

Poetic Annihilation in the Sufi Experience of Ibn al-Fāriḍ

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Abstract:

This study aims to explore the distinctiveness of the annihilation experience in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetry by examining its religious and aesthetic dimensions and tracing its evolution from a spiritual concept into a unifying vision. At the same time, it aims to highlight how the poet embodies the three stations of annihilation: between the sensory dimension and the absolute dimension, annihilation in the supreme Self, and the unity of witnessing, as a cognitive and aesthetic path towards the Absolute. Hence, the article seeks to conclude that the poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ constitutes a unique experience in which love and knowledge are harmonised and in which existence appears as nothing but a mirror of divine beauty.

Keywords: Ibn al-Fāriḍ; annihilation; Sufism; divine beauty; unity of witnessing.

Introduction:

Islamic Sufism constitutes one of the most prominent spiritual paths that has worked to expand the religious experience in Arab-Islamic culture because it has transcended the limits of the superficial understanding of texts to the inwards apprehension of esoteric meanings, such that this experience "emerges from the depths in order to reach the depths. "¹ In its quest to realise a direct knowledge of God through purification and spiritual conduct. At the heart of this profound experience, the concept of annihilation emerges, since it represents a superior station on the Sufi path, in which the existence of the wayfarer is effaced in the witnessing of the real and through which he transcends his limited self until he attains "the purification of the soul and the refinement of the spirit through virtues. "²

Thus, we find the Sufi poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ, who is regarded as one of those who expressed this station in an elevated manner, bringing together within it the purity of the spiritual experience and the nobility of artistic formulation. For his poetry in particular, the Great Tā'iyya and the Khamrīyya have bestowed upon annihilation a unique image, as a moment of spiritual rapture in which the ego becomes intertwined with the Absolute and the boundaries between lover and Beloved are effaced.

The distinctiveness of annihilation in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's experience does not, in any way, lie in the Sufi contents that he presents but rather in the manner in which he has fashioned these meanings within a poetic structure imbued with symbolism, allusiveness, and beauty. Hence, precisely from this point, the importance of this study, which seeks to uncover the features of this distinctiveness through a reading of selected examples from his poetry, linking spiritual experience and the language of poetry, as well as annihilation as an existential state and annihilation as an aesthetic experience, arises.

Notably, the station of annihilation was not exclusive to a single Sufi school because it constituted a common axis among the leading figures of Sufism in both the eastern and western Islamic worlds alike. However, the manifestations of this station varied according to the intellectual and aesthetic backgrounds of each mystery. While some expressed annihilation in the language of philosophy or in a terse language of allusion, Ibn al-Fāriḍ was distinguished by embodying it through a dense poetic language that accommodates Sufi concepts in vivid, sensuous images that pulse with life.

In addition, annihilation in his experience is not presented merely as a negation of the self; in contrast, it represents a fundamental transformation in consciousness that reshapes the relationship between the human being and existence, between lover and beloved, within the framework of an all-encompassing spiritual unity. This is what has rendered his poetry an open field for multiple readings, corresponding to the multiplicity of readers.

On this basis, this distinctiveness is regarded as one of the key elements for understanding the impact of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, as he brought together the dimensions of spiritual experience and the authenticity of poetic expression and thus became, in the view of critics and scholars, a pioneering model of the convergence of thought and feeling, doctrine and beauty. Hence, the importance of pausing at some of his poems arises to derive the modes of his representation of annihilation and his distinctiveness from other mystics.

1- Sufi Annihilation: Meanings and Dimensions:

1-1- On the Concept of Annihilation:

Annihilation in Islamic Sufism is regarded as one of the most important stations attained by great mystics. In essence, it is the effacement of the wayfarer's awareness of his own self in the presence of the real, such that he becomes absent from all else. In many Sufi writings, annihilation is paired with the station of subsistence, on the basis that

"annihilation takes on two forms: one that comes through abundant spiritual discipline, and the other through the loss of awareness of the world of dominion and sovereignty, which is [attained] by immersion in the majesty of the Creator and the witnessing of the Real."³

There are numerous definitions of annihilation among the Sufis. For al-Junayd al-Baghdādī, it is "the annihilation of the servant from the vision of himself,"⁴ that is, a transformation of consciousness from the partial ego to the total presence. Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī holds that annihilation is "absence from everything other than God."⁵ For Ibn ʿArabī, he links it to the concept of the unity of existence; it is "the fusion of the individual self and its annihilation in its unique world, by a mode of presence that confirms the nature of the existential unity resulting from the divine self-disclosure."⁶ In other words, annihilation is a state in which the divine being is manifested in such a way that it overwhelms the human self, and the boundaries between worshipper and worshipped dissolve in a moment of spiritual witnessing.

Moreover, annihilation cannot be understood in isolation from the Sufi system, which progresses from repentance, renunciation, and spiritual struggle, through love and knowledge, to annihilation and subsistence. It is thus the fruit of a long spiritual journey founded upon purification, the struggle against the self, and severing attachments to the world.⁷

Annihilation represents the summit of this path, where the wayfarer comes to witness the divine reality without intermediaries, and the distinction between (the ego) and (the real) vanishes at the level of consciousness. Nevertheless, this does not mean the abolition of the human being's material existence; rather, it is a transformation in awareness and spiritual taste, since it causes the wayfarer to live in a state of spiritual union, not literal indwelling.

