

Why and how to Read Romanticism: *Ibrah* as a Mode of Comparative Reading for Pakistani Students of Literature and Culture

*Iftikhar Shafi**

Abstract

The paper argues that reading Romanticism through the Sufi literary tradition, a mode of reading that the paper calls *ibrah*, may be instructive today in terms of understanding and possibly resolving some fundamental critical issues in the contemporary Pakistani literary and cultural context. The argument proceeds by establishing that the contemporary literary and cultural problems, first in their western context, may be seen as fundamentally Romantic in nature symptomizing a particularly Jewish mode of existence. This the paper achieves by referring to the so-called postmodern revisions of Romanticism by some major western critics. Secondly, the paper seeks to investigate through some of the central literary figures in the Pakistani literary canon how the impact of the western literature and culture and a subsequent distancing from a rich cultural tradition has forced the Pakistani literary and cultural consciousness to 'own' these problems, hence falling itself into a Romantic / Jewish predicament. Although the comparative studies, East and West, have mostly focused on the apparent inspirational and aspirational similarities between Romanticism and the Sufi literary tradition, this paper rather focuses more upon the differences that exist between their traditional / religious provenances and attempts to develop a cultural critique that may suggest a critical and theoretical reorientation for dealing with our contemporary 'Romantic' situation.

'Take warning, then, O ye with eyes (to see)':¹ *Ibrah* as comparative reading

This paper is structured basically on a diagnostic and prescriptive scheme. It suggests that it is primarily through a comparative approach that European Romanticism can become a *maqâm-e- ibrat* or a 'scene of instruction' for a Pakistani student of literature and culture. The primary

* Dr Iftikhar Shafi, Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Karachi, Karachi.

¹ *The Glorious Qur'an*, trans. A. Yousuf Ali, American Trust Publications, 1977, 59:2. All the subsequent translations of the Qur'anic verses have been taken from this translation.

aim of a Pakistani student of literature and culture, the paper maintains, may be an attempt to identify, understand and possibly resolve the intricate issues related to the Pakistani critical and cultural matrix, its development (or degeneration) into a predicament-like situation. Reading Romanticism in a particularly comparative mode suggested here may allow a Pakistani reader to move in the direction of achieving such an aim.

Romanticism relates to the modern critical and cultural situations, both in their western and Pakistani contexts, in some significant ways. In the wake of a period of a certain anti-Romantic sentiment, initiated by Mathew Arnold accusing the Romantics of ‘not knowing enough’ and invigorated by the likes of T. E. Hulme and T. S. Eliot in the early twentieth century, there has been a revival of interest in Romanticism in the West. Depending upon their view of what Romanticism was, a number of contemporary western critics have acknowledged that far from being a done and dusted philosophy of idealism, Romanticism actually comprehends some of the most central critical concerns of the so-called postmodern period in the western cultural history. Harold Bloom calls Romanticism ‘the tradition of the last two centuries’ in the West,² and Paul de Man suggests that the western critical movements since Romanticism, despite their avowed aims to this effect, have not been able to move out of the Romantic domain:

Time and again, literary and critical movements set out with the avowed aim of moving beyond Romantic attitudes and ideas . . . But time and again, it turns out that the new conceptions that thus assert themselves were in fact already present in the full context of European Romanticism; instead of moving beyond these problems, we are merely becoming aware of certain aspects of Romanticism that had remained hidden from our perception . . . What sets out as a claim to overcome Romanticism often turns out to be merely an expansion of our understanding of the movement . . .³

So what are those Romantic concerns that are so ‘universal’ that they do not allow even the most avant guard and sophisticated critical perceptions in the most recent times to go beyond them? It is in

² Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.35.

³ Paul de Man, ‘The Negative Road’, in *Selected Poetry of John Keats* (NY: New American Library, 1966), pp.29-30.

answering such a question that European Romanticism starts appearing to be relevant not only to the contemporary western cultural scenario, but also, by an ironic definition of ‘universal’ that seems to be embraced by some of our most noted twentieth century cultural vicars in Pakistan, looks to become a measure of the direction Pakistani literature and culture was going to take. As to why these Romantic concerns were embraced by the Pakistani literati as their own may be an overdetermined problem, but one may still cite as a highly probable cause the semblance of universality given to the European cultural crisis by the onslaught of cultural imperialism via colonialism. Add to that the cultural pressure generated by the accompanying criticism produced in the West that would actually allow only the supratribal, supernational communities to be capable of participating in the European cultural crisis, and the picture gets clearer. As a result, anyone who does not share the Romantic angst would be associated with the non-European ‘primitive, prescientific and pre-philosophical, myth-dominated’ culture, as de Man explains Husserl’s position vis-a-vis the non-European cultures in Husserl’s ‘The Crisis of European Humanity and Philosophy.’ Paul de Man points out that Husserl ‘warns us . . . that we should not assume a potential for philosophical attitudes in non-European cultures . . . Husserl’s claim to European supremacy hardly stands in need of criticism today . . . it suffices to point to the pathos of such a claim at a moment when Europe was about to destroy itself as center in the name of its unwarranted claim to be the center’.⁴

It is as a move away from such Eurocentricity that this paper suggests for a Pakistani student *ibrah* as a mode of approaching Romanticism. In a way of putting it, instead of being defensive against Husserl on his ‘accusations’ we should rather reassert a mode of ‘seeing things’, if this is what is initially meant by criticism and theory, which is markedly different from the European ‘philosophical’ attitudes. This critical reorientation may be a way out of crisis, probably the only way if one goes by both Husserl’s and de Man’s suggestion that the western philosophy, criticism and the ensuing cultural crisis are all actually one and the same thing, and de Man in particular considers Romanticism as culmination of this crisis-ridden consciousness.⁵ Through its ordered

⁴ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1971, 1983), pp.15-16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.16. ‘Husserl’s text reveals with striking clarity the structure of all crisis-determined statements. It establishes an important truth: the fact that philosophical knowledge can only come into being when it is turned back upon itself’.

polysemy, *ibrah* as a ‘crossing over’ opens up a comparative space for us to view Romanticism; as ‘warning and admonition’ it allows us to see the consequences of approaching, adopting and owning Romanticism rather naively without the necessary cultural mediations; and finally through its etymological links with *ibr*, the Jews, *ibrah* invites us to further explore for our own cultural and instructional needs what has already been asserted by the twentieth century western revisions of European Romanticism, namely, its Jewish provenance.

Desire as *differance*: Romanticism’s wandering anguish

Let us now try to explore those Romantic concerns that also define the postmodern western critical crisis, how these concerns are seen to be arising out of a basically Jewish mode of existence, and how they relate to the Pakistani cultural condition. For the immediate purpose, I would try to subsume the various Romantic concerns under the general rubric of the Romantic concern with language, for given the so-called ‘linguistic turn’ in the twentieth century western criticism by virtue of which criticism acquired the name of ‘theory’,⁶ this strategy would facilitate our understanding of why Romanticism has become so relevant to the postmodern western criticism. My main purpose here would be to interpret the nature and fate of the Romantic desire in terms of the Romantic attitude towards language and how a similar take on language and desire can be observed not only among the postmodern Western theorists but also among some of the most noteworthy Pakistani writers in the twentieth century. These ‘crisis-determined’ attitudes would then be placed alongside some specimens demonstrating the language-desire relationship which are chosen from another literary tradition whose understanding demands the critical and cultural reorientation earlier talked about in this paper.

Paul de Man in his take on Romanticism quotes Rousseau’s statement on desire that reflects a consciousness that, according to de

⁶ Both Derrida and de Man, in their own terms, assert this centrality of language as a main symptom of a shift in the western critical history. According to de Man ‘Literary theory can be said to come into being when the approach to literary texts is no longer based on non-linguistic . . . considerations . . .’ ‘The Resistance to Theory,’ in *Theory and History of Literature*, Vol.33 (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1986), p.7. Derrida also talks about ‘the moment when language invaded the universal problematic’ as the moment of a ‘rupture’ in the history of western metaphysics. *Writing and Difference* (NY: Routledge, 1978), First Indian reprint, 2003, p.354.

