

Khayal in Rumi: Imagining Otherwise

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Abstract

The paper discusses the concept of *khayâl* as it appears in Rûmî's works. But as the title suggests, this discussion involves here a comparison between the Western critical notion of the Imagination and Rûmî's category of *khayâl*. One can critically imagine *khayâl* perhaps only thus. The history of the concept of the imagination in the West suggests that the concept has always stood in a relation of an oppositional otherness to the concept of reason. The phenomenon of Rûmî's extraordinary poetic output, perhaps peerless in many ways, seems to offer a mediatory response to long standing quarrel between reason and imagination, between poetry and philosophy in the West. The paper argues that the imagination can only apprehend *khayâl* by opening itself to its own otherness. Rûmî's relatively recent 'euphoric' reception in the West is only one among those various considerations out of which the need for such a comparison arises. The discussion of the comparison between *khayâl* and the Western notion of the imagination leads to the question of the way one should approach Rûmî. At a time when Rûmî is increasingly becoming a part of comparative literature syllabi all around the world, it is important to investigate the theory of imagination that regulates his poetic practice and to talk about a critical approach that emerges from within Rûmî's own work.

I

The moment the issue of imagining *khayâl* in Rûmî is raised, it runs into a necessary difficulty of understanding the meaning of one critical term from a religious tradition, i.e., *khayâl*, in terms of another somewhat akin concept of the imagination, coming from a quasi-religious tradition of the Western criticism. It is, first of all, a difficulty because any exhaustive transference of meaning through translation is yet a debatable

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issue. Moreover, it is necessary for a number of readers - those academically trained to approach poetry by using the Western critical categories – to encounter this difficulty. Theory is sustained through instances. Many of us, if not all, usually approach Rūmī after having read Mir, Ghālib, Iqbal, Faiz or Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats and T.S. Eliot. Theories about how poetry is written or read, its relationship with human society and the human self have been based in the West and also in the modern East upon the performance of these and other various instances mentioned above. Theories about the imagination itself, which has historically been thought to be the most operative human faculty in the process of artistic creation, have been based upon certain practices of art and poetry in the West. A theory will naturally remain valid as long as it explains those imaginative practices, one among which is poetry. But the moment a big anomaly is encountered, as is encountered by the Western criticism in case of Rūmī, the theory has to make room for adjustments, if not a complete overhauling. It is with a view to such an adjustment that this study is carried out.

Rūmī's poetic phenomenon is unprecedented in the West. It is, realistically speaking, quite difficult to compare his work, both in quantity and in quality, to any of the Western poets. He evades an understanding in the Western critical terms in many ways. Starting at an age when, to the Western understanding, poets usually either exhaust themselves or become increasingly 'impersonal,' in order to continue as poets, he composed scintillating lyric poetry of epic proportions. Producing ecstatic lines in verbatim Rūmī may also remind the Western critic of the long written off oral tradition in the West. The modern Western critical mind must ask: 'what sort of imagination is this?'

Yet it will not be correct to consider this study relevant only from the point of view of the Western reader. Rūmī's poetic phenomenon is unique, at least in some ways, even for the so-called Eastern poetics. It has somewhat become ubiquitous in the discourse of Eastern poetics to consider poetry as an act of 'imagination'. The discussions on the nature and function of *takhayyul* or *mutakhayyalah*, mostly conform to the Western critical discourse on the imagination and hence, this study argues, can hardly be considered as adequate to account for Rūmī's case. Mawlana Altaf Hussein Hālī and Allama Shibli Nomani, the twin titans of the Eastern poetics in Urdu criticism, both rely upon the Western sources in their discussion of *takhayyul*. Hālī literally equates *takhayyul* with the imagination (probably under the influence of the Romantic theorists whose critical variation upon the notion of imagination comes relatively closer to the idea of *khayâl* in the

Sūfi poetics)¹. Abul Kalam Qasimi, in his study of the link between Urdu criticism and the Eastern poetics, agrees with other critics who say that in his discussion of *takhayyul* Hâlî has used ideas from Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. But Qasimi rather criticizes Hâlî for mixing up Coleridge's notions of fancy and imagination instead of finding any problem with Hâlî's identification of *takhayyul* with the imagination. Qasimi thinks that Hâlî could not fully understand Coleridge's position.² It may well be the case that the tradition of the Eastern poetics both Hâlî and Qasimi have in mind (neither of them particularly focuses upon any of the Sūfi writers) can afford to equate *takhayyul* with the imagination.

Although Qasimi rightly points out that in his discussion of *takhayyul* Shiblî is also influenced by the ideas of Aristotle and Coleridge, Shiblî's case is in some ways still different from that of Hâlî. This difference may be explained by the fact that Shiblî, in his remarkable critical history, *Shi'r-ul-Ajam*, pays due attention to the huge contribution of the Sūfi poets to the Eastern poetics, and along with including a detailed chapter on Sūfi poetry, writes a long treatise on Rûmî which was separately published as *Sawânih Mawlavî Rûm*. This attention to the case of Sūfi poetry is perhaps what allows Shiblî to criticize and at times utterly reject the Western critics. Shiblî acknowledges, for instance, that if one goes by the standards of Mill, the whole body of Persian and Urdu poetry would be rendered useless and inconsequential.³ Similarly, he severely criticizes Aristotle's mimetic theory of poetry, and instead considers *takhayyul* (imagination) along with *muhâkât* (imitation) as an essential quality without which poetry cannot remain poetry.⁴

When Shiblî defines *takhayyul* as essentially the power of invention (*quwwat-e-ikhtirâ'*), he reminds one of the Romantic idea of the imagination (compare Sidney's 'vigour of invention', Coleridge's 'power of recreation' and Wordsworth 'conjuring up absent things'). But in the same passage Shiblî makes an observation which seems to address the longstanding quarrel between poetry and philosophy in the West. Shiblî notes that it would be misleading to think that the imagination or *takhayyul* operates only in art and not in science and philosophy. The only distinction is between the purpose and the *modus operandi* of

¹ Altaf Hussein Hali, *Muqaddemah Sh'ir wa Sha'iri* (Lahore: Ishrat Publishing House, n.d.), p.44.

² Abul Kalam Qasimi, *Mashriqui Sh'iriyat aur Urdu Tanqeed ki Riwayat* (Delhi: Makatabah Jamia, 1992), p.214.

³ Shibli Nomani, *Sh'ir al-Ajam* (Lahore: Al Faisal, 1999), Vol I, p.11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p.6.

takhayyul in these domains.⁵ It is by using Shibli's ordering of *takhayyul* in this way as a premise that this study seeks to bring in a possibly contributive dimension to the discussion of *takhayyul* and *khayâl* in Rûmî. It is therefore an attempt at developing a specific determination of the nature of *takhayyul* (a derivative operation of *khayâl*) in an instance that evades any accommodation in terms of the general notion of the imagination and *takhayyul* in the Western and the Eastern critical discourses. Shibli's remark that Rûmî's art was not primarily poetry is borne out by Rûmî himself: 'What is poetry to me so that I brag about it / I have another art, other than the art of the poets'.⁶

This 'other art', however, by no means banishes poetry as such from its domain. Shibli maintains that Rûmî's poetry could only be called poetry because of the power of *takhayyul* that operates within it.⁷ In this case it becomes all the more necessary to trace the source of that *takhayyul* in Rûmî that makes his work different from the likes of Anwarî, in whom also Shibli traces the working of *takhayyul*. In other words, if in order to understand Rûmî's poetic phenomenon the significance of the Western notion of the imagination has to be revised, by the same token, the notion of *takhayyul* in the so-called Eastern poetics has to be rethought as well. It is to explore the nature of the power of *takhayyul* in Rûmî's case, what Shibli on another occasion calls Rûmî's 'divine or holy power' (*quwwat-e-qudsiyyâh*)⁸, that this study into the concept of *khayâl*, which governs and regulates this *takhayyul*, is carried out.

The main difficulty, recalling from the beginning of this paper, in equating *khayâl* with the imagination is that the former concept in Rûmî's case must be seen as growing out of a purely theological discourse, i.e., *tasawwuf*, whereas the latter reaches us today through a critical history, which is a mixture of Greek philosophy and some aspects of the Judeo-Christian theology. The Western critics call this history as the history of onto-theology, in Richard Kearney's words, an 'admixture of the intellectual frameworks of Jerusalem and Athens.' Bearing the common significance of the image-making power of man, the concept appears in the Western critical history in its polysemic manifestations through the Hebrew *yetser*, the Greek *phantasia* and *eikasia*, the Latin *imaginatio*, the German *einbildungskraft* and *phantasia*, and the English

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.9.

⁶ Rumi, *Kulliyat-e-Shams Tabrizi* (Tehran: Intisharat-e-Amir Kabir, 1336 H), p.163.

⁷ Shibli Nomani, *Sawanih Maulavi Rum* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, n.d.), p.56.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.100.

and the French *imagination*. This history can broadly be categorized into three main historical periods: the classical, the modern and the postmodern. There are subdivisions indeed to be reckoned with; for instance, the term classical may refer to the ancient Greek thought, sometimes referred to as the Hellenic thought and the Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and also the medieval Christian thinkers like St Thomas Aquinas and Hugh and Richard of St Victor. The modern period starts with the post-renaissance thought, specially with the French rationalism of Descartes, also includes the nineteenth century Romanticism and the early twentieth century philosophies of existentialism and phenomenology. Within the modern period, the eighteenth century in England is often termed as the neoclassical period for the overemphasis upon the role of reason in this period. The postmodern period, also referred to as the post-structuralist critical thought, roughly begins around the mid of the twentieth century, and could be said to be still going on.