1-2- From the Religious Concept to the Poetic Concept of Annihilation:

It is not hidden from the reader of the Sufi text that the concept of annihilation is considered one of the most controversial Sufi concepts owing to its multifaceted religious and spiritual dimensions, as well as the intellectual and artistic questions it has raised simultaneously. On the religious level, annihilation is closely linked to the idea of pure monotheism. For Sufis, the spiritual path aims to reach a degree of purity of heart and inner clarity that enables the servant to see nothing in existence. However, God, so that he is annihilated from his own self and from all that is other than Him. Thus, from this perspective, annihilation is the realisation of the essence of the Islamic creed, which affirms the oneness of God and His transcendence above any like or equal, whereas the Sufis approach it not as a mere doctrinal affirmation but as an inwards experiential tasting lived by the wayfarer in the depths of his being.

In this same context, annihilation is not merely a material absence or a sensory death; rather, it is the effacement of egotism and the stripping away of the attachments of the self and desire until the light of the real is manifested in the heart of the gnostic.

On the poetic and hermeneutic level, annihilation was transformed from a spiritual concept into an aesthetic and artistic symbol through which the experience of divine love is expressed. Sufi poets, foremost among them Ibn al-Fāriḍ, found in the concept a spacious horizon for embodying the relationship between lover and Beloved in the language of love, passion, and union. Thus, terms such as dissolution, intoxication, absence, and union became instruments with diverse meanings for expressing the moment of annihilation. The language of poetry helped transfer the concept from its abstract theoretical domain to a human sphere that pulsed with emotion so that the Sufi experience became open to aesthetic appreciation after it became an intimate matter between servant and Lord. Thus, the poetic interpretation of annihilation is what confers upon Islamic Sufism its creative and human dimension, since it makes the spiritual experience a field for artistic expression and makes divine love a universal language shared by the receiver and the poet.

The representations of annihilation differed among mystics and poets: while the theologians expressed it in the language of concepts, the poets fashioned it in the language of images and symbols. Thus, whereas al-Junayd al-Baghdādī says that annihilation is “the annihilation of the servant from the vision of himself,”⁸ we find poets expressing this very meaning through the image of dissolution in the Beloved, or absence in His light, or union with His attributes. Here, the distinctiveness of Sufi language becomes manifest, as it blends the religious with the affective doctrine with beauty, so that there is no opposition between faith and dense symbolic expression, given that symbol in Sufi poetry is not a deliberately contrived obscurity but a necessity for expressing an experience that is not grasped by the intellect but tasted by the spirit, for “tasting alone, and nothing else, is the criterion of judgement.”⁹

Thus, annihilation, in its religious dimension, represents the ultimate goal of journeying towards God, and in its poetic dimension, it represents the aesthetic pinnacle of expressing this journey. Through this interpenetration between the two concepts, Sufi poetry became a mirror of the spiritual experience in its purest forms, transforming from a homiletic or theological discourse into a language of cosmic love that embraces the Absolute and unveils the secret of existence through love and dissolution in divine beauty.

2- Manifestations of Poetic Annihilation in the Experience of Ibn al-Fāriḍ:

There is no disagreement that Ibn al-Fāriḍ.¹⁰ Occupies a unique place in the history of Islamic Sufism, for he was able to unite the spiritual experience with the loftiness of artistic expression, so that his poetry came to be regarded as a clear mirror of the Sufi experience in its most elevated stages. If annihilation in Sufi thought is a station on the path of journeying towards God, then in Ibn al-Fāriḍ, it is transformed into an absolute affective state that transcends the boundaries between the human being and existence and expresses the dissolution of the self in the divine Beloved, not merely as the end of the path but rather, on the contrary, as a new birth of consciousness.

In the poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, the religious and aesthetic dimensions of annihilation are fused so that the Sufi concept becomes, for him, an integrated experience. That is, he does not content himself with describing annihilation as a spiritual station; instead, he lives it in his language, his rhythm, and his images until the poem itself appears as a journey of gradual annihilation towards the divine light.

His major works, particularly the Great Tā'iyya and the Khamrīyya, reveal a unique understanding of annihilation grounded in absolute love, insofar as passion becomes a means to knowledge, knowledge becomes a path to union, and union becomes one of the manifestations of annihilation. On this basis, annihilation appears in the poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ as a kind of transformation in consciousness that enables the gnostic to see their own self in light of the divine reality, witnessing God in all things and beholding in every being the face of the eternal Beloved. The self, for him, is not abolished but purified and refined to become a vessel for the divine lights. From this, it is clear that his experience reveals a delicate balance between absence and presence, between annihilation and subsistence, and between passion and rational discernment, which grants his poetry human and spiritual dimensions that transcend the bounds of time and space.

2-1- Sensory Dimension and the Absolute Dimension:

Journeying towards God, exalted is He, is an ascension by which the soul rises from the world of outwards appearance to the world of reality, from the sensory to the absolute, and from the earth of matter to the heaven of spirit. In essence, it is an inner transformation and a change in attributes that prepares the soul for communion, with its greatest Beloved, God, glorified and exalted be He.¹¹ In this way, the essence of the Sufi poetic experience in Ibn al-Fāriḍ can be seen as taking the sensory as an entryway for revealing what lies beyond sensation and the material image as a ladder for entering the world of divine meaning. The poet accepts sensory beauty; in contrast, he interprets it so that it becomes a manifestation of divine beauty, as in his words from the Khamrīyya:

شَرِينَا عَلَى ذِكْرِ الْحَبِيبِ مُدَامَةً

سَكِرْنَا بِهَا مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يُخْلَقَ الْكَرْمُ

We drank, at the mention of the Beloved, a continuous wine;

We were intoxicated by it before the vine was created.

