This is another mask.
It might fit you.
The man who wanted a prayer-mat

Once someone asked the Prophet to provide
A prayer-mat, and the best of men replied:
"The desert's arid sands are burning now.
Pray there; against the hot dust press your brow
And feel it sear your flesh; the wounded skin
Will be an emblem of the wound within."
If no scar marks your heart, the countenance
Of love will pass you by without a glance;
But heart's wounds show that on the battlefield
Your friends have found a man who will not yield."

A bird asks how long the journey is, and the hoopoe
describes the seven valleys of the Way

Another bird said: 'Hoopoe, you can find
The way from here, but we are almost blind -
The path seems full of terrors and despair.
Dear hoopoe, how much further till we're there?'

'Before we reach our goal,' the hoopoe said,
'The journey's seven valleys lie ahead;
How far this is the world has never learned,
For no one who has gone there has returned -
Impatient bird, who would retrace this trail?
There is no messenger to tell the tale,
And they are lost to our concerns below -
How can men tell you what they do not know?
The first stage is the Valley of the Quest;
Then Love's wide valley is our second test;
The third is Insight into Mystery,
The fourth Detachment and Serenity -
The fifth is Unity; the sixth is Awe,
A deep Bewilderment unknown before,

The seventh Poverty and Nothingness,
And there you are suspended, motionless,
Till you are drawn - the impulse is not yours -
A drop absorbed in seas that have no shores.

The Valley of the Quest

When you begin the Valley of the Quest
Misfortunes will deprive you of all rest,
Each moment some new trouble terrifies,
And parrots there are panic-stricken flies.
There years must vanish while you strive and grieve;
There is the heart of all you will achieve -
Renounce the world, your power and all you own,
And in your heart's blood journey on alone.
When once your hands are empty, then your heart
Must purify itself and move apart
From everything that is - when this is done,
The Lord's light blazes brighter than the sun.
Your heart is bathed in splendour and the quest
Expands a thousandfold within your breast.
Though fire flares up across his path, and though
A hundred monsters peer out from its glow,
The pilgrim driven on by his desire
Will like a moth rush gladly on the fire.
When love inspires his heart he begs for wine,
One drop to be vouchsafed him as a sign -
And then he drinks this drop both worlds are gone;
Dry-lipped he founders in oblivion.
His zeal to know faith's mysteries will make
Him fight with dragons for salvation's sake -
Though blasphemy and curses crowd the gate,
Until it opens he will calmly wait,
And then where is this faith, this blasphemy?
Both vanish into strengthless vacancy.
Eblis and God's curse

God breathed the pure soul into Adam's dust,
And as He did so said the angels must,
In sight of Adam, bow down to the ground
(God did not wish this secret to be found).
All bowed, and not one saw what God had done,
Except Eblis, who bowed himself to none.
He said: "Who notices if I don't bow?
I don't care if they cut my head off now;
I know this Adam's more than dust - I'll see
Why God has ordered all this secrecy."
He hid himself and kept watch like a spy.
God said: "Come out - I see you peer and pry;
You know My treasure's home and you must die.
The kings who hide a treasure execute
Their secret's witnesses to keep them mute -
You saw the place, and shall the fact be spread
Through all the world? Prepare to lose your head!"
Eblis replied: "Lord, pity me; I crave
For mercy, Lord; have mercy on Your slave."
God answered him: "Well, I will mitigate
The rigour and the justice of your fate;
But round your neck will shine a ring to show
Your treachery to all the world below -
For fraudulence and guile you will be known
Until the world ends and the last trump's blown."
Eblis replied: "And what is that to me?
I saw the treasure and I now go free!
To curse belongs to You and to forgive,
All creatures of the world and how they live;
Curse on! This poison's part of Your great scheme
And life is more than just an opium-dream.
All creatures seek throughout the universe
What will be mine for ever now - Your curse!"

The death of Shebli

As Shebli's death approached his eyes grew dim;
Wild torments of impatience troubled him -
But strangest was that round his waist he tied
A heathen's belt, and weeping sat beside
Heaped ash, with which he smeared his hair and head.
"Why wait for death like this?" a stranger said,
And Shebli cried: "What will become of me?
I melt, I burn with fevered jealousy,
And though I have renounced the universe
I covet what Eblis procured - God's curse.
So Shebli mourned, uncaring if his Lord
Gave other mortals this or that reward;
Bright jewels and stones are equal fro~
His hand.
And if His gems are all that you demand,
Ours is a Way you cannot understand -
Think of the stones and jewels He gives as one;
They are not yours to hope for or to shun.
The stone your angry lover flings may hurt,
But others' jewels compared with it are dirt.
Each moment of this quest a man must feel
His soul is spilled, and unremitting zeal
Should force him onward at whatever cost -
The man who pauses on our path is lost.
Majnun searches for Leili

Once someone saw Majnun, oppressed with pain,
Sifting the dusty highway grain by grain,
And asked: “What are you searching for, my friend?”
He cried: “My search for Leili has no end.”
The man protested: “Leili is a girl,
And dust will not conceal this precious pearl!”
Majnun replied: “I search in every place;
Who knows where I may glimpse her lovely face?”

Yusef of Hamadan, a learned seer,
Once said: “Above, below, in every sphere,
Each atom is a Jacob fervently
Searching for Joseph through eternity.”
By pain and grief the pilgrim is perplexed
But struggles on through this world and the next -
And if the goal seems endlessly concealed,
Do not give up your quest; refuse to yield,
What patience must be theirs who undertake
The pilgrim’s journey for salvation’s sake!
Now, like a baby curled inside the womb,
Wait patiently within your narrow room;
Ignore the world - blood is your element;
Blood is the unborn child’s sole nourishment.
What is the world but wretchedness and fear?
Endure, be steadfast till your time draws near.

Sheikh Mahna and the peasant

In deep despair Sheikh Mahna made his way
Across the empty desert wastes one day.
A peasant with a cow came into sight,
And from his body played a lambent light -
He hailed the man and started to narrate
The hopeless turmoil of his wretched state.

The old man heard, then said: “O Bu Sa’id,
Imagine someone piled up millet seed
From here to highest heaven’s unknown climes,
And then repeated this a hundred times;
And now imagine that a bird appears
And pecks one grain up every thousand years,
Then flies around the earth’s circumference
A hundred times - from heaven’s eminence
In all those years no sign would come to show
Sheikh Bu Sa’id the Truth he longs to know.”
Such is the patience that our pilgrims need,
And many start our quest, but few succeed;
Through pain and blood their journey lies - blood hides
The precious musk the hunted deer provides;
And he who does not seek is like a wall,
Dead, blank and bland, no living man at all;
He is, God pardon me, a walking skin,
A picture with no life or soul within.
If you discover in your quest a jewel,
Do not, like some delighted doting fool,
Gloat over it - search on, you’re not its slave;
To make an idol of the gems you find
Is to be drunk, to cloud the searching mind -
At this first glass your soul should not submit;
Seek out the wine-press of the infinite.

Shah Mahmud and the sweeper

Shah Mahmud rode without a guard one night.
A man who swept the streets came into sight,
Sifting through dust-heaps pile by filthy pile.
The king drew rein and with a gracious smile
Flung down his bracelet on the nearest heap;
Then like the wind he left the searching sweep.
Some later night the king returned and saw
The man engaged exactly as before.
He said: “I threw a bracelet on the ground; 
You could redeem the world with what you found! 
You could be like a king, a lord of men, 
And yet I find you sitting dust again!”

The sweep replied: “The treasure that you gave 
Made me a hidden, greater treasure’s slave - 
I have perceived the door to wealth and I 
Shall sift through dust-heaps till the day I die.”

Search for the Way! The door stands open, but 
Your eyes that should perceive the door are shut! 
Once someone cried to God: “Lord, let me see 
The door between us opened unto me!”

And Rabe’eh said: “Fool to chatter so - 
When has the door been closed, I’d like to know?”

The Valley of Love

Love’s valley is the next, and here desire 
Will plunge the pilgrim into seas of fire, 
Until his very being is enflamed 
And those whom fire rejects turn back ashamed. 
The lover is a man who flares and burns, 
Whose face is fevered, who in frenzy yearns, 
Who knows no prudence, who will gladly send 
A hundred worlds toward their blazing end, 
Who knows of neither faith nor blasphemy, 
Who has no time for doubt or certainty, 
To whom both good and evil are the same, 
And who is neither, but a living flame. 
But you! Lukewarm in all you say or do, 
Backsliding, weak - oh no, this is not you! 
True lovers give up everything they own 
To steal one moment with the Friend alone - 
They make no vague, procrastinating vow, 
But risk their livelihood and risk it now.

Until their hearts are burned, how can they flee 
From their desire’s incessant misery? 
They are the falcon when it flies distressed 
In circles, searching for its absent nest - 
They are the fish cast up upon the land 
That seeks the sea and shudders on the sand. 
Love here is fire; its thick smoke clouds the head - 
When love has come the intellect has fled; 
It cannot tutor love, and all its care 
Supplies no remedy for love’s despair. 
If you could seek the unseen you would find 
Love’s home, which is not reason or the mind, 
And love’s intoxication tumbles down 
The world’s designs for glory and renown - 
If you could penetrate their passing show 
And see the world’s wild atoms, you would know 
That reason’s eyes will never glimpse one spark 
Of shining love to mitigate the dark. 
Love leads whoever starts along our Way; 
The noblest bow to love and must obey - 
But you, unwilling both to love and tread 
The pilgrim’s path, you might as well be dead! 
The lover chafes, impatient to depart, 
And longs to sacrifice his life and heart.

A lord who loved a beer-seller

Love led a lord through paths of misery. 
He left his splendid house and family 
And acted like a drunkard to be near 
The boy he loved, who lived by selling beer - 
He sold his house and slaves and all he had 
To get the means to buy beer from this lad. 
When everything was gone and he grew poor 
His love grew stronger, more and then yet more - 
Though food was given him by passers-by, 
His endless hunger made him long to die.
Each morsel that he had would disappear,
Not to be eaten but exchanged for beer,
And he was happy to endure the pain,
Knowing that soon he could buy beer again.

