract and rational grid laid over real territory for purposes of control — while for the medieval Islamic pilgrim the map is not an abstraction but a spiritualization of space, an interiorization of the sacred landscape. The purpose of Western map writing is to *erase* the areas of *terra incognita*, to fill in those sinister gaps in the grid. But for the pilgrim the goal of the pilgrimage is always “unknown” no matter how many times it is “discovered” or even colonized and settled. It is this which gives our medieval travelogues their air of constant *surprise*, structurally so reminiscent of the magical narrative of the *Nights*.

For Naser Khusraw the voyage begins in reverie, dream, vision:

I was a clerk by profession and one of those in charge of the sultan's revenue service. In my administrative position I had applied myself for a period of time and acquired no small reputation among my peers.

In the month of Rabi' II in the year 437 [October 1045], . . . I set out from Marv on official business to the district of Panj Deh in Marv Rud, where I stopped off on the very day there happened to be a conjunction of Jupiter and the lunar node. As it is said that on that day God will grant any request made of him, I therefore withdrew into a corner and prayed two *rak'ats*, asking God to grant me true wealth. When I rejoined my friends and companions, one of them was reciting a poem in Persian. A particular line of poetry came into my head, and I wrote it down on a piece of paper for him to recite. I had not yet handed him the paper when he began to recite that very line! I took this to be a good omen and said to myself that God had granted my behest.

From there I went to Juzjanan, where I stayed nearly a month and was constantly drunk on wine. (The Prophet says, “Tell the truth, even if on your own selves.”) One night in a dream I saw someone saying to me, “How long will you continue to drink of this wine, which destroys man's intellect? If you were to stay sober, it would be better for you.”

In reply I said, “The wise have not been able to come up with anything other than this to lessen the sorrow of this world.”

“To be without one's senses is no repose,” he answered me. “He cannot be called wise who leads men to senselessness. Rather, one should seek out that which increases reason and wisdom.”

“Where can I find such a thing?” I asked.

“Seek and ye shall find,” he said, and then he pointed toward the *qebla* and said nothing more. When I awoke, I remembered everything, which had truly made a great impression on me. “You have waked from last night's sleep,” I said to myself. “When are you going to wake from that of forty years?” And I reflected that until I changed all my ways I would never find happiness.⁵

⁵ Naser-e Khusraw, *Book of Travels* [*Safarnama*], translated by W. M. Thackston, Persian Heritage Series, (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1986), pp. 1–2.

As an Ismaili, Naser Khusraw was secretive about many aspects of his itinerary, but there is no mistaking his intention that we should read his *Safarnama* as the record of a spiritual trajectory. By page two he has already visited the tomb of Bayazid Bastami; soon thereafter, a mosque "said to have been built by Oways Qarani" in northern Syria:

In the mountains we saw a spring that they say flows every year after the middle of Sha'ban. For three days it flows, after which there is not a drop of water until the next year. Many people go there on pilgrimage and seek propitiation of God. They have built edifices and pools there. Passing on from that place, we came to a field covered with narcissus in bloom, and the entire place looked white because of all the flowers. . . .

Thence we went to Byblos, which is a triangular city with one angle to the sea. Surrounding it is a very high, fortified wall. All around the city are date palms and other tropical trees. I saw a child holding both a red and a white rose, both in bloom, and that was on the 5th of the last Persian month, Esfandarmadh, old reckoning, of the year 415 of the Persian calendar.⁶

In this alchemical symbol, the marriage of sulphur and mercury under the Angel's gaze, Naser perhaps traces a sign of his journey's goal.

In Lebanon he finds the tombs of Old Testament prophets in a dangerous region of bandits and wild hills; in Jerusalem he meditates on the *mir'aj*:

They say that on the night of the heavenly ascent, the Prophet first prayed in the Dome of the Rock and placed his hand on the Rock. When he had come out, the Rock rose up because of his majesty. He put his hand on the Rock, and it froze in its place, half of it being still suspended in the air. From there the Prophet came to the dome that is attributed to him and mounted the Boraq, for which reason that dome is so venerated. Beneath the Rock is a large cave where candles are kept burning. They say that when the Rock moved to rise up, this space was left, and, when it froze, this cave remained.⁷

Cairo is the high point of his journey — there he sees everywhere traces of the glory of the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim, the mad alchemist who had vanished into the desert not many years before. Naser tells us nothing of his secret doings there, his initiations into higher spheres of Ismaili propaganda, but instead expiates on the beauties of architecture, the richness of the bazaars:

I saw the following fruits and herbs, all in one day: red roses, lilies, narcissi, oranges, citrons, apples, jasmine, basil, quince, pomegranates, pears, melons, bananas, olives, myrobalan, fresh dates, grapes, sugarcane, eggplants, squash, turnips, radishes, cabbage, fresh beans, cucumbers, green onions, fresh garlic, carrots, and beets. No one would think that all of these fruits and vegetables could be

⁶ Ibid., pp 12–13.

⁷ Ibid., p. 33.

had at one time, some usually growing in autumn, some in spring, some in summer, and some in fall. I myself have no ulterior motive in reporting all this, and I have recorded what I saw with my own eyes.⁸

Naser now moves on to Mecca, where he remains for a while as a professional Pilgrim-guide, then sets out to return to Persia by a strange and difficult route through some of the emptiest desert in Arabia (where he passes the ruins of the house of Layla) on his way toward the mysterious city of Lhasa, stronghold of the Qarmatians. These Ismaili schismatics once stole the Black Stone from the Kaaba in Mecca, and they were sworn enemies of the Fatimid Caliphate in Cairo. No doubt Naser had been ordered to spy on them.

Now, on the wild margins of the Islamic world, he begins to suffer.

On the 5th of Rabi' 1442 [28 July 1050], having gone eight parasangs south-east, we came to a station called Dayqa, which is in a valley in the desert and surrounded on two sides by wall-like mountains. Between the two is an open space one hundred cubits wide where a well had been dug; the water was plentiful but not very good. Past this place there are five days of desert with no water whatsoever, so each person had to draw a jar of water. Next we came to a station called Hawd, which is a stone mountain with two holes from which water flows. The water stays in a pool and is fresh, but someone has to go inside one of the holes to bring out water for the camels. It had been seven days since the camels had been watered or fed, since there had been no [water or pasturage]. The camels stopped once every twenty-four hours, from the time the sun got hot in the day until the afternoon prayer, and they proceeded the rest of the day and night. The stopping-places are all known, because you cannot stop just anywhere, since there might not be anything to burn, and only in stopping-places can camel dung be found to burn for cooking. It was almost as though the camels themselves knew that if they poked along they would die of thirst; they did not need to be driven and, setting their own direction, went of their own accord, although there was no trace whatsoever of a road. . . .⁹

After enduring much hardship and suffering great discomfort, on the 23rd of Safar [6 July] we came to Falaj, a distance of 180 parasangs from Mecca. Falaj lies in the middle of the desert and had once been an important region, but internal strife had destroyed it. The only part left inhabited when we arrived was a strip half a parasang long and a mile wide. Inside this area there were fourteen fortresses inhabited by a bunch of filthy, ignorant bandits. These fourteen fortresses had been divided up between two rival factions who were constantly engaged in hostilities. They claimed to be the "Lords of al-Raqim" mentioned in the Koran. They had four irrigation canals for their palm grove, and their fields were on higher ground and watered from wells. They plow with camels, not cows. As a matter of fact, I never saw a cow there. They produce very little in the way of agriculture, and each man has to ration himself with two seers of grain a day. This is baked as bread and suffices from the evening prayer until the next evening, as in the

⁸ Ibid., p. 54.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 64–65.

month of Ramadan, although they do eat dates during the day. I saw excellent dates there, much better than in Basra and other places. These people are extremely poverty stricken and destitute; nonetheless, they spend the whole day fighting and killing each other. . . .

I stayed four months in this Falaj under the worst possible conditions: nothing of this world remained in my possession except two satchels of books, and they were a hungry, naked, and ignorant people. Everyone who came to pray brought his sword and shield with him as a matter of course. They had no reason to buy books. . . .

We had almost given up hope of ever being able to get out of that desert, the nearest trace of civilization in any direction being two hundred parasangs away through fearful, devastating desert. In all those four months, I never saw five maunds of wheat in one place. Finally, however, a caravan came from Yamama to take goat's leather to Lahsa. Goat's leather is brought from the Yemen via Falaj and sold to merchants. An Arab offered to take me to Basra, but I had no money to pay the fare. It is only two hundred parasangs to Basra from there, and the hire for a camel was one dinar, whereas a good camel can be bought outright for two or three dinars. Since I had no cash with me, they took me on credit on condition that I pay thirty dinars in Basra. I was forced to agree to these terms, although I had never in my life so much as set foot in Basra!