Man, can not be characterized as a desire: ‘If all my dreams had turned into reality, I would still remain unsatisfied: I would have kept on dreaming, imagining, desiring. In myself, I found an unexplainable void that nothing could have fulfilled; a longing of the heart towards another kind of fulfillment of which I could not conceive but of which I nevertheless felt the attraction’.⁷ Commenting upon Rousseau’s statement de Man points out that ‘all nostalgia or desire is desire of something or for someone; here the consciousness does not result from the absence of something, but consists of the presence of a nothingness’.⁸ Hence such a desire as expressed in Rousseau’s text is not properly, but only ironically, a desire—what I call here the desire as *differance*, to use a famous coinage of Derrida that designates an endless process of differing and deferring, suspending fulfillment in constant abeyance. The mode of Rousseau’s statement also reflects fulfillment only as an imaginary condition, a consciousness and awareness on the dreamer’s part that there is nothing on the other side of the dream, no fulfillment on the other side of the desire, no reality on the other side of imagination. This Romantic dream Derrida calls the ‘dream of full presence’ and contrasts this ‘Rousseauistic side of thinking’ which to Derrida is ‘saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty’ with the joyous ‘Nietzschean *affirmation*’ of nothingness that he calls ‘the other side’ of Rousseauistic Romanticism. Both Rousseauistic Romanticism and Nietzscheanism (postmodernism, in a wide sweep) share one thing in common with each other: the knowledge of nothingness and meaninglessness; the difference between them is how they respond to this ‘negative’ knowledge. Rousseau’s continuation with dream without reality, his engagement with the existential void, would be tinged with sadness and guilt, whereas Nietzsche’s affirmation of dream without reality would be joyous and trespassing. They look to be two sides of the same coin. That is why while contrasting these two seemingly opposing philosophies Derrida wants us to ‘conceive of the common ground, and the *differance* of this irreducible difference’.⁹

The void that thus lurks beneath both Romantic idealism and postmodern materialism is the true source of the literary production of these eras, as de Man puts it: ‘Poetic language names this void with ever-

⁷ Jean Jacques Rousseau, Letter to Malesherbes, Pléiade ed. I, p.1140. Quotation and its discussion taken here from Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p.18.

⁸ Paul de Man, *op.cit.*, p.18.

⁹ Derrida, *op.cit.*, pp.369-70.

renewed understanding and, like Rousseau's longing, it never tires of naming it again. This persistent naming is what we call literature'.¹⁰ Earlier in the same essay, de Man has already pointed out that the reason the later nineteenth century and twentieth century critics considered Romanticism as basically a deluded philosophy was the Romantic yearning towards coinciding sign and meaning (in Derrida's words, 'the dream of full presence'), a dream that the Romantics were well aware could never come true, but at the same time could not help feeling sad about this negative knowledge. Voloshinov, a twentieth century Russian Marxist critic, considers the Romantic theory of expression as consisting of an 'inner some thing which is expressible and its outward objectification for the others' or probably for oneself. The Romantic desire translated thus in linguistic terms would be the fullness of experience in expression, the 'pre-linguistic' dream to be completely turned into 'linguistic' reality (Coleridge's own claims about the attempted writing of *Kubla Khan* and its consequent fragmentary nature may be a case in point). The resulting Romantic agony according to Voloshinov would be the Romantic realization (or delusion) that 'expression deforms the purity of the inner element (experience)'.¹¹ This notion of 'an idea or 'interior design' as simply anterior to a work which would supposedly be the expression of it' Derrida in his own terms calls 'the prejudice of the traditional criticism called *idealist*'.¹²

The postmodern critical sensibility would play down the hard and fast distinction between dream and reality, asserting, like Shakespeare's Prospero, that what one thinks to be real is also 'such stuff as dreams are made on', or rather vice versa, what one thinks to be the 'pre-linguistic dream' is also a linguistic interpretation. If Voloshinov's critique of and answer to the Romantic dichotomy and the resulting Romantic agony is precisely this that 'The experience ... and its outward objectification are created out of one and the same material' and that there is no such thing as 'experience outside of embodiment in signs',¹³ Derrida would in a similar fashion assert that 'from the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs'.¹⁴ Richard Kearney illustrates this complicity between the Romantic and the postmodern art:

¹⁰ Paul de Man, *op.cit.*

¹¹ Nikolaevie Valentine Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), p.83.

¹² Derrida, *op.cit.*, p.12.

¹³ Nikolaevie Valentine Voloshinov, *op.cit.*, p.85.

¹⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.50.

Modern art becomes postmodern when it parodies its own pretensions, when it upends the traditional distinctions between the imaginary and the real, the possible and the impossible, that which can be thought or said and that which cannot. Borges' own metaphor of art as a sprawling labyrinth with no entrance or exit, where man loses himself in circular self-mirroring paths, aptly illustrates the postmodern paradigm. 'Sleeping is like dreaming death, just as waking is like dreaming life,' Borges confesses. 'I can no longer tell which is which'.¹⁵

Borges' confession here looks characteristically Keatsian — imagination becoming a 'deceiving elf' that ultimately results in confusion between sleeping and waking: 'Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music:— Do I wake or sleep?' ('Ode to a Nightingale'). Thus the Romantic 'dream' and the postmodern 'reality' can be said to be made of the same stuff, and this realization of the void that stares in the face of desire to name the unnameable constitutes the Romantic agony, and also a certain 'stoic' postmodernism that is its other side.

In a relatively recent study Sheila A. Spector has discussed Romanticism's Jewish connection. She points out that:

Characterized by interest in a number of new themes—including the imagination, the irrational, the particular, the remote, egotism, orientalism, primitivism, medievalism, and the sublime, to name a few—(Romanticism) was not simply an aggregate of novel ideas but, rather, a response to the dislocation of the old certitudes and an attempt to derive a new ethos. Though seldom acknowledged, the Jews had an integral role to play in this process.¹⁶

Through its postmodern critique, we may observe in such Rousseauistic Romanticism some features that are characteristically Jewish in sensibility. Firstly, there is seen to be a *deliberate* and a conscious avoidance of fulfillment, a desire of success paradoxically accompanied by an attachment to failure: a hesitation to enter the 'promised land'. This is what Derrida obliquely refers to as 'The consciousness of having something to say as the consciousness of nothingness' and calls it '*not*

¹⁵ Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination, Ideas of Creativity in Western Culture* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), p.269.

¹⁶ Sheila A. Spector (ed.), *Romanticism / Judaica: A Convergence of Cultures* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), p.1.

the poorest but the most oppressed of consciousnesses'.¹⁷ Secondly, the desire's fate as *differance* relates it to an avoidance of death as signifying the cessation of continual deferment of meaning, a trait that the Qur'an associates with the Jews. The Jewish desire is never associated with death. Thirdly, the Romantic anguish comes out to be an inability to come to terms with the unseen *as* the unseen, the constant desire to translate the spiritual into the material. Such anguish is reflected in the Qur'anic accounts of the Jews constantly asking Moses to show them God 'manifestly'. This materialistic yearning in case of Romanticism results in anguish and a certain 'brokenness' whose continuation may ultimately lead to a disillusionment with the unseen altogether, a gradual fading of the dream itself—a movement that is visible in the later stages of English Romanticism through figures like Keats, Shelley, a sure supplanting of religion through Arnold, progressively leading to a resort to the occult in the transformed Romanticism of Yeats and Pound, a faith in *jibt* (sorcery) and *tâghūt* (evil) that the Qur'an associates with the Jews.

This Romantic anguish with language—'writing' in its Derridian sense, the necessary material mediation of experience, Derrida calls the 'anguish of the Hebraic *ruah*' that shatters the Flaubertian Romantic dream of the 'total Book' that contains 'the most irreplaceable within it.' Derrida exposes the Romantic anguish: 'To write is . . . to know that the Book does not exist . . . This lost certainty, this absence of the Jewish God does . . . as the absence and the haunting of the divine sign . . . regulate all modern criticism and aesthetics . . . To write is to know that through writing . . . the best will not necessarily transpire . . .'¹⁸ The Jewish links of the Romantic anguish with writing have been aptly recorded by Geoffrey Hartman:

(The Jew in Romantic literature) may appear as Cain, Ahasuerus, Ancient Mariner, and even Faust . . . These solitaries are separated from life in the midst of life, yet cannot die . . . And in Coleridge's Mariner, as in Conrad's Marlow, the figure of the wanderer approaches that of the poet. Both are storytellers who resubmit themselves to temporality and are compelled to repeat their experience in the purgatorial form of words. Yeats, deeply affected by the theme of the Wandering Jew, records a marvellous comment

¹⁷ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.8 (Italics mine). The statement may well be interpreted as a tongue-in-cheek reference to the Jews.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.10-11.

of Mme. Blavatsky. ‘I write, write, write . . . As the Wandering Jew walks, walks, walks’.¹⁹