Before we start tracing the unfolding of the imagination through this history, let us make an assertion: that the Hellenic or the Greek aspect of this history has progressively had the better of its Hebraic aspect. In the ‘unholy matrimony’ of ontology and theology, called ontotheology, ontology has triumphed over theology. Apart from some aspects of the medieval Christian observations on the significance of the imagination⁹, the discourse on the imagination prior and subsequent to

⁹ Twentieth century Western research has itself shown that the medieval Christian theologians in their discussion of the imagination were influenced by the Islamic Sufi thought. For details see Bundy, Murray Wright, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1927); Cocking, J.M., *Imagination, A Study in the History of Ideas* (London: Routledge, 1991); Cocking observes: ‘...those Europeans who knew the Arabs through living with them in Spain or reading them in Latin translation realized that the Arab way of life and intellectual achievements offers a good deal from which the West could profit. But also... the Muslim religion was a danger, and in the intellectually sophisticated forms provided by its philosophers was a formidable rival to its present religion whose dogmas were perhaps at that stage less cogently defended... From the religious point of view, the Arabs’ presentation of the Greeks had the advantage that it already bent the speculations of Neoplatonism, and more importantly Aristotle--towards the dogma of revealed religion; it had, however, the major disadvantages of that it was a rival and immensely powerful and prestigious religion which claimed to swallow up Christianity and supersede it (pp.149-50). Also see Palacios, Asin, *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, London, 1926; Palacios drew detailed parallels between the account of the Prophet Muhammads’ (S.W),

this medieval period has basically been revolving around the Greek Socratic, and pre- and post-Socratic notions. George Santayana thinks that the ancient Greek mythology ‘remains still the mother-tongue of the imagination, and, in spite of all revolutions and admixtures is the... language of art and poetry.’¹⁰ Since the overall purpose of our study is of a comparative nature, it would be worthwhile recording Santayana’s comment on the difference between the Western and the oriental sensibilities: the oriental mind, Santayana thinks, ‘has no middle; it oscillates between extremes and passes directly from science to mysticism, and back again; it lacks virile understanding and intelligence creative of form’.¹¹

Colin Falck also sees the Hebraic legacy of the Western history as unsuitable for its understanding of imagination and considers the Western world as basically a ‘Hellenic world’:

...it has now perhaps even begun to seem likely that Christianity was never really imaginatively suited to the inquiring and open minded temperament of the Hellenic world, and that after two millennia it is still the pagan religion of the ancients which makes up our deepest spiritual language.¹²

Falck finds Santayana’s remarks on the difference between the Western and the oriental sensibilities consistent with the fact ‘that art and literature—which are what (the West) now need(s) for... spiritual regeneration—are taken less seriously in the East than in the West.¹³ One only needs to compare, without commenting on the ‘less serious’ attitude towards literature in the East, Santayana’s divesting the East of paying attention to the middle terms and confronting it with a ‘non-creative extremism’, with Aristotle’s definition of ‘Acumen’ in *Analytica Posteriora* as ‘a talent for hitting upon the middle term in an

nocturnal journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and to the heaven in the Qur'an, Ibn Arabi's *Book of the Nocturnal Journey* and *Commedia* to show that Dante must have taken the imaginative substance of the *Commedia* from Arab sources. Although Palacios was not able to furnish evidence for a possible transmission of these Arabic sources to Dante, the gap was filled by the 1950 discoveries of the Latin and French translation of the popular Arabic religious texts describing the Prophet's journey to the heavens dating back to the time of Dante.

¹⁰ George Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (NY: Scribner's, 1900), p.96.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.56.

¹² Colin Falck, *The Identity of Poetry and Religion*, in *Religion and Literature*, 20.2 (Summer 1988), p.51.

¹³ *Ibid.*, note 12, p.56.

imperceptible time ... (for) seeing the extremes (one) becomes familiar with all the middle terms¹⁴. The comparison should suffice as a suggestion of the discrepancies the Western intelligentsia run into while confronted with their Hellenic and Hebraic heritages.

This heterogeneous admixture of an history offers some rather interesting versions of imagination. From being compared to a mad dog to be chained by reason to the most exalted form of reason itself, imagination's proper placement among the human faculties remains a problem. At times it appears as an adversary to reason, as in Plato, leaving one doubly removed from reality. On other occasions it is seen as a faculty in service of reason, as in Aristotle. The Romantics, like Wordsworth, identify it as the most exalted form of reason itself. Ultimately it is reduced to a playful operation that parodies itself without any reference to reality, as is the case in the postmodern period.

Paradigmatically speaking, imagination's history in the West can be divided into the *mimetic*, the *productive*, and the *parodic*, corresponding to the classical, modern and the postmodern periods respectively. In the mimetic paradigm the function of imagination is to copy. For Plato this copying is an external copy of nature which itself is an external copy of the transcendental idea or reality. Only reason can reach the reality or the world of forms or ideas. Thus, weighing imagination against reason, Plato downplays the imagination by the gesture of banishing poets from his ideal republic.

In Aristotle, the function of imagination still remains mimetic, but this function does not remain a slavish copying of the imperfect copies of the original forms as in Plato. Aristotle, unlike Plato, does not locate reality in the fixed, permanent and the unchanging forms or ideas. He seems to elevate the status of this material or the natural world by considering reality as a process in which the ideal forms are manifested through the concrete image in the material world. In *De Anima*, Aristotle makes distinction between *phantasia aisthetika*, the purely sensible imagination, and *phantasia logistike / boulentike*, rational imagination, an exclusively human faculty.¹⁵ The rational imagination 'synthesizes' empirical sensation in terms of a common sense, which in turn is representable to reason. This synthetic practice, *eidōlopoionontes*, is yet not a 'productive' function and in this differs from the modern idea of

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Analytical Posteriora*, The Oxford Translation of Aristotle, revised by J. Barnes 2 Vols. Princeton, 1984, p.89. b. 10 ff.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *De Anima*, in *A New Aristotle Reader*, Ed. J.L. Ackrill (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp.429 A, 433 A-B.

the imagination.¹⁶ Although Plato's idea of the image as a form of printing as external copy of nature which itself is an external copy of the transcendental idea, is replaced by Aristotle by considering image as an internal activity of mind, *phantasia* still remains an intermediary faculty residing, as it were, *between* the primary and pre-existing faculties of sensation and reason. In both Plato and Aristotle, imagination remains ultimately subservient to reason.¹⁷ But despite this ultimate subservience, imagination through its necessary participation makes reason ambivalent. For Aristotle the form remains, in the words of Joseph Owens, 'in some way—the thing itself'.¹⁸ The imagination simultaneously participates in the ideal and the material. Hence for Aristotle, the poet is not simply an imitator, but a creator. Aristotle's reality then is not *metaphysical* in the strict sense of the word (neither is Plato's as his reality is the world of *forms*). This is why one of the key chapters in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is 'Ontology', that is, the study of being.

Aristotle in a way elaborates that Plato's reason, and the corresponding idea of reality, that is, the world of forms is, so to say, already 'corrupted' by the imagination. The reality, the world of forms, hence should be considered as imaginal.¹⁹ The *productive* or the *Romantic* paradigm of imagination takes its cue from Aristotle. Sidney, Wordsworth and Coleridge, all rely upon this Aristotelian premise of the creative nature of the imagination. For the Romantics, imagination becomes reason in its most exalted form. But this romantic attempt at concentricizing the imagination and reason rather results in an uneasy

¹⁶ Aristotle, *De Memoria*, p.450 A.

¹⁷ Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination, Ideas of Creativity in Western Culture* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), p.113.

¹⁸ Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 3rd edition, rev. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978), p.196.

¹⁹ As this study is of a comparative nature, it would be relevant to note here that Sheikh Ahmed Serhindi, Mujaddid Alf-e-Thani severely criticized Plato and other Greek philosophers for relying upon their 'dreams and imaginations' and for following their 'imaginal visions'. Mujaddid sahib thinks that the Greeks, instead of purifying their *qalb* (the heart), only went through a purification of their *nafs* (the self). See *Maktubat-e-Hazrat Mujaddid Alf-e-Thani*, trans. Mawlana Syed Zawwar Hussein Shah (Karachi: Idarah Mujaddidiyah, 1993), Vol. III, 80. Mujaddid sahib's view would confirm that Plato's idea of reality could at the most correspond to the world of forms, *alam-e-mithal*, in Sufi terms. It means that Wordsworth was not so much wrong in calling the imagination as the most exalted form of reason, keeping in mind the idea of reason he received from the history of the Western thought.

and untenable identification between the two. In a way Romanticism can be considered as a thwarted attempt at revitalizing the religious in a history heavily dominated by philosophy in the West. The reason against which the Romantic imagination measures itself is already steeped in self-consciousness. Plato's world of forms, available only to reason, and Descartes' *cogito*, the one truth beyond any doubt, both are a product of self-consciousness. Plato, for instance, objected to any such activity, be it divine or human, that would carry you 'out of your self'.²⁰ Thus, for the philosophical tradition in the West the self is a more reliable and primary source for the knowledge of truth than the divine. Plato's rejection of poetry comes in the face of his acknowledgement that 'the poet is a light and winged and holy thing,' and that he sings by 'the power divine'. This divinity and holiness, however, is unacceptable as it is at the cost of senses and reason.²¹ This mistrust of divinity in Plato against the self-conscious reason becomes understandable if one takes into consideration the Hellenic system of divinities that Plato inherited. The Hellenic account of the origin of the imagination can be traced back to the myth of Prometheus. Prometheus, literally meaning 'fore-sight' (pro-metheus), stole fire from the gods and bestowed it upon man. Zeus punished Prometheus by chaining him to a rock and sending an eagle to devour his liver. With the use of this stolen fire, man was able to invent his own world, creating the various arts which transmuted the order of *nature* into the order of *culture*.²² Prometheus can thus be construed as a 'Greek Lucifer' who caused separation between God and man.

Comparatively, the Hebraic term for imagination is *yetser* from the noun *yetsirah* (creation), and the verb *yetsar* (create), all coming from the root 'yqr'.²³ In *Berach* (61a) it is written that 'God created man with two *yetsers*, the good and evil'. Regarding the significance of *yetser* Eric Fromm writes:

The noun *yetser* means 'form', 'frame', 'purpose' and with reference to the mind, 'imagination' or 'device'. The term *yetser*

²⁰ Plato, 'Ion', in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, Ed. Hazard Adams (NY: Harcourtbrace, 1992), p.15.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

²² Hesiod, *Works And Days of Theogony*, Trans. Stanley Lambardo (Indianapolis/ Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1993), 509-72, pp.75-77, paraphrase taken from Kearney.