When someone asked: "What is this love?" he cried:
"It is to sell the world and all its pride —
A hundred times — to buy one drop of beer."
Such acts denote true love, and it is clear
That those who cannot match this devotee
Have no acquaintance with love’s misery.

Majnun’s love for Leili

When Leili’s tribe refused Majnun, he found
They would not let him near their camping-ground.
Distraught with love, he met a shepherd there
And asked him for a sheepskin he could wear,
And then, beneath the skin, began to creep
On hands and knees as if he were a sheep.
"Now lead your flock,” he cried, “past Leili’s tent;
It may be I shall catch her lovely scent
And hidden by this matted fleece receive
From untold misery one hour’s reprieve.”
And so Majnun, disguised beneath the skin,
Drew near his love unnoticed by her kin —
Joy welled in him and in its wild excess
The frenzied lover lost all consciousness;
Love’s fire had dried the fluids of his brain —
He fainted and lay stretched out on the plain;
The shepherd bore him to a shaded place
And splashed cold water on his burning face.

Later, Majnun was talking with some friends
When one said: "What a tattered fleece defends
Your body from the cold; but trust in me
I’ll bring you all you need immediately."
Majnun replied: "No garment’s worthy of
Dear Leili, but I wear this skin for love —
I know how fortune favours me, and I
Burn rue to turn away the Evil Eye.”
The fleece for him was silk and rare brocade;
With what else should a lover be arrayed?
I too have known love scent the passing air —
What other finer garment could I wear?
If you would scour yourself of each defect,
Let passion wean you from the intellect —
To leave such toys and sacrifice the soul
Is still the first small step towards our goal.
Begin, if you can set aside all shame —
To risk your life is not some childish game.

The beggar who fell in love with Ayaz

A beggar fell in love once with Ayaz —
The news soon spread through markets and bazaars,
And when he rode about the gaping town
There was the beggar running up and down;
Or if Ayaz once halted in the square,
His eyes would meet the beggar’s hungry stare.
But someone gossiped to Mahmud, who went
To try and apprehend the miscreant —
Ayaz rode out; Mahmud was horrified
To see the beggar running at his side,
And from his hiding-place the monarch saw
The beggar’s face, wasted like yellow straw,
His back bent like a polo-mallet’s curve —
From side to side he watched him duck and swerve,
As if he had no self-control at all
But moved when hit just like a polo-ball.
He summoned him; then said: "And so you thought
A beggar could be equal to the court?"
The man replied: "In matters of desire,
A beggar is his monarch’s equal, sire —
You cannot sunder love from pauper’s rags;
They’re like a rich man and his money bags —"
And poverty in love resembles salt:  
It gives love taste; you can't call that a fault!  
You have the world and love your sovereignty -  
You should leave passion to the likes of me!  
Your love is with you; you need never know  
The pains of absence love should undergo.  
Oh, you are proud to have him, but love's trial  
Would come if you should lose him for a while.”

The king said: “You are ignorant, that’s all -  
Staring as if he were a polo-ball!”

“It’s me who is the ball,” the man replied;  
“Look - both of us are struck from side to side;  
Each shares the other’s pain, each feels the force  
Of Ayaz when he rides by on his horse -  
We’re both bewildered by his mallet’s blows,  
And where we’re going neither of us knows.  
But if we share the same predicament  
And seem in grief to be equivalent,  
Yet still the ball does more than I can do  
And sometimes gets to kiss his horse’s shoe.  
Though both are hurt, mine is the grimmer part -  
Its skin is scarred, my scars are in my heart.  
Ayaz pursues the ball he hits - but I  
In unregarded agony must sigh;  
The ball will sometimes land at Ayaz’ feet,  
But when shall Ayaz and a beggar meet?  
The ball will know the scent of victory  
But all such joys have been denied to me!”

The king cried: “You may boast that you are poor,  
But where’s your witness? How can I be sure?”

“I don’t belong here, sire,” the beggar said,  
“But I’m not poor and you have been misled;  
You want a witness - if I sacrifice  
My living soul for love, will that suffice?  
O Mahmud, love like yours is meaningless;  
Die if you want to boast of your distress!”

Then, in the silence after he replied,  
He sank at his beloved’s feet and died —

And when he saw the lifeless body there  
The world was darkened by Mahmud’s despair.  
Prepare to risk your being while you live,  
And know the glory sacrifice will give -  
If you are summoned by that distant call,  
Pursue the fading sound until you fall;  
And as you fall the news you longed to find  
Will break at last on your bewildered mind.

The Arab in Persia

Through Persia once an Arab took his way,  
Where foreign customs filled him with dismay -  
He met a group of dervishes, who had  
Renounced the world and seemed to him quite mad  
But don’t be fooled - if they seem filthy thieves  
They are far purer than the world believes,  
And though in drunkenness they seem to sink  
The ecstasy they know is not from drink).  
The Arab saw these men; without a sound  
He fainted and lay stretched out on the ground -  
They quickly splashed his face to bring him round  
And then cried: “Enter, no-one, enter here!”  
And in he went, though torn by doubt and fear  
They made him drunk, he lost himself and soon  
His mind had foundered in a vacant swoon  
His gold, his jewels, his very livelihood  
Were stolen there and disappeared for good -  
A dervish gave him more to drink, and then  
They pushed him naked out of doors again  
Dry-lipped and poor the man was forced  
A naked beggar, till he reached his home,  
And there the Arabs said: “But what’s gone wrong?  
Where is your wealth, where have you been so long?  
Your gold and silver’s gone, what can you do?  
This Persian expedition’s ruined you!”

lines 3396-3421
Did thieves attack you? You don’t say a word —
You seem so different; tell us what occurred.”
He said: “I went as usual — full of pride —
Then saw a dervish by the highway’s side.
But then what happened next I can’t be sure;
My gold and silver went and now I’m poor!”
They said: “Describe this man who blocked your way.”
He said: “I have; there’s nothing more to say.”
His mind was still elsewhere and all he heard
Seemed idle chatter, empty and absurd.
Enter the Way or seek some other goal,
But do so to the utmost of your soul;
Risk all, and as a naked beggar roam
If you would hear that “Enter” call you home.

The lover who wanted to kill his beloved

A selfless youth had lost his heart to one
Whose beauty beggared all comparison,
But then the girl grew sick (as Fate decreed),
As thin and yellow as a rotten reed.
Now death approached — she seemed to waste away;
Dark night descended on the brightest day.
When he was told his love despared of life,
The youth ran riot, brandishing a knife,
And cried: “If death — which no man can withstand —
Has come, then let her perish by my hand!”
But someone grabbed the wild youth’s arm and said:
“What point is murder, fool? Why should you shed her blood when in the hour she will be dead?”
“But if I kill her,” came the youth’s reply,
“The law decrees that I too have to die,
And at the resurrection hell will be
My burning doom through all eternity;
Thus I shall die for her today and light
A candle for her in the future’s night —

To die for her is my supreme desire,
To die, and burn for her in endless fire.”
True lovers tread this path and turn aside
From this world and the next unsatisfied;
Their souls rise up from death and seek above
The undiscovered, secret home of love.

The death of Abraham

As Abraham approached his life’s last breath,
He fought with Azra’el and parried death.
“Go back,” he cried, “and tell my King to wait;
The King’s friend will arrive a little late.”
God answered him: “But if you are My friend,
You are prepared, and glad, to reach life’s end.”
Then someone said: “What makes your soul rebel
And seek to hide itself from Azra’el?
True-hearted lovers risk their lives; so why
Are you reluctant or afraid to die?”
And he replied: “How can I give my soul
When Azra’el obscures the longed-for goal?
When Gabriel himself appeared in fire
And asked me to describe my heart’s desire,
I did not glance at him; the path I trod
Had then as now no other goal but God —
I turned my head aside from Gabriel,
And shall I hand my soul to Azra’el?
I shall not give this soul until I hear
The word of God command me to draw near;
And when I hear His voice this life will be
Less use than half a barley grain to me —
How could I give my soul to anyone
But Him? Enough, my explanation’s done!”

lines 3441–3458

lines 3459–3476
The Valley of Insight into Mystery

The next broad valley which the traveller sees
Brings insight into hidden mysteries;
Here every pilgrim takes a different way,
And different spirits different rules obey.
Each soul and body has its level here
And climbs or falls within its proper sphere —
There are so many roads, and each is fit
For that one pilgrim who must follow it.
How could a spider or a tiny ant
Tread the same path as some huge elephant?
Each pilgrim’s progress is commensurate
With his specific qualities and state
(No matter how it strives, what gnat could fly
As swiftly as the winds that scour the sky?).
Our pathways differ — no bird ever knows
The secret route by which another goes.
Our insight comes to us by different signs;
One prays in mosques and one in idols’ shrines —
But when Truth’s sunlight clears the upper air,
Each pilgrim sees that he is welcomed there.
His essence will shine forth; the world that seemed
A furnace will be sweeter than he dreamed.
He will perceive the marrow, not the skin —
The Self will disappear; then, from within
The heart of all he sees, there will ascend
The longed-for face of the immortal Friend.
A hundred thousand secrets will be known
When that unveiled, surpassing face is shown —
A hundred thousand men must faint and fail
Till one shall draw aside the secrets’ veil —
Perfected, of rare courage he must be
To dive through that immense, uncharted sea.

If you discern such hidden truths and feel
Joy flood your life, do not relax your zeal;
Though thirst is quenched, though you are bathed in bliss
Beyond all possible hypothesis,
Though you should reach the throne of God, implore Him still unceasingly: “Is there yet more?”
Now let the sea of gnosis drown your mind,
Or dust and death are all that you will find.
If you ignore our quest and idly sleep,
You will not glimpse the Friend; rise now and weep.
And if you cannot find His beauty here,
Seek out Truth’s mysteries and persevere!
But shame on you, you fool! Bow down your head;
Accept a donkey’s bridle and be led!