Romanticism and Pakistani culture

In his famous *ghazal* that uses ‘desire’ as its refrain, Jalal al-Din Rumi’s desire takes many forms that would appear somewhat similar to what has been said about the Romantic desire above, and hence might lead one to characterize the *ghazal* as ‘Romantic’. His desire is: for wandering abroad in mountains and deserts because the city has become *habs* (prison, restriction) for him; for someone who is not to be found; for the One who is hidden from every eye and all things are seen from Him, ‘the hidden One manifest’, for the showing of the face and the opening of the lips and of ‘coming forth one moment out of the cloud’. Moreover, the desire has a Hebraic *ruah*, being that of Jacob for the fair visage of Joseph; of the light of the countenance of Moses; like that of the hoopoe’s for the presence of Solomon. And finally, it claims a state that ‘has gone beyond every desire and yearning’.²⁰

This seemingly Romantic desire may however be distinguished from the Rousseauistic desire in that instead of being characterized by a consciousness of nothingness, it is motivated in Rumi’s words by ‘the form of faith’ in the Unseen that does not necessarily require a translation of experience into expression for its fulfillment. Unlike the Romantic ‘religion of poetic experience’, what we find here is a ‘poetics of religious experience’ regulated by the condition that the Qur’an puts in the very beginning for the ones who are to be guided from it, namely, a faith in the unseen *as* the unseen, and the famous *hadīth-e-Jibrīl* in the *Bukhārī* defines as *ihsân*, that is, to worship Allah as if one sees Him. Such a religious aesthetics (*husn* as beauty derived from *ihsân*)²¹ is markedly different from the Jewish Hebraism that conditions faith through the desire of seeing the hidden as the manifest materially / linguistically, as the Qur’an reports about the Jews telling Moses that they would never believe in him until they ‘see God manifestly’ (2 : 55). One may always argue that the desire for the hidden to become manifest,

¹⁹ Geoffrey H. Hartman, ‘Romanticism and ‘Anti-Self-Consciousness’, in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, Harold Bloom (ed.) (NY: Norton, 1970), p.51.

²⁰ Franklin D. Lewis & Hasan Javadi (eds.), *Mystical Poems by Rumi, Translated from the Persian by A. J. Arberry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp.79-80.

²¹ Joseph, famed for his beauty, has been repeatedly characterized by the *Qur’an* as being among the *muhsinīn*.

the non-linguistic to become linguistic, the desire for ‘showing the face’, is a basic human desire (after all, the desire goes back to Moses himself: *arinī anzur ilayk* [‘Show Thyself to me, that I may look upon Thee,’ *The Qur’an*, 7: 143]) and poetry and literature are a product of the brokenness that one experiences if this desire remains unfulfilled (*desirably* always in Rousseau’s case, and confessedly in Ghalib: *mein hūn apnī shikast kī âwâz*). If ‘brokenness’ is to be a source of literary production, then this brokenness may also be divided into two kinds: one that results in the consciousness and naming of the void, as in the Romantic case, and the other leading to a recognition of and an increased faith in the object of desire, as the saying attributed to the Prophet’s companion Ali that he has recognized God through the breaking of his desires. Rumi remarkably distinguishes the outcome of these two types of *shikast* (breaking; defeat): ‘If you crush (*bishkanī*) some musk or ambergris, you will fill a (whole) world with (a scent like) the exhalation of sweet herbs / And if you suddenly crush (*shikastī*) the dung of an ass, the houses will be filled to the top with stench’²²:

گر تو مشک و عنبری را بشکنی عالمی از فوح ریحان پر کنی
ور شکستی ناگهان سرگین خر خابها پر کند گردد تا بسر

From a Pakistani perspective, it is important for us to distinguish the fates of these two kinds of desire, one motivated by a distorted Hebraism (‘spilt religion’, as T. E. Hulme famously characterized Romanticism) staring ultimately at a postmodern existentialist void, and the other regulated by a genuine religious faith resulting ultimately in the ‘satisfaction of heart’ either through its material fulfillment, as in case of Abraham’s desire for God to show him how He gives life to the dead (*The Qur’an*, 2:260), or through the realization of the impossibility of its fulfillment (‘By no means canst thou see Me [direct]’) in case of Moses’s desire to see God (*The Qur’an*, 7:143).

A reflection of such Mosaic desire and *shikast* (in contrast to the Jewish desire as *differānce* and the Romantic ‘brokenness’) is to be found in Iqbal, arguably the centre of Pakistani literary canon, the outcome of whose desire and dream Pakistan was thought to be. In one of his most celebrated *ghazals* Iqbal aligns himself with Rumi in being all for giving over to a certain *shikast* that renders the broken more valuable:

²² Jalal al-Din Rumi, *The Mathnawi of Jalal’uddin Rumi*, trans. & ed. R.A. Nicholson (Karachi: Darul Isha’at, 2003), pp.III / 4500-1.

تو بچا بچا کے نہ رکھ اسے ترا آئینہ ہے وہ آئینہ
کہ شکستہ ہو تو عزیز تر ہے نگاہ آئینہ ساز میں

Don't keep it saving, your mirror is that mirror,
That if it is broken it is more valuable in the eyes of the
Maker of that mirror.²³

This brokenness follows the Mosaic desire for a direct vision. The 'awaited Real' (*haqīqat-e-muntazar*) is invoked to show himself in the 'dress of metaphor' (*libâs-e-majâz*), that is, linguistically and materially. But instead of a Romantic anguish, the brokenness that thus results from the realization of the impossibility of the fulfillment of such a desire readily translates itself into repentance (echoing Moses' repentance after the desire: *innī tubtu ilaik . . .*), and that repentance in turn is informed by a sense of incapacity of the heart 'that only knows an image / an idol,' (*sanam âshnâ*) that can grasp a vision only linguistically or materially.

کہ ہزاروں سجدے تڑپ رہے ہیں مری جبین نیاز میں
مرے جرم خانہ خراب کو ترے عفو بندہ نواز میں
ترا دل تو ہے صنم آشنا تجھے کیا ملے گا نماز میں

کبھی اے حقیقت منتظر نظراً لباس مجاز میں
نہ کہیں جہاں مینامان ملی جو امان ملی تو کہاں ملی
جو میں سر بہ سجدہ ہوا کبھی تو زمیں سے آنے لگی صدا

Some time O (You the) Awaited Real, (let Yourself) be
seen in the dress of virtuality,
For there are thousands of prostrations restless in my
suppliant forehead.
Nowhere in the world it found refuge, where did it
(ultimately) find refuge?
My self-destructive crime in Your gracious pardon.
Whenever I went into prostration, the voice came out of
the earth,
'Your heart knows only the idol, what will you find in
prayers?'²⁴

What is especially noteworthy here is that this realization of the incapacity of language to grasp the Real does not render language 'epistemologically suspect', as has happened in the case of the ensuing Romantic tradition in the West.²⁵ Despite its self-referential restraint,

²³ Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliat-e-Iqbal* (Urdu) (Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali, 1972), p.281. All the English translations of Urdu poetry included in the essay are mine.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.280-81.

²⁵ de Man points out that language's 'freedom from referential restraint . . . makes it epistemologically highly suspect and volatile, since its use can no

language in Iqbal's case still keeps pointing towards the object that lies beyond language. One may indeed recall here Rousseau's incessant longing for 'another kind of fulfillment' that always lies beyond the translation of dream into reality, of the desire into fulfillment. In Iqbal's case though, this absence of fulfillment is not characterized by a 'void', but the linguistic incapacity results in an epistemological transition that may explain Iqbal's increasing disillusionment with the western idealism and his growing affiliation with Rumi's poetics of faith.

Iqbal's encounter with Romanticism, in its initial appreciation, subsequent disillusionment, and ultimate replacement with Rumi's Sufi thought can become a measure of the course Pakistani culture, aspirationally speaking, was ideally to take, if one agrees to relate its identity with Iqbal's desire. Iqbal well understood his own colonial situation as well as the impact western colonialism had upon the culture of subcontinental Muslims. It is perhaps a realization of this impact, of being caught between two incompatible traditions that makes Iqbal elsewhere confess to the unrelatedness of a desire (*arini*) thus situated to the Mosaic tradition:

ارنی میں بھی کہہ رہا ہوں مگر یہ حدیثِ کلیم و طور نہیں

I am also saying 'Show me Yourself,' but

This is not the story of *Kaleem* (Moses) and Sinai.²⁶

The couplet, however, is the last in the *ghazal* that can be taken as a reply to the Romantic predicament. The Romantic 'dream of full presence', as Derrida would call it, is bound to a void, to be 'devoid' of any fulfillment, because it exists within what Derrida would call the 'metaphysics of presence', that is, an *epistémé* that is *exclusively* rational. In an epistemologically transitional move, Iqbal points out the impossibility of such a desire within such a tradition:

عقل گو آستان سے دور نہیں اس کی تقدیر میں حضور نہیں
دل بینا بھی کر خدا سے طلب آنکھ کا نور دل کا نور نہیں

Though reason is not (that) far away from the threshold,

(Still) presence (to be an insider) is not in its destiny.