The Arabs packed my books and seated my brother on a camel, and thus, with me on foot, we set out, headed toward the ascent of the Pleiades. The ground was flat, without so much as a mountain or hill, and wherever the earth was a bit harder, there was rainwater standing in pools. As these people travel night and day, without the slightest trace of a road visible, they must go by instinct. What is amazing is that with no indication or warning, suddenly they come upon a well.¹⁰

Lhasa is not much of an improvement. Naser hates the heretics so much he claims they never bathe, and that they eat dogs and cats. Lack of funds again keeps him and his brother immobile, and when they finally make their escape to Basra "we were as naked and destitute as madmen, for it had been three months since we had unloosed our hair" — or unloused it, either, no doubt.

Finally,

On Tuesday the 26th of Jomada II 444 [23 October 1052], after having had little or no hope and having at times fallen into perilous circumstances and having even despaired of our lives, we were all together again and joyful to see each other. We thanked God for that, and on that same day we arrived in Balkh, wherefore I composed these lines of poetry:

Though the toil and travail of the world be long
 An end will doubtless come to good and bad.
 The spheres travel for us day and night:
 Whatever has once gone, another comes on its heels.
 We are traveling through what can be passed
 Until there comes that journey that cannot be bypassed.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 84-86.

The distance we traversed from Balkh to Egypt and thence to Mecca and then via Basra to Fars and finally back to Balkh, not counting excursions for visiting shrines and so on was 2,220 parasangs. I have recorded my adventures as I saw them. If some of what I heard narrated by others does not conform to the truth, I beg my readers to forgive me and not to reproach me. If God grants me success in making a journey to the East, what I may see will be appended hereto, if God the One wills.

Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe, and prayers be upon Mohammad and his House and Companions all!¹¹

Both Ibn 'Arabi and Naser Khusraw are "esoteric travelers," but Shaykh al-Akbar is not such a practical and straightforward guide as Naser; which is why we've given in to the temptation to quote the *Safarnama* at such length. Still, Ibn 'Arabi was clearly acquainted with the hardships as well as the marvels of wayfaring. In a treatise which symbolizes the Sufi path as a *Journey To The Lord Of Power* he says:

Know that since God created human beings and brought them out of nothingness into existence, they have not stopped being *travelers*. They have no resting place from their journey except in the Garden or the Fire, and each Garden and Fire is in accordance with the measure of its people. Every rational person must know that the journey is based upon toil and the hardships of life, on afflictions and tests and the acceptance of dangers and very great terrors. It is not possible for the traveler to find in this journey unimpaired comfort, security, or bliss.

For waters are variously flavored and weather changes, and the character of the people at every place where one stops differs from their character at the next. The traveler needs to learn what is useful from each situation. He is the companion of each one for a night or an hour, and then departs. How could ease be reasonably expected by someone in this condition?¹²

It would seem that Ibn 'Arabi too knew of wretched wastelands, stifling nights in flea-ridden hotels, seasickness perhaps, homesickness, loneliness, hunger, and all the other digestive troubles of the traveler. And yet like Naser, however narrow the escape from "peril and despair," he was always ready once again to set out on a "journey to the East."

3 The Flying Carpet

Before discussing Ibn 'Arabi as a special sort of wanderer, we should first take note of him as a typical example of a huge class of *Muslim Travelers*, a task pre-

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 103–104.

¹² Ibn 'Arabi, *Journey to the Lord of Power*, translated by R. T. Harris (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 1981), pp. 27–28.

pared for us by a recent book of that title, and specifically by S. I. Gellens's good essay, "The Search for Knowledge in Medieval Muslim Societies."¹³ This search originated of course in the prototype of the Prophet, with his *hejira*, *haji* and *mir'aj*, and in the Koran ("We cause the caravans to set forth in winter and summer," CVI/2), and in the *hadith* ("Those who go out in search of knowledge will be in the path of God until they return"). This special category of *travel for knowledge*, and the text or travelogue, which is its natural product, are known as *rihla* or *talab al-'ilm*. According to Gellens, "the *rihla* was the central feature of Spanish Muslim intellectual life." Spain felt itself somehow perched at a far-distant and peripheral edge of *Dar al-Islam*, with a corresponding attraction towards the "centers" such as Tunis, Egypt, and of course Mecca. Moreover, the travel that began as a means of "refreshment" gradually became "an unavoidable necessity" for the preservation of Spain's Islamic identity, in light of the ever-increasing encroachment of Spanish Christianity's crusades against the Saracen. Spanish Islam, in fact, had entered its decline and decadence; the 'ulema were beginning to emigrate to North Africa in droves, and the biographical dictionaries of the period "show a 'diaspora' of Spanish . . . Muslims who never returned home." The Spanish travelers were typically "heavily urbanized . . . and solidly middle class," drawn from among the literati and Maliki jurists rather than the aristocracy or the "masses." In a historical and sociological sense, therefore, Ibn 'Arabi's travels amount to nothing very extraordinary. However, when we turn from pedestrian accounts of various peripatetic *mulahs* and *qazis* to the texts of our Shaykh al-Akbar, we at once find ourselves far removed from any statistical norms, and plunged into a realm of romantic magic. Ibn 'Arabi's "travel in search of knowledge" was aimed at something other than the mere collection of *hadith* or legal textbooks. He was looking for places where the mundane world of maps and of ordinary consciousness is touched by another world. He was seeking doorways into the *Mundus Imaginalis*, and thus his writings belong not to the genre of religious travel, but to the poetics of Sufi wandering.

Ibn 'Arabi is the Sinbad of Sufism — in search of wisdom rather than gold, saints rather than sorcerers — almost obsessive in his thirst for adventure and his impulse to fascinate an audience with tall tales. By tall tales I don't mean fiction, for a true Sinbad has no need of actual falsehood — his tales are all true, especially the most impossible. But a Sinbad must tell his tale, and a tale is an aesthetic unity devoid of any merely gratuitous marvel or meaningless coincidence. Tall tale tellers elevate themselves and their narratives above the level of quotidian mundanity, just as they themselves are always "larger than life":

¹³ In D. F. Eickelman and J. Piscatori, eds., *Muslim Travelers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 50–65.

they never fall beneath the truth, but rather rise triumphantly above it, truer than true.

The story of Ibn 'Arabi's meetings with Averroés is one such tale; his Meccan love affair with Nizam Ayn al-Shams another; his discovery of Sufism's Hidden Hierarchy yet another. Each of these narratives describes a particular *trajectory* in the shaykh's life — "the Journey to the Center," for example, or "the Journey to the Orient." One such trajectory, which weaves itself through the fabric of his various voyages like a recurring leitmotif, may be called "the Journey with Khezh" (or Khadir). As young Muhi'yoddin departs for the first time from Spain he stands on a cliff overlooking the sea, and a grand vision of all his future adventures passes before his eyes, even specific faces and details. He departs thus from Algiciras (Jazirat al-Khadra') and Gibraltar, the "green isle" where, according to certain Moslem geographers (as we learn with delight from Claude Addas), Khezh is said to have come with Moses to rebuild the wall of the two orphans.¹⁴ Ibn 'Arabi, who was then already an accomplished Sufi — and had actually met Khezh once in the bazaar of Seville — thus begins his travels in a most pleasingly aesthetic manner with a precognitive vision at a highly dramatic and symbolic spot of "sacred geography" under what might be called a *Khadirian Sign*, green, watery, and vibrating with magic. At once we enter the world Mircea Eliade characterized as *in illo tempore* or "once upon a time," a state announced in Persian tales with the paradoxical phrase *yek-e bud yek-e nabud* — "Once there was, once there wasn't" — a world of lucid-dreaming-while-walking-and-awake in which every occurrence, every bit of landscape is saturated with meaning.

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The Trickster archetype laughs and clowns, and this laughter in itself functions as a source of healing and inspiration for the Trickster's people. But this laughter also masks a deeper function, one which would be *scary* if not for the jokes and eccentricities that surround it and lighten it. The Trickster brings dangerous wisdom; the Trickster is an *ambiguous* culture hero.

G. K. Chesterton once said of Christianity that laughter will take you to the gates of Heaven — but not *through* them; the Prophet Muhammad once said that "God loveth a good jest." This basic underlying difference in attitude toward humor surfaces in the variant personalities of Christian and Moslem saints. Would it be fair to say that Christian saints weep, while the Sufis share with Zen adepts a tendency to laugh? A gross overgeneralization, no doubt — but not without a certain grain of insight.

When you say the name of Khezh (or Khadir) in company you should always add the greeting "Salaam aliekum!" since *he may be there* — immortal and any-

¹⁴ Addas, *Ibn 'Arabi*, p. 141.

mous, engaged on some mysterious karmic errand. Perhaps he'll hint of his identity by wearing green, or by revealing knowledge of the occult and hidden. But he's something of a spy, and if you have no need to know he's unlikely to tell you. Still, one of his functions is to convince skeptics of the existence of the *marvelous*, to rescue those who are lost in deserts of doubt and dryness. So he's needed now more than ever, and surely still moves among us playing his great game.