لَهَا الْبَدْرُ كَأْسٌ، وَهِيَ شَمْسٌ يُدِيرُهَا

هَالِكٌ، وَكَمْ يَبْدُو إِذَا مُرِجَتْ نَجْمٌ

The full moon is her cup, and she is a sun that a crescent sets in motion,

Moreover, how often, when she is mixed, does a star appear?¹²

In these two verses, wine is transformed from a symbol of sensory pleasure in Arabic poetry into a symbolic sign of experiential knowledge of God. It is, in this sense, an eternal wine from before the vine was created; that is, it is not a product of this world but of the eternal effusion of divinity that intoxicates spirits away from their sensory perception and awakens them to another presence that is apprehended only by Sufi tasting. The conjunction of the full moon, sun, crescent, and star expresses the radiance of one light in multiple manifestations, thereby embodying the transition from the sensory to the cosmic and from the particular to the universal.

مُخَيِّمٌ لِّذَاتِي، وَسُوقٌ مَّارِي، وَقِبْلَةٌ أَمَالِي، وَمَوْطِنٌ صَبَّوْتِي
مَنَازِلُ أَنَسٍ، كُنَّ، لَمْ أَنَسْ ذِكْرَهَا بَمَنْ بَعْدَهَا وَالْقُرْبُ: نَارِي وَجَنَّتِي
وَمَنْ أَجْلَهَا حَالِي بِهَا، وَأَجْلَهَا عَنْ الْمَنِّ، مَا لَمْ تَخَفْ وَالسَّقَمُ حَلَّتِي
غَرَامِي، بِشَعْبِ عَامِرٍ، شَعْبِ عَامِرٍ غَرِيْبِي، وَإِنْ جَارُوا، فَهَمَّ خَيْرُ جِيرَتِي
وَمَنْ بَعْدَهَا، مَا سَرَّ سِرِّي لِبَعْدَهَا، وَقَدْ قَطَعْتَ مِنْهَا رَجَائِي بِخَبِيْثَتِي
سَقَى، بِالصَّفَاءِ الرَّئِيْعِي، رَبْعًا بِهِ الصَّفَا وَجَادَ، بِأَجْيَادَ، تَرَى مِنْهُ ثَرَوَتِي

In another place, Ibn al-Fāriḍ says:

A camp of my delights, the marketplace of my wishes,
The qibla of my hopes, the dwelling place of my youthful longing;
Abodes of intimacy they were; I have not forgotten their mention,
And with those who came after them, nearness is my fire and my paradise.
For their sake is my state with them, and more exalted, it is
Than any favour, so long as it does not wane; and sickness is my garb.
My passion is for the valley of 'Āmir, the clan of 'Āmir is my adversary,
And although they wrong me, they are the best of my neighbours.
After her, how should my secret rejoice in her remoteness,
When, through my disappointment, have I cut off my hope for her?
May the vernal rain, in its purity, water a dwelling where there is purity,
Moreover, may it pour upon Ajyād; from it you may behold my wealth.¹³

This passage from the poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ stands as a luminous example of the Sufi experience that transcends the sensory to the realm of the Absolute, where language is

transformed into a means of unveiling rather than description, and place is inverted from its material signification into a symbolic station inhabited by meanings, not things. Here, Ibn al-Fāriḍ is not speaking of an actual campsite or physical abode but of a spiritual space in which the first moment of purity is manifested: the moment of contact with the divine essence, which negates the limits of the self and dissolves it into universal existence. The words speak, and the utterance is true, for in this poetic passage, we see an evocation of a state of ecstasy that goes beyond sense to meaning and that replaces external geography with an inner geography that expands in proportion to the radiance of the spirit.

In this way, the poet evokes images of purity, abodes, intimacy, and the thriving valley to establish an ascending inner movement that begins with remembrance and ends in annihilation, where nothing of the Beloved remains save for His absolute presence in the heart. Language in Ibn al-Fāriḍ here opens into dimensions of profound significance, as real relations are replaced by affective relations founded on suggestion rather than explicitness, on manifestation rather than description. Hence, the yearning that permeates the verses is not a longing for places but rather a longing for the Origin, for the divine reality that constitutes at once the source and the goal of existence.

In this sense, the passage represents the pinnacle of Sufi awareness of love, where absence is transformed into presence, remoteness into nearness, and torment into delight. The experience that Ibn al-Fāriḍ conveys is not that of a lover in the sensory world but that of a wayfarer who, by means of his ecstasy, passes from the lower world to the higher world, from the visible world to the invisible world, until existence as a whole becomes a translation of a single Beloved who eyes do not perceive yet spirits witness. In this context, the poet becomes absent from his own self to unite with that which transcends it so that his words become a trace of the Unseen within language and a radiance of Truth within the confines of utterance.

روحي للقاءك يا مُناها اشتأقتُ والأرض علي، كاختيالي، ضأقتُ
والنفس لقد ذابت غراماً وجوى في جنب رضاك في الهوى ما لاقت

Moreover, in another place, he says:

My soul has longed to meet You, O its utmost desire,

Moreover, the earth, like my bewilderment, has grown tight upon me.