Seek a visionary heart also from God,

The light of the eye is not the light of heart.²⁷

longer be said to be determined by considerations of truth and falsehood...', *The Resistance to Theory*, p.10.

²⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.335.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

In a masterful stroke Iqbal distinguishes between the Romantic and the Sufi situations by way of interpreting the Romantic agony by situating its passion and desire within a relentless tradition of a worldly consciousness marked historically by a rhetoric of temporality with which this desire cannot co-exist:

اک جنوں ہے کہ باشعور بھی ہے اک جنوں ہے کہ باشعور نہیں

There is a madness (passion) that is with conscious as well,

There is a madness (passion) that is not with consciousness.²⁸

It is interesting to note that it was in France, thought by many to be the seat of postmodernism, that Iqbal wrote his poetic comment on the fate of the wandering Romantic desire as *differânce* (*tamannây khâm*) that seeks to perpetuate a wordly existence (*aish-e-jahân kâ dawâm*) within a rhetoric of temporality and the resultant unrelatedness of any such desire to the true Mosaic tradition:

ڈھونڈ رہا ہے فرنگ عیش جہاں کا دوام وائے تمنائے خام وائے تمنائے خام
تھا ارنی گو کلیم میں ارنی گو نہیں اس کو تقاضا روا مجھ پہ تقاضا حرام

The West is looking for the perpetuation of the worldly existence,

O the vain desire! O the vain desire.

Kaleem (Moses) was the sayer of ‘Show me Yourself,’ I am not the sayer of ‘Show me Yourself’,

The desire is legitimate for him, the desire is illegitimate (in relation) to me.²⁹

It is also to be observed that Iqbal’s view of poetry as a desire that cannot be expressed ‘face to face’ comes comparably close to de Man’s interpretation of the Romantic literary theory that sees poetry as a ‘persistent naming’ of the void only when Iqbal couples poetry with philosophy, thus suggesting the impossibility of the co-existence of such a desire within the Western epistemological tradition that is predominantly philosophical:

فلسفہ و شعر کی اور حقیقت ہے کیا حرف تمنا جسے کہہ نہ سکیں رو برو

What else is the reality of philosophy and poetry?

A word of desire that can not be said face to face.³⁰

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.354.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.384.

It should indeed take some analysis to find out why Iqbal's desire and dream, with which the Pakistanis consciously sought to associate themselves culturally, met a Romantic fate among some of his most illustrious literary descendents. At the moment I would focus more upon tracing *how* such a predicament culturally unfolded itself (with a hope that the question of *how*, as Derrida points out, would always involve the question of *why*) through the literary evidences from a couple of the most noteworthy 'heirs' of Iqbal, two remarkable and respectable poets who have occupied a central position in the Pakistani literary canon in Iqbal's wake and thus can possibly serve as an index of the Pakistani cultural drift: Faiz and Rashid. The works of both these great poets reflect characteristically Romantic hues: the incessant wandering of desire, and an epistemological suspicion in the linguistic expression of that desire.

To begin with Faiz, the anguish of the wandering desire was not to cease with the 1947 independence. In 'Subh-e-Azadi, August 1947', a poem replete with Romantic imagery, Faiz's wandering desire for a destination of an unknown locale (*kahīn na kahīn*) and its accompanying anguish (*jigar kī āg, nazar kī umang, dil kī jalan*) unappeased by the remedy towards fulfillment (*chāra-e-hijrān*) remains on the move:

یہ وہ سحر تو نہیں جس کی آرزو لے کر
چلے تھے پار کہ مل جائے گی کہیں نہ کہیں
فلک کے دشت پہ تاروں کی آخری منزل

جگر کی آگ نظر کی امنگ دل کی جلن
کسی پہ چارہ بچراں کا کچھ اثر ہی نہیں

چلے چلو کہ وہ منزل ابھی نہیں آئی

This is not the dawn in whose desire
The friends had set out to find some where or the other
The final destination of the stars in the wilderness of the
skies.

...

The fire of the heart, the desire of the eye, the burning of
the heart

Have no effect (whatsoever) of the remedy of separation.

...

Let us move on, for that destination has still not
arrived.³¹

³¹ Faiz Ahmed Faiz, 'Subh-e-Azadi, August 1947', in *Dast-e-Saba* (Lahore: Qaumi Dar-ul-Ishaat, n.d), pp.24-27.

In Faiz's case, apart from the practically political frustrations this anguish of wandering also seems to inform the poetic process, suggesting a Romantic agony of the gulf between the experience and the expressed, the intensity of experience desperately searching for its expression, in a melancholic Romantic tone the desire ultimately leading to a break down between *sur* and *râg*, and the anguish continues till the end without an end, a desire that 'vainly but perpetually fantacizes some end to repetitions',³² in the words Harold Bloom uses to designate the Romantic desire.

آج اک حرف کو پھر ڈھونڈتھا پھرتا ہے خیال
مدھ پھرا حرف کوئی زھر پھرا حرف کوئی

لب پہ آئے تو مرے ہونٹ سیہ ہوجائیں

آج ہر سر سے ہر اک راگ کا ناتہ ٹوٹا
ڈھونڈھتی پھرتی ہے مطرب کو پھر اس کی آواز

لا کوئی نغمہ کوئی صوت تری عمر دراز
نو حہ غم ہی سہی شور شہادت ہی سہی
صور محشر ہی سہی بانگ قیامت ہی سہی

The thought wanders again today looking for a letter,
A letter full with honey, a letter full with poison

If it comes to my lips, the lips go black.

Today every connection between *sur* and *rag* is broken
The voice keeps wandering looking for its singer.

Bring a song, bring a voice, long you live,
Even if (it be) the wail of a sorrow, even if (it be) the cry of martyrdom.
Even if (it be) the trumpet of resurrection, even if (it be) the call of the
Judgement day.³³

This incessant anguish results in a loss of faith in the remedial effect of the poetic language itself, rendering it epistemologically suspect, reminding us of Derrida's words about the 'lost certainty' that as the absence and the haunting of the divine sign . . . regulate(s) all modern

³² Harold Bloom, *op.cit.*, p.36.

³³ Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Shâm-e-Shehr-e-Yârân* (Lahore: Maktaba-e-Karavan, n.d.), pp.79-80.

criticism and aesthetics . . . To write is to know that through writing . . . the best will not necessarily transpire . . . ,’ the refusal of poetry to console:

گر مرا حرف تسلی وہ دوا ہو جس سے
جی اٹھے پھر ترا اجڑا ہوا بے نور دماغ
تری پیشانی سے دھل جائیں یہ تذلیل کے داغ
تری بیمار جوانی کو شفا ہو جائے
گر مجھے اس کا یقین ہو مرے ہمدم مرے دوست
روز و شب شام و سحر میں تجھے بہلاتا رہوں

پر مرے گیت ترے دکھ کا مداوا ہی نہیں

If my word of consolation were that remedy with which
Your desolate lightless mind lived up again,
These marks of humiliation were washed off from your
forehead,
Your ailing youth was cured,
If I were certain of this, my companion and my friend!
I would entertain you by evening and by morning.

But my songs are not the remedy of your sorrow.³⁴

If in Faiz language’s failure to ‘transpire the best’ results in a Romantic brokenness that keeps the desire incessantly engaged at least in an insistence³⁵ of finding the ‘destination of the desire’s way’ (*manzil-e-râh-e-tamannâ*) in ‘the beauty of the beloved’s face,’ (کہاں ہے منزل راہ تمنا، Rashid’s interpretation of literary tradition for himself through Mir, Mirza and Miraji (with the significant exclusion of Iqbal) sees desire nothing but a ‘cry in the deserts of separation,’ ‘the moistness of a hand that has failed to reach (fulfillment),’ ‘the perpetual extension of anguish’— desire as a prison of the spirit ‘devoid of presence’:

³⁴ Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Dast-e-Saba*, *op.cit.*, pp.20-23.