From the point of view of "History of Religions" clearly Islam inherited Khezzr from earlier myths and faiths, a fact recognized by the Islamic tradition which associates him with Moses and Alexander. By the Middle Ages, however, he'd been thoroughly assimilated into the world of Islam and taken on a special role, symbolized by his two titles, "the Green Man" and "the Hidden Prophet." In particular he comes to stand for a certain kind of esoteric knowledge, which can only manifest in our banal everyday life as *shock*, either of outrage or of laughter, or both at once.

There are those who have criticized Ibn 'Arabi's kind of Sufism as positing the existence of a secret knowledge unknown even to most pious believers. Islam, say these critics, is an open religion in which the truth of God's oneness and transcendence is accessible to all. This truth, they say, could never appear to contradict revealed Law and outer Religion, could never be esoteric and gnostic. And yet the Koran itself specifically proposes the existence of such hidden knowledge, and nowhere more clearly than in the story of Moses and Khezzr (XVIII 60-81). They meet at the *barzakh* or borderland of the two oceans, that is, at the edge of the Imaginal World, and begin to travel together. But Khezzr travels in both worlds simultaneously, seeing the archetypal realities and hidden truths "behind" material reality, while Moses can perceive only the outer forms. Khezzr scuttles a ship, kills a youth, and repairs a well in a village of churlish and inhospitable folk, while Moses each time breaks his vow not to ask questions or raise objections. Finally Khezzr tells him they've reached the parting of ways and explains the secret reasons for his strange and apparently unlawful behavior. Here Moses stands for Law-bringing exoteric prophecy and Khezzr for esoteric prophecy which can appear to be "blameworthy" and even immoral to those without the eye of insight. Khezzr is one of the *afraad*, the Unique Ones who receive illumination direct from God without human mediation; they can initiate seekers who belong to no Order or have no human guide; they rescue lost wanderers and desperate lovers in the hour of need. Uways al-Qarani is their historical prototype, Khezzr their ahistorical archetype.

After telling the story of Khezzr, the Koran goes on to discuss "Dhu'l-Qarnayn" or Alexander the Great and his mythic voyages (to the land of Gog and Magog for instance), as if to remind us of the connection between Khezzr and Alexander. According to some of the *Iskandernamas*, Khezzr was the cook of Alexander's army on its ill-fated expedition into Hyperborea, the northern

land of darkness, in search of the fountain of immortality. The army itself succumbs to hardship and desert wastes as they traverse a series of mono-colored lands where all rocks and trees are red or all Oz-like green. At last the conqueror and the cook are left alone to plunge ahead into the final Stygian realm, which might be called the alchemical *nigredo* — and also simultaneously the *Nur-e siyah* (Black Light or Sun at Midnight) — the lowest and highest stages of the Path, which meet and are one, like the head and tail of the Ourobouros serpent. The two become separated in the eternal night, Alexander slashing about him with his sword, determined to conquer the unknowable, while Khezr simply wanders with an open heart. Here the legend shares a specific trope with the Koran: Khezr washes two dried fish in a pool he finds in the forest — and the fish come to life and swim merrily away chasing each other's tails (another Ourobouros-like emblem of eternity). Khezr drinks from the spring and attains immortality. Alexander in a jealous rage orders Khezr thrown into the sea, but the cook becomes a fishy monster and swims safely away. Now he wanders the earth dressed in green, and wherever his foot falls on barren ground, flowers and herbs spring up. Like many of the djinn (whom he somehow resembles, although a creature of water rather than fire), Khezr recognizes in Muhammad the perfect "meeting of the two seas," the alchemical union of esoteric and exoteric prophecy — and the Hidden One is now, of course, a Moslem.

Some have identified Khezr with St. George — but he might more accurately be seen as both St. George and the dragon in one figure. Nature, for esoteric Islam, does not need to be *pinned down* like some biology specimen or household pest — there exists no deep moral struggle between Nature and Order in the Islamic worldview. The "spirits" of Nature, such as Khezr and the djinn — who are in a sense the *principles* of natural power — recognize in the Muhammadan Light that green portion of the spectrum upon which they themselves are also situated. If Christian moralism "fixes" Nature by "killing it," Islam proceeds by conversion — or rather, by transmutation. Nature maintains its measure of independence from the merely human and moral sphere, while both realms are bathed in the integrative and salvific light of Muhammadan *knowledge*. Nowadays Khezr might well be induced to reappear as the patron of modern militant eco-environmentalism, since he represents the fulcrum or nexus between wild(er)ness and the human/humane. Rather than attempt to moralize Nature (which never works because Nature is amoral), Khadirian Environmentalism would rejoice simultaneously both in its utter wildness and its "meaningfulness" — Nature as *tajalli* (the "shining through" of the divine into creation; the manifestation of each thing as divine light), Nature as an aesthetic of realization. Khezr is the embodiment of the hadith "Three things of this world delight the heart: water, green things, and a beautiful face." He is also, as we shall see, the very patron and personification of Sufi travel.

Ibn 'Arabi not only knows about Khezr, he knows his Islamic name: Ballya ibn Malikan. "He was in an army whose commander sent him to look for water, which they lacked. He found the Water of Life, and drank it — thus it happens that he still lives now — for he was ignorant that God granted longevity to anyone who drank that water. I met him in Seville, where he taught me to submit to spiritual masters and not to contradict them."¹⁵

Young Ibn 'Arabi disagrees with one of his teachers, Shaykh 'Uryabi, about the identity of one of the Hidden Hierarchy of Sufism. They even raise their voices in argument. Later, as he strides angrily through the bazaar, someone sidles up to him and whispers in his ear. At once he returns to the shaykh and apologizes. "O Abu Abdollah (Ibn 'Arabi)," the old shaykh addresses him, "must Khezr himself come to correct you each time you disagree with me?"

As it happens, Ibn 'Arabi is right about the identity of "So-and-So," the shaykh wrong. At first it would seem that Khezr has advocated blind obedience to authority, even wrongful authority. But in fact a much subtler, more paradoxical, and typically Khadirian point has been made. "So you're *right*," Khezr seems to tell Ibn 'Arabi. "So what? Why bother to bolster your ego by arguing the point with 'Uryabi, a man who certainly knows more than you in some respect (if not in this), with the result that both of you both lose your temper and gain nothing. It is as if a traveler voyaged to a foreign land only to disagree with the people and criticize their customs, rather than keep an open mind, enjoy himself and perhaps learn something of value. *Adab* ('courtesy') is neither to quarrel nor to submit blindly, but *to share*. *Adab* is reciprocity, harmony, the art of living with others to the mutual benefit of self and others." Elsewhere Ibn 'Arabi comments, "When Khezr said to Moses, 'what thou hast never encompassed in knowledge' (XVIII, 68), he meant to say in effect that I have a knowledge taught to me by God and unknown to you, and you have a knowledge taught to you by God and unknown to me. This is *tasting* (*dhawq*)."

When you enter into this waystation, you join with a group of the messengers and you receive sciences from their specific tasting which you did not possess. For you these will be an unveiling, just as for them these had been a tasting. You gain from them the science of proofs and marks, so nothing is hidden from you in earth or in heaven when He discloses Himself to you. On the contrary, you distinguish and recognize each thing, while others, who have not reached this station, are ignorant of it. This is a knowledge of unveiling, since you witness it through the mark (*'alama*). You do not see it from yourself, since it is not your own tasting.¹⁶

Ibn 'Arabi's second meeting with Khezr took place in Tunis in 1194 .

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁶ W. C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 221.

I was in a boat in the port of Tunis. I had a pain in my stomach, but the people were sleeping so I went to the side of the boat and looked out over the sea. Suddenly I saw by the light of the moon, which was full that night, someone coming towards me on the surface of the water. Finally he came up to me and stood with me. First he stood on one leg and raised the other and I could see that this leg was not wet. Then he did the same with the other leg. After talking to me for a while [in his own language, he saluted] me and went off, making for a lighthouse on top of a hill over two miles distant from us. This distance he covered in two or three steps. I could hear him praising God on the lighthouse. He had often visited our Shaikh al-Kinani, an elder of the order who lived at Marsa 'Idun, from whose house I had come that evening. When I returned to the town a man met me who asked me how my night with [Khezzr] on the boat had been, what he had said to me and what I had said to him.¹⁷

As for the third meeting,

I was walking along the coast with a companion who denied the miracles performed by the righteous. On the way we stopped at a ruined mosque to perform the noon prayer. As we went in there arrived a company of those who seclude themselves from men, who were also intending to perform the prayer. Among them was the man who had spoken to me on the sea and whom I had been told was Khezzr. Among them also was a man of great worth, superior in station even to Khezzr, whom I had met and befriended before. I rose to greet him and he followed suit, showing joy at having met me — and then he stepped forward to lead the prayer. After we had finished, this man stood to leave, and I followed him to the door of the mosque (on the west, facing the ocean, in the direction of a place called Bakka). As I stood talking with him by the door I saw the man whom I'd been told was Khezzr take a small prayer carpet which he'd found in the mihrab of the (ruined) mosque; he spread it out in midair some seven cubits above the ground, and stood on it to perform his supererogatory prayers. 'Do you see that man and what he's doing?' I asked my traveling-companion (the skeptic). He begged me to go and question Khezzr; so when he'd finished praying I greeted him and declaimed several verses. [. . .] He told me, 'I only did it for the sake of that unbelieving one,' pointing to my companion (who was still inside the mosque and had been watching us). . . . Afterwards we set out for Rota.¹⁸

Claude Addas suggests that the mysterious figure "higher in station than Khezzr" can only have been the Pole (*qutb*) or Axis Mundi, the chief of the Hidden Hierarchy, or one of the two Imams (of Left and Right), for Khezzr himself belongs to the third rank or function, that of the four *awtad* or Pillars of the *afraad* or Solitary Ones. Addas points out (in criticism of Henry Corbin's emphasis on Khezzr's role in Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual life) that Khezzr is not Ibn

¹⁷ R. W. J. Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia: The Ruh al-quds & al-Durrat al-fakhirah of Ibn 'Arabi* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), p. 27. With additional material in brackets adapted from Claude Addas, op. cit.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 31.