The stone man

A man in China has become a stone;
He siss and mourns, and at each muffled groan
Weeps melancholy tears, which then are found
Congealed as pebbles scattered on the ground
(What misery the world would know, what pain,
If clouds should shed such adamantine rain!).
This man is Knowledge (sensible, devout;
If you should go to China seek him out),
But he has turned to stone from secret grief,
From lack of zeal, indifference, unbelief.
The world is dark, and Knowledge is a light,
A sparkling jewel to lead you through the night —
Without it you would wander mystified,
Like Alexander lost without a guide;
But if you trust its light too much, despair
Will be the sequel of pedantic care,
And if you underestimate this jewel
Despair will mark you as a righteous fool.
(Ignore or overvalue this bright stone,
And wretchedness will claim you for her own).
If you can step outside the stage we know,
The dark confusions of our life below,
And reach man's proper state, you will possess
Wisdom at which the world can never guess.
The path brings sorrow and bewildered fear,
But venture on until the Way is clear,
And neither sleep by night nor drink by day,
But give your life — completely — to the Way.

The lover who slept

A lover, tired out by the tears he wept,
Lay in exhaustion on the earth and slept;
When his beloved came and saw him there,
Sunk fast in sleep, at peace, without a care,
She took a pen and in an instant wrote,
Then fastened to his sleeve, a little note.
When he awoke and read her words his pain
(Increased a thousandfold) returned again —
"If you sell silver in the town,"
"The market's opened, rouse your sleepy head;
If faith is your concern, pray through the night —
Prostrate yourself until the dawning light;
But if you are a lover, blush with shame;
Sleep is unworthy of the lover's name!
He watches with the wind throughout the day;
He sees the moon rise up and fade away —
But you do neither, though you weep and sigh;
Your love for me looks like an empty lie.
A man who sleeps before death's sleep I call
A lover of himself, and that is all!
You've no idea of love, and may your sleep
Be like your ignorance — prolonged and deep!"
But as you scan the darkness you will find
New love and insight wake within your mind;
The man who suffers, who will watch and wait,
Is given insight by his sleepless state,
And sleepless nights enable him to bring
A tried and wakeful heart before his King.
Since sleepless watches nourish vigilance,
Sleep little, guard your heart with diligence -
What shall I say? What words have ever found
A means to save the sinking? You are drowned!
But lovers journey on before us all;
Intoxicated by their love, they fall -
Strive, drink as they have drunk, discover love,
The key to this world and the world above;
A woman will become a man, a man
A sea whose depths no mortal mind may scan.

Abbasheh told a wandering scholar once:
"The man who's kindled by love's radiance
Will give birth to a woman; when love's fire
Quickens within a woman this desire,
She gives birth to a man; is it denied
That Adam bore a woman from his side,
That Mary bore a man? Until this light
Shines out, such truths are hidden from your sight;
But when its glory comes you will receive
Blessings far greater than you can conceive.
Count this as wealth; here is the faith you need.
But if the world's base glory is your creed,
Your soul is lost - seek the wealth insight gives;
In insight our eternal kingdom lives.
Whoever drinks the mystics' wine is king
Of all the world can show, of everything -
Its realms are specks of his authority,
The heavens but a ship on his wide sea;
If all the sultans of the world could know
That shoreless sea, its mighty ebb and flow,
They'd sit and mourn their wretched impotence
With eyes ashamed to meet each other's glance."

Mahmud and a dervish

Once in a ruined palace Mahmud met
A dervish bowed by sorrow and regret,
Who when he saw his noble sovereign cried:
"Get out of here or I shall tan your hide -
You call yourself a king; you're just a lout,
A thankless, selfish infidel - get out!"
The king said: "I am Mahmud; I suggest
That 'infidel' is not how I'm addressed!"
The dervish answered him: "O splendid youth,
If you but knew how far you are from Truth,
You would not smear your humbled head and face
With dust and ash; live coals would take their place."

The Valley of Detachment

Next comes the Valley of Detachment; here
All claims, all lust for meaning disappear.
A wintry tempest blows with boisterous haste;
It scours the land and lays the valley waste -
The seven planets seem a fading spark,
The seven seas a pool, and heaven's arc
Is more like dust and death than paradise;
The seven burning hells freeze cold as ice.
More wonderful than this, a tiny ant
Is here far stronger than an elephant;
And, while a raven feeds, a caravan
Of countless souls will perish to a man.
A hundred thousand angels wept when light
Shone out in Adam and dispelled the night;
A hundred thousand drowning creatures died
When Noah's ark rode out the rising tide;
For Abraham, as many gnats were sent
To humble Nimrod's vicious government;
As many children perished by the sword
Till Moses' sight was cleansed before the Lord;
As many walked in wilful heresy
When Jesus saw Truth's hidden mystery;
As many souls endured their wretched fate
Before Mohammad rose to heaven's gate.
Here neither old nor new attempts prevail,
And resolution is of no avail.
If you should see the world consumed in flame,
It is a dream compared to this, a game;
If thousands were to die here, they would be
One drop of dew absorbed within the sea;
A hundred thousand fools would be as one
Brief atom's shadow in the blazing sun;
If all the stars and heavens came to grief,
They'd be the shedding of one withered leaf;
If all the worlds were swept away to hell,
They'd be a crawling ant trapped down a well;
If earth and heaven were to pass away,
One grain of gravel would have gone astray;
If men and fiends were never seen again,
They'd vanish like a tiny splash of rain;
And should they perish, broken by despair,
Think that some beast has lost a single hair;
If part and whole are wrecked and seen no more,
Think that the earth has lost a single straw;
And if the nine revolving heavens stop,
Think that the sea has lost a single drop.

A youth who tumbled into a well
A fine youth living in our village fell
Into a deep and dangerous, dark well—
His fall dislodged the dust; a long time passed
Before they got the young man out at last,
But he had suffered underneath the grime—
It seemed his rescuers were just in time
(Mohammad was the poor boy's name); his breath
Was laboured and he lingered close to death.
His father whimpered: "O my pride and joy,
Mohammad, speak to me, my precious boy."
"Where is Mohammad now?" the youth replied;
"Where is your son? Or anyone?" and died.
Good pilgrim, ask: Where is Mohammad, where?
And where is Adam and his every heir?
Where are the earth, the mountains and the sea?
Where are the angels and humanity?
Where are the bodies buried underground,
Where are their minds so subtle and profound?
Where is the pain of death? Where is the soul?
Where are the sundered parts? Where is the whole?
Sift through the universe, and it will seem
An airy maze, an insubstantial dream.

Yusef of Hamadan, that learned seer,
Whose heart and knowledge were uniquely clear,
Said: "Travel to the throne of majesty,
Then to the ends of all the earth, and see
That all that is, will be, has ever been,
Is but one atom when correctly seen."
The world is but a drop—what will be missed
If one son prospers or does not exist?
This valley is not easy, child—your mind
Knows nothing of the dangers you will find,
And when the Way flows blood, your pilgrimage
Has only journeyed through a single stage.
Traverse the world from place to distant place;
What have you managed but a single pace?
No pilgrim sees his journey's end; no cure
Has yet been found for all he must endure.
If you stand petrified with grief and dread,
You are no better than the senseless dead;
And if you hasten on you cannot hear
The bell that summons you sound loud and clear.
Hope lies neither in motion nor in rest;
Neither to live nor yet to die is best.
What profit have your labours brought? What gain
The teachers you pursued with so much pain?
What difference have these constant efforts made?
Be silent now and seek another trade.
Strive not to strive; withdraw and concentrate
On that small region you can cultivate.
The remedy is labour - this is true,
But not that labour which is known to you -
Renounce the work you know, the tasks you've done,
And learn which tasks to work at, which to shun.
What words can guide you where you ought to turn?
It may be you will have the wit to learn;
But whether you lament or idly sing,
Act with detachment now in everything.
Detachment is a flame, a livid flash,
That will reduce a hundred worlds to ash;
And if the world has gone, then where is fear?

A horoscope drawn on sand

Astrologers can help you understand
With fine configurations traced in sand -
You've seen one draw the heaven's calendar
And indicate each fixed and moving star,
Set out the zodiac sign by mighty sign,
The zenith of the sun and its decline -
The whirlpool waits, the monstrous whale, the shark,
And are you still determined to embark?
Imagination makes you waver—think,
How will you save yourself if you should sink?

The fly in the beehive

A hungry fly once saw a hive of bees;
Transported by delicious fantasies,
He buzzed: "What noble friend will be my guide?"
I'd give a barley grain to get inside—
How marvellous if I could just contrive
To find myself in this delightful hive."
A passer-by took pity on his pain,
Lifted him in and took the barley grain.
But when he reached the honey-store at last,
He found his wings and hairy joints stuck fast—
His sticky, struggling legs began to tire,
Encumbered by the honey's clammy mire.
He cried: "When free I didn't know my luck;
This honey's worse than poison. Help! I'm stuck!
To get into this mess I gave a grain;
I'd offer double to get out again!"
Within this valley no man can be free—
Your life has passed in thoughtless liberty;
But only adults can traverse this waste:
Let childhood go; a new life must be faced!
The valley waits; prepare now to depart;
Relinquish your beloved, selfish heart—
That pagan idol, that deceptive guide
Which turns detachment harmlessly aside.

A sheikh in love

A dervish sheikh became enamoured of
A girl whose father traded dogs. His love
Was like a surging sea that has no shore—
He slept among the dogs outside their door.
Her mother saw him lying there and said:
"Good sheikh, it seems my daughter's turned your head!
Well, if you want her you will have to be
A man who markets dogs, who lives like me.
Take up the dog trade; do it for a year
And then we'll have the wedding, never fear."
This love-lorn sheikh was not a man to shirk—
He tore his dervish cloak and set to work,
Leading the dogs to market every day
Until the promised year had passed away.
He saw a Sufi there who said: "Dear friend,
Whatever led you to this wretched end?
For thirty years you were a man—what fate
Has brought you to this ludicrous, sad state?"
The sheikh replied: "Idiot, no sermons, please—
If you could see into these mysteries,
If God should show these secret truths to you,
You'll do exactly as you see me do.
When God unveils your shame, you'll understand
What kind of dog-leash dangles from your hand!"