³⁵ The refrain of this *qawwali* (*ham bhi dekhein ge*), a form supposedly coming from the Sufi tradition, reflects at the same time an almost juvenile perseverance, adamant insistence, even threat on occasion, so different from the tone and spirit of repentance accompanying the desire to see the beloved’s face in Iqbal. A similar refrain (*ham dekhein ge*) Faiz has also used in his famous poem on political upheaval and revolution. No wonder the only mark missing in both the domains of passionate existence, the personal and the political, is repentance: *har dâgh hey is dil mein bajuz dâgh-e-nadâmat* (see ‘Do Ishq’ in *Dast-e-Saba*, *op.cit.*, pp.58-63).

میر ہو مرزا ہو میرا جی ہو
 نارسا ہاتھ کی نمناکی ہے
 ایک ہی چیخ ہے فرقت کے بیابانوں میں
 ایک ہی طول المناکی ہے
 ایک ہی روح جو ہے حال ہے زندانوں میں
 ایک ہی قید تمنا کی ہے

Be it Mir, or Mirza, or Miraji,
 It is the moistness of a hand that has failed to reach
 (fulfillment).
 It is the same cry in the deserts of separation
 The same extension of a sorrowful anguish.
 It is the same spirit that is presence-less in the prisons
 It is the same imprisonment of desire.³⁶

The poem ends with a melancholic lament of the loss of the 'leisure of dream' (*fursat-e-khwab kise?*), a necessary fate of the Romantic desire whose incessant unfulfillment results ultimately in the loss of the significance of dream itself.

Rashid, however, does retain his dreams. These are the dreams of a saddened and melancholic spirit against a modern wasteland:

اس دور سے اس دور کے سوکھے ہوئے دریاؤں سے
 پھیلے ہوئے صحراؤں سے اور شہروں کے ویرانوں سے
 ویرانہ گروں سے میں حزیں اور اداس
 اے عشق ازل گيرو ابد تاب
 میرے بھی ہیں کچھ خواب

With this age, with the dried up rivers of this age,
 With the spread out deserts and with the wastelands of
 the cities
 With the wastelanders, I am stricken and sad,
 O eternity-siezing, eternally burning love!
 I also have some dreams.³⁷

These Rousseauistic 'new dreams' of 'absolute freedom' are 'closed at the end and veiled', 'concealing within their breast the speech of a smiling virgin' (who would not speak). These are the dreams of a connection between 'things and thoughts,' between the sign and the meaning; they are 'like the perpetual desire of the ever-thirsty lips of the lover':

³⁶ Noon Meem Rashid, *Kulliat-e-Rashid* (Lahore: Mavara, 1991), p.341.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.287.

ہر چند کہ وہ خواب ہیں سر بستہ و رو بند
 سینے میں چھپائے ہوئے گویا دوشیزہ لب خند
 ہر خواب میں اجسام سے افکار کا مفہوم سے گفتار کا پیوند
 عشاق کے لب ہائے ازل تشنہ کی پیوستگی شوق کے مانند

Although those dreams are closed at the end and veiled,
 Concealing within their breast the speech of a smiling
 virgin,
 In every dream (there is) a connection between the
 bodies and the thoughts, (between) the meaning and
 speech,
 Like the perpetual desire of the ever-thirsty lips of the
 lovers.³⁸

The stanza ends with a characteristic Keatsian longing: ‘O happy, happy moment’ (*Ay lamhay-e-khursand!*). No wonder these dreams, ‘like the perpetual desire’ never to be fulfilled, end up turning the dreamer into a ‘blind scrap-dealer’ (*Andhâ Kabârî*). In contrast to Iqbal’s poet whom he calls ‘the eye’ of a nation, Rashid’s poet is a blind scrap-dealer whose dreams none of his fellow citizens want to buy. These dreams are directionless (‘feet broken, heads chopped off’), scattered in the nooks of town, unknown and alien to the townsmen’s sensibility:

شہر کے گوشوں میں ہیں بکھرے ہوئے
 پاشکستہ سر بریدہ خواب
 جن سے شہر والے بے خبر

In the nooks of the town are spread out
 Feet-broken, heads-chopped off dreams
 Of which the townsmen are unaware.³⁹

Rashid’s poet is a postmodern Romantic who has shed off all the pretensions of being an original dreamer, who recognizes that he is only an imitator whose wandering anguish can at the most have a desire to collect and give a direction to his dreams, to rejuvenate them ‘like the yearnings of newly-decorated grooms’:

گھومتا ہوں شہر کے گوشوں میں روز و شب
 کہ ان کو جمع کر لوں
 دل کی بھٹی میں تپاؤں
 جس سے چھٹ جائے پرانا میل
 ان کے دست و پا پھر سے ابھر آئیں
 چمک اٹھیں لب و رخسار و گردن

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.290-91.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.495.

جیسے نو آراستہ دولہوں کی دل کی حسرتیں
پھر سے ان خوابوں کو سمت راہ ملے

I wander among the nooks of the town day and night,
To collect them,
To heat them in the furnace of the heart,
That takes away the old dirt,
Their hands and feet come out again,
The lips and the cheeks and the neck shine up,
Like the yearnings of the hearts of newly decorated
grooms,

Again these dreams find a direction.⁴⁰

Unlike Iqbal who, despite the desolation of his ‘ruined field’ was not without hope of a fruitful reception and yielding of results in the presence of ‘moistness’ (*zarâ nam ho to yeh mittî buhut zar khez hay sâqî*), Rashid’s poet, to whom the only moistness available within a parched wasteland is the moistness of an ever unfulfilled desire (*nâ rasâ hâth kî namnâkî*), is cynically suspicious of the critical receptivity of the potential buyers of his dreams. Against a more traditional farmer-seed analogy, Rashid’s selection of the seller-buyer analogy is also instructive in the sense that it places the poet within a relentlessly consumerist, market-oriented setting, in which such directionless dreams without the promise of interpretation are only supposed to support the poet’s economy (*hân magar merî maîshat kâ sahârâ khwâb hein*):

‘خواب لے لو خواب---’
صبح ہوتے چوک میں جا کر لگاتا ہوں صدا
‘خواب اصلی ہیں کہ نقلی؟’
یوں پرکھتے ہیں کہ جیسے ان سے بڑھ کر
خواب داں کوئی نہ ہو!

‘Dreams, take these dreams!’

In the morning I go to the intersection (of the market-
place) and call.

‘Are these dreams real or imitation?’

They distinguish as if there is no better knower of
dreams than them.⁴¹

That was the poet’s morning saga. The evening in-waiting is more painful. The poet’s cynical suspicion of his buyer’s potential for creative receptivity is fittingly and expectedly reciprocated by the buyers. It is evening (the time for the coffee-house!) and the poet does not want to

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.495-96.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.496.

return home carrying the piles of his dreams on his head, and thus wants the buyers to take them for free. But the offer makes the buyers even more fearful and suspicious lest these dreams may be a deception, or a sleight of hand, or lest they break down, melt down, evaporate, or cast a spell once taken home. Notice that it is not the dreams *per se* that the people are wary off, but the particular dreams of this *kabari* that they suspect, suggesting a disconnect between, in Marxist terms (as the setting is manifestly consumerist), between the *superstructure* and the *base*, between the cultural world and the sources of its production:

شام ہو جاتی ہے
میں پھر سے لگاتا ہوں صدا
'مفت لے لو مفت یہ سونے کے خواب---'
'مفت' سن کر اور ڈر جاتے ہیں لوگ
اور چپکے سے سرک جاتے ہیں لوگ
دیکھنا یہ 'مفت' کہتا ہے
کوئی دھوکہ نہ ہو
ایسا کوئی شعبدہ پنہا نہ ہو
گھر پہنچ کر ٹوٹ جائیں
یا پگھل جائیں یہ خواب
بھک سے اڑ جائیں کہیں
یا ہم یہ کوئی سحر کر ڈالیں یہ خواب
جی نہیں کس کام کے
ایسے کباڑی کے یہ خواب
ایسے نابینا کباڑی کے یہ خواب

The evening comes.

I cry again:

'Free . . . Take them free, these dreams of gold—'

Hearing 'free' the people get more frightened

And sneak away stealthily.

'Look, he says 'free'

Lest it be a deception

Or such a secret sleight

(That) these dreams break once taken home

Or melt down

Or evaporate suddenly

Or these dreams cast a spell on us.