²³ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol-VIII, Mac Millan, 1971 'Yetser as Ps 103:14 from *Yatsar*, to form or create as in Gen. 2:8' (p.1318). 'The Hebrew word *Yetser* for which the RSV retains the translation 'imagination', in two places (Gen. 6:5 ; 8:21), does indeed seem to me the power of forming mental images...', p.685.

thus means ‘imaginings (good or evil)... The problem of good and evil arises only when there is imagination. Furthermore, man can become more evil and more good because he feeds his imagination with thoughts of evil or good. They grow precisely because of that specifically human quality—imagination’.²⁴

According to the rabbinical understanding, man’s impulse to imitate God’s own creation was first realized when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge. The wording of the serpent is this: ‘God knows well that as soon as you eat this fruit your eyes shall be open and you shall be like gods knowing good and evil.’ In the rabbinical literature the two *yetsers* are interpreted as *yetser hara* (the evil imagination) and *yetser hatov*²⁵ (the good imagination). *Yetser hara* is associated with sin, identified with corporal nature – particularly with sexual desire. It is rebellions against the majesty of God and catches man in temporality, i.e., he no longer lives in immediacy of the actual moment.²⁶ *Yetser hatov*, on the other hand, can serve as ‘an indispensable power of attaining the goal of creation and prognosticates that ‘the Messianic treaty between the lion and the lamb will result from an ‘atoned’, i.e., integrated imagination.²⁷ Martin Buber notes: ‘...[T]o unite the two urges (of the *yetser*) implies to equip the absolute potency of passion with the one direction that renders it capable of great love and great service. Thus and not otherwise can man become whole.’²⁸

There are some similarities to be seen in the Hellenic and Hebraic versions of the origin of imagination. Firstly, in both cases, the imagination possesses an ambiguous nature. It provides man to imitate the divine creation by an unlawful act. Secondly, in both accounts the imagination has a mimetic role to play. The consciousness of temporality imagination engenders bears the mark of human ‘insufficiency’, which, in turn, it seeks to address. In the Hellenic myth, for instance, the distance between *culture* (or art), and *nature* is absolute.

The differences are, although, crucial; the very differences that make it difficult for the subsequent Western thought to integrate the two influences into a ‘unified sensibility’. As Kearney argues, while the Hebraic ambiguity in the notion of *yetser* emphasizes man’s free choice

²⁴ Eric Fromm, *You Shall Be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of The Old Testament*, Fawcett, 1966, p.126.

²⁵ See Schecter, *The Evil Yetser: The Source of Rebellion*, in *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (NY: Schocken, 1961).

²⁶ Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, pp.42-4.

²⁷ Gen. R.48, quoted in Richard Kearney.

²⁸ Martin Buber, *Good And Evil* (NY: Scribner, 1952), pp.93-7.

between good and evil, the Hellenic culture treats imagination from the point of view of cognition.²⁹ The paradigm shifts from ethics to epistemology. The first divergence to be noticed is that the figure of Prometheus can, at the most, be corresponded to Lucifer, and not the Hebraic *ademeh*. But Kearney's observation, that in both the accounts, imagination is born out of an act of 'rebellion', is not supported by a careful reading. Unlike the Hellenic myth, in which the imagination is *actually* an act of rebellion, the Hebraic account suggests that *adameh* committed a 'mistake', a 'forgetting', instead of a 'rebellion', and as the Islamic tradition confirms, readily asked (and was given) forgiveness. In the Hebraic tradition, man (*adameh*), has always the provision of *yetser hatov*, the 'atoned', integrated imagination to subvert the effects of temporality by submitting to *Torah* (literally, the direction of God). The Hellenic account submits to a concept of *tragic destiny*, in which both man and the gods participate. The character of Zeus in the Promethean myth, as Paul Ricoeur notes, emerges as that of a 'wicked god' (*kakos daimōn*).³⁰ Man's creative liberty, attained through the fire of imagination, unlike the Hebraic *yetser* is one of *defiance*, not of *participation*. In the Hebraic account, on the other hand, the evil connotations of the imagination are given in purely anthropological terms, i.e., the proposition of an evil imagination is a result of man's own free choice. It is crucial at this point to attend to this idea of the possibility of an 'integrated imagination' in the Hebraic account, as this is the very idea which the Western thought throughout its history has not been able to come to terms with. The marks of this struggle for integration are evident in the medieval formulation of 'onto-theology', as noted earlier. In the Hellenic myth the only imagination we get is born along with self-consciousness, and does not offer any atonement from this predicament as against the imagination in the Hebraic tradition. In the Hellenic myth the origin of both the imagination and reason is in self-consciousness.

The Romantics were excruciatingly aware of this predicament of the imagination caught within the grip of self-consciousness. Geoffrey Hartman, in his essay, 'Romanticism and Anti-self-consciousness', talks in detail about the Romantic attempt at rescuing the already doomed imagination in the West. Quoting pertinently from the major Romantic figures such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Benjamin Constant, Novalis, Schelling and others, Hartman notes that 'thought as a disease is an open as well as submerged metaphor among the Romantics'. The Romantics,

²⁹ Richard Kearney, *op.cit.*, p.52.

³⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p.224.

Hartman further argues, were aware that ‘every increase in consciousness is accompanied by an increase in self-consciousness, and that analysis can easily become a passion that ‘murders to dissect’’.³¹ Keats, for instance, whom Martin Lings calls ‘a born mystic’, found such a self-conscious imagination in a ‘sort of purgatory blind’³² and ‘caught in lovely labyrinth’³³.

This apt metaphor for the imagination as ‘caught in a labyrinth’ takes us to the third paradigm of the imagination in the West, i.e., the *parodic* or the postmodern. The function of the imagination in this postmodern parodic paradigm remains mimetic, that is, one of copying. But unlike the classical understanding of the imagination copying some original, be it nature or the forms, the parodic paradigm sees the imagination caught in an act of an unending series of copying. What imagination can copy is, so to say, already a copy, not of anything ‘original’ but of something that is as ‘unreal’, because the possibility of any ‘reality’ is untenable within a strictly self-conscious rational system of thought. Thus, this history of the imagination in the West unfolds itself through a circular passage of mimesis, production and a parodic mimesis, and reaches a stage where its function can only be understood as ‘play’, one of the key terms to designate the function of the imagination in the postmodern period.

Metaphorically speaking, this history can be understood as the history of the imagination as a mirror, seeking to reflect what it thought to be the original, then as a lamp seeking to produce its own light instead of reflecting the light from some ‘original’ source, and finally as a labyrinth of looking glasses where at the most what it can do is to reflect another reflection. In the classical paradigm, the imagination reflects the rational reality, in the modern it claims to *create* the rational reality, but this duality, or the double vision between reason and the imagination breaks down in the postmodern paradigm. Rational reality is logically and justifiably reduced in terms of the imagination as ‘play’.

³¹ Geoffrey Hartman, ‘Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness’, in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, Harold Bloom (ed.) (NY: Norton, 1970), p.47.

³² Keats, *Dear Reynolds*, Vol.II, p.80.

³³ Keats, *Sleep and Poetry*.

II

(But) those *khayâlât* (phantasies) which ensnare the *aulia*
Are the reflection of the fair ones of the garden of God.³⁴

Rūmī

The postmodern understanding of the imagination as ‘play’, as an unending mimesis, is a logical and a necessary outcome of a thought history that measures the imagination against a reason that is essentially no different from its notion of the imagination itself. In that sense, the postmodern ‘play’ is a rephrasing and an endorsement, in fact a more realistic and correct expression of Plato’s own meaning than probably imagined by Plato himself. This bears out the famous criticism that the whole history of the Western thought is ‘a footnote’, an elaborative supplement, to Plato’s philosophy. The postmodern comment upon the nature of the imagination as it comes out from its history as ‘play’ seems to be endorsed by Rūmī himself. If *takhayyul* is to be equated with this historical significance of the imagination in the West, then indeed this *takhayyul* must be taken as ‘play’ rather than any ‘serious’ activity leading one to reality. Such a history of knowledge, art and letters, which leads to this playful imagination, Rūmī would term as ‘childish’. Rūmī undermines this history of ‘*hikmat-e-yûnâniân*’ (the wisdom of the Greeks) and invites to ‘*hikmat-e-îmâniân*’ (the wisdom of the faithful): ‘Until when will you keep reading the wisdom of the Greeks / Do read sometime the wisdom of the faithful as well’.

Rūmī says that people are engrossed in such (playful) knowledge, arts and trades because they haven’t had anything better than these. One loves life until one gets something that is more worthy than life itself. At times man considers something lifeless as full of life just like a child takes a lifeless doll to be alive until he grows up: ‘This imagination (*takhayyul*), is your doll (with which you play) / until you are a child you need it. But when the spirit has escaped from such childishness; and it is in union (*visâl*) with God / it is done with sense-perception and imagination.³⁵

Rūmī can even become a source of diagnosing the cause behind this ‘playful’ outcome of the Western history of imagination. For Rūmī, *gharad* or self-interest, as a necessary result of self-consciousness, is what lies behind the inability to discriminate between reality and

³⁴ Rumi, *The Mathnawi*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Karachi: Darul-Ishaat, 2003), Vol.I, p.72.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol.III, pp.4109-113.

illusion: ‘When self-interest appears, virtue becomes hidden / a hundred veils rise from the heart to the eye’.³⁶

This couplet appears in the *Mathnawī* at the end of a story that can actually be said to encapsulate the history of the Western imagination. This history comes full circle as a variation upon the metaphor of the mirror: imagination as a mirror, as in the classical paradigm reflecting the so called reality, to imagination as a mirror reflecting imagination itself, another mirror, or a series of mirrors, to use Keats’ metaphor, ‘a labyrinth’ of looking glasses. Imagination can only indulge in, what Mallarme calls, ‘a perpetual allusion’, can only operate in a simulacrum, ‘the mirror of a mirror... a reference without a referent, without any first or last unit, a ghost that is the phantom of no flash, wandering about without a past, without any death, birth or present’.³⁷ Imagination is, as though, still confined in ‘a purgatorial blind’, as Keats saw it – an awareness of this purgatorial state aptly recorded by Samuel Beckett:

No trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there
imagination not dead yet, yes, dead, good imagination dead
imagine ... world still proof against ending tumult. Rediscovered
after what absence in perfect voids it is no longer the same, from
this point of view, but there is no other.³⁸

The story of the *ahwal* (the squint-eyed/double-seeing) in the first book of the *Mathnawī* seems to encapsulate the split in the Western thought history in a few lines. The *ahwal* (squint-eyed) enters, to use Derrida’s words, ‘a textual labyrinth paneled with mirrors’; what he finds is ‘no simple reference...’³⁹, in Mallarme’s words, ‘mirror of a mirror’:

The master said to a squint-eyed (pupil), ‘come on; go,
fetch that mirror out of the room’.

