

RAFIQ KATHWARI

## Versions\*

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Having made a conscious decision to transform the originals rather than stick to the literal, as would a more reliable translator, I have dropped lines, altered meter and changed titles wherever I felt inspired to—for instance, *Ḥaḳīqat-e Ḥusn*, literally *The Reality of Beauty*, to *Fiction*)—yet I have labored hard to preserve the overall original intent and, to the extent possible, infuse my versions (that is exactly what they are, Versions) with an echo of Iqbāl's all important tone.]

### HIMALAYA<sup>1</sup>

O Himalaya, tell of that time when man first lay  
in your lap. O let me imagine that dawn  
unstained by red. Run backward, cycle of  
day and night, ancient eras a moment in your lifetime.  
You are a poem whose first verse is the sky.  
Your bright turbans dazzle the Pleiades.  
Lightning across your peaks sends black tents wandering  
above the valley. The wind polishes the trembling  
mirrors  
at your hem. Streams cascade down your forehead,  
your cheeks quiver. As morning air cradles intoxicated  
roses and the leaves are silenced by the rose-gatherer's  
wrists,  
so speech is silenced in the roar of falling water.

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\* The "versions" incorporate only portion's of Iqbāl's poems and not whole poems. —*Editor*

<sup>1</sup>"Himāla" in Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl: Urdū* (Lahore: Shaikh Ghulām 'Alī ainq Sanz, 1973), 21.

YOUR LOVE'S HORIZON IS WHAT I WANT<sup>2</sup>

*The simplicity of what I want*

Tease me with a glance  
*Test my patience. That's what I want*

Let's bestow bliss on the pious  
*Seeing you face to face is what I want*

I am a speck of dust reaching for the sky  
*"You can't behold," is the command I want*

One day I will leave this gathering I love  
*Snuffed like a candle is not what I want*

I have told our secret in public  
*I have no manners. Scold me. That's all I want*

FICTION<sup>3</sup>

"Why didn't you make me eternal?"  
Beauty asked God one day,

Who replied: "The world's fiction  
is carved from nothingness.

In changing colors you were born:  
true beauty is ephemeral."

The moon overheard this dialogue,  
beamed it to the morning star

who woke the dawn, whispering sky's secret  
to the dewdrop, earth's guardian.

Dew drenched the rose petals,  
and Spring left the garden weeping.

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<sup>2</sup>Based on the ghazal that begins "Tirē 'ishq kī intihā čāhtā hūn" in *ibid.*, 105.

<sup>3</sup>"Haqīqat-e Ḥusn" in *ibid.*, 112.

TWO STARS<sup>4</sup>

As two stars approached  
each other, one said:

“If we could only stay  
only could stop whirling.

If the sky were kinder  
we’d shine together.”

But this desire of two  
bears longing in itself.

Stars are fated to revolve  
in orbits ordained.

Together is a dream.  
Separation the law.

A WALK IN THE SKY<sup>5</sup>

I walked alone, the bewildered stars,  
past day and night, circled  
my journey’s secret. I left the old order.

What can I tell you about Paradise,  
desire’s horizon? Birds in olive trees,  
houris unveiled, goblets clinking.

Beyond Paradise, a place so dark  
even Layla’s curls would pale,  
so icy, Venus herself would hide.

“What is this place?” “This is hell,”  
an angel answered to my surprise.  
“Here, borrowed fire creates turmoil:

those who come here are their own flame.”

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<sup>4</sup>“Dō Sitārē” in *ibid.*, 148.

<sup>5</sup>“Sair-e Falak” in *ibid.*, 175.