'Arabi's first or even his primary initiator. That role belongs to Jesus. But it is clear that Khezh performs a *special* function in our shaykh's life — or, to be precise, several different functions. He presides over Ibn 'Arabi's mode of travel; and he presides over a certain line of transmission and manner of initiation.

Khezh's miracles as reported first-hand by Ibn 'Arabi actually involve modes of transport — walking on water, and the "flying carpet." The specific natural law being defied in both cases is gravity. Gravity is also *gravitas*, or grave seriousness. Khezh's buoyancy, his weightlessness, is both romantic and slightly humoresque. As an immortal mortal, Khezh behaves like a figure in a dream; in fact, he behaves as we do in our happiest dreams of flying, or of the quintessence of life, "a green thought in a green shade." He resembles those late medieval paintings of vegetable people, faces made out of fruit and leaves and sunlight: slightly sinister, at once funny and beautiful. In his relations with Khezh, Ibn 'Arabi finds himself intersecting the world of a Thousand Nights and a Night; where else could we find an image like this: moonlight, an ancient lighthouse, a lateen-rigged ship at anchor, a man dressed in green strolling across the moon's light-path; our shaykh, seasick and insomniac, gaping in wonder as Khezh lifts his feet to show they're dry — a gesture worthy of Ali Baba, puckish and almost boastful. The scene in the ruined mosque is even more entertaining, Scheherazadian, straight out of Douglas Fairbanks's *Thief of Baghdad*. Here we readers of obscure ancient dusty Sufi treatises are suddenly rewarded with a moment of pure storytelling, which recreates in us the heart of a child who listens to a tale of wonder and falls asleep to dream of marvels. The flying carpet (like Buraq, Garuda, Alexander's Moon Chariot) exemplifies the soaring Imagination, the flight of sacred fancy, reverie as voyage. The Persians use the phrase *baftan o yaftan* to suggest the "weaving" of the mind and intellect as opposed to the "certainty" of intuition and unveiling. But the image of the flying carpet reminds us that weaving can also be a form of certainty. Like all crafts, weaving has magical origins, and each carpet is a sort of microcosm, a little mirror of the paradisaal garden with its fountains, herbs, tree of life, flowers and animals. The carpet is also the nomadic artform par excellence — it brings to our rooms in the city something of the lightness of desert wanderers. The prayer carpet symbolizes the fact that each Moslem is (potentially) his/her own *imam*, and that every spot on the face of the earth, or even seven cubits above it, is (potentially) sacred ground, a *hortus conclusus* or echo of paradise. The distinction (made by many commentators on Ibn 'Arabi) between capital-"I" Imagination and "mere daydreams" is perhaps exaggerated and even misleading. To distrust reverie is also to distrust the Imagination, for even the idlest daydream is open to the sudden irradiation of the divine (*tajalli*), provided the heart itself is open. It would seem that Khezh works especially through such moments, for he appears not only to the lost and desperate but also to the dreamers. "Tell me a story," says the child of the heart; and it is at this instant

that Khezz intervenes, with his enigmatic smile, to whisk us off bodily to that borderland where everyday life is penetrated by the marvelous.

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My Shaikh Abu Ya'qub ai-Kumi told me that Abu 'Imran had once reached the mountain of Qaf which surrounds the earth and that he had performed the forenoon prayer at its base and the afternoon prayer at its summit. On being asked the height of the mountain he had replied that it was three hundred years' journey high. He had said that God had girded the mountain with an enormous serpent whose tail and head were joined. Abu 'Imran's companion on this journey had said to him, 'Greet the serpent and it will return your greeting. 'Abu 'Imran had therefore greeted the serpent, whereupon the serpent had returned his greeting and enquired about Abu Madyan. [Abu Madyan was a great Sufi shaykh of North Africa, whom Ibn 'Arabi never met in the flesh.] Then he had asked the serpent how it came to know of Abu Madyan. The serpent replied, 'I am surprised at you! Is there anything on the earth which does not know of Abu Madyan? I and others have known him ever since God revealed His love and proclaimed it; indeed all things, animate and inanimate, know and love him.'

In a certain country Abu 'Imran had seen ants as large as goats and had met an old woman of Khurasan who stood on the sea while the waves washed round her legs, praising and glorifying God.¹⁹

Ibn 'Arabi begins his journeying at the farthest-west point of his world, the Hesperidean gates, the Green Isle of Khezz — and at the farthest-east point of his travels, in Mosul, Ibn 'Arabi meets a man who invests him with the power of Khadirian initiation. Thus Khezz marks the trajectory of Ibn 'Arabi's Journey to the Orient and becomes the patron of his *siyahat*, his intentional and symbolic wandering. Moreover, through his Mosulian disciple Ali ibn Abdollah al-Jami, Khezz chooses Ibn 'Arabi to carry on the transmission of a very special Sufi *silsilah* (which he also received from another source, one Taqiuddin Tawzari, who had it from Sadroddin ibn Hamawayh, who had it from his grandfather, who had it from Khezz). The object that Ibn 'Arabi received in both cases was a *khirqah* or "mantle." Nowadays the term usually implies the "patched cloak" of the Sufis, but Ibn 'Arabi's may have been more like a headscarf or shawl of cotton. Ali al-Jami bestowed it upon him in "the same garden outside Mosul, in the same place and in the same way he himself had received it from Khezz." Before that moment, Ibn 'Arabi admits, he had thought of the *khirqah* only as a symbol of companionship, i.e., a badge of acceptance into a line or order of Sufism. Now however he discovers the real purpose of such an investiture. If a shaykh wishes to cure one of his disciples or companions of some "imperfection of state," he will don a *khirqah* and meditate on the perfection of that state; then he will transfer the garment to the disciple *along with the desired state*. The

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 122-123.

Khadirian state of course consists of *'ilm laduni*, knowledge direct from God, which moreover often causes the recipient to act in strangely paradoxical and even seemingly unlawful ways. No wonder Ibn 'Arabi spent much of his stay in Mosul in the company of "madmen" and "blameworthy ones" such as Abul Hasan Thabit ibn 'Antar al-Hilli, called (by various chroniclers) "lying, stupid, gross, vain and slanderous," and who was moreover guilty of the "blasphemy" of composing an imitation of the Koran. Addas also mentions, as "a strange and curious matter," that Ibn 'Arabi lists fifteen disciples to whom he transmitted this *khirqā*, and that fourteen of them were women (including one of his wives), and that eight of them were invested in dreams.²⁰ There is something suggestively tantric in these facts, which seem to touch on "the erotic world of Faery."

Kheẓr travels with Alexander; he travels with Moses; and in a sense he travels with Ibn 'Arabi — or at least, serves as the *sign* under which Ibn 'Arabi wanders (for as the Prophet said, "My Companions are like stars; follow which you will, and be guided aright"). And as Corbin tells us (in the words of Sohrawardi), "if you *are* Kheẓr, you too can ascend Mt. Qaf without difficulty." If you have realized the "Kheẓr of your being," you may travel even to that place which is doubtless another *border* or gateway between this world and the *Mundus Imaginalis* — or, to be more precise, you may travel in both worlds simultaneously, like Kheẓr, seeing each landmark, as in a dream, suffused with significance and hidden knowledge.

It seems appropriate that Ibn 'Arabi passed on the Khadirian mantle to so many in dreams, for Kheẓr serves above all as the *initiator* of those who for some reason have no ordinary human master, those who depend on direct visionary experience to open them to the influx of *tajalli*, the "divine irradiation." There have even existed in Sufism (and in recent times) orders of dervishes who have no master but rather a teacher of dreams, a go-between who can introduce disciples to the *technique* of seeking initiation in the Imaginal World.

This technique stands the ordinary scheme of mysticism on its head — it is a backwardness. Usually initiation comes first, and only then visions and veridical dreams. This upside-down quality of Kheẓr's Way reminds us of those clown societies among the American Indians, whose humor consists of doing the opposite of everything normal, wearing shoes on their heads, talking backwards, outraging moral convention and authority: — this clowning hides a deep wisdom in ridicule and whimsy, and such societies operate under the Sign of the Trickster, using laughter to storm the gates of Heaven (or slip through like a sneak thief).