Said the squint-eyed one; ‘Which of the two mirrors shall I bring
you? Explain fully’. ‘There are not two mirrors,’ replied the
master, ‘go, leave off squinting and do not be seeing more (than
one).’

‘O master,’ said he, ‘don’t chide me.’ Said the master, ‘smash
one of those two.’ The mirror was one, though in his eyes it
seemed two; when he broke the mirror, there was no other.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol.I, p.334.

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, ‘The Double Session’ in *Dissemination* (London: Athlone Press, 1981), p.206.

³⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Imagination Dead Imagine* (London: Calder, 1965), p.7.

³⁹ Jacques Derrida, *op.cit*, pp.187, 206.

When one was broken, both vanished from sight: a man is made squint-eyed by evil propensity and anger,
 Anger and lust make a man squint-eyed, they change the spirit
 (so that it departs) from rectitude.

When self-interest appears, virtue becomes hidden: a hundred veils rise from the heart to the eye.⁴⁰

The mime, for Derrida, operates ‘without breaking the mirror’. For the Western thought, this imagination, despite being in a rather tragic predicament must go on, until perhaps this critical tradition thinks about rethinking the idea of reason itself, until the source of reason is relocated, re-centered (rather than merely dis-located and de-centered) from the self as consciousness, the Western imagination is bound to remain in a seemingly ‘lovely labyrinth’, in Keats’ words, in a sort of ‘purgatory blind’.

III

What they have faked is but a magician’s trick:
 and the magician thrives not (no matter) where he goes.

Al Qur’ân, 20:69

Shall I inform you, (O people!), on whom it is that the evil ones descend? They descend on every lying, wicked person, (into whose ears) they pour hearsay vanities, and most of them are liars. And the Poets—it is those straying in Evil, who follow them.

Al Qur’ân, 26: 221-24

But the evil ones ever inspire their friends...

Al Qur’ân, 6:121

Cast off the spell of magic from your heart;
 so that you may get hold of the treasure of the perfect one.

Rūmī

As noted earlier, the Western notion of a disoriented, lost, playful imagination as *takhayyul*, is an operation that Rūmī associates with ‘a play of doll,’ that creates an illusion of reality to the spiritually immature

⁴⁰ Rūmī, *The Mathnawi*, Vol.I, pp.327-34 (For contextual continuity, I have replaced Nicholson’s translation of *Shishe* from *bottle* to *mirror*. *Shishe* refers to both the meanings).

mind. The Qur'ân associates this *takhayyul* with magic: 'Their (the magicians') ropes and their rods—so it seemed to him on account of their magic—began to be in a lively motion' (20:66). In the contest between Moses and the magicians, the magicians cast a spell through which the ropes appear to the spectators in the image of the snakes (the root is خَيْلٌ يَخْيِلُ تَخْيِيلٌ). Keeping in mind the Western thought history through which this imagination unfolds, it should not come as a surprise that poets and writers especially in the 'enlightened' period subsequent to the 'dark' middle ages, have resorted to the occult for poetic inspiration in heavy numbers. From Christopher Marlowe till the present time, there is a history of the complicity of the literary and the occult imagination. In Marlowe's *Faustus*, when Faustus has exhausted his inspiration from all available disciplines of knowledge, he finally resorts to necromancy and enters into a pact with Mephistopheles, the devil. The subsequent history of the imagination in the West can be seen as a sort of this 'Faustian expansionism'. Victor Hugo, Balzac, Nerval, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarme, WB Yeats, Ezra Pound, DH Lawrence, just to mention a few, all had an active link with magic and the occult. Although this list includes names mostly from the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century symbolist and surrealist movements, it couldn't be said that the association of the imagination with magic is an ahistorical phenomenon. In line with the argument of this study that the Western history of the imagination has come full circle, in fact a direct link can be established between this modern event and its classical inception. Ezra Pound, for instance, who worked on energizing his literary symbolism through the occult, identifies his own idea of the imagination with the Greek *phantastikon*. *Phantastikon* makes one's mind 'circumvolved... like soap-bubbles reflecting sundry patches of the macrocosmos'.⁴¹ In one of his letters, Pound writes about *phantastikon*: 'It is what imagination really meant before the term was debased presumably by the Miltonists, tho' probably before them. It has to do with the seeing of visions'.⁴² 'Imaginal visions', recalling from an earlier remark in this paper, was with what Mujaddid sahib dismissed Plato's own view of reality. We have already made this assertion that in the Western thought history, the origin of both imagination and reason is in self consciousness, or in Mujaddid sahib's terms, *nafs*. The ultimate aim of Pound's occultist imagination is 'the expansion of consciousness into a state where (the initiate in the occult) awakes... his relationship with the

⁴¹ Ezra Pound, *Psychology and the Troubadours*, 1911.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Letter to Harriet Monroe, April 1913.

gods, and participates in their world'.⁴³ It is this consciousness that becomes the identical origin of the imagination, reason and the occult in the West. Oswald Murray writes, that the idea that consciousness is the ultimate reality in life is maintained both by the transcendental school of philosophy; that of Hegel, Green, Kant etc and occultism alike. The occult, Oswald sees as the expansion or transcendence of normal state of consciousness. Thus, 'transcending' for Oswald becomes 'trans-sending'.⁴⁴

Albert Beguin in his essay, 'Poetry and occultism', observes that 'if a common myth haunts the minds of poets and initiates (in magic and the occult), it is the myth of Prometheus', the Greek myth of the simultaneous origin of the imagination and consciousness. This imagination, in Beguin's words, 'elude(s) the need for grace, for redemption' and excludes the possibility of its atoned version (*yetser hatov*, in the Hebraic tradition). Beguin also notes that these poets 'like the initiate (in magic) move ... away from the Christian responses,' and 'agree in rejecting or in remaining unaware of any appeal to a redeemer'.⁴⁵ These Promethean poets, the 'poets of Satan,' as Beguin calls them, have 'arrived at a sort of tacit alliance with the occult "tradition"'. If one accepts Ezra Pound's goal of the occult imagination as of awakening a 'relationship with the gods' then the Greek system of divinities to whom both Pound and Plato (despite his apparent rejection of poets) subscribe for inspiration, can itself be seen as the source of this occult imagination.

In putting the word 'tradition' in quotes, Beguin seems to be erroneously conflating the meaning of this word in its Hellenic and Hebraic contexts. 'Modern poetry', or the poetry of the occult, as Beguin sees it, 'has its roots in the "tradition"' and explains his putting the word tradition in quotes by adding that he uses this word 'in the absolute sense given to this word by the disciples of René Guénon'.⁴⁶

Among the disciples of René Guénon, there is at least one who would not quite agree with Beguin's understanding of the 'absolute sense' of René Guénon's 'tradition'. Muhammad Hasan Askari, the eminent Urdu critic, thinks that for Guénon, tradition originates in

⁴³ *Ibid., Celestial Tradition*, p.107.

⁴⁴ Oswald Murray, 'Man's Relation to the Phenomenal World As Viewed by Transcendental Philosophy and By Occultism', *Theosophical Siftings*, 1892-1893, Vol. 5, pp.3-6.

⁴⁵ Albert Beguin, 'Poetry and Occultism', *Yale French Studies, Literature and Ideas*, Vol. 4, 1949, p.10

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.10.

metaphysics (not in the Aristotelian ontological sense). Metaphysics, as Askari explains Guénon's position, is not the name of a few theories, rather it is based upon the concept of oneness or unity (*al-tawhid wâhid*). This is the real and the essential meaning of tradition. In Islamic terms, this tradition is called *dîn* (religion). Askari also points out that René Guénon in his several books argued that the Greeks were in caught up in the issues of being and ontology, and could not really get the true meaning of metaphysics. It was Guénon who tried to convince the West that theology and metaphysics are essentially the same. Askari quotes from Guénon, that once a Western intellectual while talking to a Hindu pundit praised the Western philosophy so much that the pundit finally asked: 'Okay, Then give me a few basic principles of your philosophy.' After hearing the subsequent account silently, the pundit said: 'Indeed, this is very interesting talk... for an eight year old....'⁴⁷

If one agrees with Guénon's definition of tradition, the notion of imagination in the West has to be accepted as largely 'mythical' rather than 'traditional'. It is with this distinction in mind, and with a view to give a traditional significance to the imagination in its correspondence with *khayâl* that the study now turns to Rûmî. Much pertinent for the purpose of this study, it is Askari again who uses Guénon's 'law of inverted analogy' to discuss the traditional significance of *khayâl*.⁴⁸

The study will make use of his discussion where needed.

IV

(Moses said) Is sorcery (like) this?

But sorcerers will not prosper.

Al Qur'ân, 10: 77

It should be recalled from the earlier part of our discussion that in considering Rûmî's case from the point of view of an imagination which lies outside the domain of Rûmî's tradition, the tradition of *dîn*, the phenomenon of Rûmî's poetry comes as unprecedented. For the 'mythic imagination', poetry doesn't take place as it does in Rûmî's case. Having too little space here to consider the 'quality' of Rûmî's poetry (and also taking it rather for granted in the face of the global acclaim it has received) we will restrict here to a comment by Franklin D. Lewis, a leading Rûmî scholar in the US, on Rûmî's poetic output which reflects the unusual nature of his composition:

⁴⁷ Muhammad Hasan Askari, *Majmuah Muhammad Hasan Askari* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2000), pp.639-65.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, *Waqt ki Ragani*, pp.689-732.

...Rūmī composed well in excess of 60,000 lines of verse. Should further textual scholarship eventually require that we eliminate many of the *roba'is* and even ghazals from the Rūmī canon, his poetic output will remain immense. Sixty thousand lines is more than Homer, Dante, Milton or Shakespeare produced...60,000 lines of Rūmī's Persian would actually equal about 120,000 lines of verse in English. The *Mathnawī* measures out around 570,000 syllables, roughly the same number of syllables found in 57,000 lines of English pentameters, and therefore equivalent to approximately 4,000 sonnets. By way of comparison, Shakespeare's 154 sonnets contain only 2,156 lines, or 21,560 syllables.