No please! What use are these dreams of such scrap-dealer

These dreams of such a blind scrap-dealer? ⁴²

Before moving on to the final nocturnal stanza, let us for a moment wait here for a comparative comment as this comparative intervention may allow us to understand the fate of the Romantic desire and dream in the final stanza in the context that this paper seeks to evoke. The Romantic predicament of the poet's role as a dreamer, a seer, a prophet, his day and night saga of anguish of unfulfilled desire, can here be compared to the Sufi association of poetry to the prophetic tradition (*shâerî juzvîst az payghambarî* or *hast Qur'ân dar zabân-e-pehlavî* or *nîst payghamber walî dârad kitâb*, etc.). The Qu'ranic accounts tell us that the prophets also called their people 'night and day' but their calls only 'increased the flight' of their audience. On the call of the prophets their audience 'thrust their fingers into their ears' (fearful that the voice of the call may cast a spell upon them), 'covered themselves up with their garments, grown obstinate, and (gave) themselves upto arrogance' (71: 5-7). The prophet's invitation to their call was for free: 'No reward do I ask you for it . . .' (26: 109). But the breaking of the desire to convince the people, although accompanied by deep grief ('It may be thou frettest thy soul with grief, that they do not become believers' [26 : 2]; 'Thou wouldst only, perchance, fret thyself to death, following after them, in grief, if they believe not in this message' [18 : 6]), is always consoled in the prophetic tradition by the Source of their inspiration ('let not those grieve thee, who race each other into Unbelief (whether it be) among those who say 'We believe' with their lips but whose hearts have no faith; or be it among the Jews, — men who will listen to any lie . . .' [5: 44]). This consolation prevents the prophets from falling into any sort of Jewish-Romantic *ya's* (anguish, sorrow, hopelessness; 'Until, when the apostles give up hope [of their people] and [come to] think that they have been treated as liars, there reaches them Our help' [12: 110]). Having been rejected, when they leave their people they do not lament (7: 93). When they return to their night after their day's 'prolonged occupation with ordinary duties,' they are received 'wholeheartedly' by the Source of their inspiration, always convinced of their message despite any rejections ('Truly the rising by night is most potent for governing (the soul) and most suitable for [framing] the Word [of Prayer and Praise]. True, there is for thee by day prolonged occupation with ordinary duties' [73: 6 – 7]).

It is with this prophetic tradition that Rumi's Sufi poetics, and the Sufi poetic occupation associates itself. For the adherents of this tradition, night comes as a consolation, as a release.

In Rumi's words 'from the body's snare, eras(ing) (the impressions on) the tablets (of mind)':

می رہائی می کنی الواح را
 فارغان از حکم و گفتار و قصص
 شب ز دولت بی خبر سلطانیان
 نی خیال این فلان و آن فلان
 گفت ایزد ہم رقود زین مرم
 چون قلم در پنجه تقلیب رب

بر شبی از دام تن ارواح را
 می رہند ارواح ہر شب زین قفس
 شب ز زندان بی خبر زندانیان
 نی غم و اندیشہ و سود و زیان
 حال عارف این بود بی خواب ہم
 خفته از احوال دنیا روز و شب

The spirits are set free every night from this cage, (they are) done with ordinance and talk and tale.

At night the prisoners are unconscious of their prison, at night governors are unconscious of their power.

There is no sorrow, no thought of gain and loss, no fancy of this person or that person.

This is the state of the affairs of the *arif* (gnostic), even without sleep: God said, (*Thou wouldst deem them awake*) whilst they slept. Shy not at this.

He is asleep, day and night, to the affairs of the world, like a pen in the hand of the Lord's control.⁴³

The nights of an unfulfilled desire in this tradition do not produce, as in Rashid's Romantic case, an existentialist 'cry in the deserts of separation,' but are spent, like Rumi's lover's who is separated from his beloved in Bukhara, 'boil(ing) on fire, like a kettle.'⁴⁴ This metaphorical difference between the nocturnal conditions represents the difference between two traditions that this paper seeks to highlight comparatively, the difference between the desire's fate in a rigorously philosophical and rational consciousness as a torturous restlessness through deceptive intricacies and complexities (*pīch-o-tāb*), and the outcome of an unfulfilled desire as affectionate burning (*soz-o-sāz*). Iqbal, as our cultural representative with the colonial coercion on the one side and the religious tradition on the other, can also be seen at one stage caught between these two traditions, spending many a night in a bid to decide how to spend his nights, veering from one side to the other:

اسی کشمکش میں گزریں مری زندگی کی راتیں
 کبھی سوز و ساز رومی کبھی پیچ و تاب رازی

In this dilemma the nights of my life were spent

⁴³ Jalal al-Din Rumi, *op.cit.*, pp.I/389-93.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.III / 3893.

At times the affectionate burning of Rumi, at times the torturous restlessness of Razi.⁴⁵

In Iqbal's case, Rumi finally won: *Jītā hay Rūmī, hārā hay Rāzī* ('Rumi has won, Razi has lost').⁴⁶

The nocturnal saga of Rashid's blind scrap-dealer is, unfortunately, different. He returns home at night, the pile of his dreams over his head, his face distorted with anguish, muttering to himself all night 'take these dreams!' By this time, Rashid's dream-dealer is so fed up with his own dreams that he is even ready to pay as well if somebody is ready to take them, as if desperate to somehow get rid of them for a good night's sleep. He finally doses off, muttering, and haunted by the failure of his desire to make his dreams count, haunted by the dreams of his own dreams:

رات ہوجاتی ہے
 خوابوں کے پلندے سر پہ رکھ کر
 منہ بسورے لوٹتا ہوں
 'یہ لے لو خواب---
 اور لے لو مجھ سے ان کے دام بھی
 خواب لے لو خواب---
 میرے خواب---
 خواب --- میرے خواب---
 خوااااب---
 ان کے داااام بھی ی ی ی---'

Night comes.

I return, sullen-faced, with the pile of dreams over my head.

'Take these dreams—

And also take their price from me

Dreams, take these dreams—

My dreams—

Dreams — my dreams

Dreaeaeaeams—

Their priiiiice aaaalso —' ⁴⁷

This is the fate of the Romantic desire in postmodern times: from the wandering anguish of Keats's 'knight at arms' and his haunting dream ('*La Belle Dame Sans Merci*), to Poe's haunting anguish of 'a dream within a dream' once 'the hope is flown away,' ('A Dream within a

⁴⁵ Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.309.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.363.

⁴⁷ Noon Meem Rashid, *op.cit.*, pp.497-98.

Dream'), down to Borges' failure to distinguish sleep from waking, death from life as all are haunted by the anguish of a dream and a desire that is destined to remain unfulfilled:

Yet if hope has flown away
 In a night, or in a day,
 In a vision, or in none,
 Is it therefore the less *gone*?
All that we see or seem
 Is but a dream within a dream. ⁴⁸

Conclusion

ہے غیب غیب جس کو سمجھتے ہیں ہم شہود
 ہیں خواب میں بنوز جو جاگے ہیں خواب میں

It is the absence of the unseen, what we think is present,
 (We are) still within a dream, as we have awoke from the
 dream

I have deliberately taken the liberty to myself translate Ghalib here to fit my immediate purpose of relating the foregoing discussion to the contemporary Pakistani culture. The formation and the assertion of a national culture that was supposed to be an awakening from (interpretation of) Iqbal's dream, turns out, it looks, only to be an awakening into another dream—a dream haunted by 'the absence of the Unseen.' Caught between a conscious reflection of Iqbal's dream and desire and an unconscious representation of the desire and dream in Faiz and Rashid (as two representative poets, they may be said to voice our 'collective unconscious'), what we think is the present in Pakistani culture, if taken to be represented by language in Faiz and Rashid, seems to have unconsciously fallen into a Jewish-Romantic predicament, in a sense of being 'haunted,' in Derrida's words about modern aesthetics, by 'the absence . . . of the (unseen) Jewish God,' and characterized by 'the absence and haunting of the divine sign'.