How much must I describe this journey's pain?
Who heeds my talk? How long must I explain?
What is the point of all these words I say?
Not one of you has set out on the Way,
And till you set out you cannot perceive
The truth of all I urge you to believe—
Who shares the patient vigil that I keep?
What good's a leader? You are all asleep!
The pupil who asked for advice

There was a pupil once who begged his sheikh:
"Give me some good advice, for pity's sake!"
The sheikh cried: "Leave me - go on, get away,
And if you itch for what I've got to say,
First wash your face - musk can't drive out a stink;
Words are no good to someone sick with drink!"

The Valley of Unity

Next comes the Valley of pure Unity,
A place of lonely, long austerity,
And all who enter on this waste have found
Their various necks by one tight collar bound -
If you see many here or but a few,
They're one, however they appear to you.
The many here are merged in one; one form
Involves the multifarious, thick swarm
(This is the oneness of diversity,
Not oneness locked in singularity);
Unit and number here have passed away;
Forget For-ever and creation's day -
That day is gone; eternity is gone;
Let them depart into oblivion.

The world compared to a wax toy

Once someone asked a dervish to portray
The nature of this world in which we stray.
He said: "This various world is like a toy -
A coloured palm-tree given to a boy,
But made of wax - now knead it in your fist,
And there's the wax of which its shapes consist;

Bu Ali and the old woman

An ancient crone once went to Bu Ali
And said: "This gold-leaf is a gift from me."
The sheikh replied: "Since first this Way I trod,
I've taken gifts from no one except God."
The woman laughed: "Well said, and no mistake!
How many can you see, O reverend sheikh?
The man who treads the Way sees one alone
And counts a temple as the ka'aba's stone."
Listen! Attend to all He has to say,
For His existence cannot pass away;
The pilgrim sees no form but His and knows
That He subsists beneath all passing shows -
The pilgrim comes from Him whom he can see,
Lives in Him, with Him, and beyond all three.
Be lost in Unity's inclusive span,
Or you are human but not yet a man.
Whoever lives, the wicked and the blessed,
Contains a hidden sun within his breast -
Its light must dawn though dogged by long delay;
The clouds that veil it must be torn away -
Whoever reaches to his hidden sun
Surpasses good and bad and knows the One.
This good and bad are here while you are here;
Surpass yourself and they will disappear.
You come from nothing but lie caught within
The cumbersome entanglements of sin -
Would that your first blank state were with you yet,
Before existence trapped you in its net.
First free yourself from sin's adhesive loam,
Then be dispersed in dust and wind-swept foam.
How could you guess what ills within you lurk,
The foulness of their haunts, the dripping murk,
Where snake and scorpion slither through the deep,
Then undiscovered lose themselves in sleep?
Wake them, encourage them, and they will swell
Into a hundred monsters loosed from hell.
All men contain this evil in their hearts,
And hell is yours till every snake departs —
Work free of each insinuating coil;
Your soul’s salvation will reward your toil.
If not, you are the hidden scorpion’s prey,
The quick snake’s quarry till God’s Judgement Day;
And those who will not seek this freedom crawl
Like worms who have no higher life at all . . .
(Attar! Enough of all this oratory;
Resume your tale, you’d got to ‘Unity’.)
‘When once the pilgrim has attained this stage,
He will have passed beyond mere pilgrimage;
He will be lost and dumb — for God will speak,
The God whom all these wandering pilgrims seek —
Beyond all notions of the part, the Whole,
Of qualities and the essential soul.
All four of them will rise up from all four;
A hundred thousand states will rise and more.
In this strange school the inward eye detects
A hundred thousand yearning intellects,
But failure dogs the analytic mind,
Which whimpers like a child born deaf and blind.
To glimpse this secret is to turn aside
From both worlds, from all egocentric pride —
The pilgrim has no being, yet will be
A part of Being for eternity.

A slave’s freedom
Loghman of Sarrakhs cried: “Dear God, behold
Your faithful servant, poor, bewildered, old —
An old slave is permitted to go free;
I’ve spent my life in patient loyalty,
I’m bent with grief, my black hair’s turned to snow;
Grant manumission, Lord, and let me go.”
A voice replied: “When you have gained release
From mind and thought, your slavery will cease;
You will be free when these two disappear.”
He said: “Lord, it is You whom I revere;
What are the mind and all its ways to me?”
And left them there and then — in ecstasy
He danced and clapped his hands and boldly cried:
“Who am I now? The slave I was has died;
What’s freedom, servitude, and where are they?
Both happiness and grief have fled away;
I neither own nor lack all qualities;
My blindness looks on secret mysteries —
I know not whether You are I, I You;
I lose myself in You; there is no two.”

The lover who saved his beloved from drowning
A girl fell in a river — in a flash
Her lover dived in with a mighty splash,
And fought the current till he reached her side.
When they were safe again, the poor girl cried:
“By chance I tumbled in, but why should you
Come after me and hazard your life too?”
He said: “I dived because the difference
Of ‘I’ and ‘you’ to lovers makes no sense —
A long time passed when we were separate,
But now that we have reached this single state
When you are me and I am wholly you,  
What use is it to talk of us as two?  
All talk of two implies plurality -  
When two has gone there will be Unity.

**Mahmud offers Ayaz the command of his armies**

One day Mahmud’s unconquered armies made  
A splendid pageant drawn up on parade;  
And on a mountain-side to watch the show  
Of elephants and soldiers spread below,  
The king and his two favourite courtiers stood,  
Hasan, the slave Ayaz and Shah Mahmud.  
The serried soldiers, jostling elephants,  
Seemed like a plague of locusts or of ants;  
More armies at that moment filled the plain  
Than all the world has seen or will again,  
And Mahmud said: “Ayaz, my child, look down -  
All this is yours, dear boy; accept the crown.”

The great king spoke - Ayaz seemed quite unmoved,  
Lost in his private thoughts; Hasan reproved  
The youth and said: “Where are your manners, slave?  
Think of the honour that our king just gave!  
And yet you stand there like an imbecile,  
And do not even murmur thanks or kneel -  
How can you justify such gross neglect?  
Is this the way you show your king respect?”

Ayaz was silent till this sermon’s end,  
Then said: “Two answers come to me, my friend.  
First then, a slave could grovel on the ground  
Or gabble thanks and have the heavens resound  
With some self-advertising, long address -  
And climb above the king or say far less;  
But who am I to interpose my voice  
Between the king and his asserted choice?  
The slave is his, and regal dignity  
Demands that he decide and act, not me.

If in his praise I see both worlds unite,  
It is no more than such a monarch’s right;  
Can I – unworthy to be called his slave –  
Comment on how he chooses to behave?”

And when Hasan had heard him speak he said:  
“Ayaz, a thousand blessings on your head;  
Your words convince me and I now believe  
That you deserve the favours you receive -  
But what's the second of your answers, pray?”  
Ayaz replied: “Hasan, I cannot say  
While you are here – you do not share the throne.  
This mystery is for the king alone.”

The king dismissed Hasan. “There’s no one here,”  
He said; “now make your hidden secret clear.”

Ayaz replied: “When generosity  
Persuades my sovereign lord to glance at me,  
My being vanishes in that bright light  
Which radiates from his refulgent sight;  
His splendour shines, and purified I rise,  
Dispersed to nothing by his sun-like eyes.  
Existence has deserted me, so how  
Could I prostrate myself before you now?  
If you see anyone or anything,  
It is not me you see - it is the king!  
The honours you continually renew  
Are offered, given and received by you;  
And from a shadow lost within the sun  
What kind of service could you hope for? None!  
That shadow called Ayaz must disappear –  
Do what you wish; you know he is not here.”
Next comes the Valley of Bewilderment,
A place of pain and gnawing discontent -
Each second you will sigh, and every breath
Will be a sword to make you long for death;
Blinded by grief, you will not recognize
The days and nights that pass before your eyes.
Blood drips from every hair and writes “Alas”
Beside the highway where the pilgrims pass;
In ice you fry, in fire you freeze - the Way
Is lost, with indecisive steps you stray -
The Unity you knew has gone; your soul
Is scattered and knows nothing of the Whole.
If someone asks: “What is your present state;
Is drunkenness or sober sense your fate,
And do you flourish now or fade away?”
The pilgrim will confess: “I cannot say;
I have no certain knowledge any more;
I doubt my doubt, doubt itself is unsure;
I love, but who is it for whom I sigh?
Not Muslim, yet not heathen; who am I?
My heart is empty, yet with love is full;
My own love is to me incredible.”

The story of the princess who loved a slave

A great king had a daughter whose fair face
Was like the full moon in its radiant grace,
She seemed a Joseph, and her dimpled chin
The well that lovely youth was hidden in -
Her face was like a paradise; her hair
Reduced a hundred hearts to love’s despair;
Her eyebrows were two bows bent back to shoot
The arrows of love’s passionate dispute;
The pointed lashes of her humid eyes
Were thorns strewn in the pathway of the wise;
The beauty of this sun deceived the train
Of stars attendant on the moon’s pale reign;
The rubies of her mouth were like a spell
To fascinate the angel Gabriel -
Beside her smile, her sweet, reviving breath,
The waters of eternal life seemed death;
Whoever saw her chin was lost and fell
Lamenting into love’s unfathomed well;
And those she glanced at sank without a sound -
What rope could reach the depths in which they drowned?