Of course, bulk does not by any means determine merit, and a ranking of poets is not at issue here. But the sheer volume of Rūmī's poetic output does confirm the stories about the extemporaneous and spontaneous nature of his composition...

Most of Rūmī's poems seem to date from after his encounter with Shams, but if we assume that Rūmī began composing poetry seriously the year before meeting Shams, this would give him a productive composing career of thirty years. On average, then, Rūmī composed 2,000 lines per year for thirty years, over 5 lines per day.⁴⁹

What we are discussing here is 'an event at variance with the usual course rendering it unable to produce the like thereof,' the words Edward Lane uses in his Arabic – English lexicon to describe *al amr kharg al-â'dah* or a *mu'jizah*. Sabah Akbar Abadi's couplet tells the story:

شاعری دل کی جو آواز نہیں ہوتی ہے ساحری ہوتی ہے اعجاز نہیں ہوتی ہے

(Poetry that is not the voice of the heart / is magic not a miracle)

But this 'voice of the heart' in Rūmī's case should not be confused with Wordsworth's 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'. If the heart is to be taken as a translation of *dil* or *qalb* in the Islamic tradition of Rūmī's *tasawwuf*, then its meaning has to be understood as something more than a mere seat of 'emotions'.

You say, 'I too have a heart'; (but) the heart is above the empyrean, it is not below.

Certainly in the dark earth also there is water, but 'tis not proper for you to wash your hands with that water,

⁴⁹ Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi, Past and Present, East and West, The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalal al Din Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), pp.314-15.

Because, though it is water, it is overcome by the earth. Do not, then, say of your heart, 'This too is a heart.'

The heart that is higher than the heavens is the heart of the saint or the prophet.⁵⁰

Askari explains that in the Islamic tradition faith is not to be taken as an 'emotional' state, rather it is acquired through the 'perfect reason' ('*aql-e-kul*). In the tradition, the place of '*aql*' or reason has been given as heart (*qalb*). In the Quran itself, '*aql*' or reason has been associated with the heart (22:46). Askari further points out that in the terminology of *tasawwuf*, the word *jazbah*, which is commonly understood as emotion or feeling and usually associated with the heart, does not signify basically human 'emotion', rather it means the attraction or absorption towards Allah.⁵¹

As compared to the Western notion of imagination rested in self-consciousness, in Rūmī the place of *khayâl* is in the heart: 'Someone is hidden here like a *khayâl* in the heart'.⁵² A correspondence, of this placement of *khayâl* in the heart, with the Prophetic tradition *al 'aql fil qalb* (reason is in the heart), in the tradition of Rūmī, shows that both reason and the imagination become concentricized in the heart. Another couplet in *Fîh-e-Ma Fih* places *dhîkr* (remembrance of Allah) in the heart and *khayâl* in the eye.

Your (image) is in my eye,
 Your name is upon my lips
 The memory of you is in my heart
 Where then should I write?
 Your (image) dwells in my eyes;
 Your name is never absent from my
 Lips your memory has its place in the Depth of my soul.
 Since you roam free in these places, where Should I address a
 letter? The pen broke, and ripped up the paper.⁵³

Askari mentions that one of the terminological meanings of *khayâl* in the Islamic Sūfi tradition is to make one remember the first covenant ['Am I not your Lord – they said: Yes' (7:172)]. Mawlana's

⁵⁰ Rumi, *The Mathnawi*, Vol.III, pp.2245-248.

⁵¹ Muhammad Hassan Askari, *Majmuah*, p.652.

⁵² Rumi, *Kulliyat-e-Shams Tabrizi*, pp.2388, 2894.

⁵³ Rumi, *Fîhi ma Fih*, Ed. Badiuzzaman Faruzanfar (Tehran: Chapkhanaye Majlis, 1330 H.), pp.178-79, mostly the translation here is Thackston's [W.M. Thackston Jr. (trans.), *Signs of the Unseen, The Discourses of Jalaluddin Rumi* (Boston: Shambala, 1999)], apart from some phrases from Arberry [A.J. Arberry (trans.), *Discourses of Rumi* (London: John Murray, 1961)].

couplet quoted earlier (*sad hijâb az dil besûye dîdeh shud*), also relates this connection between the sight and the heart. The Qur’ân also corresponds the function of seeing to the heart: ‘Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts.’ (22:46)

Hence Rûmî’s poetry as ‘the voice of the heart,’ and the imagination that regulates it, are not ‘magical’ in the sense in which the occultist or the mythic imagination becomes magical. The imagination that originates from the self (*nafs*), or self-consciousness, the occultist imagination, for Rûmî is the Satanic imagination as Rûmî considers *nafs* and Satan as essentially the same: ‘The Self and Satan both have (ever) been one person (essentially); But they have manifested themselves in two forms’.⁵⁴ The function of such occultist imagination, the imagination that has its origin in the self and Satan, in Rûmî’s view is to ‘transform realities’:

The work of magic is this, that it breathes (incantations) and at every breath (moment) transforms realities.⁵⁵

At one time it shows a man in the guise of an ass,

(At another time) it makes an ass (look like) a man and a notable.

Such a magician is within you and latent: truly, there is a concealed magic in temptation (excited by *nafs*).⁵⁶

Such an imagination pertaining to magic, and the corresponding notion of *takhayyul* that the Qur’ân associates with *sihr* (magic) is what, as indicated earlier, Rûmî considers ‘play’ or a ‘doll’ [*la’bat*, (doll), from *la’b*, (play)]. In comparing his own poetic discourse with such an imagination, Rûmî calls his own poetic imagination *sihr* (magic) in a figurative sense. This figurative sense of *sihr*, like the other Sûfîs, Rûmî borrows from the tradition of the Prophet: ‘Verily there is a kind of eloquence that is enchantment’. Lane explains this figurative sense of *sihr* as *sihr al-halâl* (the lawful enchantment), because ‘the speaker propounds an obscure matter, and discloses its true meaning by the beauty of his eloquence, inclining the hearts [of his hearers] in like manner as they are inclined by *sihr*.⁵⁷ This tradition often appears among the Sûfîs in conjunction with another tradition: ‘Verily there is a

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol.III, p.4053.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.4072.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.4073-74.

⁵⁷ Edward William Lane, *Lane Arabic-English Lexicon* (Bairut-Lebanon: Librairie Du Liban, Riad el-solh square, 1997), Vol.IV, p.1317.

kind of poetry that is wisdom'.⁵⁸ Considering his own poetry ‘magical’ in this traditional sense, Rūmī calls it *daf*-*e-sihr*, ‘the counter-charm’ to the Satanic magic of *nafs*. Referring to the occultist imagination, Rūmī places against such Satanic magicians those who ‘defeat sorcery’:

In the world in which are these magic arts, there are magicians
who defeat sorcery,

In the plain where this fresh (virulent) poison grew, there had
also grown the antidote, O son.

The antidote says to you, ‘Seek from me a shield, for I am nearer
than the poison to thee.

Her words (the words of *nafs*) are magic and they ruin; my
words are (lawful) magic and the counter-charm to her magic’.

The Prophet said, ‘Verily, there is a magic in eloquence’, and
that goodly hero spake the truth.⁵⁹

V

Then Produce a Surah like thereunto...
Al Qur’ân (2: 23)

He (God) said, ‘If this seems easy to thee, say,
(compose) one Sura (in the style that is so) ‘easy’ as this (*Qur’ân*).
Rūmī

The *Mathnawî* of Mawlavi full with meaning is (as if)
Qur’ân in the Persian tongue.
Jami

The conclusion to all the foregoing discussion must be about the question of how to approach Rūmī. The study has throughout been making this ‘claim’ (the claim appears in its most challenging form in the caption of this section above) that Rūmī’s poetic phenomenon is incomparable outside the tradition to which Rūmī belongs, that is, the tradition of *dīn*. Hence his poetry needs to be appreciated only from within this tradition. This claim actually goes against almost a unanimous critical verdict in the West, and of course against those ardent exponents of the so-called

⁵⁸ See Al Hujveri, Abul Hasan, *Kashf al-Mahjub* (Lahore: Tasawwuf Foundation, 1998), p.345; Ghazali, Abu Hamid, *Ihya al-Ulum al-Din* (Urdu translation) (Lahore: Rahmania, n.d.), Vol.I, p.63; Vol.II, p.444; Vol.III, p.199; Amir, *Dibacheh Gurrat al-Kamal* (Lahore: National Committee Baraye Sat Sau Saleh Taqrībat-e-Amir Khusrāu, 1975), p.18.

⁵⁹ Rumi, *The Mathnawi*, Vol.III, pp.4075-79.

Eastern poetics who have taken an unconditional oath of allegiance at the hands of the Western critics. To put it simply, it means that you don't have to be a good Christian, or even a Christian believer at all for that matter, in order to have a 'fuller' and a more 'desirable' appreciation of, say, Dante's *Divine Comedy*; you don't need to actually subscribe to the Homeric system of divinities in order to appreciate in the same manner of 'fullness' or 'desirability' what happens in *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey*, and so on. Few in the West would disagree with the idea that in order to better appreciate any creative practice in a particular era, the dynamics of the corresponding theory of imagination needs to be understood. This is actually the reason for the existence of such a long history of criticism and theory in the West and the detailed treatises on the history of imagination and ideas that this study has been referring to throughout. But ironically, faith, belief and subscription to that particular theory of the imagination somehow have remained 'extrinsic' to the appreciation of art. One could understand that imagination, as if to say, from 'outside' and were able to apply that 'outsider's' understanding to a particular work of art.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ For a detailed discussion of the problem of the relation of faith and belief to the appreciation of art, see William, J.J., Rooney, *The Problem of 'Poetry and Belief' in Contemporary Criticism* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1949). Rooney writes: '...in both the creation and appreciation of poetry, belief is intrinsically irrelevant, but that in the creation of a poem, belief often is a condition, even a condition *sine qua non*, and that in appreciation belief often does in fact influence response so as to create what, to distinguish it from a specifically literary response, may be called a *mixed response*'. The practical conclusion is that what is essential to sound criticism where beliefs are involved is that the critic must be always aware of, and consistently make, the distinction between mixed and pure literary responses... (p.147). In comparison with Rooney's rather 'outdated' formalistic dismissal of belief as irrelevant to the 'pure' literary appreciation, Mary Gerhart takes a hermeneutic position to argue that 'belief is both essential to and existentially present in literary criticism' [Mary Gerhart, *The Question of Belief in Literary Criticism* (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1979), p.298]. But Gerhart still includes belief among the 'basic structures of human consciousness'. Gerhart seems to reduce belief to 'philosophic reflection': '...(the question of belief in literary criticism), demonstrates that hermeneutics provides that larger context wherein literary criticism can be understood in relation to philosophic reflection, and wherein an interpreter can be seen to function as aesthete, scientist, and philosopher' (p.299).