The Qur'anic allusions in Faiz and Rashid seem to confirm such an absence and haunting. 'God remains *only in name*' could also be an unfortunate sense that a reader can get from a line that would traditionally translate as 'only *God's* name will remain' the way Faiz contextualizes the judgement-day scenario taken from the Qur'an to fit his own revolutionary ends. The allusive imagery in *Hum Dekein Gay* poetically conforms to the Qura'nic account only to be decidedly

⁴⁸ Edgar Allen Poe, 'A Dream within a Dream,' in *Complete Tales and Poems* (NY: Fall River Press, 2012), p.84.

subverted at the end: the Qur'anic 'Whose will be the dominion that Day? That of God, the One, the Irresistible' (40: 16) is, through a subtle detour *via* Hallaj that seeks to identify 'the creation of God' (*khalq-e-Khuda*) with God Himself, turned into 'And the creation of God will rule.' This sounds quite similar to what Derrida calls 'Divine creativity . . . reappropriated by a hypocritical humanism':

بس نام رہے گا اللہ کا
 جو غائب بھی ہے حاضر بھی
 جو ناظر بھی ہے منظر بھی
 اٹھے گا انا الحق کا نعرہ
 جو میں بھی ہوں اور تم بھی ہو
 اور راج کرے گی خلق خدا
 جو میں بھی ہوں اور تم بھی ہو

Only God's name will remain (God will remain only in name?)

Who is both absent and present,

Who is the Seer as well as the Seen.

The chant of 'I am the Truth' will rise,

That is me as well as you,

And God's creation will rule,

That is me as well as you.⁴⁹

Faiz's Marxist dream, though acceptable to Rashid insofar as it could at least produce such 'hue and cry, such commotion and such mercuriality' from which such 'enchanted forms (the Marxist desires) can get the restlessness of a creative soul,' would still be 'Romantic' to Rashid. In a comment that could be applied as well to the enchanting contrast between a certain characteristic tranquility in Faiz's expression and a corresponding restlessness lurking in his experience, Rashid refers to the 'tranquil faces' of Stalin, Marx and Lenin who are 'candle-beneath-the-skirt with the burning and the anguish of unfulfilled desires' (*Bechâragī*, p.572). Rashid's own Nietzschean aggression does not try to cosmetically hide anguish beneath a calm face and the divine sign haunts his writings more openly. The Scriptural grandeur of Solomon ('A Kingdom which suits not another after me,' *The Qur'an*, 38: 35) and the riches of Sabâ ('provided with every requisite,' 28: 23) have been Romantically inverted to depict a wasteland in *Sabâ Virân* (168 – 169). Rashid's Solomon is 'head on his knees, morose and cynical, sad and scattered-haired' for whom royalty and monarchy is 'only the sprint of a

⁴⁹ Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Nuskhā Haye Wafa* (Lahore, Makataba-e-Karavan, n. d.), p.656.

deer.’ He is a character in a wasteland where both love and lust have lost their meaning: love is an ‘ephemeral flame,’ and lust is ‘the odour of an odourless flower’:

سلیماں سر بہ زانو ترش رو غم گیں پریشاں مو
جہاں گیری جہانبانی فقط طرا رہ ابو
محبت شعلہ پراں بوس بو ئے گل بے بو

Solomon, head-on-knees, sour-countenanced, sad, hair-scattered,
Royalty and monarchy, only the sprint of a deer,
Love — an ephemeral flame, lust — the odour of an odourless flower.⁵⁰

Such are the Romantic imprints on two of our greatest poets after Iqbal, who unlike Iqbal, for their own different reasons, could not or did not feel the need to dissociate themselves from the tricky literary tradition handed down to them as colonial subjects. The Romantic literary tradition was tricky particularly because of its apparently similar aspirations, dreams and desires to those of the Sufi literary tradition. Rashid seems to be aware of this trickery. Sabâ is a wasteland because ‘still on this land there are the footprints of the marauders of some imposter’:

سبا ویراں کہ اب تک اس زمیں پر ہیں
کسی عیار کے غارت گروں کے نقش پا باقی
سبا باقی نہ مہرو ئے سبا باقی

Saba is a wasteland, for still on this land
There are the footprints of the marauders of some imposter.
Neither Saba remains, nor the moon-faced (beloved) of Saba!⁵¹

But despite the awareness of having been tricked thus, Rashid is nevertheless tricked. Like a disillusioned Rousseauistic Romantic he seems to have lost all hope of a reconnect with the religious sensibility of the Sufi literary tradition. The long gone hoopoe, ‘the cossid of happy footsteps’ for Rashid’s Solomon, and the messenger of the ‘true tidings’ for the Qur’anic Solomon (28: 22), is not to come back:

سلیماں سر بہ زانو
اب کہاں سے قاصد فرخندہ پے آئے

⁵⁰ Noon Meem Rashid, *op.cit.*, p.169.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.169.

کہاں سے کس سیو سے کاسہ پیری میں سے آئے

Solomon head-on-knees,
Whence to come the cossid of the happy footsteps?
Whence, from which jar the wine to come in the old
cup? ⁵²

One symptom of Rashid's being caught 'awares' is his apparent failure, or unwillingness, to distinguish the Romantic from the Sufi desire. He heaps all together, the Byronic Juan and the Sufi Hallaj and Sarmad, in the same purgatorial existence (recall Hartman's words earlier quoted about the purgatorial nature of the Romantic anguish) within the category of the addicts, who are all dancing together, hair disheveled, and naked. Rashid's fascination with this Romantic purgatorial existence—this 'mysterious and desire-exciting company' is recorded in detail in *Bechâragî* where the speaker, like a fugitive school-going boy, comes and sits under the wall of Hell, looking stealthily from a fissure:

میں دیوار جہنم کے تلے
پر دوپہر مفرور طالب علم کی مانند
آکر بیٹھتا ہوں اور دزدیدہ تماشا
اس کی پراسرار و شوق انگیز جلوت کا
کسی رخنے سے کرتا ہوں

I, under the wall of the hell,
Every afternoon, like a run-away student,
Come and sit, and stealthily watch
Its mysterious and desire-exciting company
From a fissure. ⁵³

It is among this purgatorial company comprising of figures trembling, with blood on their hands, astonished with parched lips in a water-less desert, their feet held by a wheel decorated with light and colour around which they are continually revolving that Rashid locates the Sufis:

ژواں حلاج سرمد
چرسی انسان کی طرح ژولیدہ مو عریاں
مگر رقصاں

Juan, Hallaj, Sarmad,
Dishevelled like an addicted man,
Naked
But dancing. ⁵⁴

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.571.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

It is this confusion of desire in Romanticism and *Tasawwuf* that translates for Rashid the wasteland of his Sabâ into a wasteland of *Tasawwuf*, into a wasteland of Sufi love. In two almost identical poems, *Tasawwuf* and *Raig-e-Diruz*, the former being a shortened version that was initially not included in any of his books and the latter included with the addition of three stanzas in *La = Insan*, Rashid identifies our cultural predicament precisely in Romantic terms. The first two stanzas of both the poems are identical, with the only difference of the terms *Tasawwuf* and *muhabbat* (love). We, ‘the inhabitants of the ruins of *Tasawwuf* / love,’ Rashid tells us, ‘are reared by an anguished stretch of time.’ We are under an illusion that our walking and wandering has come to an end: ‘as we have walked for centuries, we think that we have reached the shore, reached the end of the stamping of the feet of our civilization.’ We as ‘the inhabitants of the tombs of *Tasawwuf* / love, the ones who laugh at the stories of our own destruction, think that we have found the mark of our destination’:

ہم تصوف کے (محبت کے) خرابوں کے مکین
 وقت کے طول المناک کے پروردہ ہیں
 ایک تاریک ازل نور ابد سے خالی
 ہم جو صدیوں سے چلے ہیں تو سمجھتے ہیں کہ ساحل پایا
 اپنی تہذیب کی پاکوبی کا حاصل پایا
 ہم تصوف کے (محبت کے) نہاں خانوں میں بسنے والے
 اپنی پامالی کے افسانوں پہ بسنے والے
 ہم سمجھتے ہیں نشان سر منزل پایا

We, the inhabitants of the wastelands of *tasawwuf* / love,
 Are reared by an anguished stretch of time.
 A dark beginning, empty of the light of eternity.
 We thought as we moved through the centuries
 That we have found the shore.
 That we have reached the end of the stamping of the feet
 of our civilization.⁵⁵

The additional stanzas in *Raig-Diruz* characterize us like that rain-stricken bird that remains ‘ensconced in the nook of the past’, who even if at times startled by a sudden trial, is blinded by ‘the heavy curtains of slumber’:

ہم محبت کے خرابوں کے مکین
 کنج ماضی میں ہیں باراں زدہ طائر کی طرح آسودہ
 اور کبھی فتنہ ناگاہ سے ڈر کر چونکیں

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.264, 550.

تو رہیں سد نگاہ نیند کے بہاری پردے

We, the inhabitants of the wastelands of love
Are ensconced in the nook of the past
Like a rain-stricken bird.