It happened that a handsome slave was brought
To join the retinue that served at court,
A slave, but what a slave! Compared with him
The sun and moon looked overcast and dim.
He was uniquely beautiful - and when
He left the palace, women, children, men
Would crowd into the streets and market-place,
A hundred thousand wild to see his face.
One day the princess, by some fateful chance,
Caught sight of this surpassing elegance,
And as she glimpsed his face she felt her heart,
Her intellect, her self-control depart -
Now reason fled and love usurped its reign;
Her sweet soul trembled in love’s bitter pain.
For days she meditated, struggled,
But bowed at last before the force of love
And gave herself to longing, to the fire
Of passionate, insatiable desire.

Attendant on the daughter of the king
Were ten musicians, slave girls who could sing
Like nightingales - whose captivating charms
Would rival David’s when he sang the psalms.
The princess set aside her noble name
And whispered to these girls her secret shame
(When love has first appeared who can expect
The frenzied lover to be circumspect?),
Then said: "If I am honest with this slave
And tell my love, who knows how he'll behave?
My honour's lost if he should once discover
His princess wishes that she were his lover!
But if I can't make my affection plain
I'll die, I'll waste away in secret pain;
I've read a hundred books on chastity
And still I burn - what good are they to me?
No, I must have him; this seductive youth
Must sleep with me and never know the truth -
If I can secretly achieve my goal
Love's bliss will satisfy my thirsting soul."
Her girls said: "Don't despair; tonight we'll bring
Your lover here and he won't know a thing."
One of them went to him - she simpered, smiled,
And, oh, how easily he was beguiled!
He took the drugged wine she'd prepared - he drank,
Then swooned - unconscious in her arms he sank,
And in that instant all her work was done;
He slept until the setting of the sun.
Night came and all was quiet as the grave;
Now, stealthily, the maidens brought this slave,
Wrapped in a blanket, to their mistress' bed
And laid him down with jewels about his head.
Midnight: he opened his dazed, lovely eyes
And stared about him with a mute surprise -
The bed was massy gold; the chamber seemed
An earthly paradise that he had dreamed;
Two candles made of ambergris burned there
And with their fainting fragrance filled the air;
The slave girls made such music that his soul
Seemed beckoned onward to some distant goal;
Wine passed from hand to hand; the candles' light
Flared like a sun to drive away the night.

But all the joys of this celestial place
Could not compare with her bewitching face,
At which he stared as if struck senseless, dumb,
Lost both to this world and the world to come -
His heart acknowledged love's supremacy;
His soul submitted to love's ecstasy;
His eyes were fixed on hers, while to his ears
The girls' song seemed the music of the spheres;
He smelt the burning candles' ambergris;
His mouth burned with the wine, then with her kiss;
He could not look away, he could not speak,
But tears of eloquence coursed down his cheek -
And she too wept, so that each kiss was graced
With salty sweetness mingled in one taste,
Or he would push aside her stubborn hair
And on her lovely eyes in wonder stare.
Thus, in each other's arms, they passed the night
Until, worn out by sensual delight,
By passion, by the vigil they had kept,
As dawn's cool breeze awoke, the young man slept.

Then, as he slept, they carried him once more
And laid him gently on his own hard floor.
He woke, he slowly knew himself again -
Astonishment, regret, grief's aching pain
Swept over him (though what could grief achieve?
The scene had fled and it was vain to grieve).
He bared his body, ripped his tattered shirt,
Tore out his hair, besmeared his head with dirt -
And when his friends asked what assailed his heart,
He cried: "How can I say? Where could I start?
No dreamer, no, no seer could ever see
What I saw in that drunken ecstasy;
No one in all the world has ever known
The bliss vouchsafed to me, to me alone -
I cannot tell you what I saw; I saw
A stranger sight than any seen before."
They said: "Try to remember what you've done, And of a hundred joys describe just one."
He answered: "Was it me who saw that face? Or did some other stand there in my place? I neither saw nor heard a thing, and yet I saw and heard what no man could forget." 
A fool suggested: "It's some dream you had; Some sleepy fantasy has sent you mad."
He asked: "Was it a dream, or was it true? Was I drunk or sober? I wish I knew -
The world has never known a state like this,
This paradox beyond analysis,
Which haunts my soul with what I cannot find,
Which makes me speechless speak and seeing blind.
I saw perfection's image, beauty's queen,
A vision that no man has ever seen
(What is the sun before that face? God knows It is a mote, a speck that comes and goes!).
But did I see her? What more can I say?
Between this 'yes' and 'no' I've lost my way!"

The grieving mother and the Sufi

Beside her daughter's grave a mother grieved.
A Sufi said: "This woman has perceived
The nature of her loss; her heart knows why She comes to mourn, for whom she has to cry -
She grieves, but knowledge makes her fortunate:
Consider now the Sufi's wretched state!
What daily, nightly vigils I must keep
And never know for whom it is I weep;
I mourn in lonely darkness, unaware
Whose absence is the cause of my despair.
Since she knows what has caused her agony,
She is a thousand times more blessed than me -
I have no notion of what makes me weep,
What prompts the painful vigils I must keep.

My heart is lost, and here I cannot find
That rope by which men live, the rational mind -
The key to thought is lost; to reach this far Means to despair of who and what you are.
And yet it is to see within the soul -
And at a stroke - the meaning of the Whole.”

The man who had lost his key

A Sufi heard a cry: "I've lost my key; If it's been found, please give it back to me -
My door's locked fast; I wish to God I knew
How I could get back in. What can I do?"
The Sufi said: "And why should you complain? You know where this door is; if you remain Outside it - even if it is shut fast -
Someone no doubt will open it at last. You make this fuss for nothing; how much more Should I complain, who've lost both key and door!"
But if this Sufi presses on, he'll find The closed or open door which haunts his mind. Men cannot understand the Sufis' state, That deep Bewilderment which is their fate. To those who ask: "What can I do?" reply: "Bid all that you have done till now goodbye!"
Once in the Valley of Bewilderment The pilgrim suffers endless discontent, Crying: "How long must I endure delay, Uncertainty? When shall I see the Way? When shall I know? Oh, when?" But knowledge here Is turned again to indecisive fear;
Complaints become a grateful eulogy
And blasphemy is faith, faith blasphemy.
The old age of Sheikh Nasrabad

Sheikh Nasrabad made Mecca's pilgrimage
Twice twenty times, yet this could not assuage
His yearning heart. This white-haired sheikh became
A pilgrim of the pagans' sacred flame,
A naked beggar in whose heart their fire
Was mirrored by the blaze of his desire.
A passer-by said: "Shame on you, O sheikh,
Shame on these wretched orisons you make;
Have you performed the Muslims' pilgrimage
To be an infidel in your old age?
This is mere childishness; such blasphemy
Can only bring the Sufis infamy.
What sheikh has followed this perverted way?
What is this pagan fire to which you pray?"
The sheikh said: "I have suffered from this flame,
Which burned my clothes, my house, my noble name,
The harvest of my life, all that I knew,
And what is left to me? Bewilderment,
The knowledge of my burning discontent;
All thoughts of reputation soon depart
When such fierce conflagrations fire the heart.
In my despair I turn with equal hate
Both from the ka'aba and this temple's gate -
If this Bewilderment should come to you
Then you will grieve, as I am forced to do."

A novice sees his dead master

A novice in whose heart the faith shone bright
Met with his teacher in a dream one night
And said: "I tremble in bewildered fear;
How is it, master, that I see you here?

My heart became a candle when you went,
A flame that flickers with astonishment;
I seek Truth's secrets like a searching slave -
Explain to me your state beyond the grave?"
His teacher said: "I cannot understand -
Amazed, I gnaw the knuckles of my hand.
You say that you're bewildered - in this pit
Bewilderment seems endless, infinite!
A hundred mountains would be less to me
Than one brief speck of such uncertainty!"

The Valley of Poverty and Nothingness

Next comes that valley words cannot express,
The Vale of Poverty and Nothingness:
Here you are lame and deaf, the mind has gone;
You enter an obscure oblivion.
When sunlight penetrates the atmosphere
A hundred thousand shadows disappear,
And when the sea arises what can save
The patterns on the surface of each wave?
The two worlds are those patterns, and in vain
Men tell themselves what passes will remain.
Whoever sinks within this sea is blessed
And in self-loss obtains eternal rest;
The heart that would be lost in this wide sea
Disperses in profound tranquillity,
And if it should emerge again it knows
The secret ways in which the world arose.
The pilgrim who has grown wise in the Quest,
The Sufi who has weathered every test,
Are lost when they approach this painful place,
And other men leave not a single trace;
Because all disappear, you might believe
That all are equal (just as you perceive
That twigs and incense offered to a flame
Both turn to powdered ash and look the same.
But though they seem to share a common state,
Their inward essences are separate,
And evil souls sunk in this mighty sea
Retain unchanged their base identity;
But if a pure soul sinks, the waves surround
His fading form, in beauty he is drowned —
He is not, yet he is; what could this mean?
It is a state the mind has never seen.

One night that sea of secrets, that beloved seer
Of Tus said to a pupil standing near:
"When you are worn out by love's fierce despair
And in your weakness tremble like a hair,
You will become that hair and take your place
In curls that cluster round the loved one's face —
Whoever wastes away for love is made
A hair concealed within those tresses' shade —
But if you will not waste away, your soul
Has made the seven gates of hell its goal."

A frenzied lover wept; a passer-by
Inquired the cause, and this was his reply:
"They say that when at last the Lord appears,
He will receive, for forty thousand years,
The men who are deserving in this place;
Then from that summit of celestial grace
They will return and know themselves once more
Bereft of light, the poorest of the poor.
I will be shown myself — I weep to think
That from such heights to such depths I must sink;
I have no need of my identity —
I long for death; what use is 'I' to me?"
I live with evil while my Self is here;
With God both Self and evil disappear.
When I escape the Self I will arise
And be as God; the yearning pilgrim flies
From this dark province of mortality
To Nothingness and to eternity.
And though, my heart, you bid the world farewell
To cross the bridge that arches over hell,
Do not despair — think of the oil-lamp's glow
That sends up smoke as black as any crow;
Its oil is changed and what was there before
The shining flame flared up exists no more.
So you, my quaking heart, when you endure
These threatening flames, will rise up rare and pure."