But what does it mean to be an ‘insider’, or to be an ‘outsider’, by the same token? How do we define a ‘fuller’ and a ‘desirable’ appreciation of poetry? What is the place and function of poetry in life?

The unfortunate supplanting of ‘tradition’ by ‘myth’ in the Western criticism has rendered it almost impossible to answer such questions in any conclusive way. When Mathew Arnold announced the replacement of the religious imagination with the poetic (read: mythic; Arnold in *Dover Beach* after lamenting the loss of faith does not show any desire of reviving it, rather stresses upon strengthening personal relationships. Moreover, Arnold was a severe critic of the Romantics because he thought that the Romantics did not read enough philosophy as compared to their German counterparts), he was not only anticipating the subsequent course of the Western critical thought, but also recording its preceding history.⁶¹ This supplanting of religion by myth had already taken place, much before Arnold, in the Greek origins of the mythic imagination and consciousness. This supplanting, or ‘de-centering’, to use a phrase more in vogue in critical jargon these days, has resulted in a loss of meaning, of inside and outside, of fuller and partial, of desirable and undesirable, indeed rendering language and imagination as a game, or ‘play’, of indeterminacy. In the present context of our discussion, this loss of meaning, perhaps in its most crucial form, resulted in the collapse of the distinction between *īmān* (faith) and *kufr* (unbelief).

In the context of distinguishing *khayāl* in Rūmī from the Western notion of the imagination and hence the nature of Rūmī’s poetry from the poets of the Western mythic imagination, the collapse of the distinction between *īmān* and *kufr* is the most crucial, because Rūmī himself considers precisely this distinction as the source of that discriminating power which enables one to distinguish between the binaries, of good and bad poetry, of lawful and unlawful magic, of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, actually giving meaning to life itself.⁶² In *Fih-e-*

⁶¹ See Mathew Arnold, ‘The Study of Poetry’, in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, Ed. Hazard Adams (NY: Harcourt brace, 1999), pp.603-4.

⁶² It is interesting to compare the liberal humanist or the Leavisite criticism before the flowering of this decentered theory and criticism in the West with what is being said about the tradition of Rumi here. The liberal humanists also emphasized upon the ‘central’ or the ‘essential’ meaning, but since the location of this center was basically in the human consciousness in their case, the notion of this ‘center’ was critically untenable, as was logically proved by the subsequent theory. Askari sahib in one of his letters comments upon this dilemma of the loss of meaning in the so-called traditional approach to literature in the West: ‘On the one hand Leavis is repeatedly saying that the only way to keep literature and the

Ma Fih, Rūmī distinguishes between two types of speeches, two kinds of discourses, one *sukhan-e-naqd* (the immediate words) and the other *sukhan-e-naql* (the copied or the imitated words). ‘They resemble each other’, Rūmī says, ‘and there is need for a discriminator to recognize the *naqd* from the *naql*. That discrimination is *īmān* (faith), and *Kufr* (unbelief) is lack of discrimination. Our discourse is all *naqd*’, Rūmī discriminates, ‘and the discourse of the others is *naql*’. Who these ‘others’ may be, Rūmī elaborates yet again through the example that was earlier used to distinguish between the traditional imagination (as *khayâl*) and the mythic imagination. ‘Don’t you see’, Rūmī says, ‘how in the time of Pharaoh, when Moses’ rod became a serpent and the rods and ropes of the magicians also became serpents, he who lacked discrimination saw all to be of the same kind and made no distinction between them; but he who possessed discrimination understood the magic from the true, and through discrimination became a believer? Hence we realize that faith is discrimination’. In a revealing coincidence of terms, Rūmī actually seems to be commenting upon the fate of the Western imagination unfolding through centuries into its ultimate reduction into “play”: ‘The elder is not wise if he is preoccupied with playing; though he be a hundred years old, he is still raw and a child. A child, if he is not preoccupied with playing, is in reality an elder’.⁶³

The meaning of *īmān* (faith) in the tradition is, as in the words of the Prophet, to believe ‘in Allah, His angels, His Books, His messengers, the Last day, and to believe in the divine destiny, both the good and evil thereof’.⁶⁴ This *īmān* is what determines the meaning of an ‘insider’ for Rūmī. If there is no agreement between Rūmī and his reader upon this meaning of faith, the reader would remain ‘deprived’, as Rūmī puts it, of the ‘fuller’ and ‘desirable’ appreciation of Rūmī’s poetry:

teaching of literature alive is to convince the students that literature can say something about human life which no other discipline can teach (that’s why he wants literature and criticism to be ‘meaningful’). On the other hand the students also agree to this and want some ‘relevance’ in their educational system, but at the same time they also ask Leavis and other thinkers the meaning of ‘life’ and the meaning of ‘meaningful’. [Muhamamd Hasan Askari, Letter to Shamsur Rahman Faruqui, 02 February 1970, *Riwayat* (Lahore: Maktabahye Riwayat, 1983), pp.138-39.

⁶³ Rumi, *Fih ma Fih*, Ed. Badiuzzaman Faruzanfar (Tehran: Chapkhanaye Majlis, 1330 H.). The English translation is from A.J. Arberry, *Discourses of Rumi*, p.156.

⁶⁴ *Sahih al-Muslim*, quoted here from Sharf al-Din al-Nawawi, *Al Arba'in al-Nawawiyyah* (Karachi: Al-Rahim, n.d.), p.32.

So we realize that faith is discrimination, distinguishing between truth and falsehood, true coin (*naqd*) and imitation (*naql*). Whoever is without discrimination remains deprived. These words which we speak are enjoyed by every man of discrimination, but are wasted on him who is without discrimination.

Now these words have fallen into the hands of the one without discrimination. It is though you have given a precious pearl into the hands of a child who does not know its value. When he goes farther on, an apple is placed in his hand and the pearl is taken away from him since he has no discrimination. So discrimination is a great possession.⁶⁵

For the one who remains ‘deprived,’ the one without the faith or discrimination, the ‘outsider’, the only appreciation of Rūmī that would be available would, of course, be pertaining to the ‘outside’ or the ‘form’, the liberal humanist, formalistic, the so-called analysis from the viewpoint of ‘art’, with no appreciation of Rūmī’s *fann-e-digar* (the other art). A comparison of the appreciation of Rūmī in the Muslim world by the ‘insiders’ (if one is ready to accept this claim), with some of his appreciations by the Western critics results in revealing differences. To cite a few examples, among others, one could refer to Sultan Valad’s (Mawlānā’s son and *khalīfah* after Hasāmuddīn Chelebi) characterizing Mawlānā’s poetry as poetry of lovers and mystics, flowing from an excess of passionate intoxication as against the poetry of ‘professional poets’, which is an effort of all their intellect and being.⁶⁶ Jāmi called Mawlānā’s *Mathnawī* as ‘the Qur’ān in the Persian tongue’. Mawlānā Ashraf Ali Thanavī considers it as Divinely inspired (*ilhām*)⁶⁷, and Mowlavī Ferūzuddīn entitles his verse translation of the *Mathnawī* as *Ilhām-e-Manzūm* (Divine inspiration in verse). However, R.A.Nicholson finds Mawlānā’s poetry as lacking the color and perfume of Hafiz, having no sense of humor, careless execution and grotesque employment of allegory; Schimmel describes his verse as ‘technically correct’ but certainly different from ‘the refined, diamond like ghazals of poets like

⁶⁵ Rumi, *Discourses*, pp.156-55.

⁶⁶ Sultan Valad, *Mathnawi-ye Valadi, ens h e Baha al Din b. Mawlana Jala al-Din Mohammad b. Hosayne Balkhi, mashhur be Mowlavi*, Ed. Jala al-din Homai (Tehran: Eqbal, 1316/1937), pp.53-5.

⁶⁷ Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanavi, *Kaleed-e-Mathnawi* (Multan: Idarah Talifat Ashrafiyah, n.d.), Vol.1, p.10.

Hâfiż or Jamî; and Julia Scott Meisami attributes ‘a general lack of originality’ to Mawlânâ’s treatment of conventional figures.⁶⁸

Rûmî himself would not appreciate such an ‘outsider’s’ approach to his poetry. In comparing the ‘form’ of *auliâ* (the friends of Allah) to the form of the rod of Moses and ‘the form of the speech’ of *auliâ* to the form of the incantation of Jesus, Rûmî tells the reader what *not* to look for in his poetry:

In the incantation of Jesus do not regard (merely) the letter and the sound: regard the fact that Death turned and fled from it.

In his incantations do not regard the petty words: consider that the dead sprang up and sat down.

In (the case of) that rod, do not regard the easy getting (of it): regard the fact that it cleft the green sea.⁶⁹

If there can be no agreement between Rûmî and his readers upon the meaning of faith, then Rûmî’s claims for his poetry as being miraculous as compared to magical, and all the claims this study has sought to make in an apparently argumentative way about *khayâl*’s incompatibility with the Western idea of the imagination, would remain meaningless. This is why in the second book of the *Mathnawî* when Rûmî explains that there are ‘some assertions the truth of which is attested by their very nature’, he addresses this explanation only to the ‘insider’, whom Rûmî calls *âshnâye jân-e-man* (‘my soul’s familiar friend’):

If you are my soul’s familiar friend, my words full of (real) meaning are not (mere) assertions

Although this written itself is a (mere) assertion, still this written is evidence of the reality (of the assertion).

Although this seems to be (mere) assertion, yet the soul of the experienced one says, ‘Yes, (it is true)’.

When you say to a thirsty man, ‘Make haste! There is water in the cup: take the water at once,’

Will the thirsty man say in any event?

‘This is (mere) assertion: go from my side, O pretender! Get thee far away!

Or (else) produce some testimony and proof that this is of aqueous kind and consists of the *water that runs from a spring*.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric, The Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), pp.164-65.