The self has indeed melted in passion and in concealed anguish

Over what it has met in love, for the sake of Your good pleasure.¹⁴

In this passage, the Sufi experience reaches its pinnacle in Ibn al-Fāriḍ, as language is transformed into a mirror of the burning of the spirit in its longing for the Absolute, and the poet moves from expressing yearning to embodying the state of annihilation in the Beloved. The voice here is no longer the voice of a lover yearning for a sensory

encounter but the voice of a soul that has gone out from the orbit of the self to dwell in the expanse of divine existence. As this longing intensifies, the sensory world grows narrow: the earth, which had been the human being's dwelling place, becomes a symbol of the constriction of material existence before the vastness of spiritual manifestation, while the spirit is liberated from the captivity of choice to expand to the will of God alone. In the melting of the self in passion and concealed sorrow, the experience reaches its apex, as love becomes a fire that purifies the being and returns it to its origin so that dissolution becomes a form of manifestation. In this way, Ibn al-Fārīd expresses the transition from partial existence to universal existence, from pain to purity, and from human feeling to divine awareness, so that the poem becomes a testimony to the moment of union in which all that is sensory is effaced and only the presence of the Absolute remains, revealed in the depths of the inner being.

وقل تركت صريعا في دياركم، حيا كميته، يُعِيرُ السُّقْمَ للسُّقْمِ
فمن فؤادي لهيب ناب عن قبس ومن جفوني دمع فاض كالديم
وهذه سنة العشاق، ما علقوا بِشَادِنٍ، فَخَلَا عُضْوٌ مِنَ الْأَلَمِ

In another place, he says:

Say: I was left slain in your abodes,

Alive like one dead, lending sickness to sickness.

From my heart, there is a blaze that stands in place of a spark,

And from my eyelids, a tear that overflows like continuous rain.

Such is the way of lovers: whenever they cling

To a tender gazelle, not a single limb is free of pain.¹⁵

In this passage, Ibn al-Fārīd continues to expand his amorous experience onto the Sufi horizon, where the features of human ecstasy and divine love interweave into a single fabric so that the suffering of the body becomes a manifestation of the spirit burning in the presence of the Beloved. Here, the poet describes the station of annihilation, in which the lover is left slain in the abodes of his Beloved, that is, standing before the hands of divine beauty with the structure of his self dissolved. The blaze that issues from his heart is not an earthly fire but rather a flame of knowledge that stands in place of a spark from the divine light; thus, suffering itself becomes a path to unveiling and burning a means of purifying human existence of its density.

Moreover, when he says that this is the way of lovers, he thereby acknowledges the reality of the Sufi experience as the law of cosmic love that courses through everyone who has attached himself to the Absolute, for passion is a trial and affliction a sign of sincerity. For withholding greetings from them, this is not merely a romantic image; in

contrast, it signifies the gnostic's severance from the world of habit because he has come to live within a sphere of inner stillness in which there is no peace save with God. Therefore, he appears alive like one dead: his bodily life has been extinguished so that the life of the spirit may be kindled within him, and his outwards illness "lends sickness to sickness," because he has become a source of existential pain that can be healed only by arrival.

In the end, when tears pour from his eyelids like continuous rain, the balance between torment and mercy manifests; weeping is purification and not weakness, and thus, it is the outflow of the spiritual effusion that washes away the remnants of the ego. The mention of the *shādin* serves as a symbol of divine beauty that seizes the heart until the body is emptied of pain, as pain itself is transformed into delight in the witnessing of beauty. Thus, these verses transcend sensory tragedy to become hymn to annihilation and divine love, wherein the being melts in His light, burning is transformed into deliverance, tears into illumination, and death into a new birth in the presence of the Absolute.

Similarly, Ibn al-Fāriḍ views sensory beauty as one of the manifestations of divine beauty; he does not stop at the limits of the outwards image but passes through it to the essence of absolute reality that is disclosed within it. Beauty, in his view, is a means of contemplating the craftsmanship of the Creator; therefore, when he sings of the sensory, he intends, thereby, the divine radiance that is manifested in every beautiful thing. This meaning is made clear in his words:

قال لي: حسن كل شيء تجلى: بي تملئ فقلت: قصدي وراكا
لي حبيب أراك فيه معنى، غرّ غيري، وفيه، معنى، أراكا

He said to me: "The beauty of everything that is made manifest

Is fulfilled through Me", so I said, "My aim is what lies beyond You."

I have a Beloved: in Him, I behold a meaning

That has beguiled others, and in Him, there is a meaning by which I behold You.¹⁶

In these verses, Ibn al-Fāriḍ declares that every beauty in existence is but a reflection of the splendour of the divine essence and that the earthly beloved is nothing but a mirror in which the gnostic beholds the face of the supreme reality. Hence, the woman in his poetry is neither an individual entity nor a symbol of human love but rather an image of universal beauty that is embodied in all created beings. She is a manifestation of the divine mystery that overflows upon the cosmos, and all that she possesses of allure or radiance, she derives from that eternal origin. Thus, love, for Ibn al-Fāriḍ, is transformed from a human emotion into a spiritual experience in which the lover sees, in every beautiful thing, a trace of the Creator, and in every glance of beauty, a path to the Absolute. Moreover, Sufis is "first and foremost the child of the heart, and the intellect may agree with the heart concerning what it loves and whom it loves, or it may not agree;

for love is the subtle yet powerful thread that links all the Sufi's attitudes to one another, and without it, we cannot understand these attitudes. "¹⁷

Accordingly, it becomes clear that Ibn al-Fāriḍ was the poet of transformation from sense to meaning, from manifest beauty to absolute beauty, and from pleasure to knowledge. He made the sensory path to God and poetry a means of embodying what cannot be spoken, so that the text, for him, as we have said, became a journey of unveiling that illumines the intellect and purifies the heart, wherein material beauty is annihilated in the majesty of divine reality.