²⁰ Addas, *Ibn 'Arabi*, p. 179.

Some will say that this "crazy wisdom" serves a good purpose in a unified traditional society such as a tribe, or even medieval Islam, but that the modern world is itself a turning-upside-down, a radical form of insanity, and that we moderns must seek elsewhere for our spirituality, that we must renounce the risky dreaminess of the "blameworthy" for some more austere and disciplined Path. I see their point, but cannot wholly agree. The modern world like any world has its *ordinary* consciousness, its consensus view of reality, its bland mundanity, smugness, blind obedience to self-proclaimed authority. Every world needs its tricksters and clowns, although specific tactics may change from era to era. Every world is in danger of becoming a wet blanket, stifling all spontaneous liberating eruptions of the marvelous, of *non-ordinary* consciousness.

4 Lifting the Ninth Veil

A SLAVE GIRL OF QASIM AL-DAWLAH

She belonged to our master the Prince of the Faithful. She lived in the neighbourhood of Mecca and died there. She was unique in her time and had attained the power to cover great distances quickly. When she was away on her wanderings she would commune with the mountains, rocks and trees, saying to them, 'Welcome, welcome!' Her spiritual state was strong and she served the Folk and followed the Way with unswerving sincerity. She had the virtues of chivalry and was most strenuous in self-discipline, frequently practising day-and-night fasting. Despite this she was strong and her exertions seemed to suit her well. I have never seen one more chivalrous than her in our time. Dedicated to the exaltation of God's majesty, she attached no worth to herself.²¹

'ABD AL-SALAM AL-ASWAD THE NEGRO

This man was an itinerant. Almost always when I came to a village, I would be told, 'So-and-so has passed through here.' He never settled in any place. When I asked him about his unsettled life he told me that he found a good spiritual state in moving about.²²

There have existed various styles of Sufi travel; presumably dervishes of earlier and more "golden" eras practiced a sort of freestyle wandering, but by the medieval period *siyaha* had become a game with rules. Journeying to the Far Horizons (or the "Caravan of Summer") served as a discipline of the Path, as much as the Retreat or Audition or any other noncanonical ritual. Only more extensive research will serve to place Ibn 'Arabi along this line of evolution, but it would seem that he represents a transitional period in which the final and

²¹ Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia*, p. 154.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 138.

perfected form of intentional travel was just beginning to emerge. Of course neither Ibn Battuta, Naser Khusraw, nor Ibn 'Arabi are full-time begging dervishes — more like gentlemen with a taste for “going about the earth to meditate on the spectacle of the vestiges of bygone centuries and vanished nations,” as Ibn 'Arabi defines travel in the *Futuhat*.²³ But we may certainly learn something of Ibn 'Arabi's attitudes and even actual practice by examining Travel as a *formal* process, for our shaykh was the very model of a successful wandering Sufi, a mirror for later generations of neophytes who might hope to attain through discipline the sort of states and adventures he received as free gifts.

For Hujwiri (d. 1077), Travel was already definitely a matter of “rules”: a fully developed technique, which he includes under the rubric of the Ninth Veil. He divides all dervishes firmly into two classes, the residents and the travelers.

Chapter on the Rules of Companionship Affecting Residents.

Dervishes who choose to reside, and not to travel, are bound to observe the following rules of discipline. When a traveller comes to them, they must meet him joyfully and receive him with respect and treat him like an honoured guest and freely set before him whatever food they have, modelling their behaviour upon that of Abraham.

Chapter concerning Their Rules in Travel.

When a dervish chooses to travel, not to reside, he ought to observe the following rules. In the first place, he must travel for God's sake, not for pleasure, and as he journeys outwardly, so he should flee inwardly from his sensual affections; and he must always keep himself in a state of purity and not neglect his devotions; and his object in travelling must be either pilgrimage or war (against infidels) or to see a (holy) site or to derive instruction or to seek knowledge or to visit a venerable person, a Shaykh, or the tomb of a saint; otherwise his journey will be faulty. And he cannot do without a patched frock and a prayer-rug and a bucket and a rope and a pair of shoes (*kafsh*) or clogs (*na'layn*) and a staff: the patched frock to cover his nakedness, the prayer-rug to pray on, the bucket to cleanse himself with, and the staff to protect him from attacks and for other purposes. Before stepping on the prayer-rug he must put on his shoes or clogs in a state of purity. If anyone carries other articles, for the sake of keeping the Sunna (Apostolic custom), such as a comb and nail-scissors and a needle and a little box of antimony (*mukhula*), he does right. If, however, anyone provides himself with more utensils than those which have been mentioned, we have to consider in what station he is: if he is a novice every article will be a shackle and a stumbling-block and a veil to him, and will afford him the means of showing self-conceit, but if he is a firmly grounded adept he may carry all these articles and more.²⁴

²³ Addas, op. cit., p. 165.

²⁴ Ali B. 'uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf al-Mahjub, The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism*, translated by R. A. Nicholson (London: Luzac & Co., 1936), pp. 341–346.

No doubt Ibn 'Arabi was "firmly grounded" enough to afford a few luxuries, but he can be irritatingly vague about such details; nevertheless I imagine that Hujwiri's description would fit him closely enough, at least during such episodes as his wandering from shrine to shrine along the Tunisian coast. I wonder, however, if he always matched up to Hujwiri's advice not "to talk of the hardships which he may have suffered in travel, or discourse on theology, or tell anecdotes, or recite traditions in company, for all this is a sign of self-conceit."²⁵ Perhaps he saved it all for his memoirs.

Hujwiri covers the proper rules for eating, for walking, even for sleeping; the overall purpose of such precision must be to induce a state of permanent awareness and concentration on every detail, till it becomes *luminous* detail, part of the *tajalli* experience. The Naqshbandi dervishes call this "watching your feet." Hujwiri even goes into considerable detail about the rules of begging, a practice in which Ibn 'Arabi seems not to have indulged — although, again, he is vague about his sources of income. Was he supported by his family, a sort of Sufi remittance man? No one who wrote as much as he did can be imagined as actually working for a living, for writing was then even more an unpaid vocation than it is today.

Full-time wandering mendicant qalandars certainly already existed in Ibn 'Arabi's time. We know for example that his near-contemporary and admirer Fakhroddin Iraqi spent a portion of his youth in such company. As an annoyingly pious and learned teenager Iraqi fell in love with a younger boy among a troupe of dervishes who happened through his hometown. As we learn from his biographer:

By the age of seventeen Iraqi had learned all the sciences, both the transmitted (such as Koran, *hadith* or traditions of the Prophet, and jurisprudence) and the rational (such as logic, principles of jurisprudence, philosophy, mathematics, etc.), and had already begun to teach others. One day it happened that a company of wandering Qalandars came to the city. . . .

They began to hold one of their meetings, and with sweet melody to chant the following verses:

We've moved our bedrolls from the mosque to the
tavern of ruin;
we've scribbled over the page of asceticism and
erased all miracles of piety . . . etc.

Iraqi beheld this wild crew, and among them he spied a young boy of unequaled beauty, a boon to lovers' hearts. If the artists of China had seen those twining locks, they would have been astonished. Again Iraqi, like an eagle, stared

²⁵ Ibid., p. 347.

at the boy, and the bird of his heart fell into the snare of love. The flame of desire caught at the haystack of his reason and consumed it. He tore off his turban and robe (the dress of a theological student) and gave them to the Qalanders, saying

How if my bosom friend, my beloved,
my intimate, how sweet, if it were you.
 If you compounded a medicine for my
 heart,
 racked with pain, if you cured my soul,
 how sweet.
I would swell so with joy the earth could not hold
 me
if for just one moment you would drink my desire . . . etc.

After some time, the Qalanders left Hamadan and set out for Isfahan. No sooner had they vanished than Iraqi was overcome with longing for them, and for one in particular. He began by throwing away all his books . . .

In short, like one already detached from the world, he set off in pursuit of those wanderers, and had walked two miles when he caught up with them. Whereupon he recited:

I have seen that the lane of piety stretches out,
 far, far into the distance;
My dearest boy, can you not show me then
 the way of the madman? (etc.)

The Qalanders received him with great joy. At once they sat him down, shaved his hair and eyebrows (an offense against pious custom) and, in short, made him one color with themselves. He continued with them on their wanderings through Persia, and eventually to India.²⁶

Ibn 'Arabi's style of travel was no doubt quite different from this, and one feels that the more austere and *Sunnati* (orthodox) Sufism of North Africa induced in him a certain ambivalence toward the wilder and more heterodox manifestations of the Persian-influenced School of Love. We know that he criticized such practices as *shahed-bazi* (or "Contemplation of the Unbearded") and excessive "intoxication"; however we also know that he included Sufis of this school among his closest associates in the East.