⁶⁹ Rumi, *The Mathnawî*, ed. Nicholson, Vol.III, pp.6261-263.

⁷⁰ Rûmî, *ibid.*, Vol.II, 3573, pp.85, 90, 93-95, 407-8.

But one can still raise the question whether the idea that to be an ‘insider,’ in order to have a fuller appreciation of something is a claim valid only for the *fann-e-digar* of Rūmī, or is it a principle in general equally valid for all other kinds of art. That is to say, if the claim necessitates the reader to subscribe to Rūmī’s notion of faith, then by the same token, does it ask the reader to become an initiate in the occult for a fuller appreciation of Yeats or Ezra Pound? In principle, Rūmī would consider this claim valid for the perception of ‘anything’: ‘Do thou, then become the resurrection and see the resurrection / This is the necessary condition for seeing anything.⁷¹

An assertion that could be made even at the outset of this discussion is that the possibility of being an ‘insider’ can, by definition, be only in case of something that *has* any inside in very first place. The occult operates only at a surface level and has in this sense no ‘inner’ dimension to it. The Qur’ān also associates the practice of magic and its effect only with the physical perception of sight [‘so when they (the magicians) threw, they bewitched the eyes of the people...’ (7:116)].

Rūmī’s ‘insider’, the one with faith as the power of discrimination, by dint of thus being an ‘insider’, also knows the ‘outside’—he knows things ‘in and out’. To use the example Rūmī repeatedly uses in the *Mathnawī*, it could be asserted that when Moses said to Pharaoh *asih’run haza* [‘is sorcery (like) this?’ (Al- Qur’ān, 10: 77)] while not being a magician himself, by virtue of the knowledge of the nature of his own miracle, he knew in reality exactly what magic was, indeed more than the magicians knew about their own art themselves. This is why this study ‘claims’, and has been attempting to attest this claim by its very nature, that a plausible critique of the Western thought can be developed even from within Rūmī’s tradition itself, a tradition that actually excludes the mythic or the occult from its domain while still comprehending it at the same time.

Thus, Rūmī’s ‘insider’ is the one who comprehends the ‘outside’ as well. He is, as Rūmī calls him, *sâhib-e-dil*, the ‘man of heart’ and ‘is a plenum; when you have seen him, you have seen all ... All creatures in the world are a part of him, and he is the whole.

All, good and evil, parts of the dervish be
And whoso is not so, no dervish is he.

Now when you have seen him who is the whole, assuredly you will have seen the whole world, and whomsoever you see after him is a mere repetition. Their speech is contained in the words

⁷¹ Rumi, *The Mathnawi*, Vol.VI, p.756.

of the whole; when you have heard their words, every word you may hear thereafter is a mere repetition.

Whoso beholds him, in whatever place,
Has seen all men and viewed the whole space.⁷²

Rūmī's *sâhib-e-dil* interprets 'all that is in our hearts', whose seeing is 'the answer to every question':

O thou whose countenance is the answer to every question,
By thee hard knots are loosed without discussion.

Thou interpretest all that is in our hearts, thou givest a helping hand to everyone whose foot is in the mire.⁷³

He whose walk is on the spheres,
How should it be hard for him to walk on the earth?⁷⁴

Thus, it is not difficult for an imagination trained and cultivated in the tradition to comprehend the mythical imagination in its entirety. That is why the traditional approaches to Rūmī in the Muslim world have put some strict conditions upon the readers of Rūmī. Elaborating such conditions Mawlânâ Ashraf Ali Thânavî in *Kalîd-e-Mathnawî* observes:

For the viewers of the *Mathnawî*, it is necessary that they are pliant in nature, correct in their conviction and should be knowledgeable, in which the needful knowledge of logic and reason is also included. They should have sufficient acquaintance with the Persian language and the knowledge of religion (*dîn*), and should also have a taste for poetry. If they are not experts in the knowledge of *tasawwuf*, they should at least have a dispositional affinity with it. If they are not a *muhaqqiq* themselves they at least should have spent considerable time in the company of any *muhaqqiq* and have taken benefit from them, and if they are *sâhib-hâl* then it is 'light upon light' because the subjects of the *Mathnawî* are available fully only to such a one, and the one who is not a *sâhib-e-hâl* cannot understand them that much, in fact, he is prone to be lead astray at some places (in the *Mathnawî*).⁷⁵

The traditional approaches in the Muslim world have often metaphorically related Rūmī's work to the Qur'ân (*hast Qur'ân der zubân-e-pahlavî*) and Rūmī himself to the Prophet (*nîst payghamber valî dârad Kitâb*). Rūmî, while giving an account of those 'evil fancies' that are unable to understand the essence of his poetry, likens the objections

⁷² Rumi, *Discourses*, p.88.

⁷³ Rumi, *The Mathnawi*, Vol.I, pp.96-7.

⁷⁴ Rūmî, *The Mathnawî*, Vol.II, p.1428.

⁷⁵ Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanavi, *Kalid-e-Mathnawi*, Vol.1, p.15.

leveled against his poetry by these ‘deficient in understanding’ to the objections leveled by the unbelievers against the Qur’ân itself. The ones ‘deficient in understanding’ said,

...That this discourse, namely, the *Mathnawī*, is low; (that) it is the story of the prophet and (consists of imitation);

When the Book of God (the *Qur’ân*) came (down), they railed likewise at it too,

Saying, ‘It is (mere) legends and psaltery tales; there is no profound inquiry and lofty speculation;

The little children understand it; ‘tis naught but things approved and disapproved—

He (God) said, ‘If this seems easy to thee, say, (compose) one Sura (in the style that is so) ‘easy’ as this (the *Qur’ân*).⁷⁶

At the present time when Rūmī is fast becoming a canonical figure among the syllabi of not only Persian but also English and Comparative Literature departments all around the world, it becomes imperative to put things right in the matter of how to approach him. The proliferation of various critical approaches in the postmodern Western criticism is a logical and an inevitable outcome of the ‘de-centering’ of the ‘tradition’ by “myth”. The Western imagination and its literary aesthetics both come out of a culture ‘without the Book’. If these critical approaches are uncritically applied to the understanding of Rūmī, desirable results through such a reading may not come out. The Western critical tendency now is to put all literary discourse into all kinds of contexts: feminist, marxist, psychoanalytic, colonial, post-colonial, new historicist, liberal humanist, moral Formalist, Formal moralist, structuralist, post-structuralist, phenomenologist, deconstructionist, sexist, and even gay and lesbian, all generating from an imagination grounded in self-consciousness as rationality. Without putting all these and various other approaches into the critical perspective coming from Rūmī’s own tradition, one may appreciate Rūmī for all the reasons but for the one he himself would want to be looked at. An incautious approach to Rūmī might result in comments like those of Fatemeh Keshavarz in which she thinks that the Muslim world has been having problems in identifying the poetic and the mystic experiences in Rūmī because the Muslim critics are not ready to apply the Western critical categories to Rūmī. Without carefully taking into account the fact that logos (speech/rationality) must have a different significance in the religious tradition from the philosophical mythology, she criticizes the Muslim world for preserving its logo-centric outlook by avoiding these

⁷⁶ Rumi, *The Mathnawi*, Vol.III, pp.4233-242.

various Western critical approaches.⁷⁷ One must realize that these contextual approaches in the West have emerged as a result of the loss of the ‘text’ itself, ‘the Book’, as a result of the loss of a ‘center’ that can regulate the play of meaning. As the arch-deconstructionist, Jacque Derrida sees it, these contexts are only going to lead to other contexts; playing around with the imagination without approaching anything one could call a ‘text’ or ‘the Book’: ‘there are only contexts’, Derrida writes, ‘without any center of any absolute anchoring’.⁷⁸

‘Anchor-lessness’ is exactly the metaphor Rūmī himself uses to denounce all such approaches to his own poetry that emerge from the aesthetics of ‘de-centering’ as insufficient, actually harmful as long as they originate from self-consciousness, instead of originating from *qalb* as the simultaneous origin of faith, imagination and ‘*aql* (reason). Rūmī considers it a mark of wickedness to be ‘anchorless’ and compares the wicked man to an ‘anchorless ship’: ‘The wicked man is an anchorless ship, for he finds no precaution (means of defense) against the perverse (contrary) wind’.⁷⁹ Such people who, ‘without any center of absolute anchoring’ (to use Derrida’s phrase), are swept away by every wind (*hawâ*, which also signifies desire), Rūmī calls *safîh* (a fool), a word the Qur’ân uses for those who turn away from the center determined and established by the tradition (*dîn*), either by denying altogether the existence of any center, or by locating that center anywhere other than where the tradition locates it:

The Fools among the people will say: ‘What hath turned them from the *Qibla* to which they were used?’ Say: to God belong East and West: He guideth whom he will to a Way that is straight.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric*, p.140.

⁷⁸ Jacque Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.320.

⁷⁹ Rumi, *The Mathnawi*, Vol.III, p.4310.

⁸⁰ The *Qur'an*, 2:142, trans. Abdullah Yousuf Ali, 2nd ed. 1977. In his commentary Yousuf Ali writes: ‘*Qibla*=the direction to which Muslim turn in prayer. Islam lays great stress on social prayer in order to emphasize our universal Brotherhood and mutual co-operation. For such prayer, order, punctuality, precision, symbolical postures, and a common direction are essential, so that the Imam (leader), and all his congregation may face one way and offer their supplications to God. In the early days, before they were organized as a people, they followed as a symbol for their *Qibla* the sacred city of Jerusalem, sacred both to the Jews and the Christians, the people of the Book. This symbolized their allegiance to the continuity of God's revelation. When, despised and persecuted, they were turned out of Mecca

And who turns away from the religion of Abraham but such as debase their souls with folly? (2: 130)

Such fools, Rūmī says, are swept away by every wind: ‘The foolish are swept away by every gust of desire / because they have no weight (ballast) of (intellectual) faculties.⁸¹ Rūmī’s metaphor of ‘being swept away by the wind’ can again be traced back to the Qur’ān. The Qur’ān uses this metaphor for those who consider divinity as a matter of partnership, the *mushrikīn*: ‘...if anyone assigns partners to God, he is as if he had fallen from heaven and been snatched up by birds, or the wind had swooped (like a bird on its prey) and thrown him into a far distant place’ (22:31).