First put aside the Self, and then prepare
To mount Boraq and journey through the air;
Drink down the cup of Nothingness; put on
The cloak that signifies oblivion —
Your stirrup is the void; absence must be
The horse that bears you into vacancy.
Destroy the body and adorn your sight
With kohl of insubstantial, darkest night.
First lose yourself, then lose this loss and then
Withdraw from all that you have lost again —
Go peacefully, and stage by stage progress
Until you gain the realms of Nothingness;
But if you cling to any worldly trace,
No news will reach you from that promised place.

The moths and the flame

Moths gathered in a fluttering throng one night
To learn the truth about the candle's light,
And they decided one of them should go
To gather news of the elusive glow.
One flew till in the distance he discerned
A palace window where a candle burned —
And went no nearer; back again he flew
To tell the others what he thought he knew.
The mentor of the moths dismissed his claim,
Remarking: “He knows nothing of the flame.”
A moth more eager than the one before
Set out and passed beyond the palace door.
He hovered in the aura of the fire,
A trembling blur of timorous desire,
Then headed back to say how far he’d been,
And how much he had undergone and seen.
The mentor said: “You do not bear the signs
Of one who's fathomed how the candle shines.”
Another moth flew out - his dizzy flight
Turned to an ardent wooing of the light;
He dipped and soared, and in his frenzied trance
Both Self and fire were mingled by his dance -
The flame engulfed his wing-tips, body, head;
And when the mentor saw that sudden blaze,
The moth's form lost within the glowing rays,
He said: “He knows, he knows the truth we seek,
That hidden truth of which we cannot speak.”
To go beyond all knowledge is to find
That comprehension which eludes the mind,
And you can never gain the longed-for goal
Until you first outsoar both flesh and soul;
But should one part remain, a single hair
Will drag you back and plunge you in despair -
No creature's Self can be admitted here,
Where all identity must disappear.

The Sufi who thought he had left the world

A Sufi once, with nothing on his mind,
Was - without warning - struck at from behind.
He turned and murmured, choking back the tears:
“The man you hit's been dead for thirty years;
He's left this world!” The man who'd struck him said:
“You talk a lot for someone who is dead!

But talk's not action - while you boast, you stray
Further and further from the secret Way,
And while a hair of you remains, your heart
And Truth are still a hundred worlds apart.”
Burn all you have, all that you thought and knew
(Even your shroud must go; let that burn too),
Then leap into the flames, and as you burn
Your pride will falter, you'll begin to learn.
But keep one needle back and you will meet
A hundred thieves who force you to retreat
(Think of that tiny needle which became
The negligible cause of Jesus' shame). 23
As you approach this stage's final veil,
Kingdoms and wealth, substance and water fail;
Withdraw into yourself, and one by one
Give up the things you own - when this is done,
Be still in selflessness and pass beyond
All thoughts of good and evil; break this bond,
And as it shatters you are worthy of
Oblivion, the Nothingness of love.

The dervish who loved a prince

A great king had a son whose slender grace
Recalled the comely Joseph's form and face -
He had no rival; none could emulate
This prince's dignified and splendid state.
Lords were his slaves; beauty bowed in defeat;
The loveliest were dust beneath his feet,
And if he walked the desert's wastes at night
It seemed a second sun diffused its light.
That he eclipsed the moon's magnificence
Is scant praise for his lovely countenance;
The darkness of his curls was like a well
In which a hundred thousand lovers fell;
The beauty of that hair was like a fire -
A flame that tantalized the world's desire
(But fifty years and more could not suffice
To paint the tumbling curls of paradise).
A glance from those narcissas eyes was like
The searing fire when bolts of lightning strike.
His laugh was honey and his smile could bring
A hundred thousand blossoms news of spring—
But of his wondrous mouth I cannot speak;
There self-hood vanishes, I am too weak.
When he appeared it seemed that every hair
Reduced a hundred hearts to love's despair—
He was far lovelier than words convey;
The world adored him, what more can I say?
When he rode out toward the market-place,
A naked sword was held before his face;
Another followed him; and those who tried
To stand and stare were quickly pushed aside.

There was a dervish, a poor simpleton,
Who fell in love with this great monarch's son—
Too weak to chatter, he would sit and sigh,
Beyond all help and hope, prepared to die.
He sat outside the palace night and day,
But closed his eyes to all who passed that way;
He had no friend, no comrade who could share
Love's pain, or sympathize with his despair.
His heart was broken; tears of silver rolled
Down sunken cheeks that looked like sallow gold;
And what kept him alive? At times he'd see
The prince ride by in distant majesty.
Then crowds of people ran from near and far
To gather in the noisy, packed bazaar—
They pushed and shoved; shouts filled the atmosphere,
You'd think that resurrection day was here;
Distracted heralds tried to clear the way,
Raging at stragglers who would not obey—
The ushers yelled, then called the army in,
To clear a mile or so and quell the din.

And when our dervish heard the heralds' sound,
He fainted and lay stretched out on the ground;
It seemed he left himself, and ecstasy
Was strangely mingled with his misery
(Though no one noticed him, there should have been
A hundred thousand mourners at the scene).
His body would turn blue, or to his eyes
Great gouts of blood instead of tears would rise;
His tears would freeze with grief, and then desire
Would make them scald his face like liquid fire.
But how could such a wretch (who begged for bread,
A skinny wraith half living and half dead,
A man with half a shadow, which the sun
Appeared determined to reduce to none)
Expect to be befriended by a prince
Whose like has not been seen before or since?

It happened that one day the prince rode out.
The beggar sent up an ecstatic shout:
“Love's conflagration fills my heart and head;
All patience, reason, strength have turned and fled!”
He raved and ranted, and at every groan
Dashed his bewildered head against a stone,
Until unconsciousness had quenched his sighs
And thick blood spurted from his ears and eyes.
A herald of the prince saw everything,
And hurried to denounce him to the king.
“My lord,” he panted, “something must be done;
A filthy libertine adores your son!”
The monarch felt his honour was at stake,
And for his injured reputation's sake
Cried: “Chain his feet and drag him through the town,
Then from the gibbet hang him upside-down.”
The royal guards set off at once and made
A ring around the hapless renegade—
They dragged him to the public gibbet, where
A huge, blood-thirsty mob had filled the square,
And no one knew his pain, or thought to plead  
On his behalf, or tried to intercede.  
A courtier brought him to the gallows tree,  
Where he screamed out in mortal agony:  
"Grant me the time to worship God before  
The gallows claims me; let me pray once more."  
The angry courtier signalled his assent  
And gave him time to make his testament.  
But halfway through his prayers he groaned: "Oh, why  
Should kings decree that guiltless men must die?  
Before I'm murdered in this wretched place,  
Lord, let me see that boy's seductive face,  
And when he stands here I will gladly give  
My soul for him and have no wish to live.  
I'd give a hundred thousand lives to see  
That princely pattern of nobility;  
O God, this is your servant's last request -  
I love, and those who die for love die blessed,  
And though for him I bid the world farewell,  
Love cannot make love's slave an infidel.  
How many countless prayers you grant, dear Lord -  
Grant mine; grant my life's vigil its reward!"

This arrow reached its mark; the courtier felt  
His adamantine heart begin to melt -  
He hurried to the king and there made plain  
The secret causes of this Sufi's pain;  
Weeping, he told how halfway through his prayer  
The Sufi had succumbed to love's despair.  
The monarch's anger passed, and clemency  
Made him revoke his former harsh decree.  
He turned then to his son and gently said:  
"Do not distress this wretch who hangs half dead  
Beneath the gibber's arm - go to him now,  
And speak to him as only you know how.  
His heart is in your hands; use all your art  
To comfort him and give him back his heart.

You were the poisoned draught that seared his throat;  
Drink with him now, be poison's antidote!  
Let happiness replace his misery;  
Renew his life, then bring him here to me."  
Oh, clap your hands, dance, stamp your nimble feet,  
Rejoice, prosperity is now complete!  
This prince sought out a beggar; this bright sun  
Sought out the unregarded simpleton;  
This ocean of rich treasures did not stop  
Until he had united with a drop!  
The prince sped like an angel through the town  
And saw the beggar hanging upside-down -  
The body shuddered, swayed and fought for breath,  
Clinging half conscious at the edge of death.  
Beneath the gallows tree his tears and blood  
Had clogged the swirling dust to viscid mud,  
And seeing him the prince's noble eyes  
Flooded with tears that he could not disguise.  
He wished to hide them from his army's sight,  
But tears in princes are a sign of might.  
They flowed like rain and in that moment he  
Increased a hundred times his sovereignty.  
Endure in love, be steadfast and sincere -  
At last the one you long for will appear;  
Act as this beggar did, lament and sigh  
Until the glorious prince gives his reply.  
He saw the prince approach from far away  
But could not catch the words he tried to say;  
He twisted, struggled, raised his face and there  
The prince's weeping eyes returned his stare.  
He trembled, weak as water with desire;  
He shuddered, burned by love's consuming fire,  
And with his last laborious, hoarse breath  
Gasped: "Prince, you see me at the point of death -  
Your words can kill me now; you did not need  
Guards and a gibbet to perform this deed."  
Then as a dying candle flares he cried  
The last exultant laugh of death and died;
Made one with his beloved he became
The Nothingness of an extinguished flame.
True pilgrims fathom, even as they fight,
The passion of annihilation's night —
Your Being here is mixed with Nothingness,
And no joy comes to you without distress;
If you cannot endure, how will you find
The promised peace that haunts your troubled mind?