By the eighteenth century at the latest the qalandar (or "wandering dervish") style of Travel had changed in many respects from the practice of such gentlemen as Ibn 'Arabi or such undisciplined bohemians as Iraqi's companions. Instead of a simple staff and bucket the dervish now carried an axe (*tabarzine*) and begging bowl (*kashkul*) carved from the shell of a *coco de mer*,

²⁶ P. L. Wilson, *Scandal: Essays in Islamic Heresy* (N.Y.: Autonomedia, 1988), pp. 125-128.

both frequently engraved with calligraphy; he still wore a patched robe, but added a sash holding a small carpetbag, a special *taj* (crown) or felt cap indicating his affiliation, and also sometimes decorated with calligraphy. (Well-to-do dervishes were so covered in *text* that they became living books or signs.) On the one hand, these modern dervishes added yet more rules to Hujwiri's simpler rubric; for example some orders defined the permissible amount of time a dervish could rest in any one place — forty nights, for instance, or only one night — while others demanded such ascetic practices (which may still be seen in India today) as the wearing of heavy chains or womens' garments — or that one *literally* watch one's feet while walking. On the other hand, some orders veered even further toward the bohemian pole, indulging in hashish, opium, and wine, or wild *sama*' parties with handsome youths. A major revival of qalandarism took place in Persia in this period under the aegis of the Ni'matullahi Order, influenced in part by Indian traditions introduced by a shaykh from Hyderabad, Seyyid Ma'sum Ali Shah. Ma'sum's chief disciple, Nur 'Ali Shah Isfahani, gives this account of the Indian master's appearance in Persia:

One day, in the neighbourhood of the Dar al-'Ilm ('City of Knowledge', a name for Shiraz), I was walking, heart laden with pain and soul revelling in sorrow, helpless and obsessed with supplication, mixing the dust of the way with my tears; I was passing an alley when I noticed a man dressed in rags, clad in the cape of nakedness and the cap of signlessness. The Light of Lordship shone from his brow like a star of fortune, and he appeared quite clearly to have abandoned the thread of foresight and contrivance into the hand of Fate and bowed his head in renunciation, satisfied with his lot. A little mob of bewildered children had gathered around him, ignorant, as it were, of both the state of the moth and of the candle, throwing rocks helter-skelter at his graceful head; while he, bright star of Wisdom's Zodiac, brilliant pearl of the Jewelbox of Unity, opened his petal-lips in the smile of an unfolding rose and sang in the tones of a nightingale

'The children's stones
Have made my head a tulip garden.
It is spring-time;
The madness has begun.'

Although Nur 'Ali was young at the time of this meeting, perhaps no more than fifteen or sixteen, he had already learned the principal religious sciences from his father, and shared his desire for enlightenment. He was reputed to be, and is traditionally represented as, a beautiful youth. It is significant that his biographer (in *Riyad al-siyahah*) compares him to 'Iraqi and Awhad al-Din Maraghahi, as well as to Ahmad Ghazali, in order to describe his character. In the same way, his reputed physical beauty is also meaningful, for these statements about him and these qualities establish his reputation and position as one of the great masters of the Way of Love. Portraits of Nur 'Ali are as standardized as icons:

the same lovely, almost girlish face, framed by long tresses, the same graceful pose (leaning on his dervish axe, his begging bowl before him). They can be seen everywhere in Iran today, woven into rugs, engraved on brass trays, painted on coffee-house walls and on the sides of old horse-drawn carts in south Tehran. For Persians, Nur 'Ali has in a certain sense become one of the archetypes of devotional consciousness.²⁷

Here is one of Nur 'Ali's "on the road" songs:

We are the rainclouds streaming pearls
 Hey Mountain man hey
 We are the womb-like sea which stores them
 Hey get up move along!
 If you seek the Light of God why wander
 vainly back and forth?
 We are the Orient of Light
 Hey Great Mountain hey!
 If you seek the Hidden Mysteries
 all open and unveiled
 We are the Treasury of Secrets
 Hey get up move along!
 If your day has become like night and storm
 misted and obscure
 We are the candle to banish gloom
 Hey Mountain Man hey!
 If you see merchandise you desire
 in the Caravan of Oneness
 We are the Caravan's camel driver
 Hey get up move along!
 We are the revellers drunk and free
 of the shreds of reputation
 The wine of this tavern is ours to sell
 Hey Great Mountain hey!²⁸

Nur Ali married a beautiful girl, Bibi Hayati, who became a dervish and wandered with him; this unusual woman also composed a *divan* of charming erotic/mystic poems in which her husband becomes the "divine beloved." Their group included a "madman," the musician Mushtaq Ali Shah, who met his end stoned to death by an angry mob under the direction of a mullah deeply offended by Mushtaq's accompanying the Call to Prayer on his *sehtar*. (I knew a man in Iran whose great-great-grandfather had actually witnessed this martyrdom.) In fact many of the dervish troupe were sent to Paradise by the hands of

²⁷ Pourjavady, N., and P. L. Wilson, *Kings of Love: The History and Poetry of the Ni'matullahi Sufi Order of Iran* (Tehran: ILAP, 1978), pp. 97–98.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

outraged authority, including both Seyyid Ma'sum and Nur 'Ali Shah themselves. After the great persecution of the mid-nineteenth century (which I have described in *Kings of Love* and Hamid Algar in his *Religion and State in Qajar Iran*), qalandari Sufism almost disappeared from Persia. Dervishes gave up wandering, changed their patched cloaks for mullahs' *abas* and turbans, threw away their musical instruments, renounced dancing and begging for a living. These practices then survived mostly in Afghanistan and India, and when I visited those lands in the 1970s it was still possible to meet dervishes living in exactly the same manner as the friends of Iraqi or Nur 'Ali Shah. May they continue to flourish! — despite all wars, all puritanical reaction, all communism and capitalism, all super-highways and television. If modern dervishes are no more than "traditional hippies," still I feel that the world has a secret but absolute need for the presence of such wild free spirits, just as it needs the presence of some *wilderness*, unplanned, unmanaged, apparently profitless, chaotic as God first made it. (And both of these *needs* seem to fall under the patronage of the master traveler, Khezr himself.)

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Now that we have some picture of the outward form of Sufi travel, we may go on to "inquire within" and try to discover something of its *meaning* — and here we can turn with full confidence to the Shaykh al Akbar, who may be weak on petty detail, but never at a loss for explanations and unveilings.

To ask about the meaning of Travel — in its actual physical realization — is not exactly the same as asking about its symbolism. So permeated is Islam with the culture of travel — from that of Ibn Khaldun's bedouin to that of the Meccan pilgrims — that Sufism falls naturally into the habit of expressing the entirety of its project in terms of wayfaring (*suluk*) in which each aspect of the Journey becomes a metaphor for an aspect of the spiritual quest. Thus to discuss *suluk* is to discuss Sufism. Therefore we must confine ourselves to an investigation of the actual Sufi practice of travel or *siyaha*, and make use of the vocabulary of *suluk* only when it applies specifically to material journeying. In this sense we may say that if the Sufi path can be symbolized as wayfaring, then Travel can be interpreted as if it were, in effect, the Sufi path. As *ta'wil* (hermeneutic exegesis) can be applied to an event or physical object just as to a text or vision, so it can be applied to the events of a journey — and of course all the more to a journey consciously undertaken as a spiritual exercise. In the Arthurian Cycle the knights receive the *ta'wil* of their adventurous journeys from monk-hermits conveniently located along the paths of their random wandering. The dervish is knight and hermit in one.

Travel contains two secrets that are not really discussed by our authors, or at least only vaguely hinted at: that the traveler must maintain a psychic openness to adventure, a certain attitude of power-without-self-will (*iradah*), or perhaps

one might say “will-without-distracting-mentation.” The Traveler must not close himself up within himself in any narrowing sense — his must be an *active meditation*, like the martial arts in Taoist/Zen practice. Second, one may actually train oneself, not only to attain this state of *ch’i*, to use the Chinese expression, but also to be “lucky” in Travel, to find oneself in the way of adventure, to be always favorably positioned for what the Surrealists call the penetration of everyday life by the Marvelous.

The Traveler must achieve a state of mind (or soul) similar to that of the lucid dreamer, or as Ibn ‘Arabi calls him, the “intelligent dreamer” who knows “that in the sensory world of fixed engendered existence there are transmutations at every instant, even though the eyes and the senses do not perceive them, except in speech and movement.” W. C. Chittick comments:

People know that dreams need interpretation (*ta’bir*). The word *ta’bir* derives from the root ‘.b.r., which signifies ‘crossing over,’ hence, to traverse, to ford, to pass. The interpreter (*mu’abbir*) is he who passes from the sensory form of the dream to the meaning which has put on the clothing of form. From the same root we have ‘*ibara*’ or ‘[verbal] expression,’ which is a passage from understanding to exposition.