2-2- Annihilation in the Supreme Self:

Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī defines annihilation in his words: "Annihilation is the effacement of creatures, and the transformation of thy nature from the nature of the angels, then [again] annihilation from the nature of the angels, thy joining to the primordial way; then thy Lord gives thee to drink what He gives thee to drink, and plants within thee what He plants."¹⁸ The human soul cannot attain the presence of God so long as it remains captive to its own self and its attributes, and the transcendence of these constraints is realised only through love; divine love, in the view of the Sufis, is the path that leads the human being to annihilation in God.¹⁹ Hence, we find that the Sufi poet reaches the moment of complete effacement of the self in the presence of the divine self, a moment that can be described only in the language of rapture and dissolution. On this basis, in his major odes, especially the Great Tā'iyya, we find that the boundaries between lover and Beloved dissolve so that nothing remains of the ego saving its shadow and nothing of multiplicity saving its indication of the One. Annihilation, for Ibn al-Fāriḍ, does not mean loss or nonbeing. However, instead of transforming in consciousness from the partial self to the supreme self, the wayfarer sees himself only in light of divine attributes. From this arises his suggestive expressions, in which he sometimes speaks with the pronoun of the Beloved and at other times with the pronoun of the lover; the two voices intermingle, and speaker and spoken-to become one in the moment of annihilation.

Annihilation in the supreme Self represents the pinnacle of the Sufi experience for Ibn al-Fāriḍ; it is the station in which the gnostic transcends the limits of his individual self to dissolve into the Absolute, so that he sees no existence for himself save through God, and witnesses no act save His act. Suppose that the transcending of the sensory agent towards the absolute agent is the beginning of the path. In that case, annihilation is the end, in which the duality between servant and Lord is effaced in a consciousness overflowing with unity and light. This annihilation does not signify the abolition of the self into nonexistence; rather, it is the effacement of the ego in the witnessing of reality so that all things come to subsist through God.

وجد، بسيف العزم، سوف، فإن تجد تجد نفسك، فالنفس إن جُدت جُدت

Ibn al-Fāriḍ says:

Experience easily, with the sword of resolve, soon-then, if you find,

You find a self; yet the self, if you are generous, you sever.²⁰

Here, the Sufi meaning is manifested in its loftiest forms, where annihilation in the supreme Self becomes the wayfarer's ultimate aim and end; the experience is not a passing emotional reaction but comes to represent a path of inner striving in which the self melts into its primordial light, freed from the burdens of desire and illusion. Ecstasy, with the purity it bears, is the gate that is opened by resolve, and the role of the latter lies in the blade that cuts through the veils of heedlessness to unveil the essence of reality. In this moment of annihilation, nothing remains of the being save a ray of divine light, and the human being becomes nothing but a face of the One. Thus, loss is transformed into perfection and absence into absolute presence; speech falls silent, and meaning itself begins to speak.

Thus, if annihilation in the supreme Self is the apex of the gnostic experience, then the manifestation that follows it is the station of subsistence after annihilation, wherein the wayfarer returns to existence purified of his self, in order to witness unity within multiplicity and the Real in the manifestations of creation, as he says:

وفي حبه من عَزَّ توحيد حبه فبالشرك يصلى منه نار قطيعة

In His love, the unification of love for Him is too exalted;

Through associating others with Him, one is made to burn with the fire of severance from Him.

وما شأن هذا الشأن منك سوى السوى، ودعواه، حقا، عنك إن تمح تثبت

Nothing of this affair, as it concerns you, is anything but “otherness.”

Moreover, its claim, in truth, departs from you; if you are effaced, it is made firm.

كذا كنت حيناً، قبل أن يكشف الغطا من اللبس، لا أنفك عن تنوينة

Thus, I was for a time, before the covering of confusion was lifted;

I did not cease to cling to duality.

أروح بفقد بالشهود مؤلفي وأغدو بوجد، بالوجود مشتتي

I depart, through loss, made one in my familiar by witnessing,

and I return, through ecstasy, scattered throughout existence.

يُفرقني لي، التزاماً، بمخضري ويجمعي سلمي اصطلاماً بغيبتي

He separates me-for myself-as a binding, in my presence,
and He gathers me, in my negation, by the ravishment of my absence.

أَخَالَ خَضْبِضَ الصَّحْوِ وَالسَّكْرِ مَغْرَجِي إِلَيْهَا، وَتَحْوِي مُنْتَهَى قَابِ سِدْرَتِي

I deem the lowest point of sobriety and intoxication to be my ladder unto Her,
and it contains the utmost limit of the span of my Lote-tree.

فَجَاهِدْ تَشَاهِدَ فَيْكَ مِنْكَ، وَرَاءَ مَا، وَصَفْتَ، سَكُونًا عَنْ وَجُودِ سَكِينَةٍ

So strive, and you will be held within yourself, from yourself, beyond what I have
described,

a stillness surpassing the mere existence of tranquillity.²¹

Here, in these verses, Ibn al-Fāriḍ elevates his Sufi experience to the station at the boundary between worshipper and worshipped so that multiplicity becomes one of the faces of unity. The loving self here passes through the travail of consciousness between absence and presence, between intoxication and sobriety, until it reaches the station of tranquillity that transcends all human cognition. In this horizon, associating others with God becomes nothing but a veil before the light and differentiates nothing but a trial of the unity of existence that is manifested in all things. In this sense, then, ecstasy becomes a means of unveiling, for it comes to represent an arena of self-disclosure that the wayfarer traverses in order to reach a stillness that is the summit of movement. This presence does not perish because it has become nothing other than annihilation in reality.