You leapt like lightning once, yet now you stand
Like marshy water clogged with desert sand —
Renew your courage, put aside your fear
And in love's fire let season disappear.
To be unsure, to pine for liberty,
Is to resist our journey's alchemy.
How long will caution make you hesitate?
Fly beyond thought before it is too late!
To reach that place where true delight is won,
Accept the dervish path as I have done —
I speak of "I"; in truth there is no "I"
Where logic falters and the mind must die.
I lose myself within myself; I seek
For strength in being poor, despised and weak.
When poverty's bright sun shines over me,
A window opens on reality;
I see both worlds and in that light I seem
Like water lost in water's moving stream.
All that I ever lost or ever found
Is in the depths of that black deluge drowned.
I too am lost; I leave no trace, no mark;
I am a shadow cast upon the dark,
A drop sunk in the sea, and it is vain
To search the sea for that one drop again.
This Nothingness is not for everyone,
Yet many seek it out as I have done;
And who would reach this far and not aspire
To Nothingness, the pilgrim's last desire?

Nuri was questioned by one pure in soul:
"How far is it until we reach our goal?"
And said: "We pass through fire and splendour first;
Then seven oceans have to be traversed.
A fish" — (now listen carefully to me,
And I will show you how to cross this sea)
Will draw you by its breath — a mighty whale,
Vast but invisible from head to tail,
Who deep in solitude delights to swim
And by his breathing draws the world to him."

The journey

The hoopoe paused, and when the group had heard
His discourse, trembling fear filled every bird.
They saw the bow of this great enterprise
Could not be drawn by weakness, sloth or lies,
And some were so cast down that then and there
They turned aside and perished in despair.
With fear and apprehension in each heart,
The remnant rose up ready to depart.
They travelled on for years; a lifetime passed
Before the longed-for goal was reached at last.
What happened as they flew I cannot say,
But if you journey on that narrow Way,
Then you will act as they once did and know
The miseries they had to undergo.
Of all the army that set out, how few
Survived the Way; of that great retinue
A handful lived until the voyage was done —
Of every thousand there remained but one.
Of many who set out no trace was found.
Some deep within the ocean's depths were drowned;
Some died on mountain-tops; some died of heat;
Some flew too near the sun in their conceit,
Their hearts on fire with love—too late they learned
Their folly when their wings and feathers burned;
Some met their death between the lion’s claws,
And some were ripped to death by monsters’ jaws;
Some died of thirst; some hunger sent insane,
Till suicide released them from their pain;
Some became weak and could no longer fly
(They faltered, fainted, and were left to die);
Some paused bewildered and then turned aside
To gaze at marvels as if stupefied;
Some looked for pleasure’s path and soon confessed
They saw no purpose in the pilgrims’ quest;
Not one in every thousand souls arrived—
In every hundred thousand one survived.

The birds arrive and are greeted by a herald
A world of birds set out, and there remained
But thirty when the promised goal was gained,
Thirty exhausted, wretched, broken things,
With hopeless hearts and tattered, trailing wings,
Who saw that nameless Glory which the mind
Acknowledges as ever-undefined,
Whose solitary flame each moment turns
A hundred worlds to nothingness and burns
With power a hundred thousand times more bright
Than sun and stars and every natural light.
The awe-struck group, bewildered and amazed,
Like insubstantial, trembling atoms, gazed
And chirred: ‘How can we live or prosper here,
Where if the sun came it would disappear?
Our hearts were torn from all we loved; we bore
The perils of a path unknown before;
And all for this? It was not this reward
That we expected from our longed-for Lord.’
It seemed their throats were cut, as if they bled
And weakly whimpered until left for dead,

Waiting for splendour to annihilate
Their insubstantial, transitory state.
Time passed; then from the highest court there flew
A herald of the starry retinue,
Who saw the thirty birds, trembling, afraid,
Their bodies broken and their feathers frayed,
And said: ‘What city are you from? What race?
What business brings you to this distant place?
What are your names? You seem destroyed by fear;
What made you leave your homes and travel here?
What were you in the world? What use are you?
What can such weak and clumsy creatures do?’
The group replied: ‘We flew here for one thing,
To claim the Simorgh as our rightful King;
We come as suppliants and we have sought
Through grievous paths the threshold of His court—
How long the Way was to complete our vow;
Of thousands we are only thirty now!
Was that hope false which led us to this place,
Or shall we now behold our Sovereign’s face?’

The herald tells the birds to turn back
The herald said: ‘This King for whom you grieve
Governs in glory you cannot conceive—
A hundred thousand armies are to Him
An ant that clambers up His threshold’s rim,
And what are you? Grief is your fate—go back;
Retrace your steps along the pilgrims’ track!’
And when they heard the herald’s fearsome words
A deathly hopelessness assailed the birds.
‘But they replied: ‘Our King will not repay
With sorrow all the hazards of the Way;
Grief cannot come to us from majesty;
Grief cannot live beside such dignity.
Think of Majnun, who said: “If all the earth
Should every passing moment praise my worth,'
I would prefer abuse from Leili’s heart
To all creation’s eulogizing art—
The world’s praise cannot equal Leili’s blame;
Both worlds are less to me than Leili’s name.”
We told you our desire—if grief must come,
Then we are ready and shall not succumb.

The herald said: ‘The blaze of majesty
Reduces souls to unreality,
And if your souls are burned, then all the pain
That you have suffered will have been in vain.’
They answered him: ‘How can a moth flee fire
When fire contains its ultimate desire?
And if we do not join Him, yet we’ll burn,
And it is this for which our spirits yearn—
It is not union for which we hope;
We know that goal remains beyond our scope.’

The birds narrated then the moth’s brief tale:
‘They told the moth: “You are too slight, too frail
To bear the vivid candle-flame you seek—
This game is for the noble, not the weak;
Why die from ignorance?” The moth replied:
“Within that fire I cannot hope to hide—
I know I could not penetrate the flame;
Simply to reach it is my humble aim.”

Though grief engulfed the ragged group, love made
The birds impetuous and unafraid;
The herald’s self-possession was unmoved,
But their resilience was not reproofed—
Now, gently, he unlocked the guarded door;
A hundred veils drew back, and therebefore
The birds’ incredulous, bewildered sight
Shone the unveiled, the inmost Light of Light.
He led them to a noble throne, a place
Of intimacy, dignity and grace,

Then gave them all a written page and said
That when its contents had been duly read
The meaning that their journey had concealed,
And of the stage they’d reached, would be revealed.

Joseph’s brothers read of their treachery
When Malek Dar bought Joseph as a slave,
The price agreed (and which he gladly gave)
Seemed far too low— to be quite sure he made
The brothers sign a note for what he’d paid;
And when the wicked purchase was complete
He left with Joseph and the sealed receipt.
At last when Joseph ruled in Egypt’s court
His brothers came to beg and little thought
To whom it was each bowed his humbled head
And as a suppliant appealed for bread.
Then Joseph held a scroll up in his hand
And said: ‘No courtier here can understand
These Hebrew characters—if you can read
This note I’ll give you all the bread you need.’
The brothers could read Hebrew easily
And cried: ‘Give us the note, your majesty!’
(If any of my readers cannot find
Himself in this account, the fool is blind.)
When Joseph gave them that short document
They looked—and trembled with astonishment.
They did not read a line but in dismay
Debated inwardly what they should say.
Their past sins silenced them; they were too weak
To offer an excuse or even speak.
Then Joseph said: ‘Why don’t you read? You seem
Distracted, haunted by some dreadful dream.’
And they replied: ‘Better to hold our breath
Than read and in so doing merit death.’
The birds discover the Simorgh

The thirty birds read through the fateful page
And there discovered, stage by detailed stage,
Their lives, their actions, set out one by one -
All that their souls had ever been or done:
And this was bad enough, but as they read
They understood that it was they who'd led
The lovely Joseph into slavery -
Who had deprived him of his liberty
Deep in a well, then ignorantly sold
Their captive to a passing chief for gold.
(Can you not see that at each breath you sell
The Joseph you imprisoned in that well,
That he will be the king to whom you must
Naked and hungry bow down in the dust?)
The chastened spirits of these birds became
Like crumbled powder, and they shrank with shame.
Then, as by shame their spirits were refined
Of all the world's weight, they began to find
A new life flow towards them from that bright
Celestial and ever-living Light -
Their souls rose free of all they'd been before;
The past and all its actions were no more.
Their life came from that close, insistent sun
And in its vivid rays they shone as one.
There in the Simorgh's radiant face they saw
Themselves, the Simorgh of the world25 - with awe
They gazed, and dared at last to comprehend
They were the Simorgh and the journey's end.
They see the Simorgh - at themselves they stare,
And see a second Simorgh standing there;
They look at both and see the two are one,
That this is that, that this, the goal is won.
They ask (but inwardly; they make no sound)
The meaning of these mysteries that confounded
Their puzzled ignorance - how is it true
That 'we' is not distinguished here from 'you'?
And silently their shining Lord replies:
'I am a mirror set before your eyes,
And all who come before My splendour see
Themselves, their own unique reality;
You came as thirty birds and therefore saw
These selfsame thirty birds, not less nor more;
If you had come as forty, fifty - here
An answering forty, fifty, would appear;
Though you have struggled, wandered, travelled far,
It is yourselves you see and what you are.'
(Who sees the Lord? It is himself each sees;
What ant's sight could discern the Pleiades?
What anvil could be lifted by an ant?
Or could a fly subdue an elephant?)
'How much you thought you knew and saw; but you
Now know that all you trusted was untrue.
Though you traversed the Valleys' depths and fought
With all the dangers that the journey brought,
The journey was in Me, the deeds were Mine -
You slept secure in Being's inmost shrine.
And since you came as thirty birds, you see
These thirty birds when you discover Me,
The Simorgh, Truth's last flawless jewel, the light
In which you will be lost to mortal sight,
Dispersion to nothingness until once more
You find in Me the selves you were before.'
Then, as they listened to the Simorgh's words,
A trembling dissolution filled the birds -
The substance of their being was undone,
And they were lost like shade before the sun;
Neither the pilgrims nor their guide remained.
The Simorgh ceased to speak, and silence reigned.
The ashes of Hallaj

Hallaj's corpse was burned and when the flame subsided, to the pyre a Sufi came who stirred the ashes with his staff and said:

'Where has that cry "I am the Truth" now fled?
All that you cried, all that you saw and knew,
Was but the prelude to what now is true.
The essence lives; rise now and have no fear,
Rise up from ruin, rise and disappear -
All shadows are made nothing in the one
Unchanging light of Truth's eternal sun.'