When the nature of the cosmos is truly ‘verified’ (*tahqiq*), the knower sees it to be a form of imagination, in need of interpretation like a dream.²⁹

“The Traveler,” says our shaykh in a passage that could refer either to *suluk* or *siyaha*, “is he who travels with his reflection in search of the signs and proofs of the existence of his Maker. In his traveling he finds no proof for that other than his own possibility.”³⁰ Ibn ‘Arabi goes on to give a metaphysical definition of “possibility,” but the term may also suggest to us the Traveler’s openness to the perception of “transmutation” and to the intuition that he needs in order to grasp the true nature of “speech and movement” and the events of the journey.

If one can travel as if one were Khezzr, even if only for moments at a time, one finds oneself traversing the borderland, the isthmus at the meeting of the two seas, the *Mundus Imaginalis* or “God’s Wide Earth.” The physical world and the imaginal world here coincide with the precise “fit” of total identification. The archetype for such an experience is of course the hajj. But for the Sufi Traveler, every journey is the hajj, every *tajalli* is the Kaaba. Every path, if it be properly understood, is *the* Path; every way, however fraught with difficulty, can be experienced as a “straight” path to realization.

All movements are straight. There is nothing but straightness and no way to opposition. . . . The “straightness” of a bow is its crookedness because of what is desired from it. Hence there is nothing in engendered existence but straightness,

²⁹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 119.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

since He who brought it into existence, God, is upon a straight path in respect of being a Lord. Though some of the paths enter into others and some become confused, they never cease being straight — the straightness of confusion and the straightness for which they came into existence. Hence the paths are in an absolute straightness which exercises its ruling property over every engendered thing.³¹

The Sufi Traveler is “begging” not just for alms but for this divine bakhshesh of signs, portents, encounters, coincidences, marvels, aesthetic shocks, spiritual insights, peak experiences, adventures (even danger), unveilings. This is why, as Hujwiri reminds us, the Prophet said, “Seek charity only from those with beautiful faces.” Above all the dervish begs for the sheer *energeia* or power needed for the very difficult and dangerous act and art of Travel, a power which might also be called joy. Ibn ‘Arabi says,

If the person is in disequilibrium his wayfaring will consist of struggle and ascetic discipline. If he is in equilibrium he will be cheerful and joyous in his wayfaring, full of gaiety and happy. Affairs which are difficult for others will be easy for him and he will not have to force himself in any of the noble character traits.³²

The simplest definition of “disequilibrium” is ill health. All travelers know the result of falling sick while on the road. Buildings that (the day before) looked like fairy palaces now appear boring and oppressive. People who seemed friendly and fascinating now strike one as dull, dishonest, downright rude, and aggressive. Landscapes saturated with romance turn grey and lifeless. One’s *will*, which yesterday skipped along with the health and insouciance of a vagabond player or gypsy minstrel, now folds up on itself like a tourist with stomach cramps. But the Traveler whose temperament, so to speak, is balanced — ah, for such a cherubic wanderer no door is closed. The native cuisine delights him, local customs amaze him, owl-haunted ruins inspire him to verse. A happy person is an attractive person. Everyone and everything is drawn to such a joyous wayfarer, from madmen and children to local tutelary spirits, the djinns of the locus or spirits of place. For one in this state, to see a tree in its suchness is to meet its dryad; to bathe in a spring is to meet its undine; to touch a rock is to meet its kobold or troll; and the campfire is the veritable salamander of flame. Now everything becomes a sign, above all a sign *of itself*, a language of the birds, a semiotics of quintessences. The calligraphy of *taj*, *kashkul*, and *tabarzine* mirrors the calligraphy of Nature, the texts of natural shrines and gardens, that “other Koran” which consists of everything in creation seen as “waymarks” or signs. And this, to paraphrase Ibn ‘Arabi, is what is meant by “tasting” — not only in the sense of direct intuitive unveiling (or reading the

³¹ Ibid., p. 301.

³² Ibid., p. 305.

text) but also in the sense of an aesthetic, a feeling, a preparedness, an art, a certain posture and gesture, an elegance of being. In this sense we began by suggesting the possibility of a *poetics of wandering*; and we have found it in this text-like relation of the wayfarer and the Wayfaring.

Only one question now remains, but I confess that for me it is the most interesting. *Suluk*, the spiritual journey itself, is always possible. But what about *siyaha* or "intentional Travel?" Does it not depend for its realization on the presence of a *terra incognita*, a true sense of the "wideness" (which is also the wildness) of "God's Earth?" And do we not live in a world that has been thoroughly *mapped*, in which everything is re-cognized and re-presented? Moreover, have we not been told that the essence of the modern is the elimination of time and distance through technology and its tyrannical unification of the psyche, its leveling and compacting, its reduction of everything to Information? In this world of the *disappearance of differences*, one must ask if the *siyaha* is still possible. And to answer this we must first pick out and examine a few luminous points in the psychic historiography of Travel in the modern world.

5 Abyssinia

Two journeys will serve to emblemize for us the secrets of modern travel. The first, which may in fact be thought of as the very first modern journey, is Rimbaud's expedition to Abyssinia. Having renounced poetry and magic along with what he thinks of as civilization, Rimbaud sets out for a land which for him is nothing but an *abyss*, an emptiness, a disappearance. He never returns. With him, Occidental culture in its highest and most refined form reaches an impossible impasse, self-destructs, and plunges back toward wildness. His goal is the "forbidden" city of Harrar, penetrated for the first time by a European (Sir Richard Burton, a convert to Sufism and perhaps the last of the great old-time travelers) only a few years before. In a sense Rimbaud makes a Journey to the East — he may even have converted to Islam — but, as 'Attar says of the Moth who finds the Flame, "he brings back no news."

The second journey consists of the last few years of the life of Nietzsche. He wandered incessantly and alone, by preference from mountaintop to mountaintop, with excursions to various sunlit Italian Renaissance cities. He too escaped from Western culture, but kept on writing (letters back home from the abyss, so to speak) for a little while, until in the streets of Turin madness overtook him, he became "Dionysus *and* the Crucified" in one blaze of consciousness, and collapsed into apparent imbecility. He too never came back.

Rimbaud's real Abyssinia and Nietzsche's metaphoric Hyperborea (which he claims as his spiritual homeland) stand for the intensity, purity, and courage of the modern traveler, faced with the death of poetry, the death of magic, "the death of God." Stalin put his bloody finger on the essence of nineteenth and

twentieth century travel when he coined the term "rootless cosmopolitan." He meant the Jews. But in this sense we are all Jews, and all our sympathy lies with the wanderers, the gypsies, and heretics, rather than with the totalitarian murderers who try to fix them in place, number them, control them, and finally exterminate them. We wander because no nation, no ideology, no culture, no religion, no philosophy holds our loyalty or pins us down in time or place. We are cut loose. We drift.

This heroic/existentialist form of travel has produced its own hideous deformed and parodic caricature, which is, of course, tourism. Tourism, in a nutshell, takes the Exotic Other and alienates you from it — by interposing tour guides, buses, schedules, and tasteless boring misinformation between you and the goal of your travel. Instead of experiencing the Other you consume a representation or even a simulation of the Other, a fake which is sold under the slogan "*Experience exotic Abyssinia!*" or words to that effect. All tourists merely tour the Abyss itself, the empty space from which meaning has vanished; they too are existentialists but they don't know it; — and therefore they become the opposite of heroes — they become *villains*. They have inherited the mantle of colonialism and are vampirizing the last "natural resource" of the exotic far-away lands and wildernesses through which they swarm: *difference*.

In the near future you will see advertisements for the latest and perhaps the final development of this process: computer-generated Virtual Reality tours. Thanks to the *speed* of Information transfer, which approaches instantaneity, movement itself will disappear from travel. Now you may visit exotic Abyssinia without even leaving the comfort of your "work station" — for just as the *leisure* of tourism is nothing but the masked production of the prison of *work*, so the computer will unite these two poles of modern oppression in one machine, from which time and space have been eliminated.

In his latest novel, *The Western Lands*, William Burroughs makes use of Egyptian, Mayan, and Islamic esotericism to resurrect the ancient Gnostic notion that Space is "good" and Time is "evil." Time is *control*, Space is *freedom*. While I would resist the Dualist implications of such a doctrine, I find it throws some light on our phenomenology of travel. The wandering Sufis in a sense escaped from time into space. A *shrine*, for example, is a place where one moment in time, one break-through of eternity into time, has been enshrined, encapsulated, preserved, and made accessible. To visit the Dome of the Rock is to participate in the present presence of the Prophet's *mir'aj*. The space remains, the hollow cave of pure space to which Naser Khusraw drew our attention — and the pilgrim enters it, leaving "profane" time behind. Mohammad "really" traveled to Paradise, but he did so outside time — and found that the jug he'd accidentally upset in his house in Arabia was still spilling its contents as he returned from Jerusalem. The tourist by contrast moves in a world of pure time without space. The International Airport is not a space, it is a

machine to control Time. The places visited are not spaces, but points of time in an itinerary — “if it’s Tuesday it must be Belgium.” The traveler in Virtual Reality however will “transcend” both space and time to enter a field of *pure mediation*. And here he/she will remain, untouched and untouching, until the final space of the body and the final time of mortality break in like rude guests upon his/her ex-stasy and reclaim him/her for the Abyss.