And if ever we are startled by a sudden trial

We remain blinded by the heavy curtains of slumber.⁵⁶

One would tend to agree that this looks an astonishingly remarkable and sadly exact picture of the contemporary cultural milieu in Pakistan, with the only possible reservation that Rashid presents this Romantic predicament as the predicament of *Tasawwuf* and love. In this dark wasteland from where ‘the gazelles of ‘enlightenment’ quickly turn back from a distance, the only voice that keeps ringing in a night of anguish is ‘*Yâ hū! Yâ hū,*’ an expression suggesting the Sufi incantation of remembrance of God, and also Moses, whose tradition through Islam the Sufi desire follows:

ایسے تاریک خرابے کہ جہاں
دور سے تیز پلٹ جائیں ضیا کے آہو
ایک بس ایک صدا گونجتی ہو
شب آلام کی ‘یا ہو یا ہو!’

Such dark ruins from where

The gazelles of enlightenment quickly turn back from a
distance

One, only one voice keeps ringing

The ‘*Yâ hū! Yâ hū*’ of the night of anguish.⁵⁷

Rashid confuses the nocturnal anguish of a Romantic predicament (recall *Andhâ Kabârî*) with the affectionate burning of the Sufi night, ultimately identifying the Romantic desire and dream with the Sufi desire and dream:

ہم محبت کے خرابوں کے مکین
ریگ دیروز میں خوابوں کے شجر بوتے رہے
سایہ ناپید تھا سائے کی تمنا کے تلے سوتے رہے

We, the inhabitants of the wastelands of love

Kept planting the the trees of dreams in the sands of the
past.

The shade was missing,

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.265.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

We kept sleeping under the desire of the shade.⁵⁸

The turning away of the ‘gazelles of ‘enlightenment’’ (my deliberate liberty at translating *zia* into ‘enlightenment’ instead of a more literal ‘light’ is to suggest the Western influence in our culture) from the voice of *Yâ hû* (the religious Sufi tradition) is, to me, what has thrown our contemporary Pakistani culture into a Romantic predicament, with a continuous walk ‘forward’ to ‘progress’ accompanied by a seemingly unending undecidedness as to our identity and direction. Contemporary Urdu poetry points out this Yeatsian-Balavatskian ‘walk, walk, walk.’ Ahmed Navaid, for one, aptly records this cultural condition:

سمت کی کوئی خبر ہے نہ ستارے کا پتہ
چلتے رہنے کو ہی یہ لوگ سفر جانتے ہیں

Neither there is any awareness of direction, nor the location of the star,
These people think that mere moving on means a journey.

The desire corresponding to this cultural experience is a Rousseauistic one—a desire that cannot properly be characterized as a desire. In Navaid’s words:

اک تمنا کہ تمنا ہی نہیں ہے جیسے
ایک سودا ہے کہ جیسے کوئی سودا ہی نہیں

A desire, as if it is not a desire,
An ambition as if it is not an ambition.

Both Rashid and Faiz become a barometer for our cultural drift after Iqbal. I often wonder why Iqbal the visionary expressed some of his most significant thoughts in a language that his own people were to turn away from in a matter of a few years after him, Persian. The trend away from classical languages like Arabic and Persian, and now increasingly from Urdu and other regional languages towards English, is another symptom, along with the anguish of the wandering desire, of the Pakistani culture falling into a Romantic predicament as it reflects a rendering of these languages, in de Man’s words earlier quoted, ‘epistemologically suspect.’ It amounts to a loss of faith in the languages’ capacity to tell us anything about the world; all they can do is telling us about themselves. It also amounts to a negative knowledge that through these languages, in Derrida’s words about modern aesthetics, ‘the best will not necessarily transpire’.

Although the determination of the inextricable relationship between form and content is a tricky critical debate, one can still rather ‘naively’ observe that usually when something fades away, the spirit goes away before the body, the content goes missing before the form does. Both Rashid and Faiz through their Romantic unconscious also symptomize the Pakistani cultural degeneration at a stage when the form does give a semblance of a correspondence with content, when the body without spirit is still intact. It is the highly Persianized and Arabicized diction in both the poets that takes some critical effort in the mode of *ibrah* for the reader to figure out the cultural patrimony that these languages were traditionally supposed to signify subtly replaced by the Romantic cultural package accompanying the onslaught of English colonialism. In the words of Iqbal, *reh gayī rasm-e-azân, rūh-e-Bilālī na rahī*. Like Rashid, Faiz sahib also seems to be caught ‘awares’ when he is seen towards his final years forcefully condemning ‘the onslaught against our cultural identity by institutions like the English-medium schools or the Western media’ and fearing the day when ‘the new class of Western-oriented literary wisecars who are only semi-literate in their own literatures are allowed to take over’.⁵⁹

This was Faiz in 1983, the time by which he had probably sensed that even the ‘*rasm-e-azân*’ is about to go, the impending final stage of the cultural impoverishment staring right in face. The rest of the story poets like Anwar Masood can tell.

Ibrah as a mode of comparative reading can only work for the contemporary students of literature and culture in Pakistan, especially of English literature, if the students are deeply grounded, body and soul, in what Faiz calls ‘their own literatures.’ They have a double duty, to deal with two traditions that are tantalizingly close and yet distant from each other, and within this difficult space of ‘the near and the far’ locate their own cultural existence. Destined to be ‘bi-lingual,’ they need to have, like Rumi’s reed, ‘two mouths,’ one ‘hidden in (the Beloved’s) lips’, and the other ‘wailing’ unto the listeners. Their convivial critical voice ‘falling on the air’ lets ‘every one who hath insight know that the lamentation issuing at *this* end is (inspired) from *that* end.’ Their nocturnal agitations should follow the recitation of the Prophetic tradition of ‘pass(ing) the night with my Lord,’ and ‘plunge into the heart

⁵⁹ Faiz Ahmed Faiz, ‘Thoughts on the Future of Ghazal,’ in *Culture and Identity, Selected English Writings of Faiz*, Sheema Majeed (ed.) (Karachi: Oxford, 2005), p.216.

of the sea of fire,' only to receive the protection of the Lord's 'O fire, be cool':

یک دهان پنهانست در لب هائے وی	دو دهان داریم گویا همچو نی
بای هوی در فگنده در هوا	یک دهان نالان شده سوئی شما
که فغان این سری بم زان سر است	لیک داند بر که او را منظر است
کین چنین پرجوش چون دریاستی	با که خفتی وز چه پہلو خاستی
در دل دریای آتش راندی	یا ابیت عندر بی خواندی
عصمت جان تو گشت ای مقتدا	نعره یانار کونی باردا

We have two vocal mouths, like the reed: one mouth is hidden in his lips.

One mouth is wailing unto you: it lets (many) a shrill note fall on the air;

But every one who hath insight knows that the lamentation (issuing) at *this* end is (inspired) from *that* end.

With whom hast thou slept and from what (whose) side hast thou risen, that thou art so full of agitation, like the sea?

Or hast thou recited (the words of the Prophet), 'I pass the night with my Lord,' and plunged into the heart of the sea of fire?

The shout (of God), 'O fire, be cool,' became a protection to thy spirit, O exemplar (for all).⁶⁰

Reading western literature in general, and Romanticism in particular, through the comparative strategy of *ibrah* could possibly help a Pakistani student of literature and culture identify and hopefully resolve the existing cultural crisis in Pakistan, a crisis that this study has attempted to identify as essentially Romantic with deep Hebraic undertones. Thus reading Romanticism through the Sufi literary tradition, with Rumi at its centre, is inevitable in identifying why, in Iqbal's words, our 'half-open eye' is still deceived by a dream within a dream, why our existence is 'still a mystery' for us, why our 'longings still do not know any grace,'

⁶⁰ Jalal al-Din Rumi, *op.cit.*, p.VI / 2002-2009.

why our ‘prayers are empty of stability and fulfillment,’ and why ‘the strings of the instrument of our self are still broken’:

غلط نگر ہے تری چشم نیم باز اب تک
 ترا وجود ترے واسطے ہے راز اب تک
 ترا نیاز نہیں آشنائے ناز اب تک
 کہ ہے قیام سے خالی تری نماز اب تک
 گسستہ تار ہے تیری خودی کا ساز اب تک
 کہ تو ہے نغمہ رومی سے ہے نیاز اب تک

Still your half-open eye is seeing-with-error,
 Still your existence is a mystery for you,
 Still your longings do not know any grace,
 Still your prayers are without stability,
 Still the instrument of your self is broken-stringed,
 For you are still unmindful of Rumi’s song. ⁶¹

⁶¹ Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.583.