A hundred thousand centuries went by,
And then those birds, who were content to die,
To vanish in annihilation, saw
Their Selves had been restored to them once more,
That after Nothingness they had attained
Eternal Life, and self-hood was regained.
This Nothingness, this Life, are states no tongue
At any time has adequately sung -
Those who can speak still wander far away
From that dark Truth they struggle to convey,
And by analogies they try to show
The forms men's partial knowledge cannot know.
(But these are not the subject for my chyme;
They need another book, another time -
And those who merit them will one day see
This Nothingness and this eternity;
While you still travel in your worldly state,
You cannot pass beyond this glorious gate.)
Why do you waste your life in slothful sleep?
Rise up, for there is nothing you can keep;
What will it profit you to comprehend
The present world when it must have an end?
Know He has made man's seed and nourished it
So that it grows in wisdom until fit

The king who ordered his beloved to be killed

There was a monarch once of seven lands,
A second Alexander, whose commands
Sent armies forth from pole to pole, whose might
Eclipsed the splendour of the moon at night.
He had a minister whose wise advice
Was well-informed, sagacious and precise.
This minister was father to a son,
A beauteous youth, a peerless paragon;
No man has ever seen such comely grace
(He dared not leave the palace save at night
For fear of causing some tumultuous fight;
Since all the world began no youth has known
The love, the adoration, he was shown.
His face was like the sun; his curls like dusk,
A twilight scented with delicious musk;
His little mouth was fresher than the brook
That gives eternal life, and in his look
A hundred stars seemed gathered as a guide
To tempt whoever saw him to his side;
His thick, spell-binding hair spilled down his back
In twisted tresses, glistening smooth and black;
And round his face the clustered ringlets seemed
Like little miracles a saint had dreamed;
His eyebrows' curve was like a bow (what arm
Could ever draw it or resist its charm?),
The eyes themselves a sorcery to quell
A hundred hearts with their hypnotic spell;
His lips were like the freshet that bestows
A sweet, new life on spring's reviving rose;
His youthful beard was like the fledgling grass
That re-emerges where spring's runnels pass;
His serried teeth were like . . . oh, who but fools
Would try to represent such shining jewels!
And on his cheek there was a musk-like mole,
That seemed a portent of Time's hidden soul;
What can I say? No eloquence conveys
A beauty that surpassed all mortal praise.
His king caught sight of him - and passion made
This monarch like a drunken renegade.
That full moon caused his sovereign to appear
As thin as is the new moon, wan with fear.
His love obsessed the king; a moment spent
Without that youth was torture, banishment -
He could not rest away from him; desire
Destroyed his patience in its raging fire.
He sat the boy beside him day and night,
Whispering secrets till the last dim light
Left that beloved face - when darkness fell,
Sleep did not touch this sovereign sentinel;

And when the boy's head drooped the monarch kept
A guardian vigil while his servant slept,
The face lit by a candle's softening light
Watched by the weeping king throughout the night.
The king threw blossoms in his loved one's hair,
Or combed it hour by hour with tender care,
And then for sudden love would cry aloud,
Weep tears like raindrops scattered from a cloud,
Or make a public banquet for the boy,
Or drink with him alone, in secret joy -
He could not bear to be without his face,
To see him absent for a moment's space.
The youth chafed inwardly, but he was tied
By terror to his royal master's side,
Afraid that if he went away but once
The king would hang him for his impudence
(Even his parents were afraid to say
They wished to see their son from day to day -
They dared not offer succour or support
To one who seemed the prisoner of the court).

There was a girl at court, a lovely child
Who filled the room with sunlight when she smiled.
This youth caught sight of her, and like a fire
Love kindled his impetuous desire.
One night (the king was drunk) he slipped away
And in her room the two together lay.
At midnight, though the king could hardly stand,
He staggered out, a dagger in his hand,
And searched the court, prowling from place to place
Until he found them locked in love's embrace.
Then hate and love could not be held apart:
Wild flames of jealousy swept through his heart.
'How could you choose another love?' he cried.
'What idiocy is this, what selfish pride?
To think of all that I have done for you
(Far more than any other man would do!).
Is this then my reward? Continue, please!
You're expert at it, everyone agrees!
But think - my coffer's key was in your hand;
My noblemen were under your command;
I ruled with your assistance and consent;
You were my closest friend, my confidant;
And yet you sneak in secret to this whore -
Foul slave, you are my confidant no more!' He paused, then ordered that the youth be bound
And dragged in chains along the filthy ground -
The silver pallor of his lovely back
Was at the king's commandment beaten black,
And where his throne had been the soldiers built
The gibbet that would show the world his guilt.
'First flay the faithless wretch,' their monarch said,
'Then hang him upside-down until he's dead -
And then those chosen for my love will see
Their eyes should glance at no one else but me.' The monarch's courtiers hurried to comply -
Gasping, head down, the youth was left to die.

But when the minister, his father, heard
The punishment this lover had incurred,
He wept and cried: 'What harsh necessity
Has made the king my son's sworn enemy?' Two slaves had seized the boy - to them he went,
To them he made his fatherly lament,
And as he gave them each a pearl he said:
'Drink has confused our noble monarch's head;
He will regret my son's uncalled-for fate,
But when he's sober it will be too late;
Whoever kills my son will then be killed.' They said: 'If his commands are not fulfilled,
It's we who'll die - if he comes here and sees
No bloody corpse, the next deaths he decrees
Are ours!' The wily minister then brought
A murderer, convicted by the court,

Who waited in a prison-cell for death --
They stripped the villain, flayed him, stopped his breath,
Then hanged him upside-down until the mud
Beneath the gibbet reddened with his blood
(The boy was hidden in a private place
Till it was safe for him to show his face).

The next day dawned; the king was sober now,
But anger still stamped furrows on his brow.
He called the slaves and asked: 'What did you do
With that abhorrent dog I gave to you?'
They said: 'We flayed the wretch, then hanged him where
The court could witness his last, cruel despair -
He hangs there now, my lord, head down and dead.'
The king rejoiced to hear the words they said
(He there and then made each of them a lord,
And gave them presents as a fit reward).
'Let him hang there,' he cried, 'till late tonight -
There is a lesson in this shameful sight,'
But when his people heard the tale they felt
Their hearts in surreptitious pity melt;
They came to stare, but none could recognize
The youth in that hacked corpse which met their eyes.
All day the city mourned with smothered cries
Tears hastily suppressed and inward sighs.

A few days passed; the king's rage vanished too,
And as his anger went his sorrow grew -
Love made him weak; this lion-hearted king
Became an ant, afraid of everything.

Then he remembered how they used to sit
For days and nights, when love seemed infinite,
Drinking their wine in homely privacy,
And more drunk with each other's company -
He could not bear the thought; he felt tears rise
To overflow his weeping, downcast eyes.
Regret consumed him; reason, patience fled,
And in the dust he bowed his noble head.
He dressed in mourning, neither ate nor slept,
But, shut away in lonely anguish, wept.
Night came; he drove off that still-gaping crowd
Which stood beneath the gallows tree, and, bowed
By lonely grief, told over one by one
The actions of his absent paragon.
Then as each loved, lost deed was called to mind,
He groaned that he had been so rash, so blind.
Pain gripped his heart; his tears flowed like a flood;
He smeared his features with the corpse's blood,
Grovelled in dust, clawed at his pampered skin,
Wept countless storms for his unthinking sin -
He raved, and, as a candle burns away,
Wasted with grief until the break of day,
And when dawn's gentle breeze arose returned
To his apartments' hearth, and still he burned.

For forty nights the ashes of despair
Reduced him to the stature of a hair;
For forty nights none dared approach the throne
Or speak to him, and he was left alone.
For forty days he fasted, then one night
He dreamed he saw the boy - his face was white
And smeared with trickling tears; from foot to head
Were blood-stains where his gaping wounds had bled.
The king cried: 'Comfort of my soul, what chance
Reduced you to this evil circumstance?'
'I am like this,' the weeping boy replied,
'Because of your ingratitude and pride -
Is this fidelity, to flay my skin
For some imagined slight, some paltry sin?
Is this how lovers act? No infidel
Would make his lover undergo such hell;
What have I done that I should hang and die,
A shameful spectacle to passers-by?'
My soul is burned with passion and despair;  
There is no part of me that does not bear  
The scars of wild regret - how long, O Lord,  
Must absence be my fate and my reward?  
Just God, destroy me now; I gladly give  
My soul to death; I have no will to live.'  
He fell bewildered in a strengthless faint,  
And silence closed his passionate complaint.  
But help was near; the minister had heard  
Each conscience-stricken and repentant word -  
He slipped out from his hiding-place and dressed  
His son as if he were some honoured guest,  
Then sent him to the king. The youth appeared  
Like moonlight when the heaven's clouds have cleared;  
Dressed all in white he knelt before the king,  
And wept as clouds weep raindrops in the spring.  
Then, when the wakened monarch saw the boy,  
There were no words that could express his joy.  
They knew that state of which no man can speak;  
This pearl cannot be pierced; we are too weak.  
The absence that the king endured was gone  
And they withdrew, united now as one.  

No stranger followed them, or could unfold  
The secrets they to one another told -  
Alone at last, together they conferred;  
Blindly they saw themselves and deaf they heard -  
But who can speak of this? I know if I  
Betrayed my knowledge I would surely die;  
If it were lawful for me to relate  
Such truths to those who have not reached this state,  
Those gone before us would have made some sign;  
But no sign comes, and silence must be mine.  
Here eloquence can find no jewel but one,  
That silence when the longed-for goal is won.