In another place, we find him saying:

فَلَا وَصَفَ لِي، وَالْوَصْفُ رَسْمٌ، كَذَاكَ إِلَّا سَمٌ وَسَمٌ، فَإِنْ تَكْنِي، فَكُنْ أَوْ انْعَتِ

I have no description-for description is a delimiting outline

likewise, no name or mark; so if you must allude, then say "He," or else describe.

وَمَنْ أَنَا إِيَّاهَا إِلَى حَيْثُ لَا إِلَى عَرَجْتُ، وَعَطَّرْتُ الْوُجُودَ بِرَجْعَتِي

And from "I am she", I ascended to where there is no "to,"

and I perfumed existence by my return.

وَعَنْ أَنَا إِيَّايَ لِبَاطِنِ حِكْمَةٍ، وَظَاهِرِ أَحْكَامٍ، أَقِيمْتَ لِدَعْوَتِي

And as for "I am I," it is for an inner wisdom

and outwards rulings that were established for my summons.²²

These verses of Ibn al-Fāriḍ embody the state of annihilation as the pinnacle of the Sufi experience, which transcends the limits of both self and language, as the poet continues to negate everything that distinguishes or confines the being. Description is, in essence, a restriction and a differentiation, whereas annihilation is an effacement in the Absolute that does not admit determination. In this state, the duality between the two modes of existence disintegrates, and the word becomes a trace of being rather than a mere instrument of exposition. This finding reveals the ascent from the state of union to a station that surpasses all aims and directions; thus, subsistence after annihilation is realised, and the return becomes an irradiation of existence. The experience is completed when it is transformed into a cosmic function so that annihilation becomes a preparation for the emergence of the inner and outer wisdom that has been established for the sake of the call to true unity. In this way, annihilation becomes a passage from the "I" to the "He," from the finite to the infinite, in an experience in which poetry and knowledge are assimilated into one another, word and being, annihilation and absolute plenitude.

Thus, it becomes clear that annihilation, for Ibn al-Fāriḍ, is an ontological transformation in which the centre of consciousness shifts from the self to the Absolute and from mere affect to manifestation. In this stage, the gnostic sees himself through God, and so realises the station of subsistence after annihilation, where nothing remains of the servant except what subsists through God, and nothing of the cosmos except what is disclosed by God.

Through this vision, the language of poetry in Ibn al-Fāriḍ becomes an illuminative language that transcends description toward unveiling, making the poetic image a means of embodying the meta-empirical and of rhythm an echo of the movement of the spirit on its path toward God. Hence, annihilation in the supreme Self is the very quintessence of his poetic and spiritual journey, which begins with love and culminates in the realisation of the truth.

2-3- Unity of Witnessing:

For Ibn al-Fāriḍ, the experience reaches its peak in what is known as the unity of witnessing, for all stations and states, in his view, "are permeated by love, leading to annihilation, until witnessing is realised."²³ In this rank, the gnostic beholds the Real in everything, without dissolving into creation or withdrawing from the world. After annihilation comes subsistence through God, wherein the poet sees by the light of God, hears by Him, and moves by His will, as in the sacred ḥadīth: "I was his hearing with which he hears and his sight with which he sees..."²⁴ This unity is a practical realisation that all existence is a manifestation of the One. For this reason, the verses of Ibn al-Fāriḍ abound in images that speak with the tongue of cosmic unity, since the distinctions between self and other, earth and heaven, lover and Beloved, are veiled so that reality discloses itself in an absolute presence not bounded by time or space.

Thus, and on the basis of what has preceded, the unity of witnessing represents the highest degree of the Sufi experience for Ibn al-Fāriḍ; it is the ripe fruit of the two stations of transcending the sensory towards the absolute self and of annihilation in the supreme self. At this stage, he witnesses the real in the world and sees a trace of divine existence in everything. It is the moment of total awareness in which creation and Creator meet in a single mirror.²⁵ Moreover, the poet beholds the entire cosmos as a radiance from the light of the One, not as a multiplicity that contradicts His unity. In this respect, Ibn al-Fāriḍ offers his contribution in the following passage:

وجادت ولا استعداد كسب بفيضها وقبل التهي، للقبول، استعدت

It poured forth its effusion, although there was no preparedness acquired for its outpouring,

and, before readiness itself, it had made ready for acceptance.

فبالنفس أشباح الوجود تنعمت وبالروح أرواح الشهود تهنت

Through the soul, the phantoms of existence found their delight,
and, through spirit, the spirits of those who witness found their joy.

وحال شهودي : بين ساع الأفقه ولاح مراة رفقه، بالنصيحة

Moreover, the state of my witnessing lies between one hastening to grasp its horizon
and one whose regard for its gentleness shines forth in counsel.