In contrast to this gloomy paradigm of travel’s future, and by a process of conscious rejection of its tenets, I believe that a counter-force has come into being in our century, a new tradition of travel, potentially akin to the authentic and valid wandering-art of our dervishes. The romantic aspects of Rimbaud’s and Nietzsche’s rootlessness already foretell this new (and yet primordial) possibility.

If the modern world has been thoroughly *mapped*, nevertheless we now know that maps by definition cannot be accurate (short of actual one-to-one representation, and not even then) because geography is *fractal*. That is, it cannot be measured in terms of whole dimensions, but only fractional dimensions. Similarly, although our culture appears also to have been completely mapped, so that no exotic Other remains unknown, so that all surprise and coincidence have been eliminated, I believe that culture also must be considered fractal in nature. Real life, which includes the life of the spirit, can never be finally quantified and “tamed.” *By definition* something elusive will remain still unknown and perhaps (who knows?) unknowable, hidden like the endless luminous peninsulas of the Mandelbrot Set within the fractional complexities and the sheer organic chaos of life itself, of *natura naturans*. The modern traveler (as opposed to tourist) seeks to vanish into these hidden fractal dimensions of the map of culture where the rational tyranny of Consensus and Information cannot penetrate. Unlike the ancient *qalandar* he does not “go out” in search of Mt. Qaf but rather “goes in” — not into his limited self, but into the secret hidden spaces of real life, untouched by control and mediation, where the authentic and marvelous still flourish.

Unlike today’s “homeless,” who view themselves in the light of the permissible Consensus category of “Victim,” some of our century’s uprooted have made a virtue of their fate. I retain the image of several hobos somewhere in California or the Southwest, riding a flatcar in the sun, eating stolen grapes and reading the Sunday funnies — but I cannot remember if this is from Jack London’s *The Road* or Jack Kerouac’s *On The Road*. Rail technology and automotive technology both turned out to possess hidden unplanned fractal dimensions, and thus were capable of serving as supports for authentic intentional wandering. Paul Bunyan on the mythopoeic Mississippi or Thoreau in the mountains of Maine were already traveling along the borderland which separates Sinbad’s world from that of the colonial map or the Cooks’ Tour — the Imaginal World from the Simulated World. With the poets of the 1950s the

connection emerges into consciousness: they discover the East and set out on Journeys to the Orient. Whitman plus Zen equals a new art of travel, innocent of "rules" but plunging headlong into the Unknown in search of treasure and the water of life.

Also in the 1950s certain European artists and intellectuals known collectively as Situationists created a manifesto for this kind of travel, which they called the *dérive* or "drift." As "psychogeographers" they wandered at random through city streets, following only feelings or clues or coincidences. As Guy Debord explains it,

Among the various situationist methods is the *dérive* [literally: 'drifting'], a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances. The *dérive* entails playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects; which completely distinguishes it from the classical notions of the journey and the stroll.

In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.³³

In one variation on the *dérive*, obviously inspired by Surrealism and known as "the Possible Rendezvous," two people who are unknown to each other are told they may possibly meet "someone" in a certain area during a certain time, but neither of them is given any sign of recognition; the encounter is left to chance. Perhaps they'll miss each other, or perhaps some unexpected adventure will occur, because such a "great game" (as Debord calls it) increases the chances for chance to intervene in what might otherwise be seen as a mere "random walk."

The Situationists rejected all ideology, Capitalist as well as Communist, secular, and religious. Their *drift* away from all the totalitarian absolutes of European culture — which began in a sense with Nietzsche — has been carried forward by a number of contemporary proponents of theory (a word which, we might recall, originally implied luminous *vision*). J.-F. Lyotard has coined the term "driftworks" to describe his project, which is one of perpetual discovery, of "thoughts which elude all vigilance, moving lightly toward unguarded targets, in accordance, it seems, with no declared or undeclared finality . . . guerrilla thoughts, daughters of opportunity, ever ready to exploit the slightest irregularities of the grounds they scout and refuse to invest."³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari based their work *Nomadology* in part on Ibn Khaldun's thesis of nomadism as a nucleus of power (a "war-machine") against the State and by extension against

³³ "Theory of the *Dérive*," translated by Ken Knabb, in *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981) pp. 50–54.

³⁴ J.-F. Lyotard, *Driftworks*, edited by R. McKeon (New York: Semiotext(e), 1984), p. 1.

any centralized or absolutized authority. They simply turn Ibn Khaldun on his head by arguing that the purpose of culture is not the glory of the State, as Ibn Khaldun says, but is rather to be found in the freedom and even the randomness of the nomad (as Ibn Khaldun at times seems to imply). Deleuze and Guattari, who may be called Nietzschean post-Marxist anarchists or “dada epistemologists” (to quote Feyerabend), here find themselves in harmony with our Sufi historiographer, and in honor of this odd meeting I coined the term *nomadosophy* with which to begin this essay. If such a seemingly improbable coincidence of thought can prove not only possible but elegant, we may also find ourselves on the verge of discovering a resonance between the *dérive* and the *siyaha* — and it was in anticipation of this discovery that I called the essay “Sacred Drift.” The *Buraq* is a synthesis of mule, bird, and woman — a taxonomist’s nightmare — and yet it flies.

This sacred drift, whatever it may be, has not yet fully emerged —and perhaps of necessity it cannot be defined without “killing” it. Without risking trespass upon the mysteries, therefore, I may say only that the kind of Travel Ibn ‘Arabi performed — intentional and imaginal — may have profound implications for the kind of travel in which we post-existentialists hope to discover a revalorization of all “waymarks” and an escape from alienation and mediation. We may discover a new *feng shui* in which the landscape will once again be invested with meaning, or rather with a liberatory aesthetics. Rather than speak of caravan routes or shrines we may think in terms of fractal drift and peak experiences. Rather than “rules of Travel” we may develop the art of *psychotopology*, or perhaps “the psychotopography of everyday life.” I can imagine a marginal culture of urban nomads, guardians of the wilderness, techno-gypsies — and finally the appearance of actual modern *qalandars* who will reinvent intentional and imaginal Travel. I cannot picture the details except as elements in a science fiction story — but I do not consider this mere idle fancy. My attempt at a Bachelardian poetics of wandering would be incomplete without this reverie on the future of Travel, despite the vagueness to which it is condemned. And indeed, perhaps it is not “future” at all, but already *present* — though still hidden and secret.

Does Travel have a future? If we are to believe Ibn ‘Arabi, it must. We are “all of us wayfarers,” he says in the *Futuhat*, “for there can be no end to wayfaring.” This being so, any pessimism would ill suit and serve us. It is always morning, the caravan is always departing. All we can do is share the Prophet’s prayer — “O Lord increase our amazement” — and set forth into the Bewilderness.

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

Proper Vocation

Nothing occupies us, Sir,
 save service to that cupbearer;
Saki! another round, please —
 & deliver us from Good & Evil.
God, Sir, has created no one
 without a proper vocation;
as for us, He has appointed the job
 of permanent unemployment: —
by day dancing in the light
 like motes of dust;
by night, like stars, curcumambulating
 the moon-visaged beloved.
If He wanted us to work, after all,
 He would not have created this wine;
with a skin-full of this, Sir,
 would you rush out to commit economics?
What job could a drunkard do
 other than the work of the wine itself?
that sacred vintage, transported across
 earth & heaven to the Everlasting Refuge.
Drink mere worldly wine, sleep
 one night & it passes;
drink from the flagon of the One & your head
 will follow you to the grave.
The source of all mercy, Sir,
 pours it out for free;
& these sakis treat us as sweetly
 as nursemaids their children.
Drink, my heart, & go drunk,
 wherever you go, go drunk,
introduce others to this pleasure

& God will keep you well supplied.
 Where you witness some beauty
 sit & be a mirror;
 where you see ugliness
 slip the lookinglass back in its bag.
 Wander happily about the streets
 mingling with the young &
 beautiful
 reciting, "Nay, I swear
 by this city . . . "*
 bravo!
 . . . ah, but my head,
 my head is spinning from this wine;
 I will dry up & be silent,
 I will not sit here & count blessings
 which mathematics cannot
 comprehend.

*Koran XC-1. The reference here is to Mecca as the City of Revelation — Rumi intends by extension any city or place wherein beauty and intoxication attain the power of revelation.

MAWLANA JALALODDIN RUMI

Ghazal

Oh no, an intellectual among *her* lovers!?
a beauty like her? Faugh! Impossible!
Keep the brainy ones far from her door,
keep the bath-house dung-smoke from the East Wind!
Sorry, no intellectuals admitted here. . . .
but a lover? Ah, a hundred salaams!
Intellect deliberates, Intellect reflects —
and meanwhile Love evaporates into the stratosphere.
By the time Intellect finds a camel for the Hajj,
Love has climbed Mt. Sinai.
Love comes and gags me: "Scribbler!
Forget mere verse. The star-ship departs!"

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