Rūmī does not only diagnose the problem of ‘de-centering’ or ‘anchor-lessness’, he also prescribes a solution to get it fixed. The ‘anchor’ for Rūmī is the ‘*aql*’ (reason; Nicholson translates it as ‘intelligence’ here). But this ‘*aql*’ is not to be had from philosophical reasoning, rather is the ‘*aql*’ of the *auliā*, the friends of Allah, the ‘insiders’ of the tradition of *dīn*, that originates not in self-consciousness but in *qalb* or the heart: ‘To the intelligent man the anchor of intelligence is security / beg (such) an anchor from the intelligent. Since he (the Sage) has borne away / the succours (supplies) of intelligence from the pearl-treasury of that sea of Bounty’.⁸²

This ‘begging’ of ‘*aql*’ from the people of ‘*aql*’ is what can lift the blinds that come between the heart and the eye, blinding one from the vision of reality, ‘concealing the (real) art’ (*chūn gharad āmad hunar pūshīdeh shud / sad hijāb az dil besūye dīdeh shud*), an ailment earlier associated with the Western critical approaches. It is only through the help of the ‘insiders’ that one can approach discourses such as that of Rūmī, the discourses Rūmī calls *wahye dīlhā* (the inspiration of the hearts) and *sidq-e-bayān* (true explanation):

and arrived in Medina, Mustafa under Divine direction began to organize his people as an *Ummat*, an independent people, with laws and rituals of their own. At that stage the Ka’ba was established as a Qibla, thus going back to the earliest center, with which the name of Abraham was connected, and traditionally also the name of Adam. Jerusalem still remained (and remains), sacred in the eyes of Islam on account of its past, but Islam is a progressive religion, and its new symbolism enabled it to shake off the tradition of a dead past and usher in the era of untrammeled freedom dear to the spirit of Arabia. The change took place about 16 ½ months after Hijrat.

⁸¹ Rumi, *The Mathnawi*, Vol.III, p.4310.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.4312.

By such succours (replenishments) the heart is filled with knowledge: it (that knowledge) shoots from the heart, and the eye too becomes illuminated,

Because the light from the heart has settled upon this eye so that your eye, having become the heart, is (physically) inactive.

When the heart too has come into contact with the intellectual lights, it bestows a portion thereof on the eyes also.

Know, then, that the blessed water from heaven is the inspiration of (men's) hearts and the true explanation (of every mystery).⁸³

Gharad (vested interests), as mentioned earlier, Rūmī sees as the cause of the blinding of the heart and the eye. Calling such blindness arising from vested interests as ‘artful blindness’, Rūmī prescribes ‘conformity (to the *auliā*)’ for the sufferer of such blindness as a remedy. The discourse of the *auliā* is like a river, and the blind is thirsty:

We are drinking the water of *khidr* from the river of the speech of the saints: Come, O heedless thirsty man!

If you do not see the water, artfully after the fashion of the blind, bring the jug to the river, and dip it in the river.

Forasmuch as you have heard that there is water in this river-bed, (go and try): the blind man must practice conformity.⁸⁴

The study is not by any means arguing against the application of any critical ideas generated through an honest, sincere and objective investigation into the issues relating to culture, gender, history, politics or language, ‘the changes of perspective evolved on the Western scene’, to use Keshavarz’s words, ‘primarily available to the Western critic’. ‘All these are not in the right; nor are this herd entirely astray’, to apply Rūmī’s words to the present debate. Actually, there is a growing trend in the West these days to trace out the affinities between the postmodern critical theories and the Sūfi ideas (a case in point is Ian Almond’s recent book *Deconstruction and Sufism*). But one must appreciate the traditional reason, the reasons of Rūmī himself, behind what Keshavarz sees as a ‘reluctance, even apprehension in applying new views to the literature of the Muslim world, particularly that of the medieval period’. The reason behind such apprehension, as the study has argued, is that these new approaches are a product of a ‘de-centered’ vision, a product of the imagination as ‘play’, and must be regulated by the critical insight or discrimination Rūmī calls *īmān* (faith). The claim of this study, that a plausible critique of the Western criticism can be developed from within

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp.4314-317.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.4302-304.

Rūmī himself, looks to stand validated when Rūmī again seems to encapsulate this proliferation of critical approaches and yet again stresses the need for ‘a believer’ to pass the final verdict:

The philosopher gives an explanation of another kind;
 A scholastic theologian invalidates his statement;
 And someone else jeers at both of them, while another hypocritically tires himself to death.
 Know the truth to be this, (that) all these are not in the right; nor are this herd entirely astray,
 Because nothing false is shown without the True; the fool bought spurious coin in the hope of gold.
 If there were no current (genuine) coin in the world, how would it be possible to issue false coins?
 Where is the sagacious and discerning believer, that he may distinguish effeminate wretches from men?⁸⁵

VI

Imagining *khayâl* in Rūmī necessitates an epistemological shift from ‘ilm al-*abdân* (ontology) to ‘ilm al-*adyâñ* (theology), the knowledge originating from *hushyâri* (self-consciousness or *nafs*), surrendering to the knowledge originating from *qalb*, *dil*, (the heart) as *îmân* (faith), as ‘*aql* (reason), and as *khayâl* (imagination). In *Fihi ma Fih* Mawlana makes the distinction between *khayâl-e-kâmil* (the perfect imagination) and *khayâl-e-nâqis* (the imperfect imagination), which leads directly into the epistemological distinction between ‘ilm al-*abdân* (knowledge of ‘bodies’/ science of bodies) and ‘ilm al-*adyâñ* (knowledge of ‘religions’/ science of religions) governing the concepts respectively:

Any knowledge that comes about through instruction and acquisition in this world is knowledge of ‘bodies’. The knowledge that comes about after death (‘die before you die’) is knowledge of ‘religions’. *Knowing* what ‘I-am-God’ is the knowledge of bodies; *becoming* ‘I-am-God’ is the knowledge of religions. To see the flame and light of a lamp is the knowledge of bodies; to burn in the flame or light of the lamp is the knowledge of religious. Everything that is ‘seeing’ is the knowledge of religions, everything that is ‘knowing’ is the knowledge of bodies. You say what is actualized in seeing and sight; all other knowledge is knowledge of *khayâl* (mental images / fantasy).⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Rumi, *The Mathnawi*, Vol.III, pp.2925, 2927-929, 2939.

⁸⁶ Rumi, *Signs of the Unseen*, trans., W.M. Thackston, Jr., p.238.

Imagining *khayâl* in Rûmî is possible only at the condition of the mythic view of the imagination repenting and converting to the traditional view of the imagination as *khayâl*. But to have this ‘insider’s’ vision the mythic imagination has to undergo a purgation, has to pay an expiation by letting go its desire for any further exertion in complicity with the Western self-conscious reason, by having, like the magicians of Pharaoh, its ‘hands and feet cut off’: the magicians surrendering to the miracle of Moses: ‘For us, we have believed in our Lord: may he forgive us our faults, and the magic to which thou compel us ...’ (Al Qur’ân, 20:73). The ‘insider’s’ look, Rûmî tells us, can only be had at the cost of ‘hands and feet’: ‘For that look makes (all) pains sweet: it is the blood-price (paid) to the magicians (of Pharaoh) for (the amputation of) their hands and feet’.⁸⁷

What the magicians get as the blood-price, Rûmî lists in his *Mathnawî* while commenting upon the saying of Pharaoh’s magicians, at the time of their punishment, ‘tis no harm, for lo, we shall return unto our Lord’. They get an ‘I’ that is free from the ‘I’ full of tribulation and trouble, an ‘I’-hood with an ‘irreversibly ordained facility’ as against the ‘I’-hood that is ‘baleful’ and ‘vindictive’; rising from the ‘radiant East’ an ‘I’-hood without ‘I’, springing away from the ‘I’-hood of the world, an ‘I’-hood without affliction, an ‘I’ that could not be ‘revealed by thinking’ but only after passing away from self (*fanâ*):

Heaven heard the cry, ‘*tis no harm*’: the celestial sphere became a ball for that bat.

(The magicians said), ‘The punishment inflicted by Pharaoh is no harm to us: the grace of God prevails over the violence of (all) others.

Lo, we are (the real) ‘I’, having been freed from (the unreal) ‘I’, from the ‘I’ that is full of tribulation and trouble.

To thee, O cur, that ‘I’-hood was baleful, (but) in regard to us it was irreversibly ordained felicity.

Beware, do not make (too much) haste: first become naught, and when you sink (into non-existence) rise from the radiant East!

The heart was dumbfounded by the eternal ‘I’-hood: this (unreal) ‘I’-hood became insipid and opprobrious (in its sight).

The spirit was made glad by that ‘I’-hood without ‘I’ and sprang away from the ‘I’-hood of the world.

Since it has been delivered from ‘I’, it has now become ‘I’: blessings on the ‘I’ that is without affliction;

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol.V, p.4119.

For it is fleeing (from its unreal ‘I’-hood) and the (real) ‘I’-hood is running after it, since it saw it (the spirit) to be selfless.

(If) you seek it (the real ‘I’-hood, it will not become a seeker of you: only when you have died (to self) will that which you seek become your seeker.

If the intellect could discern the (true) way in this question, Fakhr-i Razi would be an adept in religious mysteries;

But since he was (an example of the saying that) whoso has not tasted does not know, his intelligence and imaginations (only) increased his perplexity.

How should this ‘I’ be revealed by thinking? That ‘I’ is revealed (only) after passing away from self (*fana*).⁸⁸

Until this conversion of the imagination takes place, until that *gharad* that draws the veil from the heart to the eye is not let go of, in the words of Richard Kearney ‘a creative letting go of the derive for possession, of the claim to calculus of means and ends’,⁸⁹ Rūmī may be read and appreciated for all the reasons but for those he himself would want to be appreciated. ‘Even when it can’t go on’, Kearney observes, ‘the postmodern imagination goes on. A child making traces at the edge of the sea. Imagining otherwise. Imagination’s wake. Dying? Awaking?’⁹⁰ ‘When you have come this far, stop and apply yourself no more’, Mawlana replies, ‘Reason has no further sway. When it has reached the edge of the sea, let it halt.’⁹¹

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.4120-146.

⁸⁹ Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, p.368.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.397.

⁹¹ Rūmī, *Signs of the Unseen*, *op.cit.*, p.207.