شهيد بحالي، في السماع لجاذبي، قضاء مَقَرِّي، أو ممر قضيتي

A witness to my state, in the audition of my attractor,

is the decree of my place of abiding or the passage of my destiny.²⁶

Within the Sufi fabric, the experience of the unity of witnessing is manifested as one of the loftiest degrees of spiritual feeling, for the distance between worshipper and worshipped vanishes only at the level of perception; the wayfarer beholds the Real manifested in all things without claiming indwelling or union. Hence, the passage cannot be read apart from its spiritual background because it is founded upon a divine effusion that grants the soul the lights of existence so that it delights in its forms and hues. In accordance with this mode of self-disclosure, witnessing becomes a state between self-awareness and dissolution in the All, and audition is transformed from sensory perception to spiritual attraction, which decreases the distance between the soul and its primordial source.

Accordingly, this witnessing cannot be separated from the act of preparing for receptivity, which symbolises the readiness of the spirit to receive the effusion; receptivity here is not a voluntary act but an inner openness to the Absolute. Spirits meet in the joy of unveiling, and a kind of ontological communication is realised between being and light at a station that is apprehended only by tasting, not by reason. In keeping with this type of discourse, self-disclosure becomes like a mirror in which the divine Self is reflected upon the surface of the purified heart, and witnessing becomes a form of inwards monotheism that sees multiplicity fused within unity.

وأشهدت غبي، إذ بدت فوجدتني هنالك، إياها ، بجلوة خلوتي

I made my dullness bear witness; when she appeared, I found myself.

There, being Her, in the epiphany of my seclusion.

وطاح وجودي في شهودي، وبنت عن وجود شهودي، ماحيا، غير مثبت

My existence collapsed within my witnessing, and apart from

the existence of my witnessing, there remained an effacer, not an affirmer.²⁷

In this self-disclosure, the distances between being and its meaning, between the image and its source, are dissolved so that existence becomes a moment of absolute clarity in which vision and the seen are united. There, the self withdraws from its narrow limits to expand within the expanse of unveiling, and seclusion becomes a station of manifestation, where the feeling of separation disappears and is replaced by a present awareness that sees the All in the One and the One in the All. The unity of witnessing is not an effacement into nonexistence but rather a plenitude with actual existence, a moment in which the knower becomes known and vision itself becomes the object of vision. At this station, nothing remains but pure presence, where multiplicity is veiled within the radiance of unity and silence becomes more eloquent than speech because language proves incapable of containing what is disclosed in the secret.

The identification between the self and its loved one also reaches its peak so that the inner feeling becomes a mirror of the divine presence. Their vision is intensified, and consciousness is transformed into a spring from which witnessing and love flow simultaneously, as he says:

فالفيت ما الفيت عني صادراً إلي، ومنني وارداً بمزيدتي

Thus, I found that what I had cast away from myself was going forth

towards me, and from me returning, increased by my own surplus.

وشاهدت نفسي بالصفات، التي بها تحجبت عني في شهودي وحجبتني

Moreover, I beheld myself through the attributes by which

It had been veiled from me in my witnessing and in my veiling.

وإني التي أحببتها، لا محالة، وكانت لها نفسي علي محيلتي

Moreover, I am she whom I love, inevitably,

and my soul was, for her, my pretext against myself.

فَهَامَتْ بها من حيث لم تدر، وهي في شهودي، بنفس الأمر غير جهولة

Therefore, she became enamoured of her, without knowing whence,

while she, in my witnessing, in very truth is not ignorant.

وقد آن لي تفصيل ما قلْتُ مُجْمَلًا وإجمال ما فصلت، بسطاً لبسطي

Moreover, now it is time for me to outline in detail what I have said in summary,

and to summarise what I have outlined in detail, as an unfolding of my expansion.

أفاد اتخاذي حبها، لاتحادنا، نوار، عن عادِ المُحِبِّينَ، شَدَّتْ

My adoption of love for her, by virtue of our union,

has yielded marvels that have departed from the standard way of lovers.²⁸

In this passage, it is clearly manifested that the poet is no longer speaking from a position of separation but from the station of annihilation in unity, where the duality of subject and object dissolves into a single river of witnessing. Vision is overturned upon itself to witness its own witnessing. The being becomes both act and passion in the exact moment, given that existence is a circular movement that knows neither beginning nor end. In this horizon, the veil is transformed into radiance and absence into presence because the soul is separated from its Beloved only to see Him more clearly in His hiddenness from it. This is the unity of witnessing in its purest sense: that the one should be disclosed in the mirrors of multiplicity without division and that multiplicity should be unveiled in the one without vanishing. What occurs here is not a description of a state but the emergence of an experience in which existence speaks from within itself, where the veil becomes one of the faces of unveiling and vision, in an absolute sense, oscillates between manifestation and concealment that exchange meaning in the silence of the secret. Thus, love becomes the mirror of existence, witnessing the very essence of love and the self; at the end of the journey, the self is nothing but the trace of the light that has been disclosed in its innermost mystery since preeternity.

Unity of witnessing, for Ibn al-Fāriḍ, is an existential and epistemological state that he expresses in a language overflowing with symbols and lights; in it, balance is achieved between love and knowledge, between ecstasy and reason, and between the self and the All. He does not negate multiplicity; instead, he sees in it degrees of manifestation. Nor does he abolish the sensory; instead, he purifies it so that it becomes a means of witnessing.

Thus, the Sufi journey in Ibn al-Fāriḍ concludes with a station in which existence is elevated to its highest peak: the gnostic is annihilated from his own self. It beholds God in all things so that the world becomes a sacred book in which the verses of divine beauty are recited. Annihilation leads to subsistence, subsistence bears fruit in witnessing, and witnessing returns the human being to the world, not absent from it, but present within it as a witness to the unity that does not admit multiplicity.

3- Conclusion

The Sufi experience of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, in its poetic dimension, is manifested as a journey from sense to unveiling and from the self to the Absolute, a journey in which the poet rearranges the relationship between the human being, existence, and God in the light of a unifying vision that sees beauty as a path to truth. Ibn al-Fāriḍ succeeded in bringing together experiential (tasted) knowledge and artistic language, transforming the Sufi experience from intellectual contemplation into an aesthetic creation overflowing with symbols and light, reflecting the profound connectedness between the spirit and the Absolute.

The poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ reveals a spiritual structure that is progressively articulated in the three stations of annihilation. In "between the sensory dimension and the absolute dimension," manifestations of earthly beauty are transformed into symbols of divine meaning. In annihilation in the supreme Self, the poet expresses the moment of complete awareness of God in which the boundaries of the self are effaced. The unity of witnessing is the summit in which the gnostic beholds God in all things, without nullifying existence or denying phenomena, so that the entire cosmos is transformed into a mirror of the divine presence.

In the poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, the Sufi vision and the aesthetic vision are integrated simultaneously so that annihilation becomes an ever-renewed experience of consciousness and subsistence a station of divine presence in the soul and in existence.

The poet transformed his Sufi experience into a poetic discourse that brings together love and knowledge, spirit and language so that his poetry became an unceasing irradiation along the path of truth and its eternal beauty.

Endnotes:

¹ Aldjia Mouada, "The Sufi Text and the Question of Hermeneutics: Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Tā'iyya as a Model," *al-Makhrab: Research in Algerian Language and Literature*, no. 10, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Mohamed Khider University, Biskra, 2014, 445.

² Maṣṣouria b. Ossman, "The Experience of Annihilation in Sufi Discourse," *Logos*, nos. 7–8, University of Tlemcen, September 2017, 71.

³ Maṣṣouria b. Ossman, *The Experience of Annihilation in Sufi Discourse*, 71.

⁴ al-Junayd, *al-Rasā'il al-Qushayrīyya fī 'Ilm al-Taṣawwuf* (The Qushayrī Epistles on the Science of Sufism), ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd b. al-Sharīf, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1974), 61.

⁵ Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya* (The Classes of the Sufis), ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Ṭāhā 'Abd al-Bāqī Sarūr, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1960), 66–67.

⁶ Maṣṣouria b. Ossman, *The Experience of Annihilation in Sufi Discourse*, 73.

⁷ The same reference, 71.

⁸ al-Junayd, *al-Rasā'il al-Qushayrīyya fī 'Ilm al-Taṣawwuf*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd b. al-Sharīf, 61.

⁹ Fayṣal Barīr'awn, *Islamic Sufism: The Path and the Men*, Sa'īd Rāfat Library, Faculty of Arts, 'Ayn Shams University, Cairo, 1983, 10.

¹⁰ Ibn al-Fāriḍ is 'Umar b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, known by the honorific Sharaf al-Dīn. He was born in Cairo in 576/1181, and his origin is from the city of Ḥamāt in Greater Syria; thus, his personality combined the Levantine spirit, the Egyptian milieu, and Hejāzī longing. He was called "Ibn al-Fāriḍ" because his father used to apportion the stipulated shares (farā'id) between women and men in front of the judges. Moreover, he was known for the beauty of his face, his dignity, and the light of his countenance, which increased in radiance during ecstasy and audition. He was one of the great Sufi poets who expressed divine love with depth and sincerity. He was influenced by the character of the people of the Levant, known for subtle feeling, love of beauty, and eloquence of expression, which distinguished his poetry by its sweetness and spiritual elevation. Al-Tha'ālibī and al-Khwārazmī pointed to the superiority of the writers of the Levant in the purity of their language and their refined poetic taste, and this is reflected in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's style and poetic genius. As for his longing for the Ḥijāz, it sprang from his connection to the spiritual stations and presences that inspired his Sufi inner state. See: *Dīwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, edited and introduced by Maḥdī Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1990), 3–4.

¹¹ Aḥmad Khāmīs Zakī Mar'ī, "The Stations and States in Ibn al-Fāriḍ," *Journal of the Faculty of Arts*, vol. 73, no. 113, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University, Egypt, July 2023, 2.

¹² *Dīwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, ed. and introd. Maḥdī Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1st ed., 1990), 179.

¹³ The same source, 93.

¹⁴ The same source, 95.

¹⁵ The same source, 186.

¹⁶ The same source, 158–59.

¹⁷ Fayṣal Barīr'awn, *Islamic Sufism: The Path and the Men*, 10.

¹⁸ Muḥammad al-Munṣif b. al-Bashīr, *Ibn 'Arabī's Philosophy of Knowledge and Being* ('Ālam al-Kutub al-Ḥadīth li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1st ed., n.p., 2016), 189.

¹⁹ Aḥmad Khāmīs Zakī Mar'ī, "The Stations and States in Ibn al-Fāriḍ," 2.

²⁰ *Dīwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, ed. and introd. Maḥdī Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn, 40.

²¹ The same source, 43–44.

²² The same source, 50.

²³ The same source, 2.

²⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr b. Nāṣir al-Nāṣir (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāh, 1st ed., vol. 8, 1422/2001), 2893.

²⁵ See: Aḥmad Khāmīs Zakī Mar'ī, "The Stations and States in Ibn al-Fāriḍ," 2.

²⁶ *Dīwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, ed. and introd. Maḥdī Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn, 55.

²⁷ The same source, 66–67.

²⁸ The same source, 38.